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# Local administration and Harasiis tribal authority in the Sultanate of Oman

Dawn Chatty

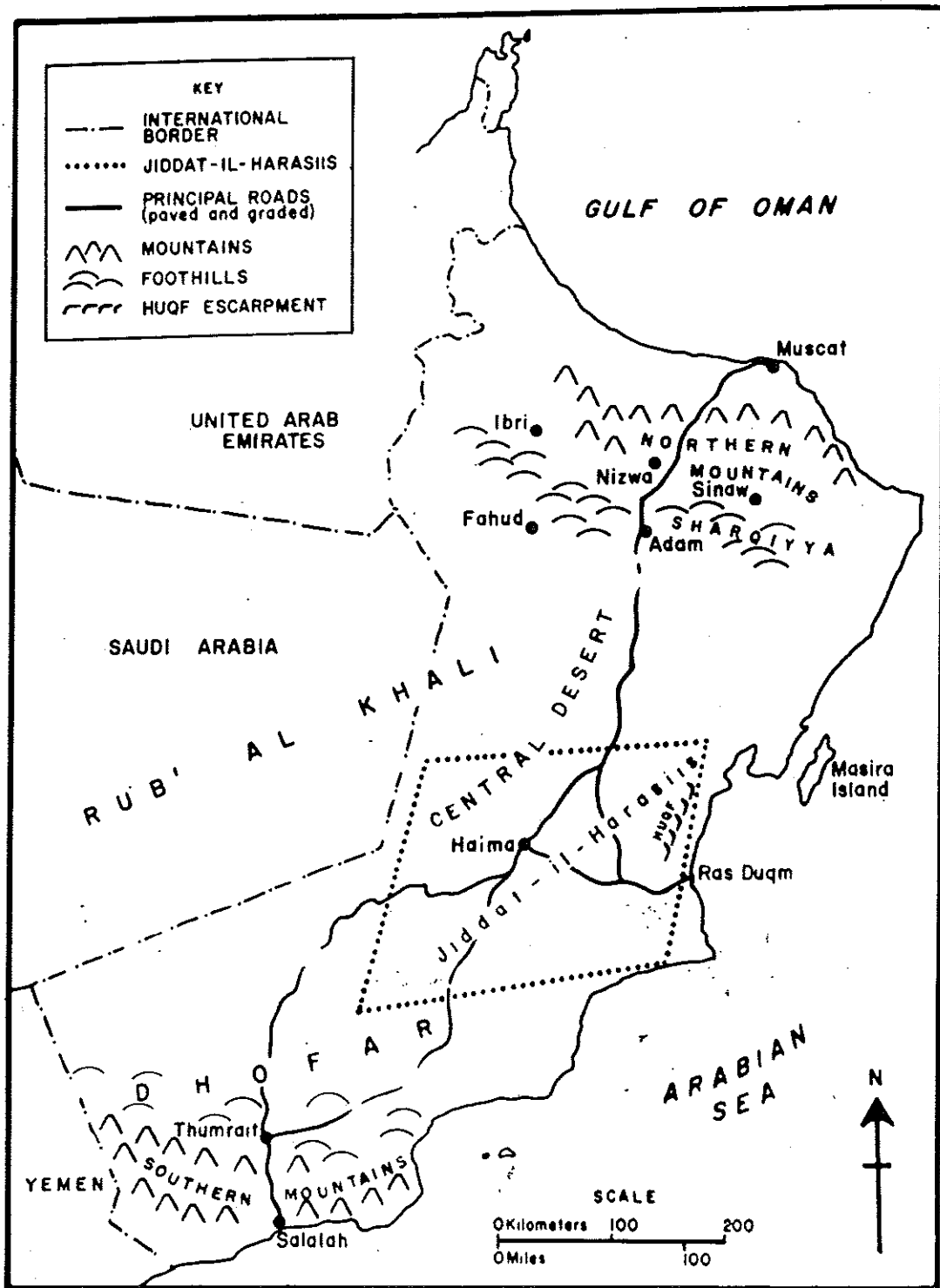
## Introduction

The Harasiis tribe is a small community of about three thousand nomadic-pastoral people inhabiting the most remote, isolated, and inhospitable region of the Sultanate of Oman. Up until the last two decades, their affairs were largely concerned with sheer physical survival in the desolate Jiddat-il-Harasiis that they claimed as their own (map 1). Though this claim was verbally contested by a neighbouring tribe, it was never physically challenged. The tribes' relations with adjacent pastoral groups were conducted generally at the level of lineage organization, and, occasionally at the highest level of organization, the council of tribal elders and its selected spokesman, the *sheikh*. These relations nearly always revolved around issues of territorial boundaries and access to water. During the 1960s and 1970s these border and water issues took on a larger dimension. There was an imperceptible shift and tribal identity came to be more firmly established not only vis-à-vis other tribes, but also in relation to the national oil company (P.D.O.), and the person of the Sultan of Oman. By the 1980s, tribal identity was increasingly troubled by the 'new' concept of national identity and the ensuing loss of tribal political voice. With the advent of the 1990s, tribal identity has come to play a very reduced role in the administration and governing of

the territory that remains exclusively the home of the Harasiis tribe.<sup>1</sup>

