Belief Characters as Anthropomorphic Psychosocial Realities
The Egyptian Case*

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[*Note: Page numbers in the original are indicated within <> signs].

Scholars from various disciplines have attempted to study the phenomenon of supernatural illness and related healing practices in traditional Egyptian communities.[1] Their works, however, were seriously handicapped by two main deficiencies: lack of understanding of the intricate belief system of which the possessing spirit is a part, and failure to perceive the symbolic correlation between the characteristics of the possessing spirit and the nature of the illness being treated.

In the following essay, a belief is treated as a close equivalent to a psychological "attitude."[2] First, both a belief and an attitude involve a cognition: something which the individual knows about. It is impossible for a person to believe in, or have attitudes towards an object which does not exist in his cognitive system (i.e., mind) and which that individual cannot perceive. In this respect, "attitudes" and "beliefs" differ from subconscious <pg.8> "drives," "urges," and "impulses," which influence the feelings and actions of a person, but they themselves are not cognitively perceived.

Second, a belief and an attitude both include a feeling component:[3] fear, love, hatred, reverence and so forth. Thus, a person who knows about ghosts will associate them with fear in the same manner as he will link God to holiness, love, reverence, awe and other sentiments attributed to a deity in the culture to which that person belongs.[4] If a person never heard of a "ghost", he may not be expected to display any feelings upon hearing that word, or even to perceive a "ghost" upon seeing or hearing things which a believer in ghosts will perceive as a ghost.

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1. See for example A. Okasha "A Cultural Psychiatric Study of El-Zar in U.A.R.," *British Journal of Psychiatry* 112 (1966): 1217- 1221; John G. Kennedy, "Nubian Zar Ceremonies as Psychotherapy," *Human Organization* 26 (1967): 185-194; and Hani Fakhouri, "The Zar in an Egyptian Village," *Anthropological Quarterly* 41 (1968); 49-56.
2. See David Krech, Richard S. Crutchfield, and Egerton L. Ballachey. *Individual in Society* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1962), pp. 140-141.

3. Psychologists differentiate among different types of feelings. For example, "**Sentiments** are feelings which rest upon past experience or training and thus have a cognitive or intellectual basis," meanwhile, "**Emotions** [...] are acutely disturbed affective processes which originate in a psychological situation and which are revealed by marked bodily changes in glands and smooth muscles." See Paul Thomas Young, *Motivation and Emotion* (New York: Wiley, 1961), pp. 352-354

4. On the affective aspects of a deity see "African World View and Religion," Chapter 13 in Phyllis M. Martin and Patrick O'Meara, eds., *Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), pp. 208- 220, esp. pp. 214-218.

It is important that we differentiate between mere "knowledge" and "belief". Not all supernatural beings which are usually classified as "belief characters" in a culture necessarily involve a feeling on the part of all members of that culture. In certain cases a member of a culture may know about a character which is believed in by others, and which evokes in those believers a specific sentiment, such as fear, but that member himself does not experience this sentiment at all. Some intellectuals, for example, who just emerged from traditional cultures have knowledge of a belief character in that culture without experiencing the feeling which the character normally evokes.

Thirdly, beliefs and attitudes impel the individual to act in the direction of the feeling involved. A person who knows that ghosts are fearful and experiences fear when confronted by a ghost, will normally move away from or against ghosts. Conversely, a person that knows that God is "loving" and experiences the feeling of being loved when in the presence of God, will move towards God.

<pg.9> A belief character (or a "creature of legendary," if you will) is, therefore, an entity which is known to members of a community, evokes a certain feeling and tends to influence the actions of those who experience that feeling.

The Arabic word for "creature" is "*makhlooq;*"[5] it normally refers to a living thing which, it is believed, God created. In a broader sense, creation involved inanimate objects and places as well as living creatures and entities.

The typical Egyptian, Moslem or Christian, believes that Heaven is a place, that God exists in Heaven and that Paradise and Hell are two locations within heavens. Holy scriptures outline these beliefs which evoke a feeling of holiness; believers act accordingly.

Another place which is believed by some to actually exist is a hidden land of ideal life, a utopia. Descriptions of this utopian community appear in the oral lore of various groups, especially as a folk narrative. The story may be summarized as follows:[6]

> A poor man became tired of his life so he decided to go to the desert hoping that a beast may kill him and thus he may finally rest. He walked into a cave and found himself in front of nine men slapping their faces and shouting in unison, "It serves me right!" The poor man joined in their strange ritual. Soon the men discovered his presence and told him that he did not belong with them. They cast him into the cave. He found himself in a strange country and among strange people. There, he learned that he had come to a community where money, greed, dishonesty, and interference in the affairs of others (which plague modern life) did not exist. Every member of the community calculated the

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5. A classical Arabic treatment of "creatures of legendary" was compiled by Zakariyya ibn-Muhammad al-Qazwînî (1203-1283 or 4); see his `ajâ'ib al- makhlugât wa al-hayâwânât wa gharâ'ib al-mawjûdât [The Wonders of the Creatures, and Animals, and Strange Things in Existence], 2 Vols. (Cairo, 1963). For a comprehensive treatment of folk beliefs about the subject, <pg.31> see Mohammad El-Gohary's (El-Gawhary's) `ilm al-folklore (The Science of Folkore), Vol. 2: *The Study of Folk Beliefs* (Cairo, El-Ma`arif, 1980), and his "al-Ginn fî al-mu`taqad al-sha`bî" (The Jinn in Folk Beliefs), in: *National Review of Social Science* (Cairo), Vo. 9 (1972), no. 1, pp. 95-131.

