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Tacit Containment

Social Value, Embodiment, and Gender Practice in Northern Sudan

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This paper is about the intersection of power, history, and gender in rural northern Sudan, and its tacit expression in meaningful practice. Based on ethnographic work conducted in the village of Hofriyat since the mid-1970s,[1] my argument pivots around the implications of an intrinsically fragile and valuable substance—blood. Suggestive contrasts exist between public, cross-sex assertions about blood and those more specific to women. I will argue that such contrasts derive from women's and men's different positions in local thought and practice, and reflect their respective efforts to maintain social integrity in a harsh and often unforgiving world.

The people of Hofriyat (a pseudonym) are Arabic speakers and Muslims who live alongside the Nile some 200 km northeast of Khartoum. The village had, as of 1984,[2] some 500 permanent residents, and the village area to which it belongs contained some 2,000 more, though at least that many again had migrated to the capital or were spending the better part of each year at work in Libya, Egypt, and the oil-rich areas of Arabia and the Persian Gulf. Historically it is mainly men who leave in search of work; when amicable relations with neighboring nations allow, their earnings abroad from trade, service, and professional work are sent home to sustain village households. Men who live in the village typically farm. But the agricultural potential of the region is limited by its desert climate; few if

any families subsist solely on cultivation and most rely heavily on cash and kind remittances from kin. Women may be *de facto* heads of households during their husbands' extended absences; they bear primary responsibility for socializing the young; they can inherit and own land or other property and control their own incomes; yet most are economic dependents, and all are jural minors, formally subordinate to men.

Villages along the Nile north of Khartoum evince neither sharp economic differentiation nor a clearly identifiable bourgeoisie. Conventional concepts of class are inadequate to describe their composition. Economic disparities among villagers certainly exist, but are, for the most part, exceptionally fluid, unsedimented, historically transient. Every rural family, whether or not its members farm, has "city" kin—a husband, brother, son, father, even a male cousin—who sends money home from elsewhere in the country or abroad. Many commonly identified as "peasant farmers" because they cultivate some land are older men who have, ironically, spent most of their lives outside the village working for wages or in trade. And farm ownership scarcely signals "peasant autonomy," given, among other things, the severe fragmentation of arable holdings under Islamic inheritance laws and the caprice of the flooding Nile in depositing or removing productive silts (plus houses, corrals, and compound walls), to say nothing of fluctuations in the availability of water, or of diesel fuel for irrigation pumps when water supplies are good, or the vagaries of markets, state development policy, and international opinion of the current regime. In this precarious physical, political, and economic climate, wealth tends to be deciduous: more often used to strengthen social networks—by contracting marriages, sponsoring relatives' schooling and foreign work permits—than accumulated and invested directly in farming or trade. Social investment is a survival strategy that mitigates the radical discontinuities one might otherwise expect to obtain between cultivators, and off-farm workers and merchants, or between city dwellers and villagers. More than class, it is kinship that defines allegiances and determines opportunities, at least in the rural context,[3] and it is the *density* of localized kin allegiances—more than economic factors *per se*—that distinguishes rural from urban communities in northern Sudan.

Marriage is economically and politically critical in this context, and control over fertility, its bestowal and its materialization in morally entangled progeny, is key to social and physical well-being. And crucial to this process is female circumcision, here infibulation. In Hofriyat many men overtly link the practice of infibulation with the maintenance of a family's honor, its social capital: The procedure is intended in part to preserve women's chastity and hence their marriageability. Women, however, generally emphasize not sexuality but fertility: to them, infibulation ensures moral motherhood.[4] Local idioms and associations suggest that infibulation encloses the womb and defends it against misappropriation much as courtyard walls enclose and protect a family. Yet in elaborating on this link the sexes privilege different dimensions of that which might be usurped; these provide the focus for my discussion below. But first let me outline my approach.

Analytical Considerations

I am working from the assumption that all human relationships are saturated with power—power that is fluid, dynamic, not unidirectional, yet which might condense, fugitively or protractedly, in persons, roles, and institutions. These last may wield an influence due more to their ultimate, sacred legitimacy than to any overtly coercive force. Implicit here is a concept of power that attends more to its authorizing capacities than its initiating or agentive ones, and, after Foucault, more to its enabling than its repressive potentials.[5] Indeed, to conflate power with repression is to imagine it as being applied from a position external to an individual in order to curb her presocial will; eschewing this as Enlightenment sophistry, one might suggest instead that power channeled through the forms and practices of everyday life produces agents who are nonetheless intrinsically social beings. A Foucauldian concept of power stretched to embrace nonindustrial, non-European contexts as well as the bourgeois European one it was originally designed to portray, seems arguably to resemble a Durkheimian concept of "society," at least in its effects. To an extent it reformulates "society" from a more thoroughly constructionist position, abating Durkheimian concerns for the relationship, hence the

distinction, between the (incompletely socialized) individual and the group. Neither view is entirely adequate for my purposes: Foucauldian power often appears too totalizing, leaving little room for agency of any kind; Durkheimian individuals seem too autonomous except when they have conspired to delude themselves. Yet the interplay of embodied commitment and disenchantment I adduce in practices considered below is, no doubt, informed by both.

My approach is also shaped by the insights of Bourdieu on the *habitus*, the mute internalization of the axioms of one's social world.[6] While I am concerned with how people who consider themselves "children (*awlad*) of Hofriyat" produce "docile bodies and pliant minds in the service of . . . collective stability, health, and social well-being," here I stress the different positions of women and men in respect to this process.[7] My principal interest lies in how, through their gender-specific practices, village women both enact and at times implicitly challenge the valence of apparently hegemonic concepts, summoning what is taken-for-granted to public attention, quietly but continuously opening up informative constructs to make space for their own experiences. Further, women's self-production enables them to engage the world in creative and possibly empowering ways.

While it is tempting to suggest that in Hofriyat, as in certain colonial or intercultural interactions, a dominated group (here women) has appropriated its oppressor's (men's) categories and accommodated or transformed them in light of its own concerns, this model is inadequate to the present case. Hegemonic meanings are neither authored nor possessed and controlled solely by men, though they clearly endorse male privilege. Nor are they simply received and defied by women. Rather, women and men through their joint and distinctive practices create and continuously refashion the realities they both celebrate and routinely dispute. It is crucial that this be plain, as my discussion revolves around the practice of infibulation, an incendiary topic in the West. Both academic training and immersion in an intellectual tradition with Judeo-Christian and secular humanist roots throw up stumbling blocks—like the distinction of body from mind, or the presumption of linear, agentive causality—that

may impede understanding of bodily practices in other societies, let alone our own, and lead to simplistic and uninformed verdicts of "male domination."[8]

In short, the ethnography to follow depicts gender dynamics within a cultural context that is—albeit unevenly—shared, collectively produced and maintained. Yet the absence of overt compulsion does not mean that power is not at work. As Comaroff and Comaroff note, power's effects

> are internalized, in their negative guise, as constraints; in their neutral guise, as conventions; and, in their positive guise, as values. Yet the silent power of the sign, the unspoken authority of habit, may be as effective as the most violent coercion in shaping, directing, even dominating social thought and action.[9]

I would add a layer to this observation: Hofriyati women routinely guide this unspoken authority in seeking to control the conditions of their lives, and they do so in ways that both reproduce the terms of hegemony and subvert them at the same time. There is a tendency to consider such acts *re*-directions, or what Foucault calls "counterinvestments"; yet I sense this would be imprecise.[10] For they are not *derivative* performances, components of a "reverse discourse" through which women acting on their own behalf revise dominant meanings of circumcision and the blood that it conserves.[11] Rather, meanings brought to light through women's practices are originary, or at least convergent and coeval with those vested with formal legitimacy in Hofriyat. They articulate women's specific experiences as the embodiments of social value, and their focus, in accord with men's, on conserving that value: on holding the line against the ever-present threats of entropy from within, and inundation by powerful forces from without. Conflicts of experience signal the sexes' different investments in their social world.

