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Les eaux comme force de création des relations sociales dans l'Émirat de Ras Al-Khaimah

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WATERS AS CREATIVE FORCES FOR SOCIAL RELATIONS IN RAS AL-KHAIMAH EMIRATE

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Introduction

Context and methods of research

This research was assembled as part of an archive, compiled at the request of the late Shaikh Sultan bin Saqr al Qasimi, the then Deputy Ruler of Ras Al-Khaimah Emirate and the then Director of the National Museum, who wanted to record information of how people had lived their lives before money from oil transformed life in the Emirate and the whole region, as he considered that the knowledge of former ways of life, based on local resources and social practice, had value and should be available to the younger generation. We had visited RAK in 1988 while waiting for Omani visas, and stayed with the archaeologist then attached to the National Museum. We suggested the idea of an archive recording life before oil to Shaikh Sultan's private secretary who thought this a good idea, but Shaikh Sultan considered it impracticable at that time. He approached us in 1997, having checked on our researches in Oman, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, and was assured we were serious and reputable people. Being paid local salaries we were seen, locally, as not profiting from our research. Shaikh Sultan was unwilling to allow research on politics in the past or the recent

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present, including the role of rulers, although it was accepted that aspects of politics, such as local dispute resolution, would necessarily come up in the course of research. This accounts for the lack of detailed information on politics, and since oil wealth began to arrive by 1970 and the creation of the Federal Nation State of the UAE. In 1971: so our research ended there. Former sources of livelihood and profits had been superseded by inclusion in the global economy, and political activities had to encompass citizenship as well as the tribe. Earlier social practice around waters became largely irrelevant. External technologies brought in by locals from the 1940s (diesel pumps and hoses) and by government (desalination plants and piped water systems) have largely replaced earlier technologies.

Information was collected in five six-monthly periods between October 1997 and April 2004, with a shorter period in spring 2005. In the first years, we lived in social housing at Shimal, north of RAK town, and later at Fulayah, south of RAK town. Finding knowledgeable and interested people took time. Even if individuals were retired, most were engaged in family enterprises of farms, gardens, goat herds, small and large businesses of different sorts, or with local administration and concerns, across the Emirate and outside; if they were employed, most worked in Abu Dhabi or Dubai Emirates on shifts of varying lengths; people were busy. And information, beyond the most general, had to be earned by knowledge on our part acquired from observation, previous conversations, earlier experience in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Oman, and from reading published materials. People generally viewed the archive as a potential public good and were willing to contribute by carefully describing and explaining their former activities. Listening carefully was important: local speakers tend to describe an immediate situation in its particular context, whereas the researcher tends to talk and listen in terms of general definition. They frequently suggested other informants, introduced us to specialists for particular topics, or sponsored us as respectable and responsible persons. Material considered not the concern of the archive was evaded by speakers. Information was checked by

observations and in conversations across the region with a great many individuals and small groups, and in repeated discussions with several tribes people. These latter individuals self-selected themselves as being particularly interested and knowledgeable in various aspects of the archive, and were exceptionally generous with their time. Constant checks, with the accumulation of material, established generally agreed facts by an indirect consensus. We are immensely grateful to the many people who shared their time and knowledge with us.

The information on waters in the Ru'us al-Jibal and Western Hajar mountains as a driving force of human relations and a means of creative action presented in this paper is essentially a paraphrase of the relevant material from the archive; what is written has been abstracted from the descriptions and explanations in conversations and discussions. If readers want a more direct voice, they might consult our book (2011) that places the archival material in wider historical and ethnographic contexts, using published sources. We find it interesting that across the environmental areas of the Emirate, which each have their own hydrology and resource bases for livelihood and profits, the inhabitants used similar concepts to describe their relations with waters.

The historical context

Providing an historical for the discussion of waters and social relations is complex. Many tribesmen considered some tribes to have been in the region since well before the arrival of Islam, by which time development of natural resources was well established, sources of livelihoods and profits in place, and society functioning as it had in the recent past. That is, they conceived that the recent past was a continuation of a long established social process. Archaeological and textual evidence supports this (e.g. Potts, 2001; Al-Rawas, 2000: 35-50). Local ideas of history put forward by contributors to the archive used two contexts. The first saw history as concerned with the cycles of rulers and dynasties over time, and so tribes have no place in this context. In the second, within the tribal context, history is the recurring cycles of the disruption of the just moral order and its re-establishment through consensus, and

outside chronological time (Dresch, 1989: 179; Lancaster W. & F., 2011a: 6-9, 360-375, 383-403, 544-558; Wilkinson, 1987: 6); much happens in tribal histories, but little is seen to change. Some tribesmen referred to outside events such as the arrival of the Portuguese in 1507, the Hinawi-Ghafiri wars of the early 18th century, or the establishment of the Maritime Peace in 1820, as examples of rulers taking action and who had tribesmen among their followers, but these events did not change the tribal system itself. In conversations, tribes-people moved easily between descriptions of things they had done or noticed in their youth and assumptions of environmental change in that part of that particular valley, or of shifts in tribal areas from changes in population, dispute settlement, or marriage and inheritance over centuries. In general, they say that life was the same until oil, and what changes there might be, were accommodated. Often, speakers used the present tense – or in Arabic the uncompleted tense – to describe events or situations that did happen in the past but might take place now or in the future. This, combined with a cyclical view of history, makes an historical context difficult to establish while trying to give local voices.

