

Humanities & Arts Requirement

Humanities and Arts Project Title Page

Entering and Redefining the Man's Domain:

Cafe Culture and the Intricacies of Navigating Public Space as a Woman in Morocco

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Abstract

In this paper I examine, observe, and draw conclusions from the way women from all over Morocco move through public spaces with a focus on the stigmas and culture surrounding cafes. I argue that class and affluence are able to erase certain boundaries that are due to the many factors affecting women's access to acceptable public spaces. These two factors allow women to essentially buy their way out and give yourself some freedom in movement and presentation while in public.

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Introduction

The way a Moroccan woman can move and present herself in a public space is differently complex compared to her American counterpart. Women are not barred from taking up space in public but are affected by different institutional gender structures and heavy Islamic influence. “Allowable” public movement and presentation for Moroccan women are results of affluent and religious dependent dynamics between men and women, and I am arguing that class and affluence are able to erase these boundaries which are reinforced by age and region. Along with this, these two aspects of life allow you to be able to buy your way out of the thoughts and repercussions of your family and community. I want to observe how women from different regions, age groups, and social classes interact amongst themselves and with those around them in a culture that supports the ideology that public spaces are “strictly the man’s domain”.¹ I will define what public and private spaces mean in a Moroccan context in order to support my observations and to speculate on why things are the way they are. In addition to this, I will provide observational, contextualized evidence as to why public settings are seen as an “all boys club” and how this is starting to change. I cannot claim to write a Moroccan woman’s experience as I am not one, but I can observe interactions and engage in conversations to gain a better understanding of what it is like. Rachel Newcomb had a similar outlook for her research in *Women of Fes* where she had said that it is her attempt “to mark out and analyze the subtle area between what [she] witnessed and what people told [her]”² because it is the only claim she could validly make.

¹ “Culture and Etiquette in Morocco,” Rough Guides, <https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/africa/morocco/culture-etiquette/>. This is not the only source I have to support this specific claim and will continue to justify this statement throughout my work.

² Rachel Newcomb, “Introduction: Women of Fes and the Territories of Ideology,” *Women of Fes: Ambiguities of Urban Life in Morocco* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 7.

Religion and male entitlement are some of the driving factors which deter women from the streets and towards their homes. This also includes many different interpretations of what space is and who can use it. Because of this, the way spaces are defined in a Moroccan context are **is** not as simple as defining private as the home and public as not. It is the types of interactions that can occur in a space which implies the definition³ and is supported by Islamic notions.⁴ For example, a “public” space can be considered a private sphere of influence for women until an unknown male enters the room. Inversely, a “private” space, such as one’s home, can become a public space when guests are invited specifically by the male head of house. When one is sharing space and has the ability to interact with someone of the opposite sex the space becomes restricted for both parties. For women, other women and family members are *mahrem*,⁵ so the restriction is not applicable during situations with them. It is this *na-mahrem*⁶ aspect of this notion that necessitates a veil to be worn when in the presence of an unrelated male, thus becoming intertwined with the way women chose to move and take up space in public. As of now, the public is still “the man’s space” but the dynamics are changing in certain cities and it is clear to see that some women want to reclaim their position in society.

Literature Review

Rachel Newcomb’s *Women of Fes* is an ethnography of women and public space in a way that maps the traditions and customs affecting women in Morocco.⁷ Newcomb describes the

³ Shampa Mazumdar and Sanjoy Mazumdar, “Rethinking Public and Private Space: Religion And Women In Muslim Society,” *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 18, no. 4 (2001).

⁴ This notion is based off of interactions with the opposite sex. I am making sure the way that spaces can be fluid in a Moroccan context is understood before describing the notion in much greater detail.

⁵ Those who women are forbidden to marry.

⁶ Those who women are not forbidden to marry.

⁷ Rachel Newcomb, “Introduction,” *Women of Fes: Ambiguities of Urban Life in Morocco*, 1-27.

way women assert themselves, reclaim their identity, and determine agency in a form of research very similar to my own. She comments on what she sees and what she is told and draws conclusions from it to see where the truth really lies. Newcomb also talks heavily about gendered public spaces and the intricacies they hold for Moroccan women.⁸ A mix of colonialism, post-colonialism, globalization, urbanization, and Islamic influence have created a very interesting public space dynamic in Morocco. This is especially true for women as it can be a struggle to take up space in public and own it.

In order to begin to contextualize why women tend not to take up space you need to understand the Islamic notion that reinforces this. According to Shampa Mazumdar and Sanjoy Mazumdar, the idea that “the street is strictly the man’s domain”⁹ is derived from the Islamic notion of *mahram* and *na-mahram*, who is forbidden to marry and who is not.¹⁰ These terms came from research performed in India and Iran so they translate slightly differently, but the implications are still ingrained into the way Moroccan society functions. It is the interaction with *na-mahram*, those of the opposite sex who are suitable for marriage, that makes spaces in Morocco so relatively different than the US. This is especially true for those who are less affluent or from more conservative parts of Morocco. In addition to the “simple” definition of space that is dependent on the *na-mahrem*, there is also shame, *lhagra* and *l’ār*, that can be associated with a woman being in public.¹¹ *Lhagra* was traditionally for men and public spaces

⁸ Rachel Newcomb, “Chapter 6: Occupying the Public: New Forms of Gendered Urban Space,” *Women of Fes: Ambiguities of Urban Life in Morocco*, 127-151.

⁹ “Culture and Etiquette in Morocco,” Rough Guides, <https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/africa/morocco/culture-etiquette/>.