Let me remark briefly on another ethnographic dimension: religion. Here I take a broad approach. Hofriyati are Sunni Muslims and my discussion includes reference to formal, official Islam but is not limited to it. For Hofriyati, Islam is an embracing context, not one belief system among

others in a pluralistic universe. Islam describes a person's fundamental relationship to reason and knowledge, the world at large and as such. Its practices refer to nonhuman, transcendent powers, yet are in no way isolable from quotidian concerns. Religion saturates Hofriyati life and is not a privileged domain; it is also remarkably elastic insofar as people disagree about the proper performance of rites, the nature of spirits, treatments for illness and the like. Yet these are surface features. They are informed by an underlying epistemology that is indeed immutable, containing the essence of universal Islam: *tawhid*, the oneness of Allah. This truth is an ultimate if unavowed source for locally elaborated imagery through which Hofriyati and their neighbors understand the significance of human being-in-the-world. God is one, whole, singular and integral, perfect and incorruptible. Humans are none of these, though men's persons approach the exemplary more closely than do women's. Yet, through social interventions and cultural fashionings of their bodies, women, too, align themselves with the ideal, in a way that complements the approximations of men.

In order to appreciate the Hofriyati constructions detailed below, one must bracket a proclivity in Western commonsense discourse for dualist or "representational" logic (consonant with aforementioned cleavages between mind/body, actor/action) in which images and their referents constitute finite units in distinctive domains. In Hofriyat things typically do not exist in and of themselves but in reciprocal relationship; natural substance is inseparable from cultural code. Blood, for instance, does not represent fertility—it *is* fertility. Fertility is intrinsic to certain types of blood, not a disembodied concept that blood signifies or encrypts. Hofriyati cultural logic favors homology and metonymy: Images participate in each other's forms and contents; they are immanent and recursive, resolving to other images and yet other images, weaving a deeply textured fabric out of relations, objects, attributes and conditions, experiencing and meaningful bodies. Here images do not reduce to hidden truths, they harbor them. To depict such images as distinct from the persons who embody them is not just contextually inaccurate, but blunts recognition of how they affect bodily states and motivate people's actions.

This accounts in part for discrepancies between Hofriyati and Western depictions of female and male circumcision. For Hofriyati, such surgeries complete the social definition of a child's sex by removing external traces of androgyny: to remove the clitoris and labia is to remove male body parts in female form, while to remove the foreskin is to remove a female body part in male form. The infibulated female body is covered, closed, and its productive blood is bound within; the male body is unveiled, untied, opened to engage the world. The operations are said to make the children marriageable. They capacitate their bodies for procreation, producing a lack in one that only the other can meet, but not in any crude physical way (Hofriayti are well aware that uncircumcised people reproduce). Rather, they endow their bodies with moral and social consequence and align them in the meaningful world. The operation is performed when a child has achieved a certain degree of "*agl*," reason or "social awareness": the ability to internalize the rules of comportment and proper behavior, to anticipate others' needs and respond in appropriate ways, to demonstrate the reciprocity of perspectives that is the basis of human sociality. Children must understand that their bodies are being purified and socially controlled; the respective surgeries indelibly inscribe their bodies with the impress of moral gender, socialized sex. The procedures are deemed analogous, complementary.[12] They accentuate difference in order to create the potential for intensified social relationship.

From their reference point in scientific biology and a presumptively presocial body, Western analysts are prone to dispute Sudanese claims: Removing the clitoris is not equivalent to removing the foreskin, but to amputating the penis.[13] Yet such critics, including those who, like Winkel, argue similarly from the position of Islamic law, have missed the cultural point.[14] They mistake a moral and cosmological statement about collective and personal identity for poor scientific observation. Slippage is exacerbated by the Western propensity for mapping gender onto presocial anatomical sex, whereas in Hofriyat, *inherently social* anatomical "sex" is made to conform to moral "gender." The social character of the sexual body is the point I turn to next.

Social Bodies: Blood and Bone

Infibulation, by enclosing the womb, safeguards uterine blood, the source of a woman's fecundity. I was told that a child's bones and sinew (hard parts) are formed from the semen or "seed" of its father, while its flesh and blood (soft parts) are formed from its mother's blood.[15] Blood is inherently transformative: it awakens the potential in (dry) seed; reflected here is a humoral model of health and physiology tailored to local circumstance. Moreover, Hofriyati, like the Anatolian villagers Carol Delaney describes, employ agrarian imagery when discussing procreation.[16] A man's offspring are his *zari'a*, that which is planted, his crop. Yet, to my knowledge, unlike Anatolians, they characterize woman neither as soil nor field—which suggests a passive, if nurturing role during pregnancy—but associate her instead with the fluids whose presence permits the triumph of life over death, growth over desiccation in Hofriyat's harsh desert climate. Like the annual inundation of the Nile upon which the village relies, womb blood is periodic, liquid, warm, and animating. Yet like the Nile it is also subject to dangerous fluctuation. The local staple, *kisra*, is a bread made by mixing sorghum flour obtained through men's farm labor or wages, with water that women fetch from the river or village wells. *Kisra* embodies the proper combination of substance and fluid, the fruits of male and female work, both productive and reproductive at once, which, transformed by heat—the heat of a woman's griddle, the heat of her womb—is necessary to sustain human life.

Venous and menstrual blood differ, not in kind, but in potency, in *time*: "red" blood that circulates in the body and pools in the womb turns "black" and sluggish when its capacity is extinguished. Blood expelled at childbirth is also described as "black," as is blood that issues from a wound. The shift from red to black, quick and moist, to heavy and lethargic charts declining productivity, advancing age, and the fugitive nature of maternal connection, discussed below. Recognition of blood's inescapable entropy is paired with a concern for maintaining social and physical vitality through conservation, the maintenance of internal balance, and the intensification of prior embodied relationships.

Though circumcision socializes physical manifestations of the child's inherent androgyny, it by no means obliterates them. The merging of seed and blood in the womb makes all bodies composites of male and female substance; genital surgeries create the capacity for relationship between persons able to confer these vital substances—blood and bone—and their attendant social attachments to future kin. Kin thus participate in each other's bodies and selves: bodies are neither unique nor finite and a person is unthinkable except in reference to kin. The composition of one's body is wholly shared with full siblings of either sex. Further, same-sex full siblings are physio-social duplicates and may substitute in each other's marriages after one of them has died (considered again below).

Still, parental matter combined in a human body parts company over the generations, for only women transmit blood, only men transmit seed. More, blood becomes increasingly decomposed inside the body with age: one's body is said to "dry up" as it matures, skin cedes its moisture, red blood in the womb loses its fecundity, flesh no longer adheres firmly to bones but becomes slack, withers, and ultimately, after death, disappears. The bones alone remain. Maternal blood is ephemeral, suggestive of all that is transitory in the temporal world; it is not only moral, but mortal.[17] Paternal connection prevails, structuring bodies and relations through time; indeed, the rigid appendages of the body—foot, calf, thigh—are terms for progressively inclusive generational levels in tribal genealogies. Maternal relations supply the tissue that attaches bony descent groups, providing integument that will eventually decay, allowing the "bones" to disengage—unless, that is, they are regenerated by successive marriages among maternal kin. It should come as no surprise that Hofriyati are preferentially endogamous; most first marriages are between first or second cousins, virtually all are contracted within the village area or its urban extremities. Ideally the village is at once physically and socially integral.

Thus, while the individual human body is a microcosm of social relationships, the ideal village is a bounded body writ large, whose bones are fixed by the successive intramarriages of women and men. Preferred spouses belong to the same patriline, with the children of brothers being closest and therefore choicest to wed. Yet the lineal principle is completed

by a uterine one that braids related descent lines in corporeal exchange. The most fitting marriage, the socially closest but most difficult to achieve, is that between the children of brothers who are also the children of sisters (bilateral parallel cousins) and whose grandfathers are brothers, or grandmothers sisters. Such couples share a socio-physical constitution derived from identical paternal and maternal sources; their children are exact internal replicas of themselves. Exemplary marriages are in practice rare (2% of all known marriages over an 80-year span); still, they provide a measure by which people can gauge the suitability of partners whose moral and physical bodies are less copresent in their own. When sisters marry into different patrilines, people remember; their offspring are classed as 'children of maternal aunts,' (*awlad khalat*). This limited extension of relationship is subject to intensification and containment over time, in that the cosubstantiality of the children of maternal aunts provides a basis for marriages among their descendants. Bodily matter cycles continuously through the village body, its differentiated bones bound and rebound over time by the flesh and blood that maternal connection provides.[18] Local practice favors condensing exchange, intensifying sociality, and repelling temporal and moral dissolution by using present and past relationships to create the possibility of close kinship one or more generations hence. Blood is thereby contained in the village body much as it is contained in the body of an infibulated girl.