## *The Jiddat-il-Harasiis*

The Sultanate of Oman is made up of three distinct geological zones: the northern coastal plain and mountain ranges (Jebel Al-Akhdar and Jebel Al-Hajar), the southern coastal plain and mountain ranges (Jebel Qara and Jebel Qamar), and the central desert of Oman, a large limestone slab, which is mainly taken up by the Jiddat-il-Harasiis. To the west of the Jiddat lies the vast *Rub' al-Khali* (the Empty Quarter). To the east is an escarpment (*Al-Huqf*) that drops sharply down to the Indian Ocean. The Jiddat is an area of nearly forty thousand square kilometres. Physically it appears as a peculiarly flat and featureless expanse of rock, pebble and coarse sand. There are few ridges or outcroppings of more than ten metres breadth. In the northern and eastern part of the Jiddat, the most conspicuous features are the shallow depressions, locally called *haylat*, of several to as many as twenty-five hectares, which are scattered about the desert floor. These are recognizable by the sudden relative abundance of vegetation in the area – a scattering of trees and bushes – and often wildlife in the area such as gazelles, foxes, hares and hedgehogs. In the southern part of the Jiddat, the limestone slab gives way in several places to deep fissures or *wadis* which drop away dramati-



Map 1: The Sultanate of Oman

cally toward the Indian Ocean. Each of these deep *wadi* systems is graced with abundant vegetation, mainly acacia trees and dwarf palms, and water is sometimes found near the earth's surface. Stanley Price (1990: 75-81) describes the

regions' central climatic characteristics in some detail.

The Jiddat, like all deserts, shows great fluctuations in temperatures annually as well as daily. Average shade maximum temperatures in June are 43° C and

daily extremes of 47° or 48° C are not unusual. The coolest months are December, January, and February with average maximum temperature of 26° and 27° C and the average minimum in January of 11° C. The daily fluctuations of temperatures can be as much as 20° C. Furthermore relative humidity can vary from less than ten per cent to saturation in the course of twenty-four hours. Rains can fall at any time of the year, though late winter and early spring tends to see the most rainfall. The mean annual rainfall in the Jiddat is less than fifty mm.

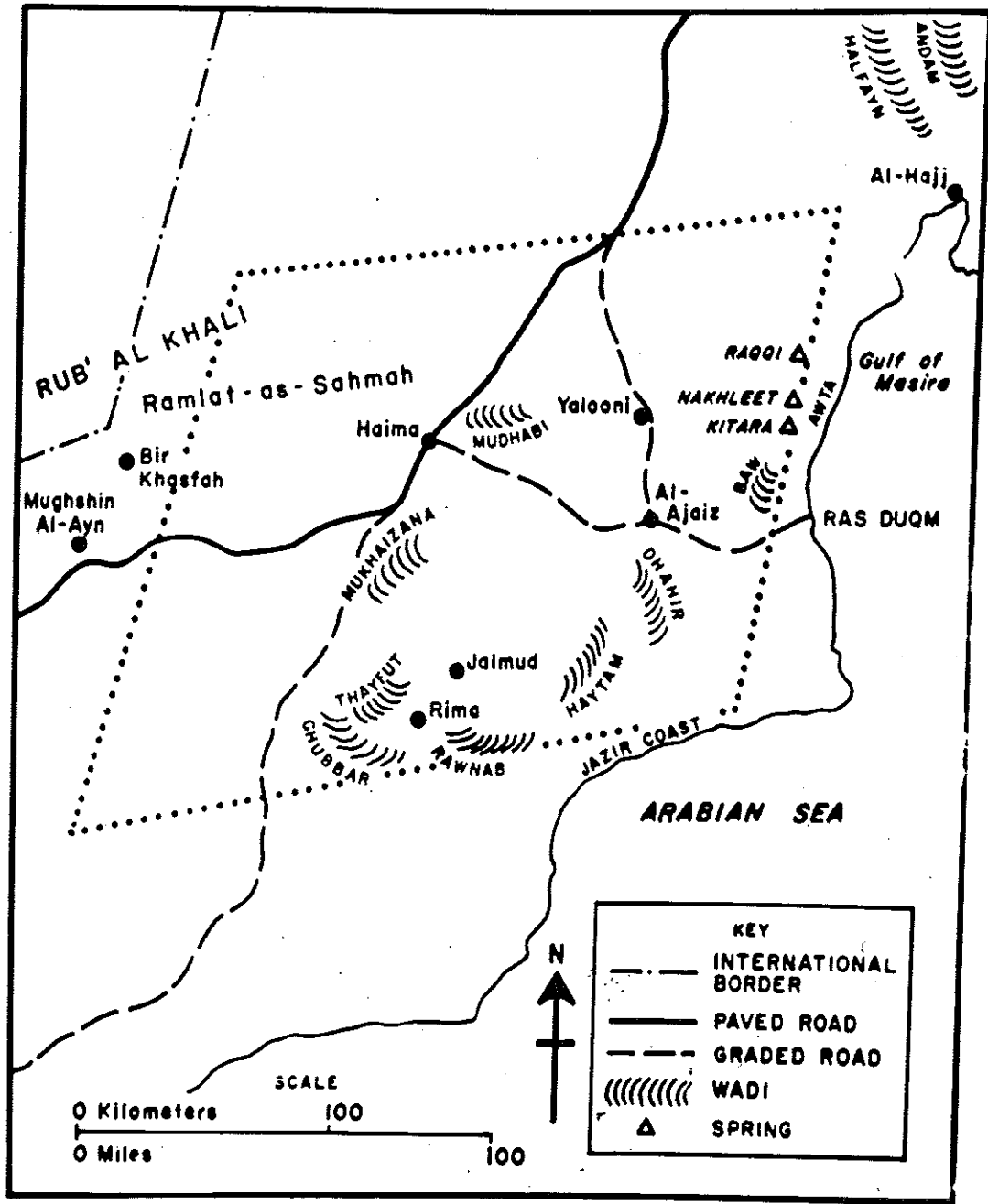
The eastern Jiddat's proximity with the Indian Ocean helps to dilute some of the extremes of climate which are associated with most deserts. An almost daily sea breeze between the months of March and October can cause air temperatures to drop by as much as 10° C in ten minutes, and the same time relative humidity increases rapidly. When this breeze continues after nightfall, and its speed drops to less than eight knots per hour, a fog bank forms at ground level which remains well into mid-morning the following day before being burned off by the sun.