¹⁰ Shampa Mazumdar and Sanjoy Mazumdar, “Rethinking Public and Private Space”: 304.

¹¹ Rebecca Moody, “Reshaping Shared Space: Gender Norms, Quotidian Islam and Grand Taxis in Morocco,” (Presentation, Religion, Affect, and Emotional Unit, American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, San Diego, November 23-26, 2019).

and *l'ār* for women and private spaces. Naturally though, they are not this neat anymore because of the way women have reinforced their position in society and in public in recent years.

Moroccan author Tahar Ben Jelloun said in an interview once that “the power of the world in Morocco belonged to the men and the authorities. No one asked the point of view of poor people or women,”¹² and this really reflects on Leila Ahmed’s argument in her chapter “Women and the Rise of Islam” in *Women and Gender in Islam*. There was a lot of change in the practice of Islam after Muhammad’s death, especially for women. According to Ahmed, “some women [even] felt Islam to be a somewhat depressing religion.”¹³ Umar, the second Caliph after the Prophet, was the one who enacted a majority of this change. He introduced and enforced punishment by stoning, sought to confine women to their homes, and attempted to prevent women from attending prayers at the mosque.¹⁴ He even was ill-tempered and physically abusive towards his own wives and directed this harshness towards all women regardless of the space he was in. The consequences of Umar’s actions still play out today and can be seen in the way women are perceived by men and the restrictions that they face while navigating public space.

Islam is not the only factor in defining the function and flowability of a space. One has to also consider class, age, and wealth, just to name a few. Rachel Newcomb’s article “Gendering the City, Gendering the Nation: Contesting Urban Space in Fes, Morocco” explores the rules that pervade a Muslim woman’s experience in a public, urban setting.¹⁵ Her article focuses on Fes

¹² Maya Jaggi, “Voice of the Maghreb,” *The Guardian*, published May 6, 2006, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/may/06/featuresreviews.guardianreview27>.

¹³ Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 60.

¹⁴ He was not actually able to instill this, but he did institute segregated prayers and a separate imam for each sex. Imam is an Islamic leadership position and can lead Islamic worship services, serve as community leaders, and provide religious guidance. “Imam,” *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, revised February 5, 2020, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imam>.

¹⁵ Rachel Newcomb, “Gendering the City, Gendering the Nation: Contesting Urban Space in Fes, Morocco,” *City & Society* 18, no. 2 (2006): 297.

specifically which provides a unique perspective of different spaces that a woman can be in in a very conservative part of Morocco. Newcomb starts her article with a very jarring, very traditional Moroccan proverb stating “He who takes his wife out in public divorces her.”¹⁶ Beliefs like this have started to change as Newcomb continues on to say that it is common to see a college age woman sitting in a cafe to study, even talk to and flirt with other male students. This contrasts greatly from her observation of older business women who greet their male colleague yet sit at another table. I would disagree with Rachel Newcomb in saying that students use cafes as an entryway that leads to flirting from my own experiences in Fes and will continue to elaborate later on. Regardless of this, I believe it is very important that Newcomb establishes that women are using unique tactics to reshape urban space in a way that includes themselves.¹⁷

Class and affluence divides allow women to break away from conservativeness and tradition and do something that can be interpreted as “modern” or “bold.” I would not claim that there is a divide in religious practices in these two cities, but I would say that the aforementioned two grant women some freedom to choose¹⁸ how they display their religion. Women who live in poorer areas such as the medina or the countryside are not granted these same freedoms. Without trying to generalize their experience, I have found that women from poorer areas cling to tradition more than upper and middle class women because they are much more likely to receive backlash from their family or the community. *L’ar* does not just affect the individual woman

¹⁶ I talked to my darija teacher, Ustheda Khadija, about this proverb specifically and she never heard it before and struggled to think of how to translate it. This proverb is not well known amongst the younger generation and was probably only used to highlight traditional ways of thinking. I thought it was an interesting way to start a paper because it is a very strong statement to make.

¹⁷ Around late November 2019, Flower Cafe, the first and only women’s cafe in Morocco opened in Tetouan. It was created to be a safe and comfortable place for women to sit and talk and is a current example of the changes Newcomb was describing in her time in Morocco around 2006.

¹⁸ These two words hold a very heavy connotation, especially considering the stance Western feminists have taken on the “oppression” of Muslim women. I am aware of this but all that I am trying to convey is that in progressive/ affluent cities in Morocco, such as Rabat, it is very common to see women who veil and do not veil and does not seem to hold a negative stigma for those who do not.

herself, but also her family and those she interacts with. If someone even thinks she has “misbehaved” in any way the repercussions can have long lasting, deep-rooted consequences. Women of the Ville Nouvelle¹⁹ have a lot more access to accepting public spaces,²⁰ but in rural areas it is considered controversial just to send a young girl to school.²¹ Rosa Rogers, director of *Casablanca Calling*, depicted the effects that education and misinterpretations of religion have on young girls and women. These issues are not usually displayed so clearly and are often swept under the rug. A specific example of this was when I spoke to Ilyass Bouzghaia, a researcher at the Center of Women’s Studies in Islam in Rabat.²² His organization is aware of how many Moroccan women are uneducated and unaware of their own rights,²³ but government funded programs prioritize educating foreigners and high academics about Moroccan women’s issues. Every time I asked about public outreach he redirected his answer to talk about international student organizations they work with, including my own.²⁴ For some insight on this education aspect of poorer and lower class Moroccan women, a 20 year old girl from the Rabat medina laughed when Grace Malabanti asked if she was a student.²⁵ I continue to argue that class and affluence affect a woman’s boundaries in life and this girl perfectly represents this. Due to no fault of her own she holds a position in society, within a progressive city, where it is laughable for her to be formally educated.

