

Artistic Topologies: New Social Formations and Political Change in an Emerging Ammani Art World

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Abstract

As an Ammani café became a popular hangout for artists, artists' social practices were reshaped by the spatial affordances of the café. This paper examines the ways that relationships between artists changed through this spatial rearrangement, exploring the political consequences of those changes. It compares three successive, distinct topologies of social practice within Jordanian art, including a dispersed practice of visitation between artists, a concentrated practice of café sociality, and a third practice spread across an emerging artistic neighborhood. It shows how each spatialization affects power relations within the art scene along lines of class, geography, and gender, and also transforms artistic productivity. Showing how spatial rearrangements transform the political conditions of Amman's art scene, this paper highlights a fluid and contingent urban politics where the stakes of inclusion and action are perpetually changing. [Neighborhoods; Art; Urban Space; Politics; Middle East]

Introduction

This paper analyzes a major change in the sociality of Jordanian art, observed in Amman, between 2014 and 2017. Over this time, artists' predominant social practice shifted from what I refer to as a "dispersed practice of visitation" where artists travelled to meet each other in galleries and homes to a highly concentrated "café sociality," where many artists regularly gathered in a particular café: Café Rumi. This development is linked to the emergence of an "artistic neighborhood" or cultural hub in the Amman neighborhood of Jabal al Luweibde. Whereas Jordanian art had previously been fairly widely dispersed across the city (see Hourani 1996), artists had recently begun to rapidly and conspicuously concentrate in Jabal al Luweibde. This concentration was a driver of disruptive gentrification (as frequently seen elsewhere, i.e., Lloyd 2010; Ley 2003) and was supported by new influxes of capital coming into Amman via aid organizations related to the Syrian crisis. Although Jabal al Luweibde has long histories of art and is home to several important, longstanding art institutions, this level of concentration was new for the neighborhood, and for Jordanian art more generally.

As Amman's art scene shifted from its previous spatial dispersal to its contemporary neighborhood concentration, key social structures of the

scene were reorganized by this shift, driving consequential changes in the power dynamics of Jordanian art. The conditions determining who counts as an artist, who is included or excluded from the art scene, who is empowered to act within that scene, and in what ways, were transformed, with consequences extending out of the art scene and across the city at large.

My analysis begins with a focus on a particular café, Café Rumi, founded in 2014, which developed into a popular artistic hangout and is a major focal point of both neighborhood gentrification and of the emerging artistic scene. While Rumi is hardly the first café to play an important role in Jordanian art, the centralization of Amman's artistic scene around Rumi was new. Rumi's well-known artistic presence attracted many visitors from both inside and outside the neighborhood, developing a gravitational influence over the art scene and channeling social behavior in ways that helped structure emergent forms of social interaction. As with the development of artistic scenes elsewhere, this is tied to wider changes in Jordan's economy and to the emergence of a consumer class attracted to the cultural capital associated with art (Ley 2003). Yet, as hubs of artistic sociality, neither Rumi nor the neighborhood are neutral sites. Rather, they present new topologies of social practice; new domains within which an emerging artistic community takes shape.

Contrasting the social practices observed at Rumi with dispersed practices of visitation that predominated before, my analysis shows how the developing sociality at Rumi transformed the art scene in a variety of ways, including an increase in artistic productivity (by reducing the labor needed to access social resources), a broadened class base of the art scene (by changing the conditions of access), geographically redistributed artistic resources (by concentrating artistic socialization in Rumi), and a rearranged balance of gendered power (by moving socialization into a more masculine space).

Scholarship investigating "art worlds" has shown how an ecosystem of social and material relations supports creative production (Becker 1982; Bourdieu 1993). Work in the global south has highlighted urban space as a key component of the art world, as particular urban topologies prove conducive to artistic production (Sooudi 2016; Grabski 2017). For artists working in increasingly international markets, urban geography provides access to international flows of capital, connecting these flows to artistic production (Grabski 2017). This paper builds on these studies through a topological attention to the ways that social groups come together in space, highlighting how urban space is not only a resource mobilized by art worlds in artistic production, but a constitutive ground which (re)defines that art world, its boundaries, and its political stakes.