Social Groups

We use the historic present tense in this paraphrased section, as the information presented concerning tribe and community was from when informants were young and from their parents' and grandparents' time and, they assumed, for as long as Arab tribes have existed – since before Islam – and to continue in some ways to the present.

In the region the majority of people identify themselves by tribe (Lancaster W. & F., 1992; 1999; 2011a: 1-25). There are more than twenty tribes, using the most inclusive local usage, in the Emirate. Some are small tribes with all or most of their members in the Emirate, others are parts of larger tribes with members in other UAE Emirates, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and East Africa. Individuals become members of a tribe at birth; he or she is known as the son or daughter of his or her father, and is a member of this nuclear family and the named groups of increasing inclusion to

which the nuclear family belongs. Men and women remain members of their natal families for life, but women are rarely mentioned in the descriptions of tribe and tribal sections which use the idiom of genealogy. A man knows his line of descent from actual men to his grandfather and sometimes great grandfather; then he belongs to a named descent group described as of five generations depth, although in reality this group is of a greater actual genealogical depth. A number of such groups comprise a named tribal section; a number of named tribal sections make up a named tribe. The name of the tribe may be presented as a real man, or as a name. Levels of inclusion are not replicates since recruitment and function are different. While local terminologies vary between tribes, they describe the same processes. Movement of individuals and groups from one tribe to another was and is common, and individuals may leave the tribal system for periods of time or forever. Membership of a tribe gives the individual a jural identity, and a commitment to generally accepted tribal social practice underpinned by moral premises. Individual tribes-people put forward particular examples: the obligation to give protection and hospitality, to be generous to the needy, to manage affairs from one's own efforts and to be independent, to defend one's rights and to fulfil one's obligations, to be content with what one had, that individuals are responsible for their acts, the right to make a living in an honourable manner. Such moral premises encapsulated economic and political practice; a Shihhi in Dibba Bai'ah considered that:

The sharing of everything was essential [...] to share, a man had to contribute, because then he had something to share. Sharing means contributing, except for those who are too old or infirm. If someone started getting too strong and taking from the weak, he was forced to leave because we wouldn't share with him any longer.

Jural identity as a tribes-person gave the ability to participate in the institutionalised processes that maintained economic and political life of the tribes of the region and beyond until c.1970 with the coming of the nation state and incorporation in the global oil economy. Men from several tribes pointed out that tribes did not in reality, except in very unusual circumstances, operate as bounded

groups, even though accounts of migrations and raids sound as if they did. This comes from the use of tribal group names, as there are no other ways of referring to the actual fluid and flexible composition of groups on the ground.

Tribal identity enables jural and political participation, but a tribesman's economic and social activities are with members of his community, which are described as those with whom « we live, work and marry ». A Shamaili said:

Tribes here are like tribes everywhere else. Men make the networks through which they do things through women. Some marriages are between people closely related, some to women less close, and some are made a long way out so that we have links to people in areas far away if we need to go there. Actual first cousin marriage is rare.

All tribes said they had links through women to other tribes, close by and more distant. This community is informal, a flexible combination of mobile individuals, with claims to co-residence, although some members are present, others absent, and closely linked through women (as mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters). Such informal communal productive groups are found in tribes across the Arabian peninsula (Lancaster, 1997: 173; Lancaster W. & F., 2011a: 10-25; 1995: 104, 112; 1992: 347-348; Antoun, 1972: 48ff; Fabietti, 1990; Marx, 1977); members of small tribes refer to these groups as *jāma'āt*, « communities », while in large tribes they are referred to in descent kinship terms. While tribes-people spoke often of being part of a community, they emphasised that each person has his or her own property and makes his/her own decisions about its management (Lancaster W. & F., 2011a: 26-34). Tribes-people said that before oil, they had provided for themselves from their own efforts and looked after all in their communities; they were rich because they were self sufficient, while those of the coastal towns were poor.

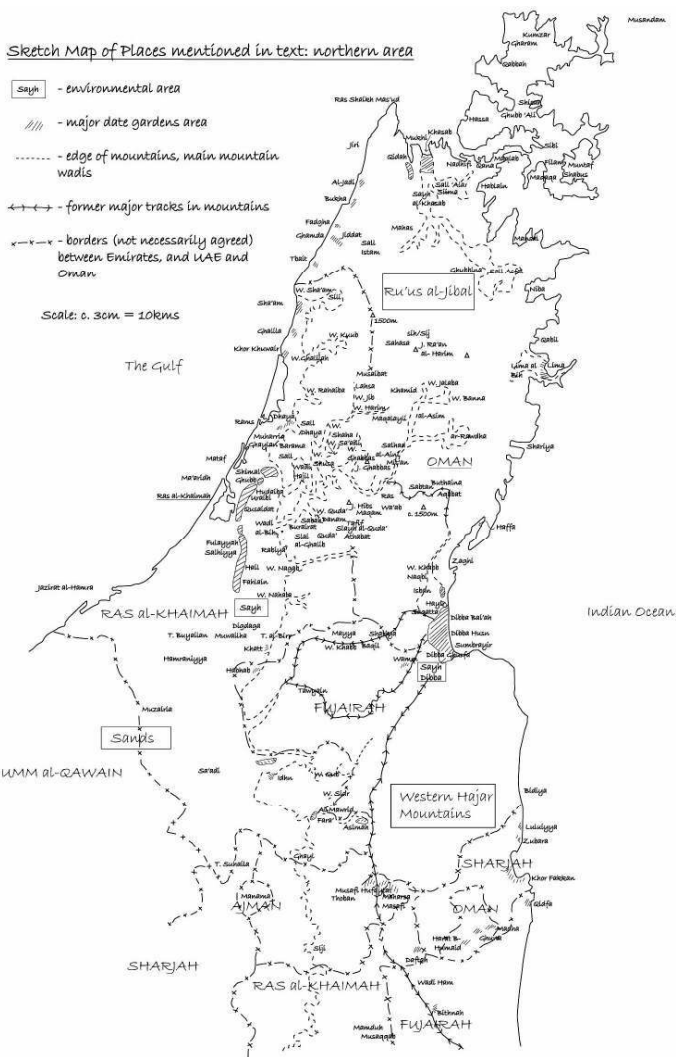
RAK town had a local, tribal population and a non-tribal population of the ruling family, merchants, Iranian and Baluch traders and craftsmen, and descendants of slaves from East Africa. The town was inhabited in the winter months, and in the summers, its population moved inland to the date garden areas, while many of

