



MULTINATIONAL OIL EXPLOITATION AND SOCIAL INVESTMENT: MOBILE PASTORALISTS IN THE SULTANATE OF OMAN

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Throughout most of the 20th century, nomadic pastoral peoples in the Middle East have faced enormous pressure to change their way of life and adapt to a more settled and hence modern existence. Most of the nations of the Middle East and North Africa turned to their pastoral peoples with a determined view to making them stay put in one place. People who moved were regarded as a threat to the security of the settled. Settlement schemes, it was assumed, would assure control over these far-flung peoples. The international development efforts of this era designed to make nomadic peoples 'modern' also largely failed resulting in a stalemate and often a national policy of benign neglect. In this chapter, I examine the ways in which nomadic pastoral communities in the Middle East have been able to negotiate livelihood successes out of general state policies of 'neglect.' Furthermore, I show how these communities have been unable to parlay that triumph into further benefit except where global institutional agencies have intervened on their behalf.

I begin the chapter with a description of the ways some nomadic pastoral groups (Bedouin) in Northern Arabia have been able to manipulate government 'neglect' into economic successes. I then examine the situation in Oman, where a different state policy was enacted and where oil concerns have been paramount. Determined to provide social benefits to its nomadic pastoral communities without forcing them to settle, the government of Oman extended basic services to these communities. These provisions, I argue, gave the isolated and remote pastoralists in the country a breather, a space in which to catch up with the rest of the rural population. However, in spite of this radical policy, it has become clear two decades later, that the pastoral community has been, in effect, neglected and poorly understood in comparison with the rest of the citizens of the country. Furthermore, it is the lack of a meaningful relationship with the oil companies whose concession areas extend over most of





their traditional tribal lands which has highlighted the fundamental disadvantage of this 'stakeholder' group.

One significant new element in this universe is the budding international pressure for accountability, transparency and respect for human rights among multinational companies in extractive industries (oil and mining) as well as international conservation organizations (see Moser and Miller 1999). This pressure is being translated in some corners into greater effort for sound social investment policy and concern with respecting the human rights of indigenous peoples through either greater efforts at participation or partnerships (see, for example, May et al. 1999). This move has given some nomadic pastoral communities a new voice and leverage in demanding sound social performance policies from oil companies and other international bodies as well as from national government for themselves and their communities in the deserts of the Middle East. Whether this eventually translates into a form of affirmative action on the part of multinational oil companies or a campaign for restitution of land and other rights on the part of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) remains to be seen.

The Nature of Nomadic Pastoral Societies

The definition of pastoralism used in this chapter is: "animal husbandry by natural graze and browse with some access to crop cultivation." As no pastoral group is ever entirely self-sufficient, it must maintain reciprocal and interdependent relations with sedentary communities on the margins of its grazing areas. The pastoral adaptation to the ecological environment has always presupposed the presence of sedentary communities and access to their products. Today, with use of even more sophisticated technology in the form of trucks, water bowsers, metal utensils and shelter frames, bottled gas, mobile phones and other trappings of the 20th and 21st century, the dependence on people outside the pastoral group is particularly apparent.

The pastoral way of life is shaped by movement—a mobility that is both philosophical and physical. The combination of seasonal and regional variability in the location of pasture and water makes movement of herds from deficit to surplus areas both logical and necessary. Pastoralists have a double reliance on land in the form of pasture for graze and browse and in the form of water resources



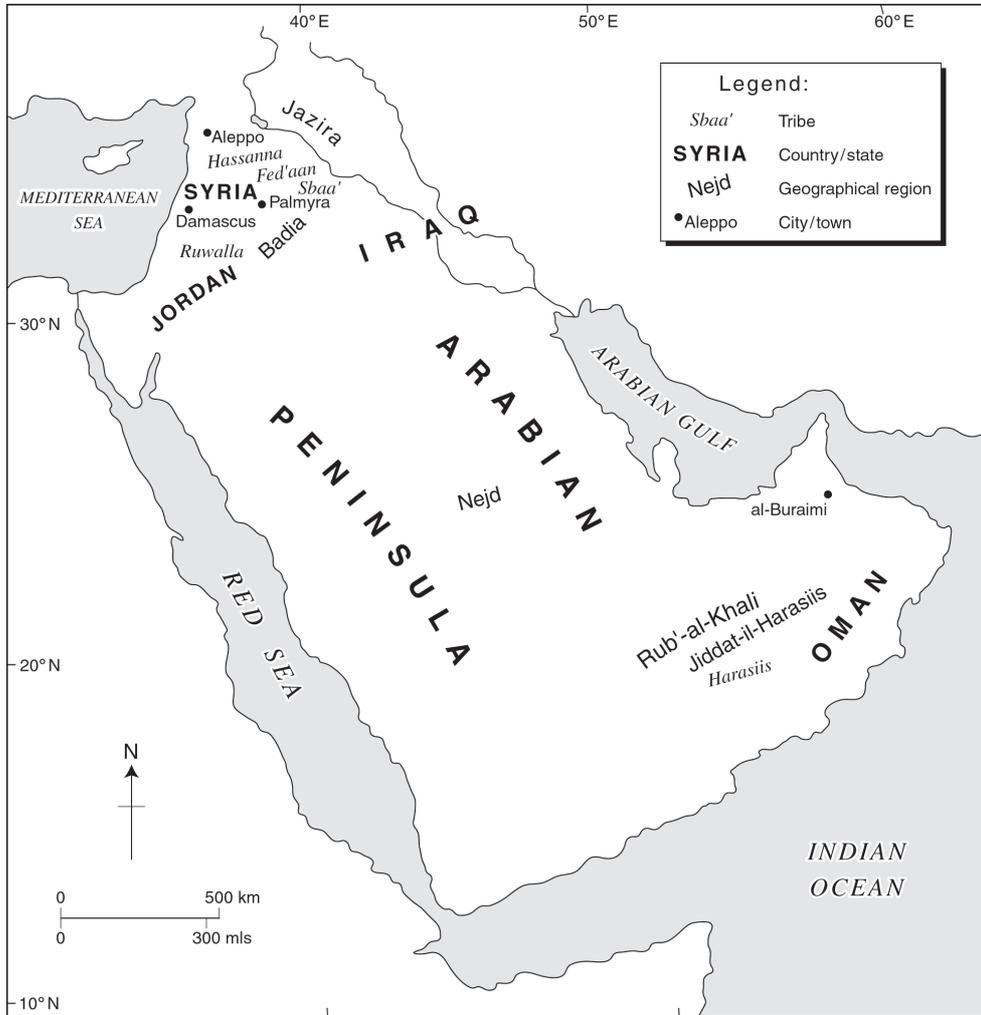
for themselves and their herds. Each discrete unit or tribe seeks to control sufficient land and water for the livestock holdings of the group. The borders between tribes—in the past—have always been fluid and subject to constant reinterpretation as the relative political and physical strength of one group vis-à-vis another fluctuated or as pasture conditions became desiccated. Up until the mid-20th century, tribes were in constant competition with each other for the use of these precious resources, and the weaker units, or less ably represented ones, were often forced to give up their rights to use certain areas. In some cases this meant only minor readjustments in the allocation of resources within the tribe. In other cases it meant wholesale tribal displacement.

