Editorial Introduction: Bedouin and Boundaries in the Middle East

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Boundaries have been a major theme in geography since its establishment as an academic discipline in the mid-19th Century (James, 1972; Newman and Paasi, 1998). The reason may be that "boundaries" are an all-encompassing natural phenomenon. Animals use unique methods to create bounded territories that help ensure their physical survival. Inanimate entities, such as bodies of water and landscapes, are delimited by boundaries created by forces of nature such as watersheds that separate drainage basins or major tectonic and volcanic events creating abrupt topographical breaks. Among humans, boundaries exist on various social and spatial scales, from the private individual to the group or community, and further to a whole public. They extend from local places to a whole region, up to and including a country and continent. Thus, "boundary" is a broad, complex concept.

The concept of human boundaries is commonly used to reflect formal or informal regulative authority in social relations. Formally, it involves delineating a territorial line around states or sub-state units, such as regulative spatial units (districts, municipalities, and various other administrative units). In the case of a state, a formal boundary is known as a "border," and its physical manifestation as a "borderline." These words are mostly used for delineating national entities ("peoples") even though a people may be dispersed among several nation-states or the physicality of the borderline itself may be blurred (Newman and Paasi, 1998). The formal manifestation of a boundary carries many legal connotations related to state law or to local by-laws and regulations in administering the relations between individuals and government.

However, within formal boundaries at state or sub-state levels, people (individuals and groups) belonging to various social entities and identities also choose to voluntarily establish and maintain boundaries in informal ways. People delineate imagined boundaries to create a territory that physically and emotionally meets

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their needs and aspirations to be distinguished, separated and defended from others. Various social attributes serve as imagined dividing lines for such bounding. Beyond nationality, which is a most notable attribute at the state level, informal bounding at sub-state levels may relate to social attributes such as religion, social class, race, ethnic origin, gender and age. Each of these attributes contains its own internally agreed upon informal "rules" and "codes" of territorial organization that require an imagined informal boundary so that the group it represents may conduct life according to its unique aspirations. Thus, boundary-making and territoriality have long been known to be closely related (Sack, 1984; Casimir and Rao, 1992). This complexity suggests that boundary-making may be related to conflict, and that it may simultaneously be both the source of conflict and its product. In other situations, people may resort to boundary-making precisely in order to avoid conflict.

Tribal societies are a prominent sub-type of a social group within a nation-state that practices informal rules and codes for territorial organization. The Middle East, particularly the Arab Peninsula, is notable for its Bedouin and other tribal communities (Marx, 2005; Gardner, 2018). Many of its states emerged out of tribal societies, and in some the presence of Bedouin tribes and tribal loyalty is quite considerable. The unique socio-political organization of Bedouin tribes also entails the creation of imagined and real tribal boundaries in order to control various types of material resources needed for subsistence and also to protect tribal identity. Drawing these boundaries is based upon inter-tribal agreements that are the consequence of conflict and tribal wars or are agreed upon to precisely avoid such conflicts. Their reliance on varied subsistence resources, some of which require seasonal mobility of livestock within particular ecological zones, gave birth to the image of Bedouin tribes as practicing chaotic nomadic life. In reality, however, there is a structural spatial order in this seeming chaos, which is manifested in an area called *dira* or *dar* that defines the territorial boundary of the tribe and with which tribal members identify (Fabietti and Salzman, 1996).

There is an inherent contradiction between tribality and the state (Kressel, 1993) because the tribe often considers itself the sovereign of its territory, with tribal law and various other tribal institutions being the dominant source of legitimacy and government for individual tribal members, overruling state law (Bailey, 2009). This contradiction can therefore apply to tribal territorial boundaries which quite often conflict with state borders that bisect them or otherwise interfere with their legacy (Meir and Tsoar, 1996). The encounter with modernity and Western culture, and with the modern state apparatus, has obviously blurred the distinction between Bedouin tribes and the state, in some cases even causing a considerable weakening of tribal power and its local dominance in the face of the state. However, there are also cases and circumstances where the power of the tribe is maintained but manifest in different and concealed forms. Consequently, tribal boundaries have lost much of their traditional significance, but they may be retained informally to serve many interests and needs of the tribe in facing the state or other rival tribes.

The issue of patriarchy and the related issue of gender roles and status of women are of particular significance for Bedouin tribes and tribal boundaries (Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2007). The boundary is not necessarily a totally sealed entity as far as tribal men are concerned. However, free spatial movement of tribal women outside their *dira* and even within it is considerably constrained as they are constantly monitored and controlled by men's gaze. Tribal boundary has thus a differential gendered meaning for tribal members, affecting crossing boundaries, encountering outsiders and exposure to different tribal sub-cultures or other non-Bedouin sub-cultures within state territory.