¹⁹ Districts of the city built by the French protectorate that tend to be more affluent and modern.

²⁰ An Airbnb host once said that you will not see a woman in a cafe in the medina unless she is followed by “her entourage” of other women. I will talk about this conversation later.

²¹ *Casablanca Calling*, directed by Rosa Rogers (New York City: Women Make Movies, 2014), DVD.

²² Ilyass Bouzghaia (researcher at the Center of Women’s Studies in Islam) in discussion with the Abigail Collins, January 2020.

²³ There was a revision to the Moudawana, the family code, in 2004.

²⁴ The Institute for the International Education of Students (IES) in Rabat.

²⁵ Grace Malabanti (student and fellow researcher) in discussion with Donut Girl*, January 2020. *name redacted

Even though Rabat is a very progressive city, the gender divide is still very much intact especially when it comes to those who cannot access public space as easily. There is not just one Moroccan woman and not just one experience. Women of different classes and ages will have different beliefs and experiences with public and private spheres, and every woman in any category will have some type of individualistic experience. The summation of these books and articles help me understand all the subtle nuances that affect women in public and help form valid interpretations of my observations.

Mahrem, Na-Mahrem, and Other Islamic Notions Affecting Public Space

Mahram and *na-mahrem*. Who is forbidden to marry and who is not. Father, brother, uncle, women. Others. A system designed around the notion of a hypothetical male suitor is all that is required to keep a woman unwelcomed in public, let alone to truly take up space or sit down at a cafe. As mentioned earlier the terms *mahram* and *na-mahram* derive from research Shampa Mazumdar and Sanjoy Mazumdar performed in Iran and India around 2001. The exact definition for these terms in a Moroccan context translates slightly differently so it is not common for a Moroccan woman to talk about *mahram* and *na-mahram* as specifically,²⁶ but the effects of these terms hold true. This is the basis for public versus private spaces in Morocco, and we begin to see where Islam starts to heavily intertwine with Moroccan culture. An intricate map has been created for women to follow when navigating public spaces and has become infinitely more complicated in recent years as women seep into public spaces more and more.

²⁶ I talked with Professor Hamzaoui and Professor Sadik Rddad to reaffirm this and both agreed. Both professors are native to Morocco and while the implications of these words hold true in Morocco, the words themselves are pronounced slightly differently. A mahrem typically refers to a male guide who accompanies a woman while she is out in certain public situations. I am general in saying this because the situation which necessitates a guide may vary person to person. I will continue to use these terms in defining public versus private spaces though.

Islamic influence in Morocco does not stop with defining space. It can inflict shame externally and internally if you happen to “step out of line.” *Lḥagra* and *l’ār*, shame that comes from the public eye and shame that manifests internally, respectfully. *Lḥagra* emerges from the feelings of inferiority inflicted upon oneself which is largely affected by class, power and gender dynamics.²⁷ Dr. Rebecca Moody, PhD describes in a speech that “*lḥagra* is a vegetable vendor being harassed by police, watching both his stock and his scale being confiscated knowing full well he has no way of getting them back. It is an injustice that results in shame and against which one has no real recourse, no matter how demoralizing.” *L’ār*, on the other hand, typically comes from the “misbehaviors” of a woman. The way she speaks and presents herself in public and who she is seen with, all with the weight of her family’s integrity carried with her. The effect of *l’ār* is very clearly depicted in the movie *Death for Sale* when Aouatif, Malik’s sister, ends up hanging herself.²⁸ She chooses this end for herself after she is caught with a man who is not her husband,²⁹ rather than face the backlash of her family and community.

As public space has traditionally been for men and the private for women, these terms acted as gender specific without actually being gender specific. No matter if it is a man or woman, shame deviating from anywhere can be internalized, given how strong family image is prioritized in Moroccan culture. On the other hand, it is not like women are forcing men out by taking up space in public, so it may be likely that they are experiencing both *lḥagra* and *l’ār* differently than how men are. Regardless of how it plays out for each specific individual, I do not believe these terms are as static as they used to be, similar to the definitions of public and

²⁷ Rebecca Moody, “Reshaping Shared Space: Gender Norms, Quotidian Islam and Grand Taxis in Morocco,” (Presentation, Religion, Affect, and Emotional Unit, American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, San Diego, November 23-26, 2019).

²⁸ *Death for Sale*, directed by Faouzi Bensaïdi (Belgium Entre: Chien et Loup, 2001), DVD.

²⁹ But was it *really* a choice?

private space. At least in cities like Rabat, women move through public, take up space, and have real jobs outside of their wifely and motherly duties. I do not see the gender divide of space in Rabat and Morocco fading away anytime soon, as the patriarchy is still very much intact; it just does not function in the same way as it used to.