The nomadic pastoral tribes of the Arabian Peninsula are often referred to as Bedouin, a term derived from the Arabic word, *bedu*, meaning an inhabitant of the *bādiya*—the large stretch of semi-arid land or desert that comprises nearly 80 per cent of the Arabian landmass (see Map 1). They have, for centuries, pushed their frontier regions into border areas of agricultural settlement and have, as often, been repulsed when central governments have had the strength to do so. Along the northern frontiers of settlement that arc around present-day Jordan, Syria, and Iraq, elements of the nomadic pastoral tribes invariably settled in the border villages and combined agriculture with raising of small livestock and paying their taxes to the representatives of the central authority.

At the close of the World War I, Northern Arabia was partitioned by the League of Nations. The semi-arid lands of the *Bādiya* were divided up and distributed, under ‘mandate status,’ to France and Great Britain. The Southern wedge alone remained in the hands of Abdul Aziz Al Saud, the founding father of Saudi Arabia. This step, along with the subsequent establishment of British and French administrations in their respective regions, telegraph and road infrastructure, and the introduction of mechanized transport, had a tremendous impact on the pastoral tribes of the region.¹ Many were to

¹ The first time troops of Western powers were used against pastoral groups in the Middle East to protect oil interests was in 1909. At that time Indian soldiers of the 18th Bengal Lancers were brought in to protect the drilling areas of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company in Persia from local pastoral tribesmen who were trying to defend their traditional grazing grounds. See George W. Stocking *Middle East Oil: a Study in Political and Economic Controversy*. London: Allen Lane, Penguin Press. 1971.





Map 1.





prophesize that these developments spelled out the death of their way of life. Most of these changes, however, were quickly absorbed by the Bedouin and altered to meet their own highly adaptive system.

In the second half of the 20th century, development experts came to regard nomadic pastoral peoples with scorn, if not disdain (Bocco 1990, see also this volume pp. 303-331). Nomadic pastoral systems of livestock management were regarded as minimal—if not controversial—by national and international experts (Dyson-Hudson 1991, pp. 219-256). Many of these experts regard local peoples as having a poor knowledge of animal breeding. In addition, many ‘development’ experts assumed that the pastoral people in parts of the Middle East, as in Africa are ruining their physical environment (Dyson-Hudson 1991, p. 219; Rae 1999).

Unlike Africa, however, the Middle East and North Africa has never been the focus of mass international pastoral development assistance.² Governments of the Middle East, perhaps because they regarded their pastoral populations as signifiers of internal political problems, sought local rather than international solutions. Accordingly, government policy in the Middle East has been directed at settling these peoples either by physical force or by economic enticement. Settlement of nomadic pastoralists has been seen as the only way to control and integrate marginal and problematic populations that did not conform to the modern nation-state aspirations of the newly created republics and kingdoms of the regions.

Settlement Efforts in the Middle East

In the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula and in parts of North Africa, governments have attempted to lure the nomadic pastoralists out of the deserts and arid rangelands to settlement schemes and agricultural pilot projects. These, in large measure, have failed. More forceful approaches have included revoking the traditional communal land holdings of these people. Modern private registration of land has been encouraged, particularly in the marginal areas

² Neville Dyson-Hudson reports that the African livestock development programs of the past two decades have been aimed at increasing livestock production, raising the standard of living of the human population, and improving the environment itself. The entire process could be seen as an effort towards transforming subsistence pastoralism into the beginnings of commercial livestock production, pp.220.





of the desert that border the agricultural belt, the Fertile Crescent, where dry farming of cereals can be supported in years of good rain. This last approach has had some success from the point of view of the government.

In Saudi Arabia and the Southern region of the Arabian Peninsula, the situation of nomadic pastoral peoples has been complicated first by the discovery of oil, and more recently, the tremendous wealth that has come into the hands of these governments. Saudi Arabia has for decades tried to settle its large nomadic pastoral peoples. Beginning as early as the 1920s, settlement schemes were built to house these people. The association of this way of life with a backward, less evolved human state, also contributed to government efforts to suppress it. In later decades settlement projects built at tremendous expense were financed locally from oil revenues. Predictably, the schemes failed (e.g. the Wadi al-Sarhan Project, the King Faysal Settlement Project). The nomadic pastoralists, discouraged by attempts to turn them into settled tillers of the soil, flitted away. Some returned to their old way of life; others turned to new endeavors more compatible with pastoralism, such as in the transport industry or in trade.

