CHAPTER 5: MAKING VISIBLE THE INVISIBLE: THE INTANGIBLE CONSTRUCT

5.1   SUB PROBLEM 4

Relevant intangible artefacts of the culture of the northern riverain Sudan need to be identified and analysed to enable further reflection on the meanings behind certain physical and spatial manifestations of that same culture.

5.2   HYPOTHESIS 4

Careful and purposeful selection and analysis of relevant intangible artefacts can articulate the hidden characteristics of the built culture of the northern riverain Sudan region and elaborate on the themes that guide this study.

5.3   OUTLINE OF CHAPTER 5

This chapter sets out to investigate some of the intangible phenomena that have been exposed through the study of physical artefacts in the previous chapter. Underlying values and belief systems were found to be crucial determining factors when trying to understand the spatial and physical set-up in the region.

A construction of the meaning of this aspect is firstly attempted by understanding socio-economic systems and patterns of interaction. Thereafter, corresponding ritualistic practices are investigated as well as attitudes to art and artefacts/knowledge and creativity. An endeavour to decipher social attitudes evident in the literature of people from the region is also attempted.

Subsequently, themes of the intangible culture of the region are articulated, referring to relevant theory and anthropological writings. The culture as 'text' is broken down into its components and the intangible 'world' of the northern Sudanese riverain peoples is articulated into categories. Clues to these are detected in writings and traditional sayings of the region.

As discussed in Chapter 2, within the idea of architecture as language, architecture necessarily reflects societal meanings. The link between architecture, society and language, is therefore addressed critically.

5.4   THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE MEANING OF A PHENOMENON

A consistent phenomenon that has become evident through the study of artefacts in the previous chapter is that underlying values and belief systems have a major role to play in determining the spatial and physical set-up of the region – that is, place-making activities that reflect people's intervention with the environment. This section of the chapter attempts to break this phenomenon down into its components and to explore their meaning.

Codes/languages	**Tangible Culture**	**Intangible Culture**
Artefacts at a variety of scales – Sum of which is also a language= **Culture**	Body/Garment/Utensil Food Furniture Partitioning Building Neighbourhood City	Form of these visual/physical/spatial expressions is generated by intangible **Values** **Beliefs** Clues to these are detected in:

Socio-economic patterns and corresponding activities
Religious and social rituals
Attitudes to art/artefacts/knowledge and creativity
Literature and philosophy on/from the region
Language use and words

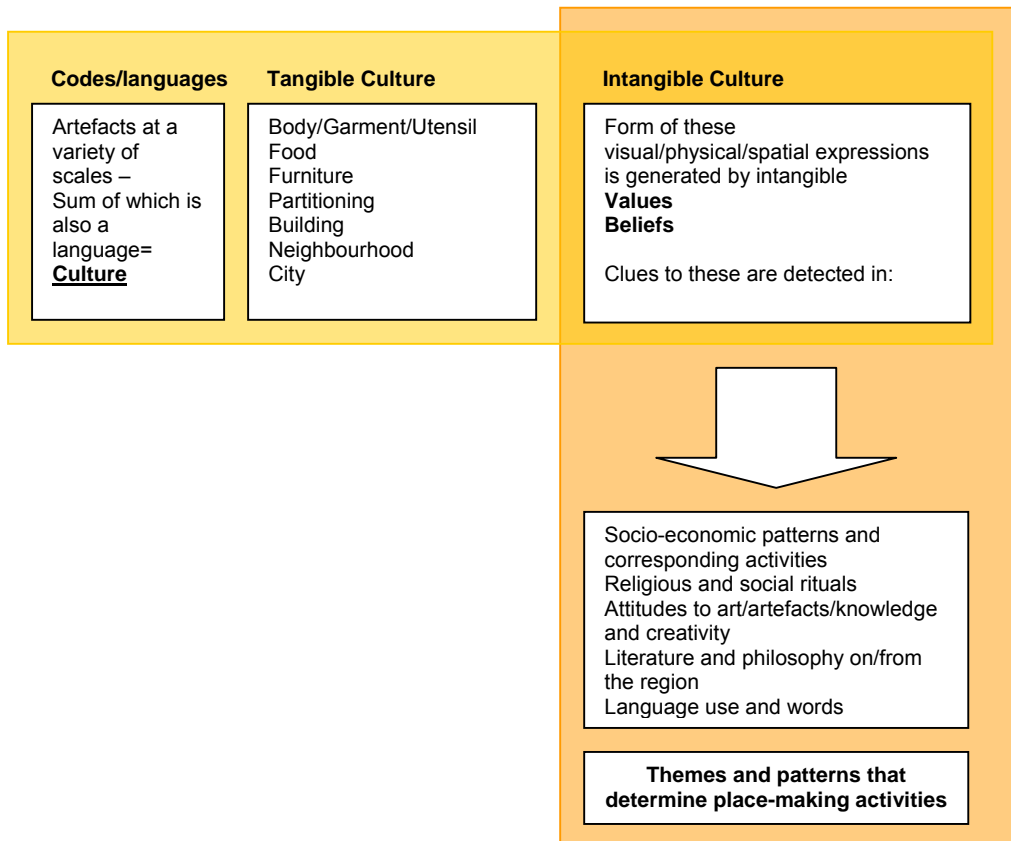**Themes and patterns that determine place-making activities**

Table 5.1 Tangible and intangible culture: Construct of aspects of culture relevant to the context, explored through various themes and patterns.

Table 5.1 above illustrates the starting point of an investigation into the nature and the meaning of the stated phenomenon. Subsystems of a wider cultural realm of the region are articulated. The architectural categories explained in Chapter 2, are further elaborated. The investigation is initiated by referring to Habraken (1998), who explains the environment in terms of levels of intervention, systems of creation and agents of control over each level. These levels of intervention progress in scale from the body to the settlement or city level. These levels vary in control from private to public.

The physical form of these expressions and the territorial (place) agreements are based on cultural aspects – understanding negotiated by all the parties involved in

the set-up of a community. Power forces of dominance and dependence no doubt play a role in maintaining equilibrium in the social structure.

Analysis of Table 5.1 will be continued in section 5.5 when the variable and the invariables of the themes and patterns of this culture will be investigated in terms of resultant place-making activities.

5.5   SOCIAL SYSTEMS

Patterns of interaction are what identify the community as a unit through their adopted activities, schedules and routines. Excessive social activities originate in values that have become an identifying feature of the Northern Sudanese people. The same symbolic meaning is experienced in these various activities and this is what makes up the community's culture (Vagenes, 1998: 152).

5.5.1   The *Fareeq* community network

A community has been defined as the daily network of face-to-face interaction. Most networks of interaction between people are based on their *fareeq* or their neighbourhood. A *fareeq* will also have ties with other *fareeqs*. This interaction implies frequent visits and assistance in the form of finances, food and most of the time a helping hand in ceremonial occasions. *Fareeq* is an Arabic term describing a corporate unit of nomadic groups, two to four settlements headed by a *shaykh* (Kenyon, 1991: 21). The term *shaykh* is also used to denote a leader and not necessarily a religious man. *Fareeq* people derive their identity from the group corporate identity "a powerful impact on the everyday lives of its members and can exert considerable pressure on people to conform to social norms." (Ferraro, 1998: 249).

Fareeqs constitute a <u>hilla</u> or village. "Social and economic life found its form and substance in the village, where neighbours were also most often relatives." (Bjørkelo, 1989: 45). The demarcation of the *fareeq* is strong in peoples' consciousness and is reflected in their patterns of interaction, but it is not necessarily apparent in the settlement layout. People from different *fareeqs* may be neighbours.
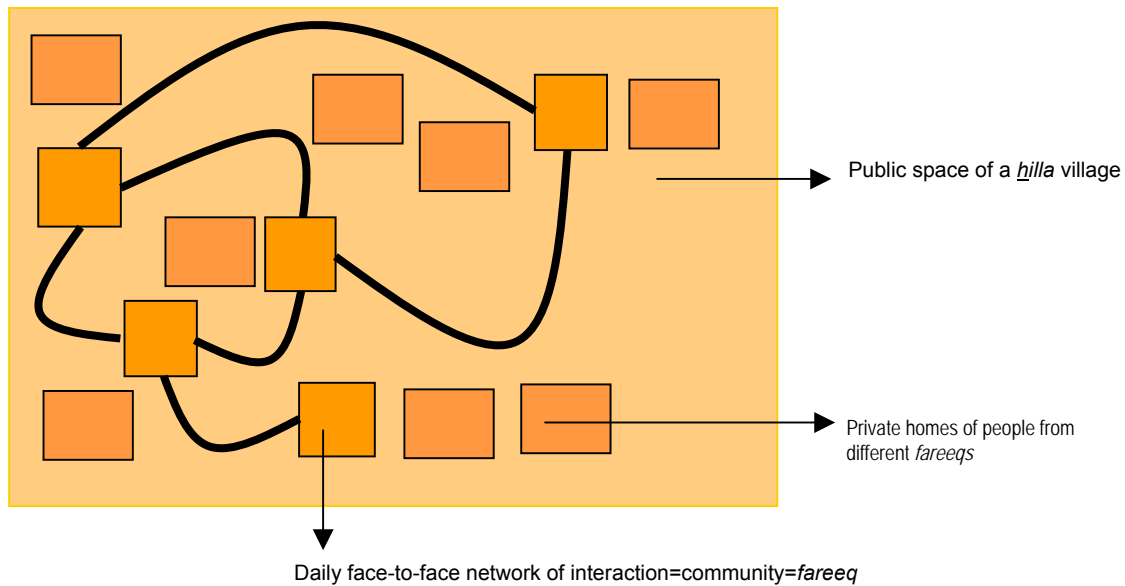
Public space of a _hilla_ village

Private homes of people from different _fareeqs_

Daily face-to-face network of interaction=community=_fareeq_

Fig 5.1 The _Fareeq_ within a village setting.

