

# United Arab Emirates Enclaves: A Hybrid System of Tribal-Modern Boundaries

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*Political enclaves and exclaves are a rare phenomenon in the Arab World. Yet, there are ten enclaves and exclaves only in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). These geopolitical features are a result of tribal affiliations that exceeded territorial contiguity, and they manifest the amalgamation of traditional settings and modern political order. This paper examines the historical conditions that created the enclave phenomenon in the discussed region and maintained them in the modern UAE. This analysis includes a theoretical discussion of territorial and border concepts in Bedouin societies, in addition to a historical examination of border-making processes in this region. The paper also analyses three selected subnational-level exclaves through empirical surveys of geographical and socio-economic factors and discusses their significance to their affiliated emirates. The study asserts that distinguished sociopolitical spaces were a common feature in the traditional tribal sphere. The border negotiation methods in this region were the main factor that enabled their preservation. It also argues that even though territorial enclaves are open to free movement, they manifest spatial segregation within small-scale spaces.*

**Keywords:** United Arab Emirates; tribes; enclaves; subnational-level exclaves; borders

## INTRODUCTION

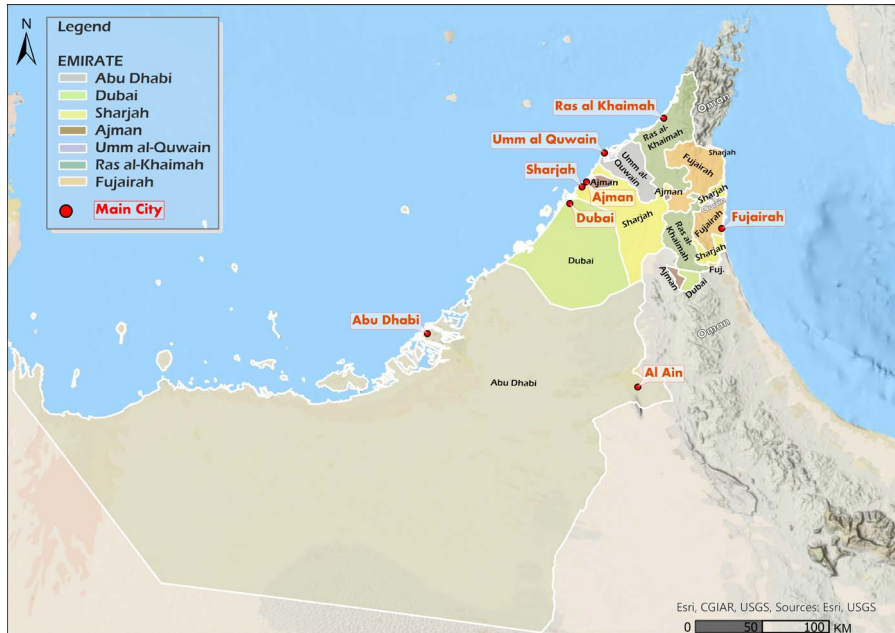
There are ten enclave-type territories in the fragmented political map of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Eight of them are *subnational-level mere exclaves* under the jurisdiction of different emirates within the federal state.<sup>1</sup> Out of the seven emirates that comprise the UAE, five are composed of disconnected territories. The most remarkable manifestation of that geographical setting is the emirate of Sharjah, whose jurisdictions are scattered to five detached territories (Figure 1). The UAE is the only country in the Arab world formed as a federation and the only one that contains official

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enclaves and exclaves. Enclaves are non-contiguous territories surrounded entirely by another state. In our case, the territorial patchwork of the UAE is mainly comprised of *mere exclaves*, meaning that more than one political entity (emirate) surrounds them (Vinokurov, 2007). Since they separate one emirate from another, rather than one country from another, they are categorized as *subnational-level exclaves*.

**Figure 1:** Political map of the modern UAE



Source: Adapted based on Esri, USGS

Non-contiguous territories are a rare phenomenon in the Middle East due to the colonial nature of border-making processes in the region. The delimitation of the majority of modern Arab countries corresponded to Western concepts and practices that included, inter-alia, the idea of contiguous territory. The fragmented nature of the UAE is testimony to traditional attributes of the political entities in the region known as the Trucial States or Sheikdoms, absorbed into the modern state structure. This paper examines the historical roots of the enclave phenomenon in the UAE from its emergence to its integration into the modern state structure. This analysis includes a theoretical discussion of territoriality and border concepts in Bedouin societies and a contemporary empirical study of three selected subnational-level exclaves: Hatta (Dubai), Masfut (Ajman), and Kalba (Sharjah). These case studies can provide a valuable perspective of the UAE's geographical peripheries and of different methods of managing exclaves. Moreover, 50 years since their formalization, we can now assess the importance of these exclaves to their mother-emirates and the significance of tribal spaces under the modern state structure.

## TERRITORIALITY IN TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

All ten enclave-type territories in the UAE spread along the Hajar Mountains in the eastern part of the country (Figure 2). The main geographic feature essential to the inhabitants was the mountain's wadis (riverbeds) which afforded rare conditions in the mostly arid area for cultivating land crops and accessing pastoral resources. Consequently, many regional powers sought domination over the mountains, some of which eventually became modern sovereigns under the national and federal state structure.

**Figure 2:** The Hajar Mountains, a view from the sea



Source: Adapted based on Landsat image

### *The Tribal dar*

The tribal *dar* or *dira* represents a vaguely defined area where a certain tribe or a tribal coalition live, wander, dwell, and control. The concept of the *dar* is inherently different from modern territorial sovereignty since it does not have to be fixed, static, contiguous, or exclusive (Kelly & Dodds-Parker, 1964; Wilkinson, 1983). These features result from the terrestrial environment in Bedouin societies, which usually comprises arid desert land, lack of resources, and lack of clear physical boundaries. Another attribute that shaped the *dar* was the priority of blood affiliation and social ties over territorial affiliation (Kristof, 1959). In such systems, any change in tribal loyalties leads to a redefinition of the territorial jurisdiction of the ruling sheikh. Moreover, those loyalties are not necessarily confined to a homogenous region, and may be scattered over a vast area where several other loyalty networks exist (Wilkinson, 1983). The tribal communities of the Hajar were usually segments of

larger tribal coalitions (*sheikhdoms*). Each *sheikhdom* and each *dar* encompassed various degrees of nomadism and, thus, several ideas of territoriality. The various *dars* were located in close proximity to one another and frequently overlapped, creating a multi-loyalties space. This structure requires a deeper understanding of territory and territoriality in mixed spaces.