With the huge increase in the profit from petroleum extraction, which the Arabian Gulf States, Saudi Arabia, and the Sultanate of Oman experienced in the early 1970s, came a new approach to the 'problem of nomadic pastoralists'. Mass settlement schemes were abandoned in favor of enticements to individual citizens. Control, in a political sense, was attempted by encouraging the individual tribesman to come forward and register himself as a citizen. In return, these governments granted various privileges. In the wealthier states, with very small settled populations, registration carried with it an entitlement to a plot of land, a house, an automobile, and a subsidy for each head of livestock. In other states, registration meant a monthly stipend—generally in the region of the local equivalent of several hundred US dollars—often disguised as a salary for some form of national paramilitary service.

Benign Neglect of Pastoral Adaptation: The Case of Syria

With the end of the Ottoman Empire and the imposition of a League of Nations Mandate, the French authorities in Syria set about to





encourage the Bedouin to govern themselves, perhaps influenced by some romantic 18th and 19th century image of the 'noble savage'. Bedouin tribal leaders were supported by a special French administrative unit, the *Contrôle Bedouin*, which was outside the jurisdiction of the French civil administration. This unit encouraged traditional Bedouin law and conflict resolution to operate in the *Bādiya*. Occasionally such skirmishes spilled over into agricultural areas governed by a separate colonial administration. As long as French interests were not affected, the Bedouin were informally allowed to operate as a de facto 'state within a state.'

However, with the discovery of oil in the region in the 1930s, the French Mandate power became concerned with safeguarding the potentially important international investment. After finding that inter-tribal Bedouin raiding and skirmishing were affecting the laying and protection of oil pipelines from the interior to the Mediterranean coastline, the French reversed their original policy and vigorously pacified the area, stripping the tribes of their semi-autonomous status, and co-opted the leadership into the urban elite of Damascus, Hama and Aleppo. This was accomplished largely through grants of private ownership of large areas of the common tribal grazing areas of the *Bādiya*, voting rights in Parliament, privileged access to foreign education for the sons of Bedouin leaders, and significant monetary compensation (France 1923-1938).

The establishment of the independent nation-state in the late 1940s and 1950s saw the continuation of several decades of sustained effort to control and break down pastoral tribal organization. The Bedouin tribes of Syria, and Northern Arabia in general, struggled with two opposing forces: one compelling them to settle on the edges of the desert and engage in marginal agricultural production; the other forcing them to move away to seek multi-resource livelihoods and pastoral subsistence across several national borders (see, for example Abu Jabber 1981; Chatty 1986; and Lancaster 1981). In September 1956 after several years of continuous skirmishing in the Homs, Hama and Aleppo, the government summoned all the major tribal leaders to Damascus. This was ostensibly an effort to arbitrate the conflict between the tribes and sign a 'peace' treaty. The occasion was also used as the first official and formally documented step in dismantling any government recognition of a people who had no fixed abode, did not receive any state services, and were not accessible to control either by police forces or security services.



In 1958, the *Bādiya* was nationalized and all tribal holdings ceased to be recognized by the state, the entire area coming under 'state ownership' (see Masri 1991, and also Rae 1999). With this measure, the government believed it had completed the dismantling of the Bedouin tribes which had begun nearly fifty years earlier by the French neo-colonial administration.

The 1960s were a period of strenuous government land reform, including not only the formal seizure of all commonly-held tribal land but also the confiscation of the large tracts so recently awarded to individual Bedouin tribal leaders as private holdings. Much of these confiscated holdings were given to urban merchants, favored politicians, and entrepreneurs for large-scale industrial development of cotton and wheat production in the less arid areas of the *Bādiya*. Following a three-year-long drought in the early 1960s, in which over two million sheep died, the government instituted a program to alleviate the problems caused by this ecological disaster. The government set about reviving the livestock industry without also restoring authority to tribal leaders, or tribes to their traditional lands. Terms such as environmental degradation, desertification and overgrazing came to be used by technicians, diplomats and politicians alike when discussing the Bedouin and their use of the *Bādiya* (see Chatty 2003). Development aid and technology transfer to Syria was aimed at taking over greater areas of the *Bādiya* and converting them into important agricultural crop producing regions—especially cotton. A United Nations sponsored project was set up to revitalize the pastoral sector of the Syrian economy, but not the structure of its society (Draz 1977). Its foremost goal was to stabilize the mainly pastoral livestock population. This proved extremely difficult since the agricultural and livestock technicians running the project—mainly trained in the West—did not understand Bedouin methods of animal husbandry.³ In turn, the Bedouin had no trust in government especially in light of the recent confiscation of grazing land, and the explosive expansion of agricultural development over nearly a third of the best rangelands of the *Bādiya*.⁴ The *Bādiya* was carved up into administrative districts and the Bedouin were expected to register to

³ Bedouin animal husbandry is based on risk minimalization rather than the more common Western market profit motivation (see Shoup 1990).

⁴ The Bedouin 'dry farmed' cereals during years of good rain, but the large-scale cultivation in this arid zone had never occurred before (see Sammane 1990).



join livestock co-operatives on an individual basis (the 'traditional tribe' no longer officially recognized by the state). Most Bedouin choose their cooperative membership along tribal lines and so maintained a tribal cohesion, that was no longer meant to exist.

Throughout this period of official dismemberment and denial by the government, Bedouin households continued to manage their way of life, largely without any real interference into their practices. Within the context of an open access landscape, these Bedouin found ways to maintain and improve their livelihoods and sustain their way of life, even in the face of outsider competition in the form of large-scale commercial livestock herding by many urban merchants and entrepreneurs.