The significant amount of moisture available from the fogs which frequently blanket parts of the Jiddat and the mean annual rainfall determine the vegetation cover of this desert. Experiments run at the white oryx reintroduction project base camp in Wadi Yalouni have shown that between midnight and morning as much as 140 ml of water can be collected from a metre square mesh screen. The Jiddat's tree cover is remarkably dense for a desert. The most widespread species is the *Acacia tortilis*. Particularly partial to the shallow depressions, or *haylats*, scattered about the Jiddat are the *Acacia ehrenbergiana*. In deeper sand and many *haylats*, single trees of *Prosopis cineraria* grow, sometimes reaching fifteen to twenty metres in height. In places, these

*Prosopis* trees are so abundant as to appear as woodlands (Wadi Ghubra and Wadi Rawnab). These trees can grow in the Jiddat despite the low rainfall because of the abundant fog moisture. Even in the absence of rainfall, bursts of green leaves can be observed at all times of the year. March-April and September, however, are the periods of the year when air temperatures are moderate and fogs are most common. During this period, plant growth is stimulated and grasses flower. Thus the primary consequences of the fog on the Jiddat is that it has a level of primary production twice a year even without rain.

### The Harasiis Tribe

The Harasiis tribe appears to have been originally of Dhofari origin. These nomadic pastoralists speak a modern South Arabian language known as Harsuusi, and, according to oral traditions, the original section of the tribe was *beit Afarri*, which once lived in Wadi Kadrit between Salalah and Wadi Hadramaut. Areas of refuge between the Dhofari mountains and its hinterland are still believed to be accessible to Harasiis tribespeople. Over the past few centuries, the Harasiis have gradually moved north and east into the region which takes their name, the Jiddat-il-Harasiis (map 2). During these migrations, the Harasiis have come up against – or been pushed by – stronger neighbours and have failed to secure usufruct over anything other than the most inhospitable areas. Marginalized groups from other tribes were probably also incorporated into the tribe giving it a particularly loose political and social appearance. As they moved or were pushed north, the tribe probably acquired refugees or splinter groups from adjacent tribes. Moving up



Map 2: Jiddat-il-Haraiis

along the Jazir Coast to the east, they came up against a large and politically influential tribe, the Jeneba. To the north, they met the Wahiba tribe in the Wadi Halfayn and moved no further. Behind them was the Mahra tribe, of greater numerical strength. They too were being pushed out of traditionally held territories by the more powerful Beit Kathir tribe. To the west, the *Rub' al-Khali* presented an awesome physical barrier to

further expansion. Unable to move further north or east, the Harasiis remained concentrated on the desert plateau itself, although in summer, they were forced to leave this waterless plain and descend into the Awta or lowlands below the Huqf escarpment. There they barely managed to maintain an uncomfortable existence with their neighbours, the Jeneba.