As seen in the previous chapter women are involved in _mujamalat_ (socialising) as opposed to the _wajibat_ (duties) of men. Never-ending social obligations dominate people's lives. The nature of social structure represents the primary influence on the organizational configuration of domestic space at community level and the individual house.

A woman is perceived as _haneena_ if she maintains networks with her _fareeq:_

> "These networks are individual and female-oriented. They are maintained by women visiting assiduously and they are activated by the sort of social occasions that demand a great deal of assistance from other women: life crisis such as birth, circumcisions, engagements, marriages, funerals, thanksgivings, or karamat of varying sorts. Women's input is in terms of both personal services and financial help and is often totally independent of the men in their families." (Kenyon, 1991: 21)

The above refers to the functioning of a village but can be used to explain contacts between families in Khartoum, or other urban centres, and their interaction with their village of origin. Tangible ways of expressing loyalty to the family of origin can be seen in visits and gifts to the village and also in guests who come to the city and have to be entertained (Banaga, 1987: 100-101). It is sometimes difficult to identify the nuclear family in this set-up.

5.5.2   The nuclear family

It is extremely difficult to differentiate between public and private – to identify where a family's communal life ends and private life begins. A nuclear family is identifiable in most households but their life is elaborately intertwined with day-to-day activities and energies of the _fareeq_. As seen in the previous chapter, the distinction between one

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family home and the other sometimes dissolves and is not visually evident in village morphology. This is a reflection of daily patterns of interaction and inter-dependence. Close proximity and functional connection suggest the presence of broader, kin-based residential groups, while single discrete and well-defined enclosures of modest size indicate single-family residential patterns (Kent, 1990: 166). Physically, in terms of the morphology of a village, the latter is evident. Yet, in terms of the daily functioning of a village, activities cross the physical barriers and blur them.

5.5.3   Segregation of the sexes

The dual social world in the Middle East where men are progressive and liberal and women are conservative and inward focused also applies to the riverain region (Kronenberg, 1987: 392). This wider duality also creates a duality within each individual – complying with the standards of the clan as opposed to self-realisation. For example, a woman's status remains firmly anchored in the female sphere regardless of her education (Kronenberg, 1987: 392). 'Progressive' males must comply with 'un-progressive' attitudes within the family or clan.

This segregation between the sexes is expressed in many forms, few of which are physical. Food preparation, for example, takes up a large portion of the day for a woman. A man's role is to provide the food through working outside the home. The sequence of eating is as follows: first the men, then the women and finally children. This is achieved with a circulating tray – a large one that can carry many plates – a mobile dining table.

As seen in the previous chapter, it is difficult to strictly differentiate between men and women domains within the house, especially as the woman has a degree of freedom in terms of movement (this has been linked to dress form allowing woman more freedom) and social practice that means that she is within her domain in all the women zones of the houses included in her social network.
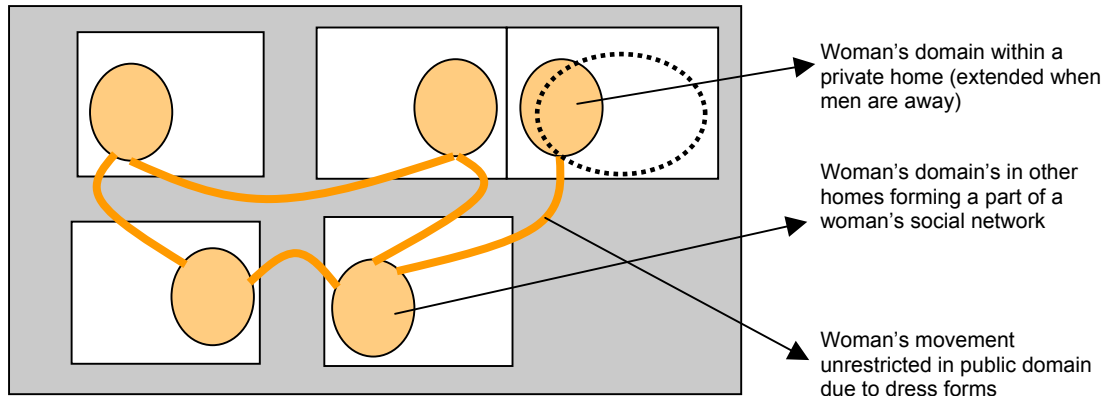
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Woman's domain within a private home (extended when men are away)

Woman's domain's in other homes forming a part of a woman's social network

Woman's movement unrestricted in public domain due to dress forms

Fig. 5.2 The movement patterns of women in a neighbourhood.

5.5.4   Personal appearance as a form of gender differentiation

Lack of strict physical segregation is compensated for by strict gender differentiation. This is apparent in dress forms, as mentioned above and in the previous chapter, in cosmetics and in separate rites of passage. In terms of cosmetics and beautification techniques, women spend a great deal of their time in this pursuit. This applies to all the economic groups. "The beauty they pursue lies not in the cultivation of arts nor in the creation of works of art; they are less concerned with beauty around them than in creating beauty in and about their personal selves." (Kenyon, 1991: 230). Also refer to Ismael (1982: 78), where in one case study a woman spends about three hours on beautification in one day. Many of the beautification techniques have been in existence since ancient Nubia.

In addition to being associated with physical and mental well-being, personal beauty is related to maintaining gender differences. Kenyon refers to this as ideational separation: "…the maintenance of gender differences is a much more effective method of segregation than the erection of physical barriers." (1991: 230)

5.5.5   Milestones and activities

Dominant life cycle rituals are associated with the four life milestones, namely birth, circumcision, marriage and death. All rituals associated with the first three can be attributed more to indigenous customs than to Islam (Kenyon, 1991: 232). Many rituals linked to these life milestones are intended to protect from the evil eye, the jinn and other spirits. This is investigated later. In all of these the house/ neighbouring house/ adjacent street or public space is transformed to accommodate people and functions. There is spontaneity inherent to these space-use systems – the immediate appropriation of a space for different functions.

5.5.6   Social sanction – maintaining social order

In the elaborate social interactions systems mentioned above, one must remember that the role of a woman as an intermediary of important information is also important in the social construct (Ismael, 1982: 181). This is a part of the informal system of social sanction. No formal laws are violated, but these informal mechanisms ensure that people stick to the social norms. Socialisation is also a means by which social norms are passed on from one generation to the other (Ferraro, 1998: 248) and an instrument for control. Ferraro explains the tools as follows:

- Public opinion/Being talked about
- Isolation/Gossip, ostracism, rumour, sarcasm, derision

Another social ordering principle is achieved through respect for elders and the past. This has been and still is a major structuring factor in Sudanese society. Al-Amin (1989: 9) sees three broad social groupings: Children younger than 12, unmarried adults and married adults. There is little mixing between these groups in public (Al-Amin, 1989: 10).
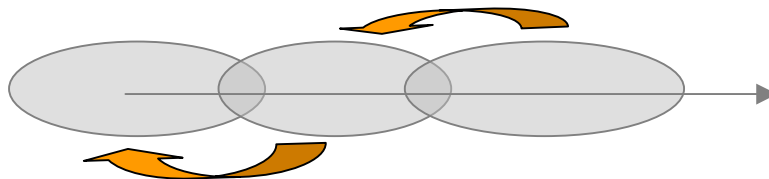

Fig. 5.3 Overlaps between the different age groups – indicating a 'passing-down' of information from generation to generation.

5.6   ECONOMIC SYSTEMS

Historically, the economic system of the region depended on trade and agriculture. A *saqiyya* (waterwheel – see description and images in Glossary) system of production, with joint cultivation and rights in shares in the produce dominated before the Turkish invasion:

> "…people belonging to a saqiya defined their ownership rights in terms of shares in the wheel and the land, rather than in physically demarcated plots, and received from the produce according to their number of shares and labour input." (Bjørkelo, 1989: 59).

The system depended on agreement/negotiation on the water wheel, the animals and slaves.

The Turkish administration attempted to impose a market oriented agricultural and fiscal policy and this contradicted with existing subsistence systems. This changed the economic structure of the region negatively:

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"Cash crops were found to have exhausted the soil, the animal motive power, and the wheel, and limited the space and time left for food production. The cutting of trees to clear land for government schemes, to build boats and to get fuel for the steam-powered river boats was another serious attack on the eco-system." (Bjørkelo, 1989: 140)

Since before the Turkiyyah, land ownership has been highly prized but cheap labour and slaves previously worked it, so there is a dislike for agricultural work. This has been regarded as an obstacle to progress (on the ja'ali tribe in Bjørkelo, 1989). From early on trade and crafts were means of supplementing household incomes, or full-time occupations (Bjørkelo, 1989: 5).

Formal systems, till today, are supplemented by elaborate informal systems rooted in social attitudes explained in the previous section. These include hospitality (*diyafa*) and *nafeer*, where neighbouring household participated in building, or work in the fields, and were treated with food and drink.

Yet, generally, the region provided few opportunities for wealth and thus emigration started very early in history: "…this phenomenon…can be traced back as far as the old empire in Egypt." (Kronenberg on Nubian emigration, 1986: 398). It became more marked due to Turkish economic policy and harassment during their reign. Immigration has been a major form of gaining wealth, with men leaving to travel west or south to trade and to send back money to their families in the northern, riverain region: these traders are known as the *jalaba*, travelling traders or slave traders. This is still the case today, the only difference being that the people of these regions have ventured further a field, starting with the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia. Another difference is the type of service being marketed. Northern Sudanese in general, and Nubians especially, continue to show interest in their place of origin, with which they maintain contact (Kronenberg, 1986: 398).