Jean Gottman (1975) defines territory as the organization of space according to people's goals, whereas the concept of territoriality adds a political dimension to the spatio-social definition. Sack describes territoriality as an attempt "to affect, influence or control people" in a geographic area (Sack, 1986). According to this approach, Meir differentiates between Bedouins and agricultural societies, asserting that nomad Bedouins are not classified as territorial communities since they have "no formal ownership of land" (Meir, 1996). The territorial labeling of agro-pastoral tribal communities stems from their sedentary mechanisms that lead to greater control over possessions and peoples. Land ownership of the latter group increases the need for geographic borders and defense alliances, which compose the basis for spatial definitions (Meir, 1996).

The Hajar Mountains attracted three types of settled communities: tribal fragments whose traditionally main occupation was agriculture; originally nomadic clans who sought refuge from inland tribal conflicts; and originally nomadic clans that could not sustain their Bedouin habits due to growing competition over oases resources. As a result of their historical nomadic practices and being part of larger coalitions, the territorial perceptions of the Hajar communities converged with others. Wilkinson (1983), who conducted a field study on the societies of eastern Arabia, described a less clear distinction between territorial and non-territorial communities. He argued that nomadic or semi-nomadic communities that worked in the pearl fishing industry, for example, had similar territorial concepts to those of the settled communities since this occupation required ownership over resources, even on a seasonal level (Wilkinson, 1983). Thus, tribal sovereignty in eastern Arabia had various degrees of capacity, from nodal to centrifugal control. Likewise, territorial ownership had various levels, from non-exclusive to fully exclusive. The *dar* was multi-layered accordingly.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, John Gordon Lorimer, a British diplomat and historian, authored a gazetteer of settlements and tribes in eastern and central Arabia that shed light on the scattered nature of the political entities at that time (Lorimer, 1908a, 1908b). The gazetteer is one of the few pieces of evidence historians possess to depict the region's political map in this period and earlier. Lorimer includes a historical description of events such as migrations and conquests that shaped the spatial organization in the region, and from which we can trace the historical roots of enclaves and exclaves in modern UAE. For example, when Lorimer described the territories of Umm al Quwain, he mentioned that they form "an enclave in Sharjah territory" (Lorimer, 1908b). Later documentation, mainly records of border disputes and border negotiations since the 1930s, further demonstrated a relatively small and multi-layered space of diverse territorial perceptions and multiple loyalty

networks. The local sheikh's territorial demands, at least in the first stages of the negotiations, revealed multiple, sometimes overlapping, netlike spatial patterns (Zaga, 2021b). This system comprises several nodal, linear, and polygonal shapes, such as settlements, oases, grazing areas, agricultural lands, forts, roads, seacoasts, and harbors. Within this network, no border can be delineated circumferentially (Walker, 1994). This spatial system allowed different Bedouin and settled societies to reside in shared areas, sometimes within the same settlement, such as in the case of Dibba and Al Ain, while each clan held its own quarter and possessions.

Since possessions and tribal affiliations transcended territorial aspirations, many clans and settlements found themselves isolated from the tribal core and the capital city of the sheikhdom and far from their ruling sheikh or suzerain (Kelly & Dodds-Parker, 1964). For instance, tribal coalitions such as the sheikhdom of Ajman reached Al Ain Oasis, Masfout, and even Sohar on the coast of Oman (Lorimer, 1908a, p. 635). The ruler of Ajman failed to gain a durable foothold in the Sohar and Al Ain, but his extended spread illustrates the historical spatial patterns and territorial notions. In a modern view, we would categorize a local clan surrounded by other tribes as a socio-political exclave, but this was not the perception under the spreading and scattered nature of tribal networks in the region.

## THE EMERGENCE OF THE TERRITORIAL-POLITICAL ENCLAVES

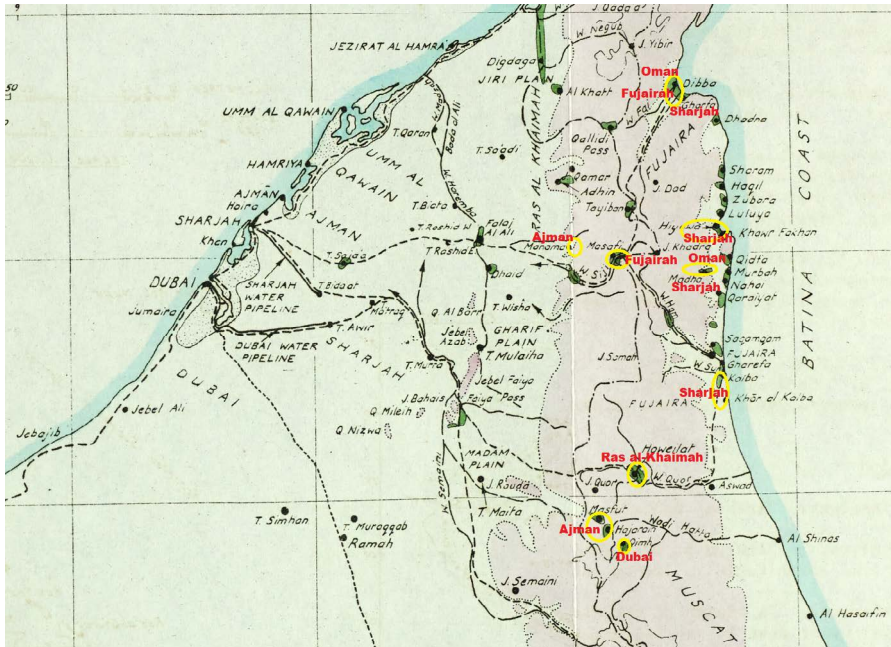
Four main conditions enabled the abundant appearance of enclaves and exclaves in the landscape: the climatic and topographic conditions of the Hajar Mountains and their natural resources, which led to a scattered spatial organization; the political instability and the high turnover of rulers in the Hajar Mountains throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that cut off jurisdiction contiguity; the region's relative isolation from a deep domination of empires, states, and other external forces, thus, maintaining the local organizations undisturbed; and the transitional phase from a tribal system to the foundation of a modern state that respected traditional divisions and kept them under the federal structure.