Yet, despite such maneuvers, decline in bodily and social health will occur. Things come apart—as indeed they must. The point is this: Female fluids, and the flesh that they produce, must be expended so that human life can be sustained, and eternal life, which follows death, can be ensured. In order to merit *al-janna* (paradise), one first must be born and then live a Muslim life. Those conceived and raised in the moral/social womb of the maternal body/house/village are privileged to anticipate such a reward. But the eternal implications of spent uterine blood are seldom acknowledged, it seems, by men.

Blood and Gold

Two sets of local practices invoke somewhat different, if overlapping, renderings of blood and the female body. One is associated with the wedding and illuminates constructs that are official, and common to women and men; the other consists of "women's customs" (*'adat an-niswan*, specifically *mushahara* and *dukhan*) and, I think, provides a sense of how women elucidate salient images in addressing their own experiences and concerns. I begin with the wedding, in Hofriyat a cultural performance par excellence.

At several points during this three-day rite the groom struggles to gain access to his bride: twice he must give her coins to "open her mouth," for she maintains silence in his presence. The term for mouth, *khashm*, refers also to other body orifices including the vaginal opening: the bride is both uncommunicative and sexually reticent. Once accepted, the groom's payments inaugurate the dynamic reciprocity of material support (gleaned largely from the world beyond the village) for moral reproduction (within it) that is the hallmark of a successful marriage.

Other episodes depend on the homology between architectural enclosures and the womb. In Hofriyat, the bride does not move to her husband's house, he comes to hers. When he arrives with his entourage outside the walls of her family's houseyard on the night of the wedding feast, he is prevented from crossing the threshold, the *khashm al-bayt* or "mouth of the house" by a group of the bride's kinsmen. He must fight them to gain admittance. On another occasion, the groom returns to his bride's house after ritually bathing in the Nile to find that a sheep has been slaughtered at the threshold. To enter he must step over the animal's blood. This rite recalls the Islamic 'Id al-Kabir, the festival that is the highpoint of the ceremonial year, when each male head of household slaughters a ram in remembrance of Ibrahim's willingness to submit to Allah's request that he sacrifice his son Ismael (his only full Arab male descendant).[19] Allah spared Ismael at the last moment, substituting a ram to sacrifice instead, and thus sustained Ibrahim's line. Yet here the context is different. The Hofriyati wedding sheep (either sex may be used) substitutes for the bride: The blood of the animal killed at the bride's threshold invokes both the blood of defloration and, as in spirit possession contexts explored below, uterine blood required for procreation. The bride's blood, her fertility, indeed her life, will be sacrificed like the sheep's that her husband might acquire descendants. The wedding sheep's blood sanctifies and anticipates the loss and transfer of female blood which, like the commemorative slaughter on

the 'Id, enables the flow of patrilineal descent. Bridal blood must be shed to guarantee continuity in this world and the next: Female substance is inherently expendable.

Most of the paraphernalia associated with brides, recently circumcised girls, and mothers newly delivered, all of whom are referred to as "brides," is either red in color or described as such. The bridal mat, bridal perfume (*humra*, "redness"), henna, and bridal veil (*garmosis*) are cases in point. The color is that of active, productive uterine blood. Yet the red cloth of the *garmosis* is shot with gold, and a bride is copiously bedecked in gold jewelry—gifted by her husband, loaned by her family—whenever she is on public display. Gold is condensed value that is extracted from the outside world by men, the appropriately filtered consequence of their productive engagements with nature or foreign groups. It is the categorical convertible substance, removed from day-to-day exchange and forged into protective adornment for women, put to the service of descent. For gold does more than signify masculine achievement and feminine worth; it demonstrates a woman's relatedness, that she is backed by responsible men. In all, the wedding ceremony reverberates with imagery advising caution and control in opening up the protected social/female body through marriage/sexual intercourse and exposing its active moral asset, its blood. Yet it also asserts the rightness of that act under appropriate conditions. However, the bride herself is quiescent; here it is men who master, expose, and expend, and she who reflects their acts.

Consider now the other set of practices alluded to, the *'adat an-niswan*, beginning with *mushahara*.[20] Collectively this term refers to ailments, cures and prophylactics having to do with excessive uterine blood loss (*nazif*). *Nazif* refers to hemorrhage, not to menstruation: the distinction is that between red and black blood. Yet *mushahara* derives from *shahr*, meaning "new moon" or "month." The connection can hardly be fortuitous, for just as *mushahara* practices are concerned to control genital bleeding, lunar rhythms signal predictable, disciplined genital flow. This tacit link may express the ambivalence with which women regard a loss of uterine blood: Regular menses portend continuing fertility but indicate the absence of pregnancy, while their failure suggests either pregnancy or its opposite, sterility.

Causes of genital hemorrhage and means to prevent it are several: One who has just given birth, or is newly infibulated or recently wed must wear a gold ring whose face is that of an "Egyptian" coin (*khatim ginay masri*). Should she neglect to do so, and then see a woman wearing gold, she will surely hemorrhage. When a woman discovers she is pregnant any gold she is wearing at the time cannot be removed until after the birth lest she miscarry. *Nazif* is said to be caused or exacerbated by spirits (*jinn*), who are attracted to blood and gold; a menstruating woman who visits a graveyard risks sterility, for it is a popular abode of *jinn*. Gold worn on the arms and upper body diverts spirits' attention from the vaginal area, which is assailable because it is "open" and bleeds.

Women who have recently undergone genital surgery and childbirth are apt to suffer uncontrollable hemorrhage if visited by people returning from a funeral, or by those who have seen a corpse or butchered animal and not yet cleansed their vision of death.[21] To prevent this, a bowl of Nile water containing some sorghum seeds or dried *kisra*, plus an axhead or some coins is placed before the threshold to the invalid's room. Visitors must first look into the bowl, after which they may enter the room with impunity. If river water is not provided, guests should gaze into a well and see in its depths a reflection of the moon or stars before proceeding to their destination. Should a new mother suffer *nazif* because of a guest's omission or because she has somehow come into contact with blood spilt at circumcision, she hopes to remedy the affliction by peering into a bowl of Nile water containing a gold coin, or into a well that reflects the moon or stars just after sundown. Such practices suggest homologous cosmic and earthly domains: The medium of the night sky is to feminine water as substantive heavenly bodies are to masculine coins and axheads—objects whose reflective properties can avert harm. Importantly, coins, agriculture, the Nile, the moon and stars—all invoke cyclical over linear process, recuperability over consumption and decay.

Mushahara hemorrhage has to do with mixing opposed experiential domains concerning blood: with a woman whose blood is vulnerable and exposed seeing gold when she is wearing none, seeing someone who has seen death and, for the newly delivered, seeing blood shed at circumcision. Since the ailment can also cause her milk, a product of feminine

blood, to weaken or dry up, it imperils her child even after successful delivery. In a pregnant woman not yet come to term miscarriage or stillbirth might result.

The logic of *mushahara* becomes more explicit by considering that *nazif* is said to occur if the woman sees a female gypsy, or Halibiyya. The Halib are outsiders, thought to have come to Sudan from Syria; today they are itinerant traders and blacksmiths whose forceful salesmanship has earned the women among them a reputation for brashness and questionable conduct.[22] While Hofriyati women are residentially fixed, Halib women are peripatetic, travelling openly in the company of men. Moreover, unlike Hofriyati they are not infibulated. If a gypsy woman enters a courtyard (as she is apt to do uninvited) where a woman is ritually confined, immediately the door to the invalid's room is shut and closely guarded so as to prevent the two from making visual contact.

