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Framing the Trucial Coast's tribes: Shifting notions of borders and imperial influence before the United Arab Emirates

Moran Zaga

Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, the University of Chicago, Pick Hall for International Studies 5828 South University Ave., Chicago, Illinois 60637, USA

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ABSTRACT

The process of border formation of the United Arab Emirates included extensive local leadership participation. Such a rare event in the Middle East affords a glimpse into local inhabitants' notions of borders and their transformations over time. Based on primary sources in English and Arabic, the paper follows the evolution of the unique spatial interpretation of borders adopted by the local leadership. It highlights two perceptual turning points during the border negotiations, from the reticular border system, through the setting up of frontier zones to the phase of territorial borders. The negotiations records shed light on the dialectic process of shaping and reshaping border perceptions through an ongoing dialogue between the local and British elites and through mutual adjustment of spatial ideas and practices. The paper argues that the borders delineation process in this region exemplifies late-stage decolonization when pragmatism transcended ideology and when locally-oriented considerations prevailed bureaucratic amenity.

Introduction

> 'You wish me to tell you about the boundary. Before these days there was no boundary among Arabs except [when] the Christians came here'.[1]

In political geography, borders are described as dynamic entities in progress, yet more common than them physically changing are changes in our perceptions of borders, which vary over time, place, and society.[2] This paper analyzes the notion of borders from the perspective of the communities that inhabited the Trucial Coast (as the pre1971 United Arab Emirates were known). Over the last century, the borders in the region known today as the United Arab Emirates (UAE) underwent immense changes in every respect: morphology, visibility, functionality, and of course, conceptually. From beginning to end, the traditionally dynamic tribal boundaries in a relatively open space evolved into fixed territorial borders, which became a dominant feature in the spatial landscape of the region. Within this evolution, this study identifies two major turning points in border perceptions in the political history of the region: the shift from a reticular system of borders to the notion of frontier zones and the subsequent shift to the notion of strict borderlines.

Not only does the field of border studies lack a common methodology to examine communal ideas on political borders, this task becomes even more challenging when studying historical notions. Changes in border perceptions are difficult to identify in retrospect as they are continually being constructed and reconstructed in our minds. Moreover, these notions are mostly vague and their individualistic nature typically defies generalizability. Yet, in rare cases, the conceptual change is so rapid, intense, and widespread that it leads to a deep shift in common border perception. Studies on the conceptual aspect of boundaries became

E-mail address: moranz@uchicago.edu.

[1] Said Bin Hilal Chibani, the Ruler of Al Bu Shamis, to Sheikh Saqr Bin Mohammad, Ruler of Ras Al-Khaimah, 1954, The National Archives [hereafter TNA], FO 1016/397.

[2] S. Jones, Boundary concepts in the setting of place and time, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 49.3 (1959) 241–255; A. Paasi, Boundaries as social processes: territoriality in the world of flows, *Geopolitics* 3.1 (1998) 69–88, 75.

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more popular in the 1990s, along with the growing interest in the rather elusive theme of 'the significance of boundaries'.[3] These works were inspired by earlier works on the 'significance of territory'.[4] The tripartite foundations of a state system – territoriality, boundaries, and sovereignty – are tightly linked to each other and influenced by each other, and cannot be examined separately. J.C. Wilkinson was among the scholars who, in 1983, investigated changing spatial notions and practices in southeast Arabia.[5] Many of his insights on territoriality are also applicable to the study of boundaries due to the proximity and overlapping characteristics of these two geographical features. However, focusing on boundaries, as this study does, affords further, and sometimes different, conclusions on the relations between space and society.

These concepts cannot be detached from the British colonial legacy in the Trucial Coast and its specific regional articulations. Britain had gained a major foothold in the region following the signing of the 1820 agreement with several local leaders, which established its protectorate status in the region.[6] Under the protectorate system, Britain achieved and maintained its interests by controlling the colonies' foreign affairs, leaving a substantial degree of internal autonomy to local leaders.[7] Even though the Trucial Coast was under Britain's colonial influence for about 150 years, the formation of the modern UAE borders differs from the typical decolonization process in two remarkable features: the long duration of the process and the extent of local participation in it. Historical geographers have recently re-engaged decolonization theories through questions of periodization, spatiality, and influences.[8] In a special section devoted to geography and decolonization in this journal, Daniel Clayton and Satish Kumar argue that geography dealt 'too briefly' with these questions.[9] In our case, the periodical element and the colonial and decolonial approach are taken into account to evaluate border perceptions. Yet, alongside the colonial context, the paper aims to illuminate the local perspective of spatial perceptions, discourse and practices colonial spatial discourse.

The border negotiations in the Trucial Coast were conducted from approximately the early 1930s, a relatively late stage in the post War World I order, until the late 1970s, while some borders were finalized only in the late 1990s. The extended period of delineation allowed local leaders to gradually adapt to the new framework of sovereignty, territoriality, and new borderlines in practice and in concept. Throughout this period, Britain engaged with the local leadership in a high degree of involvement in the delimitation process. Britain's exceptional approach toward border making in this region should be considered in the context of its timeframe. In 1929, the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf F.W. Johnston wrote to the British Secretary of State for India W.W. Benn:

> … there seems a possibility that eventually, with the growing power of Bin Saud or some other form of Arab nationalism, the time might come when failure to consolidate and regularise our claims in a more definite and less veiled manner might leave us to be shorn on privileges which we had long enjoyed, but which we had failed to make sufficiently regular to stand before a diplomatic court.[10]

J.G. Laithwaite of the India Office expressed a similar line by citing a decision from 1928 of 'the Persian Gulf Sub-Committee' of the Committee of Imperial Defence, mentioning that 'our present position on the Trucial Coast is sufficient to protect essential British interests'; and that 'we should endeavor to maintain the independence of the Trucial Chiefs'.[11] With its attention turned outward, Britain played a relatively passive role in the Trucial Coast of the early twentieth century. Out of this position, the local leadership was able to develop its own conceptualization of borders and to practice local spatial dynamics up to the 1930s when Britain decided to become more involved in shaping local configurations. By the 1930s, most of the political entities in the Levant and North Africa were delimited. The new borderlines led to substantial local conflicts and regional instability. Britain's colonial experience by that time may indicate that some lessons had already been learned, leading to new tactics in the negotiations and to greater involvement of the local leadership, as the above correspondence may imply. With the end of World War II (WWII), Britain initiated its withdrawal from most of its colonies in the Middle East, but not from the Arabian Gulf. S.C. Smith explains Britain's long presence in this region through ideological anti-communist policy and strategic considerations of protecting oil interests.[12] These concerns support this paper's assumption that Britain favored a pragmatic approach in local spatial organization rather than ideological interests that were directed outward. Britain's withdrawal from the Trucial Coast is 'one of the last major acts in British decolonization.'[13] Within this broad context, the local elite eventually played an influential role in the shaping of the political map of the UAE, which represents locally oriented borders that largely correspond to the pre 1971 regional political and social order.

Despite the substantial continuity in territorial distribution, the shift from tribal settings to a modern political organization

[3] J.P. Cassarino, *Approaching Borders and Frontiers: Notions and Implications*, European University Institute, RSCAS, 2006; L. O'dowd, The changing significance of European borders, *Regional & Federal Studies* 12.4 (2002) 13–36; C. Rumford, Theorizing borders, *European Journal of Social Theory* 9.2 (2006) 155–169; C. Johnson et al., Interventions on rethinking 'the border' in border studies, *Political Geography* 30.2 (2011) 61–69.

[4] J. Gottmann, The evolution of the concept of territory, *Social Science Information* 14.3 (1975) 29–47; R.D. Sack, Human territoriality: a theory, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 73.1 (1983) 55–74; H. Lefebvre and D. Nicholson-Smith, *The Production of Space*, Oxford UK & Cambridge USA: Oxford Blackwell, 1991.

[5] J.C. Wilkinson, Traditional concepts of territory in south east Arabia, *Geographical Journal* 14.3 (1983) 301–315.

[6] The Protectorate (sometime called Exclusive) Treaties, 5–8 March 1892, British Library, IOR, R/15/1/736; for a detailed explanation on the legal position of the sheikhdoms read: H.M. Albaharna, *The Legal Status of the Arabian Gulf States: a study of their treaty relations and their international problems*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1968, 61.

[7] Albaharna, *The Legal Status of the Arabian Gulf States: A Study of Their Treaty Relations and Their International Problems*, 60–61.

[8] H. Fitzpatrick, Imagining and Mapping the End of an Empire: Oskar Spate and the Partition of India and Pakistan, *Journal of Historical Geography* 66 (2019) 55–68; R. Craggs and H. Neate, Post-Colonial Careering and the Discipline of Geography: British Geographers in Nigeria and the UK, 1945–1990, *Journal of Historical Geography* 66 (2019) 31–42; J. Sarmento, Portuguese Tropical Geography and Decolonization in Africa: The Case of Mozambique, *Journal of Historical Geography* 66 (2019) 20–30; D. Clayton and M.S. Kumar, Geography and Decolonization, *Journal of Historical Geography* 66 (2019) 1–8; M. Suremain, Between Political Reserve and Scientific Change: French Geographers and Decolonization in Tropical Africa, 1945–1967, *Journal of Historical Geography* 66 (2019) 9–19.

[9] Clayton and Kumar, Geography and Decolonization, 3.

[10] Future policy on the Trucial Coast: Correspondence between J.G. Laithwaite - the Secretary of State for India, the Government of India, and F.W. Johnston - the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, 23 April 1929, India Office Records [hereafter IOR], L/P&S/18/B419.

[11] An introductory note by J.G. Laithwaite of the India Office: Future policy on the Trucial Coast: Correspondence between J.G. Laithwaite - the Secretary of State for India, the Government of India, and F.W. Johnston - the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, 23 October 1929, India Office Records IOR, L/P&S/18/B419.

[12] S.C. Smith, Britain's Decision to Withdraw from the Persian Gulf: A Pattern Not a Puzzle, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 44.2 (2016), 328–351, 331.

[13] Smith, Britain's Decision to Withdraw from the Persian Gulf: A Pattern Not a Puzzle, 328.

involved a deep change in inhabitants' border perceptions and spatial practices, including the local reconstruction of the modern notion of borders as a state institutions. The adjustments to the different systems of sovereignty, territoriality and borders were reflected in either a complete inversion of traditional customs or in hybrid changes that embodied a mixture of new customs with existing traditions. This study analyzes the reconceptualization of borders in the Trucial Coast by evaluating the extent of that transformation and by identifying the conditions in the negotiation process that triggered a change in local leadership's attitudes toward borders. It lays an essential ground for comparison with border making processes in other areas and different periods of the imperial Middle East.