### *Topographic and Climatic Aspects*

All territorial enclaves and exclaves of the UAE are located in the surroundings of the Al Hajar Mountains. This area attracted many tribes, rulers, and regional powers throughout history due to its favorable climate and terrain, especially when compared to the inland. The 30-50 km wide mountain range comprises numerous valleys and peaks from 250 to 2,000 meters high in the UAE section (northern Hajar). The physical conditions of the mountainous terrain were an influential factor in the spatial arrangements of the tribes. Coastlines, wadis and hillsides afforded a great advantage in the rocky nature of the mountains compared to desert conditions. Also, due to their topographic nature, the mountains provided refuge for

disputed tribes and political groups (Heard-Bey, 1982). The inland wadi settlements were characterized by moderate weather, some precipitation, and erosion of fertile sediments that contributed to cultivating agriculture. Another advantage of the wadi settlements was the distribution of underground water. Figure 3 displays the natural water resources in the area and the main settlements. It is clear from this map that the settlement distribution largely, if not completely, stemmed from the allocation of water resources. The yellow circle signifies a water reservoir and a settlement, such as in Manamah (Ajman) and Masafi (Fujairah). The origin of the map is in a hydrological and groundwater survey of the British company “Sir William Halcrow & Partners” conducted in the Trucial States in 1965 (H.M. Political Agent Dubai, Sir William Halcrow & Partners, 1965). This adapted version also highlights the fragmented nature of the political jurisdictions according to the different water reservoirs. The eastern coastal settlements offered more livelihood options in commerce, fishery, boat building, etc. (Heard-Bey, 1982).

**Figure 3:** Intersects of water resources and political enclaves/exclaves in the UAE



Source: Adapted based on H.M. Political Agent Dubai, Sir William Halcrow & Partners, 1965

The Hajar Mountains are also geographically important since they constitute a land bridge between the Arabian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. They serve as a commercial passageway between India to the east and the Middle East and Europe to the west. Thus, the coastal and wadi settlements afforded strategic and economic

control on gateways and major routes. In conclusion, physical conditions were a central factor in the struggles for supremacy between the sheikhdoms.

### ***Political Instability in the Hajar Mountains***

The exclaves originated in agricultural communities that settled in the Hajar mountain wadis and frequently shifted allegiances and alliances. The attractiveness of the Hajar drew many powers that often changed the balance of power in the region. The six ruling families that govern the discussed region today represent political instability from the nineteenth century and earlier to 1971 with the establishment of the UAE. The characteristics of the tribal's territorial settings, together with physical geographical attributes, formed a chaotic political map and balance of power in the Hajar Mountains.

The main catalyst for the rise of multiple powers in this area was the decline of the Qawasim tribe during the nineteenth century, which today forms Ras al-Khaimah and Sharjah. Until the eighteenth century, the Sultan of Muscat controlled the inland settlement of the mountain range, while maritime forces such as the Hurmuz empire and the Portuguese intermittently controlled the coastal strip (Al-Qasimi, 1999). By the beginning of the nineteenth century, both inland and coastal settlements along the Hajar Mountains were subject to the growing Qawasim coalition, from the tip of Musandam to Wadi Hatta and the Buraimi oasis. This coalition included other tribes, clans, and families that sought protection and economic opportunities that the ruling family provided. The emergence of the Qawasim domination created the first known enclaves in the region, as some settlements and clans chose to cling to their historical bonds with the Sultan of Muscat. These enclaves multiplied when the British influence in the region intensified from the beginning of the nineteenth century. Even though the British domination in the region was very limited until the 1930s, compared to its control in India or Egypt, the British attacks on the Qawasim's naval forces weakened their maritime power (Abdullah, 1978; Zahlan, 1978). In addition, the agreements signed between Britain and the local sheikhs prevented the latter from collecting maritime taxes, which the British referred to as piracy (Al-Qasimi, 1986). With the Qawasim diminishing influence, local power surfaced and claimed control over various settlements.

The border negotiation records demonstrate how diversified the eastern area's political map was and how many tribal networks existed in the region simultaneously. The main forces and ruling families that gained a foothold in the region were: the Sultan of Muscat, Al Qasimi family of Ras al-Khaimah, Al Qasimi family of Sharjah, Nuaimi family of Ajman, Al Maktum family of Dubai, and Al Sharqi family of Fujairah.

### ***Regional Isolation***

The position of the Trucial Coast, today's UAE, in the Arabian Gulf was not highly attractive to empires and external forces throughout most of its history. Even



when external forces invaded the region, they were mainly concerned with its coastal and maritime spheres. The Ottoman Empire did reach further to western Qatar. The British Empire, which launched its official rule in the Gulf in 1820, was focused during the Nineteenth Century on maritime peace.

Rosemarie Said Zahlan titled Britain's policy in the Gulf "the maintenance of the *status quo*" (Zahlan, 1978). As Britain's main interest in the early nineteenth century was to secure its maritime routes to India, implementing a protectorate on the Arab side of the Gulf was an efficient way to achieve it. In contrast to a mandate or a colonial regime, the protectorate describes a rule of intervention and control in the external affairs of a political entity while leaving internal affairs to local leaders. Albert Hourani, John B. Kelly, Uzi Rabi and other scholars referred to this type of narrow influence "the man on the spot" (Hourani, 1969; Kelly, 1968; Rabi, 2006). With a small garrison and few diplomatic representatives, the British Empire did not aspire to shape the social and political status of the sheikhdoms. Owing to this rare self-governance of the sheikhdoms, they were able to maintain traditional structures and organizations until a very late stage, such as the multiple tribal networks and enclaves' phenomena.

### ***The Transitional Phase from Traditional to a Modern System***

Until the 1930s, the political map had shifted frequently, with almost no territorial agreements. As the border negotiations evolved, the notion of territorial sovereignty became more familiar to the local sheikhs. Within the abundant discourse of the Westphalian System in the Middle East, Gause (1992) and Zacher (2001) highlight the challenge of the emerging Arab countries to assert their primacy "over the people and territories within their borders" (Gause III, 1992, p. 443). Yet, in the region under discussion, a more gradual process of border delimitation generated a hybrid system of tribal-modern borders.