the men went to the Great Pearling banks. Rulers governed and were the arbitrators of last resort for the settlement of disputes for tribes-people, provided a market and water supply for the town, collected *zakat* (the Islamic tax on produce), used Islamic law and were merchants on their own account.

Difference between Islamic and customary law

A significant difference between Islamic law, used by rulers and merchants of the coastal towns, and customary law, used by tribal people should be taken into account. Islamic law recognises full ownership of land permanently available for cultivation, i.e. irrigated land, as that land has been developed to become productive; undeveloped land used for grazing or the collection of firewood or honey is considered « dead » and to belong to the ruler. Tribal law regards all land in a *dīrat* (a term which comes from a root meaning « to make the rounds, to administer » and so the area preferentially associated through use, management and defence of its resources with a tribe) as developed in some way and so owned tribally.

In both systems of law, ownership of land and its waters go together, they cannot be separated. Ownership comes from the development of a natural resource so that it becomes more productive, in the case of permanent cultivation by managing or developing waters and channelling these waters to soils, and planting productive trees. In both systems of law, owners have the right to transfer ownership by inheritance, gift, or sale; but tribal law uses the right of pre-emption to ensure that any such transfer must be within the tribe, or have the approval of all tribal members. Since many marriages are made across tribes, it follows from ownership and inheritance by men and women that pieces of land and its water move outside tribe; such pieces of land are usually brought back into the tribal *dīrat* by exchange, re-allotment, or purchase within a generation or two, and some tribal sections do not allow women to inherit land, only animals or money. This is a widespread custom throughout Arabia and encompasses most social groups.



The geography of Ras Al-Khaimah Emirate

The Emirate is in two discrete parts; the northern part stretches along the Gulf coast, between the Emirate of Umm al Qawain and the Omani province of Musandam. At the southern end are the sands, then the coastal plains and creeks on one of which is RAK town. Inland of the sands and the coastal plains are mountain ranges; the northern end of the western Hajar which joins the southern end of the Ru'us al Jibal which continues north into Musandam. The southern part of the Emirate lies in the western Hajar, and faces the Shamailiyya coast and the Indian Ocean (see map).

The Ru'us al Jibal mountains are sedimentary limestone with basins of soils on some faces; its drainage systems have a few, mainly seasonal, springs or seeps, and some natural cisterns. The western Hajar mountains are igneous, their heights are bare, but the drainage systems in many valleys have soils and produce permanent up-welling flows from springs. The drainage systems of both mountain ranges carry rains down to the coastal plains and so recharge the coastal water tables.

Rains come as storms, mostly in winters; amounts and frequencies are extremely variable in frequency, duration, and locality. It is rare for there to be no rain anywhere in any year. For rain to be useful, it must produce a flow that can be channelled to fields for annual crops and gardens for perennial (tree) crops, and raise the water table. Summers are hot with high humidities and winds off the seas prevent coastal date crops from ripening well. Dews and mists benefit trees and perennial shrubs and grasses.

The inhabitants could, in the recent and historic pasts, describe themselves in terms of location and livelihood – people who lived from the sea, from the sands, from the date gardens, from animals, from cultivation, or from the mountains (Lancaster W. & F., 2011a: 35-36). Each of these descriptions concealed movement between economic activities across the seasons, and usually, by physical movement across sea and landscapes. It was generally held that no one area and no one resource could supply livelihood and profits of

themselves; movement between resources and exchange between productive sectors were essential.

People regard each place, in all its detail, as particular and distinct, like but different to others of the same general type.

Residence

The *farīj* or *farīq* (same word with two different vernacular pronunciations between North and South) is the residential unit in the mountains. The dictionary meaning (Wehr, 1961: 708) is « a band, a company », but from the root « to separate, to make distinctions between ». People of the Ru'us al Jibal and the western Hajar mountains use the term to describe one set of enmeshed relations for livelihood and profits between waters, land, people and buildings in a named place, and distinguished from and physically separate from, another similarly constructed set. It is recognition of active participation in sets of relations about production and distribution manifested through claims and rights expressed as dues or shares because of contributions: Al-Na'im (2004) discusses *farīj* in this way with reference to merchant families in Hofuf, Saudi Arabia. Without people working on and living from the fields or gardens, the locality is only a place or « buildings », *hārat*. The development of resources, marriage, and inheritance, give an individual and his/her family rights to land and water in three or four *farīj/farīq*. In the Ru'us al Jibal these places are on different mountains and/or at different altitudes, and in the western Hajar along different valleys with permanent water flows. As rainfall, flood flows and water tables vary across the landscapes in most years, having separated resource areas helps to ensure some returns in all years. Individuals and their families move between their *farīj/farīq* working on each as appropriate, and at each *farīj/farīq* are with different members of their wider community. Villages are different, their people do not move except between winter and summer houses as they have their livelihoods at hand – typically, date gardening and fishing.