6. Narrated by an adult male from Cairo, the full text of this narrative may be found in Hasan M. El-Shamy, *Folktales of Egypt*, No. 12, [pp. 86-93]. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

number of blessings (from <pg.10> God) that he earned and spent within the limits of his income.

At first the poor man lived according to the code of honor, but soon he was overcome by his "worldly life" vices. He became greedy and acquired things to which his actually earned blessings did not entitle him. His acquisitions included marrying the king's daughter, but on the condition that he does not interfere in or inquire about things which were not of his concern. After a brief period of happy married life, he becomes discontented and decides to leave the palace and wander about. He saw three incidents which aroused his curiosity to such an extent that he could not resist interfering and asking "why?" The incidents were: an old man harvesting ripe and unripe watermelons; a man bailing water out of a river only to pour it back into the very stream from where it had just been drawn; and two groups of people standing opposite of each other on the banks of a river pulling a beautiful house- boat; each group was trying to pull it towards itself. The first two times, the poor man was forgiven for having broken the contract not to interfere' but the third time he was told that he had to go. The three incidents which he had seen were explained to him as follows: The first was the angel of death; he takes away the souls of the young and the old alike. The second was the "stream of livelihood"; God grants different people varying amounts but no one retains anything and all reverts to the main stream. The third was "worldly life"; each person tries to pull it towards himself but to no avail.

After hearing these simple facts of life, the poor man was cast out. He found himself in the cave with the others. He joined in their repentful, self-punishment and in shouting: "It serves me right!"
<pg.11>
For the majority of Egyptians this narrative does not involve a belief in the actuality of its contents. For a few, however, it is a belief narrative to the extent that it can radically alter a person's actions. The altered pattern of behavior is manifested in the actual acts of a Sufi (mystic), dressed in rags who continuously roams the streets of his town in total bewilderment. He has a small rock in his hand with which he beats on his chest shouting, "It serves me right! It serves me right!" Three cases of this severe emotional disturbance were reported from the Nile Delta, Cairo city, and Middle Southern Egypt.[7] In all three, people who were close to the disturbed Sufi cited the story about the utopia and explained, "He was there."

The social reality, as seen by mystics, is that human nature drives a person to greed which in turn, generates dishonesty and intrusion into the affairs of others; contemporary human societies are plagued by these vices. A utopian community where these social ills are not found is believed to exist. This utopia is described in terms of the actions of its human-like beings; the ideals, values, and symbols expressed in the story are highly anthropomorphic.

For the three (mentally disturbed) Egyptian mystics, the utopia described in the story was real; they not only believed in its existence, but also experienced being "there." The psychological reality is determined by the perceptions "real or hallucinatory[8]"of the existence of this "belief community" and by their subsequent experience, which seems to be identical with those of the "hero' of the story.

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7. These locations indicate that the phenomenon is very widely distributed.

8. Hallucination is: "a false perception which has a compulsive sense of the reality of objects although relevant and adequate stimuli for such perceiving are lacking." See Horace B. English and Ava C. English, *A Comprehensive Dictionary of Psychological and Psycho-analytical Terms* (New York: David McKay, 1966).

A number of "creatures" who are believed to exist have equally far-reaching effects on the thoughts, feelings and actions of a greater number of Egyptians. Angels, Satan, and the <pg.12> Jinn (pronounced 'ginn') are salient examples of such beings. Their real existence is held--almost universally--to be at least as real as that belief utopia is for the three mystics mentioned above.

In **folk** belief systems the Jinn[9] represent one of the largest and most important categories of these "creatures"; they are perceived in highly anthropomorphic terms. From the perspective of the native believer, the Jinn are invisible creatures of ethereal composition; they were created out of fire. Jinn inhabited the earth before Adam and Eve arrived. Some traditions state that God had ordered the Jinn to dig out the seas and pile up the mountains. They, however, rebelled and became despotic. God sent angels to fight them and they were driven off to remote areas of earth. With the exception of their ethereal constitution and their greater capabilities, the Jinn are believed to be very similar to humans. Jinn. like humans, have strong inclinations towards sin and evil. Jinn societies mirror human societies in their social organization, their political, economic and familial institutions, their industries, their races and their religions. Jinn are held to be less powerful than angels, but far more powerful than man; they are believed to exist everywhere, so to speak, and live side by side with humans.

The Jinn are partial to desolate locations, but they can also be found within households in such odd spots as ovens, staircases, toilets, baths and dark abandoned rooms. Most people take special precautions when entering these places: many, for example, ask the permission of the inhabiting Jinn. Failure to do so may offend the Jinn, who may retaliate by causing sickness. possession, or property damage. In Arabic, the very concept of mental illness and emotional instability (Junoon) is derived from the belief in the Jinn's ability to possess a human's body and mind.
<pg.13>
Various categories of Jinn appear in highly specialized roles. Although most natives only sense these specializations, actual descriptions of cases where Jinn interact with man reveal that the boundaries among these roles are very stable. A special group of Jinn is referred to as "Dwellers" or "Inhabitants;" they coexist with humans in the same living quarters and are viewed as keepers and defenders of the home against outside, malevolent Jinn. The "Dwellers" do not appear in the contexts of possession, or of employing the Jinn for the performance of "magical" tasks; unlike the majority of the Jinn, "Dwellers" do not evoke fear in those who believe in them. The Jinn which may be used by a "magician" to perform a task are called "Servants" or "Aids;" they do not appear in the roles of possessing spirits, for example. Another category of Jinn is composed of female water spirits; they may drown a person, but they never appear as "Servants" or possessing spirits.