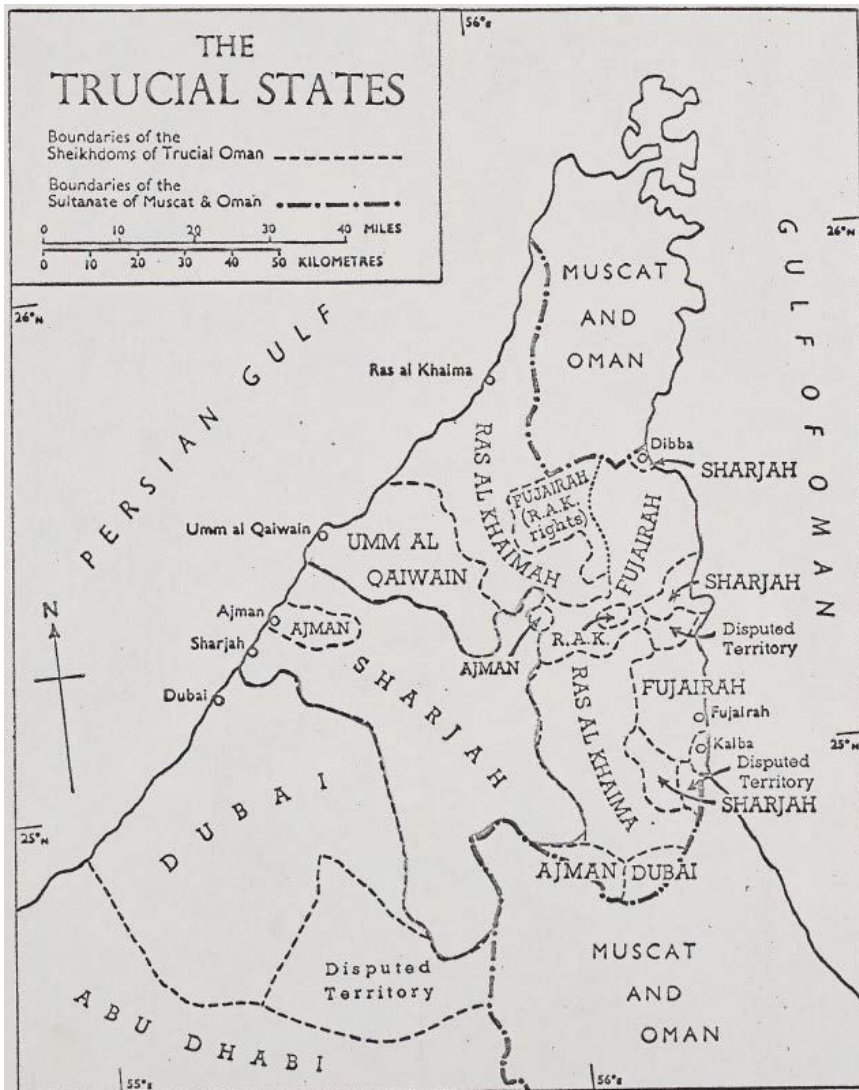
The British representatives in the border negotiations expressed a locally-oriented approach in an attempt to affiliate the people and territories to their rightfully-owned leaders. The records validate their genuine effort to match the scattered territories to each sheikhdom and delineate them accordingly. Thus, the emerging borders reflected the old tribal network to a large extent, and the political borders leaned on the traditional social boundaries in a high coincidence (Zaga, 2021b). Figure 4 portrays the proposed modern borders based on the traditional socio-political distribution. The sketched map demonstrates the fragmented nature of the political map in the region and the hybrid system that the British diplomats and local sheikhs agreed to.

However, from that point in time and space, it was the territory that defined the citizenship of the population and their link to a certain ruler. Any change in the social composition, such as internal migration and shifting political loyalty, would have to be absorbed within the existing fixed borders. From the demarcation stage to the establishment of the UAE in 1971, each sheikhdom had its own advanced proto-state or semi-state system (Onley & Khalaf, 2006). Therefore, the new-old scattered



territorial jurisdictions became official political enclaves and exclaves according to the classic definition of the terms. Perhaps, one of the most striking decisions in the unification process of the sheikhdoms was to maintain this territorial setting, while many other countries in the world broke old political enclaves to reshape the territorial organization according to the modern state idea.

**Figure 4:** A sketch map of proposed borders prepared by British diplomat Julian Walker



Source: Walker, 1962

### THREE TRIBAL-MODERN EXCLAVES IN THE UAE: HATTA, MASFUT AND KALBA

The hybrid character of the modern subnational exclaves is manifested not only by their territorial structure that is left unchanged but also through their governance and administrative management. Many traditional elements are still functioning in these territories today. For example, The mother-emirates still control and manage the exclaves directly; all exclaves are open for passage, and there is no fence or other physical barrier that separates them from their surrounding; and in most cases, there is not even a sign that marks them and mentions a transition between one jurisdiction and another. The exclave population does not necessarily affiliate anymore with the traditional tribal coalition that historically controlled this location. Nevertheless, their position still affects their everyday life in administration, taxation, infrastructures, and even in the socio-economic status of the various exclaves. The following case studies describe this hybrid system in detail through the formation process, the characteristics, and the modern manifestation of three exclaves: Hatta (Dubai), Masafi (Fujairah), and Masfut (Ajman). The selection of these three enclaves derives from their representation of diverse and similar features that can produce a compelling comparative analysis. They signify three different jurisdictions and historical accounts. In addition, they exemplify various spatial management and a range of socio-economic levels. Still, all three exclaves share a similar status of being a geographic periphery to their mother-emirate and the country; hence, it is worthwhile comparing them on that basis.

#### *Hatta (Emirate of Dubai)*

##### *Location*

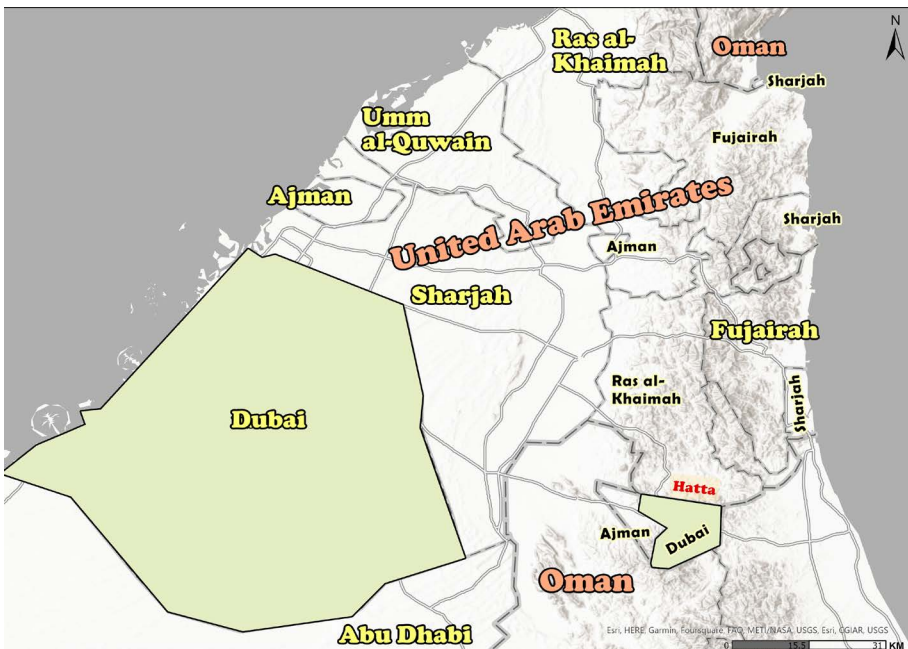
Hatta, previously known as Hajarain, is a landlocked exclave of the emirate of Dubai, located nearby Wadi Hatta, about 135km from the emirate's capital the city of Dubai. It is the southernmost territory of the UAE in the Hajar mountain ridge. Hatta borders two other exclaves: Masfut exclave of the emirate of Ajman and a detached territory of Ras al-Khaimah emirate. It also borders the State of Oman.