Local ideas of waters: a paraphrase of archive material

Tribes-people of the region are aware from experience that waters are not passive subjects to be managed. Waters vary between seasons and over time, and across and within the different environmental areas of the region. Relations between waters and people are regarded as continually active through people's understanding, experiences, and work. The natural waters of the region, observed, experienced and enhanced by the work of free and autonomous tribesmen, and mixed with soils brought down from the mountains by floods over the millennia, provide a variety of livelihoods and profits, depending on geological and hydrological features along with climatic variations. All water comes from God, and all water was originally rain. Jibal, mountain, has connotations of « to shape, fashion, create », and the people of the two mountain ranges consider, lexically and poetically, their mountains as the foundations of the region and themselves the original inhabitants. The mountains enable clouds to gather and rains to fall, flowing down the mountain sides, bringing rocks and silts, recharging springs and underground waters, flooding mountain plateaux and wadis, plains and sands, refreshing trees and shrubs, and causing annuals to burst through the soil.

Local descriptions of waters

Each mountain range can be described through its waters: the Hajar has up-welling waters, recharged by rain, for irrigated gardens, and people and animals depend on wells; the Ru'us al Jibal has surface waters, flood flows, from rainfall for fields, and people and animals depend on cisterns. Waters drain from both mountain ranges to plains and coasts; those receiving drainage from the Ru'us al Jibal talk of *sayl*, surface flood flows from winter rains, those whose waters come from the Hajar mountains talk of *ghall*, waters that surface from underground sources and are recharged by rains, and *sayl*. Surface flood flows provide winter water for grain fields and for date gardens, from which they wash out salts and gypsum. *Ghall*, recharged by winter rains, surface along drainage systems and flow all year or for many months in channels through date and fruit gardens. People distinguished between rain that causes a flow,

and a light rain that did not flow but refreshed perennial plants and trees. Waters are of themselves, they are autonomous, with qualities that describe – « living », sweet, bitter, salt, sulphurous, with gypsum, and so on; they fall, flow, sink in, decrease, disappear, reappear, or are present as humidities, mists, and dews; they are useful or not useful. Waters that change from being useful to not useful (e.g. becoming too salt) are referred to as '*aqq*', « recalcitrant, like a child »; just as one has to wait for a child to behave, so does one have to wait for water to become living; it is not possible to make water change. Local tribes-people spoke of waters as Signs from God for people of understanding; anthropological discourse would use « carriers of symbols ».

The verb linked to the root for water has meanings of « to mix, merge, to abound in water »; for water to have meaning, it interacts, it enters into relations. « Living » water, *ma' hayy*, adds to this, it brings life, makes alive, by merging or mixing with soils, plants, animals. This cultural relation between waters and their perception by local people is characterised by interdependence, inter-relationships, and so like all other aspects of meaningful life.

Water and the creation of jural relations

Waters to be useful require understanding and work by people, and so enter into jural relations; a Shihhi at al-'Aini in the Ru'us al Jibal said: « Even though water comes from God and so is free to all, when this water enters a built channel, it has claims on it. »

Claims are expressed as shares, in proportion to the effort and time of the people making and maintaining the channel to field, garden, cistern, or well. The relation is not of « control over », as waters need not enter the channel – rain may not fall or be insufficient to create a flow; the channel may be badly sited, blocked, or broken. The relation is one of interdependence; waters to fulfil their purpose should be useful to man, and unless men make channels, this usefulness occurs only in limited circumstances. Waters are enhanced by man, with the aid of slopes and stones to create effective channels. « Water », for its fullest meaning, should be intensified, by man made means if necessary, and or be mixed

with something to become more productive; a Shihhi at Sabtan in the Ru'us al Jibal and some Mazru'i in the western Hajar dismissed visible rain puddles as not being water, as there was no flood flow. Channelling water to fields and gardens and so mixing with soils for cultivation accords with this, as does the jural fact that a field or garden and its water cannot be separated. Channelling water to cisterns, and the recharging of underground waters for wells, is another form of water becoming more productive through people's work.

Yearly rainfall of itself rarely provided enough for successful cultivation of grains; in the Ru'us al Jibal a Habūs tribesman explained:

Rain is useful if it produces a flood flow; by itself, there would hardly ever be enough for a harvest. For a good crop there must be two flood flows, and with three we are certain of a good harvest. We have to bring enough rainwater to the fields, and that is why we build channels, *masayla*, to divert water across the slopes and flood the terraced fields we built to hold the silts.