My attention to topology here builds on geographic scholarship that explores how social forms interact with physical space, and specifically how distinct topological arrangements of those forms produce distinct conditions of possibility (Harvey 2012). Topology, as the arrangement of

social forms upon space, is in contrast to topography, the physical dimensions of space itself. At its simplest, topology is a concept that explains how two cities may be closer together when connected by a road than they are to a third city which is physically closer to each, but has to be reached by a circuitous route. For the art scene under discussion here, topology helps to explain how numerous social resources came to be more accessible at Rumi than through visits to their source. Similar to the hub-and-spoke model common to many train systems, Rumi centralized diverse social networks of the art scene, making it an easy point to connect with fellow artists.

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This paper is the outcome of extended ethnographic research examining the spatial practices of Jordanian artists. Research included extensive participant observation at Rumi, around the neighborhood, and in art galleries. I conducted approximately one hundred interviews, with subjects including artists, critics, neighborhood residents, and other figures associated with art and social change. Fieldwork began with short visits in 2014 and 2015 and continued with extended research of fourteen months, from August 2016 to October 2017, meaning that my work overlapped with the changes described in this paper. I directly observed the profound interrelated changes to the neighborhood of Jabal al Luweibde and the sociality of Amman's art scene and confirmed these changes in conversation with artists and neighborhood residents.

I begin with ethnographic description of two contrasting topologies of artistic sociality: that found in the café, and a sociality of visitation between friends, which I argue Rumi has largely superseded. I discuss how topological differences between these socialities facilitate different arrangements of artistic community, especially as Rumi centralizes social practice. I then show how this shift channels neighborhood change, and how this in turn impacts gendered relations of power within the art scene. I conclude by highlighting the dynamic and interrelated stakes of art's spatial formation, as Rumi's development underlies shifting gender and class relations, redistributions of cultural resources, and a contested gentrification.

Artistic Sociality at Café Rumi

I first visited Rumi in 2015 to interview an artist who had suggested the café as a meeting place. Rumi was then very small, consisting of just three tables and a coffee bar. The artist who I met with, P, a known and somewhat influential figure in Ammani art, joked that Rumi was becoming her office. Indeed, when I arrived, she was sitting at a table, where she had been for the better part of the day, with her computer open, having just finished another meeting. Later, another friend who knew about the meeting joked to me about all the time P was spending there. "[P] is always there," my friend said. "She likes to hold court. You know you can find her there."

I went to Rumi twice more that summer, also for interviews. On these occasions, the artists I met did not claim that Rumi was their office, but that they liked the atmosphere. As their home or workspace was already in the neighborhood, Rumi was a convenient place to meet. Rumi was, however, getting more crowded and clearly gaining in popularity. By my third visit, it was difficult to find a seat inside and we had to make space on a bench outside the café. The interview was also repeatedly interrupted as both my interviewee and I stopped to say hello to artist friends coming and going from the café.

Later that year, Rumi expanded to accommodate its increasing popularity. It now occupies a wide and prominent location on a corner of Kulliyya al Sharee'ah Street, a main street in Jabal al Luweibde ("Weibde" for short). The layout includes two indoor seating areas, a shaded patio, and extra seating along the sidewalk. When packed, as it is with increasing frequency, Rumi accommodates about one hundred people. It is often difficult to find a seat.

Rumi's expansion accompanied a general growth in neighborhood traffic, as Jabal al Luweibde transformed from a relatively quiet residential neighborhood (with some artists and art institutions in it) into a popular artistic hub. During this transformation, Rumi was a destination point. Building on a base clientele of artists who lived and worked in Weibde, it drew visitors from farther afield, some coming to Weibde for the first time. I met several people who came from outside the neighborhood, both artists seeking to connect with the scene and spectators hoping to see what the fuss was about.

I personally began going to Rumi regularly in August 2016, after moving into a nearby apartment. I initially did not think of Rumi as a key fieldsite for my research, which was then investigating the political impacts of artists' spatial practices through attention to particular galleries and public art projects. Rather, like some of my artist colleagues, I liked the atmosphere. Sitting on a tree-lined corner with relaxing music and great espresso drinks, I found it a nice place to check my emails and write.

However, while there, I ran into numerous artists from my research. When I saw an acquaintance, it was an opportunity to say "hello" and check up on one another in casual conversation. They might ask about my research, and I might ask them about the progress of artistic projects. Some of these contacts would invite me to sit and chat, and over time, we became friends. Through these meetings, I strengthened my contacts, was introduced to new people, was exposed to new information, and frequently received advice. Casual meetups led to more serious research. A contact would remember something that they wanted to tell me, would invite me to accompany them to an artistic event, or would recall that I had requested an interview which they had not yet made time for.