##### *History*

Hatta was home to the Hajarain clan, named after the Hajar mountains. Owing to surveys and documentation made by British diplomatic agents in the Trucial Coast, we can trace the changing power of balance in the region. Lorimer's survey of 1908-1915 is one of the first written pieces of evidence of the loyalty shift of the Hajarain from the Sultan of Muscat and Oman to the ruling sheikh (Hakem) of Dubai. In the mid-nineteenth century, the sheikhdом of Dubai, under the governorship of Hasher Bin Maktoum, gained control of the village, which was then called Hajarain (Heard-Bey, 1982). The capital of Dubai was rather new itself. In 1833, a rift between the Al Falaha and the Al Falasi families of the Bani Yas tribe

resulted in the migration of Al Falasi northeast and to the foundation of Dubai city and emirate (Peck, 1986). Since its establishment, Dubai was physically and politically constrained, locked between two great powers. To the southwest of Dubai was the sheikhdom Abu Dhabi that dominated the desert area from Liwa to Buraimi and the coastal strip. In the northeast, the Qawasim tribe and its dependencies dominated most of the territories including the sheikhdoms of Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah. Thus, in search of more extensive control, the rulers of Dubai reached beyond and far from their territorial core, joining in alliances with other tribes such as Naim and Bani Qitab. Eventually, Hatta was the only locality they gained a permanent foothold in beyond their territorial contiguity. Dubai's control over Hatta reflects a convergence of factors, among them the mentioned alliances and the decline of Omani domination in this region during the reign of Sultan Turki bin Said (Lorimer, 1908a).

**Figure 5: Hatta**



Source: Adapted based on Esri, USGS

During the border negotiations, the British diplomat Julian Walker collected the rulers' version of their territorial jurisdiction. The testimonies of Dubai's ruler sheikh Sa'id bin Maktum in 1953 and 1955 clearly mentioned that his territory included "Wadi Hatta near the Betnah" (Walker, 1955). In 1957, Walker sent a report to the political agent in Bahrain on the frontiers, stating that "the Sultan (of Muscat – m.z.) recognizes that the Dubai section of the Wadi Hatta, including Hajarain,

Qima and Hail as well as Suhailah, was conceded to Dubai by his predecessor in about 1870 in return for services rendered” (Walker, 1957). Hatta was linked to the coast of the Arabian Gulf not only politically but also economically. Every summer, men from Hatta and further south in Oman migrated to the Trucial Coast to work in the pearl fisheries (Walker, 2010). In the unification stage, Hatta was formally recognized as a territorial section under Dubai’s jurisdiction.

### *Geopolitical Importance*

The district of Hatta contains one city and some major strategic points, among them the international border with Oman, a water reservoir with a dam and a hydroelectric station, agricultural terrain, and the strategic height advantage of the mountains reaching 870m elevation. In 2018, Dubai recorded 13,295 people living in Hatta (Dubai Statistics Center, 2018). Owing to Dubai’s authority over Hatta, the emirate gained strategic control of the international border with Oman. Hatta is also important to Dubai’s economy and prestige as an attractive tourist destination. In 2021, more than 1.2 million tourists visited Hatta (Gulf News Report, 23.07.22). Therefore, even though Hatta is a distant peripheral exclave, it is not less important than inland municipalities in the contiguous territories to the capital. In 2021, the ruler of Dubai announced a development plan for Hatta that aims “to enhance economic and social growth... and raise the living standards and wellbeing of the people of the area” (News Report, 23.10.22).

One of the salient implications of the political-territorial patchwork in Hatta’s surroundings is the visual disparities between the different entities. While Hatta is famous for its modern urban planning, government-built villas, and extensive tourism, the neighboring villages display a more hilly and sporadic landscape (see Figures 7 and 8). Thus, no fences or welcoming signs are necessary to recognize a transition from one jurisdiction to another.

### *Masfut (Emirate of Ajman)*

#### *Location*

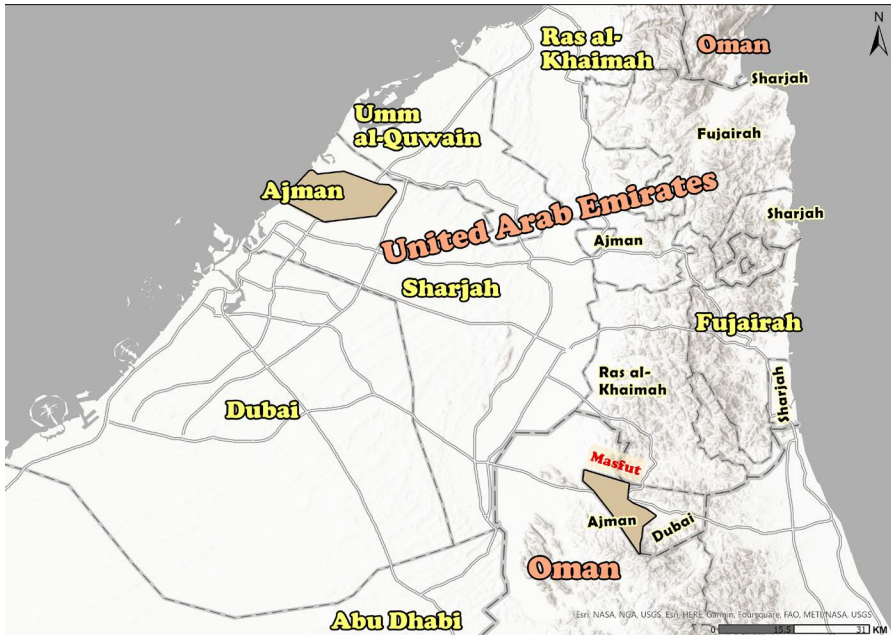
Masfut (also written Masfout) is a landlocked exclave of the emirate of Ajman, located alongside Wadi Hatta and far about 125km southeast from Ajman city. It borders Hatta exclave (Dubai), the detached southern area of Ras al-Khaimah emirate, and the State of Oman.