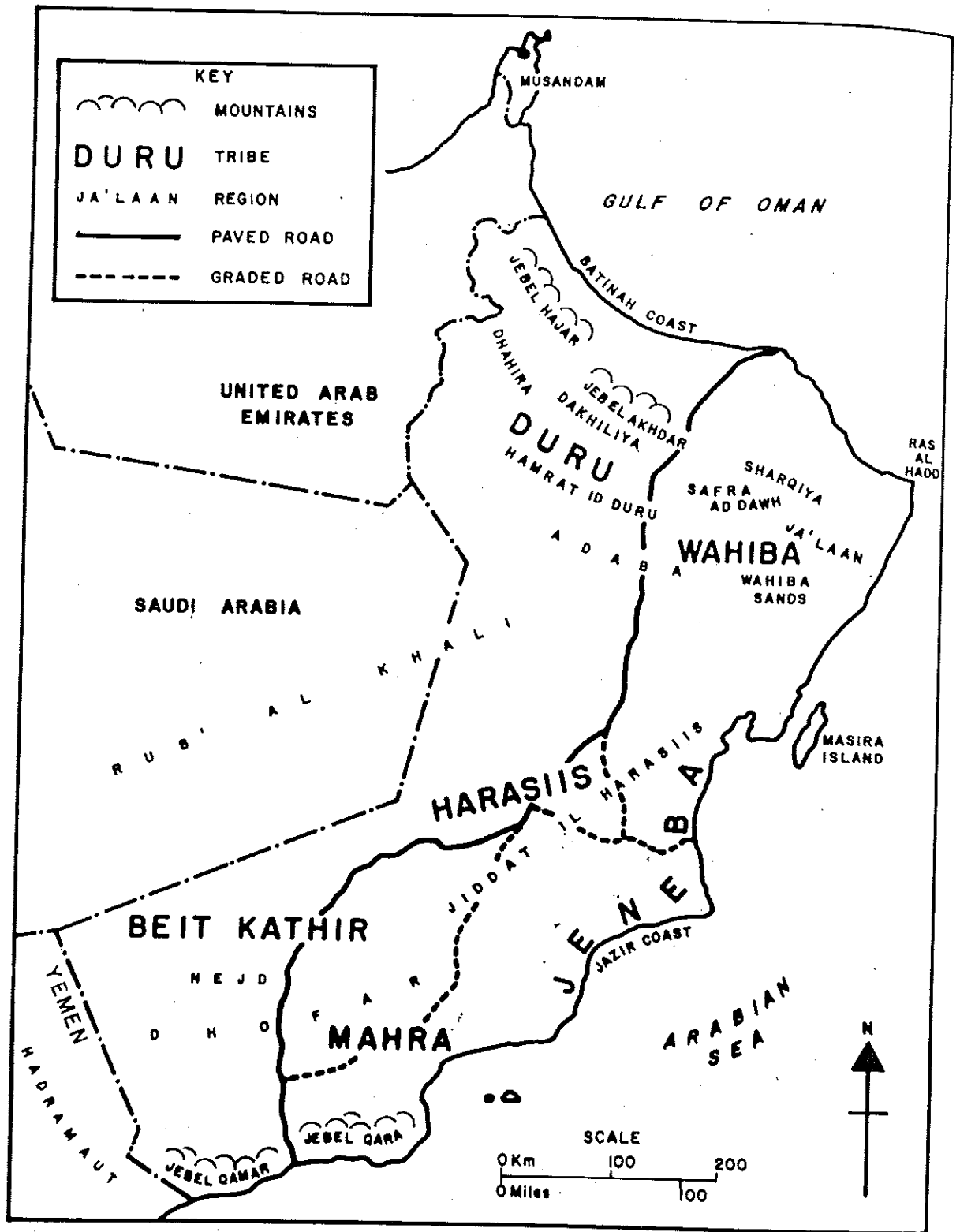
The Harasiis raise camels, goats, and occasionally sheep for subsistence or the production of milk. Their way of life requires the movement of their herds from depleted to surplus areas. Hence migration is a key feature of life, and is structured by a combination of seasonal and ecological variables in the location of pasture and water. The survival of both herds and herders depends upon this continuous movement. As with any pastoral tribe, territorial control is of paramount importance. Survival depends upon having control over territory sufficiently large and varied in resources to maintain communal life. Although the Harasiis tend to live mainly in the *haylats* or *wadis* of the Jiddat, they do occasionally set up households in the sands to the west and in other areas when rainfall has produced sufficient graze or browse for their animals. By the late 1960s, the Harasiis defined their territory as running loosely along the floor of the Wadi Rawnab to the south and east of Rima, along the middle of the Wadi Haytam to the northeast, up to the general region of the Harashiif dunes to the north, and across the Ramlat-as-Sahmah to the west. These areas were shared, and sometimes contested, with the Jeneba on the east, the Wahiba and Duru' in the north and the Beit Kathir and Mahra to the south.

