

and creatures.²⁵ Unlike other important elements that maintain life, such as water and food which can be privately owned by individuals, air cannot be claimed by anybody as private property. Air is for all creatures whose lives depend on it. Strong or severe winds and whirlwinds are believed to be caused by strong movements of the *'ifrīt* or, using the peasants' own expression, *fasiat 'ifrīt*, an *'ifrīt*'s fart.²⁶

8. The Universe: Diversity and Unity

Concerning *al-'ālam*, the world, or *al-kaun*, the universe, as a whole, we conclude the following points. Ontologically, what is *zāhir*, visible, or *hā-ḍir*, present, is not the only substance that exists in the world. What is *bāṭin*, unseen, or *ghā'ib*, absent, also exists. Metaphorically speaking, what is invisible or absent is *mahjūb*, veiled or concealed either by its very nature, such as souls, or by something else, such as an *hijāb* (veil) or any other barrier. The universe, then, is constructed on the relationships that exist between the oppositions of visibility/invisibility, or perceptibility/imperceptibility. Beings and entities that exist in the first sky and on the first earth are visible and material while beings that belong to the invisible domains of the heavens are immaterial. This results in the opposition material/immaterial.

Although what is behind the first or lowest sky and what is in the underworld (the seventh earth) are both invisible, the nature of invisibility differs in the two cases. Above the first heaven, all invisible beings and entities are made by Allah of *nūr*, light. Moreover, behind the first heaven there is an eternal light which is unseen because of the *hijāb* (veil) which, in this case, is the first sky itself. In this connection, the light is a unifying principle or value that renders the diversity of beings or creatures and entities which exist within the upper heavens or beyond the first heaven a unity.

As opposed to what is beyond the first heaven, which is *nūr* (light and divine), the invisible domain that exists in the earth is *ḡalām* (dark). Here, we find other pairs of oppositions to include

dark/light and profane/divine. Both light and dark are considered as *qūwā ghaibīyah*, invisible forces; the first is called *qūwā an-nūr*, "forces of light," while the second is called *qūwā az-ḡalām*, "forces of darkness." Light is associated with benevolent forces while dark is connected with malevolent forces. Light contradicts and encompasses dark. In a word, light is superior to dark. The earth itself is transitory and, consequently, the dark within it is temporal and inferior. Meanwhile, the light seen on earth is cyclic and temporal, not eternal as is that which exists beyond the visible heaven. In this connection, one finds the opposition between eternity and transience. The ultimate source of the light of all the heavens and the earth is Divinity or Allah. Villagers, in many different contexts, quote the verse of the Qur'ān that states: *Allah nūr as-samāwāt wa al arḍ*, "Allah is the Light of the heavens and of the earth" (Qur'ān 24:35). "The religious way of seeing things requires a classification of beings according to their dignity" (Dumont 1980: 65).

If the air is an invisible link between the first sky and the earth, then the saints as represented in their sanctuaries and angels are respectively visible and invisible links between all the heavens and the earth. Angels, ordered by Allah, descend to the earth to undertake some specific work or deliver messages to men, then ascend to the heavens after completing their mission. Meanwhile, all angels have one leader or chief angel, Jibrīl. Jibrīl is known as the messenger of Allah who gives Allah's message to the prophets. The prophets, in turn, give Allah's message to the people. Jibrīl resides in the seventh heaven. On the other hand, all devils and non-Muslim *jinn* or *'afārīt* have a leader or chief, Iblīs or *ash-shaiṭān ar-rajīm*, the cursed Satan who uses his own knowledge for evil purposes. Here, we have another set of oppositions, that between heavenly or productive knowledge (given by Allah) and destructive knowledge designed by the devil. This opposition can be reformulated as *siḥr/dīn* "magic/religion." Living men known for possessing *baraka*, blessing, as well as saints are religiously significant as immediate agents for achieving good things, while magicians represent erroneous and nonreligious activities. Iblīs is known as being *'aduww Allah*, the enemy of Allah and the founder of magic. Furthermore, as opposed to *jinn*, who eat and procreate, angels neither eat nor procreate. Angels represent unity in so far as they are created of and identified with *nūr*, light, while *jinn* and *shayāṭīn* represent diversity and disunity as far as they are created of fire and associated with winds. The next opposition

25 Ancient Egyptians reached a similar idea where the Lord was described as follows: "Lord of life, he who lets the throat breathe and gives air to every nose" (Morenz 1973: 182).

26 Lane (1966: 229) says that, among the Arabs of Egypt, the "whirlwind which raises the sand or dust in the form of a pillar of prodigious height, and which is so often seen sweeping across the fields and deserts of this country, is caused by the flight" of a *jinn*.