The parallel border formation process in the Levant and North Africa has been extensively investigated, generally portrayed as a pattern of imposed decisions on the local society and its political leadership.[14] Compared to the intense, almost exclusive role played by colonial powers in delineating the borders of the Levant, the case of the Trucial Coast affords a unique opportunity to examine a relatively bottom-up process of border formation. The study of borders in this region, therefore, requires more considerable attention to local sociological and geographical features, beyond the colonial historiographical perspective. The negotiation stage has been described in detail by J.B. Kelly and D. Dodds-Parker, A.R. Al-Shamlan, and R. Schofield.[15] Their analysis, in addition to the extensive records of the British Government and especially the Foreign Office, provides a fertile ground for investigating further ramifications of the evolution of borders. Among them are border perceptions and the nature and scope of their transformations over time. The surveyed records include treaties, correspondences, reports, notes and maps, in English and Arabic, and sometimes in English translations of Arabic. Most of the evidence used in this paper represent the standpoint of the leading sheikhs in the region, and several demonstrate Britain's approach that mirrors the gap in the perceptions between the sides of the negotiations. Another inseparable dimension of such analysis refers to the change of territorial practices that determine borders and are influenced by them. Based on an examination of these sources, the study follows the changes in the local leadership's interpretation of borders, with reference to the political events in the region that influenced them.[16] It identifies the various stakeholders and examines particular events, terminologies and narratives that may indicate a widespread perception of borders or a change in them. By highlighting local participation in the border formation process, the research expands our understanding of hybrid models of delineation that include both local and colonial influences.

The point of departure of the analysis is the traditional border notions that prevailed prior to the border negotiations, which portrayed limits as an imaginary network of spotted locations that spread throughout space in a reticular manner rather than circumferentially. The first section, thus, explains the conditions and settings that shaped the traditional idea of borders. The negotiation phase prompted a fusion of new ideas and practices of statehood with the old order of the Trucial Coast. The following two sections examine two periods within this process: the first from the 1930s to the early 1950s, and the second, partially overlapping, from the 1950s to the 1960s. The first period represents a confluence of ideas and the first turning point in which the notion of borders as frontier zones had emerged. The following section analyzes the second turning point when the frontier zone concept transformed into the notion of linear borders and became instrumental in the local leadership's efforts to exercise their sovereignty. The final fixation of borders signifies a further though not the final stage in the adoption of modern perceptions and functions of borders. The conceptual and material approaches toward borders keep changing in a dialectic process with the reshaping of tribalism and nationalism continuously.

The *al ahram* border concept

The traditional political system of the Trucial Coast is typically described as a network of social ties between tribes and leaders.[17] The ruling sheikhs in the region served as dynastic leaders of Sunni Arab tribal coalitions or, according to J. Onley and S. Khalaf, of 'tribal proto states', using Ernest Gellner's typology.[18] The proto states of the Trucial Coast were named Trucial *sheikhdoms* or Trucial states by Britain, a term which remained in general use to describe these political entities during the colonial era. Yet, the paper refers to the Trucial Coast to describe broad regional processes that transcended one political entity or another. The two major tribal coalitions (*taḥālaf* in Arabic) in the region were the Bani Yas, which was concentrated in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, and Al Qawasim, whose center was in Sharjah and Ras al Khaimah. The region was also home to several smaller tribes and clans, including the Na'im (Ajman), Al Ali (Umm al Quwain) and the Sharqiyin, also known as Al Sharqi (Fujairah). The social composition of the sheikhdoms typically included the ruling sheikh's nuclear family, as well as distant branches of the tribe, and other geographically adjacent foreign tribes that sought security and economic protection from a dominant sheikh in exchange for their loyalty.[19] The sheikhdoms served as the main socio political institution in the region, even though clans often shifted their alliances across sheikhdoms and their rulers sometimes lost effective control as the unstable balance of powers shifted (see Fig. 1 1)[20].

The term 'border' indicates a particular concept and practice for any given community.[21] In tribal systems, the unique interpretation of borders is even more versatile, since they reflect an outcome of four main factors: the particular perception of territoriality of the tribe, its socio-political structure, the system of sovereignty and the geographical features of the living area. Defining the term border in

[14] L. Anderson, The state in the Middle East and North Africa, *Comparative Politics* 20.1 (1987) 1–18; B. Lewis, *The Shaping of the Modern Middle East*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994; J. Barr, *A Line in the Sand: The Anglo-French Struggle for the Middle East, 1914–1948*, New York: WW Norton & Company, 2012.

[15] J.B. Kelly and D. Dodds-Parker, *Eastern Arabian Frontiers*, Faber & Faber, 1964; A.R. Al-Shamlan, *The Evolution of National Boundaries in the Southeastern Arabian Peninsula: 1934–1955*, University of Michigan, 1987; R. Schofield, *Territorial Foundations of the Gulf States*, London: UCL Press, 1994.

[16] Those records were compiled and archived into the 'Cambridge Archive Editions - Near & Middle East collection'. The more useful series for this article were: J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Omen and Central Arabia*, Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire: Archive Editions (Original publication 1908–1915), 1986; R. Schofield and G. Blake (eds.), *Arabian Boundaries: Primary Documents, 1853–1957*, Archive Editions, 1988; P. Tuson, *Records of the Emirates 1820–1960*, Archive Editions, 1990; P. Tuson, *Arabian Treaties 1600–1960*, Archive Editions, 1992; R. Schofield, *Arabian Boundary Disputes*, Archive Editions, 1992.

[17] Kelly and Dodds-Parker, *Eastern Arabian Frontiers*; Wilkinson, Traditional Concepts of Territory in South East Arabia; J.C. Wilkinson, *Arabia's Frontiers: The Story of Britain's Boundary Drawing in the Desert*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1991.

[18] E. Gellner, *Anthropology and Politics*, Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1995, 184; J. Onley and S. Khalaf, Shaikhly authority in the pre-oil Gulf: a historical–anthropological study, *History and Anthropology* 17.3 (2006) 189–208, 191.

[19] Wilkinson describe the latter tribes as 'client groups'. Wilkinson, Traditional concepts of territory in south east Arabia, 309.

[20] Fig. 1 - Topographical sketch of the region, showing the main settlements in the nineteenth century (mainly those under discussion) and prominent geographical features.

[21] J. Anderson and L. O'dowd, Borders, border regions and territoriality: contradictory meanings, changing significance, *Regional Studies* 33.7 (1999) 593–604.

the particular and subjective interpretations of the sheikhdoms is a rather elusive task for two main reasons: (a) such a definition entails some degree of generalization that would not necessarily apply to all the different categories of communities or to the different phases of socio-political developments in each sheikhdom, and; (b) associating the term with its familiar Western sense is almost inevitable. Thus, any attempt to develop an understanding of border perceptions in the Trucial Coast involves some degree of comparison that might misrepresent unique local interpretations. Kelly's note that 'the concept of territorial sovereignty in the Western sense did not exist in eastern Arabia' raises the question whether borders, similarly, did not exist at all in eastern Arabia or whether they simply functioned differently.[22] This study is inclined toward the latter interpretation and outlines the unique attributes and functionality of borders as they shifted over time.

Prior to the negotiations in the 1930s, the ruling sheikh's sovereignty was linked to a social structure that preceded territorial affiliation.[23] As Kelly and Dodds-Parker described, 'A ruler exercised jurisdiction over a territory by virtue of his jurisdiction over the tribes inhabited it. They, in turn, owed loyalty to him and not to the sheikhdom, amirate or sultanate in which they dwelt'.[24] This jurisdiction was expressed in customary and organizational functions such as tax collection (*zakat*, revenues and dues) collection, effective control of possessions and peoples, de facto control over territorial domains called the tribal *dar* or *dirah*, a monopoly on the use of force, a quasi-legislative system, and even international responsibility.[25]

In the tribal context, a dar is the setting within which the tribe migrates, settles, and operates (the tribe's home range, according to Kelly), whereas the sheikhdom represents the political entity that exercises its sovereignty over the dar.[26] Wilkinson associates the connotation of the word dar in Arabic with the meaning of a circle or swiveling.[27] Hence, the term represents an idea of a movement around a node. The tribal dar was instrumental in creating a common language and shared territorial practices. Forming *taḥāluf*, political alliances, afforded the ruling sheikhs a larger dar and greater political prestige. The tribal network in eastern Arabia that evolved out of these spatial and political settings became the primary order in the region, according to which other structures and processes were shaped.

The conventional interpretation of borders in the literature of border studies refers to its function as means to form territorial 'containers' of political and social organizations.[28] Whereas, in our case, borders filled a different purpose of indicating possessions and ownerships. This notion was evolved due to two main reasons. First, the sheikhdoms were not structured as containers but rather as a fluid system of networks. And second, this system was the primary spatial tool to determine the socio-political organizations instead of borders. The precedence of tribal loyalty served as the main factor in determining the political distribution of sovereignties, eliminating the need to determine fixed territorial borders in a circumferential manner.[29] In the 1924 peace agreement between the Sheikh Sultan bin Saqr Al Qasimi II of Sharjah and his uncle Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmad (the former ruler of Sharjah who still dominated parts of the interior *dar*), Sheikh Sultan confirmed that he had no claims on 'land properties, slaves, houses and animals' or on 'old date palms'.[30] This statement illustrates the pre-negotiation ownership system that placed property over territorial affiliation. Thus, the sheikhdom can be geographically defined as a cluster of possessions and assets, rather than a continuous territorial entity. The traditional borders of such spatial system functioned according to the principle of 'the border is the well', where a 'well' is understood to symbolize this cluster of possessions, such as oasis, roads, forts, harbors, coastlines, palm trees, and settlements. The local terminology used to describe this principle was *al ahram* (forbidden), in the sense that such assets were under the control and protection of the ruling sheikh and forbidden to other tribal coalitions.[31] Al ahram represented the highest degree of territorial sovereignty within a sheikhdom's fluid territorial definition. The religious concept of a *haram*, as it appears in the Quran and Sunna, refers mainly to moral and personal prohibitions, but it also includes a component of political boundaries. S. Hashmi explains this term in the context of the tribal raids in the times of the Prophet Muhammad and pre-Islam.[32] These raids were usually aimed at properties rather than territorial expansions. It was not the territory that was forbidden to desecrate, rather these properties themselves which represented the border – the haram. The lexical definition of a boundary usually refers to 'the indicated limits of an area'.[33] Even though the concept of al ahram does not follow that description, it serves as an indicator of the (proto) state's sovereignty. Encyclopedia Britannica brings an example of the ancient Greek and Roman boundaries during the Middle Ages, describing them as 'a place where a state had put a halt to its authority'. This idea was conceptualized in Paul de Lapradelle's famous La Frontie're, and was used later by other theoreticians such as F. Kratochwil and A. Paasi.[34] In contrast, the landmarks of al ahram acted as the place where the state applied its authority. Hence, classifying an al ahram landmark as a border entails an interpretation of a core rather than an edge. In an internal correspondence between the political envoys to the region J.F. Walker of the eastern department in the foreign office and the Political agent in Dubai J.P. Tripp, the latter stated that:

> I am sorry to have to tell you that Sheikh Saqr of Sharjah is proving un-cooperative, and takes the line that Jawasim

[22] Kelly and Dodds-Parker, *Eastern Arabian Frontiers*, 18.

[23] G. Joffe, Territory, state and nation in the Middle East and North Africa, in: C. Schofield and R. Schofield (eds.), *World Boundaries*, volume 2, London: Routledge, 1994, 1.

[24] Kelly and Dodds-Parker, *Eastern Arabian Frontiers*, 18.

[25] F. Heard-Bey, *From Trucial States to United Arab Emirates: A Society in Transition*, New York: Longman, 1982, 112–118; Wilkinson, Traditional concepts of territory in south east Arabia, 310; Joffe, Territory, state and nation in the Middle East and North Africa, 1–3; Albaharna, *The Legal Status of the Arabian Gulf States: A Study of Their Treaty Relations and Their International Problems*, 129–144.