Thus, Jinn are referred to by different names and titles which reflect their perceived nature and roles. Names such as "Giant' and "Efrit" often refer to different types of Jinn with varying personal powers and capabilities; "tribe", "line" or "division" refer to the numerical size of a group of Jinn; "Sultan" and "King" refer to Jinn with varied political powers. Other titles such as "Counterspirit", "Brother" and "Sister" refer to Jinn in their relationship to a human being.

In personal, familial life, Jinn may cause sickness; the Jinn may possess a person by, literally, entering that person's body. As indicated in actual field cases, the sex of the possessing spirit is invariably the

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9. For general information on the Jinn in Egyptian society see Edward E. Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (New York: Dover, 1973). See also Ernest Zbinden, *Die Djinn des Islam und der altorientalische Geisterglaube* (Bern: P. Haupt, 1953).

opposite of that of the possessed person. In this context, the spirit is, or becomes, what we may label <pg.14> here as a "personality spirit (i.e., a component of the individual's personality, or self)." Frequently, more than one Jinni will possess a person. In such cases, the possessing spirits are related to one another. One of them, usually not the main spirit, may be of the same sex as the person afflicted.

One case of possession reveals the close association between the actual social conditions and the qualities of a possessing Jinni. The social realities of this case are as follows:[10] Abdu is a handsome, blondish young man in his middle twenties; he comes from a fairly well to do family of farmers. He is married and--at the time--had two children but both had died before reaching the age of two.

As the rules of village require, Abdu, his wife (and their children) resided in his father's house;[11] they occupied one room on the second floor. Meanwhile Abdu's father, mother, and younger brothers and sisters--who ranged in age from three to eighteen--occupied the rest of the house. Abdu went to the village school and was "the top of his class;" he even received a trophy for being "the best' while his competitor, Taha, did not.

Being the eldest son. Abdu's father took him out of school when he was about fourteen and assigned him the task of tilling the land. Abdu carried out the arduous assignment with some help from the father and younger brothers. The father--then in his forties--withdrew gradually from the actual farming chores and maintained only a supervisory role; he kept all financial matters and major farming decisions in his grip. The father led a leisurely life, which a farmer of his social rank, success, and number of sons, expects to enjoy at that age. He dressed neatly, traveled often, enjoyed the company of his friends and had a good deal of prestige in the community; he was viewed as religious, honest. firm and temperamental.
<pg.15>
The father became enamored with Hejaz; he used considerable amounts of the family's income to go on pilgrimage to Mecca. Although pilgrimage is required of a Moslem who can afford it only once in a lifetime, he went several times. The family resented this extravagance, especially since they themselves received very little monetary rewards and had to live austerely. The family, however, could not openly challenge the 'right' of its head to spend his own money on such a 'noble' cause.

Abdu himself was totally dependent on his father in financial matters; he received only pocket money, while the father provided the entire household with food, clothes, medicine, and even luxury items (such as perfumes) as gifts for the son's wife on special occasions. Furthermore Abdu had to submit to the will of his father in social and family affairs; the father rebuked him repeatedly in front of his wife which led her to taunt him for carrying no weight in the household. Another event made matters worse for Abdu; Taha, his competitor at school had completed his education, become a teacher, taught abroad, and returned to the village for a visit. Taha had his own car, a Mercedes, which he had bought with his savings.

The climax of Abdu's psychological condition came one summer day in 1956. As Abdu slept under a

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10. For a number of years the present writer witnessed the unfolding of the various chapters in the lives of the members of this family. Three accounts of the present incident were recorded: one by the father, another by Abdu himself, and a third by Abdu's mother. The three reports are very similar except in one respect: the father in his report places far less blame on himself and more on Abdu's wife.

11. <pg.32> Residence in Egyptian villages is patrilocal; the newlyweds reside with the groom's father. See Hamed Ammar, *Growing up in an Egyptian Village* (New York: Octagon, 1966), pp. 42-50.

guava tree in the field, he woke up abruptly; he was in a state of shock and was shivering. His neighbors and younger brothers carried him home. For days Abdu was ill; he could not even stand up. His father thought it was "fright" and invited the official sheiks of the mosque to recite the Holy Book, but their treatment did not work. The father took Abdu to a number of medical doctors in Cairo where he received shots, pills and other medicines; this treatment had only limited short-lived success. Abdu became more and <pg.16> more withdrawn; he ate very little and could not work. Occasionally he threw tantrum fits, he shouted insults, and his body shook violently to the extent that "ten men could not make his arms still."

Neighbors told Abdu's mother that her son was possessed and suggested that they invite *mashâyikh* (faith healers, or shamans) to exorcise the possessing spirit; however, the father refused adamantly to believe this "nonsense."[12] The mother took her son behind the father's back to faith healers in neighboring areas, but they failed to cure him. Finally neighbors prevailed over the father and extracted his consent to invite the neighborhood *shaikh* (shaman); the father, however, insisted that he himself would not attend.