Women have not always been so removed from the public like this. During the Jahilia time period, predating Muhammad's introduction of Islam, women were participants and authority figures in central affairs and held positions of political leadership. In addition matrilineal customs maintained a strong presence, but all of this "steadily declined in the ensuing Islamic period."³⁰ Leila Ahmed describes this transitional period in her book *Women and Gender in Islam* and recounts that as instrumental women were in "contribut[ing] to the verbal texts of Islam,"³¹ Islam attributed to "the formal introduction of seclusion."³² Although veiling was not new to the region, Muhammad was the first person to mandate lifetime veiling of his wives, and this was only one type of seclusion he introduced. In a more modern perspective on veiling, many Western feminists today believe that a veiled or covered woman is an oppressed woman, and this is far from the truth. Religion does not dictate anything specific about a woman, in the same way modesty is not determined by the presence or absence of a veil.³³ Western feminism has a lot to say about the issues with "other's" societies rather than truly understanding how customs, traditions, and society works outside of the US. Just because something is different does not necessitate an equivalence to bad or wrong and this acceptance is oftentimes ignored by those who are "trying to help."

³⁰ Leila Ahmed, "Chapter 3: Women and the Rise of Islam," *Women and Gender in Islam* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 43.

³¹ *Ibid*, 47.

³² *Ibid*, 53.

³³ Leila Ahmed, "Chapter 9: The First Feminists," *Women and Gender in Islam*, 179-180.

The Streets

Rabat is the capital city of Morocco and is known for its coast, Islamic and French-colonial landmarks, as well as being one of the most populous urban cities.³⁴ Along with its physical markers, it is also known as being one of the more progressive cities. I wake up every morning to the massive mall that lies within its heart,³⁵ and it's clear to see the urban evolution that has occurred. Rabat is very urban in all respects of the word and this is only one example. Outside of the medina, there are hardly any traces of traditional Moroccan architecture and housing. Rather you can find single family homes and apartment buildings mixed between restaurants, cafes, doctor offices, and almost anything else you would expect to find in a city in the US. Business men and women shuttle to and from the tram throughout the day and high school and college age students alike flock the station for their afternoon lunch break. What needs to be highlighted is that there *are* business women and about an equal gender ratio of students from what I have seen. For many Moroccan women, access to higher institutions of education is unattainable due to class and where you are from.³⁶ To be a well educated business woman like this is no more than a pipe dream for the vast majority of Moroccan women.

The progressiveness of Rabat directly correlates to the flowability of public space for women. There is no visible stigma around women who do or do not veil, young or old. In addition to this it is fairly common to see a woman smoke in cafes along with the men, which conservative views have traditionally associated with sex work.³⁷ At face value this may not

³⁴ "Rabat," Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia, revised January 21, 2020, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rabat>.

³⁵ The Arribat Center, which opened in November 2019 and covers roughly 216,000 square meters.

³⁶ Urban versus rural Morocco paints two very different landscapes of what you are able to achieve and access, especially as a woman.

³⁷ "Culture and Etiquette in Morocco," Rough Guides, <https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/africa/morocco/culture-etiquette/>.

seem that deep, but in a rural village a young girl wearing jeans rather than a *tamlhaft*³⁸ is enough to make her mother concerned about the shame that would be brought upon herself.³⁹ This is not the case in most of Rabat though.⁴⁰ It is very common to see young girls to middle aged women wear anything that I would consider conservative yet modern to ripped jeans and a leather jacket regardless of their veiling. I also found it interesting that more high school girls do not veil than those who do.⁴¹ This contrasts from the older women, who tend to dress very traditionally and usually move in packs of at least two to three. Obviously veiling is not the only marker of a woman who is a practicing Muslim, but it is easy to notice similarities in the way veiled women move through space versus unveiled, especially those who are a bit older.

For a culture that cares so much about being covered, the *hammam* was a very unique experience. A *hammam* is a public bath house separated by gender, so it is considered a private space. The comfort I saw the women express made it clear to me that the intricacies of public space are not due to privacy amongst strangers, but rather modesty between the two genders. I believe that this is where the walls that are formed from living in such a gender-restricted society begin to melt away. My Darija teacher, Ustheda Khadija, brought me and the other girls in my program to the *hammam* she likes to go to. As intimidated as I was it was not weird that our teacher brought us because that is how Moroccan culture is. The *hammam* is a place to relax, and for Moroccan women it is one of the private spaces just for them that cannot be infiltrated by men. Each of us was assigned a worker who cleaned and exfoliated us literally head to toe and it

³⁸ An ankle-length wrap that goes over all other clothing and is a required outerwear for all females in that village.

³⁹ Katherine E. Hoffman, *We Share Walls: Language, Land, and Gender in Berber Morocco* (Malden, MA, Oxford, UK, and Carlton, AU: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007), 62.

⁴⁰ It might be shameful in some spaces to wear jeans, but not in the Rabat I have seen so I will not comment any more on this specific possible discrepancy.

⁴¹ Is it modernizing or rebellion? Or does the progressiveness of Rabat just allow this to happen without backlash? Maybe because they're part of a higher, educated class? I do not have the answer for you but I have thought about it.

was clear to see how normal this is for Moroccan women. Most of us kept to short, necessary conversations with our worker due to our limited Darija, but other women in the room talked casually with those around them in similar fashion to the way you would talk to a friend catching up over coffee. This type of experience could never happen in the US because our culture does not promote this type of nakedness. You should be empowered and feel comfortable in your own skin enough to show yourself off, but never would I have ever thought of sitting naked with my friends as another woman washes us. I am not saying this in a negative light, I like to wear whatever I choose and not be shamed or catcalled for it,⁴² this is just an area where Moroccan culture differs so much from my own.