Borders, particularly among pastoral people, are constantly in flux and reflect the relative strength of one tribe over the other. In the case of the Harasiis, they also reflect the sheer ruggedness of an area – the Jiddat – that few are prepared to struggle to survive in. So limited was access to water in the Jiddat, that tribal tradition had it that the Harasiis never drank water, but lived almost entirely on the milk from their camel and goat herds. This cultural explanation reflected a geographical truth. Until the 1960s, there was no source of water whatsoever on the Jiddat. Marginally drinkable water was

found only along the Awta, the lowlands below the Huqf escarpment running parallel with the coast of Oman from Duqm to al-Haj. There, recent rain runoff percolated down through the limestone. At several places (Raqqi, Nakhleet, Baw) water seepage was sufficient enough for the place to be accorded a name. These 'springs', as the Harasiis called them, were heavily mineralized, yielding water that was barely potable. It was the unique feature of the heavy, early morning fog which provided the herds with sufficient moisture for their needs. These herds then provided the human population with enough milk for its nutritional requirements.

### The traditional universe: Water is the measure of politics and politicians

The Harasiis tribe is made up of about two hundred and fifty households. These extended family units are generally composed of a nuclear family and close kin. They average ten or eleven members. The actual day-to-day composition of a household varies greatly as kinsmen and women are often called in to substitute for absent members or help out in times of need. Upon marriage female offspring tend to remain in their paternal household until they have families of their own with children old enough to help out with the regular chores required in animal husbandry. Only then do they set off and set up their own separate households. On average, a household keeps a hundred goats and a few sheep. These animals are basically looked after and milked by women and girls, though male family members will assist when required. This small livestock is owned by women and decisions regarding their sale rest with them. The average house-



Map 3: Nomadic pastoral tribes of Oman

hold has twenty-five camels of which five or six – lactating or pregnant camels – are kept at the homestead. The rest are allowed to roam freely in the desert. Camels, which are owned exclusively by

men, can only be milked by male household members.

Until very recently the world of the Harasiis tribe was extremely limited. The focus of its life was basically the Jiddat

itself. The long treks for supplies could take anywhere from five to fifteen days with very few if any opportunities for human interaction outside of their own tribesmen. Adam, then Sinaw, and Nizwa were the primary trading centres, with Salalah a distant fourth choice. For most tribesmen, the Jiddat-il-Harasiis was the whole world. This tribe of about four hundred 'arms bearing' men was organized into seven lineages called *buyut* (singular *beit*). These lineages were the Aksit, Mutaira, Barho, Sha'ala, Aloob, Afarri, and Katheryan. They were further divided into two factions, one headed by the *beit* Aksit and the other by the *beit* Mutaira. The leadership of the tribe as a whole lay with the *beit* Aksit, whose ancestral founder was commonly acknowledged to have united the disparate units into one tribe about one hundred and fifty years ago. Each lineage recognized two men who acted on its behalf as spokesmen when meetings were called to discuss problems relating to the welfare of the tribe – generally about water or boundaries. These were called *rushada'* (singular *rashiid*). The key position among the *rushada'* was that of the *sheikh*. He traditionally enjoyed a wide and ill-defined field of privileges and was accorded great respect by the tribesmen who relied upon him to adjudicate in conflicts and to formulate the consensual opinion in tribal negotiations. Occasionally he travelled to Salalah along with other tribal leaders to receive gifts from the Sultan of Muscat and Oman or to request that the Sultan adjudicate in an inter-tribal conflict.

For the individual Harasiis tribesman, however, contact with others was limited, by and large, to members of neighbouring pastoral tribes such as the Jeneba, the Wahiba, the Duru' and the Mahra (map 3). The regular treks for supplies to villages along the borders of the desert were about as distant a trip as the

Harasiis individual ever experienced. He had no knowledge of the political struggles in the north of the country between the Imam and the Sultan, and between the Hinai and the Ghafiri, or in the south between the feuding tribes of Dhofar. The Harasiis tribe, of the four major nomadic pastoral tribes of Oman was the only one not to be drawn into the several struggles to topple the Sultan in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>2</sup> This historical fact was, in large part, due to and reinforced by the geographical remoteness and inaccessibility of the Harasiis tribe. The individual's identity, and the tribe's as a whole, derived from almost total political isolation from current events developing in the Sultanate during the middle of the twentieth century.

### Petroleum and politics in the 1960s and 1970s

Over a period of about fifteen years (1958 – 1973), an imperceptible reaffirmation of tribal identity took place, due in large part to the sudden presence in the Jiddat of petroleum related personnel. Tribal identity came to be more firmly established vis-à-vis other tribes and the monumental organization of the national oil company (which many tribesmen regarded as the ruling force outside of the Jiddat). This modern bureaucracy required a careful recording of the political identity of all its employees and labourers. Hence during this period tribalness developed into an important issue in mediating relations between individual Harasiis tribesmen and the 'foreign' individuals regularly appearing on the Jiddat.