Each field had its own channel or shares of channels; most fields were built over time as groups, with flood channels from the slopes around going to them. In the Hajar, as on the coastal plains, flood waters to the grain fields and gardens were important winter waters. Channels for grain fields collect rain flows from slopes; date gardens are sited along natural flood channels, and each garden has a built channel that diverts a share of the rain flow floods to it. The points of division are said to have existed « for ever », and cannot be changed without major difficulties. A Naqbi at Fahlain explained:

Anyone who wanted to take off water for a new garden had to make an agreement and buy the right to a portion of flood water with each existing owner. Occasionally, someone would take flood water by force, but there was no right to do this, the right went with negotiation and agreement.

Flood-water was seasonal and temporary, diverted to fields and cisterns by *masayla* channels, and shared by the division of waters, known to all using a location and enforced by each individual as it affected him.

Falay/falaj are the important waters in the date gardens of the Hajar valleys. The term comes from a root meaning « to split, divide, and so into shares of running water » (Lane, 1984: 2436). Most were *falay ghaili* (adjective from *ghall*), surface flowing waters, with a few *falay da'ūdi* systems, built underground channels from (in Oman) a mother well or (in southern Ras Al-Khaimah emirate at Wadi Munai'y and Wadi al Qawr) large rainfall recharge basins, to a group of gardens. An elderly Dahamni at Munai'y commented:

Using the names of people for the *aflāj* (pl. of *falaj*) commemorates the long, long ago ancestors of the people who have rights in the *falay* and organised its building in the beginning. The users of each *falay* were a community, the *falay* bound the community, they were the same.

Falay construction might seem to act as a charter in that it objectifies human relationships, but is constructed differently by a tribal political system where action is undertaken by jurally equal and autonomous individuals, whose consensus is the political authority. An elderly school caretaker at Munai'y had, as a boy, helped his father clean out the underground *falay* channel and recalled that an Omani had been brought in to be responsible for the division of water, and who paid him and his father for the cleaning with money collected from the *falay* users roughly in proportion to how much water each was entitled to; although there was this responsible person and his book, each person using each *falay* knew the amounts and timings of the water belonging to their land and to other people's. This knowledge was communal, not specialist – « everybody knew ».

Waters and the tribally identified communities within the region are founded on the need to channel natural waters, as seasonal flood-flows from rains or as up-wellings from underground waters, to soils for cultivation. This required participants with jural identities, whose relations of rights and claims to waters and the lands made cultivable by waters as diverted waters (surface rain flood flows – *sayl*) or split waters (flowing waters from underground – *falay ghaili* and *da'ūdi*) were expressed as shares,

considered to have been originally of parity among the holders. The depth of time since the original development, inheritance down the generations, and shifts in family size account for differences in amounts of cultivable lands and their waters in each specific location. Local tribes-people point out that every wadi, mountain, slope, or flow is different. So is each field and garden; each has its own characteristics and capacities for productivity, reflected in the amount of land needed for livelihood, and the manner in which the members of each local community manifests its relations with the waters on which it depends for livelihood and profits; Wilkinson (1977: 100), makes a similar point for central Oman. Animal husbandry «goats, sheep, cows, donkeys and camels» was important in all areas, and some lived primarily from their animals. People and animals drank from flowing waters if available or from collected waters, cisterns in the Ru'us al Jibal, wells in the coastal plains, the sands and parts of the Hajar. Waters collected in cisterns and wells had claims on them as shares by those who had made or maintained them. Work repairing cisterns and wells was limited to members of families with claims of ownership, as help by outsiders allowed future claims on that water. Water for the quenching of thirst could not be refused to passers-by, whereas watering animals for commerce from the resources of others without agreement or payment was not permitted.

Three kinds of claims, derived from relations with waters, were established; charity or compassion, in the satisfying of thirst or hunger; shares, from contributions of time and energy to development for livelihood by tribes-people in their tribal areas and inherited down the generations; and agreements or contracts between individuals for livelihood and profit. Shares and contracts are jural relations, whereas compassion is a moral imperative and required by God.

Jural relations with flowing waters, *sayl* or *ghall*, and the lands they watered, were the foundations for seasonal residences, livelihoods and profits by individuals and families and for the communities so constructed. While tribes-people described the channelling of waters into shares as the basic condition for

production, *sayl* flood waters and *ghall* up-welling flows allowed different sorts of agriculture. *Sayl* flood waters were essential for annual crops of grains and vegetables while *ghall* waters and/or wells were essential for perennial crops. The unreliability of rainfall as flood flows and the dependence on annual crops of grains for land watered only from rain gives rise to recompense as shares, for those who work as owners and those who contribute only their labour. Permanently watered land, growing date and other fruit tree crops, may be worked by the owner and his family in shares, while employed workers could be servants or *baiyadīr*. Servants had no responsibilities but did only what they were told. *Baiyadīr*, from the root with a meaning «to bring to maturity», described garden workers who had responsibilities and acted more as agents, and paid in money or dates, expressed in money terms; they could take up unused land for vegetable and grain crops, which were theirs to do with as they liked. Wells worked by bulls were used in some date gardens in the Hajar and elsewhere; garden owners dug one or more wells in their gardens with the help of a group from the local community; by marriage and inheritance from both parents, persons other than the garden owner had claims on its trees and shares of well water, while the owner of a garden often had claims on trees and well water in other gardens. A Ka'abi in the Hajar pointed out that shares in construction and from inheritance were easily seen in the numbers of pumps and hoses at wells delivering water from a garden to other gardens and vice versa.