In the presence of all the family and neighbors, "men and women" the shaman and his assistant arrived into Abdu's room. Only the father was missing; he sat in the guest room downstairs. The *shaikh* diagnosed Abdu's illness as possession; one of the Jinn had entered his body and was responsible for his sickness and improper actions and words, especially towards his father. After the necessary rituals were conducted the *shaikh* managed to establish contact with the spirit: a female Jinni. Then the healer said. "Call his father!" From his own perspective, the father gave an account of the affair and of his dialogue with the possessing Jinni spirit:[13]

People came to me and said, "Come, see!" I said, "No!" They said, "Just come so that you can hear and see for yourself."

[When I finally went upstairs], I found that the boy [i.e.. Abdu] was talking [in a feminine voice]. She finally spoke; she spoke [to me] through his tongue, but he himself was <pg.17> in a state of unconsciousness. I was amazed and exclaimed, "May God help us!"

She said [to me, in reference to the medical treatment], "You have been driving hypodermic syringes into me. And you did to me such and such. I am [a female Jinni] from Mecca. I am Moslem, of the best Moslems. . . . He [i.e., Abdu] was lying under a guava tree . . . he was feeling unhappy with his wife because she was playing hard to get. I came to him to marry me; he has a pure [i.e., un-profaned] body and I like a pure body. [When he refused to marry me], I became angry with him. I had intended to drown him in a well or a river, but **for your own sake**, I changed my mind."

[I said to her] "Lady, why all this? We are peaceful people and we mind our own business." She said, "By God, I was kind to him only **for your own sake**." She wanted him to wear silk clothes and perfumes and to do no work [on the farm]. I said to her, "Lady, he is a decent person and has pride. How could you force him to wear flagrant colors and to wear perfumes? People will ridicule him and

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12. The pattern of the reactions of the puritanical father to this ritual which lies outside formal religious practices is typical: "ridiculing disbelief, reluctant tolerance, participation, then total acceptance," see Hasan El-Shamy, "Mental Health in Traditional Culture: A Study of preventive and Therapeutic Folk Practices in Egypt," *Psychiatry and the State*, a special issue of *Catalyst*, fall (1972): 13-28.

13. Tape recorded on October 29, 1971.

may even think that he is a queer! ... You say, 'I was kind to him only for your own sake [i.e., the father's]', and you say that you are from Mecca. Mecca is the place for pilgrimage [i.e., such things are not allowed there] . . . We are fellahin and [from well known] families; each one has his own traditions. No, [I can't consent] to these demands'."

She said, "Alright [no colorful or silk clothes; no perfumes], but he must not be made unhappy."

I said to her, "That is even worse! Lady, since you are a Moslem, and of the best Moslems, [you should know] that <pg.18> the [occasional] feeling of being unhappy is a part of the nature of human beings. How can a person avoid it? This can't be!"

She said, "**You** should not make him unhappy."

I said, "I will try not to make him unhappy. However, if unhappiness is unavoidable this would be something which is out of our control and [happens] in spite of us. [For] if he did not become unhappy with his father, he may become unhappy with his wife or his mother. Sometimes a person becomes unhappy even with himself; however I will try."

She said, "Alright, but he must not work [on the farm]."

I said, "This is a difficult [condition], but can be managed. His younger brother can take his place. If he did wish to help his [younger] brother, let it be; if he doesn't, let it be."

[She said], "He must wear only clean, neat clothes."

I said, "Let it be, but regular clothes: No [flagrant] colors.'"

He did not ask for these things; **it was she** who did not want him to work. She wanted him to remain neat, clean and attractive.

We agreed to these conditions . . . Neighbors, men and women were all around. It was something **embarrassing**.

Now it was time for her to get out [of his body]. She wanted to get out through his eye [but the *shaikh* insisted she get out through a wound to be made in his little toe] . . . [At first she refused]. The *shaikh* said, "I will take <pg.19> my complaint against you to your king! What brought you here! Why are you causing harm to innocent people! You will be put in prison! [...] Do you think that the Kingdom [from which you came] is loose! I'll take you to your king."

She said, "Please, let us not harm each other. I will come out [through the toe]."

As soon as she got out, he [Abdu] went like this: "Ahhhh . . . [i.e., became completely relaxed]." He looked terribly embarrassed; [for] it was just like acting in the movies. . . . But, had I not seen it with my own eyes, I would not have believed it."

Abdu's troubles were lessened; he gained some independence and more considerate treatment from his father, especially in the presence of others. He did not have to work in the fields, nor wear the shabby work clothes, nor carry unattractive agricultural implements. Eventually, he even moved with his wife and

children in a next-door house, which his father owned.

However friction between Abdu and his father did recur, but on a subdued level. Under the terms of the agreement with the possessing Jinni, the temperamental father had to control his anger and not lean heavily on his son.