Trade activities have had a role in the structuring of the daily rhythm of life in villages and towns. This is still felt today where traditional markets are more, or equally, dynamic when compared to western style shopping areas. Al Suq al Arabi in Khartoum is located to the south of the western style centre and is always buzzing with activity. In Omdurman, Suq Libya was originally established by smugglers in the 1970's who brought their goods across the border from Libya. Suq al Naqa is the cattle market of the western Sudanese nomads. The traditional Suq Omdurman (shown on the outskirts of the city during the Mahdiyya and now engulfed by a growing metropolis) thrives on strong informal networks within the country and

outside its borders. Suq Sa'ad Qishra in Khartoum north, Bahri, depends on 'suitcase traders' who bring in goods from Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syria. It is interesting to note that, today, many of these traders are women operating in the informal networks that they excel at. Daily activities revolved around economic activities in one form or the other. Bjørkelo here describes Shendi on the eve of the Turkiyya:

> "Except around midday, people would engage in various cultivation activities depending on the season. Occasional visits by the traders or the passing of larger caravans would stir up extra activity; a trading relative might stop to bring presents or necessities to his family. Some villagers would seize the opportunity to barter foodstuffs and handicrafts for utensils, spices, perfumes, medicines and so forth." (Bjørkelo, 1989: 54).

Religious centres of learning were and still are maintained by charity and endowments. During the Funj these were supplied by the sultan in land or slaves but mostly given by the locals in labour, food or clothing. During the Funj eras, when the *feki* or *'alim* or *shaykh* chose his abode he was granted the land by royal decree and an estate for cultivation with slaves may be included. The size of the estate was related to the piety or sagacity of the *'alim* or *shaykh* and a *nafeer* was used to construct the buildings. The first to be erected is the *masjid*.

The cost of upkeep was gained from the land, which was worked by slaves and students (the *masjid* and *khalwa* closed during the cultivation season, July-October) and from grants, presents and alms and any private business that the *feki* may conduct. It was very much a people's initiative and the role of the sultans is limited. The *qubba's* are a source of revenue even today, for the heirs to the *feki*, as visitors come with offerings as their ancestors did 300 years ago to the original *feki*. It is believed by many that life in the religious centres encouraged handouts and laziness (this information is mainly from Badri, 1970: 33-44).

5.7   STATUS AND POWER SYSTEMS

Western social evolutionary theory assumes a rise in social complexity, internal stratification and central authority. It is generally believed that, as societies become more complex their spaces become more function specific . Administrative segmentation would then result in changes in residential occupation (Kent, 1990).

This has not been the case in the region under study. Socio-political dynamics varied greatly between the different eras, but power became decentralised after periods of high control rather than the opposite. It is speculated that later in time, the influence of social status on settlement designs became less evident perhaps as poverty

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became more widespread, as the Turkish authorities became more brutal and as Sufism and the *shaykh's* cult became more dominant in the day-to-day life of people.

Systems of segregation were reinforced, in a deliberate and controlled manner, during the British colonial period through building and planning regulations, where residential 'classes' were formalised, progressing from first-grade to fourth-grade. Each was distinguished by plot size, building heights, setbacks and materials (Osman, 1996).

As discussed in Chapter 2, economic or climatic factors are easily observable determinants of changes in house forms and settlement layouts. While the importance of these is not undermined, it is seen that the impact of cultural change is more profound, yet less recognizable.

A crucial aspect of culture is no doubt power and leadership establishments. Power relations are important in designing and maintaining a particular built environment. And in a two-way process, architecture plays an active role in structuring social hierarchies and creating power strategies. This is explored more below:

5.7.1   Kushite and Meroitic eras

There was elaborate social stratification in the Kushite and Meroitic eras. In the early Meroitic eras, the choice of Kings through blessing by oracles ensured that political power and religion were inseparable (Hakem, 1988:97). The post of King was hereditary, and the decision of succession was taken outside the temple, yet the oracular custom was a recognized endorsement by the God, Amun-Re (Hakem, 1988: 97-98). Hakem (1988: 98-99) goes on to explain how the King would be selected from the royal family in Meroe (the political capital) and then proceed to Napata (the religious capital) for formal ratification of his new post. Reisner (1930: 92 in Hakem, 1988: 100) quotes the declaration by Pi'ankhy (one king of the neo-Kushites, 747-716 BC) (Hakem, 1988: XV) on his stela (royal inscriptions):

> "gods may make a king,
> men may make a king,
> but only Amun-Re made me"

Political establishments dominated society in the Meroitic eras but validation of political authority through religion was paramount. It was in reality, not the priests who decided on succession, but the military leaders, top men of the royal family and

high-ranking officials (Hakem, 1988: 101-102). In the pre-Islam eras, the political leader dominated.

5.7.2   Christian era

When the centralised power of a large kingdom under one thrown is discontinued and the Christian era emerges, this is characterised by the break-up into three small kingdoms and from then on the kingdom is run more as independent decentralised states.

Secular governance during the Christian era may have been the result of the Coptic Church believing in a separation between the state and religion (http://www. copticcentre.com/two.htlm). Political establishments maintained their dominance. The ruler claimed spiritual supremacy and controlled the church.

5.7.3   Arab penetration

The arrival of the Arabs around 642 AD, meant new power relations, which resulted in differences in spatial arrangements within the home, gender-related sub-divisions and different social hierarchies. The resulting acculturation had an impact on how people viewed the environment and how they intervened through buildings and space manipulation.

Hierarchical relationships between people and the importance assigned to them are strong but not so evident physically. Space became less segmented and more multi-purpose. It was more gender specific, in a fluid manner, as this changed depending on circumstances. Surprisingly, there were fewer physical sub-divisions, which did not correspond to the more elaborate social segmentation that emerged due to new socio-political dynamics. Barriers became social rather than physical.

During the 'gap'[1] in history, 642-1504, a paradigm shift occurred whereby religious individuals became key figures within the social order. In the present Sudan, rapid industrialisation is paralleled by a belief by many that religion and the state are inseparable. This is a pivotal concept in Islam, where the purpose of man is perceived as being the correct service of God, and the primary function of a

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[1] The use of the term 'gap' here denotes the recognition that there was a transitional phase between the major historical civilisations of the region. Though these civilisations differed drastically in their forms of expression (one leaving behind massive monuments and the other remembered through intangible concepts) they were both highly centralised and had significant influence beyond their borders.

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government is to make the rendering of such a purpose possible (Gruenbaum, 1955: 143). Sometimes the religious leader claimed supremacy and even became the political leader in the Mahdi's case.

Similar patterns during the transition period are unknown due to the little information available about this era in terms of how and why the transformation took place. What is evident though is that, after the 'gap' in the history of the region, a new paradigm emerged where the *feki* gained predominance over the political ruler. It is only the *feki* who is buried under a *qubba* and seldom a political leader. It is still the *qubba* that rises above other buildings in towns and villages, and even in a major city like Omdurman. Thus, the two structures the *qubba* and the mosque came to have supremacy functionally and visually. Perhaps clues to the reason for this transition can be found in the power structures of the Funj.

5.7.4   Funj era

Before the Turkish invasion, status and power were reflected in the unequal distribution of land, water wheels, animals and slaves among the peasants (Bjørkelo, 1989: 4). Another ranking system was also based on occupation:

> "Blacksmiths, fishermen and woodcutters had the lowest status among free men. Religious learning and sanctity, expressed in the ability to cure sick people and perform miracles, bestowed great prestige and respect. Family ties with prominent lineages or the ruling elite, as well as with holy men, were sources of status and prestige, irrespective of secular wealth." (Bjørkelo, 1989: 55).

The socio-political structure of society was based on a vertical structure based on status, but with a horizontal structure cutting through this. The following is a diagram based on Bjørkelo (1989) but with the religious leader added as having a high social position, perhaps comparable to the king or the political leader. One of the similarities between the two is the fact that the holiness of a religious *shaykh* can be inherited. Sometimes the relation between the political leader, king, and the religious leader is one of mutual gain enabling them both to have authority, as the king can gain public support through the *shaykh*. The religious leader gains land and material support from the king in return.
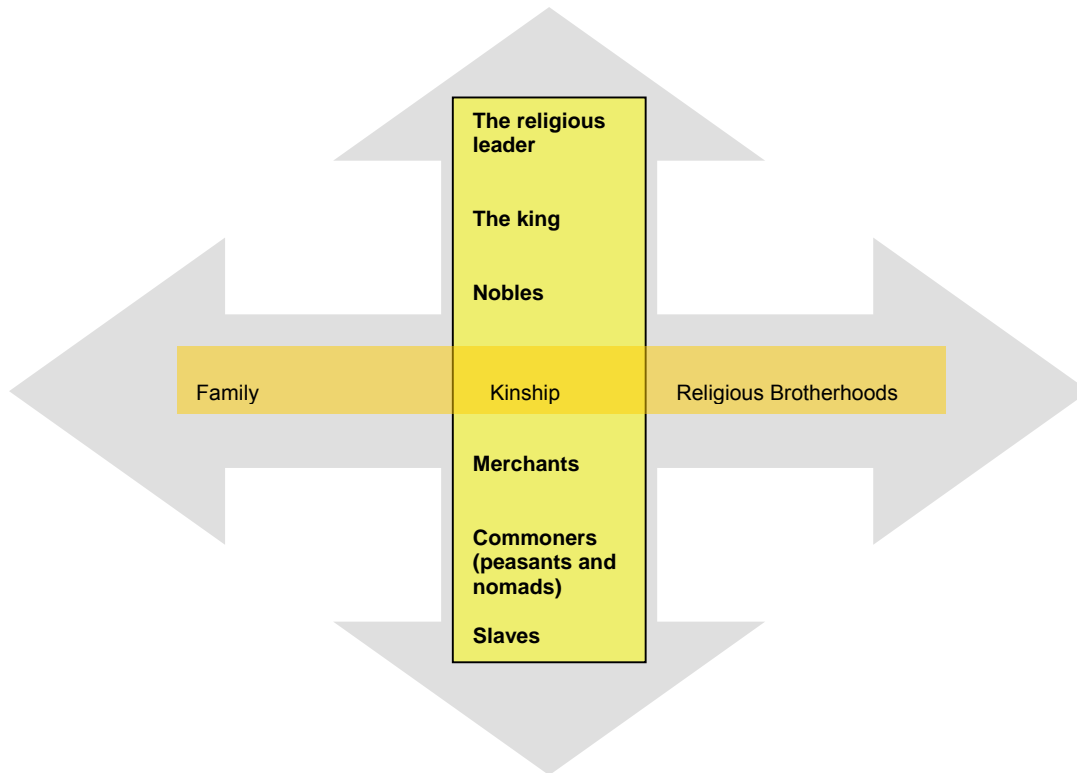
Fig. 5.4 The two dimensions of status during the Funj era.