Mushahara concerns the transmission of debilitating and restorative effects on fluids having to do with women's fertility by means of sight. Sights potentially harmful to ideally contained fertility/blood include female openness, male value generated outside the village if one is not at the time protected by same, and physical entropy—death. The eyes are orifices of the human body, which, like mouths, communicate between its interior and the ambient world. This, of course, supplies the basis for villagers' concept of the evil or "hot" eye (*'ayn harra*): that someone's appreciative look might unwittingly cast misfortune on the person, animal, or thing admired. In *mushahara*, damage to women's blood and its products—fetuses, and milk—stems from confusing domains or neglecting their proper association, thus violating gender complementarity and social order. It occurs when the essence of death—and in Hofriyat both butchering and burial are solely the province of men—is visually mixed with that of birth, solely women's sphere; when one who has shed black blood in childbirth sees red blood whose emission capacitates fertility; when a normally reserved, dignified, and enclosed Hofriyati is brought into contact with an uninfibulated, unconfined gypsy, the antithesis of moral womanhood. Such mixings pose a threat to a woman's bodily integrity, imperiling her distinctive yet symmetrical worth with precocious decomposition. Moreover they illuminate the female body's status as a metonym and icon of the relatively enclosed village body-writ-large.

Mushahara practices work to maintain what women consider proper order, and to proclaim the value of their contribution. The ring made from a gold coin of foreign origin that a husband gives his wife at marriage—like the coins he gives her to "open her mouth"—contractually binds her fertility/blood with the promise of future provision. She endows it with another, though not unrelated significance: wearing it protects her blood by diverting attentions of *jinn*, powerful spirits ready to take advantage of her physical and ritual defenselessness whenever the occasion should arise. Gold and money are identified with men who, as the village's first line of defense, are charged with taking from the outside world what is compatible with local ideals and putting it to appropriate use. But if wearing gold defends a woman from spirit attack, neglecting to wear it may increase her vulnerability should she then see it worn by another. Now the spirits attracted to a visitor's jewelry may be drawn, not to hers, but to her blood. With this she is tacitly reminded that blood and gold are close yet inexact equivalents; blood that flows in one's veins and from one generation to the next is intrinsically more precious, however alluring—and transactable—foreign gold might be. Gold, after all, is an unspecified, all-purpose medium of exchange; blood is anything but. *Mushahara* is an implicit assertion of gender complementarity that adjusts the asymmetry of quotidian valuations: between females, fluids, blood, internal space, and intrinsic worth on the one hand, and males, substances, gold, the outside world, and humanly attributed value on the other. Its practices reiterate the bride when, at the wedding's climax, she appears before the assembly clothed in her red and gold veil, the *garmosis*. Indeed, a woman keeps near her a *garmosis* whenever her uterine blood is vulnerable: whenever she is "open." For women the interwoven colors of the bridal cloth evince the proper *union* of male and female contributions and domains.

Recall that the bowl of Nile water meant to defuse noxious visions also contains some sorghum seeds or stale *kisra* dough, plus a metal axhead, or hatchet, and/or some coins. Considering that water is associated with women's work and both human and earthly fertility; that metal tools,

coins, and sorghum recall farming and male labor; and that dough (dry and therefore needing moisture to become edible) is the result of women's and men's combined subsistence activities, metaphoric and metonymic of their separate contributions to the body of a child, it seems reasonable to suggest that the prophylactic power of the *mushahara* bowl lies too in its affirmation of proper order. Visitors optically transmit the essence of calibrated gender complementarity to the woman whose fecundity is in danger because it has been exposed.

Sight is not the only sense implicated in the vulnerability and defense of uterine blood. In Hofriyat, bad odors can cause illness. Smells of sweat or of the black blood of childbirth indicate unboundedness and, like inappropriate visions, dispose a woman to possession by bloodthirsty *jinn*. Bridal chambers and confinement rooms are fumigated regularly with "sweet" wedding incense designed to expel sojourning spirits. Commercial perfumes and colognes are used liberally by both sexes in Hofriyat. Referred to as "cold" scent (*riha barda*), their thermal properties link them to men's bodily techniques like shaving. *Riha barda* is not homemade, but must be purchased from 'outside' with money that men have earned. Indicative of generosity, extravagance, purity, cleanliness, and health, it is lavishly showered on guests at a wedding, and even informal visits culminate with circulation of a bottle of Bint as-Sudan (Daughter of Sudan) cologne and the instruction to *itrayhati*, "perfume yourself." Cold scent is also sprinkled on woods burned in the bridal smoke bath, *dukhana*, which, like *mushahara*, is a "women's custom."

A woman's first smoke bath takes place shortly before her wedding. A hole dug in the kitchen's earthen floor is filled with incense and fragrant wood shavings and lighted. The bride removes her clothes, wraps herself to the neck in a thick, tightly woven blanket, and sits astride the smoldering pit, entrapping the rising smoke. She emerges hours later with her skin emitting a powerful smoky odor that lasts for several days.[23] The sauna simultaneously prepares her for sexual intercourse[24] and purifies her body while reiterating affinities among femininity, closure, fertility, and heat. This and other practices like infibulation, considered *harr*, "hot" and "painful," enable the bride, thereafter the married woman, to both seal her skin against future fluid loss and conserve and augment her body's heat. Her corporeal heat is by nature less than a man's, yet hers will be depleted in transforming physical substance into life and must be augmented from time to time.

Still, a woman sprinkles *cold* scent on the burning woods of her bath. And cold scent is also used in women's cosmetics, in, for example, *dilka*, a skin-smoothing paste of sorghum dough, which is itself smoked over fragrant woods in the early stages of its manufacture. Resonance with gender complementary meanings of *kisra* bread is clear. Moreover, (external) cologne is often mixed with (internal) Nile water in the *mushahara* bowl to protect visitors from breathing unsavory odors upon entering the room of a newly circumcised girl or a woman recently delivered.

Breathing—taking into one's body—a proper complement of cold and smoky odors is crucial to well-being. Here again it is important to achieve gender balance. "Sweet" bridal incense reveals this well: fragrant woods like *sandal* are first tossed with sugar and 'cooked' in a large pan, then sprinkled with cold scent and liquid smoked perfume; fragrance is released by smoldering the amalgam in a brazier. The smell, as noted earlier, is designed to forestall bodily intrusion by *jinn*. For its own part, smoked perfume, that called *humra* or "redness," is a condensed expression of complementarity made by combining precious oils with granulated musk, smoked sandalwood powder, and cold perfume. As a final touch the woman making it pours the mixture into a bottle, lights a cigarette, and blows tobacco smoke through the neck, shaking the bottle vigorously to disperse the smoke. Women preparing to attend a nuptial dance daub themselves generously with *humra*: it is aesthetically pleasing and guards against bad smells. But more than this, its redness and smoky odor serve constantly to remind the wearer of her productive femininity, indeed to impress her body with its qualities. Like wedding incense, and like the red and gold threads of the wedding veil, its specific blend of elements protects her fertility and reiterates the appropriate union of male and female spheres. (Departed female friends and kin, including anthropologists, have their supplies of these items regularly replenished by Hofriyati in the hope that offspring will ensue.)

Bodily openings, whether untoward or desired for the creation of relationship, entail interaction with the ambient world that can disrupt a woman's internal balance; the prophylactic or corrective measures known as "women's customs" synaesthetically restore the harmony essential to physical integrity and reproductive health. It is the proper and dynamic conjunction of male and female domains, such practices attest, that is necessary to conserve uterine blood and the moral community it sustains.

Saudi Migrants

The moral community perceives threats to its continuity from time to time, yet most come less from the direct pressure of outside forces than from shifts in how men filter or marshal their effects. In the 1980s, for example, the preferred destination for young men working abroad was Saudi Arabia. Those lucky enough to obtain Saudi work permits earned far more money than men employed in Sudan; when they returned home in search of brides they were prepared to offer lavish gifts and lucrative connections to the families of marriageable girls, and became highly desirable as sons-in-law. Several of these men claimed to have become better educated in the ways if Islam during their Arabian sojourns and used this to justify requests for premenstrual girls as brides. In two instances, girls aged 10 and 11 were removed from school to prevent them becoming immersed in the secular world, and married quickly without their consent. In each case the couples were distant cousins; while the mothers of both brides and grooms were said to have had other, closer, arrangements in mind for their children, they were summarily overruled by male kin. All of this contravened normal practice.[25] Moreover, the girls were chosen over their older unwed sisters, another transgression of local ideals. Women I spoke to at the time felt their position was eroding relative to men's; they referred to the behavior of the migrant grooms and brides' fathers as *ma ma'gul*—not *'agl*: lacking, that is, in social awareness.