Occasionally minor relapses in Abdu's condition occurred; these relapses were always interpreted as signs of the return of the Jinni-woman, because the father broke or was about to break the contract. Meanwhile, Abdu was gradually asserting his newly found independence. He started to make small business deals on his own and earn some money; as the father saw it, Abdu "began to spend on himself, his wife and his children in slight <pg.20> excess." Abdu finally moved to Cairo, against his father's wishes, but his wife and children remained in the village. He and his father were not on speaking terms, but there were no confrontations. Perhaps it was not purely coincidental that Abdu's job in the city was that of a guard in a movie theater. His father had thought that the affair of possession was "Just like acting in the movies."

The father died in 1971 while on his ninth pilgrimage; to die in Hejaz was his most cherished hope. Currently, his wife (Abdu's mother) is managing the farm[14] and Abdu assists her during his frequent visits to the village. The spirit which had possessed Abdu never returned.

In this case, the social problems of a young man led him into a state of emotional disorder. The intruding psychological realities were expressed symbolically in the person of a possessing spirit. Apart from its general qualities as a Jinni, the exact nature of the possessing spirit was not fixed *a priori*; her characteristics emerged as a result of a dynamic encounter and exchange among the father, his son, the shaman, and last--but not least--all the [relatives and] neighbors who witnessed the entire event. The presence of the neighbors generates a sense of shame,[15] which is an essential agent for social control in

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14. Under Islamic Laws of inheritance the land had to be divided among the heirs. The mother, however, managed to keep the farm largely intact.

   A folk belief-narrative told by a member of the family of the deceased father (Hajji M...) clearly indicates the family's lingering resentment of his frequent pilgrimage expenditures and casts doubts on their usefulness. During a belated visit to extend my condolences, I was received by the widow of the deceased and her *silfah* (sister-in-law, the wife of her husband's brother), whose own husband had already been dead for a number of years. When I mentioned the belief that: "It is sinful for Hell to touch the body of a person who had performed pilgrimage seven times," the sister-in-law, almost compulsively, narrated a story which may be summarized as follows:

   The Servant of the Holy Shrine (al-masjid al-ḥarâm) in Mecca notice that a certain man comes every year. He asked him about the reason for these yearly visits; the pilgrim answered that he wished to die and be buried there, and that he and his family endured financial hardships so <pg.33> that he may accomplish his goal. Upon hearing that, the Servant asked him to sleep in a certain corner of the shrine one afternoon and to tell him of any dreams (manâm) he may have.
   The man "saw in a dream" biers flying into the Shrine from far away places, and biers flying out of the Shrine to distant lands. The Servant explained: the first ones carried bodies of people who died away from the shrine but were predestined to be buried nearby; meanwhile, the others carried the bodies of people who died inside the Shrine but were **not** predestined to be buried there.
The narrator concluded that one could die in a distant land and still, supernaturally, be buried in Mecca. The wife of the deceased fully agreed.

15. For a discussion on the differences between "shame" and "guilt" as agents for social control, see El-Shamy, "Mental

traditional communities.

Considering the father's religiousness, and his passion for Mecca, it was no accident that the possessing spirit turned out to be a good Moslem, from Mecca and to be enamored with the un-profaned body of the handsome and virtuous son. It was also not coincidental that she was not a royalty and that she had respect for the father, and did things for his sake, just like other members of his social group did. The demands made by the possessing spirit are also a part of her perceived entity; they were <pg.21> public pronouncements of what the son lacked. The spirit is, therefore, an anthropomorphic representation of the son's social grievances and of the emotional state they generated in him. The healer adroitly created a psychodrama,[16] in which the son plays the role of the possessing Jinni-woman, while the father retains his normal role; they publicly negotiated their differences without either party losing face; the blame was placed on the possessing Jinni. Thus, the healer induced a situation in which the oppressive social system could be **reorganized in order to accommodate the afflicted party**. This traditional technique is possible only when all parties share the cognitions, sentiments, and action tendencies involved in a belief.

Another category of Jinn, or Jinn-like creatures, is believed to be permanently associated with a human being. These are the "Counterspirits" (or "Counterparts") and the "Siblings" of a person. It is believed that every human being acquires at birth a being which is called *Qarînah*[17]--if it is a female, or *Qarîn*--if it is a male. The Counterspirit goes through the same events and experiences which its human counterpart goes through: growth, marriage, happiness, pain, sadness, illness, death and so forth. The one exception is that the female Counterspirit cannot give birth while the human female can.

The sex of the Counterspirit in relationship to that of the human to whom it is linked is controversial. Some researchers report that the Counterspirit is of the same sex as its human counterpart;[18] meanwhile, others argue that this supernatural being is of the opposite sex.[19] Regional variations in the culture (i.e., culture area)[20] and differences in the sex[21] of the informants were proposed as possible causes for these inconsistencies in the reports given by informants on this subject. While sex-group differences may account for some variations, regional, geographic factors[22] were shown to have little if any, influence.

Health," pp. 24-27.

16. See Lewis Yablonsky, *Psychodrama: Resolving Emotional problems Through Role-playing* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

17. See Winifred S. Blackman, "The Karin and Karineh," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 56 (1926), pp. 163-169.

18. Blackman, "The Karina," in *The Fellahin of Upper Egypt* (London: Frank Cass, 1968), pp. 69-74.

19. G. D. Hornblower, "Traces of a Ka Belief in Modern Egypt and Old Arabia," *Islamic Culture* (1927), pp. 426-430.

20. Blackman, "The Karina."

21. <pg.34> See Lyman H. Coult, *An Annotated Bibliography of the Egyptian Fellah* (Coral Gables, Fla: University of Miami Press), p. 117, no. 810.