Even though Rabat is so progressive, the street remains the man's domain.⁴³ Rachel Newcomb states in "Gendering the City, Gendering the Nation: Contesting Urban Space in Fes, Morocco" that "for women, streets, unlike cafés, do not encourage lingering. The street is a pathway between destinations: market, school, work, or home."⁴⁴ To illustrate how this dynamic plays out there was a man selling books across from the cafe I was sitting at. It was around midday and he was on a street corner near the Parliament building. Women and men alike were showing about equal interest in the books, most stopping quickly to examine the titles then continue moving. At one point though, there were five men standing around the books for much longer than anyone else who had passed and hardly any women stopped until they dispersed. I

⁴² No matter what season it is in Morocco it would not be acceptable to wear shorts, a tank top, or anything else overly revealing because of the way modesty from religion plays out here. There is nothing wrong with this, it is just different.

⁴³ Just because it is acceptable for women in Rabat to do certain things does not equate to the individualist and independent approach American women have where they can go anywhere or do anything by themselves. I am aware that this is a very broad generalization but it reflects the way I and the women around me have moved through spaces my whole life.

⁴⁴ Rachel Newcomb, "Gendering the City, Gendering the Nation: Contesting Urban Space in Fes, Morocco," *City & Society* 18, no. 2 (2006): 298.

previously hypothesized that women tend to go to cafes or other public spaces where other women are and this is the perfect example.⁴⁵ As I mentioned it is acceptable for women to sit and even smoke in cafes in Rabat, but oftentimes they will be with other women, or as my Airbnb host in Tetouan called it, their “entourage.”⁴⁶

This group mentality plays out in a lot of public spaces because streets for women, unlike cafés, do not encourage lingering. The street is a pathway between destinations: market, school, work, or home. This results in Moroccan women, regardless of age, often traveling in packs, walking in groups of two or three holding hands or linked arm in arm. The spaces in which women can move are dependent upon environment, economics, and social class, and are not easily reducible to a set of rules or prescriptions.⁴⁷ Class and affluence are able to allow women more freedom and independence in their movements and the tram is the perfect example of this. I have found it interesting since landing in Morocco that I consistently see the most women out in public around the tram.⁴⁸ Whether going to school, work, or wherever else they might be going, I have only seen such a predominant amount of women on one other occasion in Tetouan.

Taking up Space and Cafe Culture in Rabat

Cafe culture is very prevalent in Morocco. No matter the time of day you will see men, smoking and drinking their coffee while reading a newspaper or people watching. Every cafe always has tables outside with a majority of the seating facing towards the street and groups of tables inside. Outside seating is typically dominated by men but that does not mean it is

⁴⁵ Even as a foreigner or when I am in the US it can be extremely uncomfortable to be the only woman in a space depending on the circumstances.

⁴⁶ Some women will sit in cafes by themselves, but they do not represent the majority of women I have seen.

⁴⁷ Rachel Newcomb, “Gendering the City, Gendering the Nation”: 295.

⁴⁸ The tram does not restrict those who use it, I am only focusing on those who have had access to higher institutions of education and highlighting the difference it makes for women and their mobility.

uncommon to see women amongst them as well. It is Moroccan culture for women to keep to themselves and this has a lot of influence on the way women interact with each other and those around them, along with the way they have not interacted with me, the white foreigner. Women will mix in inside or outside, alone, with other women, or a man, sometimes even dominating the space on a gendered level. This does not happen often, but it is important that it *can* happen because it shows that the effect of *mahram* and *na-mahram* on space in Rabat is complex and unique.

The experience that I had in Campus Sweet, a cafe near University City Souissi I, was very similar to Café Maure in the Kasbah. At Campus Sweet I was surrounded by other college students studying and eating in between classes. I sat at a table on the second floor by myself and no one approached me while I was there. There was one girl who sat by herself, a mixed group of about five, and two couples. The larger group talked and laughed and stayed at the cafe longer than I did, but the comparison between the two couples is interesting. One couple remained pretty neutral, sitting at opposite sides of a U-shaped booth as they talked over tea. The other couple sat on the same side of a normal table, lightly touching each other and holding hands throughout their time there. This space acts as private because both couples clearly felt comfortable enough to express their relationships in front of others. “Islamic ideas of gender segregation affect the definition and the social construction of ‘public space’”⁴⁹ and these college students have found a way to define space in their own terms. There was no need to worry about being caught since they were surrounded by peers,⁵⁰ as this was not a space meant for adults.⁵¹ The secluded Café Maure acted in a similar fashion. It is a somewhat small cafe in the kasbah

⁴⁹ Shampa Mazumdar and Sanjoy Mazumdar, “Rethinking Public and Private Space”: 303.

⁵⁰ An example of *l’ar*.

⁵¹ It would be the same as seeing some random parent or grandparent eating in the campus center by themselves.

that is tucked away and hidden from the outside. The seclusion of this space allowed two more couples to express their affection for each other in a technically public setting. Although these occurrences were in two very different neighborhoods⁵² I would say the similarities between the interactions are a direct result of being able to define for oneself which spaces are public and which are not. Could all of these interactions happen at different cafes? Maybe, but I do not believe the privacy implied by these “hidden” spaces can be ignored.