By the 1970s, a spontaneous change had occurred throughout the region as truck transport was adopted by the Bedouin to mobilize their way of life in the face of the rapidly changing environment. No one person or government had spear-headed this move. But throughout the Bedouin community a common recognition had occurred that adopting truck transport made sense. Left alone to their own devices, officially decreed as no long existing as a political unit, the Bedouin in Syria, Jordan and Northern Arabia in general proceeded to make changes to their economy to mobilize themselves to take advantage of regional markets to move livestock and other goods as well as to purchase needed grains. A study of herding in Syria and Jordan in the 1990s has revealed that the 'average' monthly income expected during a good year from a herd of 300 head of sheep (a middle range holding) is higher than the income which a university professor can expect to earn.⁵

Enlightened View of Pastoral Adaptation Shadowed by Neglect: The Case of Oman

The six largest pastoral tribes of Oman divide themselves into two groups: those descended from Qahtan and those whose origins go back to Nizar (or some use the name Adnan). The main Qahtani tribes are the Mahra, the Jeneba, the Bayt Kaythir and the Harasiis

⁵ The study of hired shepherds in Syria and Jordan revealed that the income of the middle range herders was consistently higher than the professional salaries of civil servants in government (see Chatty 1995).





(Chatty 1984). These tribes gradually moved north into Oman from Yemen and the Hadramaut beginning two or three millennia ago. The Nizari or Adnani tribes include the Duru' and the Wahiba. These tribes as well as other sedentary groups are said to have come to Oman from the north or through the Buraimi pass sometime between the 2nd and 3rd century AD. There are other categories by which these largely pastoral peoples identify themselves. These include the differentiation between Hinawi and Ghafiri supporters—the opponents in the early 18th century civil war in Oman. In many cases, the Ghafiri supporters tend to believe in their Nizari or Adnani origins and the Hinawi supporters tend to hold to Qahtani myths of origin. Increasingly members of these pastoral tribes have also self-identified themselves as Bedouin. Sustainable livelihoods are based on domesticated livestock that can exist and sometimes thrive on the natural graze and browse of the desert. The well-being of these herds, and by association, these peoples, depends upon their access to the widely spread-out grass, tree and shrub cover throughout the desert region in response to rainfall and other forms of precipitation. Livestock is the key to this way of life and mobility a basic feature in herd management and cultural identity.

For all the pastoral tribes of Oman, the organizing principle of social life is the herd of livestock. The well-being of the family depends upon the careful manipulation of the breeding cycle of the herds of camels, sheep and goat in order to have milk available for the family to drink year round. The daily routine, the seasonal routine, and any migrations are determined by the needs of the herds. Whether living in a cement house, a house of plywood, or one made up of dead tree branches and tarpaulin, the organizing principle of their daily life is still livestock and access to natural graze and browse.

Throughout all the desert regions of Oman, life depends upon access to water. In the past survival depended upon moving herds and households to water sources. Today, however, in most of Oman, water is moved to the herds and the households by truck or water bowser. The Harasiis tribe, which is the focus of this chapter, represents perhaps the most distant community from urban centers and hence, the most extreme case. Up until the late 1950s, the rock and gravel desert plain (Jiddat il-Harasiis) which composed most of their traditional territory of about 40,000 square kilometers contained no water whatsoever. The only source of water available to them was found along the Awta—the lowlands of the Huqf escarpment lying





just along the coast of Oman from Duqm north towards Al-Hajj. During the winter months, the Harasiis moved along the Jiddat-il-Harasiis searching for pasture and browse for their herds of camels and goats. In the event of heavy condensation, water would be collected by spreading blankets out and later wringing the water from them into drinking vessels. Their water consumption, however, was kept to a minimum with the family relying on their herds to provide them with enough milk for their nutritional and physiological requirements. During the summer the Harasiis abandoned the extremely hot Jiddat plateau altogether and moved down into the Awta where their herds had access to the brackish springs of the region.

In the late 1950s the national oil company which had been exploring for oil in the northern desert of Oman, moved into the Jiddat-il-Harasiis and drilled two water wells, one at Al-Ajaiz and the other at Haima. Within a few years, several families began to remain on the Jiddat during the hot summer months relying on their access to the water well and some sporadic delivery of water by tankers under the direction the oil company. For the Harasiis tribe a revolution was in the making, as had happened earlier in other tribal areas, like that of the Duru' near Ibri. Wells for water were being sunk, animal troughs built and oil company bowzers were occasionally delivering water to key households.

The 1970s were a period of tremendous transformation for Oman as a whole. Disillusionment with the enforced backwardness of the state and medieval nature of previous government under the reign of Sultan Sa'id reached such alarming proportions that rebellion was inevitable. In July of 1970, the thirty-eight year reign of Sultan Sa'id ended, when he signed a formal abdication document in favor of his son, Qabus bin Sa'id. Oman was kick started into the 20th century with significant road building and other infrastructural development. The country's development budget in 1971 for example, during Sultan Qabus bin Sa'id's first year as ruler was \$60 million. By 1975 it had grown to \$1,000 million. By the mid-1970s, the country had established modern road, sea and air communications with the rest of the world. Telegraph and telephones were becoming widespread, as were schools, health clinics and hospitals. Social welfare services and the extension of water and electricity supplies were also rapidly expanding in ever growing circles from Muscat and Salalah.

By the early 1980s, with basic social services rapidly and methodically extended into the rural countryside of Oman, Sultan Qabus