22. See Coult, *An Annotated Bibliography.*

<pg.22> Still more confusion arises when informants as they often do, call a female counterspirit a "Sister (i.e., a Sibling)" in addition to a number of other names including "Mother-of-male children." The same informants usually believe that these names represent independent supernatural creatures.

Siblings, the *Akhkh* (Brother) or *Ukht* (Sister), are also encountered as independent beings. In **most** respects the supernatural brother and sister are identical with the male and female Counterspirit; their relationship with humans has also been a subject for controversy in relationship with humans has also been a subject for controversy in academic writings.[23]

An older parallel to the contemporary "Sister" and the "Counter- spirit" appears in a tenth century Arabic work.[24] According to some traditions, Eve always gave birth to twins, a boy and a girl. God ordered Adam and Eve that twin brothers and sisters may not marry each other.[25] Therefore, exchange marriage was developed; in order to get a wife, each one of Adam's sons had to exchange his own twin sister for the twin sister of another brother. `Unâq was a deformed daughter of Adam and Eve; she had two heads and ten fingers on each hand, each finger had two talon-like nails. `Unâq was born "single, without a brother;" thus, she could not acquire a husband. Frustrated and alienated, she became a witch and "misled a great many of Adam's sons" (i.e., her brothers). Thus, "Adam cursed her and Eve said, 'Amen.'" God sent a lion that devoured her and relieved Adam and Eve of her.[26]

Setting academic, theoretical controversies aside, we find that actual cases reported by informants about encounters between a human female and the supernatural "Counterspirit" and/or "Sister" are injurious to that human female; meanwhile, a human female's supernatural Brother is affectionate. Also a human male's supernatural Sister is protective and affectionate <pg.23> towards **that** human male. Informants perceive this pattern but usually do not articulate it. The pattern is congruent with the older account about `Unâq and more importantly with the actual structure of sentiments in the Arab family. Within the Arab home, the brother's relationship with his sister is very affectionate, while the relationship between sisters and that between the brothers is usually characterized by rivalries.[27]

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23. See Blackman, "The Fellahin," pp. 74-76; also Zbinden, *Die Djinn*, p. 15. Also see M. El-Gohary, *`ilm al-folklore* (cairo, 197?), p. 431, and "al ginn fi al-mu`taqad al-sha`bî." Although it is reported that the *Akh* (Brother) does not exist in Egyptian folk beliefs, there is evidence which indicates that this supernatural entity appears in contemporary Egyptian lore but on fairly limited scale; see H. El-Shamy, The Supernatural Belief-Practice System in the contemporary Arab Folk cultures of Egypt (1974).

24. Abu-al-Hasan `Ali al-Mas`ûdi, *'akhbâr al-zamân [The Events of Time]*, (Beirut: dar al-'andalus, 1966), pp. 116-117.

25. Compare this folk 'evolutionary' theory with that proposed by Sigmund Freud concerning the origin of the Oedipus complex; see *Totem and Taboo* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1950).
      For further evaluation of this hypothesis and its role as an emotion in narrative lore see, "Emotionskomponente," in: *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* (Göttingen) Vol. 3, nos. 4-5, pp. 1391-1395 (1981); "Psychoanalysis and Folklore," in: *Al-Majallah*, Cairo, 117, September, 1966, pp. 33-41; and "Collective Unconsciousness and Folklore," in: *Al-Majallah*,
Cairo 126, June 1967, pp. 21-29.

26. Compare "`Unâq with Lilith in Jewish and Christian traditions; see James E. Hanauer, *Folklore of the Holy Land: Moslem, Christian and Jewish* (London, 1907), p. 19.

27. On sibling rivalries see Ammar, *Growing Up, pp. 53-56. See also Hasan M. El-Shamy, "The Traditional Structure of <pg.35> Sentiments in Maḥfûz's Trilogy: A Behavioristic Text Analysis," Al-`Arabiyya* 9 (1976), pp. 53-74;esp. pp.

Thus, the use of the folk terms: Sister, female Counterspirit, etc. in referring to a member of this category of supernatural beings is determined by how a particular person perceives the role of that being in a specific situation. The title "Sister" is used to refer to this entity in its role of love and protection for a human **male**. On the other hand, the titles "Sister," female "Counterspirit" and "Mother-of-male-children" are used to refer to the same being in its injurious role, especially toward a human **female**. This being threatens a human female; it challenges her function as the human wife of that supernatural entity's human brother and threatens her capacity as a human mother who is capable of giving male children to her human husband. This viewpoint can be substantiated by pointing out that in actual familial situations, a new wife has a shaky position in her husband's family: the wife's position can be strengthened only by bearing male children, which earns her the honorific title: "mother- of-male-children." The most injurious role of the supernatural female Counterspirit, "Sister," and "Mother-of-male-children" is that of suffocating human infants, thus undermining a woman's position as a wife and as a mother.[28]

A retired *Shaikh* gave the following account of a case he had handled some years earlier; it involves a young wife and her supernatural "Sister":[29]

<pg.24>

A girl named Fayda--she was the daughter of . . . got married to Sa`d, son of . . . When she moved to her husband's house [actually the house of the husband's father[30]]  things did not go right for her. After a week or so, they said to her, "Come and bake." "Come and look." "Come and do the laundry," and things like that. Actually the mother of Sa`d was a decent and good-hearted woman; so was his father, but the one that caused her [i.e., Fayda] the troubles was Sa`d's sister. He actually had two sisters, Fatma and Si`da; Si`da, was very young, but the trouble came from Fatma. ...That is the nature of things.[31] She did not want him to marry Fayda and used to say, "She is not fit for him," and things like that.