In 1954 the first oil exploration party landed at Duqm. The political head of the interior of Oman, the Iman, had refused to allow any oil company personnel to



travel through the interior of the country in order to reach the desert areas south of Ibri where it was suspected oil would be found. Instead, an oil exploration party travelled by sea, landed at Duqm and set out across the Jiddat-il-Harasiis to reach Fahud where the first oil discovery in Oman was made. Representatives of the Jeneba and Harasiis tribes were there to meet the exploration party on arrival at Duqm. Besides the understandable excitement and curiosity which such an event would have created in an otherwise fairly monotonous existence, the situation was quickly manipulated into becoming an important political milestone by the tribesmen. Each tribe tried to claim the exclusive right to provide labour for the exploration team. In so doing, tribal identity became a significant reality for daily existence. An individual's chance to be employed even on an ad hoc basis depended upon what agreement had been reached between the oil company and the tribal representatives.

Employment quotas from each of a number of competing tribes were regularly hammered out for every oil exploration location. And just as regularly, they were contested by various tribesmen, using disputed as well as dubious border claims as the basis for their demands. For all the tribes in the area of the oil concession, this period was the beginning of an era of heightened awareness of tribal identity. Individuals had always been aware of who they were, but now, quite suddenly, foreigners were using this identity to make political and economic decisions which impinged dramatically on the life of individuals.

These disputes were profoundly disturbing for all. Representatives of the ruling *beit* Aksit lineage found themselves challenged and at odds with representatives of the rival and sometimes competing lineage, the *beit* Mutaira. At

the time of the actual landing at Duqm, it was a member of the *beit* Mutaira who was on hand to greet the foreigners. This individual, the leader of the rival lineage, claimed the exclusive right to provide labour for the oil company from the Harasiis tribe. The oil company found this man, Salim bin Huweila, to be exceptionally capable, hard working, and charming as well, and appointed him the labour supervisor for the Harasiis tribe. When the leader of the tribe, Sheikh Shergi, appeared on the scene to demand his rightful role, it was denied him on grounds that the labour supervisor did not need to be the overall tribal leader. For the next decade these two men fought bitterly over the issue. Salim bin Huweila maintained his position with the oil company while Sheikh Shergi, on many occasions, successfully derailed his rival's efforts.

During this decade, each man claimed the right to provide the Harasiis portion of support and labour to the oil party.<sup>3</sup> This claim and struggle served to reinforce and solidify the meaning of tribal identity for the individual tribesman. For the first time, a political and social concept was being grounded in the economic reality of earning a wage and perhaps purchasing some of the goods that were making an appearance in their universe, most notably automobiles.

The presence of the oil company and its exploration teams in the Jiddat-il-Harasiis challenged and unwittingly undermined the internal tribal cohesion. Initially, for many Harasiis tribesmen, the reality of being appointed a labourer was more important than worrying about who was making the appointment. Within a matter of a few years, however, the tribal leader was able to muster enough support to call a strike and thus disrupt oil company work. The tribesmen eventually split into those backing the traditional leader and those support-

ing the oil company appointee. This dispute was finally settled in Salalah by the Sultan of Oman and resulted in the traditional leader being 'stripped' of his office. For the next decade, until the accession of the present Sultan and the restoration of the traditional leader to his rightful place in 1972, the Harasiis tribe was divided and leaderless. Some turned to Salim bin Huweila for help, but many began to search for others in position of power. The local representatives of the Sultan's government, the *wali* (plural, *awliyya'*), began to be approached by some tribesmen. By the end of the decade, the *wali* of Adam, a town nearly 300 kilometres north of the Jiddat, was being regularly consulted by the Harasiis tribesmen. During this period, tribal identity was reaffirmed and recast due to the presence of 'foreigners' in their universe. However, the way these relations were played out undermined overall tribal solidarity and consensus.

In 1970, Sultan Saiid bin Taimur was removed from office and his son, Qaboos bin Saiid, acceded to the throne. With him came rapid change, development, and modernization. Slowly in the first few years, but gaining momentum with each successive year, a modern government bureaucracy developed. In the remote desert interior of Oman, this came to be felt in the role which the Ministry of Interior played and in the operations of the offices of the *wali* in each region. Individual tribesmen had several options where in the past they had but one. Tribal elders, who had exclusively represented the tribe in the past began to find that their undisputed role was occasionally being questioned. Among tribes where group cohesion and solidarity were firmly established, the role of the *wali* was often restricted to non-tribal matters, affairs that concerned the modern government in Muscat. Among other tribes, like the Harasiis, where political solidar-

ity had been undermined, the role of the *wali* steadily took on greater dimensions.