Cafe Majestic sits within a green space near parliament in the Ville Nouvelle of Rabat. It is typically occupied by equal proportions of women and men, which is expected of this area.⁵³ The first time I was there, I saw a woman wearing a niqab who sat by herself and seemed to be simply people watching. I thought it was interesting that she was alone because women who veil tend to be in groups.⁵⁴ Originally she was sitting at the table outside, closest to the door. There were two people sitting next to her and once they left she moved inward as much as she could. I have no explanation for this experience other than maybe she did not like the waiters and customers constantly passing close to her through the doorway. On another occasion there was a group of four or five women about the same age and one passed her baby around for the others to fawn over. There was also a time where two women talked and caught up over coffee and pastries for a while. At one point one of the women left and then the other woman's husband joined her. The commonality in these three interactions was the way in which the space was used. None of the women were concerned with those around them, as if each individual table was their own personal private space. Women taking up space in public like this is still relatively

⁵² Different neighborhoods means different class and resulting gender structures.

⁵³ Ville Nouvelle equates to money which equates to access to spaces.

⁵⁴ I am not generalizing on Moroccan women's experiences; it is just a pattern I noticed regardless of the cafe I was at.

new, but each has found a way to be accepted within the existing power structures.⁵⁵ Just because these women were in public did not mean they needed to exist in a traditional sense of public space. The affluence of the Ville Nouvelle allows women not to worry about those around them reacting negatively to them being there. They have essentially bought their way into a space that would accept them and refuse to be pushed aside by the gender standards put in place by other neighborhoods.

Near the Egyptian Embassy, Cafe Fabiola consistently had a lot of female patrons, a majority of which smoked. This was always surprising, occasionally a bit off-putting, because of the way the smoke saturated the air and the connotations smoking can hold against women. One of the occasions I was there, there was an unveiled woman sitting with three men. The entire group sat and smoked for a while, their hands never absent of a cigarette. On the other side of the cafe there was another unveiled woman who sat by herself, again cigarette in hand, talking to someone on the phone. Between the two sat an older, veiled woman who chatted with her husband over tea, using one of the menus to waft the smoke from her face. On a different occasion I walked in and there was so much smoke hanging in the air that I decided to go to Cafe Friandise across the street. Same neighborhood. Same day. Same street. Same time. Yet I was the only female in the establishment with a bunch of older men, not another woman in sight. This was one specific situation where it is clear that class and affluence did not factor into women sitting in a cafe. Rather I would claim that this is the group mentality playing out. It pervades a Moroccan woman's experience while in public, and whether intentionally or not, this shows that women tend to go to the public spaces where other women are. If you are able to afford going

⁵⁵ Rachel Newcomb, *Women of Fes*, 5.

into a cafe, why not go to the one that feels safer and more comfortable. Along with this, I would argue that this shows being able to afford a space does not always translate into being accepted.

As mentioned previously it is Moroccan culture for women to keep to themselves and I experienced this every time I was in a public space. I have had a really hard time talking to women the entire time I have been in Morocco, “a strange little sense of shame” which has pervaded my time here, “[my] body’s sense of being out of place.”⁵⁶ Probyn manipulates the definition of shame in her chapter “Shame, Bodies, Places” and continues on to say “[this shame is] born of the desire to fit in, of an interest in being part of a place. That interest propels you toward exposure: the slip of tongue as you mangle a colloquialism, the moment when you don't get a joke or fail to recognize part of local lore.” I could easily strike up a conversation and impress the male servers or shopkeepers with my Darija. It is easy to see their dynamic change and face light up when they realized that I knew their language, but I never really had this experience with a woman. It felt so much more intimidating to try to have a conversation with a woman because I know it is not their culture to engage in small talk with those around them, even though the space is shared. The one conversation I did have with a woman was entirely in English. I met her on the tram and was intrigued because she was reading an English book. She explained that she was from Casablanca and doing her PhD work in English studies, and was quickly gone again as we had reached her stop. Class and education have never so easily removed a boundary for me in my time in Morocco and as hopeful as I was at the time I am not surprised it did not happen again. A peer of mine met a girl at Bibliothèque Nationale⁵⁷ that I could talk to, but I did not want to need to rely on someone, especially a guy, to make the

⁵⁶ Elspeth Probyn, “Shame, Bodies, Places,” *Blush* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 38.

⁵⁷ National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco

connection for me. Gender dynamics in public spaces in Morocco are intricate and the interaction would not have been as authentic as if I had made the connection myself.

Nightlife and Nightclubs

The Rabat medina comes to life at night, men and women alike filling the streets. Outside of the medina, though, is very different. After 7 p.m. and the sun has set everyone retreats towards their homes. The streets quiet, taxis become less frequent, and you are almost alone. Almost. An eerie feeling begins to seep in and you become ultra aware of those who *are* out because there must be a reason, right? You hold your bag a bit tighter and walk a bit quicker so you can avoid the pack of young guys or the older man who is very clearly under the influence of something and loudly but not quite yelling unintelligible gibberish into the night.⁵⁸ If a woman does not belong in public space, then she definitely does not belong at night. There are some cafes, such as the Space Cafe, that I have passed almost every weekend at night walking home from the train and I have never seen a woman sitting there. There is usually a group of about five or so men in each of the surrounding cafes and they all stop and stare mid-convo, mid-sip, mid-whatever. Eyes pan across until we are out of focus in the most unsettling way. Similar to the feeling I got passing the cafes in Tetouan,⁵⁹ it feels like being on the opposite side of a movie screen. At night the welcoming feeling I felt during the day transforms into feeling like I am, or we are, their source of entertainment for the night. The group of foreigners who walk past and do not make eye contact to make sure not to elicit any unwanted attention.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ This does not describe every night in Rabat, just a few memorable occasions.

⁵⁹ Talking about this experience more later.

⁶⁰ This is similar during the day to try to avoid catcalls, but at night it is much more intimidating and unsettling.