[26] Kelly and Dodds-Parker, *Eastern Arabian Frontiers*, 18.

[27] Wilkinson, Traditional concepts of territory in south east Arabia, 303.

[28] Anderson and O'dowd, Borders, border regions and territoriality, 594; P.J. Taylor, The state as container: territoriality in the Modern world-system, *Progress in Human Geography* 18.2 (1994) 151–162; P.J. Taylor, Beyond containers: internationality, interstateness, interterritoriality, *Progress in Human Geography* 19.1 (1995) 1–15.

[29] J. Walker, The United Arab Emirates and Oman frontiers, in: C. Schofield and R. Schofield (eds.), *World Boundaries*, volume 2, London: Routledge, 1994, 173–183, 173.

[30] Sultan bin Saqr, Covenant undertaken by Sheikh Sultan Bin Saqr, 12 November 1924, India Office Records [hereafter IOR], R/15/1/276.

[31] F. Al-Ṣaygh, *Al-Imarat Al-Arabiyah Al-Muttahidah - Min Al-Qabilat ʾilā Al-Dawlah (The United Arab Emirates – From a Tribe to a Country)*, Al-'Ayn: Al-'Ayn Dar al-Kitab al-Jami'ī, 2000, 231.

[32] S.H Hashmi, Political Boundaries and Moral Communities: Islamic Perspectives, in: A. Buchanan and M. Moore (Eds), *States, Nations and Borders: The Ethics of Making Boundaries*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 181–213, 194.

[33] Boundaries, in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Chicago: W. Benton, 1972.

[34] Boundaries, *Encyclopædia Britannica*; P.G. de Lapradelle, La Frontière, Paris: étude de droit international, Les Editions internationales, 1928; F. Kratochwil, Of Systems, Boundaries, and Territoriality: An Inquiry into the Formation of the State System, *World Politics: A Quarterly Journal of International Relations* (1986) 27–52; Paasi, Boundaries as Social Processes: Territoriality in the World of Flows.

> [Qawasim] have lost a lot of territory to Sharqi, who has penetrated their "ahram".[35]

The British records rarely use this term, but they serve as a good reference to portray the al ahram expressions. Official British relations in this region began already in 1806 when the East India Company of Britain reached an agreement with the Al Qawasim sheikh to restore maritime peace. The piracy accusation made by Britain is under question among scholars today, which some consider being an act of diplomacy to increase its involvement.[36] In practice, Britain continued its colonial aspiration in the region, which was regularized in the treaties of 1820. These agreements constitute a symbolic starting point of Britain's involvement throughout the region. Subsequent treaties, agreements, understandings and active engagements on the ground further extended Britain's influence.[37] The protectorate system served the mutual interests of Britain and the ruling sheikhs: Britain obtained exclusive decision making authority on all matters of defense and foreign affairs, while the ruling sheikhs gained greater legitimacy and governance skills, while maintaining their control over their sheikhdoms and their subjects. The diplomatic agreements between the local leaders and the British representatives in the region, which were mostly conducted simultaneously and separately with each ruling sheikh, represented important validation of the sheikhs' political status. As Britain's involvement grew, the region experienced accelerated modernization and substantial development of public services, which further elevated the ruling sheikhs' reputation and political power. These British influences also eventually stimulated the adoption of modern notions and practices related to boundaries and territoriality, growing closer to modern principles.

Throughout this period, which concludes in the late 1920s, Britain expressed little interest in changing local configurations. However, the regional surveys it conducted afforded common language when the border negotiations in this region began. This colonial approach enabled the continuation of local practices. A prominent factor that shaped the traditional border concept was the physical and environmental characteristics of the Trucial Coast. The roots of the UAE's map can be traced to the settlement patterns and distribution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The difficult topographic and climatic conditions of flat desert and rocky mountainous channeled most of the population to settle on the land fringes; in the coastal regions, and in oases and valleys (wadis). The challenging conditions also led to nomadic and semi nomadic lifestyles, which gradually changed over the years, until sedentary settlements became the most common custom by the time the UAE emerged. The tribal dar contained a combination of settled areas and spatial domains such as wells, roads, wadis, ridges, pastures, coastlines and strongholds that, together, served as strategic assets, while the leadership and the majority of the tribal population were concentrated at its core.

J. Gottman defines territory as the 'fruit of partitioning and of organization', adding that 'territory is a political as well as a geographical concept because geographical space is both partitioned and organized through political processes'.[38] In our case, the precedence of the tribal network constructed territorial perceptions based on social rather than spatial partitions and organizations. Although geography had played a significant role in the evolution of the tribal organization, its social component ultimately determined the partition of the territory and the organizational order, long before the border negotiations influenced them. The 1906 oral agreement between the ruling sheikhs of Abu Dhabi and Umm al Quwain (described by the latter in the following quote) illustrates the use of names of tribes andclans and their leaders to designate geographical spheres of influence:

> My brother Said bin Ahmed has returned and I have understood that you said to him regarding the settlement which has resulted from you and those present with you, namely: (1) Sheikh Hamd bin Abdulla al Sharqi of Fujairah; (2) Sheikh Mahomed bin Suliman of Dareez; (3) Sheikh Sultan bin Rashid Yakubi of Ibri; (4) Sheikh Sultan Mahomed Naeemi of Buraimi; (5) Sheikh Butiy bin Sohail of Debai; (6) Sheikh the Shihiyeen and he who is their Overlord.
>
> And (I understand that) you gave a bond of peace to Said with regard to those who have thrown in their lot with me namely the Beni Kittab and Bani Kaab and Obaid bin Miftah and the Khowatir who are with him, and other who have come to my side and are now assembled in Felej (Al Ali).[39]

The precedence of the social structure in the proto state's hierarchy formed three main patterns of territoriality: reticularity, non-exclusiveness, and fluidity. The term reticular, which originally comes from anatomy as the network of interconnected nuclei in different parts of the brain, characterizes the geopolitical system of the region in our case. If we were to accurately map the territorial distribution of a sheikhdom, it would look like a complex network of vectoral elements containing points and lines. The records of the early border negotiations reflect this amorphous structure of territories lacking continuity in the sense of a geometric polygon, with elements tied more or less loosely to each other and to the central hub. The idea of territorial continuity was foreign to the leading sheikhs, who held onto their particular sites and assets. In cases where the dar was divided into numerous non-adjoining locations, the sheikh's sovereignty did not necessarily apply to the area between them.

The large number of enclaves in the modern UAE displays tangible evidence of the traditional reticular perception of territoriality. Al Manama enclave, for example, is a result of the dispersed *Na'im* tribal coalition. The local clan that settled in the fertile village of Al Manama at the foot of the Hijar Mountains maintained political, social and economic ties with the tribal leadership located in Ajman (see Fig. 2 2).[40] Despite being surrounded by different sovereignties and despite the 65 km that separated it from the main city of the sheikhdom the inhabitants remained loyal to the ruling sheikh of Ajman and paid him zakat.[41] Historical maps of the region display a road connecting Ajman and Al Manama directly, indicating the interactions between these two locations and reflecting the spatial structure of the vectoral and reticular system.

[35] J.P. Tripp, Political agent in Dubai, to J.F. Walker, Eastern (Arabian) department in the foreign office, 3 December 1957, FO 371/126932.

[36] C.E. Davies, *The Blood-Red Arab Flag: An Investigation into Qasimi Piracy, 1797–1820*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997; J. Onley, Britain's informal empire in the Gulf, *Journal of Social Affairs* 22.87 (2005) 29–45; N.A. Haller, Selective recognition as an imperial instrument: Britain and the Trucial States, 1820–1952, *Journal of Arabian Studies* 8.2 (2018) 275–297; H. Suzuki, The making of the 'Joasmee' pirates: A relativist reconsideration of the Qawāsimi piracy in the Persian Gulf, in: O. Atsushi, *the Name of the Battle against Piracy*, chapter 3, Leiden: Brill, 2018, 69–96..

[37] H.M. Albaharna, *The Arabian Gulf States: Their Legal and Political Status and Their International Problems*, Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1975, 4–6.

[38] Gottmann, The Evolution of the Concept of Territory, 31.

[39] Letter from Sheikh Rashid of Umm Al Quwain to Sheikh Zaid Bin Khalifa of Abu Dhabi, 14 April 1906, IOR, R/15/1/266.

[40] Heard-Bey, *From Trucial States to United Arab Emirates*, 57–58; See also Fig. 2.

[41] Note on the boundary claimed by Sheikh Rashid Bin Humaid, Ruler of Ajman, 4 August 1937, IOR, R/15/4/3.

Since Al Manama was considered a political enclave already during the proto state stage,[42] Britain proposed in the border negotiations to maintain this status quo, and delimit Al Manama under the rule of the sheikh of Ajman, based on their historical links and interactions.[43] Ultimately, the enclave was officially incorporated into the UAE in its federative structure. Al Manama enclave illustrates the irrelevance of territorial borders before the negotiations stage and the netlike spatial patterns that coincided with loyalty networks.

Under the traditional economic structure, the ruler's authority over their subjects was strengthened through domination over agricultural lands, trade routes, and properties such as harbors, boats and even slaves for the pearl fishing industry.[44] The traditional economy and natural resources shaped the settlement patterns in the region, and de-facto created separated economic zones, each subregion with its own taxation and collection systems. This structure added another dimension of netlike relations between the political, social and spatial systems. Whether it was a date grove or coastal occupations such as fishery, the owners (mostly the rulers themselves of heads of clans) regarded these territories as separate one from another.

Many scholars describe premodern borders as frontier zones or borderlands to describe territorial and political expansion and division.[45] Although S.B. Jones rejected F. Ratzel's interpretation of borders in a 'primitive' political culture where 'not lines but positions are the essentials for this concept', Ratzel, in fact, expressed the notion of the reticular borders of the sheikhdoms most accurately.[46] This idea was also emphasized by T. Holdich, who wrote in 1916 that there are still vast undetermined areas where bedouins wander 'with no thought of boundary limitations even when such limitations exist'.[47] Instead of looking at the fringes of a territory, as our geographical mind tends to construe borders, tribal borders should be analyzed as an outcome of inner interactions.

> Apart from the reticular system, non-exclusivity and fluid territorial affiliations comprised two prominent principles, which were the result of the common Bedouin habits. The nomadic lifestyle dictated dynamic relations between people and space prior to the fixation of borders, which was manifested, inter alia, in seasonal migrations.[48] When a migrating tribe abandoned a particular site, the sheikh's sovereignty no longer applied to that site, upon the principle of sovereignty over the people first. J.G. Lorimer's Gazetteer portrays several examples of the dynamic and elusive nature of territorial sovereignty under migration movements:In summer most of the able-bodied men … are absent at the pearl banks, and the coast towns and villages are left to a great extent unprotected and deserted.[49] In winter, when weather is cool and grazing abundant, they are scattered far and wide in small parties.[50]Although Dhaid is controlled by the sheikh of Sharjah he has not exclusive interest in the place … the climate in the hot weather months is given as the only reason why they do not visit the place frequently.[51]

These descriptions exemplify the weighty influence of environmental conditions on the need to develop a pragmatic approach toward territoriality. Hot weather and natural resources drove migration movements and shaped temporal sovereignties over specific locations. They had also shaped border perceptions and practices accordingly, in a way that was significantly different from the Western sense of territorial borders.