It did not take me long to realize that by providing a location for this kind of sociality, Rumi occupied an important position within the art scene. I was not the only person meeting friends there. This was

happening for artists as well. Casual visits to Rumi provided artists with a chance to say hello to a range of friends, to have conversations which may or may not be related to work, to ask advice, and to get inspiration from one another.

Sitting at Rumi, I bumped into Sami, a musician and performance artist. He started telling me about a project he was working on. He wanted to open a soundproof room to allow people to come in and scream as loud as they could. The project was near completion but still had a few details to work out. He needed to design flyers and promote it appropriately. (To this end, he told me, “Tell your friends.”) He also needed to soundproof the room, something he was not sure how to do. While we were talking, our mutual friend, the noted Jordanian rapper and music producer Mohammad Hijazi, a.k.a. “Jazz Tha Process,” walked in. Sami rushed over to him. “Hey, Jazz,” he said. “I’m trying to soundproof a room. What material do I need? And where can I get it cheaply?” They had a quick conversation, and Sami came away with a list of what he needed and where to get it.

Sami could of course have gotten this information in some other way, or could have called or visited Jazz for advice, but what struck me was how easily the café facilitated this interaction. By hanging out where many other artists gathered, Sami was able to obtain useful information almost by accident, simply by being there. It turned into a very productive afternoon, as he promoted his project (to and through me), brainstormed ideas in conversation, and successfully solicited advice from Jazz. If Rumi (or a similar hub) had not been available, Sami would have had to work harder to obtain the same results. This was especially true for artists who were coming into Rumi from outside the neighborhood (as Sami was at this time, although he moved into the neighborhood soon after).

Despite a popular imagination which portrays artists as solitary geniuses, creative production is social (Murphy 2015; Sooudi 2016). The work of artists is not limited to the physical production of artworks, but includes substantial social labor. Artists depend upon a broad social infrastructure (via Simone 2004) for the networking needed to access material, patronage, and career opportunities, as well as for social support, like mentoring, advice, and the collaborative discussion of ideas. This social support is both formal, in numerous workshops and trainings that are a key part of Amman’s art scene, and informal, accessed through casual meetups like sitting in a café. Maintaining these social opportunities requires a substantial amount of “phatic” labor (Elyachar 2010 via Malinowski 1936), the casual social activity which serves no instrumental end but keeps the artist in touch with various contacts.

Ammani artists had varying attitudes towards this social labor. Some embraced the role of social butterfly and made it key to their performative artistic identity. Others, usually semi-established artists, positioned themselves as connection points who could help up-and-coming artists access power brokers (gallery owners, curators, funders, foreign residencies, etc.), and in so doing, accumulated substantial social capital. At times, I found

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myself playing this role, as through my research I had accumulated numerous contacts. Still other artists were frustrated by the pressure to be social, viewing this as a distraction from their “real” work of artistic production.

“I just want to paint all day,” G complained. “But I end up going out for coffee, meeting up, going out to eat, going to parties. It takes so much time. I get very depressed [because I am not able to paint as much as I would like to].” G’s comments highlight the amount of social activity that artists are expected to engage in, and the ambivalence with which some view this activity, considering it a distraction from their real work. Yet G, a mildly successful painter with gallery sponsorship, also depends upon this sociality. In group conversations with him, over coffee, I watched as he and other artists discussed frustrations with his sponsor, strategies for selling more work, contacts to meet during travels abroad, how to improve the English-language text on his website, and technical painting questions, alongside more banal social conversation, dirty jokes, and complaints about rising rents.

A café popular among artists, like Rumi, is a logical hub for such sociality. Cafés are nodes where social groups come together (Sawalha 2011) and foci for informal economic and/or phatic activity (Elyachar 2010). In the Middle East in particular, cafés are historically important social spaces. Widespread by the end of the Ottoman Empire, they were important meeting points for political organization, and their open sociality provided an entry point for men moving to the city (Sawalha 2011; Deeb and Harb 2013). As new groups of people mix in cafés, especially new styles of café, social roles are not clearly defined and so may be renegotiated (Newcomb 2006; Deeb and Harb 2013). Cafés are thus not just meeting points, but dynamic points of social construction.