Later, the *shaykh* (nobles, administrative rather than religious) was retained by the Turkish administration as the head of a village. This *shaykh* may represent someone among the peasantry who was wealthier but: "The majority of the village shaykhs, however, did not differ much in the lifestyle from the peasantry to whom many of them belonged." (Bjørkelo, 1989: 49).

The Funj king's court officials were subdivided into categories on the basis of their relationship to the seat of authority (Spaulding, 1985: 15).

> "After mid-century [16th Century] the court was swollen by the admission of large numbers of holy men (fugarā, singular faqīh) and petty noblemen (arbābs), who were placed together following the mosque staff. Finally, under the last sultans, positions at court were given to a variety of their personal attendants – physicians, tailors, freedmen, religious advisors, and masseurs." (Spaulding 1985: 16)

The ideology of the Funj state was that of the subordination of the majority to a few. It was a heterogeneous society with several regional sub-cultures, yet forged into a coherent whole (Spaulding 1985: 120). The ideology of Sennar extended beyond the reference to the community and its material realities – it contained elements of religion (Spaulding, 1985: 122). Gradually the strength of the centre at Sennar decreased while lower status leaders on the peripheries gained importance.

There was a high level of control in the kingdom as the king had to know of anyone who entered his kingdom, such as merchants and caravans: rapid courier to the capital dispatched information (Spaulding, 1985: 8-11).

5.8 RELIGIOUS SYSTEMS

5.8.1 Protection from the spirits

In all major ceremonies and celebrations of life's milestones, it is attempted to protect the principle person from evil spirits. That may be the bride, the circumcised child or the newborn baby. The jinn and their living spaces, areas avoided by the villagers: huge trees, thorny shrubs, the fields, mountains, uninhabited places, latrines, cemeteries, dustbins and ruins are avoided (Ibrahim, 1979: 141). Despite this, ".... it seems that the spirits occupy every corner in the village and hover in every place; the question is how do the villagers survive such danger?" (Ibrahim, 1979: 142). There are a variety of artefacts, rituals and substances that are believed to provide protection. These tools of protection are summarised as follows:

5.8.1 i) The Quran

This is done by simply reading the Quran or by bringing in a holy man to do that. A *hijab* (amulet) can also be worn which contains verses from the Quran.

5.8.1 ii) White and shiny things

Milk is, till today, used in many ceremonies as well as bright coloured *garmasis* (*Firkah* – refer to Glossary) and bright coloured string, beads and gold. The *jirtig* ceremony performed for a bride and bridegroom will include wearing of these materials and artefacts and also in the spraying with milk.

5.8.1 iii) *Bakhour* incense/substances of strong smell or taste

Bakhour is used at all major ceremonies and is used often on a daily basis in many households till today. There are different types of *bakhour* for different ailments or different occasions.

> "The wedding continued for seven days, and on each day the bakhur was placed at the doorstep of the brides room, over which the groom stepped seven times each morning and evening." (Dafallah, 1975: 59, also descriptions of the use of these various 'tools' in p.58).

5.8.1 iv) Loud sounds

Ululating and gunshots are common in wedding celebrations or other important occasions.

5.8.1 v) Sacrifices and food types

This is an important aspect of Sudanese life. Any special occasion needs to be marked by a *karama* (sacrifice) whereby meat or *balila* (boiled maize, chickpeas or other grains and seeds) or dates are distributed or a sheep killed. These are done as an offering of thanks. Many sacrificial ceremonies are carried out at the Nile (see below).

5.8.1 vi) Protection in numbers and words

Protection is also sought in numbers (Ibrahim, 1979: 143 and Barcley, 1964: 189). A person will go to a *feki* and there is a ritual where special numbers would be etched onto a square metal surface, which is worn as a ring. Critchlow explains that: "Magic squares… serve as an interpreter of the cosmic order that dominates all existence." (Critchlow, 1976:42). The author did not find enough information on this concept as related to Sudanese practice, yet it is apparently related to Muslim heritage.

> "The pre-eminence of number was confirmed by… great Islamic mathematician al-Khwārasamī… he quotes the prophet Muhammad as having said 'Praise God the creator who has bestowed upon Man the power to discover the significance of numbers.'" (Critchlow, 1976:42).

The rituals described below involve numbers in one form or the other: 7, 14 and 40 being the most common. The reason for the use of these particular numbers is undecided, but clues may perhaps be sought in the following:

> "Seven is… intimately connected with the Moon. The Moon is to be taken as the feminine principle in this perspective, measuring the heavens in a passive manner, complementing the assertive, masculine role of the sun." (Critchlow, 1976: 59).

> "…the Vedic square… was the basis of a whole mathematical system which contained a numerical model of the universe. In AD 770 the Muslims integrated this North Indian system into their own synthesis of ancient systems… Seven is at the centre of the Vedic square, which may indicate the origin of its importance." (Albarn, Smith, Steele and Walker, 1974: 10).

> "By the principle of doubling, seven becomes fourteen, a fortnight or half a month. From an esoteric viewpoint, according to Shi-ism, the prophet is the source of light, a light which is transmitted through the Imams as the 'Muhammadan Light' (*al-nūr al-muhammadīyah*); it was transmitted through his daughter Fatimah (as mother of the Imams), through 'Ali her husband, and so to the twelve Imams. Shi-ism thus describes the importance of light by naming this line 'the fourteen pure ones'." (Critchlow, 1976: 59).

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It must be noted that for the Sudanese (who are Sunnis and not Shi-ites), the number 14 is of significance in many of their rituals. How these numbers have been extended onto the built environment (if at all) is unclear. In Islamic art and architecture of other countries strong connections between decoration, form and numbers can be found. This is not clear in the case of the Sudan; the numbers are rather reflected on rituals. Various words or surahs from the Quran, repeated in sequences of 3, 7, 40, for example, are also believed to offer protection. Some words are associated with certain Sufi cults.

5.8.2   Rituals

While most of the literature on the Meroitic era focuses on the tangible remains in the form of buildings and physical artefacts, most of the literature on the Funj is about the rituals and the people. Many of these relate to the strict rules of protocol followed by visitors to the king's court such as: heads had to be bowed and the forehead struck against the ground, three seating postures were assigned to people of various ranks, communications of the king were made through an intermediary seated on the right of the king on a low stool below the thrown. The king gave his sceptre to those authorised to speak and took it back to impose silence (Spaulding, 1985: 12-14). Till today, rituals are the most visible and interesting aspect of the culture rather than tangible artefacts. A verbal portrayal of some of these rituals is displayed below:

5.8.2 i) Visits to burial places

People would sometimes visit the graves of relatives or holy men. They would place stones and flags around the grave. If it were considered the grave of a holy person, sweets and coins would be buried in the sand so that other visitors might find them (personal communication, E. Osman, 2003).
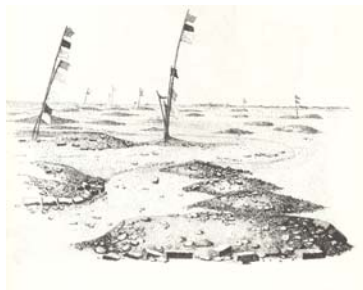

Fig. 5.5 Flags at a graveyard (Potter, 1984: 73)

5.8.2 ii) Flags and colours

Sentiments towards certain colours and their meanings were reflected in the use of flags (Abu Salim, 1992: 112): "On the graves of holy men white flags are placed."

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(*Wa 'ala maghabir al awliyya wa amakin zuhurahum tuwda'a al a'alam al bayda*). Sufi sects put up flags (*rayat*) of differing colours to express the roots of the sect and their connections with other sects. These colours were then used on their flags, turbans (*'ima*) or *khirqaa* (patched clothing of the Sufis, Abu Salim, 1992: 52): "The Sufis expressed meanings using colours." Each village has flags that are put up on religious occasions; Omdurman had a store for flags and drums (Abu Salim, 1992: 113-115).

The Mahdi carried a green flag representing the Samaniyya tariqa. It gained much importance as a symbol of the Sufi beliefs of the Mahdiyya (Abu Salim, 1992: 118-119). The army of the Mahdiyya was divided into three each with a different colour of flag: black under the leadership of the Khalifa Abdullahi and that represented the people of the west, the green flag represented the Arabs of the white Nile under Ali wad Hilu, the red flag Khalifa Mohamed Sharif Dongula of Berber, Khartoum and the *jelaba* of Sennar (Abu Salim, 1992: 119).

Flags were not just used for religious purposes. Women sellers of *marisa* (traditional beer) raised a white flag in their homes when there was *marisa* available and lowered it when there was no *marisa* (Abu Salim, 1992: 118). After the introduction of Sharia (Islamic religious law) in the 1980's, home brewed alcohol, though abundant, has since been done in strict secrecy. Abu Salim (1992: 118) tells how previously a seller of Marisa would call on 'shaykh Idris', a holy man, to help her sell her Marisa, and how she would distribute some of it for free as a sadaqa (alms giving) for the soul of the shaykh. This mix of the Islamic with the traditional is mentioned again below.

Fig. 5.6 Flags at a celebration of *Moolid* (the prophet Mohamed's birthday)(Potter, 1984: 72).