I also heard men not directly involved in the child marriages describe the grooms that way. They disapproved of taking the girls out of school, saying it was against the will of God for women to remain uneducated.

Moreover, the migrants' inordinate wealth had created inflated expectations for the *mahr*—property the groom gives his bride in fulfillment of the marriage contract, which is held in trust by her guardian in the event of divorce—and for the gifts a groom must give to his bride and her kin. The gifts, known collectively as the *shayla* or "load," consist of outfits of clothes and accessories for the bride in multiple sets, gold jewelry, expensive French perfume, *tobs* (diaphanous, often finely embroidered body wraps) for the bride's mother and sisters, plus spices and other foods for the wedding feast and the daily stream of visitors that a wedding attracts. The cost of the *shayla* had risen so sharply that by the mid 1980s men who were not Saudi migrants were finding it hard to become engaged. The standard "five-five-five" *shayla*, so called because it contained five sets of underclothes, five slips, five dresses, five pairs of shoes, five nightgowns, five handbags, and five *tobs*, had now escalated to "twelve-twelve-twelve." This was due in part to restrictions on currency exports set by the Saudi Arabian government; most returning migrants had no option but to convert a substantial portion of their savings into goods.[26] Whatever the source of the problem, the village council responded by imposing limits on wedding expenditures (limiting the *shayla* to "three-three-three"), but to little avail, as families of brides simply put a three *shayla* on display while defiantly keeping the remainder locked in newly bought trunks that were made tantalizingly visible to guests.

It is hardly surprising that people not immediately implicated in these events disparagingly suggested that the migrants were "buying" brides—girls docile and naive to their rights and social responsibilities, and insubstantially related to their husbands' kin. While the migrants, for their part, sought to shift village relations in ways they deemed salutary in light of their Saudi experience, women and nonmigrant men scorned their blatant misuse of "gold." Women, especially, were troubled that if "gold" were ultimately to overpower "blood," the moral balance provided by gender complementarity would be lost and local integrity compromised. They feared the village would no longer be able to contain the present outside forces—a revitalizing Islam, the globalizing economy—that were threatening to sweep them away.[27]

Claiming Essence

At this point I want to return to the practices associated with containing (*mushahara*) or loosing (the wedding) women's blood. That disparate understandings of the female body exist is hardly novel, nor is the realization that a person may entertain all of these at once. Presumably, men's and women's concepts of "blood" will at times coincide, at others diverge, since only women experience their bodies from within. That said, it is patent how a practice like circumcision whose apparent aim is to control and tame women's bodies is, for those who are thus designed, an expression of their reality, their social essence. Indeed women renew themselves in this fashion with every birth—reinfibulation follows each delivery—and seek to maintain their constitution with *mushahara* prophylaxis and various preparations involving temperature and smoke.

Hofriyati women materially realize an identification with fertility and blood each moment of the waking day. Virtually every act that they perform, from fetching water to baking bread, subtly reinforces this image of themselves. "Women's customs" do not dispute their ascribed identity, but build on it to strengthen their social position. They accent women's indispensability. These practices are constitutive, self-creative, however much enmeshed with more general, "hegemonic" constructs in Hofriyat. Just as North American women might unanalytically regard cosmetic surgery, make-up, uplift bras or diet pills as devices for refining the body's shape and form, the genital surgery that transforms Sudanese girls is held to be corrective. For through it women counteract the child's aberrant openness; paradoxically, they alter her body so as to preserve, and make it conform more closely with, its inherently social essence.[28]

In a provocative essay on Masai gender relations, Melissa Llewelyn-Davies suggested that where men claim to form, own, or transact women's bodies or their capacities, and have the economic and moral suasion to do so, then women's self-description as essential, inherently able beings constitutes an ingenious affront to men's authority.[29] Here an emphasis on "feminine nature"—the siren of biological determinism that western feminists properly refute as an empty apology for gender inequalities in

their own society—may be culturally appropriate. When deployed by women themselves, essentialism can be a powerfully displacing and disruptive force.[30]

Hofriyati women emphasize, indeed, *use* what they deem to be their essence—their inherently social blood—as a means to adjust, through subtle double description, an image of self they are assigned that is dramatized in the wedding rite. In a move that cannot but be ambivalent, they use the language of femininity to describe experiential struggles of the female world. Yet if their tactic is neither self-conscious nor theorized in any obvious way, it nonetheless entails an oblique displacement of the normative view by which pharaonic circumcision controls female sexuality and thus helps to maintain family honor. When considered in light of other "women's customs," infibulation has less to do with protecting ephemeral uterine blood from sexual misappropriation than with shielding it from the dangers of contamination that *all* forms of openness imply. Moreover, openness is a condition not of the infibulated woman's essence but instead of *marriage,* that eminently social institution where men wield overt control. It is husbands who, in activating wives' sexuality and contributing their seed, make women, and therefore the entire process of social and physical reproduction, vulnerable. Even the protection afforded by gold is incomplete. Men's efforts to sustain the village—which women metonymically embody—open the village to potential assault. Implicitly, Hofriyati women's self-defensive praxis suggests another view: that men are thoroughly dependent on women's creativity for temporal existence itself; and, by extension, that eternal life can be attained only through the carnal, only through the protected, moral fertility of mothers and wives.[31]

Possession

Mushahara is not always successful in stopping *nazif* or in directing attention to women's self-proclaimed worth. When it fails, the *jinn* have won, at least for the moment, and they must be appeased. The woman is possessed by a type of *jinn* known as *zar*. Alleviation of possession illness requires an extravagant *zar* ceremony which men, and specifically husbands, must provide. The rite is designed to tame a willful spirit, to draw

it into social relationship so as to domesticate its influence and convince it to restore the possessed's fertility. It involves a feast, gifts of perfume, jewelry, and clothes (for the spirit), and is similar to the wedding in other respects as well.[32] In keeping with men's roles as protectors and filters of external influence, and harking to their historic vocation as migrant workers in Egypt and the Ottoman Empire, husbands are referred to as *boabs*, "gatekeepers" or "doormen," in the lexicon of the *zar*. A *zar*-possessed woman's husband stands at the juncture of the human and spirit worlds and, just as his actions can affect his wife's bodily integrity or openness, and the village's integrity or disintegration, so might they facilitate or frustrate the spirit's controlled ceremonial materialization in the human realm.

Even when a healing rite is delayed or fails to take place, possession illness tends to mobilize support for a woman's position, bringing to conscious attention the dynamic complementarity that ought to exist between husband and wife in practice, but that religiously authorized jural asymmetries often eclipse. Because spirits are exogenous agents, their appearance introduces the potential for considerable disruption, novel ideas, and change. Equally, however, their very externality may clarify and intensify participants' commitment to Hofriyati values and ideals.[33] And this may be true of husbands as well as wives.

In possession the problematics of embodied copersonhood and marriage intersect in interesting ways and intimate creative solutions. Spirits associated with the *zar* cult in northern Sudan are referred to as "*rowhan al-ahmar*," red spirits. They are distinguished from benign white *jinn* who are Muslim, and virulent black *jinn* or devils (*shawatin*) who cause madness or grave disease. It is red *jinn* who possess women because they are attracted to their blood; such spirits are apt to wreak havoc with a woman's fertility unless assuaged, but can be drawn into symbiotic relationship with their human hosts when they are. Unlike black *jinn, zar* spirits resist exorcism; they become copresent in the body of the possessed with her self, as lifelong ethereal compeers of her materially copresent kin. And spirits, like kin, are cumulative: a woman may be under the sway of several *jinn,* who have contradictory characteristics and demands. Like all

jinn, *zayran* (plural) inhabit an intangible world analogous to the substantive one of humans: Spirits differ in sex, age, ethnicity, language, religion, and personality; they are not eternal but are born and die, though their lives tend to be longer on average than our own. They have individual identities, needs and desires; they dress and eat according to ethnic group and temperament. Yet in the village they never belong to a group that parallels Hofriyati themselves. Spirits are foreigners, always 'others' in the counterpart world.