This special issue of *Geography Research Forum* explores several questions regarding the complexity and multi-layered nature of Bedouin tribal boundaries in the Middle East and vicinity. It deals with conflict between Bedouin spatial and socio-political practices vs. those of the state, such as the impact of state boundary changes or domestic state regulations regarding land use and resource exploitation on tribal life. It also engages with the interaction between Bedouin land tenure practices at the metropolitan frontier as a type of boundary between indigeneity and capitalistic worlds. Another major concern of this special issue is crossing social tribal boundaries and inter-ethnic cultural boundaries by women.

The first article, by Muhammad Suwaed, is a general account of the issue of tribalism in general and particularly in the Middle East and North Africa, its relationships to boundaries, and its status in the face of contemporary geo-political events and processes in this region. It covers a broad scope of issues including the various academic fields engaged with tribalism, various definitions of "tribe," tribal structure, the social and political rootedness of tribal identity, the components determining tribal boundaries, the relevance of colonial history in understanding tribe-state relationships, and the contemporary nature of such relationships. The main argument of this article is that while the power of tribalism generally diminished after the establishment of many states in MENA and the evolution of a new political order during the 20th Century, the Arab Spring of 2011 was a game changer in these relationships. Long suppressed cultural and political trends have been regaining dominance because the Bedouin perceive the tribe as a source of stability especially when political interests of the state clash with those of the tribe, particularly in multi-ethnic, multi-religious states. These processes may have an impact on the sense of tribal integration with the state and hence on various issues that are related to physical and imagined tribal boundaries.

In contrast with this view of revived tribalism, the second paper by Moran Zaga, studying the United Arab Emirates, is a vivid example of a case where Bedouin tribal territorial boundaries within a modern state have very recently lost dominance. In particular, Zaga engages with the phenomenon of tribal enclaves and exclaves in the complex political map of the UAE. She shows how the emerging borders between the various emirates, including their enclaves and exclaves, strongly reflect the old tribal network and the traditional social boundaries. In contrast with other countries

worldwide, where old political enclaves were reshaped by territorial reorganization according to the idea of a modern state, these territorial boundaries have been maintained after the unification of sheikhdoms in 1971 into the new state of UAE. However, various processes are now contributing to blurring of these boundaries. Exclaves and enclaves expand toward one another, and tribal members have been adopting increasingly the federal UAE identity with the attrition of tribal identity. Thus, the current geographical segregation of these territories has been reduced and their representation of distinctive social groups that are linked to a particular tribal coalition has diminished.

International borders and border reshaping have considerable capacity to affect informal tribal boundaries, and hence the tribes' social and spatial practices, most often worsening tribal wellbeing. The impact of a border on pastoralist tribes is the theme of the third article, authored by Elad Zohar and Moran Zaga, about the border between South Sudan and Sudan that was demarcated in 2011 in an attempt to bring the civil war to an end. This region, located in a climatic buffer zone bordering the Middle East, is of particular interest due to its sensitivity to global warming effects and to the immediate danger of desertifying fertile lands, as well as a shortage of grazing ranges and water wells. Grazing and trading have been the major source of subsistence for the pastoralists, who were therefore forced to adapt their spatial practices to the new border. The Sudan-South Sudan border is still transparent, and many traditional activities remain unchanged. However, seasonal migration of pastoralists and their livestock became significantly more difficult due to increasing border regulations which have, in turn, led to growing illegal trade. Given the experience with other cases in the Middle East of a newly demarcated international border bisecting tribal grazing territories, the events in the Sudan-South Sudan border may cause increasing ecological and livelihood stress among the pastoralists and their herds.

Internal boundaries within states, along with various types of regulations concerning tribal pastoralists, are also capable of affecting tribal territories and hence tribal wellbeing. This is the concern of the fourth article, by Tomer Mazarib, which deals with the historical impact of borders on the settlement of Bedouin tribes in northern Palestine under the British Mandate during 1918-1948. The author explores the implementation processes of ordinances and laws by the British Mandatory colonial government which, along with land acquisitions by Jewish Zionist organizations, caused Bedouin to be pushed-off of grazing and farming lands, and form new settlements in permanent localities or neighborhoods in non-Bedouin villages. The ordinances included indirect issues such as protection of forests, or more direct measures such as a Bedouin Control Ordinance. These measures seriously hampered Bedouin pastoral mobility and forced the gradual disappearance of old established tribal territories, and therefore the significance of their boundaries.