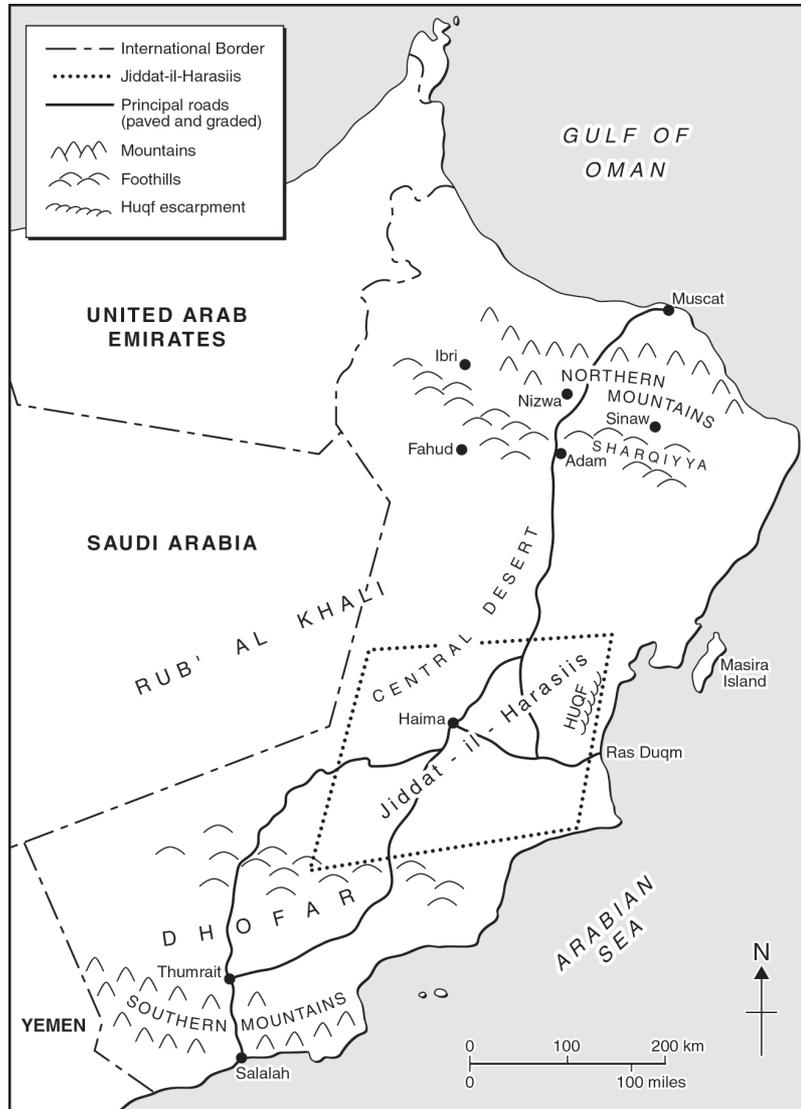
issued a number of decrees of vital interest to the remote mobile pastoral communities. These peoples were to be targeted for development. The Sultan's wishes, reiterated in a number of speeches, were that the desert regions of Oman were to receive the same care and attention as the villages and towns of the rest of the country. This mandate was interpreted by the leading government ministers to mean that a way was to be found to extend the same social services to pastoral nomads without forcing them to give up their traditional way of life. Plans were drawn up to create a number of tribal administrative centers throughout the desert where the basic social functions comprising health care, education facilities and welfare services would be available.

In 1981, the first United Nations project aimed at the development needs of a pastoral population in the Arabian Peninsula was initiated at Haima in the central desert area of Oman (see Map 2). The first year of the project was devoted to conducting an anthropological study of the population and identifying their felt needs and problems. The second and further years were focused on recommending and implementing practical programs that would extend basic social services to this remote and marginal nomadic pastoral community. The nomadic population associated with this region was the Harasiis tribe, a South Arabian speaking people of about 3,000 occupying a large, nearly waterless gravel and rock plain—the Jiddat-il-Harasiis about the size of Scotland.⁶ Raising herds of camel and goat, mainly for the production of milk, these communities migrated across the vast arid expanse of the Jiddat. Their only water holes had been dug by the oil company in the late 1950s and 1960s as the company moved around the territory looking for oil.⁷ By the mid-1970s, the Harasiis

⁶ For a full ethnographic description of the Harasiis tribe and their encounter with development planning see Chatty 1996.

⁷ In 1954 an exploratory party of the national oil company, Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), made its way from the Southern coast of Oman at Duqm into the central Oman desert steppes. With the entry of active oil exploration in the region, the fortunes of the mobile pastoral tribes of Oman fell increasingly out of their own control. The first tribal agreement to allow exploration in their territory placed the mobile tribesmen in the position of pawns in a power struggle between the forces of the Sultan and the Ibadi Iman of the Jebel Akhdar. This confrontation developed also international dimensions, drawing Saudi Arabia, Great Britain, and the Arab league, as well as a special United Nations Investigative Committee into the fray. For the tribes and their leaders, the most significant aspect of these early years of contact with the oil company was in determining which leader would be





Map 2. Sultanate of Oman





had engaged in a major technological change shifting from camels to trucks for transport. By the early 1980s every household of the seventeen sampled for our study had a four-wheel drive vehicle. Such a transformation required a fundamental shift in household economic organizations. Each household had to find means of keeping these vehicles running and 'local' employment for one member of each family became a significant survival strategy.

The Harasiis had become first exposed to opportunities for wage labor as early as the late 1950s when the oil company was exploring for oil in their territory. Initially this contact had little impact on pastoral households other than to modify their migratory patterns in order to take advantage of possible access to water, food scraps for their herds, and later, patrol for their vehicles (Chatty 1994). However, once motorized vehicles became widespread in the Jiddat, most household heads had to hold down regular employment in order to keep their vehicles running. After two decades of unskilled and poorly paid work in this sector, the Harasiis were eager to improve their opportunities. When the joint United Nations-Omani government effort to extend permanent and outreach (mobile) social services to these people commenced its work, it was met by the community with great support and enthusiasm. Their logic was that this project would be able to offer schools which would transform their youth from potentially unskilled laborers into skilled, well-paid professionals. They saw this institution as a way out of the 'non-jobs' that were currently available to them as well-guards and installation watchmen. Instead they looked to future employment with the oil company, the border police and the army. But these forms of employment required literacy in Arabic, high school diplomas and, in some case, English fluency.

recognized by the oil company which needed to establish a system for meeting its needs for labor recruitment and labor supervision in order to effectively exploit the oil promise of the area. Such requests, however, were completely foreign to the world of the mobile pastoralists. Though the tribal leaders were accustomed to acting as political mediators on behalf of their tribesmen, the oil companies mixed political and economic needs were novel to them. In some tribes this situation exacerbated the internal jealousies of the tribe, each sub-leader claiming the exclusive right to furnish labor for the oil company. In other tribes like the Harasiis, the entire tribal leadership structure was severely shaken when the oil company decided not to negotiate with the acknowledged leader of the tribe, but rather turned to a minor leader who was more amenable to the demands of the oil company (for a full description of these events see Chatty 1984).