When a woman is actively possessed by a *zar* during ceremonial trance, her habitual practice shifts: Suddenly her gestures, voice, expressions are no longer her own but those of the spirit. As cultural foreigners temporarily housed in women's bodies, spirits pronounce upon local reality via inversion and satire, in an allegorical style that married women, especially, are schooled to apprehend. But they also, even more subtly, and with a mute authority that transcends the quotidianly human, catalyze group understandings, enabling their hosts, perhaps unwittingly, to effect realignments of kin relations in the everyday world and to map out connections with forbears that counter the politically regnant form. Whereas satire and inversion are characteristic of *zar* throughout northern Sudan, the cult's kinship implications are most clearly evident in its rural manifestation, and it is these I wish briefly to explore.

In his introduction to a compendium of articles on the *zar* and *bori* cults of Africa and the Middle East, I. M. Lewis asserts that in the rural areas of Muslim Sudan it is mainly secluded women of the petty bourgeoisie who become possessed, rather than the nonsecluded wives of "peasant cultivators"; as members of a cult these otherwise restricted women can gain newfound companionship and support.[34] He goes on to opine that recruitment to the cult offers women an opportunity for role change from housewife to *zar* initiate, eventually to group leader, that would not be available to them otherwise.[35]

Such statements are untenable, not because they are false for Sudan as a whole, but because they stem from a basic misconception of women's lives in the rural context. Lewis, I contend, has extrapolated from urban cult to rural situation without paying adequate heed to the specific social

and economic configurations of these locales within Sudan. To reprise my earlier argument, classes in Hofriyat are unstable: Such economic differentiation as exists tends to be transitory, and farming more a retirement vocation than a lucrative pursuit—a meager supplement to remittance income. Rural and urban experience differs, but mainly in the greater practical density of rural relationships. And in daily life this affects stably resident women more plainly and protractedly than it does relatively peripatetic men.

Recall that marriage in northern Sudan is preferentially endogamous; the frequency with which marriages take place within the patriline and among close matrilateral and non-agnatic patrilateral kin is high, describing over three-quarters of all known first marriages in the village dating from before the turn of the century through to 1984.[36] Not surprisingly, area endogamy coincides with kin endogamy: Four-fifths of all first marriages took place between neighbors living within five miles of each other; most were between people from the same village. Even the rare husband or wife who comes from away is likely to be related to other residents through a mutual kinsman's second marriage. Given the history of this pattern and the moral and ideological precepts that have ensured its continuity, village genealogies are extremely convoluted and kinship bonds redouble. Patrilineal ties are also matrilateral ones; parallel cousins reckoned in one's own generation may be (second) cross cousins from the perspective of one's parents' generation, or vice versa. Because affinal relations are oriented inward, one means of tracing descent effectively merges into others.[37] Thus the kinship system that is ideologically patrilineal is, in practical terms, cognatic.

A paradoxical effect of repeated endogamy is that since each relationship can be evaluated from several different perspectives, moral allegiance becomes both concentrated and ambiguous. Hence it can be critical for persons to map out networks of support within an encompassing group of kin.[38] And since women are not, strictly speaking, secluded but expected to knit the social fabric by maintaining ties with neighbors and kin (the two overlap) through continuous mutual visiting, their personal networks may be less apparent or less readily negotiated than men's. Moreover,

sisters—who, recall, are fully cosubstantial—but also paternal aunts and fraternal nieces who may share paternal substance alone, are considered social and jural equivalents: able, if unwed, to slide into the other's marriage if one of them should die. So thoroughly merged are sororal wives that male genealogists usually fail to note when siblings have been born by different though closely related mothers, yet if these mothers had *not* been so closely related the point would have been remarked. Knowledge of maternal ties, deemed irrelevant to long-term patri-genealogies, is nonetheless preserved by women and, for a time, by men, as it provides a basis for future marriageability (viz., 'the children of maternal aunts'). Brothers can also replace one another in marriage, but if so, resulting offspring are named for their actual fathers; the absence of a true levirate here reflects the precedence of patrilineal descent and the greater individuation of men's social identities.[39]

Jural equivalence of persons is linked to the fact that close kin are physio-social composites of circulating maternal and paternal substance, thus aspects of each other's bodies and selves. As was suggested for the reduction of androgyny through circumcision, in Hofriyat it requires effort to create differences between persons rather than, pace Lewis, to forge their connection. Where connection is assumed or axiomatic, it is separation that becomes problematic.[40] Possession by *jinn* enables those who are possessed—however unselfconsciously—to both distinguish themselves from family members and accent links that transcend or at least nuance patrilineal kinship. Because *zar* spirits are attracted to blood, and a woman's blood forms her child's blood and flesh, offspring are likely to be affected by the spirits that possess maternal kin, typically mothers and maternal grandmothers, though mother's and grandmothers' sisters can be "sources" of spirits as well. Importantly, members of a rural cult not only share a mutual history; it is, in part, *because* of that history that they will become possessed.

Any understandings possession might catalyze for adherents depend in part on the identities of the spirits and humans involved. When Saida, for instance, was pregnant with Maryam, she became possessed by the spirit Hakim Basha, a highly placed Western doctor *zar*. So when Maryam fell

ill as a married woman and possession was diagnosed, the spirit responsible was believed to be Hakim Basha. And thus it transpired: Maryam during her healing ceremony went into trance and Hakim Basha emerged to confront the assembly through her body. But Maryam's mother's mother had also been possessed by Hakim Basha. Having a spirit who possessed one's deceased maternal grandmother is a way of relating to that ancestor, but indirectly, less through words or overt acts of allegiance than through bodily experience. Social alignments are realized here through corporeal ones in a way that complements physio-genealogical descent. But here it is spirits who, by accenting generationally transmitted organic substances, effect the alignment. The few village men who are possessed or in whom possession was diagnosed during childhood (spirits may relinquish boys as they age) had all acquired their spirits through physical attachment to their mothers. In one case where a boy and his father were possessed by the same *zar,* the two were close matrilateral as well as patrilineal kin, for the man was the boy's mother's mother's sister's son. Spirits accentuate "blood lines," adding complexity and depth to dominant patrilineal connections. In the busy tapestry of local relatedness, specific spirits supply alternative threads of coherence, lines of matrifiliative and cognatic continuity. Possession thus provides an embodied counterpoint to officially articulated kinship; in doing so it may vitalize matri-group understandings, and mobilize matri-kin support.

I am inclined, albeit cautiously, to venture that it goes further than this. It may express villagers' latent "archival" knowledge, keeping alive in shadow form an ancient practice that was at some point replaced by Arab patrilineality but remains a submerged part of the local cultural matrix nonetheless. During the Christian period in Sudan between the sixth and fifteenth centuries, and indeed for some time after that, matrilineality with preferred endogamy and adelphic succession were predominant structural principles in that region of Nubia stretching north along the Nile from below Khartoum to the Dongola Reach beyond Hofriyat. There is evidence, too, that royal women governed during their brothers' absences and sons' minorities.[41] In late medieval times the Muslim rulers of Egypt frequently captured Nubian royal women in war, holding them at Cairo

to ensure peace along the southern border: letters from Nubian kings and nobles entreating their sisters' and mothers' return attest to these women's roles as important state advisors.[42] Headstones marking commoners' graves suggest the pattern was not limited to royalty.[43]

Interestingly, the Muslim Funj confederacy that came to power in the early sixteenth century was also, for much of its ascendancy, organized on matrilineal lines.[44] Since the royal house was largely endogamous, succession to the position of sultan passed from father to son in a nonpatrilinear way. The sultan's maternal uncle played an important role as overseer of dynastic affairs and superintendent of the palace (literally, the royal enclosure or *hosh*). Important alliances with outlying subalterns were contracted by marrying them to royal women who returned home to give birth, and left their children in the palace to be raised by maternal kin. Provincial heirs henceforth belonged to the royal clan; in polygynous families the status of an heir's mother was crucial to determining succession.