In both mountain areas, people moved between work and living areas within and between seasons. However, the two cultivation systems (annual cultivation of grain in rain-fed fields in the Ru'us al Jibal; irrigated date gardening and rain watered grain and tobacco field crops in the western Hajar) required different periods of work. Date garden work took place in the autumn, with cleaning up and planting; fertilising in the late winter; and harvesting from May to October; watering varied from location, season, and tree variety. Work for grain crops in the Ru'us al Jibal took place in the autumn, ploughing or digging followed by sowing; weeding as necessary; and harvesting in March or April. In the

Hajar, with lower yields and poor storage quality, grains were sown in succession with a series of small harvests. When contrasting themselves to tribes-people in the Ru'us al Jibal, people in the Hajar described their seasonal movement as away from permanent waters to grazing areas in the winters, while going to gardens for necessary work, and withdrawing to permanent waters at the gardens by early summers. The people of the Ru'us al Jibal were in their mountain fields in the winters and came down in the summers to places with permanent water, date gardens and traders, where they got supplies of dry dates from gardens they owned, by working on the harvest and getting an agreed share, or by exchanging goats, grain, pottery, salt fish, or wild honey. Through a year, individuals and their families practised multi-resource economics moving between different locations in which they had variable roles; as owners through development, shares and agreements in their tribal areas; as workers for a share from labour or for payment in or outside their tribal area; as guests outside their tribal area or as hosts. Summers were seen as enjoyable, times of movement and meetings, shared meals and exchanges of gifts between families with different assets (Lancaster W. & F., 2011a: 239-282).

« Water arenas », moral and political relations with waters

Tribes-people had different « water arenas », conceptualised contextually as waters able to be channelled and so providing livelihood and profits, or incapable of being channelled but giving life to trees and perennials and browsed by domestic animals, and providing other economic resources. All families in all localities had a few household goats, but some tribes-people lived from and made their profits from animals in a variety of ways. The people of sands were a prime example, but many families in the Ru'us al Jibal and the Hajar did so too, while having a few grain fields. Movements between grazing areas in different tribal areas were made by agreement between families and were often reciprocal; Mazāri' at Ghayl described how they moved with their animals to Khawatir families in the sands in winters, and the Khawatir moved to them in the summers. Members of distant tribes, whose habitual grazing areas were stricken with drought, might have access to grazing land

and water from wells by treaties or contracts with local tribes of the sands, who expected reciprocal arrangements if needed.

Relations with waters created claims and rights by tribal sections for livelihood and profit in the *farij* and *fariq* of the two mountain systems. tribes-people across the study region emphasised that every one was capable of doing all the necessary kinds of work. While some people were better at some work than others or knew more about a particular resource, there were no specialists and all could learn. There were no hierarchies of knowledge, nor of labour – most men expected to work for someone else at some point in their lives because of bad rain years in the mountains, a need for money, a desire to travel, or from a surplus of labour in the family. Similarly, the premise of individual autonomy (and so honour), and networks of claims and rights over property made it impossible for a man to command others and to build up property beyond his own capacity to manage. Variations between years in rain flood flows and recharge of flowing waters across the region made long term accumulation of land or animals difficult, while the necessity of mobility in dry years meant families required good relations with distant connections. Waters and their variabilities made accumulation difficult and the ability to move essential. These all combined against constructions of hierarchies of economic or political power. Behind the antipathy to hierarchy was the moral premise that ruling was about « power to (make their livelihoods in peace) » in decentralised political arenas, not « power over » within a centralised politic system.

Waters were mutable, amounts, timings, locations, and qualities were capable of change for good and bad. Well waters becoming salt was normal in some garden areas around RAK town; owners abandoned such gardens and developed new ones along recently undeveloped flood channels, so that date garden areas moved cyclically over space and time. Destruction from floods and storms of field and garden walls and channels was expected. Cleaning, maintenance and repairs were essential to surface and underground water channels, cisterns and wells. Much of the repairs involved the waterproofing of channels, cisterns and wells with

mortars; in the Ru'us al Jibal, *juz* made from burning clays and animal manures, in the Hajar, *saruj*, small blocks of red earths built up into stacks and burnt (Lancaster W. & F., 2011b). Even natural pools in mountain drainage systems needed washed-in debris removed before the pools could refill in the next storm. Declining permanent water flows in the Hajar at *fariqs* were managed by an agreement between all owners to undertake the construction of holding basins and channels for water to each garden in cycles of timed amounts, and each owner provided his share of labour or money. At a place in the foothills, Mazāri' tribesmen described how they had dug wells worked by bulls when their surface water flows permanently declined. In another Hajar valley, Mazāri' pointed out shallow wells, with water lifted by a pivoted bucket worked by a man, that each garden owner had dug in the flow channel outside his garden to cope with failing flows in summers.