The crux of the matter is that Fayda ended up doing the whole workload for the household. In addition, Sa`d's sister was constantly setting traps for her; if something got broken, she would say, "Fayda [did it]!" If something got lost, she would say, "Fayda took it to her father's house," and things like that. The girl [i.e., Fayda] lived in constant distress especially because her husband did not curb his sister.

Fayda got pregnant and miscarried three times in a row. She never passed her sixth month [of pregnancy]. . . Her husband's family said, "She can't bear children." She was, actually, of slight build and never gained weight.

56-59.

28. See Ammar, *Growing Up*, pp. 93-96.

29. Recorded in June, 1972 from S. H., about forty-five years old, originally from Southern Egypt.

30. See note no. 11 above.

31. The hostility between a wife and her husband's sister is recurrent in the Arab family; see El-Shamy, "The Traditional Structure," pp. 59-61.

They finally sent a messenger to call me [to their house]. . .. They said to me, "Things are such and such." I knew about it already. . . .I went and did the necessary things. , . .When I 'opened the book' I found out that her [supernatural] 'Sister' has been antagonistic to her. So, I told them about what I saw: This woman was sitting alone beside the oven; she was crying and feeling unhappy because the people who are the closest to her accuse her of things of which she is innocent. They also <pg.25> lean on her too heavily. She receives no support, not even from those who are the closest to her. The accursed Sister struck her and caused her to become ill and to lose her child [i.e., fetus], because of jealousy and hatred. That accursed *Qarînah* [i.e., female Counterspirit] suffocated the infant before it was born.

"This woman is a virtuous one. She does not steal or lie. She came from an honorable household to another like it in honor. The accursed 'Sister' is seeking her destruction, but I--with the aid of 'The Seven Pledges' [which] Prophet Solomon [secured from] the 'Mother-of-male-children'[32] ... will burn the accursed 'Sister' if she returns. 'It is against the unjust- ones that things turn out to be. 'This woman needs comforting and reassuring."

I made a 'Seven Pledges' amulet for her to wear around her waist and never take it off. That amulet would burn any aggressor.

According to the *Shaikh*, Fayda was spared most of the friction, especially with her husband's sister, and she soon conceived. With the complete consent of her husband and his parents Fayda went to her parents' home to "complete her last six months of pregnancy." Her husband's family visited her daily and showed her great affection. Fayda gave birth to a baby boy and returned to her husband. Shortly after her return, the sister-in-law got married and moved away to her husband's home.

In this case, the family problems of a young wife, evidently, generated a great deal of emotional stress for her. She also went through a number of miscarriages. Since the woman involved proved to be capable of normal pregnancy and delivery, it may <pg.26> be assumed that the miscarriages were a psychosomatic symptom of her emotional condition. The healer knows the community very well; he perceives the social situation in which a husband's sister--who may also be addressed as "sister" by the young afflicted wife--fosters the conditions which lead to the young wife's stressful situation, and consequently, to her physiological malfunction. Without accusing the husband's sister of mischief, the *Shaikh* intuits that the supernatural "Sister" is the source of affliction. The Supernatural being is presented in anthropomorphic terms which parallel those of the husband's human sister. Consequently, the husband's human sister realizes her culpability as the reason for the miscarriages. When I pointed out to the healer that he first mentioned the supernatural "Sister" then shifted to the "Counterspirit," he readily explained: "What is the difference! They are all the same." Thus, his first choice, the "Sister," was highly congruent with the specifics of the case he was handling. The shared belief that the amulet "would burn any aggressor" generates the sentiment of fear in the husband's sister; she acts according to this new feeling. Her actions towards the wife change and the wife is spared most of the stress generating friction.

The final group of belief characters are associated exclusively with the *zar*,[33] a folk ritual aimed at

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32. According to legends, Prophet Solomon met the Queen of these beings and did not release her until she pledged never to harm a person who wears "Solomon's amulet".

33. See note no. 1 above.

appeasing rather than expelling the possessing spirit. The zar sub-cult is a part of the larger cult of possession and ritual healing but is normally viewed as a separate process. Professional zar practitioners usually claim that there are sixty-six members of the zar pantheon of Jinn; most, however, can actually cite much fewer names. The specifics of the zar spirits do vary from one practitioner to another yet the boundaries between their domain and those of other Jinn categories are clearly defined.