5.8.2 iii) More on colour

"The colours classification among the Shaiqiya, or generally all the Arabized groups, has a different application, e.g. akhadr green sometimes means blue or dark black in addition to the common known meaning. azrak i.e. blue, means black and aswad, i.e. black, is used only among the more sophisticated people who think their colour system reflects their environment in which black and green are the widespread colours, e.g. plantations, faces, women's dresses, etc." (Ibrahim, 1979: 95).

Colours appear to be viewed very differently among the northern riverain groups. Spaulding (1971: 101) explains how "the explorer Caulliaud (1821-1825) learned that the kingdom of Sinnār was composed of "six classes, so distinct that there is not one individual who does not know to which he belongs." These classes were distinguished by 'colour'. Yet, these colours only referred to skin colour to a limited degree: they were more related to facial features or hair type. For example, the Funj were copper coloured (Spaulding, 1971: 102). Till today, people are referred to as yellow, blue, green, red and a Sudanese would know exactly what that would imply.

5.8.2 iv) Rituals at the river bank

"Often when driving or walking along the river road in Omdurman at dusk a little band of women was to be seen in the gathering darkness wending their way to the sandy bank, or perched on the wall under a tree. Close to the mud walls of the khalifa's defences against Kitchener's gun boats a bright yellow taxi might come to a halt and disgorge its customers as near as possible to the water's edge. Their tobes would be white for the occassion and wound closely round them. A grandmother would probably be holding the new infant inside her tobe. Some of the older women would have arranged their tobes so that their mouths and noses were also covered, showing only their eyes…

When we had disembarked at a suitable stretch of river, which was little frequented... both uttered a prayer separately to Allah the Merciful. They thanked him for this child. They thanked him for all their own children and for making them productive. He was gracious and bountiful but they really had enough children now. Allah the All Powerful heed their prayer! They had had enough children. Give them no more!

Affaf washed her hands and feet and then her face. Water was placed on the child's forehead. A prayer was said. One of the women had brought some dates and millet which she threw into the river. At one time it was the custom to bring all the clothes and rags containing the faeces produced by the baby during the forty days and throw these into the river too- then all things unclean and connected with the birth would be washed away for ever." (Cloudsley, 1983: 157-158).

One aspect of Sudanese rituals that has been passed down through the ages and seems to be rooted in pre-Islamic ritual is the fact that many activities revolve around the river Nile and many blessings are sought from the river. It has been mentioned elsewhere that old traditions were not rejected with the coming of Islam. Ethnological patterns reflected Christian customs, such as the drawing of a cross on a child's forehead, which was washed of on the 40th day after birth in a ceremony similar to baptism. A mother will still take her newborn baby to the river with her close relatives and pour water on the child's forehead while reciting prayers in an age-old ritual

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resembling a baptism. Though these rituals are gradually fading away, they have been practiced till recently and are still in the author's memory. Generally, *Sharia* and theology are neglected and replaced with miracles, *karamat*, and panegyric verse, *madeeh*. (Badri, 1971: 5-6 and viii and Cloudsey, 1983: 157-158).

Many riverain tribes practice these old rituals. The Nubians, in the far north who have kept their own languages despite Arabic influence, but have been Muslims since early in history, practice many rituals that express the above:

> "During the performance of the wedding contract, in accordance with the Nubian tradition, seven women took a dish full of fatta – bread, soup, boiled rice and meat – and went to the river bank where they ate part of it and threw the rest into the water to feed the 'angels'. They then washed the dish and filled it with water and one of the ladies put her ring into it; they then carried it carefully to the bride's house. When they arrived, they washed her face and head with the water and covered her with the garmasis cloth. They call this water moyat el shihada." (Dafalla, 1975: 57).

Again during the same wedding ceremony above, which lasted for seven days:

> "At dawn the bride and bridegroom, accompanied by their relatives and friends, walked to the river bank, where they washed their faces diect from the Nile and sprinkled water on each other…. On their way home the young men beat the groom lightly with (…) palm branches. When they arrived at the house they were offered tea and breakfast." (Dafalla, 1975: 59).

> "On the seventh day a party of women carried the new-born child to the river with a big dish full of fatta out of which they ate, and then threw the rest into the river to feed the 'angels'. Then the mubkhar (a small container full of antimony powder) was set smoking, and a certain woman would carry the child and step over it seven times. When this was finished, they threw all the clothes used by the baby during his first week of life into the river and filled a pail with river water, bringing it back with the child to his mother in the house. The mother would meet them at the gate and wash her face with river water." (Dafalla, 1975: 61).

On the fourteenth day:

> "…the room was smoked with bakhur. Then some women brought branches of date palms with which they swept out the four corners of the room, calling upon the angels of the merciful to accompany them to the river." Again they went to the river and the mother stepped over a mubkhar seven times, and again everything they brought from the house was thrown into the river. (Dafalla, 1975: 62).

5.9   APPROPRIATION OF SPACES FOR RITUALS

Traditional rituals – linked to a Sudanese understanding and interpretation of religion – define space and dwelling. Mens' rituals and womens' rituals are sometimes different. Generally, the first being based on some understanding of Islam while the latter are based on what Trimmingham believes to be pagan ideas: "… as a result of sex division the men are Muslim and the women are pagans." (Ibrahim, 1979: 133 on Trimingham, 1968:46). What is interesting is how they are practiced, with which

artefacts and in which type of space. The common thread will be summarized at the end.

5.9.1 Death

Death is a significant event in any culture; in the Sudan it is a major social occasion:

> "In the case of a death, the house of the deceased is immediately turned into a mourning house, i.e. all chairs and beds are removed from the rooms and yards, and mats are placed on the floor, on which the mourners sit. In the men's quarters, hosh rigal, it is, however, the custom today is to provide chairs for the mourners. The relatives, neighbours and friends of the deceased visit the mourning house regularly, and especially the following days have to be observed: the first, third, seventh and fortieth day. It is expected that all close relatives, neighbours, and friends appear during the first day."

> "The widow and close female relatives, like daughters and sisters of the deceased, will continue sleeping on straw mats for weeks or months." (Ibrahim, 1979: 51-52).

5.9.2 Marriage

A house is quickly and efficiently transformed for different functions. A part of a bridegroom's wedding henna celebration in Nubia is described as follows:

> "… a red birish, which is a fine mat of dyed wheat stalks and palm leaves was laid on the ground. A big dish containing henna powder, mixed with water into paste, and small bowls and bottles of Indian oils, were placed before the birish. Then the place was flooded with girls and women coming in, all singing songs praising the forefathers of the groom. The groom, who was by this time dressed in light clothes, was made to lie on the birish, and the henna ceremony was carried out by the old lady most closely related to him. At first she daubed the soles of his feet and fingers and palms with Indian oil, and then applied the henna paste all over them. At this time all his unmarried friends took a small amount of the oil and henna and applied it to their fingers and palms for good luck." (Dafalla, 1975: 55-56).

A description of a wedding party in Omdurman goes as follows:

> "A cluster of men surrounded the players. Some were in shirts and trousers, a few in suits, the rest in long flowing white or cream jellabias with emmas on their heads. They moved easily to the rhythm of the music, forwards to the drummer and back, making their own individual circle, musing in thought. Each held one hand high above his own head, clicking his fingers firmly to the rhythm and, when his dance was done, stepped back to his seat and watched others dance." (Cloudsley, 1983: 62).

In all of the descriptions notice the use of all the 'tools' mentioned previously to get rid of bad spirits as well as the quick re-organisation of a space:

> "If the brides father possesses a shot-gun he may herald the beginning of this party by discharging it into the air. Mahmoud, however, did not have a gun. Instead, Hamad appeared brandishing a hippo-hide whip. Immediately the women of Mahmoud's family uttered joy-cries, each chorus answered by a chorus answered by a chorus from the groom's party and the bride's guests and relations. Then the young girls beat drums and all the children join in, singing and clapping to the rhythm. The chairs and

benches were arranged in rows, the men on one side, the women on the other." (Cloudsey, 1983: 53).

The immediate creation of temporary circles is practiced in all forms of rituals, social and religious:

> "All the guests stood in a wide circle in the street, with the women all together. The singers stood by the central open space with the orchestra, while a team of ten men stood in a row at one end facing an equal number of girls at the other end." (Nubian wedding party in Dafalla, 1975: 56).

5.9.3 Religious ritual and corresponding space: the *halaqa*

At a religious centre of a Sufi sect, on certain known days there would be *halaqat zikr*, literally circles for remembrance, where men and women would gather for *madeeh* of the prophet and the shaykh and his forefathers. The men would surround the *madaheen*, the men performing *madeeh*, who walked within the circle. The women would be grouped on one side of the circle or stand behind it. They would be smaller in number, clapping or ululating at the climax when the *shaykh* joins the circle and, it is told, performs a miracle, such as enabling people to jump from high places without being hurt (description from E. Osman, personal communication, 2003):

> "…another file of youth appeared in the *halaqa* carrying glittering swords which they rubbed into their clenched hands. When they pulled them and held up their palms and the swords, their palms were unhurt and the swords had become blunt." (Badri, 1970: 206).

Much food is then made available for everyone.

At the *khalwa*, the major ceremonial function occurred when a panel of *fekis* would test the students' ability to recite the Quran. The wooden tablets used for writing the Quranic verses were decorated with colourful paintings, fresh firewood was brought, white sand from the nearest water course was spread on the ground and *'anqaribs*, bedsteads for the panel of examiners, and mats were prepared for distinguished visitors. After the 'test' the student would be declared a *hafiz* and his family distributed dates and *balīla*, boiled corn (These descriptions are from Badri, 1970).

The religious centre was usually a large walled *hosh* (courtyard) that contained the *masjid, qubba*, guesthouses and the *'alim's* private quarters. Typical of Muslim spatial interpretation, any place where a person prays, or people gather for worship, acquires a sacred quality. Sanctity is not necessarily embedded in the built form. The *hosh* was where most functions took place and the *halaqa*, circle (of worshipers), the most sacred construct of the space.