#### *History*

The emirate of Ajman is ruled by Al Bu Kharaihan branch that belongs to the Na’im tribe (Zahlan, 1978). The Na’im is a large and important tribe spread throughout the Arabian Peninsula, including Qatar and Bahrain (Lorimer, 1908a). The ruling family migrated to the capital city Ajman at the end of the eighteenth century from its stronghold at Buraimi/Al Ain. In the nineteenth century and until the 1930s, the population’s main sources of income were agriculture, pearl fishing, maritime commerce, fishing, and shipbuilding (Al-Shamlan, 1987). The limited opportunities

for employment and income caused the tribes to wander to distant places in search of fertile lands for cultivation. Thus, despite its relatively minor presence in the modern UAE, the Na'im tribe has a wide distribution of settlements in several scattered places, including Buraimi/Al Ain, Al Manamah, and Masfut (Kelly & Dodds-Parker, 1964).

**Figure 6: Masfut**



Source: Adapted based on Esri, USGS

In 1937, the territorial demands of Ajman's ruling sheikh Rashid bin Humaid did not include Masfut (Rashid bin Humaid, 1937). However, a gazetteer published in 1955 mentioned that Masfut is "Part of a group of villages in the centre of Wadi Hatta, consisting of the following sections: Shariya, Masfut, Naga, Mussayah, Lishan and Salmi, conquered by Rashid bin Humaid of Ajman from the Naim of Buraimi in about 1946" (Walker, 1955). Today, these places are all part of the city of Masfut. Walker's documentation also sheds light on the area's characteristics, mentioning that it "contains in all approximately 50 houses of Biduwat, most of these being in Masfut settlement where the Wali's fort is situated. Otherwise, there are houses in Mussayah, Salmi, Shariyah and Naga in that order of numbers. Masfut has 450 palms approximately." (Walker, 1955).

The power shift in 1946 is considered a rather late stage in the regional political order, as the tribal allegiance map already stabilized to a large degree and many political entities became a fact in the local and western view. According to one version, it was taken from another branch of the Na'im tribe that resided in Buraimi (today part of Al Ain). A different version argues that the area was given to the



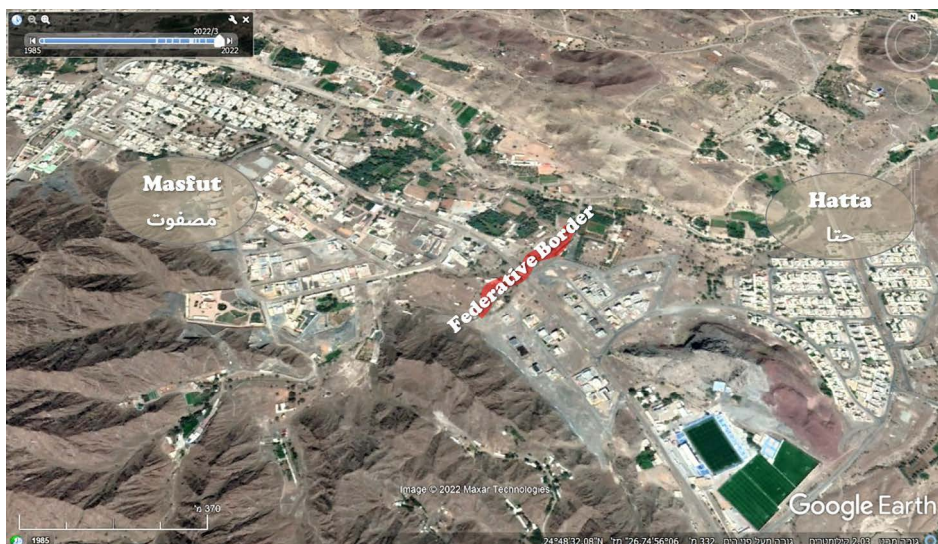
ruler of Ajman by the Sultan of Muscat and Oman. Walker's report of 1957 on the frontiers according to the Sultan of Muscat, stating that "he [the Sultan – m.z.] ... believed that the grandfather of the present ruler of Ajman received the Masfut section of the same Wadi from the Sultan of Muscat for the same reason [in return for services rendered – m.z.], and that the Naim sheikh of Buraimi never had a legal claim to this area" (Walker, 1957).

In May 1959, the Sultan of Muscat and Oman Said bin Taimur and the ruler of Ajman sheikh Rashid bin Humaid al Naimi signed a joint statement according to which they "have agreed over the frontiers as follows... The first line starts from the top of Jabal Umm an Nesur which divides the people of Hajarain and Masfut and the Bani Kaab, and goes west to a point to the south of the head of Wadi Ghalfa, this Wadi belonging to Masfut." (bin Taimur & bin Humaid, 1959). In the unification stage of the seven emirates, Masfut was recognized as a section that belonged to Ajman.

### *Geopolitical Importance*

The district of Masfut contains one main city and a smaller village named Mazeerah. The last census of 2017 recorded about 9,000 residents in the exclave (Ajman Statistics and Competitiveness Center, 2017). Same as Hatta, Masfut also provided the emirate of Ajman a direct control and access to the international border with Oman. The neighboring Omani district (Wilayat) of Mahdah used to serve as an important aisle area between the mountain settlements of the UAE and its desert oasis and coastal settlements. Mahdah checkpoint is not active in recent years for free passage. Crossing regulations between the countries is not stable and varies between different entry permits in different periods.

**Figure 7:** Same road, different landscapes: Masfut and Hatta in 2009



Source: Adapted from Google Earth

There are no signs at the entrance to Masfut exclave mentioning the transition to an Ajmani territory, but the city displays a distinctive landscape from its surrounding, with older houses and many farms compared to the neighboring Hatta. In other words, the different political affiliation of the exclaves also manifests in distinct economic conditions and urban environments in each section. Figure 7 exhibits a satellite view of Hatta (on the right) and Masfut. The image clearly shows a distinctive landscape between the two cities/exclaves in urban planning, infrastructure, and land use. An interesting development that occurred in recent years is the urban growth and spreading of both cities to the borderland between them. Figure 7 displays the urban distribution in 2009, where we can clearly see a sparse area between Hatta and Masfut, versus Figure 8 from 2022, showing new construction sites and denser distribution around the federative border.

In 2017, the government of Ajman announced a major development plan for its exclaves Masfut and Manama that includes modernized city planning and transportation infrastructures, to be completed in 2030. The 2030 Ajman vision highlights the strategic importance of deepening the link of the exclaves to their mother-emirate and increasing their population (Al-Mukhtar & Al-Khouli, 2017).