### Transition years: Water becomes the measure of the politician

For the more traditional water and boundary issues, tribal authority and modern government interaction was more fluid and changing. Border issues were settled between tribes but also often through the good offices of a local *wali*. Among the Harasiis tribesmen, border issues were clearly closely tied up with water and its availability. On each of its border areas, one or more wells had been opened by the government or the oil company by the 1970s. These precious resources naturally came to be contested by neighbouring tribes. Hence, in the south, the Harasiis found themselves having to share water with the Jeneba, and the Mahra. To the east, their previously uncontested claim to the only well in the area was challenged by the Jeneba tribesmen. After a bitter, inter-tribal feud, the government decreed that the well had to be shared by both tribes. These decrees came out of the Ministry of Interior after consultation with tribal leaders. And although some of these decisions were unpopular, they were upheld by tribal elders. At least there was water to fight over, whereas in earlier decades the resource was so scarce as to sometimes require camel caravans, of several weeks duration to fetch it.

The government delivery of water, however, was even more problematic. Internal tribal strife often surfaced over this issue. As early as the 1960s, the national oil company had undertaken a very limited but nonetheless crucial delivery of water by tankers to selected households on the Jiddat.<sup>4</sup> In the 1970s, with the establishment of a Ministry of

Water and Electricity, many desert areas and tribal groups were served on a sporadic if not regular basis. Among the Harasiis this water delivery service fuelled internal dissension between the *sheikh's* lineage and its rival faction. The government's initial effort giving the *sheikh's* family a water tanker and having him direct the delivery service, created much difficulty for the tribe as a whole. Water, it was claimed, was being delivered to the *sheikh* and related families far more frequently than to other families. Initially these complaints were dealt with within the tribal lineages and the *sheikh* made some effort to see that water was delivered equitably. As the decade drew to a close, however, and the tankers aged and broke down more frequently the protests grew louder and were eventually heard in the Ministry of Water and Electricity itself.

Concept of national identity:  
Water is the measure of the man

By the 1980s tribal identity among all the nomadic pastoral tribes of Oman was to be troubled by the gradual development of the concept of national identity. This awareness was more rapid among the Harasiis tribe than most because the tribal leadership had been weakened, and, perhaps unintentionally, undermined by various policy decisions by the oil company and the government during the preceding two decades. Furthermore, in 1981, the government opened an office of the *wali* at Haima, making its presence felt in the very heart of the Jiddat-il-Harasiis.

For the Harasiis tribe, the traditional leadership had been ineffective in protecting tribal rights. As the decade progressed, lineage leaders and individuals gradually started to bypass their ap-

pointed leader and arbitrator. The issue of water delivery was one example. Finding that the traditional leader was not making enough effort to set up the equitable distribution of water to families on the Jiddat, the rival lineage leader, Mohammed bin Thamna, undertook to negotiate directly with the Ministry of Water and Electricity. Soon other individuals began to make the long journey into Muscat to negotiate water delivery either to their own lineage or to their current grazing area. They became aware that there was another authority outside of the tribe that could, if properly approached, be of assistance to the tribe. From here it was only a small step to an understanding that their individual identity as Harasiis tribesmen could be included in the larger Omani identity with all the rights and privileges that entailed. During the 1980s it became a common occurrence to see individual Harasiis tribesmen in the outer offices of government officials, directors, and even ministers, waiting for an opportunity to petition for government service of one kind or another.

At the same time, the traditional tribal method of governing by arbitration and consensus was being undermined. Tribal elders still met regularly in the offices of the *wali*, but the outcomes of these meetings reflected both the traditional leader's loss of standing and his ineffectiveness as a negotiator. When, for example, the office of the advisor to the Sultan on the Conservation of the Environment sought an area in the Jiddat-il-Harasiis in which to set up a reserve for the reintroduction of the Arabian oryx, it approached a member of the rival lineage, and not the tribal *sheikh*. Without consulting the tribal elders, this individual offered the government a critically important *wadi* in which to set up the reintroduction project. Not until the final stage of negotiations were the tribal elders all

summoned to Muscat and informed of the government decision. There was no intra-tribal discussion and, although coercion is perhaps too strong a word to use in this instance, what dissent there may have been was not expressed. This meeting saw the signing away of the right to use an area of thirty square kilometres of what had once been their major reserve area in time of drought. The nation's government was rapidly entering into the lives of the individual tribesmen and with it came a sense of national identity.

For the Harasiis, this sentiment was accompanied by a growing sense of disappointment with their own traditional leader. When he died in 1982, many tribal elders felt that the time had come to elect someone from another family or lineage, someone who would be strong enough to represent the tribe more forcefully in its dealings with the national government. The *wali* called a meeting to elect a new leader and each lineage sent two representatives. The mood was clearly to block the former *sheikh's* son, a young man of little character or personality, from becoming the next leader. The meeting was held behind locked doors in the office of the *wali* and lasted many hours. Whatever opinions were expressed, the newly 'elected' *sheikh* was the son of the former leader. Despite the heated protestations of many Harasiis, the young man was given a chance. Over the following few years, he has shown himself to be his father's son. Largesse in cash and kind from the various government ministries intended for distribution among the tribe tended to remain in his hands. The end result of his behaviour was that few tribesmen turned to him for help or for assistance, preferring to approach the local *wali* or another government official.