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5.9.4 *Zar*

Another ceremony mainly practiced by women for the healing of various ailments, is that of zar:

> "On the day of the actual ceremony the shaikha [women shaykh] and her assistants begin by preparing a spacious room or baranda [verandah] in which mats are spread. They bring the instruments, drums and a brass washbasin t̲ashit, which are used for hot rhythmic music, and some accessories such as coats, jalabiyas and sticks t̲arbawsh are put in a strategic corner of the room to be seen by those present." (Ibrahim, 1979:172).

> "A big room is cleared and covered with straw mats, and mattresses are placed alongside the walls for the visitors. Opposite the entrance door sits the sheikha, surrounded by her female assistants. The required utensils, like incense, perfume, spears, umbrella, clothes, alcohol, and cigarettes are placed in her vicinity. The middle of the room is left empty for the dances." (Ibrahim, 1979: 57).

In all of the above, there is a strong sense of space demarcation for religious purposes these comprise the use of stones, flags and various colours. The *birish* (straw mat), and the *'angarib* (wooden bed), are central in most rituals. And, of course, dress and henna identify the central person in any ritual. The 'tools' of protection appear in all the rituals in one form or the other: words, sacrifices, scents and sounds. Few of these are in the form of physical artefacts; most have cosmic significance expressed in intangible ways.

5.10   KNOWLEDGE AND CREATIVE SYSTEMS

5.10.1 Attitudes to knowledge and creativity

It must be noted that there is great resistance to change in traditional contexts in general. Among Sudanese in traditional settings, any discussions on religion that may lead to doubt in God are avoided. Creative ability is sometimes attributed to the *shaytan* or devil:

> "It is very common among the educated to hear or read about the Satan of poetry, shayt̲aan al-sh'ar, as they believe that all the creative actions of aptitudes stem from wady 'akb̲ar, or the valley where the Satans of genius inspire the people to compose poetry or create works." (Ibrahim1979: 139).

Ibrahim places such attitudes within the broader context of Islam:

> "... knowledge, for the Moslem scholars, was not so much a reaching out to the unknown (research), as it was a mechanical process of amassing the 'known': the known being eternal and given, is unchangeable. Thus the acquisition of information and the deduction from accepted premises were most important methods of knowledge." (1979: 130).

Learning for the Sufis is very different from accepted theological teachings. It involves and understanding of cosmology:

> "A cosmos by definition presupposes an ordered universe. Cosmology is the logic of or study of the laws and intelligence inherent in this ordered universe… The overriding principle for Islam is the unity of existence and therefore of the universe. This unity has an inner and an outer aspect – a hidden as well as a manifest aspect. From this it follows that there is an inner as well as an outer way of studying cosmology. The outer embraces sensible observation, the inner is appreciating the expression of cosmological laws within one's own structure. The goal of spiritual disciplines is to unite the inner and the outer, the greater and the smaller, into an inseparable integrity." (Critchlow, 1976: 57).

Life as a temporary, transitional stage is taken very seriously and for that reason very little concern is given to physical artefacts. This is expressed in the poetry of the Butana:

> "People's value cannot be measured by their clothes
> Do not be deceived by clothes when values are bare
> Life/things are not theirs
> People are temporary keepers of these
> Like a thirsty camel, carrying water in travel"
>
> *(Al nas fi al-'irood   ma taqisa bi taybana*
> *Ma yagorak libasan   wa al 'irood 'aryana*
> *Diyl ḥuras riziq   mitl al takano amana*
> *Zay ibl al raḥeel shayla al saqa wa 'atshana)*
> (author unknown)

Many sayings and poetry revolve around the dialectic relationship between *jawhar*, essence, and *ma<u>z</u>har*, image. Like many cultures, external image is valued, but, in comparison to *jawhar*, it is delegated a secondary position in the cultural set-up of the context. This concept is central to Sufi thought and is reflected in many folk stories of the Sudanese.

A repeatedly told story, which demonstrates this concept, relates how Shaykh Farh wad Taktook went as a visitor to a certain household. He was not treated with much concern until he left and returned with a *guftan* (a beautiful cloak), after which he was treated with much respect. When he was presented with food he put the sleeve of his *guftan* into the food and said his famous words: *"kul ya kumy qabl famy"* (eat my sleeve before my mouth).

5.10.2 Literature

"Fawzia's mother, Nazeerah, an angel to the eyes. Fresh, smiling always. She visits her neighbours and loves them. She is the first to bring a tray of food on mujamalat for mourning. She is the first to lend a helping hand in times of happiness." (Mekki, 2001, 75)

The following two extracts from Eltayib Salih's novel, Season of Migration to the North, give an idea of what daily life is like in that context. They capsule a whole attitude to people and life:

> "My mother never wearied of telling me of those who had died that I might go and pay my condolences and of those who had married that I might go and offer my congratulations, and thus I crossed the length and breadth of the village offering condolences and congratulations." (Salih, 1969: 4)

> "...Mustafa during his whole stay in the village had never done anything which could cause offence, [that] he regularly attended the mosque for Friday prayers, and [that] he was 'always ready to give of his labour and his means in glad times and sad'- this was the way in which my grandfather expressed himself." (Salih, 1969: 6-7)

El Tayib Salih is still considered a leading literary figure in the Sudan even though this, his most influential novel, was written in 1969. It expresses many aspects of the northern riverain culture that have been categorised in this dissertation. It emulates the characteristics of the region and the people found in other anthropological and historical studies. In the following, he compares a character in the novel with the harsh environment:

> "He is no towering oak tree with luxuriant branches growing in a land on which nature has bestowed water and fertility, rather he is like the sayal bushes in the deserts of the Sudan, thick of bark and sharp of thorn, defeating death because they ask so little of life." (Salih, 1969: 73)

Another example, expressing the heat, dust and the salvation provided by the river, the water and the cool breeze:

> "...the closely-packed village houses, made of mud and green bricks, while our donkeys press forward as their nostrils breath in the scent of clover, fodder and water. These houses are on the perimeter of the desert: it is as though some people in the past had wanted to settle here and had then washed their hands of it and quickly journeyed away. Here things begin and things end. A small girdle of cold, fresh breeze, amid the meridional heat of the desert, comes from the direction of the river like a half-truth amidst a world filled with lies. The voices of the people, birds and animals expire weakly on the ear like whispers, and the regular puttering of the water pump heightens the sensation of the impossible. And the river, the river but for which there would have been no beginning and no end, flows north-wards, pays heed to nothing; a mountain may stand in its way so it turns eastwards; it may happen upon a deep depression so it turns westwards, but sooner or later it settles down in its irrevocable journey towards the sea in the north.' (Salih, 1969: 69)

Salih's vivid descriptions resemble many houses in the region. The focus is always on the activities and the people; the actual physical structures recede as a mere background, never controlling it, simply acting as a setting for everyday life:

> "Entering by the door of the spacious courtyard, I looked to right and to left. Over there were dates spread out on straw matting to dry; over there onions and chillies; over there sacks of wheat and beans, some with mouths stitched up, others open. In a corner a goat eats barley and suckles her young. The fate of this house is bound up with that of the field: if the field waxes green so does it, if drought sweeps over the field it also sweeps over the house. I breath in that smell peculiar to my father's house, a discordant mixture of onions and chillies and dates and wheat and horse-beans and fenugreek, in addition to the aroma of the incense which is always floating up from the large earthenware censer." (Salih, 1969: 72)

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Aboulela laments the changed lifestyle in Khartoum where the buildings come to have more dominance than previously, when life happened outdoors:

> "At night we used to sleep outdoors. We used to pull our beds out at sunset, so that the sheets would be cool later. It was so hot that sheets taken out of a cupboard, spread out to lie on were too unpleasant, they had to be cooled first. Every night, I saw bats in the clouds and the grey blur of a bird. And around the moon was another light, always the same shape. In the distant past, Muslim doctors advised nervous people to look up at the sky. Forget the tight earth. Imagine that the sky belonged to them alone. Crescent, low moon, more stars than the eyes looking up at them. But the sky was free, without any price, no one I knew spoke of it, no one competed for it. Instead, one by one those who could afford it started to sleep indoors in cool air-conditioned rooms, away from the mosquitoes and the flies, away from the azan at dawn. Now when they build houses, when they build apartment blocks, they don't build them with places for people to sleep outdoors. It is a thing of the past, something I remember from my past." (Aboulela, 1999: 39)

Eltayib Salih also expresses how changes have affected the villagers and changed the character of a place through time:

> "I stood at the door of my grandfather's house in the morning, a vast and ancient door made of harraz, a door that had doubtless been fashioned from the wood of a whole tree. Wad Baseer had made it; Wad Baseer, the village engineer who, though he had not even learnt carpentry at school, had yet made the wheels and rings of the water wheels, had set bones, had cauterized people and bled with cupping glasses. He was also knowledgeable about judging donkeys that seldom did anyone from the village buy one without consulting him. Though Wad Baseer is still alive today, he no longer makes doors as that of my grandfather's house, later generations of villagers having found out about zan wood doors and iron doors which they bring in from Omdurman. The market for water-wheels, too, dried up with the coming of pumps." (Salih, 1969: 70)

5.10.3 Language and words

In Muslim societies literacy is highly valued. The first word of the Quran is *Iqraa*, meaning read or recite. The use of symbols is an important structuring factor of this society as many others even though words are a major form of expression. Even in cases where a person is illiterate, their use of the Arabic language may be extremely sophisticated. Many illiterate people memorise the Quran. There is great importance to speech and linguistic ability, with the characteristic figures of traditional Sudanese culture being the poets and *fakis* (Ibrahim, 1979: 177-178). There is amazing disparity between the conservative use of visual expression and the explicit use of words. Even in a visual art such as painting, one will find that Sudanese revert to the use of words as a form of expression:

> "The Sudanese painter Ibrahim Salahi is greatly influenced by Islamic writing, and earlier also by African masks. His paintings include writing and sometimes faces, half human, half bull, with a stubborn stare. He tells us that words come to him as he works, and some of these appear on his work. "I find I've done them without realising it. Some of it is prayer mostly. Some... is poetry; some from the Koran... some of it is... meaningless..." (Galevo, 1986: 17)

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This portrays a complex coming together of a multi faceted history. The triple heritage is again manifest, through African culture, in the form of African imagery in the mask, Muslim culture, in the form of the importance attributed to words and through Western culture with the concept of painting as a profession and an art form.