**Figure 8:** Same road, different landscapes: Masfut and Hatta in 2022



Source: Adapted from Google Earth

### ***Kalba' (Emirate of Sharjah)***

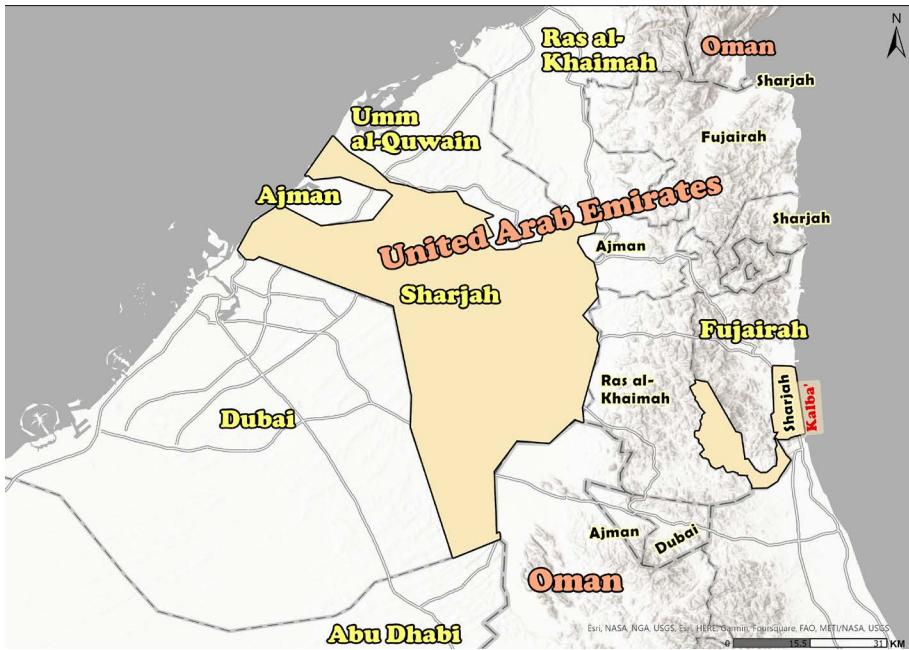
#### *Location*

Kalba' is a 200 km<sup>2</sup> exclave of the emirate of Sharjah, located on the Gulf of Oman coast, about 115km southeast of Sharjah city. The exclave comprises two territorial sections, as can be seen in Figure 9. Its main section includes the city



of Kalba, Al Ghail village and the coastal region between the city of Fujairah and the eastern border with Oman. The second section is less populated and includes a mountainous landscape and small villages such as Minazif, adjacent to Wadi Hilu and the southern border of the UAE with Oman.

**Figure 9: Kalba**



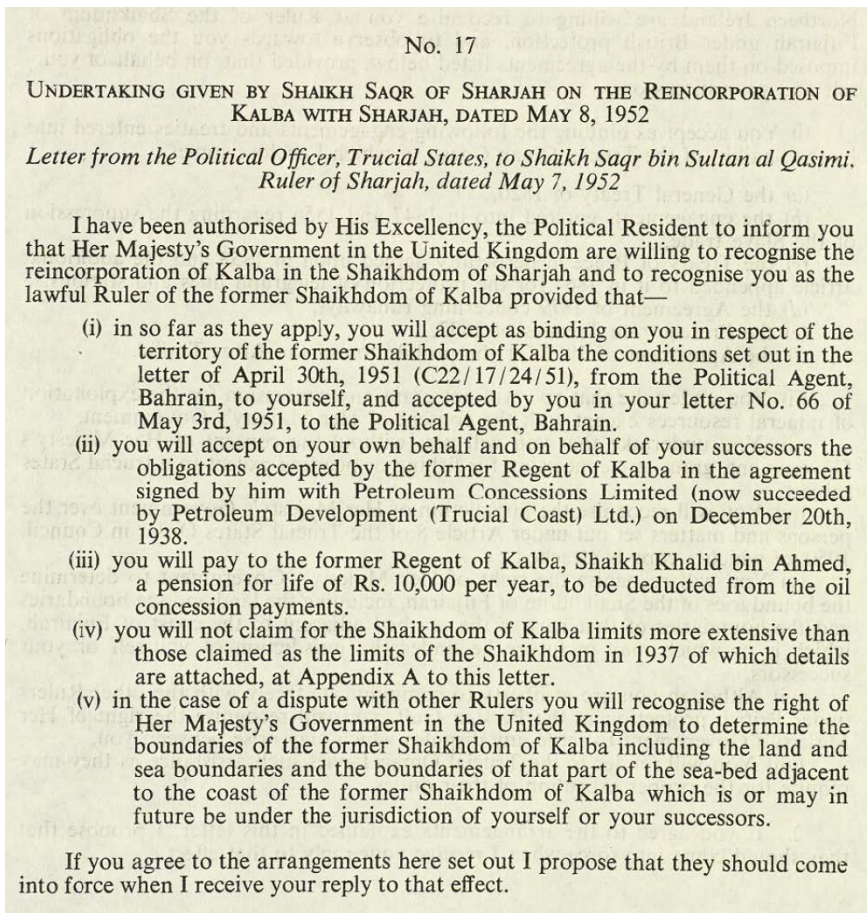
Source: Adapted based on Esri, USGS

### *History*

Kalba is one of four subnational-level exclaves affiliated with the emirate of Sharjah.<sup>2</sup> This unique geopolitical situation is perhaps the most striking manifestation of the changing balance of power in the region, mainly in the Hajar area. The rulers of Sharjah belong to the Qawasim clan that has dominated the region of Hormuz on both sides of the Gulf since the eighteenth century (Heard-Bey, 1982). Initially, the ruling family settled in Julfar, known today as Ras al-Khaimah. One of the main strengths of the Qawasim was its maritime power that served the rulers in trading and conquering coastal areas. Al-Qasimi family influence, on account of the Sultan of Muscat, spread along the northern coastline of the Arabian Gulf; the eastern coastline of the Gulf of Oman; and inland from the tip of Musandam to Wadi Hatta and the Buraimi oasis (Wilson, 1954). In contrast to the Sultan of Muscat, the Qasimi rulers did not enjoy absolute control, as some clans and settlements maintained their historical loyalty and allegiance to Muscat. This multiple loyalty system in a relatively dense space was the first well-documented appearance of tribal-political enclaves.

The shared space of tribal networks became even denser with the entrance of the British Empire and the following decline of the Qawasim domination mentioned earlier. Another event that stimulated further detachment of territories was the leadership split within the Al-Qasimi family. The political-family rift led to the formation of two separate sheikhdoms: Ras al-Khaimah and Sharjah. With time, Sharjah's political status grew stronger on account of Ras al-Khaimah, which served the former to extend its allegiance network in the Hajar and the coastal strip of the Gulf of Oman. Until 1866, sheikh Sultan bin Saqr Al-Qasimi of Ras al-Khaimah controlled Kalba undisputedly. His death led to a chain of exchange of power between Ras al-Khaimah regents, local leadership, and Sharjah rulers. In 1937, Kalba was recognized by the British government as an independent sheikhdom, and in 1952, Kalba was officially reincorporated with Sharjah (see Figure 10).