Although the Bedouin lifestyle was still the dominant spatial practice in this region in the 1930s and the 1940s, the settlement pattern in the region was diverse and included also settled agricultural communities (*hadar*), as in the case of Al Manama. The agricultural villages represented a stronger attachment to the land and a more extensive interpretation of land ownership than those of the nomadic communities (*badu*).[52] Their sedentary customs eventually sparked a growing notion of territorial exclusivity and served as models to modern settlements in the region as a whole.

The conceptual shift from al ahram to frontier zones

The period between the 1930s and the early 1950s was characterized by the stabilization of the Trucial Coast's political map. This period is usually divided in decolonization literature to interwar and postwar (WWII) strategies, marking the shift from economic interests to economic distress and from imperial ambitions to ideological motivations.[53] J. Darwin's thesis that Britain's interwar policy did not consider withdrawal is certainly valid in the Arabian Gulf, where its attention to internal organization became more vigorous.[54] Still, local and regional factors were not less influential in the evolving delineation process.

The tribal dar and its limits underwent spatial regularization as a result of several major developments: the decline in nomadic habits; the stabilization of the political balance of power; the subsequent decrease in inter-tribal hostilities (even though new hostilities erupted, they were lesser in numbers and magnitude); changes in the broader regional political order in the 1920s–30s; and most influentially, the border negotiation process in the Trucial Coast between the local leaders and the British representatives. The stabilization period marks the first turning point in local border perceptions when the notion of frontier zones emerged alongside the existing notion of the reticular system.

The emergence of the modern Arab states in the Levant during the 1920s and the independence of the neighboring kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932 inspired Trucial Coast leaders to develop their

[42] A map showing the distance between Ajman and Al Manama and the road connecting them. Bandar 'Abbas, Scale at source 1:1,000,000, War Office and Air Ministry, Britain, 1963.

[43] J. Walker, Report, 23 September 1957, TNA, FO 371/126932.

[44] Onley and Khalaf, Shaikhly authority in the pre-oil Gulf, 192.

[45] T. Holdich, Political boundaries, *Scottish Geographical Magazine* 32.11 (1916) 46,127,144; Jones, Boundary concepts in the setting of place and time, 242; M. Baud and W.V. Schendel, Toward a comparative history of borderlands, *Journal of World History* 8.2 (1997) 211–214.

[46] F. Ratzel, Die gesetze des räumlichen wachstums der staaten, *Petermanns Mitteilungen* 42 (1896) 103; Jones, Boundary oncepts in the setting of place and time, 242.

[47] Holdich, Political Boundaries, 4.

[48] Wilkinson, Traditional concepts of territory in south east Arabia, 308.

[49] J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, 'Omān, and Central Arabia, Geographical and Statistical*, Part II, volume 9, Calcutta: Irish Academic, 1908, 1438.

[50] Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, 'Omān, and Central Arabia, Geographical and Statistical*, Part II, volume 9, 1439.

[51] Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, 'Omān, and Central Arabia, Geographical and Statistical*, Part II, volume 2, 435.

[52] Heard-Bey, *From Trucial States to United Arab Emirates*, 223; Walker, The United Arab Emirates and Oman frontiers, 173.

[53] J. Darwin, British Decolonization since 1945: A Pattern or a Puzzle? *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 12.2 (1984) 187–209; G. Balfour-Paul, *The End of Empire in the Middle East: Britain's Relinquishment of Power in Her Last Three Arab Dependencies*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991; W.R. Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945–1951: Arab Nationalism, the United States, and Postwar Imperialism*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1984; F. Heinlein, *British Government Policy and Decolonization, 1945-63: Scrutinising the Official Mind*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2002.

[54] Darwin, British Decolonization since 1945: A Pattern or a Puzzle? 674.

own ambitions for independence. Yet, the customary practices of the sheikhdoms had to change significantly in order to fit the modern state system model. Most crucial was the need for defined borders, which was a rather foreign concept in desert areas. Another force that drove the local ruling sheikhs to participate in the delimitation process was the increasing role of Britain in the Gulf.

Concrete talks over the delineation of borders began in the 1930s between the British representatives and the more prominent sheikhs, according to Britain.[55] The border negotiations phase was critical in reshaping the role of the ruling sheikhs from proto state leaders to state founders. The main considerations that found expression in this process were the tribal system, the physical features of the territory, and the local balance of power. In the second half of the century, additional factors served as a basis for demarcation, most influential of them were Britain's recognition of sovereignty and the intervention of the oil company 'Petroleum Concessions Limited' that increasingly came into play.

The sheikhs' initial response to Britain's initiatives to regulate territorial affiliations and to determine fixed borders was hesitation, confusion, and antagonism. Evidence can be found in a record on the sheikh of Sharjah's response to Britain's request to state his territorial claims in 1937:

> The sheikh of Sharjah refused to state the territory claimed be him. He said that his father's territory was known to all … He said that before settling the boundary question with his neighbours and relatives he was not prepared to commit himself to anything beyond what he had stated above.[56]

In the three decades between the 1930s and the 1960s, the ruling sheikhs become accustomed to the process and gradually increased their cooperation. The local perceptions, as well as the functions of territoriality, boundaries and sovereignty, underwent various degrees of transformations during in this period. Likewise, the British representatives also incorporated local terms and concepts into the process.

The border talks also triggered internal disputes, though, in contrast to the 'traditional wars' in the region, which were mainly fought over the sheikhdoms' main assets, these 'modern wars' reflected conflicts over their fringes. Such was the case of the dispute that erupted between the sheikhdoms of Abu Dhabi and Dubai following the negotiations. In 1937, Britain had drawn a sketch of a proposed border between Abu Dhabi and Dubai, based on their territorial claims. It was the first schematic map of borders presented to local leaders in the Trucial Coast, and the first time in the history of this region that borders marked geographic limits of organizational containers Beyond the discontent expressed by the ruling sheikhs over the location of the proposed line, the sheikhs were also puzzled by discourse discrepancies with Britain. Drawing borders as continuous lines that were designed to create a permanent political status quo was a foreign idea for the local leaders. Further discrepancies were found in the terminologies, notions, considerations and the use of tools, such as written agreements and maps. The tension between the two sheikhdoms escalated and in 1945 eventually erupted into a full-scale war lasting three years. In a letter to the British Political Officer in Sharjah, the ruling sheikh of Dubai Sa'id bin Maktum articulated the traditional customs in regard to implementing territorial sovereignty:

> I have no documents or papers about the boundaries, as it has not been the custom here to write out documents or papers and especially in the old days when confidence existed among the people who used to trust each other. Executing documents was then unnecessary, rather strange. Furthermore, it was not expected that there will arise a dispute over the boundaries so that one could take the necessary precautions. Most of the transactions of the Trucial people used to be conducted verbally and a few of them maintained recorded and kept documents after having done with them.[57]

The letter reflects the encounter of the local customs of trust and verbal agreements with the modern instruments of sovereignty, which included documental evidence, maps, and written agreements. Furthermore, Maktum's argument about the unforeseen border disputes expresses the little importance or relevancy that border areas, meaning frontier zones, used to have in the traditional framework. As seen in Maktum's statement, at that stage, both the modern tools and the relevancy of borders started to be absorbed in the mindset of the ruling sheikhs. In 1947, Abu Dhabi and Dubai rulers reached a truce, but the Manasir tribe that was loyal to the ruling family of Abu Dhabi continued to raid Dubai. Sheikh Hazza bin Sultan, brother of the ruler of Abu Dhabi Shakhbut bin Sultan, wrote in 1948 to the British political officer that:

> Having long and friendly relations with the Manasir we are unwilling to expel them from our territories … We also undertake that, in the event of further raiding by the Manasir against Dubai, with whom we are at peace, we will act in accordance with tribal custom regulation the relations between tribes at peace with each other.[58]

This testimony is another evidence of the unique territorial patterns in east Arabia in contrast to the Levant in 1948, where borders and countries were already regularized. Here, the affiliated territories were still a result of tribal coalitions and alliances, sometimes shifting alliances. The expulsion mentioned in the text refers to the exclusion of the Manasir tribe from the Sheikhdom system and not necessarily their physical disposal from their land. Thus, if the ruler of Abu Dhabi would disavow the Manasir, the consequences would be the loss of territories with the loss of the Manasir's manpower and resources.

The physical attributes of the desert terrain posed one of the main challenges in determining continuous jurisdictions and borders. The long buffer zone between Dubai and Sharjah sheikhdoms constituted a boundary between the two primary tribal associations in the coastal region: the Bani Yas and the Qawasim. The buffer zone between them ran through a flat, sandy area that was sparse in settlements and natural resources. Each sheikh sought to incorporate into its territory the few existing wells and villages in this strip of land between them. Thus, their territorial demands to the British representatives were described by indicating palm trees, sandy furrows, water wells and routes that served as landmarks in the monotonous desert area.[59] At the sheikhs' request, Britain acted

[55] Jurisdiction in the Trucial Sheikhdoms, 1938–1947, 1947, IOR, R/15/1/289; Internal Boundaries, 1956, TNA, FO 371/120604; Internal Boundaries, 1958, TNA, FO 371/132796.

[56] Ruler of Sharjah, Note on the boundaries claimed by Sharjah, 4 August 1937, IOR, R/15/4/3.

[57] Sa'id bin Maktum, Translation of a letter from Sheikh Sa'id Bin Maktum to the political officer at Sharjah, 12 January 1949, FO 1016/12.

[58] Hazza bin Sultan, Translation of a letter from Sheikh S Hazza bin Sultan acting on behalf of Shakhbut bin Sultan ruler of Abu Dhabi to the political officer at Sharjah, 26 April 1948, IOR, R/15/1/292.

[59] J. Walker, Report on the Trucial Coast frontier settlement, March 1955, TNA, FO 371/114648.