Settlement of Bedouin tribes has often brought them nearer to urban centers, thereby exposing them to various urban and metropolitan influences. In fact, they

become part of the metropolitan frontier, and particularly the expansion of this frontier as a type of an economic boundary. This is the subject of the fifth article, by Tomer Dekel and Avinoam Meir, which attempts to theorize the restructuring of pre-capitalist land tenure, and particularly Bedouin land, at the metropolitan-rural frontier around Be'er Sheva metropolis in Israel. Its main argument is that the "metropolitan frontier" pushes outwards in response to market forces and subsumes rural spaces that are neither fully integrated into the formal, modern market system nor are strictly separated from it. It presents a novel perspective on the issue of Bedouin land tenure that departs from previous approaches of framing this issue within cultural or political struggles between the Bedouin and the State of Israel. Rather, it suggests an economic perspective according to which, in times and places where their land was valueless to the general market, the question of Bedouin land tenure was of negligible importance, so it was *de-facto* given to them for practical use. However, if this changes and the land's potential market value increases, the question of Bedouin tenure reemerges and rival actors give contrasting answers, and then compete for the formal allocation of the valuable land resource. Exposed thereby to the forces of the land market, the significance of traditional tribal boundaries to Bedouin life may diminish.

These processes potentially lead to increased pressures on tribal land from the state and an opposing struggle to retain the land in response. A unique and unexplored angle in this tension is the role of Bedouin women in this struggle which previously followed the patriarchal tradition as men-only activism. This is the concern of the sixth article by Safa Abu-Rabia and Avinoam Meir. The nature of boundary at stake here is neither tribal territorial boundary nor its interface with the metropolitan frontier, as in previous articles. Rather, it engages with intra-community and intra-tribal socio-political boundaries related to the question of which gender has internal social legitimacy in the struggle for the land. The article shows that women perceive the possibility that they might attain enhanced mobility across social boundaries as a result of their participation in the struggle for land. In fact, Bedouin women do cross the rigid social boundaries not only of gender but also those related to other internal differences and rivalries between tribes of different origins such as class (landed vs. landless tribes) and race (original Bedouin tribes vs. those of Black-African origin) boundaries. These women created an imagined, novel utopian social class and spatial entity: a supra-tribal, supra-place and supra-regional "clan" with unique gender leadership. This process, involving adoption of an intersectional identity, began breaching traditional boundaries of social hierarchy between innate and entrenched separate identities which hitherto shaped Bedouin women's minds and behavior.

Further to the territorial, economic, and social boundaries among tribal Bedouin, there is also the cultural boundary between a tribal community and the community at large, and particularly its crossing. While such crossing is not an issue for tribal men, it is a serious one for tribal women. Becoming gradually integrated into the

metropolitan economic system, and the gradual blurring of other internal and external tribal boundaries, may expose cultural boundaries to the test of integration. This is the concern of the seventh and last article by Batya Roded and Avinoam Meir. It analyses Israeli Bedouin women's experiences when crossing the cultural boundary with the Jewish community to enhance inter-communal familiarity among regional neighbors. Conducted within a civil society project, known as Good Women Neighbors, the crossing occurs under conditions of hegemonic and oppressive practices of non-recognition of full citizenship rights by the state and an atmosphere of geo-political reality that is bitterly and at times violently contested. In engaging within the process of inter-communal familiarity, Bedouin women have several boundaries to cross: the internal social boundary of gender difference in freedom of mobility, the physical-spatial boundary to reach the neighboring Jewish locality, the cultural Arab-Muslim and Jewish boundary, and finally the boundary between the rival, conflictual Palestinian and Israeli political identities. The synergy inherent in multiple boundary crossing by these women contributes considerably to their sense of groundbreaking and internal empowerment within their home Bedouin community.

In retrospect, two types of Bedouin tribal boundaries are presented in this special issue. The first is the territorial type which refers particularly to tribal interests in defending its material subsistence resources through various methods of physical delineation on the ground. While this focus on Bedouin boundaries was quite common during the 1980s and 1990s, articles in this special issue attest to the contemporary importance of this issue still in the 2020s. The second type is those boundaries that reflect the opposite tendency to that of tribal self-seclusion – its integration within wider socio-political spaces. These include economic, social and cultural boundaries, of which some are internal to the tribal system. It seems that significance of these boundaries for tribal affairs is no less important than those of the first type, thereby calling for an increased research effort on this issue.

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