These consensual undertakings illustrate tribal political relations demonstrated in *farīj/farīq* communities, where the responsible instigators of enterprises are jural persons only as tribes-people. The settlement of disputes over rights to shares of waters at *farīj/farīq* is also by owners with jural identity as tribesmen. Disputes over waters impede the common purpose of the *farīj/farīq* of the satisfactory achievement of livelihood for all participants. Customary water law varies in details between tribes but informants emphasised that the principle of shares in inseparable land-and-water sufficient for the livelihood and profit of each participating household. When the ideal parity of shares was no longer consistent with the reality of actual households, a general re-allotment took place through discussion, negotiations, and eventual consensus. Attacks on an owner's rights to water and his defence of his rights were dealt with initially by mediation by older members of the households involved, then by the senior men of the disputants' tribal groups, and as a last resort by arbitration by a coastal ruler. If the dispute could not be resolved, the disputants moved out of the area and the land and the water abandoned. Several pieces of long unused lands and channels were said to have been abandoned because of unresolved disputes, with tribesmen

commenting that while people should behave properly, often they did not, and so disputes over waters happened. Recent fighting over waters at a Ru'us al Jibal *farīj* owned by people of two tribes changed the inheritance pattern, so that women no longer had shares in land and water but animals or money instead. At another, small springs were filled in to stop their goats being stolen. Accounts of tribal fighting involved injured fighters, stolen animals and destroyed buildings, including filling in – but not destroying – water resources, consistent with accounts of tribal fighting in central Oman (Wilkinson, 1977: 98). A tribesman in the Hajar, interested in history, said he had read in an Omani source, that at the beginning of the Hinawi-Ghafiri wars of the early 18th century, two tribes who, according to their tribal affiliation should have been on opposing side, agreed to be neutral so that they could continue to use their shared *falay* waters. Waters in relations with people become socialised as interdependent parts of *farīj/farīq*, and like other parts of *farīj/farīq* were subjects for rock carvings (Lancaster W. & F., 2011b).

Water as a commodity: from water to oil.

The tribes-people of both mountain ranges stated repeatedly that in the past they had been *ghanī*, now « rich » but originally « self-sufficient », since the mountains had everything they needed. This claim from the Ru'us al Jibal tribes may seem weak, but many informants justified this claim that although their mountains did not grow dates (except for a few in a few places), mountain produce of animals, grain, pottery and honey, and their ownership of coastal date gardens, or their work as date garden harvesters, enabled them to get their dry dates. Mountain self-sufficiency, achieved through shares and rights, was regarded as different to the economics and politics of rulers and merchants of coastal towns, who lived from pearling, commerce by land and sea, customs duties, and taxes. Merchants were not tribal whereas small traders who traded in staple goods of grains, firewood, animals, dairy products, salt and dried fish, local textiles and so on, and who carried by land and sea, could be; i.e. traders were useful in the eyes of tribes-people, merchants were largely irrelevant. Merchants invested for

commercial profit, including in date gardens inland from RAK town, and in tobacco crops in the Hajar (Lancaster W. & F., 2011a: 281-297), and so regarded waters and their lands more as a commodity. A young local historian from a date growing area near RAK town said that in his opinion, as he had heard from family traditions, that before the family of the current ruler of the Emirate had arrived, the people of the date gardens had exchanged dates and grain with coastal people for fish, salt and cloth. This involved buying in advance, before the harvest, so if the harvest was ruined by locusts or disease, they got into debt with the families they had bought from. If the debt could not be paid, the creditor was entitled to take over the garden and the former owner becomes the worker, the *baidar*, but as they were members of the community, they were more understanding and charitable. Merchants and rulers extended credit to people on the coastal areas against the security of future crops; some gave time to pay or even cancelled the debt, others did not, and took over the garden or part offered as security. He saw much ownership of garden land and waters on the coasts have moved in this way from small local owners to merchants and rulers, with a corresponding move away from communities of sharing to merchant owners investing in commodities. Tribes-people said credit and debt (of labour, goods, or money) had always existed, linking individuals into an economic relation but also into a moral relation in which it was dishonourable for a creditor to seize assets of someone poorer than himself.

In purely economic relations, rights over channelled or contained waters could be a commodity, but the moral relations, in which waters were from God, and the recognition of jural and political relations with waters, were more important for tribes-people before incorporation into the global oil political economy. The region had always been part of the north-west Indian Ocean trading zone, and each environmental area had its sources of profits for trade, which depended on local waters and the social, economic, and political relations constructed between waters and people, underpinned by moral relations. There had been changes over time in markets and in profitable enterprises but rights to waters and their

lands enabled livelihoods and profits for the tribes-peoples of the two mountain ranges.

This situation was transformed during the 20th century, as local enterprises lost their value undercut by new technologies and imports, and the wider region was gradually incorporated into the new global political economy of oil. This transformation was voiced by people in the mountains of the Ru'us al Jibal and the Hajar as « our world turned upside down » (Lancaster W. & F., *ibid.*: 376-382), where those of the mountains became dependent on the coasts. Waters from the mountains as flood flows and recharge became less relevant as livelihoods and profits came to depend ultimately on oil. The economic history of the region is described by Lancaster W. & F. (*ibid.*: 383-410). Wages as migrant labourers in the developing oil industry, in Kuwait, then Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi, replaced profits from local production from owned resources between the 1940s and 1960s. With the establishment of the United Arab Emirates in 1971, tribes-people became citizens employed in the new ministries and security services. Employment by the state, with some irrigated gardens in the Hajar and the coastal plains, fishing for the fresh fish market, and small businesses, were the sources of livelihood and profits. This shift from waters to oil as the enabling factor of the regional political economy transformed local perceptions of waters, and the economic and political relations engendered from them (Lancaster W. & F., *ibid.*: 410-458).