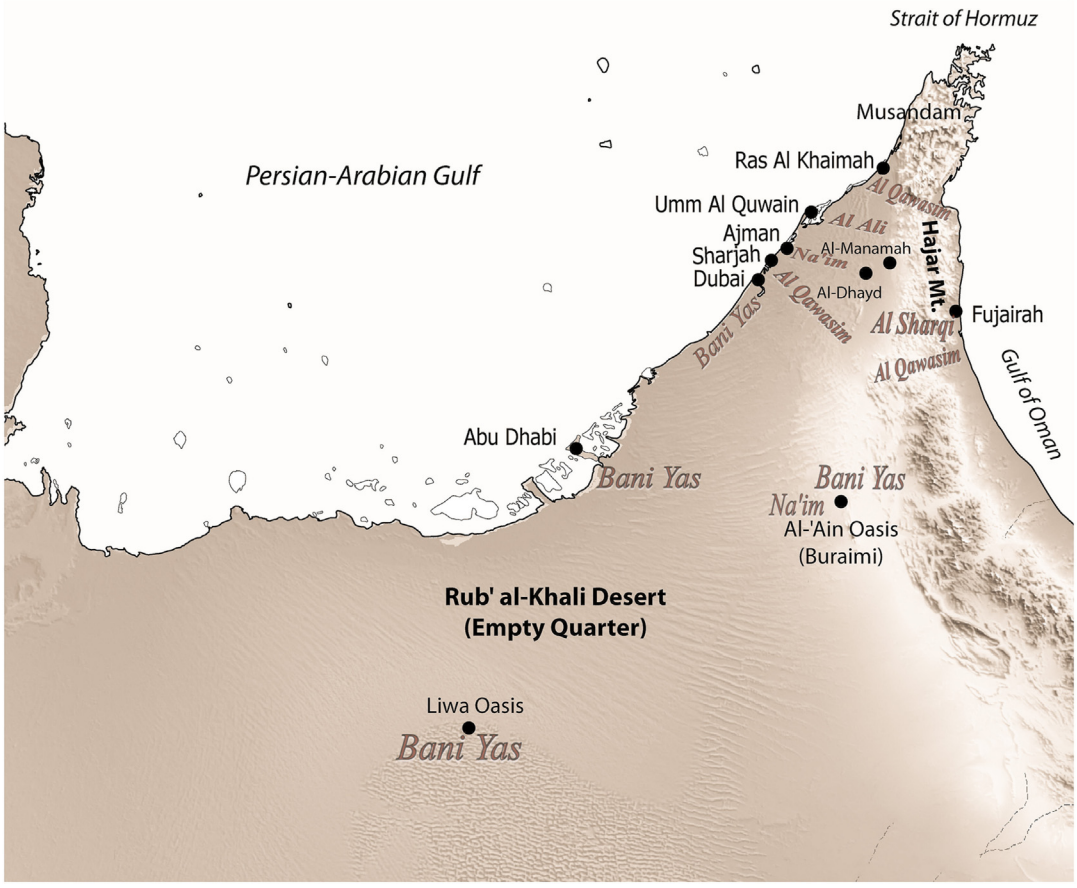

Fig. 1. Figure 1Distribution of the main settlements and leading tribes in the nineteenth century Trucial Coast.

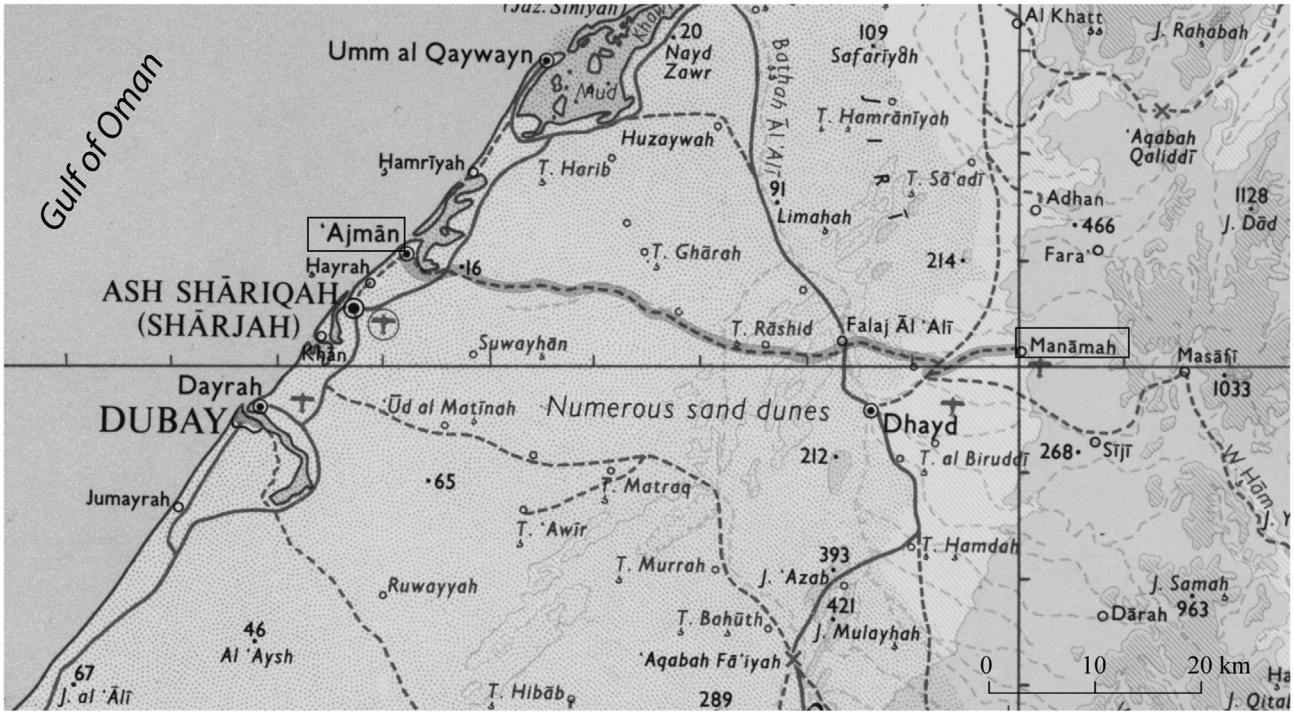

Fig. 2. Historical map of Al Manama – Ajman road, 1963.

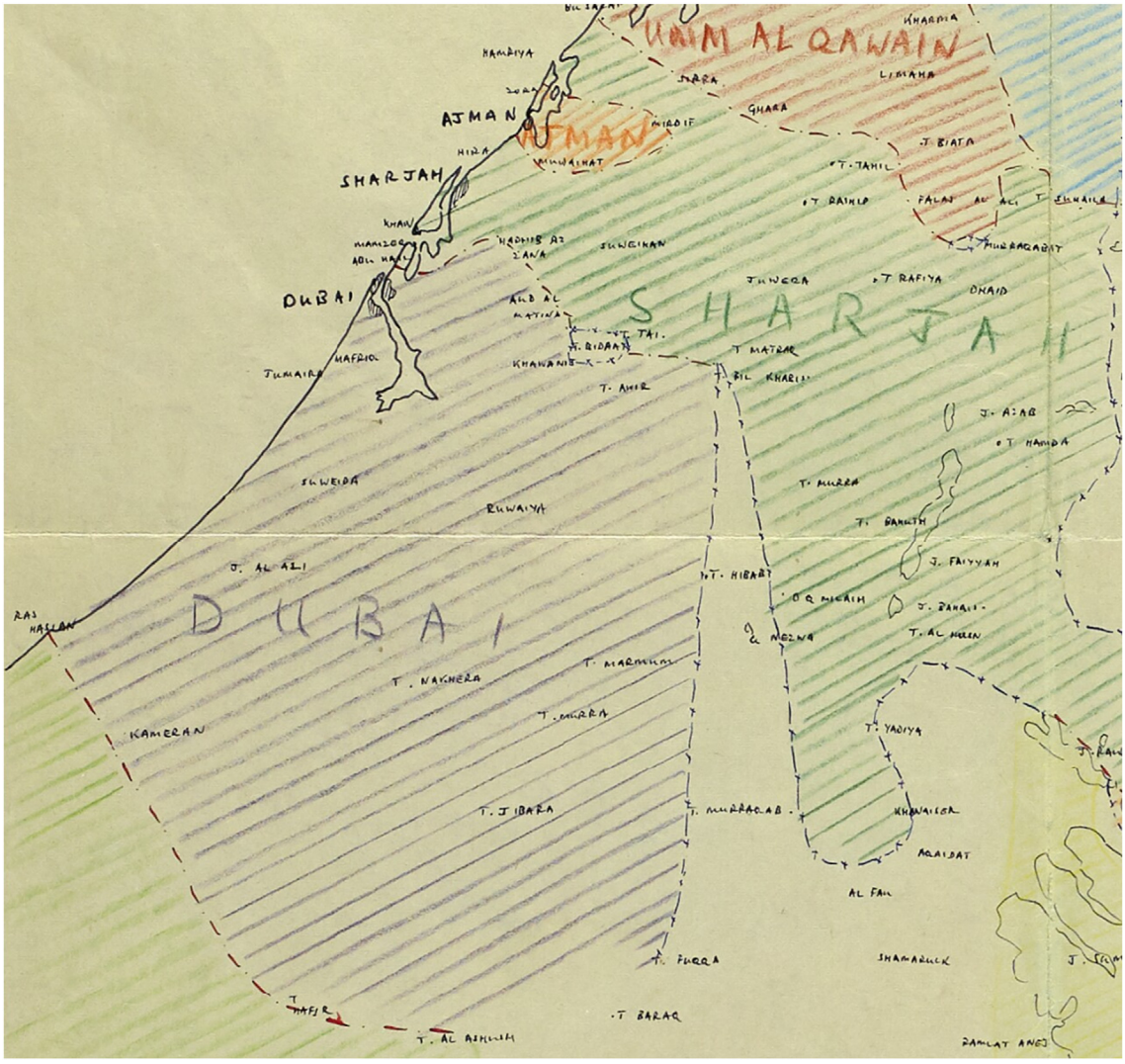

Fig. 3. Dubai and sharjah buffer zone.

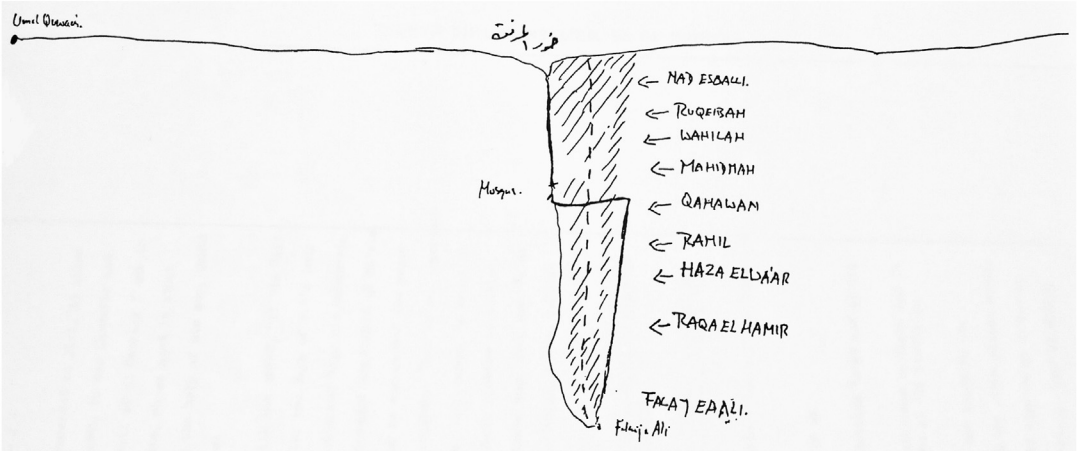

Fig. 4. Umm al Quwain – Ras al Khaimah frontier zone, as sketched by the British mediators.

as a mediator in the territorial dispute, which was focused on the more densely populated coastal region, such as Abu Hail, Al Mamzar and Al Khan, as can be seen in Fig. 3.