Within two years and with the full support of the community, the joint UN-government project was able to set up a boarding school for boys (girls were admitted on a day basis), two mobile primary health care units, a welfare office for social affairs, and a veterinary clinic with an outreach program. School enrolment, which began with forty-two boys and three girls in 1982, climbed yearly. By the mid-1990s the boarding school which included a primary and a secondary school had over 150 boys and girls in attendance. Some of the graduating boys had succeeded in getting jobs with the police, the army and in the government civil service.

The UN project attempted to involve the government in activities for the Harasiis which went beyond basic service provisions similar to those already provided to the settled rural and urban communities. Efforts to engage the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries in projects which would support the nomadic pastoral way of life were not successful. Although the Ministry was engaged in supporting local goat farming, it could not make the transformative jump of addressing 'nomadic' animal husbandry. Local requests and plans from the Harasiis to improve their animal husbandry or help develop their marketing or trade interests did not receive any government interest. Instead, what government administrators did notice was the increasing number of pastoral people coming forward to request monthly welfare assistance from the government. These officials came to regard such requests as proof of increased poverty among that sector of the country's population, evidence which required solutions in order to make these people 'economically productive.'

The nomadic pastoral population of Oman has come to be increasingly classified by government administrators as a 'poor' people who are making no productive contribution to the national economy. They are seen as a drain on the country rather than as an asset. This assessment is not derived from any particular facts of technical study, but rather from the long-standing ambiguous nature of the relations between the urban, settled societies of the towns and cities and the mobile, remote, pastoral peoples of the desert interiors. Hence government 'income-generating' schemes have been put forward which ignores the livestock livelihood base of these communities. Instead government focused on developing or teaching regionally acceptable craft skills (sewing, weaving, and spinning) which might result in goods for sale at annual government-sponsored cultural events. But efforts to improve the quality of the livestock or systems of animal





transport to towns and cities have not been supported by the state. Government schemes for pastoralists, generally an imitation of 'community development programs' for oasis farmers are regarded as a way to turn these 'poor' debt-ridden communities in the country into productive contributors of the country's gross -national product. Such schemes have little chance of making any long-term impact on the pastoral population of the country.

The Harasiis initiatives to persuade government—and its most visible associate, the national oil company—to 'develop' their traditional homeland has been met with resistance or rejected outright. Tribal demands for road-building or, at the very least, regular road grading of tracks important to the local pastoralists have been rejected or denied on environmental grounds that road construction or grading would be contrary to the requirements of the Arabian Oryx Sanctuary a large area of the Jiddat-il-Harasiis claimed by government and recognized by international conservation agencies (International Union for the Conservation of Nature - IUCN, World Wildlife Fund - WWF) for the reintroduction of the Arabian Oryx in the Sultanate of Oman.⁸ Tribal requests for government support of a system of water distribution which would rotate and change as households shifted their campsites around the desert were denied in favor of creating a system of 'fixed' facilities around brackish water wells where permanent water purification plants would be set up. Local Harasiis pastoral efforts to grow fodder in the desert and to introduce salt resistant plants were met with disinterest by Ministry of Agriculture personnel who continued to subsidize fodder farming and improved water spreading systems in the agricultural regions of the country.

The Harasiis have been changed by these experiences. Their expectations of government support and assistance have grown and their political consciousness also has been raised as they experience

⁸ In 1972 the Oryx was declared extinct in Oman, the result of over-hunting by elites from Arabia and the Gulf. The relatively richest part of the desert, the north-eastern quadrangle of the Jiddat-il-Harasiis, was identified by specialists for the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) as the site for an Oryx reintroduction project. This was approved by the government, without consultation with the Harasiis whose land this was. The restrictions on infrastructural and other development in the nature reserve has meant significant hardship and exclusion for the indigenous pastoral community (for more details see Chatty and Colchester 2002).





and compare their lot to that of their settled neighbors in the north and the South. They have taken, and perhaps will always take, every opportunity to plead their case, to ask for assistance, to request help from the large society on the fringe of their universe. Their pragmatic position has been that sometimes they succeed and sometimes they don't. Although some of their material expectations (mainly centered on their acceptance of the motor vehicle and the way it has transformed daily life) have grown, their cultural integrity remains.

For the Harasiis, subsistence animal husbandry livestock remains the central focus of their lives. A short study completed in 2001 has revealed that over the past two decades household herds have remained remarkable stable with one hundred head of goats and twenty-five head of camel remaining an average figure.⁹ Employment of at least one male member of each household remains crucial for the well-being of the group. What has changed is the development of a growing sense of frustration at the kinds of employment available. Having engaged wholeheartedly with the government effort to provide education to them, the Harasiis now ask why they see so little return. They question why the oil company and its sub-contractors still employs so many unskilled laborers from abroad, when they themselves seek employment and they are puzzled as to why so few of their educated youth seem to be able to manage to gain training and employment in the oil sector.