This contrasts greatly with nightlife I saw in Tetouan. The division in space in Tetouan is incomparable to that of Rabat. There is a main circle filled with cafes near the Royal Palace and walking through this area in the early evening there were men as far as you could see. I walked towards one of the areas of outdoor seating and there were at least fifty men all lined up drinking their coffee and tea, not a single woman mixed among them. I quickly turned around and continued on to remove all the eyes from myself and happened to end up at Feddan Square. I could not believe that I was in the same city, let alone the same part of the city. There were so many women out and about, simply sitting and talking. Something felt weird at first but it was because I actually saw women being people, sitting and lingering and lounging on street corners and benches,⁶¹ for the first time since landing in Morocco. Women were truly taking up space in public and it was acceptable. There were no more lingering eyes on my body because I was no longer in such a divided, gendered space and I actually felt at ease. It was a relief to see so many women in public in a wide range of ages and group sizes. Outside of this night I have rarely seen women sitting somewhere and owning the space in this way.

There was one night in Rabat in particular though where I did not feel the segregation of late night spaces. Rather, I felt safe. I found an inclusive environment in one of the least expected places. A few friends and I visited La Cabane Bambou, a night club in Rabat near the Egyptian Embassy. Immediately upon walking in I noticed how many women there were opposed to men. The gender divide was so significant the two guys who were with us got that weird look for once. Like they were the ones who were not supposed to be in this space. Drinking alcohol is *haram*, against the words of the Quran, for all Muslims, but usually if a Moroccan is going to drink in public it is usually going to be a guy. As with all things, men are able to push the

⁶¹ I am drawing on Rachel Newcomb's *Women of Fes* here but I am shifting the way she is employing these terms to highlight the difference I saw in Tetouan.

societal boundaries a bit further than a woman could and not need to worry about *lhagra* or *l'ār* or a *hashuma*.⁶² Because of this I expected to find essentially an all boys club, similar to the aforementioned cafes, with a few girlfriends or small groups of women sprinkled through. Women, however, dominated this space for the entire night.⁶³ This was not a gender-segregated space, there were a few male friends or boyfriends as well as a few smaller groups of just men, but at least this one night belonged to the women who were there. Large and small groups of young women, college aged to young thirties, stayed seated most of the night and drank and enjoyed the music with their friends. Due to the stigma around drinking in Morocco, the highlight of the night was just being able to be served without being judged. I have never felt such little worry in a public drinking environment before and it was likely due to the expense. Like the women at Cafe Majestic, I, as well as everyone else there, had bought our ways into a space that would accept us. I did not feel intimidated by the male gaze for the entire night, and it was simply because I have the status and affluence to be there.

Being in the “Man’s Domain” Outside of Rabat

My first experience outside of Rabat was in Chefchaouen. Chefchaouen is a very touristy city in northern Morocco partly due to its instagram-able blue walls throughout the whole city. The medina functions with tourists in mind, so most shops sell trinkets and there is a main square where a majority of the restaurants and cafes reside. I was in Chefchaouen for a whole weekend yet barely saw any women. There were many tour groups and other tourists walking around and bartering with the predominantly male shopkeepers, and this includes Moroccan tourists as well. It was very easy to pick up on who was a tourist by that look they give, trying to absorb

⁶² Translates to “shame on you.”

⁶³ It was surprising but not surprising at the same time that none of the women in the club wore a veil.

everything in all at once, and the I'm-not-totally-sure-I'm-walking-in-the-right-direction walk. Any other Moroccan woman I saw in public was most likely trying to coerce someone into getting henna drawn on their hand.⁶⁴ There were two women shopkeepers though who did stick out, one of which owned the shop in which she sold her candles. The lack of women I saw was clear and surprising because I was not expecting gender roles to play out like that, but it is nowhere near the lack I saw in Fes.

Gender is so segregated in the medina of Fes that the doors have two knockers: the lower, which lets the woman know it is family and safe to come right away and the upper, which warns her it is a stranger or guest so she should cover herself or find the nearest man to open the door for her.⁶⁵ As I toured through the medina the only women I saw were young girls running errands through the streets and much older women. The only woman I saw who was actually *being* in public sat at a cafe outside Bab Bou Jeloud⁶⁶ and was draped in a dark green *djellaba*.⁶⁷ I did not see the college students flirting and business women mixed in among her coworkers and other men that Rachel Newcomb saw in her ethnography of Fes.⁶⁸ In a personal experience, a friend and I went to a cafe to get gelato around 8 p.m. and not only were we the only women, the men snapped their necks as we sat and passed intermittent dirty looks amongst each other and in our direction because we did *not* belong in their space.

When I was in Marrakech I visited two particular cafes. At Cafe Du Theatre there were a majority of mostly middle aged men sitting by themselves or in a small group. There were two couples sitting together, both women veiled, and another woman who sat by herself. These were

⁶⁴ Women do this as a way to earn income.

⁶⁵ I got this explanation from a tour guide who lived in Fes his whole life but there may also be other explanations that I am not aware of.

⁶⁶ Being on the opposite side of this gate technically means she is outside of the confines of the medina walls.

⁶⁷ Traditional Moroccan article of clothing that can be worn by men and women alike.