The talks exposed a great deal of uncertainty and inconsistency in the territorial demands of the rulers, especially in the uninhabited lands. However, as the negotiations advanced, the ruling sheikhs became somewhat accustomed to the task of accommodating territorial demands in no man's lands.[60]

Likewise, the ruling sheikhs of Ras al Khaimah and Umm al Quwain held different versions of their jurisdictions in their first attempts to draw their frontier zones, where most of the land was uninhabited. The mediation process revealed unequal familiarity with the areas in question, in which the sheikh of Umm al Quwain demonstrated a much better acquaintance, as described by the British representative:

> The journey seemed interminable up and down a series of precipitous sand hills all of which appeared indistinguishable to the layman but never did [the representative of] Umm al Quiwain hesitate. He stopped at intervals to explain the names of successive localities, their boundaries and the names of the adjoining ones and stated which belonged to him and which to Ras al Khaimah.[61]

The negotiations over overlapping areas had a significant impact on the growing notion of frontier zones. One the one hand, the survey journey initiated by Britain compelled the ruling sheikhs to draw in detail a division of jurisdictions along an imaginary line, as can be seen in the sketch made by the British mediators in Fig. 4. One the other hand, along this line, the sheikh of Umm al Quwain portrayed discontinuous localities, each with its own boundary.[62]

This testimony, among many others alike, demonstrates how new perceptions of borders, territory and sovereignty were absorbed into traditional perceptions that were still dominant in some cases in the 1950s. In contrast to the sheikh of Umm al Quwain, the sheikh of Ras al Khaimah was rather ignorant about the area and the names of the settlements, which implied that the somewhat barren land on his western border was not of great importance to him.[63] At a later stage, he demanded different versions of his jurisdiction on the buffer zone with Umm al Quwain.[64]

The uncertainty and inconsistent territorial demands posed by the local rulers, as was also expressed in the border dispute between Abu Dhabi and Dubai, was especially salient in uninhabited territories. In February 1950, the ruling sheikh of Abu Dhabi, Shakhbut bin Sultan, wrote to the British political agent in Bahrain regarding his border with Dubai that 'Hisyan, water wells, Ghafur, Hafir and Eshush which you have mentioned are within our boundary'.[65] This statement is one of many frequent references to the al ahram concept that were made throughout the negotiations, and as late as in 1952. It appears that the notion of al ahram was recognized by the British mediators, as can be found in the letter from the British political agent in Sharjah to the British Resident in Bahrain in 1952 on the Abu Dhabi – Dubai border arbitration:It should be noted that the southmost points mentioned in the Shaikh's claim do not, apparently, mark his frontiers but are merely places within his frontiers – the well-known wells etc.[66]

Two decades after the border negotiations had begun, the ruling sheikhs continued to conceptualize their territories as a cluster of territorial assets. Nevertheless, Shakhbut bin Sultan's citation of the places demanded 'within our boundary' highlights the transitional phase that fused the traditional al ahram concept with the idea of circumferential limits.[67] Thus, the prominent change was the rising notion of bounded territory and the role of borders as frontier zones.

Frontier zone was a term used by political geographers as T. Holdich, L. Kristof and J. Prescott to define premodern border areas.[68] Frontier zones are commonly conceptualized as margins of a political entity. While the territorial representation of frontier zones and borderlands might be the exact same space, the point of view on each of these geographical features can be the opposite. Frontiers are usually mentioned to indicate regions when looking outwards from the hinterland toward the neighboring political entities. Borderlands, on the other hand, are perceived as regions of marginal cultures when looking inwards from the jurisdiction limits toward the central government.[69] Differentiating between these terms is not merely a semantic issue, rather an essential acknowledgment of the phenomenon we seek to analyze. Another epistemological differentiation is the context in which geographers and historians usually use these terms. Frontier zones are typically studied in a political and a military context and borderlands in a social and cultural context.[70] Here, for the first time in the history of this region, borders were conceived as frontier zones. Most of them crossed unsettled lands and were a result of a top-down process of locating midlines. In the bedouin domain, these frontiers were not less than a revolution in the political order, territorial practices and social life. Yet, the development of clear borderland regions and borderland cultures had yet to be evolved.

In contrast to negotiations over the uninhabited lands, the border negotiations over settled areas were characterized by relatively common and consistent principles of delineation. The most important principle for determining the territorial allocations was tribal affiliation to the ruling sheikh, which was mainly articulated in the collection of zakat.[71] In their attempt to assess the political map and to settle the borders in the region of Al Ain (Buraimi, in the British records) in 1934, the British representatives investigated the following issues: the names of the tribes and the clans, together with the names of their sheikhs; the zakat amounts and addresses according to years and sheikhs; the collectors of zakat and the place of payment; and the address of zakat payments after a leader's death.[72] Since zakat practices were customarily used to determine effective power and exercise of jurisdictions, disputes over

[60] Sketch map of internal border between the Trucial States, prepared by the British Residency, 28 August 1956, FO 371/120604.

[61] Political agent C.M. Pirie-Gordon to political resident C.M. Le Quesne, 10 April 1954, TNA, FO 1016/379.

[62] Sketch map of the buffer zone between Umm al Quwain and Ras al Khaimah British, prepared by the political agent in Dubai, 10 April 1954, FO 1016/379.

[63] Enquiry letters from Sheikh Saqr Bin Muhammed of Ras Al Khaimah to local sheikhs questioning their boundaries, June 1954, TNA, FO 1016/379.

[64] Ras al Khaimah – Umm al Quwain frontier settlement, 1954, FO 1016/379.

[65] Translation of a letter from Sheikh Shakhbut Bin Sultan to the political agent at Bahrain, 3 February 1950, TNA, FO 1016/195.

[66] Letter from the political agency of the Trucial States, Sharjah, to the C.M. Le Quesne Esq., British residency, Bahrain, 27 October 1952, TNA, FO 1016/195.

[67] Political agency Sharjah, Sketch map of disputed areas between Dubai and Abu Dhabi, showing Dubai's claim of 1949, January 1949, TNA, FO 1016/80; Correspondence on the Dubai-Abu Dhabi boundary dispute: arbitration, 1948–1950, 1950, TNA, FO 1016/80.

[68] Holdich, Political Boundaries; L.K.D. Kristof, The Nature of Frontiers and Boundaries, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 49.3 (1959) 269–282; J.R.V. Prescott, *Boundaries and Frontiers*, London: Croom Helm, 1978.

[69] Kristof, The Nature of Frontiers and Boundaries, 269–272; Prescott, *Boundaries and Frontiers*, 36–38.

[70] C. Brambilla, New Approach in Border Studies: The Need for Re-thinking the European-African Borderland through the Case of the EUSADC Relationship and the Caprivi Strip, *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 23.3 (2008) 64–65.

[71] Heard-Bey, *From Trucial States to United Arab Emirates*, 112–118.

[72] Residency agent Sharjah to political resident, enclosing data regarding Buraimi and its neighborhood, 19 September 1934, IOR, R/15/1/603.

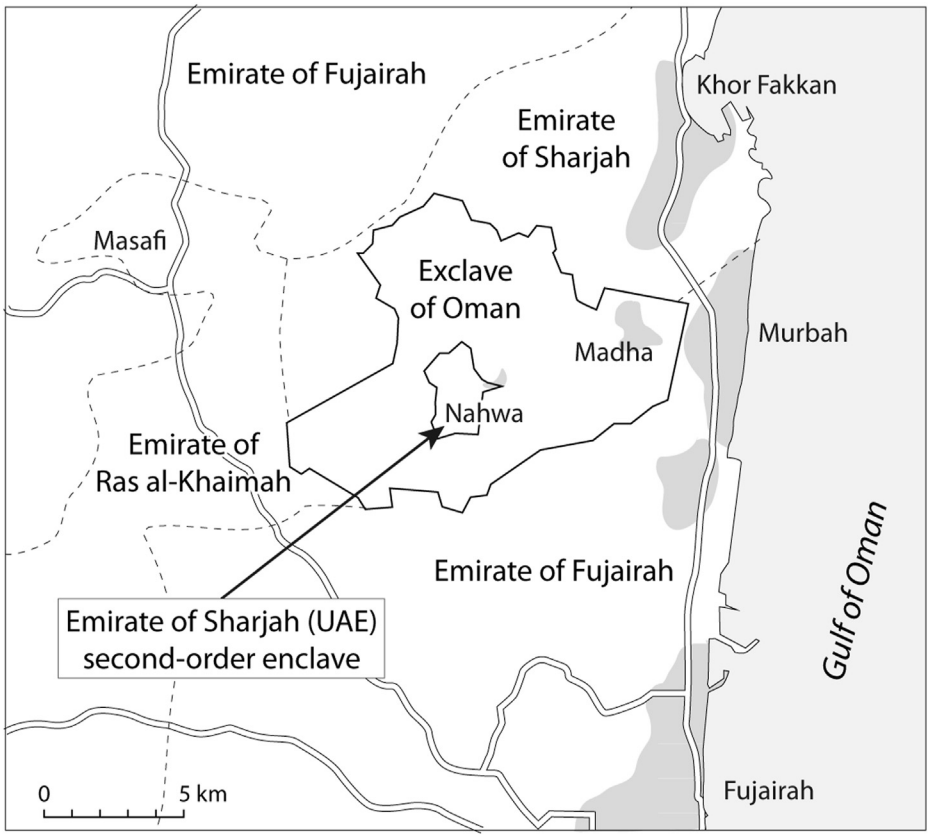

Fig. 5. Nahwa – madha enclaves.

inhabited territories were fewer in number and usually more rapidly settled than disputes over uninhabited lands.

The formation of the Madha and Nahwa enclaves located on the east coast further exemplifies the assimilation of local elements into modern territorial practices in settled areas. In the nineteenth century, Wadi Madha was a somewhat isolated settlement in an area ruled by the Sultan of Muscat (today Oman) within a larger territory that was alternately ruled by the al Qawasim rulers of Sharjah and Ras al Khaimah and other rulers. In the early twentieth century, the sheikh of Fujairah gained power in this region and applied effective control over larges parts in the eastern coastal region. The new balance of power led to the political isolation of several east coast settlements, which maintained their historical loyalty to their remotely situated rulers. The correspondence over the demarcation of Wadi Madha and Nahwa emphasized the importance of tribal loyalties, even though the villages under dispute were very small and economically insignificant. In his March 1955 report on the area, Walker noted, 'Sharjah is in de facto control of the two villages at the head of the wadi, Nahwa and Shis, from which it has been taking zakat for several years'.[73] In December 1956, the Sultan of Muscat Said bin Taimur expressed his position on Wadi Madha to the British political agent:

> … we found Wadi Madha part of our Sultanate and its inhabitants are our subjects and up to this day they have been under our jurisdiction and Sovereignty … [74]

The final border settlement created two sovereign enclaves, representing the sociopolitical distribution of that period[75]. As seen in Fig. 5, Nahwa and Shis are within a second-order enclave, surrounded by Oman's enclave of Madha that is surrounded by several other jurisdictions. By the 1950s, many of the undefined and newly disputed lands were already allocated or at least partially settled. New actors in the region, mainly the oil company, generated a new rhythm to the delineation process.

The adoption of the territorial border concept

The second half of the twentieth century was characterized by the ruling sheikhs' proactive involvement in the border delineation process and by the increasing adoption of the notion of territorial borders. The protracted negotiations had their own impact on the sheikhs' adaptation of the British terminology, notions, and principles. The main outcome of their accommodations was a gradual shift in the regional hierarchy of sovereignty, from jurisdiction over people as a primary source of legitimization to the precedence of territorial sovereignty within fixed borders. This change did not imply an abandonment of the tribal system. That system, which included the principle of loyalty, the ruling families, and the institution of the dar remained a dominant factor under the new spatio political framework. Since the tribal system served as a leading reference for the allocation task and, in fact, established the basis for the modern political map of the region, the territorial borders that became well established in the 1950s should be considered a reconstruction rather than a complete transformation of the

[73] Walker, Report on the Trucial Coast frontier settlement.
[74] Sultan Said Bin Taimur to consul-general O.B.E Chauncy, 1957, FO 371/126932.
[75] The map was dedicatedly prepared by Noga Yoselevich.

traditional customs.

