of esteemed phrases with an imagery that is admired for its subtlety. Another attribute is her sensitivity to metrical form and to the word rhythms in a verse which she composes before she may decide upon a suitable melody for her text. The generally undulating and descending melodic contours are shaped by the ingenuity of the singer who seeks to perform a text clearly understood by everyone in her audience, and although she uses a great deal of vocal embellishment it is statistically clear that Zaghawi women in the north perform their songs with a far greater use of melisma and far less precise enunciation than the Baggara *hakamma* whose every word must be clear, and who therefore avoids any vocal artifice that would blur her message. Her extended texts are set to mnemonically employed melodies with frequent use of repetition. In performance a *hakamma* always stands out in a position of respected authority, her wit is appreciated and her techniques of composition are copied by young women aspiring to her position of influence in the community. It is not accidental in such a mobile culture that the *hakamma* of the Baggara exemplifies, by the flexibility of her art and the great range of subject matter stored in her memory, the functional social values of her nomadic people: independence of spirit, courage, endurance, generosity, loyalty to kin, and practical humour in the face of life's uncertainties.

The traditional Arabic desert peoples always encouraged women poets of distinction to communicate their thoughts and social judgement in the public vehicle of poetic song. We have touched on this in this paper in the description of Zaghawi and Baggara women's songs, and it is a poetic practice we have not found among the non-Arabic Fur mountaineers. This ancient tradition of female bards may seem to be in conflict with the male dominated channels of authority of Arabic nomadism. Let us remember, however, ROBERT LOWIE'S admonition about the reality of woman's status in society, quoted by EVANS-PRITCHARD (1965: 42), "...it is important to ascertain what customary or written law and philosophic theory have to say on feminine rights and obligations. But it is more important to know whether social practice conforms to theory or leaves it halting in the rear, as it so frequently does."

The *hakamma* of the Humr in tradition and in practice remains honoured today among the tribes of Darfur as the feminine ideal figure she has always been. Similarly the *Iya Bassi* and the *bada*, and without doubt the Fur women's rainleader, retain their places in their tribal cultures as they have in the past, and continue to perform a useful social function in the face of many pressures for change assailing them from outside their culture sphere.