## Conclusion

Three decades ago, to ask a Harasiis tribesman or woman who he or she was, would have elicited the response that he or she belonged to the Harasiis tribe. The concept of Oman being anything other than a far-away place and the Sultan, the ruler of that distant location, simply did not exist. However over the past 15 years in particular, the tribe as a whole has made a monumental leap in understanding and conceptualization. Infrastructural development, and modern communications, in particular, have made it possible for men to leave the Jiddat-il-Harasiis to seek employment in the larger cities of Oman and in adjacent countries. Returning home regularly for annual leaves and long religious holidays, these men have brought with them modern commodities as well as new ideas of the world and their place in it. Education which was first introduced in the Jiddat-il-Harasiis in 1982 has begun to enlarge the horizons of the youth as well. The Omani Police Force has recently begun to systematically recruit these high school graduates for training in the police academy and eventual posting in the desert frontier areas. The philosophy behind this policy is that only someone born and bred in the desert is likely to truly know his/her way around it. The impact of such a policy, however, is to encourage an awareness of the Harasiis way of life, its cultural core, while at the same time developing a sense of citizenship on a national level.

Over the course of three decades, the Harasiis have gradually developed a sense of tribal identity in relation to new actors in their traditional universe. Like other nomadic pastoral groups in the Sultanate of Oman, they have discovered the importance of their tribal identity in not only political, but also economic terms. Employment in many of the local

government offices, in the police force, in the oil industry is often secured on the basis of tribal affiliation. In the case of the oryx reintroduction project, the internationally prestigious conservation scheme located in the very heart of the Jiddat-il-Harasiis, employment as an oryx ranger requires tribal affiliation, traditional Harasiis tracking skill, and a modern high school education. However, as the national government's local representatives have consolidated their influence, the Harasiis tribesmen, more than most other Omani pastoral groups, have found their renewed tribal identity to be increasingly politically inconsequential. They have come to find their own elected tribal leader politically ineffective and irrelevant. Accordingly tribal identity, though culturally and economically extremely important to the society, today plays a greatly reduced role in local administration. The relations of the individual tribesperson with government bureaucracy are decreasingly brokered by tribal contacts. At the same time, the concept of national identity is growing and gradually greater numbers of tribesmen are learning to rely on themselves, individually, when dealing with government, formulating their petitions, requests and desires in terms of the rights and duties of the citizen.

## Notes

(1) This paper is based upon fieldwork among the Harasiis tribe which commenced in 1981. A ten per cent random sample of the population was selected for a two year in-depth study. The find-

ings of that project appear in Chatty, 1984. Fieldwork continued among this population until 1993 and appears in Chatty, 1996.

(2) The roles which each of the other major pastoral nomadic tribes of Oman - the Wahiba, the Duru', and the Jeneba - played in this struggle are described in Chatty, 1981.

(3) The struggle between Salim bin Huweila and Sheikh Shergi is more fully detailed in Chatty, 1990.

(4) These were at the insistence of the traditional leader Sheikh Shergi who viewed water delivery as his rightful demand in exchange for allowing the oil company to explore for petroleum in the Jiddat. The request was for five drums every five weeks for the inhabitants of the Jiddat.

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### Résumé

Dans son effort de survivre dans la région désolée de Jiddat-il-Harasiis, la tribu marginale des Harasiis du Sultanat d'Oman menaît, jusqu'il y a une vingtaine d'années, une existence isolée et à l'écart. Leurs relations avec les groupes de pasteurs voisins se limitaient en général aux questions de frontières territoriales et d'accès à l'eau. Pendant les années 60. et 70. cette tribu arriva à établir fermement son identité tribale vis-à-vis des autres tribus, vis-à-vis de la compagnie pétrolière nationale et vis-à-vis de la personne du sultan. Dans les années 80. un concept „nouveau“ d'identité nationale émergea, étouffant la voix tribale politique. Au début des années 90. l'identité tribale joua un rôle très réduit à l'intérieur de l'administration et du gouvernement du territoire qui, lui, reste exclusivement la patrie de la tribu des Harassis.

### Resumen

La muy remota y marginal tribu Harasiis del Sultanato de Omán vivió hasta las últimas dos décadas de manera muy aislada, con una existencia casi secluida, siendo la mayor preocupación la simple sobrevivencia física en el desolado Jiddat-il-Harasiis. Las relaciones con grupos adyacentes giraban casi exclusivamente alrededor de asuntos sobre límites territoriales y el acceso al agua. Durante los años 60 y 70 la identidad tribal se afirmó vista a vista con otras tribus, la compañía nacional de petróleo y la persona del sultán. En los años 80 emergió un "nuevo" concepto de identidad nacional que ahogó la voz política tribal. Una década más tarde la identidad tribal solo juega un rol muy reducido en la administración y el gobierno del territorio, que sigue siendo exclusivamente la "casa" de la tribu Harasiis.

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