During the eighteenth century a desire to be more conventionally Islamic in order to compete for Middle Eastern trade with an increasingly Arabized merchant class ultimately led to a shift in practice at both royal and commoner levels. By examining formal documents such as land transfers, historian Jay Spaulding has tracked a change in naming preferences from, for example, Muhammad son of Fatima (mother) daughter of 'Aisha (grandmother) to Muhammed son of 'Ali (father) son of Ahmad (grandfather).[45] For formal purposes, at least, members of the propertied class were adding a patrilineal dimension to their genealogical options. Though such practices may have domesticated matrifiliation they did not entirely displace it. As recently as the early nineteenth century, long after Islam and Arab customs had taken root in northern Sudan, matrilifiliative tendencies were evident in the ascendance of the sultan's sisters' sons to the regional seat near Hofriyat.[46]

Traces of matrifiliative practice may be observed in the fact that a woman today is expected to give birth in her mother's home; she goes there for the last trimester of pregnancy and stays for some time after delivery, until she and her baby are deemed well and fit to return to her husband or his kin. Such visits generally include preschool children and

may stretch to a year or more, particularly if her husband is a migrant worker; as the pattern is repeated with successive pregnancies, it often happens that a woman spends most of her married life in her mother's home, and her children grow up with their maternal kin. This suggests that matrilineal patterns of spirit possession may also reflect experience, intimating the pragmatic and emotionally compelling relations among women that have little official sanction, as much as they express a matrilineal past and its embodied perpetuation. This does not, however, diminish the fact that the matrilineal logic of possession adds oblique complication to present hegemony.

Picking out practical matrilines in convoluted, highly endogamous patrilineages is not the only way that possession might work to index or effect alignments of kin. Local hierarchies of age, sex and authority are covertly challenged when spirit relations are mapped onto those of the possessed, as when mother-in-law and daughter-in-law are possessed by Muslim daughter and father spirits, respectively. Because a person can be possessed by several different spirits at once, who can hail from different homelands in the spirit world, a woman's personal pantheon of *zayran* may describe different facets of her complex social identity or express her internalization—embodiment again—of domestic political tensions. For full sisters to have no common spirits might nuance a distinction between them where they are otherwise physio-social equivalents. On the other hand, if a woman and her son's wife, who is also her sororal niece, are possessed by the same *zar* it may intensify their matrilateral bond and underplay the affinal one; if both are possessed yet no spirit links them, the opposite emphasis might obtain.

The inherent ambiguity of Sudanese kinship is repeated in spirit discourse, for only those with a thorough understanding of local relationships and their tensions, and a knowledge of participants' possession histories, are equipped to recognize in specific cases of possession the subtle reweaving of kinship and the querying, perhaps even defiance of expected allegiances they can imply. And such knowledgeable individuals are, overwhelmingly, women, whose minority status has limited their maneuverability while sharpening their attention to the subtleties of social

relations. Possession in the rural context enables women to open up thickly layered, politically significant relationships, separate their numerous strands, assess and negotiate their respective valences. Importantly, though, for Hofriyati, it is not women who initiate this process, but powers who act upon them from without: the spirits, mute oracles of vernacular village politics and, I suggest, of women's practical, embodied dissonance vis-à-vis exclusionary hegemonic ideals.

Concluding Remarks

I have elected here to examine certain aspects of village life and not others, to plow a furrow deeper and longer in these so as to draw out the implications of blood for human relationships and village integrity. I have not explored how spirits call on people to engage with foreign powers and unfamiliar practices, to domesticate them, challenge them, or incorporate aspects of them on villagers' own terms, and, in due course, be transformed by them as well. All of this is also true. To an extent, possession enables women—through their spirits—to guide the filtering task traditionally assigned to men while—through the play of the *zar*—illuminating the pleasures and hazards of porous social boundaries.

But lately there has emerged a group of young women in Hofriyat, educated since the 1989 Islamist coup, who have adopted the sartorial practices of the Sudanese religious elite and Islamic movements elsewhere in the Middle East. They wear opaque *hijabs* (head scarves) rather than transparent *tobs*; refuse perfume, incense, and gold jewelry; refer to *mushahara* and *zar* as superstitions. The practices by which their elders declared themselves the guarantors of village and family integrity, and thus economic and political well-being, may be falling from grace or being transformed. These young women stress the global unity of Muslims over local kin connectedness. Under such pressures the harmful and un-Islamic practice of female circumcision might happily disappear. Yet even as they jettison the old, new constraints—on mobility, dress, comportment—more consistent with current Islamic practice arise.[47] This, along with the influence of former Saudi migrants, may mean that the character of the village, its defensive praxis, is shifting too. If so, the ingenious assertions of

gender complementarity and kin allegiance inherent in older women's (and spirits') orchestrations of blood and gold may cease to capture the realities of female experience in Hofriyat. And the village body will have become "uncontained."

Notes

1. I am grateful to the Canada Council, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and the Connaught Fund of the University of Toronto for supporting my research, and to the people of Hofriyat for their continuing interest and generosity. I would also like to thank Margot Badran, Karen Brown, Jean Comaroff, Larry Greenfield, and Kelly Hayes for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. Its shortcomings are mine alone.
2. This was the last time I conducted intensive research there. I returned in 1994 for a visit, and have only an impression of changes that had occurred in the intervening years. The Islamist coup in 1989 and the regime's poor human rights record, to say nothing of the continuing civil war in the south, have resulted in Sudan's increasing isolation from the international community and a deepening economic crisis within. My sense is that the village has not grown, and may have shrunk in population. The disastrous floods of 1988 demolished a residential quarter of about a dozen households; their members have rebuilt homes about a kilometer inland from the river, across the railway tracks to the southeast. Some Hofriyati have gone to the capital area where food and other essentials can be more readily obtained; others have returned from the city because it is more dangerous and expensive, and failed to live up to their expectations.
3. Kinship is here largely coterminous with community, including ethnicity, locality, and confessional interest, and is likely just as significant in the urban environment if assumptions about the social disconnection that inevitably accompanies rural-urban migration are actually put to the test for northern Sudanese. This accords with observations made for the Middle East more generally Dale F. Eickelman, *The Middle East: An Anthropological Approach* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989), 119–125.
4. Janice Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits: Women, Men and the Zar Cult in Northern Sudan.* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989); Janice Boddy, "Womb as Oasis: The Symbolic Context of Pharaonic Circumcision in Rural Northern Sudan," in *The Gender/Sexuality Reader: Culture, History, Political Economy,* eds. Roger N. Lancaster and Micaela di Leonardo (New York: Routledge, 1997), 309–324. This contrasts with Gruenbaum's findings from the Gezira, where women said that men find sex with infibulated women more exciting and satisfying, and that they continue the practice so as to please them. Ellen Gruenbaum, "The Cultural Debate Over Female Circumcision: The Sudanese Are Arguing This One Out For Themselves," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 10:4 (1996): 455–475.
5. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality,* vol.1, trans. R. Hurley (1978; New York: Vintage, 1990).
6. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice,* trans. R. Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977; Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice,* trans. R. Nice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).
7. Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret Lock, "The Mindful Body: A Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 1:1 (1987): 8.
8. Janice Boddy, "Violence Embodied? Female Circumcision, Gender Politics, and Cultural Aesthetics," in *Rethinking Violence Against Women,* eds. R. Dobash and R. Dobash (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 1998), 77–110; Janice Boddy, "Gender Crusades: The Female Circumcision Controversy in Cultural Perspective," in Paul Komesaroff et al. (eds.), *Sexuality and Medicine* (New York: Routledge, 1999).
9. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa,* vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 22.
10. Foucault, *History of Sexuality,* vol. 1, 97.
11. Ibid., 101.
12. Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits*; Boddy, "Violence Embodied?"; Boddy, "Gender Crusades."
13. See Fran Hosken, *The Hosken Report: Genital and Sexual Mutilation of Females,* 3rd ed. (Lexington, MA: Women's International Network News, 1982); Alison T. Slack, "Female Circumcision: A Critical Appraisal," *Human Rights Quarterly,* 10 (November 1984): 437–486; Nancy I. Kellner, "Under the Knife: Female Genital Mutilation as Child Abuse," *Journal of Juvenile Law,* 14 (1993): 118–132; Cf. Bronwyn Winter, Women, the Law, and Sexual Relativism In France: The Case of Excision," *Signs* 19:4 (1994): 939–74; Ann L. Bardach, "Tearing Off the Veil," *Vanity Fair* 56 (8 August 1993): 122–27, 154–58.