⁶⁸ Rachel Newcomb, "Gendering the City, Gendering the Nation," 297.

the only women I saw at the cafe for the duration that I was there. After leaving the cafe and walking towards CTM bus station there were a few normal⁶⁹ Moroccan places where more girls sat and ate with friends. Affluence had kept these younger girls out of a space because they could not afford to be there, and this is one of the downsides of women needing to buy their way into certain public spaces. The acceptance that comes with an affluent public space can be hard to find in other spaces. I am not trying to sound negative, but the reality of the situation is that boundaries are put into place if you cannot afford to do so. A majority of cafes I walked past in the medina, a poorer area of Marrakech,⁷⁰ were filled with only men and the occasional tourist sprinkled in. This is very similar to the cafes I passed in Casablanca. The cafes were always filled with only men who stared at us as we walked by. The only women I did see in a cafe were two female Naval officers,⁷¹ one in a blue uniform with a medal and the other in a plain green jumpsuit near the Moroccan Naval base. Where I did see a lot of women though was in Morocco Mall and the Casablanca train station, both which hold connotations of affluence. I was not surprised by this because I have repeatedly seen all over Morocco that public spaces that are associated with affluence, along with cafes in richer neighborhoods, tend to have a relatively larger population of women.

Walking around Tetouan I did not see many women in cafes. Most had only men, a majority of which were smoking. All of the seating faced towards the street, the inside included with chairs arranged in single file lines rather than in groups around tables. It almost felt like being on the reverse side of a movie screen, as if I and the other people on the street were simply only there for the men to watch and enjoy. Our Airbnb host explained that Tetouan is a more

⁶⁹ A juice place, a shawarma place, and another one I can't remember that were all next to each other.

⁷⁰ I am excluding Jamaa Al Fina, the main square, in this statement.

⁷¹ This may not be their actual rank but this is the word I'm going to use.

conservative city, so most women do not go to the local cafes in the medina. A woman would be with her “entourage” if she were to go to one of the cafes unless she didn’t care or was going to smoke herself. Usually if a woman wants to go to a cafe she will go to one of the more “luxurious” cafes in Tetouan. This re-enforces affluence factoring into if it would be acceptable and comfortable for a woman to sit in a cafe.

Around November 2019 Flower Cafe opened, the first and only women’s cafe in Morocco. The interior is adorned in pink and flowers from top to bottom in a classy and not overwhelming way. It did not look like any other cafe with its plush seating and the entire experience screamed “Hey I can afford to be in a space like this!” The menu was in French, a status and education symbol, and somewhat expensive, a wealth symbol. Even though I was among the “freer” class of women, only two sat by themselves while I was there. There weren’t as many women as I expected there to be, with about five tables plus one who left shortly after I got there. It was also interesting that no one was sitting outside the cafe, which might have been because I arrived at an off hour or the female body guard standing outside the door. Store owner Ikram Ben El Khalil wanted to provide a place where women can feel “comfortable” and “can remove their headscarves if they feel like it.”⁷² All the servers at Flower Cafe were pretty young and did not wear a veil.⁷³ Most women in the cafe, except for one older woman, were also young and dressed pretty modernly regardless of their choice to veil, but none removed it. We were in a safe, private space surrounded only by *mahrem* yet the veil remained. Saba Mahmood explains in *Politics of Piety*, “your body literally comes to feel uncomfortable if you do not veil.” Repeated bodily actions that you engage in determine your desires and emotions, actions which do not

⁷² Safaa Kasraoui, “Women-Only Cafe Opens in Northern Morocco,” Morocco World News, December 27, 2019, <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2019/12/289923/women-only-cafe-flower-tetouan/>

⁷³ Would the servers have worn a veil outside of this space?

come from natural feelings but rather creates them. You train your memory, desire, and intellect to behave according to established societal expectations and express your agency through the confines of *al-haya'*.⁷⁴

From One Morocco to Another

Morocco is a Muslim country which means that the way Islam intertwines with Moroccan culture must be acknowledged. *Mahrem*, *na-mahrem*, *lhagra*, and *l'ār* all influence the way definitions of space are interpreted by and for women, as well as if they will even occupy a public space. There are still many cafes that are dominated by men that women will not go to for reasons that are independent of these definitions and notions. She may not have the class and affluence to physically afford to go to certain spaces, such as the Flower Cafe in Tetouan, but there are also possible repercussions due to the aforementioned shame. A woman is never herself but is also the embodiment of her family's reputation and this is especially true for the women of poorer, rural, and more conservative areas of Morocco. Even if a woman can afford a space it does not necessarily translate into her being accepted, and this was depicted by the two cafes near the Egyptian Embassy in Rabat. Again, public space is complicated in a Moroccan context but the group mentality amongst women seems to grant them a bit of freedom where they can enter and be in a space even if they do not know the other women there.

The feeling I got while in public spaces in Rabat was never replicated no matter the city I visited. Rabat is progressive and modern but does not have the same touristic influence as Tangier, Chefchaouen, or Marrakech. It has been said that there are two Moroccos, and this transcends to the cafe culture and stigma regarding women in public spaces. I have argued that

⁷⁴ The virtue of shyness or modesty, which is among the good deeds in Surat al-Qasas (The Story)

class and affluence can erase boundaries for the women of Morocco. These boundaries have been reinforced by Moroccan culture, Islam, shame, gender and power structures, as well as birthplace, and for far too long have worked together to deter women from the public and towards their homes. However, these two markers of status allow women to buy access to public spaces that will accept them. As I have mentioned women taking up space in public like this is still relatively new, yet this has not stopped women from being assertive on their position within the man's domain. Through travel and data collection throughout Morocco, I have been able to reify my stance on women in public spaces and prove that spaces such as these are not limited to Rabat.

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