Whereas relations between tribes-people and waters were constituted locally, relations with oil were very different. Oil was a commodity needed by non-locals, and its exploration and extraction required vast amounts of imported capital and technology. Oil development required defined borders for the demarcation of concessions and the compensation of rulers with revenues. Rulers had to conform to British demands but, unlike merchants who suffered the collapse of the pearl market, acquired a secure income which encouraged them to extend their control into the interior. Tribes-people were generally opposed to the change and disturbance oil exploration brought, and to the extension of rulers' interests which led to an increasingly centralised political structure,

culminating in the establishment of the federated nation state of the United Arab Emirates in 1971 (Lancaster W. & F., *ibid.*: 369-375).

Oil associated technology, such as pumps and well drilling rigs, enabled the development of commercial vegetable and date farming in areas formerly used for grazing animals on the coastal plains, the edges of the sands and in the Hajar foothills. Undeveloped or dead lands, used for grazing, belong to government in Islamic law but held communally in tribal customary law. In the 1950s and 60s, former grazing lands were awarded by rulers to merchants and members of leading families for development as commercial vegetable gardens, causing disputes between rulers and tribes and between neighbouring tribes (Walker, 1994 (vol. 4): 507, (vol. 6): 273); water was becoming a commodity. Following a period of excellent winter rains, British experts encouraged commercial agriculture with a well drilling programme and introducing new crops and practical education, and investments in new gardens grew. Later droughts, and expanding agriculture, construction, and population, increased demand for water to the point where many see present use as unsustainable (Lancaster W. & F., 2011a; 458-465).

The former need to recognise local waters and to enter into sets of relations with these waters has been made apparently pointless, replaced by rulers' ability to bring in imported technologies of piped water, flood controls and recharge programmes, bigger drilling rigs, desalination, etc. The transformation from the tribal situation of providing for one's family and community from one's own efforts, property, and participation in networks of claims and rights, to the provision of needs by agencies of the state is almost total, with an accompanying emphasis on consumerism of commodities. Most waters have become a commodity provided and controlled by government; achieving this caused some disputes between tribes-people, and between tribes and rulers. At Uraibi wells, east of RAK town, groups of Habūs disputed among themselves over ownership of and rights to water, and rights to sell water, settled by Shaikh Saqr bin Muhammad who bought the wells, explaining that if the Habūs

wanted modern houses and water in them, he had to have water to send down the pipes. Around this time, the old deep wells used for water for people and animals along the edge of the mountains, like Uraibi and Burairāt, began to dry. RAK town and coastal settlements along a 25 km stretch were provided with piped water from the modernised Burairāt wells (Fenelon 1976: 77), and later supplemented by desalination.

The provision of waters by rulers from their oil revenues may be seen as a huge scaling up of the traditional duty of rulers to provide water and livelihood for the population, or as unsustainable development. Many local people accept the transformation of their relations with water from moral relations that created livelihoods and societies to consumers of water as a commodity. Some, mostly from the Ru'us al Jibal and the Hajar, maintain their former places and waters in the mountains for a sense of identity, as a moral choice, a place where they feel comfortable in their hearts, and possibly as an insurance.

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Summary

The paper uses data collected between 1997 and 2005 during the compilation of an archive on « Life before Oil » in RAK Emirate.

Waters were seen as a driving force in the creation of landscapes and social practices. No environment is considered to provide livelihoods and profits of itself, but only through enhancements of natural waters. Through observations, experience and work, some waters permit livelihoods and profits and so create sets of political, rural and economic relations; these waters become integral parts of the communities they create. Other waters provided more generalised or more indirect benefits for people and engendered different relations.

The local, autonomous, non-hierarchical, long-term and sustainable relations with waters were transformed by incorporation into the global oil economy and the nation state. Livelihoods and profits now come from the state; relations with waters have been largely subsumed into federal ministries. Waters were regarded as a sign from God, a symbol of his mercy, to be enhanced by work into livelihood; now, water is a commodity of the state, to be consumed and paid for with money.

Key-words: creative force, social relations, mutabilities, transformations, symbolic values.

Résumé

Les eaux comme force de création des relations sociales dans l'Émirat de Ras Al-Khaimah

L'article exploite les données recueillies entre 1997 et 2005 pour la constitution d'une histoire sur « La vie avant le pétrole » dans l'Émirat de Ras Al-Khaimah.

Les eaux étaient conçues comme une force motrice du modelage des paysages et des pratiques sociales. L'environnement n'était pas considéré comme fournissant par lui-même des ressources : cela n'était possible que par la mise en valeur des eaux naturelles. À travers l'observation, l'expérience et le travail, certaines eaux produisaient des ressources et créaient ainsi des ensembles de relations politiques, juridiques et économiques ; ces eaux devenaient partie intégrante des communautés qu'elles créaient. D'autres eaux fournissaient aux gens des bienfaits plus généralisés et indirectes et engendrent des relations diverses.

Les relations avec les eaux – locales, autonomes, non-hiérarchiques, durables et sur le long terme – ont été transformées par l'incorporation dans l'économie globale du pétrole et dans l'État-nation. Les ressources et les profits viennent maintenant de l'État, les relations avec les eaux ont été largement incorporées dans des ministères fédéraux. Les eaux étaient

regardées comme un signe de Dieu, un symbole de sa miséricorde, qu'il fallait valoriser par le travail pour la subsistance. Maintenant, l'eau est une marchandise de l'État, que l'on consomme et que l'on paie.

Mots-clefs: force créative, relations sociales, mutabilités, transformations, valeurs symboliques.

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