14. Eric Winkel, "A Muslim Perspective on Female Circumcision," *Women & Health*, 23:1 (1995): 1–7.
15. Cf. Ladislav Holy, *Religion and Custom in a Muslim Society: The Berti of Sudan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 48)
16. Carol Delaney, *The Seed and the Soil: Gender and Cosmology in Turkish Village Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).
17. Cf. Delaney, *The Seed and the Soil*; Holy, *Religion and Custom in a Muslim Society*.
18. Thus to summarize villagers as "patrilineal" would leave much that is important about their lives unsaid. It should not go unremarked that my information came more often through women's words than men's. Yet I do not think that the emphasis on maternal connection was solely women's elaboration, for it was a man who first alerted me to how close marriages can be made through the children of maternal aunts.
19. In Judaism and Christianity, the person spared was Isaac, Abraham's only fully Jewish son. Depending on perspective Abraham/Ibrahim is either Jewish or Arab; yet the message about the significance of patrilineal descent is rings clear.
20. See also John G. Kennedy, "Circumcision and Excision Ceremonies," in *Nubian Ceremonial Life*, (Berkeley and Cairo: University of California and American University in Cairo Press, 1978), for a discussion of *mushahara* in Nubian Egypt.
21. Infibulated women must be surgically opened in order to give birth; after delivery, their vaginal orifice is resewn.
22. The term is said to derive either from *halab*, meaning animal milk, considered to have been the principal food of these once nomadic herders, or from Halib, the Arabic name for Aleppo, a town in Syria whence they are thought to originate. See also Ahmed Al Shahi, "Proverbs and Social Values in a Northern Sudanese Village," in *Essays in Sudan Ethnography*, eds. Ian Cunnison and Wendy James (New York: Humanities Press, 1972), 87–104.
23. See also D. Griselda El Tayib, "Women's Dress in the Northern Sudan," in *The Sudanese Woman*, ed. Susan Kenyon (Khartoum: University of Khartoum Press, Graduate College Publications, no. 19, 1987), 40–66; Hanny Lightfoot-Klein, *Prisoners of Ritual: An Odyssey into Female Genital Circumcision in Africa* (New York: Harrington Park Press 1989), 87–89).
24. Lightfoot-Klein suggests that once a woman is married, use of *dukhana* enables her to signal sexual interest to her husband covertly, thus to preserve a façade of untouchability and dutiful acquiescence to her husband's demands. Lightfoot-Klein, *Prisoners of Ritual*, 88.

25. Women typically play active and decisive roles in determining future marriages, given their greater knowledge of suitable brides acquired through mandatory visits to other households.
26. As a result, a few televisions and video cameras had begun to appear in the village, even though it was not electrified.
27. Their fears appear to have been well founded, though my data are sketchy for the period between 1984 and 1994. With the Gulf War of 1990–91 the situation changed dramatically: Sudanese workers were expelled from Saudi Arabia because the Sudanese government publicly and materially supported Iraq. This was accompanied by internal economic collapse, exacerbated if not initiated by the exclusionist policies of the Islamist regime that had seized power in 1989. The coup itself had set off a more permanent migration abroad of skilled and professional men for both political and economic reasons that continues today. In the village, weddings became much less lavish but, since cash was scarce, the affordability problem did not go away. Because it has become so difficult to marry in the traditional way, the Islamist regime has held several mass weddings (without *shayla*) to enable young people to start families. However, when I was in Sudan in 1994, I met several Hofriyati women between the ages of 18 and 35 who had never wed. Men who might have been their husbands are now either living abroad, in the army fighting the protracted civil war in the south (and possibly injured or killed), unemployed, or barely eeking out a living in Sudan. The young men I spoke to despaired of ever being able to marry and lead a "normal" life.
28. In spirit possession contexts, this essence is, in turn, challenged by spirits who parody village women and satirize their customs. See Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits*, Part 3.
29. Melissa Llewelyn-Davies, "Women, Warriors, and Patriarchs," in *Sexual Meanings: The Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality*, eds. Sherry B. Ortner and Harriet Whitehead (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 353.
30. Diana Fuss, "Reading Like a Feminist," in *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Critical Studies* 1:2 (1989): 85.
31. On this point see also Ladislav Holy, "Gender and Ritual in an Islamic Society: The Berti of Darfur," *Man*, 23 (1988): 469–87, on the Berti in western Sudan.

32. Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits*.
33. This is explored at length in Boddy, ibid.
34. I. M. Lewis, "Introduction: Zar in Context: The Past, Present and Future of an African Healing Cult," in *Women's Medicine: The Zar-Bori Cult in Africa and Beyond*, eds.I. M. Lewis, Ahmed al-Safi and Sayyid Hurreiz, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 9.
35. Ibid., 5; I.M. Lewis, "Spirits at the House of Childbirth," *Times Literary Supplement*, 1–7 June, 1990, 590.
36. My last visit in 1994 was too short and precarious to allow for the collection of complete data. See also note 14.
37. See A. Kronenberg and W. Kronenberg, "Parallel Cousin Marriage in Mediaeval and Modern Nubia, Part 1," *Kush*, 13 (1965): 241–260.
38. For discussions of the social implications of endogamy see Fredric Barth, "Descent and Marriage Reconsidered," in the *Character of Kinship*, ed. I. Goody (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973) 3–19; Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*; Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, "The Management of Marriage in a Tswana Chiefdom," in *Essays on African Marriage in Southern Africa*, eds. E. J. Krige and J. L. Comaroff (Cape Town: Juta, 1981), 29–49; John L. Comaroff and Simon Roberts, *Rules and Processes: The Cultural Logic of Dispute in an African Context* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Jean Comaroff, Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985; Hildred Geertz, "The Meaning of Family Ties," in *Meaning and Order in Moroccan Society*, eds. C. Geertz, L. Rosen, and H. Geertz (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979) 315–91; Emrys Peters, "Shifts in Power in a Lebanese Village," in *Rural Politics and Social Change in the Middle East*, eds. R. Antoun & I. Hank (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), 165–97; Lawrence Rosen, *Bargaining for Reality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982; Jacqueline Solway, "Affines and Spouses, Friends and Lovers: The Passing of Polygyny in Botswana," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 46 (Spring 1990): 41–66.
39. Note too that as in Western societies, and unlike many sub-Saharan ones, biological and social parenthood coincide, though the definition of biology differs from a scientific one in that Hofriyati bodies are not finite but participate in physio-social processes of kin. Men's bodies are nonetheless more individuated than women's.
40. Cf. Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 13.

41. See Al Hag Hamad Mohammed Kheir, "Women and Politics in Mediaeval Sudanese History," in *The Sudanese Woman*, ed. Susan Kenyon (Khartoum: University of Khartoum Press, Graduate School Publications, no. 19, 1987), 8–39; Kronenberg and Kronenberg, "Parallel Cousins," Vantini, *Christianity and the Sudan*; William Y. Adams, *Nubia: Corridor to Africa* (London: Allen Lane, 1984).
42. Giovanni Vantini, *Christianity in the Sudan* (Bologna: EMI Press, 1981), 182.
43. Dr. N. Millet, Royal Ontario Museum, Egyptian Department, personal communication with author, 4 October 1992.
44. Jay Spaulding, *The Heroic Age in Sinnar* (East Lansing: African Studies Center, Michigan State University, 1985).
45. Ibid.
46. See John Lewis Burckhardt, *Travels in Nubia* (London: John Murray, 1819) 247; James Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Sourcs of the Nile*, vol. 4. (London: James Robinson, 1790), 509. Thus the Sultan's sister or daughter was wife to the local Mek or "king" and mother of the heir.
47. Cf. Lila Abu Lughod, "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power Through Bedouin Women," in *Beyond the Second Sex*, eds. P.R. Sanday and R. G. Goodenough (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 313–337.

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