In certain cases the organization of this category of belief <pg.27> characters is perceived in largely anthropomorphic familial terms. A Cairene woman (K.)[34] who is possessed by a zar Jinni cited the zar spirits as follows:

> There is "Sultan Mamma" and his sister, "Mustagheeta [i.e., the One-who-is-Crying-out-for-Help]" [...]; "Yousaih-the- Spoiled" and his sister "Um-Ghulaam [Mother-of-the-Lad]," "Yousaih" is the son of "Mamma"; "Mary-Mariyya" and the "Priest," her brother [...],; "Rena [a female Christian spirit];" the "Minister;" "Abul-Ghait" and "Wraida [...]" his sister. "Room-Nagdi" and "Marooma,"his sister; "Sultan-of-the-Mariners" and his sister, "Safeena [i.e., the ship]," who is also the sister of the "Diver;" "The-Arab-of-the-Arabs" and his sister "Galeela; "Wallaag" is her [i.e., Galeela's] slave;" "`Uwaisha-from-the-Maghreb," she is the sister of the "Maghrabii;" "Yawree Bey" and "Um-Mamoon," his sister; the "Manzooh," and "Manzooha," [is] his sister.
>
> Naturally, there are also [groups of spirits, such as] the Egyptians, the Sudanese, the Ethiopians, the Bedouins, the Sultans-of-the-Monstary (who are included in the Egyptian group).
>
> I [personally] was possessed by the big Sultan, "Sultan Mamma" [...]

K. cited twenty-four individual zar spirits; only four relationships: Mamma and Yousaih's, Rena, the Minister, and Galeela and Wallag's were not perceived as that of brother and sister. It is significant to observe here that Mamma has a sister; he also has a son, but he has no wife. Also Yosaih has a sister, but she is not perceived as Mamma's daughter. Evidently, the brother and sister relationship in this context overrides that of the daughter and father.

In another list containing Zar spirits published by the <pg.28> distinguished orientalist-folklorist Enno Littmann[35] the brother and sister association also dominates. That list names twenty-one characters. Two of these represent ethnic identities rather than particular personal characteristics: they are "the White Slaves" and "the Ethiopian Ladies." Of the remaining nineteen, twelve are given in pairs of brother and sister, two are presented as father and son, and two (slaves) are portrayed in son-mother relationships. The rest are individual "spirits" with no kinship relations.

K's perception of the pattern of organization of the zar spirits is congruent with other aspects of the belief system especially those concerning the affectionate bond between a supernatural Sister and her human brother. This organization is also highly indicative of K's own social and psychological real conditions. At the time when the state of her "possession" was at its peak, some twenty years earlier, K.had one full brother and two half brothers and one half sister from the mother. Although she married a number of times, she did

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34. Recorded in September,1968 from K. S. She was about fifty-five years of age.

35. *Arabische Geisterbeschwörungen aus Ägypten* (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1950), pp. 35-36. It is surprising that this invaluable work by Littmann has not received any attention from scholars in this field of scholarship.

not bear any children and yearned for a child. K.was quite attached to her full brother- he also displayed a great deal of affection towards her. To the chagrin of his wife, K's full brother agreed to let her raise his first son. She kept the son with her for about fourteen years, called him "my son," and assigned him a new nickname. The son 'visited' his actual parents on special occasions, only accompanied by K. The animosity between K and her brother's wife (the boy's mother) was exceptionally acute; the two women, however, had to control the public display of their feelings towards each other. "When she was not feuding with me, she treated me as if I did not exist," said the brother's wife.

The belief state which K. adopted from the zar characters is a duplicate of her own psychosocial conditions. Mamma, the spirit which possessed K, had a sister and a son, but no wife of <pg.29> his is mentioned; K. herself had a brother but no son. Thus when K took over her brother's son and viewed him as her own, she was playing the role of Mamma's sister "Mustagheetah (the-One-Who-Is-Crying-Out-for-Help)."

Indeed, K. was crying out for help in a symbolic guise which is to be understood only within the context of the systemic relations of the zar characters in which she believed.

Conclusions

Belief characters (and places) in Egyptian folk cultures are perceived in anthropomorphic terms; on the whole, they are symbolic expressions of psycho-social realities. Each character represents a cognition' a sentiment or feeling and an action tendency for the believer. The roles the various characters play in the lives of members of traditional communities are highly institutionalized, and are perceived within the context of the broader belief **systems**. The role of a specific character is determined by the sentiment it evokes in the believers. Just as these sentiments are **not** interchangeable, belief characters do not cross the boundaries of the cognitive and affective categories within which they are perceived.

A roving writer reported that the Egyptian fellahin believe that "babies died not from disease but because Satan strangled them;"[36] a psychiatrist concluded that the possessing zar spirit is the "'Devil;"[37] and an anthropologist wrote that "the zar ceremony is essentially a means of dealing with the demonic powers of evil (various called *shaytân* [Satan], *afreet* [Efrit], *ablees* [Eblis, i. e., Satan], Jinn or zar spirits;"[38] these views stand in sharp contrast with the psychological realities in the cultures which they sought to clarify. In the words of a practicing healer:

"If Satan [i.e., the Devil] were to enter into a person['s body or mind] if that was possible and it isn't that person is <pg.30> good for nothing; that person is better dead than alive and would not be worth saving."[39]

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36. Richard Critchfield, "The Persistent Past: Passing the Buck to Demons," *The New Republic*, November 8, 1975, p. 15.

37. <pg.36> Okasha, "A Cultural Psychiatric Study," p. 1217. The same viewpoint is expressed by Nathan S. Kline, "Psychiatry in Kuwait," *British Journal of Psychiatry* 104 (1963), pp. 766-774, esp. p.768.

38. Kennedy, "Nubian Zar," p. 186.

39. See note No. 29.