Fig. 5.7 Painting by Ahmed Shibrain (Sulayman, 2000: 52)

Language is not accidental (Vagenes, 1998: 60). The relationship between the meaning of architectural elements, and the meaning of the words used to refer to them, is an important aspect of study in general. In the culture of the riverain region, many physical artefacts symbolise values and beliefs. The loose meaning of the word *bayt* (house) has been discussed previously: Houses cannot be built (*'amarat* also could imply prosper) when intentions are not good. *(Ma 'amarat biyoot wa alniya kharbana)*(Gasim*,* 1985). Notice the interchanging meaning of amarat – implying both built in the physical sense and prosper.

Miriq, rasas, wareed, 'aorooq, amina, are names of various components in local building. What these names mean (the language source) and how these meanings are reflected in folklore and poetry provide access to more intangible values of the society. In a *manaha* (a song for a person who has died – reflecting mourning and grief) it is said: Like the *miriq* (beam) (this refers to the dead brother) that has broken and scattered the *rasas* (purlins*)*(*Ziy almiriq alinkasar wa shatat elrasas*)

Rasas probably originates from the word '*ras*' (to layer, arrange, organise). *Al-amina* is a forked timber member that is placed to prop up a beam when it starts sagging.

The name probably originates from *aman*, security. This is usually in the middle of a room. *Ra<u>s</u> elshay* means 'fixed parts to each other and grouped them'. *Ra<u>sas</u>* can mean 'columns of timber carrying the roof of a house'. A *mirig* is a column of wood that carries the *ra<u>sas</u>* of the roof (Gasim, 1985: 1080)(Refer to the Glossary).

The words used to describe building components express a vision of the building as providing security and order. Yet, these concepts are always related to a broader concept of security and order inherent in relationships and people's values.

5.11   THEMES AND PATTERNS THAT DETERMINE PLACE-MAKING ACTIVITIES

The above fragments that relate to socio-economic patterns, activities and rituals, attitudes, literature and language, all serve to create a portrait of the northern riverain people of the Sudan. They are perhaps similar to other cultures in many aspects and unique in some. The themes emerging from the above explorations are articulated in the following sections:

5.11.1 Cultural space/natural space

The interwoven categories of cultural and natural space have been articulated in the writings of Levi-Strauss. He developed a *schema* of men/animals/deities:

Men in cities – Domesticated animals Nomads – Roaming animals	Wild animals	God/Spirits
Culture	Nature	Other world

Table 5.2 *Schema* of the relationship between this world and the other world: based on Levi-Strauss in Leach (1974: 76).

Levi-Strauss elaborates that culture is ourselves, it is conscious and is equivalent to the *Ego* in Freudian terms. Nature or food is unconscious and is equivalent to the *Id*. "Cooking is thus universally a means by which nature is transformed into culture." (Leach, 1974: 31). Culture is everything created by humans as opposed to things created by nature (Ibrahim, 1979: 125). At some point in the history of anthropology, the concept of culture (capabilities and habits) came to seen as a notion of text – something resembling a discourse (Asad, 1986: 141).

Cultural language is the sum/system of languages including the spoken language, clothes, food, gesture or posture: Each of these being a code conveying a particular message. These messages are familiar in meaning. The culture of the whole

northern, riverain Sudan took on a similar form through history (Ibrahim, 1979: 126). Many of the concepts in northern riverain culture revolve around the notion of this world and the other world. The polarity of the other world, for the northern Sudanese, is expressed in the diagram below. 'People' bridge the schism between these two worlds of good/evil. The Quran supports this: the existence of the unseen/metaphysical world is articulated. In everyday life, there is "…a progression from the worldly/material/profane sphere to that of the sacred/spiritual/Islamic, via realms of life cycle drama and spiritual crisis." (Kenyon, 1991: 229).

God/Allah	Angels	People	Jinn	Devil/Shaytaan
	Created from light	from clay	from fire:	
			from the flame	from the smoke

Table 5.3 *Schema* representing the relationship between this world and the other world for the Northern riverain Sudanese people. .

According to Sufi tradition, humans may ascend this succession depending on the degree of Islam (submission to Allah). In an extreme scenario, in the teachings of Mahmood Mohamed Taha, it is believed that there are different phases of faith whereby one can become a *Mumin* (believer) or a *Muhsin*, progressing to a 'complete person', closer to God (personal communication, Osman, 2004). (This Muslim thinker was executed by the Nimeri regime in the 1980's for his unconventional teachings). Generally, it is believed by many, that to be a follower of a *shaykh* is seen as vital in any process of becoming closer to Allah and his teachings: "He who has no shaykh, his shaykh is Satan." (Muhammad Uthman al-Mirghani in Karrar, 1992: 126).

As seen in previous sections, many clues to the above structure of the 'world' can be identified. These clues are detected in words, rituals and artefacts. These are the signals that expose the structure of a people's experience and make it visible to the researcher. Thus, Table 5.1, at the beginning of chapter, can be referred to again to explain the levels of control and the agents of control.
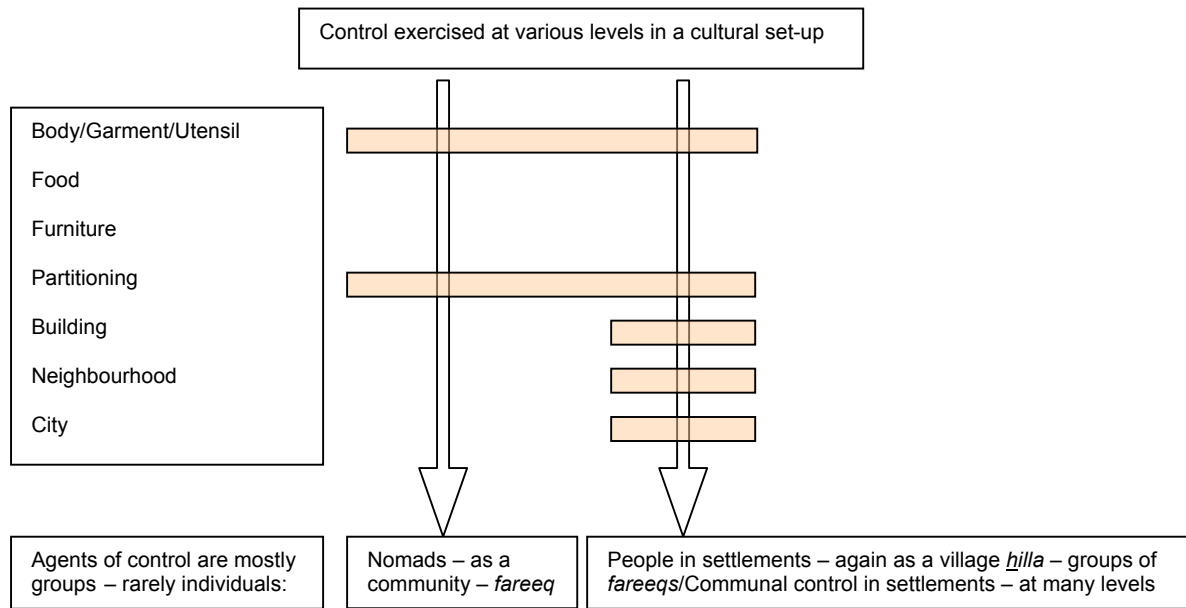
5.11.2 Levels of control/Agents of control

Table 5.4 Levels and control in the northern Sudanese environmental setting.

Habraken explains that certain environments are sustained through the order achieved by various actors (Habraken, 2000: 29). He elaborates that a:

> "…built environment may be described solely in terms of live configurations operating on different levels. In doing so, we describe it as dynamic form controlled by people, fully taking into account that built environment is the product of people acting." (Habraken, 1998: 28).

These actors:

> "…communicate, negotiate, bargain and cooperate. Such direct interactions are necessary for built environment to remain in stasis, and they have their own conventions. Although agents may contest portions of a built environment, it exists to be shared as a whole. Hence, reaching formal consensus is an important aspect of the environmental game." (Habraken, 1998: 29).

Habraken refers to configurations under the unified control of a single agent as 'live configurations'. "Thus defined, a live configuration "behaves" like a single self-organizing entity." (Habraken, 1998: 18).

The single agent in Table 5.4 is the community as an entity. The orange blocks indicate the aspects that are under some form of communal control. Both the 'body/garment/utensil' and 'partitioning are indicated as 'live configurations': they are under the control of a single agent, in this case the community. 'Utensil' is included as being that which is presented to others, such as a circulating food tray. 'Food' and 'furniture' are seen to be more under the control of a single agent rather than the

community, even though social norms may place pressure to conform to some food types related to certain occasions. Kent explains the issue of control as follows:

> "…low social complexity is a situation usually regarded in anthropological terms as synonymous with organization based on principles of kin-relationship, genealogy, and shared supernatural force rather than hierarchical stratification and separated central power. Individual members of such societies adhere to conceptual realities that emanate from implicit acceptance of group-exclusive supernatural and relationship unity, a relatively holistic world view that stresses communal rather than individual identity. On the domestic level this conceptual structure applies to the basic communal group and its living space, tending to downplay architectural segmentation of each domestic activity or activity sets." (Kent, 1990: 167)

Individual houses within a _hilla_ village form a continuum and speak a similar visual language (subtle variations on typology), yet they are under the control of separate agents. This configuration cannot be seen as 'live'. Yet, the internal layout of the houses, identifying male and female domains, is a live configuration as it is governed by the social norms of the community as a whole. As seen in the previous figures (5.1 and 5.2), a woman's domain extends to neighbouring houses. Thus, control does not always imply ownership. The house belongs to one owner, but there are two live configurations at work in determining the characteristics of this house: the one exercised by the owner and the other one exercised by the community in the form of social norms.