**Figure 10:** The British announcement on Kalba's reincorporation with the emirate of Sharjah, May 8, 1952



Source: Political Officer, 1952

Kalba district was home to the Naqbiyin, Sharqiyin, Kunud, Baluchis, and Za'ab tribes. Records from 1955 attest to a prosperous region of about 400 houses and 3,000 trees in the villages of Kalba and Khor Kalba (Walker, 1955).

#### *Geopolitical Importance*

In 2015 the exclave encompassed about 56,093 residents (City-Facts, 2015). Kalba is a classic periphery. It is among the most remote places from the UAE's national capital Abu Dhabi (about 270km by drive); it has a high illiteracy rate of 6.5%; and its economy is still based on agriculture and industry (Alfarra, 2010). Compared to the more advanced economies and the developed tourism infrastructure of its coastal neighbors, Kalba is considered a developing locality. Its position between different political entities created further challenges; among them is the dehydration of its wadis since the erection of the Fujairah dam (Alfarra, 2010). Despite this status, Kalba is important to its mother-emirate Sharjah due to its strategic position on the border with Oman. As a result of this exclaves system, the emirate of Sharjah controls most of the UAE's land borders. Same as in Hatta and Masfut, the ruler of Sharjah announced a development plan for Kalba. This plan includes building new roads and infrastructures, greening the area, and launching new tourism and education projects (Hussein, 31.08.21). In 2023, the first university is due to open in Kalba (News Report, 10.1.22). This process is similar to other peripheral cities of Sharjah, and its main goal is to improve their socio-economic status and contribution to the main emirate.

## DISCUSSION

The new political order in the Middle East replaced the priority of tribal affiliation with territorial affiliation. The state became the dominant organization in space, the old political entities lost their jurisdictions to the state, and the state's territorial borders dictated new social networks in the form of nationalism – Wataniyya (Gause III, 1992; Lustick, 1993; Podeh, 1998). The new system of alliances and state borders cut the tribal *dar* in most cases. About a century since the emergence of the modern territorial system in the region, many historic *dars* disappeared or were left irrelevant. This is not the case in the UAE, where the tribal *dar* is still dominant, despite and alongside the modern state system (Partrick, 2013).

The exclaves of eastern Arabia represent the continuity of many traditional features into the modern state. One manifestation is the affiliation of these territories to the same ruling families. Another manifestation is the internal territorial division of the UAE that corresponds with the old order, despite the detachment of the exclaves. Much of their survival lies in the federal system that facilitates the emirate's jurisdictions parallel to the country's sovereignty. A third manifestation is the peripheral nature of the exclaves that, as in the pre-modern era, are geographically distant from the political core and social processes.

At the same time, the significance and the functions of these exclaves have changed considerably. The people of Hatta, Masfut, and Kalba no longer represent distinctive social groups linked to a particular tribal coalition. They share the same Emirati identity and can internally migrate to a different part of the country under a different emirate. This new order may result in the attrition of the tribal identity. Moreover, the exclaves used to function as the *sheikhdom's* economic, military, and political arm that projects its regional power (Joffe, 1994; Zahlan, 1978), but today they are merely administrative municipalities and districts. Our case studies demonstrate how local projects and infrastructures depend on emirate-level prioritization. Some of them, mainly Masfut and Kalba, are still considered an economic burden on the emirate rather than a contribution. Another change in the significance of the exclaves is their peripherality. Although they stayed far from the political and social centers, the central federative leadership in Abu Dhabi emphasizes the geographic distance and peripheral indicators. The brief surveys in this study illustrate significant economic and social gaps with the state cores.

The transition and absorption of the exclaves from the traditional to the modern order can, therefore, be interpreted as a source of stability or, on the contrary, a basis for internal tensions. On the one hand, they allow some degree of self-determination to traditional socio-political groups and, thus, reduce social tensions that may arise from the unification of various tribal coalitions. Furthermore, they increase the distribution of power and reduce a centralized administration (Zaga, 2021a). On the other hand, the management of each exclave separately, on an emirate basis, leads to spatial inequality, which becomes more prominent considering the small size of the area. The territorial division is evident not only on the map but also on the ground and landscape, creating prominent distinctions between the different exclaves and sections in socio-economic status, urban characteristics, and strategic opportunities. Even though they are open to free movement, these exclaves challenge common national mechanisms. They, sometimes, foil the development of cross-emirate infrastructures and cut regional economic circulation, leading to spatial segregation of localities. They also afford the reasoning for managing border control on an emirate level rather than on the national level. Therefore, UAE exclaves have a great influence on their surrounding, from the everyday life of the citizens to the national politics and international relations of the country.

## CONCLUSION

The political map of the UAE reveals numerous national and subnational exclaves that form a hybrid structure of traditional and modern principles. The sedentary and semi-nomadic practices in eastern Arabia strengthened the territorial affiliation of the local communities to scattered localities. Their geographic distribution and the changing balance of power generated a patchwork of small political entities in a

relatively small space. This structure corresponds with Kristof's definition of tribal territory as a scattered cluster of possessions and ownerships (Kristof, 1959). The territorial perceptions and practices in the Hajar Mountains resemble other sedentary tribal spaces in the Middle East in many ways. Also, shared sociopolitical spaces were common in the traditional tribal sphere. However, the UAE was exceptional in assimilating these principles into the modern nation-state that usually prioritizes territorial contiguity.

Two main trends characterized these exclaves in recent years. One is the sweeping decision of Dubai, Ajman, and Sharjah rulers to pay more attention to them and invest more resources. The second trend is population growth and economic development, leading to urban expansion. In many cases, the exclave settlement expands toward one another and blurs the borderland between them. This process may reduce the current geographical segregation of these territories. It is recommended that further research will focus on the territorial perceptions of the enclaves' residents.

## NOTES

- 1 The enclave-types definitions are based on Vinokurov's "A Theory of Enclaves" (Vinokurov, 2007). The eight subnational-level mere exclaves are: Manamah, Dibba al Hisn, Khor Fakkan, Kalba, Fujairah south (Wahlah), Hatta, Masfut, Ras al-Khaima south (Huwaylat). The two national-level exclaves are: Madha (Oman within the UAE) and the second-order exclave Nahwa (Sharjah, UAE within Oman). Some may consider the Musandam region as an eleventh enclave, under the sovereignty of Oman, enclosed by the UAE and the sea. Vinokurov refers to this type as semi-enclave or coastal-enclave.
- 2 The other three exclaves are: Dibba al-Hisn, Khor Fakkan and Nahwa-Shees.

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