The second significant transformation in the notion of borders can be dated to the mid 1950s, with the emergence of the fixed territorial borders. The practical effect of the emerging frontier zones was the development of borders in this region as state institutions. Yet, the initial reaction of the inhabitants to these new frontiers was sometimes one of confusion, as illustrated in a statement made by Suhail bin Tahy, head of Bait Qibla (house of the Qibla), who represented a clan from the Al Rashid tribe that was situated in Al Ain. In 1955 he wrote:

> I have given my allegiance to Shaikh Zai'd but the majority of my tribe are under the jurisdiction of Saiyid Sa'id, the Sultan of Muscat.[76]

The border that divided Al Ain/Buraimi into two political entities had profoundly changed the political practices in the region. It created a distinction between social ties and territorial affiliations, it cemented the spatial divisions between the ruler of Abu Dhabi and the Sultan of Muscat, and it reinforced their sovereignty over the oasis that attracted many regional actors and had known many wars.

The local adoption of the territorial border concept was more clearly evident in the 1960s. In the agreement between the rulers of Dubai and Muscat from 1961, the Arabic text mentions the "tribal borders" [Hudud Kabail حدود قبائل] between the two political entities, and describes "the line" [al Khat الخط] that separates the two domains according to names of tribes (meaning, their lands) and geographical features:

> The lines starts from Jabel Umm al Nasue and goes northeast along the watershed between the wadis flowing south towards wadi Saban and Shiya', Wadi al Qahfi and al Fai (al Faj), which belongs to the Bani Ka'ab, and the wadis flowing noth to Hatta and al Qima, which belong to the Biduwat of Hajarain and Dubai …[77]

The fixation of borders effectively replaced the dynamic nature of shifting alliances with a new practice of fixed territorial sovereignty that determined the ruler – subject relationship according to territorial affiliation rather than tribal affiliation. The adoption of Western territorial concepts also entailed a complete abandonment of the nomadic lifestyle and the fluid territorial attachment, although the principle of non-exclusivity was retained.

While the protracted border negotiation process gradually reshaped the local perceptions of borders, the intervention of the oil industry had an immense and rapid impact on them. The shift from traditional to modern economy changed the governance system and led to a complete territorial transformation from a reticular structure to a polygonal one. Following the discovery of oil in 1932 in Bahrain, oil became a game changer in the political life of the Trucial Coast and a dominant factor in its spatial settings. The British oil company that initially expressed interest in the Trucial Coast in the 1930s, was in constant search for obtaining oil survey concessions from the local rulers.[78] However, as the political map was yet to be sufficiently defined, the company suffered from major setbacks in its activities and put pressure on British diplomats to find solutions. As a result, the exchanges between the ruling sheikhs and the British envoys increased in frequency and reflected a new level of engagement. According to W.R. Louis, Britain exerted a non-intervention colonial policy in the postwar period.[79] Many of its dependencies, also in the Middle East, had gained independence by the late 1940s, but for the Trucial Coast, the catalyst was not WWII rather the emergence of oil politics.

The oil era in the region changed the very nature of the border negotiations, not only by accelerating the talks, but also by developing the linear border perception of the local leadership. While in the first transformation, the focus of the ruling sheikhs on their hinterland shifted to the fringes, the second transformation was concentrated on the frontier zones, adjusting them to modern practices of fixed, strict and continuous borderlines.

Due to the emergence of the oil industry, the territories under discussion had become a valuable economic and political resource for the ruling sheikhs, who were thus motivated to negotiate with the British petroleum company over concessions and revenues, either directly or through British diplomatic delegators. Although the ruling sheikhs did not foresee the vast economic potential of the oil discoveries in the 1930s, the idea of revenues associated with specific territories stimulated their desire to obtain maximum territorial control, leading to new integrative and extensive definitions of space.[80]

The search for oil generated a great deal of confusion since many of the territories in question were no man's lands.[81] As the territorial claims extended to marginal areas, the sheikhdoms became geographically closer to one another and disputes erupted and spread. This new political environment increased the urgency to delimit the political division of the region by both sides. As their economic interests grew, the sheikhs themselves pushed to define their borders.

Between 1937 and 1951, the oil company, Petroleum Concessions Limited, signed a series of concession treaties separately and directly with each sheikhdom.[82] These treaties redefined the relationship between the rulers and their subjects, as their source of legitimacy no longer rested exclusively upon the tribal loyalty system, but also on external recognition. Moreover, the oil economy reduced the sheikhs' dependency on local revenues, thus weakening another dimension of local ties and leadership authority. As a result, the ruling sheikhs reinforced their political status. All those who were granted external recognition, either by the oil company or by the diplomatic representatives in the region, were the ones to eventually claim territorial sovereignty in the foundation of the modern state.[83]

One manifestation of the changing borders discourse following the emergence of the oil industry was shared revenues for unsettled territories, mainly in the eastern parts. The agreement signed

[76] At that time Shaikh Zai'd was the brother of the ruler of Abu Dhabi who governed the villages of Al Ain. Statement of Suhail Bin Tahy illustrating the allegiance of the Rawashid in Al-Buraimi to the Ruler of Abu Dhabi, 4 May 1955, Buraimi Memorials.

[77] Muscat-Dubai frontier agreement in Arabic signed by Said bin Taimur and Rashid bin Said bin Maktum, 10 Dhul al Qa'dah 1378, 1961, FO 93/167/32.

[78] The oil company involved in the region initially operated under the name Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC). Later, it became Petroleum Concessions Limited and nowadays, the company is known as British Petroleum (BP). Most of its local operations in the Trucial Coast were conducted by Petroleum Development (Trucial Coast) Ltd, a subsidiary of Petroleum Concessions Limited. Other oil companies, such as John W. Mecom, started to engage with the local sheikhs since the 1960s.

[79] Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945–1951*, 3.

[80] J.B. Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf, and the West*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1980, 112.

[81] Wilkinson, *Arabia's Frontiers*, 206.

[82] M.C. Peck, *The United Arab Emirates: A Venture in Unity*, Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1986, 93.

[83] Nazih N Ayubi, *Over-Stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East*, London & New York: IB Tauris, 1996, 132.

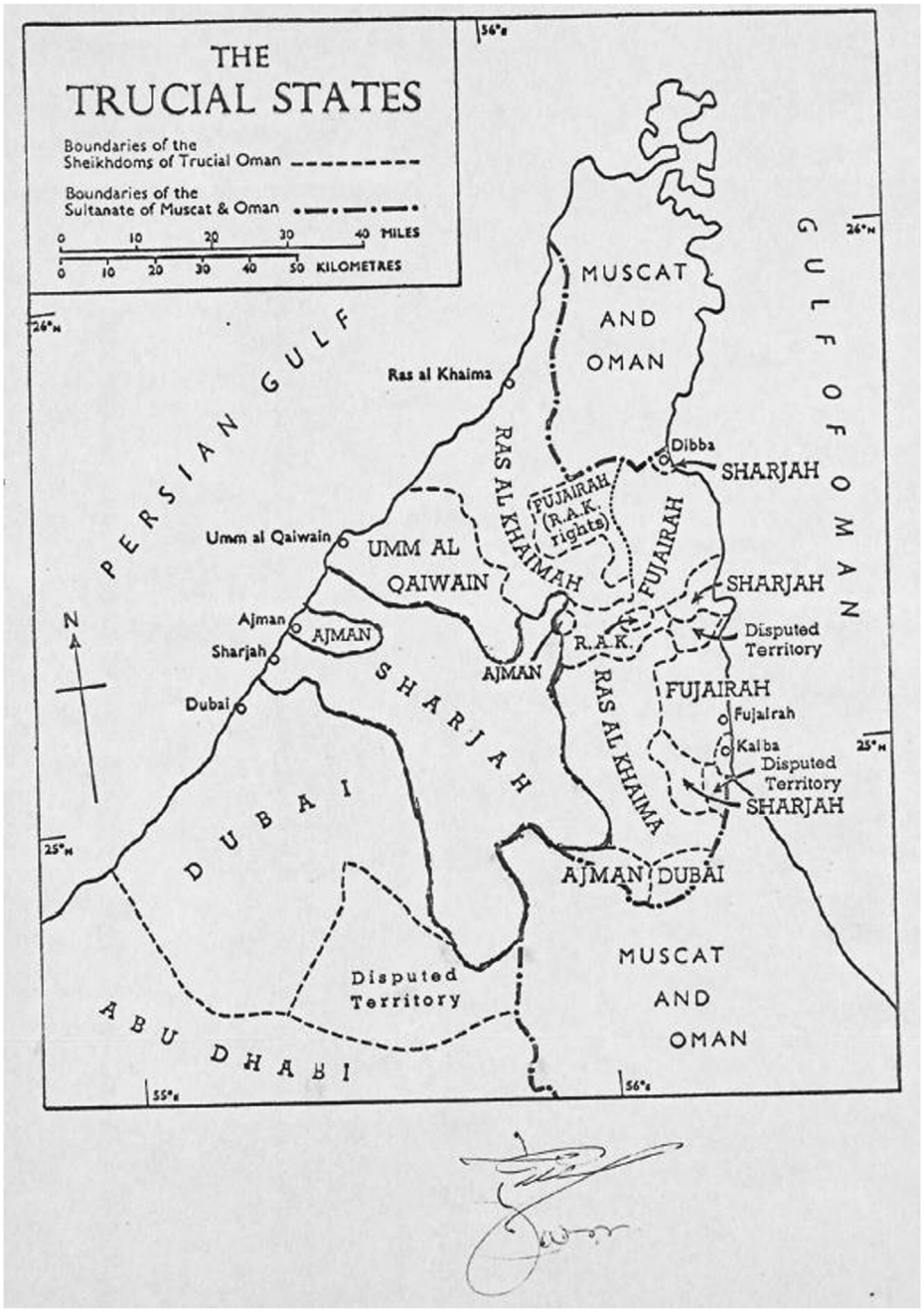

Fig. 6. The sheikhdom's borderlines as mapped by Britain in 1959.

between the rulers of Sharjah and Fujairah in 1958 articulate this new practice. In Article 3 of the agreement, the parties agreed to divide between them all revenues from oil or any other minerals to be discovered 'in the land, in the sea or in the mountains'.[84] The same patterns of border perception shifts were also demonstrated in the negotiations over the external borders of the sheikhdoms with neighboring states. Britain acted as the representative of the sheikhdoms in the delineation process with Saudi Arabia. In 1952, Abu Dhabi's territorial demands were drawn as lines on a map by British diplomats and the idea of shared profit was offered to the Saudis.[85] These principles later served as a basis for the 1974 border agreement between the independent UAE and Saudi Arabia. Retrospectively, the principle of shared territories and revenues did not entirely survive in the modern UAE.[86] Yet, this idea in the 1950s expressed the fusion of modern norms with traditional local customs, such as non-exclusivity.

[84] Agreement between Shaikh Saqr Bin Sultan Al Qasimi, Ruler of Sharjah, and Sheikh Muhammed Bin Hamed Al Sharqi, Ruler of Fujairah, 1958, FO 371/132796.

[85] The profit sharing idea was discussed along the 1950s in various formats. These negotiations are documented in many files, among them are 1953, FO 371/104412 and 1954, FO 371/109902.