There is a perceptible sense of being 'left behind,' of not benefiting from the wealth which oil—extracted from their own tribal land—has generated for the rest of the country's citizens. Although they do not use the vocabulary of the 'rights discourse' becoming so popular among indigenous groups around the world, particularly in Latin America and parts of South East Asia, the questions are basically the same: "Why are the lands we regard as our homeland and which we have inhabited for centuries not being recognized as belonging to us?" As one young Harasiis woman asked at a work-

⁹ Household figures for livestock numbers derived from 1981-1982 and 1991-1992 (Chatty 1996, pp. 94-100) are generally comparable with figures derived from a social impact assessment which was carried out for the national oil company in the region in August 2001 (see Rae and Chatty 2001). These figures show that although human numbers are rising, livestock numbers have been maintained at reasonably steady numbers, in keeping with the Harasiis assessments of what is a sustainable size of animal herd in the Jiddat.





shop run by the oil company in 2002: “Why do we not see any benefit from oil activities which take place on our lands and which are dependent upon our good will?” And presciently, one Harasiis young man asked: “Why are we being denied the benefits which all other Omani nationals have access to?”¹⁰

In part, these questions derive from a basic misunderstanding of the nature of nomadic pastoralism by government and oil company personnel alike, as well as an unwillingness to recognize the rights of these peoples to the extensive area of desert they claim as their territory and which they inhabit with their migratory their herds. When they are not physically present in particular spots they are assumed, by the oil company, to have no rights to it. Hence when the oil company came across a number of Harasiis households in Wadi Mukhaizana, in the heart of Harasiis traditional land which they planned to pump oil from, the company asked them to move out. They gave each family 50 R.O. (Omani Rial), (\$US 150), to do so and considered it generous compensation, as these peoples had no homes, no fixed structures or land deeds to prove their rights to that particular spot. For the Harasiis, this was a payment to move away from one of their most important grazing lands for the season, nothing more, nothing less. For the oil company this was regarded as an adequate buy-off, or compensatory payment to take over control of a region in the middle of the main grazing land of the Harasiis tribe.

As oil production increasingly focuses on fields in this central desert area, the questions the Harasiis have all begun to ask have national and international significance. In an age where multinational oil companies are increasingly being held accountable and pressure for

¹⁰ In 2001 a meeting was set up for me at the oil company headquarters to review some recent Social Impact Assessments which challenged earlier Environmental Assessment claims that there were no people living in the desert area the oil company wished to exploit for its petroleum potential. The engineers attending the meeting stated that there were no indigenous people in the desert fields they were currently developing. They had been out there several times and had never seen anyone. The desert was empty of people, they said. Only when the oil company set up a camp, the engineers said, did people emerge out of nowhere to demand water and food. The oil company engineers did not see why such people should be given compensation for moving off these lands. This position and attitude was not unusual among the oil company employees and reflected a general lack of understanding of mobile pastoralists, their extensive traditional land holdings and contemporary claims.





transparency grows, the neglect of a significant stakeholder group - some would say, 'rights holder' group - becomes problematic. The national oil consortium (including Shell International) holds concessions over a large portion of the Jiddat-il-Harasiis. Shell International and other oil companies in the consortium will have their concessions reviewed by the Sultan in 2005.¹¹ This review and also the growing international movement for sound social performance in concession areas have meant that the oil company feels obliged to engage in some manner, even if only superficially, with this community. This effort to develop a relationship with the Harasiis comes not a moment too soon. Furthermore, news of disturbances in other parts of the country - regarding multi-national gas companies, local employment and negotiated social investment policy - are reaching the Harasiis tribe in perhaps the remotest corners of the country.¹² The Harasiis are beginning to make their concerns over their past exclusion and lack of voice or representation known. However, on their own and from their distant camps sites and shelters, their protestations are muted and unorganized and severely undermined by bureaucratic decisions in the oil company and in government.¹³

How individual tribal members will adapt to the recent developments in the middle of the Jiddat-il-Harasiis is problematic. Here are a people caught in the modern post-colonial world of development and planning. In spite of the remoteness, the marginality and the

¹¹ A recent oil company document giving guidance on undertaking social performance reviews clearly sets out that the goals of the company "minimizes negative, and optimizes positive environmental and socio-economic impacts for local and other stakeholders." It goes on to say that social performance is one of the key ways in which the company can contribute to sustainable development and is "*increasingly important for gaining and maintaining an operations' license to operate*" (emphasis mine).

¹² A large gas liquefaction project in the Sharqiyya region of Oman recently ran into trouble over the terms which the local community had been offered in compensation for loss of land holdings, and fishing rights. The gas company's social investment package of 1.5 per cent of the profits, which was under discussion, has become common knowledge throughout the interior of Oman. Harasiis tribal elders have begun to lobby for a similar package from the oil company for the Harasiis—of 1-1.5 per cent of company profits—to be ploughed into a carefully designed and controlled social investment package for the Jiddat-il-Harasiis.

¹³ At several participatory workshop in the Jiddat held by the national oil company as part of their social impact assessments in 2001 and 2002 representatives of the Harasiis tribe, young and old alike, voiced their disquiet that after so many years of oil extraction from their traditional lands, they, as a people, saw so little benefit (personnel communications).





isolation that characterizes the Harasiis and their tribal lands, they are now beginning to face problems similar to the nomadic pastoral tribes of the rest in Arabia. Their lands have been, in a sense, confiscated and are controlled *de facto* and *de jure* by the nation-state. Recent infrastructural growth has meant that they have access to and are affected by development hundreds of kilometers away. Motor transport and motorized water pumping facilities have revolutionized their lives, as have telecommunications. Some have had the opportunity to leave and take up new lives. But many have chosen to remain.

Although each country in the Arabian Peninsula has to face different sets of economic, political and social factors, a feature that is found in common throughout is the plight of the subsistence nomadic pastoralist. Without exception, their territorial usufruct is no longer recognized by the central government; their struggle to subsist has required that they acquire modern forms of transport that can only be supported by some form of wage labor. This, in turn, often means the male household-head spending long periods of time away from the pastoral household, leaving the management of herds to women or younger and less experienced male members of the family. By accident, mismanagement, and force of circumstances, these peoples have been left to find their own solutions. Their dependence upon government has remained superficial, and these communities continue to adapt to changes in their environment; ever searching for a meaningful and viable existence for themselves and their herds. What remains to be seen is whether international pressure for accountability, transparency and respect for human rights among international non-government agencies and multinational extractive industries will continue to hold weight.¹⁴ Current indicators point to a movement