These levels of control can be learnt through observation, but the underlying forces are not always evident. A cluster of houses may be wrongly seen as a unit, many of which comprise a _hilla_ (village). In reality, it is the _fareeq_ that is the lowest denominator of a village set-up. Yet, these forces are invisible and can only be detected through understanding the socio-economic patterns, religious and social ritual and people's cultural attitudes.

"…Uniformity results from removing personal initiative from the creation of the artifact." (Habraken, 1998: 272). There is limited variety within a given typology.

Variable themes are restricted to food and furniture levels. Everything else seems to be controlled by social constraints. Clothing form may appear to be under the control of a single agent, the individual concerned, but in reality it is under the control of the community as a 'live configuration'. A well-known saying goes as follows: "Eat what you wish but wear what others like." This control of the community is even exercised on the body as certain cosmetics, including henna and perfumes, indicate various life cycles and are extremely important in terms of gender differentiation.

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Yet, despite the overall control of the community, and despite the fact that the individual house is not easily identified in a traditional village, levels of control do remain distinct. To remain stable, an environment avoids horizontal relationships between live configurations (Habraken, 1998: 34). Within a single village, individual houses are under the control of different agents. "Territory and its markers subdivide space, allowing similar configurations to coexist on the same level." (Habraken, 1998: 34). But, the homogeneity evident in this situation leads one to believe that the 'higher-level configuration' at work here, that dominating the 'lower-level configurations', is intangible and unseen.

5.12   INTANGIBLE VALUES AND PHYSICAL/SPATIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.12.1 Origins of built artefacts in the northern riverain region

Quatremère de Quincy's ideas on the origins of built form have already been mentioned.[2] He explained that distinctions between architecture were to be made based on social structure rather than on technical or aesthetic development (Lavin, 1992: 20-21). Since the hut, cave or tent (originating in the ways that people acquired their food) had a social model, architecture had to be explained in social terms (Lavin, 1992: 41). His agenda was to elevate architecture believed to originate from the hut as it was seen to be a superior form as compared to that originating in either the tent or the cave.

Hunting Fishing	Caves/diggings	Stone: uniform, simple, enormity rather than proportion, identical, repetitive, solid, monotonous
Sheparding	Tents	Frame structure and skin covering
Agriculture	Huts	Wooden: Rich, varied, complex and ordered, taste, delicacy, lightness

Table 5.5 Origins of built form according to Quatremère de Quincy.

Quatremère de Quincy uses this to explain the relationships and differences between ancient Greek and Egyptian architectures. This generalisation would be inaccurate in every way if the idea of multiple origins were not considered – something that he supported in an initial essay in 1784 and then rejected in its publication in 1804.

> "Quatremère maintained that there were two different ways for architecture to imitate, one tangible, the other abstract. One is based on the first models of the original

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[2] Quatremére de Quincy has had a profound influence in writing on vernacular or type. The author acknowledges the limitations of his theory – its flaws have been exposed. His ideas have helped to gain more insight into the problem of understanding the built form in the Sudanese region.

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dwelling of each country, the other is based on a knowledge of the laws of nature and of the impressions our soul receives from perceiving relationships between objects." (Lavin, 1992: 109).

It is explained that Chinese architecture was born of the former process where the tent form was simply duplicated.

The Nubians have acquired their food through all three methods at various phases in their history. In this region, the Nile cuts through the land un-dramatically. There are no hills and mountains and few caves. His theory fails to explain the use of columns in Egyptian architecture. The arguments could be extended to include the similar Nubian architecture. Contacts between hunters, shepards and farmers, resulting in architectural influences are also not well addressed.

Yet, Quatremère de Quincy's theory is accurate in the description of resultant structures. The built structures resemble caves. Thick walls, small openings, if any, lack of detailing and massiveness. Whether this is an imitation of previous shelter options is debateable. How people discovered it to be a form of shelter highly suited to the climate and the terrain is open to speculation.

What is more interesting in the theory, and relevant to the social patterns identified in the above sections, is the idea of sheparding. Imitation of the tent is seen as 'direct' and tangible in Chinese structures and the descendant forms of the hut are seen as more superior, because they are based on knowledge of the laws of nature and a perception of relationships between objects rather than direct imitation. Quatremère de Quincy claimed that adherence to the principles rather than the forms of nature, are what made the hut more superior (Lavin, 1992: 109). This is of course debatable. One can see in the ancient architecture of Europe stone buildings that directly imitate the building methods of a timber hut. But, this is not the intention of this discussion.

Though the limitations of this theory are exposed, it still provides an interesting platform for debate when considering the origins of built artefacts in the region of study.

5.12.2 Intangible/abstract imitation of original forms
Looking more closely at nomadic culture one can see that later imitation of primary forms was/is very sophisticated. Nomadic culture holds the following views:

> "The nomad of the Sudan regards the sedentary man as a toiler, eating only after severe labours, whereas he is a gentleman living on the income from his capital, i.e. his animals. In fact, one of the greatest misfortunes that can overcome a nomad is to become sedentary. The nomad Arab prefers his freedom to the confinement of the town, which soon corrupts the young and undermines the family structure." (Verity, 1971: 25).

> "...the life of the Kababish revolves around the needs and lives of their camels, which are their lifeblood; a man's wealth is determined by the number of camels he possesses – his home is made from the hair of the camel, his containers from its skin, his food is its milk and meat, his means of transport its back, his source of income its sale, his increase in wealth its breeding – and he will buy a wife with camels. Thus the life of a nomad is directed to supplying water and grazing for his camels and, in consequence, is regulated by the rainfall and the amount of water available at any time of the year." (Verity, 1971: 27)

> "... the Bedouin possesses nothing that cannot be moved by two people, and virtually nothing that is not absolutely necessary to his way of life..." (Verity, 1971: 34)

> "The Bedu place great value on austerity and asceticism. The harder one's life the less one eats or drinks – and this is minimal. The harder one drives oneself the greater one's esteem. So things of luxury are usually scorned. One would rather sit on the ground than on a seat; one would rather sit upright than sprawl; one must give, not take. Generosity is paramount; one must share what food one has with anyone who is near..." (Verity, 1971: 35)

In present-day habitation models one clearly sees the influence of sheparding as a lifestyle, not in built form as such but in space use patterns, something that is not addressed by Quatremère's theory. Abstract imitation of nomadic patterns means that activities are many times contained in an open space that remains empty after the people have dispersed. Space demarcation is expressed through temporary measures, such as laying of loose stones or the putting up of flags.

In terms of buildings, temporary living in the open air is expressed in many ways: Interior surfaces are exterior surfaces; very little differentiation is made between the two, material and finishing is identical. Furniture is light and easy to carry by one person. There is no differentiation between the furniture used within rooms or in the courtyard.

Functions alternate easily between inside and out. The house house/courtyard/street are seen as a continuum acting as a stage for accommodating the uninterrupted series of activities. Spaces are quickly and easily appropriated to house different functions. Everything resembles the putting up of a camp on arriving at a desired location by a nomadic group.

5.13   SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Northern riverain culture, as 'text', is broken down into its components and the 'world' of the northern Sudanese riverain peoples is articulated into categories: progressing from the subliminal that is routed in God and the Quran, to the profane and worldly, through the corresponding extreme of the 'other world', that of the spirits. Clues to the above are detected in writings and traditional sayings of the region.

In this 'other-determined ethical culture' it is found that compliance with socially accepted systems of duties and socialization. This is based on an elaborate process that maintains coherence and stability in the social and economic structures of communities. Some of these processes are based on religious values rooted in the Quran or Muslim tradition; some of them are older African customs of pre-Islamic Nubia. All of them have corresponding ritualistic practices.

Anything that is believed to remotely clash with Islamic beliefs or may lead to a questioning of the Quran is avoided. Change is resisted and creativity is attributed to the *shaytaan*. Art is treated with suspicion and physical artefacts are despised. This has generated strong attitudes to artefacts, which is further expressed through the literature of people from the region. This leads one to the conclusion that language and words are highly valued as opposed to the physical artefact. Great importance is attributed to speech and linguistic ability. The linguistic creativity of the poets and the *fekis*, and how it is appreciated, creates an interesting situation when compared to the general attitudes to creativity mentioned above.

'This world' and 'the other world' co-exist, overlapping, in the minds of the people and influence everything from their patterns of space-use, use of words, use of colour and everyday activities. Many clues to the above can be detected in writings and traditional sayings of the region.   Cultural and natural spaces are differentiated. Within the cultural realm, various levels of control are identified and their corresponding agents of control. It is concluded that cultural configurations are mostly under the control of groups rather than individuals. Many of the resultant configurations are generated from unseen and intangible social forces based on conformity. It has also become evident that in this 'other-determined ethical culture', compliance with socially accepted systems of duties and socialization blur the distinction between public and private levels of control.

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The origins of present-day habitation models are traced back to the influence of sheparding as a lifestyle, not in built form as such but in space use patterns. Nomadic cycles are detected within the cave like structures characterising the built forms of the region. The idea of multiple origins initially advocated by Quatremère de Quincy is used as well as cross-cultural contacts to explain the resultant place-making patterns in the region.

A structure of intangible phenomena is articulated. This has allowed reflection on the meaning inherent in environmental expression. Sub-problem 4 has been resolved. The themes of the study, from Chapter 3, have been elaborated using this structure and the significant influence of the intangible culture on tangible manifestations has been substantiated. Thus, the hypothesis has been supported.