[86] G. Blake, Shared Zones as a Solution to Problems of Territorial Sovereignty in the Gulf States, in: R. Schofield (Ed.), *Territorial Foundations of the Gulf States*, London: UCL Press, 1994, 200–210.

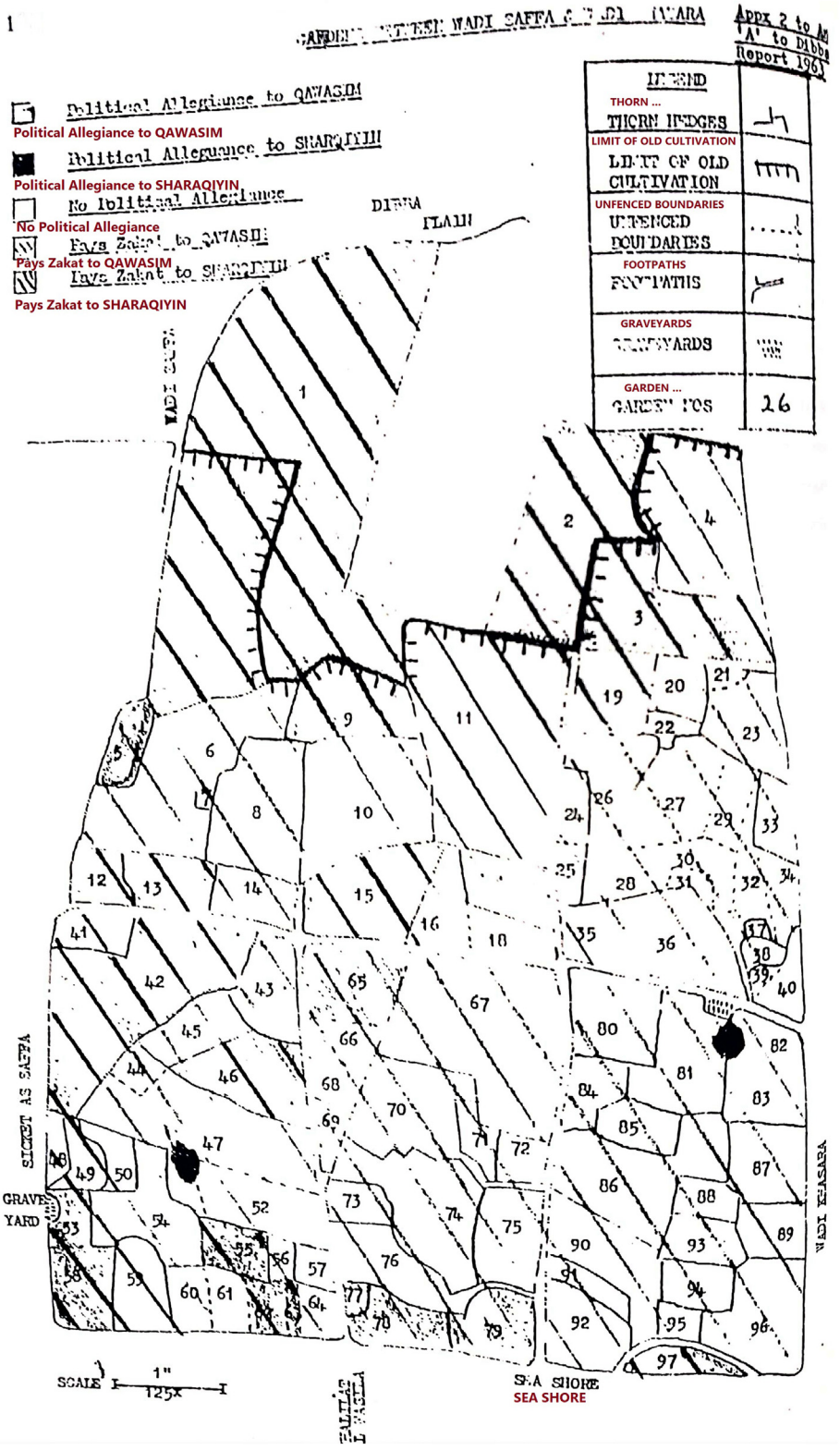

Fig. 7. The partition of dibba in 1963 .

Fig. 8. UAE borders today.

As the political map was gradually consolidated in the early 1960s, the disputed areas became the focus of border negotiations. Fig. 6 displays three disputed areas[87], but there were still many more at a higher resolution. This sketch map that Walker drew served future negotiations and oil agreements. With no other detailed map of internal borders, this drawing presents the poor use of mapping in border negotiations, in contrast to the British representative's comprehensive knowledge of the region.

Among these disputed territories was the city of Dibba on the east coast, which was split into several jurisdictions and sovereignty claims. In July 1962, the British political agent A.J.M. Craig wrote on Dibba the following statement:

> A boundary commission consisting of the Ruler of Umm al Qaiwain and the Qadhi [judge] of Dubai spent four days in Dibba, under the guidance of the Assistant Political Agent and the protection of the platoon of the Scouts, hearing the evidence in the Sharjah/Fujairah dispute. The commission sat in majlis in an impressive Agency tent and tried to pick its way between a great deal of contradictory evidence which the Qadhi pronounced as totally valueless. The Dibba frontier is one of the boundaries left undecided in the Trucial States frontier investigations of recent years. The need for demarcation has of recent months been made acute by the rival claims of the Qawasim and the Sharqiyin to inland wells and formerly barren sites which could be made cultivable with the aid of one of the new fangled pumps. Tension between the two tribes extended to the shore where each side laid claim to the disputed stretch for the use of their fishing boats.[88]

This testimony highlights the border talks' settings in this period: local arbitrators, local land forces, traditional majlis, the disputed parties and a British representative. It shows that the local administration and regularization that was developed around the negotiation process by that time. The considerations raised by the disputed parties were, as before, wells, coastlines and income sources such as fishery[89]. A year later, a sketch map was presented to the parties, displaying the complexity of drawing lines in a densely cultivated village, seen in Fig. 7.

Another disputed domain in the 1960s was the sea, which, like in the no man's land territories, turned from a futile territory to an economic asset. The oil factor was more influential in border disputes and settlements than ever before. On April 2, 1968, a

[87] Sketch map of internal boundaries in the Trucial States prepared by J. Walker, 1959, FO 371/140223 (seen also in 1962, FO 371/163063 and 1965, FO 1016/844).

[88] Political Agent A.J.M. Craig, Extracts from the Trucial States diary for the month of July 1962: 'Oil affairs', 'Dibba' – confidential annex, FO 371/163204.

[89] 'The Dibba Report 1963' by Captain W.F. Stockdate, Trucial Oman Scouts, FO 371/168920. This sketch map displays the territorial division in Dibba between political allegiances and Zakat collection to the Qawasim ruler of Sharjah and the Sharqiyin ruler of Fujairah in 1963.

maritime border agreement was signed between the rulers of Abu Dhabi and Dubai, after at least four years of negotiations.[90] It was a bilateral agreement, written in Arabic, with no British stamps. Even though Britain was deeply involved in the arbitration between them, the bilateral deal reflected the independent stage of the two rulers before 1971. At this stage, the rulers had private lawyers in their decision making mechanism. The final agreement demonstrates how the ruling sheiks in the late 1960s pursued exclusivity in cases of overlapping territories and resources:

> A maritime border line separating between the two emirates of Abu Dhabi and Dubai starts from Ras Hasian on the shore, extending linearly to the northwest across the sea, crossing oil wells that belong to Dubai, since both parties want to re-adjust this border.[91]

The agreement reflects a compromise of Abu Dhabi in its territorial demands and its decision to shift the maritime border 10 km westward in order to include the oil fields in Dubai's domain. Moreover, it reflects a new era in the border delimitation process when Britain gradually reduced its involvement and allowed even greater participation of the local rulers in this process.

Border negotiations in the second half of the 1960s were dealt with under two significant new conditions: the idea of unification between the sheikhdoms and the growing anticipation toward Britain's withdrawal from the region.[92] As seen in the Abu Dhabi – Dubai maritime agreement, mutual understandings and locally-initiated agreements became more common in the Trucial Coast towards the unification. Borders became a clear indicator of jurisdictions and an element to consider in state building. The local newspapers announced various projects that included cross-border cooperation, such as joint infrastructures between the sheikhdoms. In 1965, five sheikhdoms, excluding Fujairah and Abu Dhabi, launched cross-border infrastructural arrangements in electricity, water, roads and urban planning (with Abu Dhabi's participation in funding).[93]

The adoption of modern territorial border practices represents a peak in the evolution of local border perceptions. However, borders are still conceptually changing to this day in an ongoing process that stems from the dynamic interactions between the state and society.[94]

Conclusions

Studying borders as a process, as Paasi suggests,[95] entails a deep observation of the successive shaping and reshaping of the significance of borders for a designated community.[96] Border perceptions constitute one of many dimensions that determine the significance of borders according to local interpretations. A better understanding of the construction of historical and modern notions of borders can be achieved by identifying major turning points and by analyzing their causes, their scope, and their effects.

From the 1920s to the 1960s, the local rulers of the Trucial Coast underwent an extreme transformation in their perception of borders, shifting from the notion of dynamic clusters of possessions to frontier zones, to fixed borderlines. These new principles were absorbed into the old local systems rather than overriding them, thus creating a mixture of ideas and practices concerning the border institution. These changes also had a powerful influence on relations between space, governance and society. Up to the late 1920s, local borders expressed merely an outcome of shifting social ties. Territorial sovereignty expanded and contracted according to group membership and alliances.[97] The 1950s records of the border talks display the assimilation of foreign political concepts in the local discourse. The portrayal of the border by the ruling sheikhs became more similar to Britain's interpretation, and their demands followed the modern customary practices by indicating fixed circumferential borderlines and territorial continuity.

The borders of the new political entities established in the 1960s and 1970s (the emirates that eventually formed the federation of the United Arab Emirates) comprised a hybrid framework of ruler-subject ties. New ideas of citizenship and nationality arose alongside the traditional tribal systems of governance and spatial distribution. The ruling families maintained their leadership and effective control over their people, and the borders encircle the existing settlements according to the loyalties map. However, from that point in regional history, the institution of borders replaced the traditional institution of tribal loyalty.

In a broader context, one of the most common critiques of decolonization is the traumatic border formation process experienced by the local inhabitants, who are forced to adapt instantly to a new geographical, social, and political framework. The same cannot be said of the United Arab Emirates, which emerged after a long, gradual process of transformation and adaptation. The Trucial Coast benefited from the significant involvement of its local leadership throughout the border formation process, in which the institution of borders in this region remained a stable, balancing element despite its many changes. Moreover, the nature of this process generated an internal evolution of unique political notions of territoriality and boundaries based on mixed local and foreign ideas. In retrospect, the outcomes of this process may be reflected in the stability of the modern state and of the broader Gulf region that experienced similar developments.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

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[91] Maritime (re-positioning) border agreement between the Emirates of Abu Dhabi and Dubai, signed by Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al Nahyan and Rahid bin Sai'd al Maktoum, 2 April 1968, FCO 8/847.

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[95] A map showing the modern federal and state borders of the United Arab Emirated. Edited by the author.

[96] Paasi, Boundaries as social processes, 75.

[97] J. Agnew, The territorial trap: the geographical assumptions of international relations theory, *Review of International Political Economy* 1.1 (1994) 53–80, 54.