¹⁴ In 2001 the national oil company seemed to be responding to international pressure to integrate the local stakeholders, the nomadic pastoralists, into participatory social development. After commissioning a series of social impact assessments, the company hired a Shell Nigeria employee who had experience of social development. Her recruitment and terms of reference were managed at the highest level of the oil company, but her performance on the job was severely lacking. After less than two years in post, she was dismissed and all activity in the realm of social performance has come to a stop. Some of the more cynical Omanis have commented that her obvious lack of qualifications for the post in Oman and her strident approach to management, worked in the interest of the 'old guard' in the oil company who had little time for contemporary ideas of social performance. Now





in the direction of recognizing, as significant stakeholder groups, the mobile pastoral communities which populate the concession areas¹⁵ of the major international oil and gas companies. As long as company profits hold, that movement should continue. How effective that recognition becomes depends on the continuing demand internationally for business accountability and transparency. In the remote and largely arid lands inhabited by nomadic pastoralists in the Middle East, indigenous human rights movements are non-existent. Good social performance policies by multinational corporations will depend upon continuing global efforts to promote sound social performance and prioritized local partnerships. Without such persistent external demand, it is unlikely that the nomadic pastoral communities of the Middle East could—in the near future—leverage support for their rights, interest, and desire to see investment in their traditional territory take on the shape which they, themselves, feel would benefit them.

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that she has come and gone, they can go back to managing affairs as they did in the past (personnel communications). This view is not far from that which can be gathered from the work of Judith Kimmerling in her assessment of oil company practices in Ecuadorian Amazon (Kimmerling, 2001).

¹⁵ Within the global conservation movement, for example, concern for the human rights of indigenous peoples has been translated into an international search for more participative forms of natural resource management so as to exhibit greater respect for indigenous livelihoods. At the World Parks Congress in Durban in 2003, a Plan of Action and recommendations devoted to Mobile Indigenous Peoples was agreed (Recommendation 5.27) which called for among a number of issues, the restitution of land rights, recognition of traditional knowledge and practices and the adoption of the Dana Declaration on Mobile Peoples and Conservation (see www.dana.declaration.org). This achievement adds to the international body of instruments which can be called upon to protect mobile peoples in the context of conservation. Similar guidelines, recommendations and achievements for mobile peoples are emerging which tackle the issues which emerge from within the multi-resource extractive industry such as ILO 169, and OECD Guidelines (see Feeney 2000).



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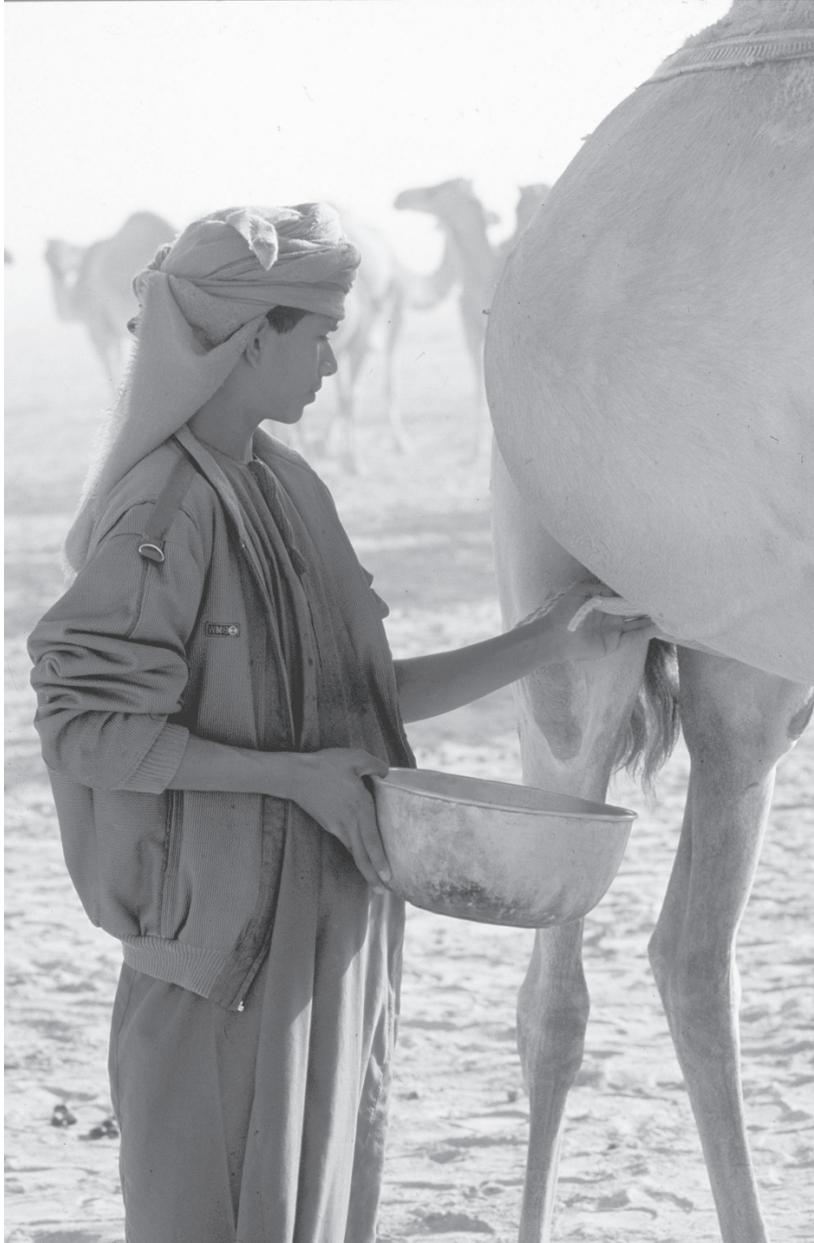


Photo 1. Youth milking camel, Sahma, Oman (O.N.P. Mylne)





Photo 2. Harasiis mother and daughter with kid and medicines. Jiddat-il-Harasiis, Oman (Dawn Chatty)





Photo 3. Harasisis family campsite, Sahma, Oman, 2002 (Dawn Chatty).



Photo 4: Camels in a truck await their journey to a new campsite, Haima, Oman (Dawn Chatty)