Likewise, Rumi is not just a neutral site upon which an artistic sociality takes place. Rather, it is the developing site of an emerging artistic sociality. The art scene at Rumi is growing. As the café increasingly crowds with artists from both inside and outside Weibde, Rumi forms an increasingly centralized, congested hub of artistic sociality. As I will discuss in the next section, this growth has displaced alternate, more dispersed, geographies of artistic sociality. As such, Rumi presents new social practices and developing structures of artistic community. Further, as I will also discuss below, Rumi’s development influences broader neighborhood changes, as the clustering of artists supports wider neighborhood development. Rumi then forms a dynamic, developing node, connecting the (changing) art world to broader society and helping to mediate changes to both.

Social Visitation

When I began preliminary research in 2014 and 2015, Rumi was not yet the hub of artistic sociality that it is today. During those early visits, I witnessed and participated in an artistic

sociality that contrasted with the sociality later observed at Rumi. This sociality was based on informal visitation between friends. These visits, rather than being centralized in Rumi, were spread out across various art spaces and artists' homes, and were small-scale, direct, and intimate in ways that Rumi is not.

I observed this most clearly in summer 2015, while a participant observer at the Makan art space. Based in Weibde, Makan was one of the first contemporary art institutions in Amman. From 2004 until it closed in 2016, Makan was a frequent site of social activity. People came for its openings, famous parties, workshops, and other events, but also just to visit. Makan had a famous social vibe, and people friendly with the scene might drop in to visit the artists running the space. This was deliberately cultivated by Makan's administrators, who viewed community building as an important institutional task. At one point, curator Shuruq Harb even redesigned Makan's gallery into a diwan, or receiving area, explicitly casting the gallery as a space for visiting and conversation.

Makan closed in 2016, after board members moved away and struggled to administer the space from abroad. In 2015, however, it was still an important hub. My role was to help artistic director Diala Khasawnih with a variety of administrative tasks. We had lots of work to do, including running a fundraising campaign, organizing the archive, planning future activities, and reviewing incoming proposals, but much of our time was devoted to socialization. We received lots of visitors, both people Khasawnih knew and people new to the space. For new visitors, it was often my job to lead a small tour, introducing them to the gallery space, kitchen, library, rooftop garden, and rear balcony (with a beautiful view of downtown Amman). There was no exhibition at the time, so showing the gallery often involved talking about past shows and the sorts of things which Makan had exhibited (i.e., the Diwan). The tours usually ended with a cup of tea on the balcony and a long, friendly conversation. I was surprised by the intimacy established through this activity, both towards the visitor—who often engaged a deep discussion about Amman, art, and how this fit into their lives—but also but also between me and Makan. The act of tour giving positioned me as an intimate within the space and its social networks.

For visitors who were old friends of Khasawnih, no tour was necessary. Visitation revolved around tea and conversation, usually for well over an hour at a time. Even delivery people and repairmen were invited to join us for tea and we had long conversations with accountants, an upholsterer who worked across the street, web designers, etc. With all of the administrative work, visitation took up a lot of time and was a major activity. Khasawnih sometimes extended the opening hours, partly to get work done, but also to accommodate visitors.

Additionally, we went to visit others. We would meet Khasawnih's friends at bars or homes for hanging out and parties. We also visited other galleries and studios. We visited both galleries that Khasawnih already knew, where she wanted to catch up with friends or see an exhibit, and

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new spaces she wanted to check out. Such visits allowed Khasawnih to develop connections to these new spaces and fit them in to her already existing web of connections. She would note that one was opened by students of X (a friend of hers), another displayed art from an artist she was close to (leading her to share stories of that artist), another opened near closed spaces which had been important in Khasawnih's own development. In this way, social visitation allowed Khasawnih to develop and maintain meaningful social relationships, connecting the new spaces into a strong social infrastructure tied together through visitation.

Importantly, our visitation took us across the city. Several visits took place in Weibde, but others were in nearby neighborhoods of Jabal Amman and downtown. Others still were farther afield, in West Amman or the University area. (This is a notable contrast to the way Rumi's sociality is centralized at the café and will be relevant in the discussion that follows.)

As with other systems of artistic sociality, these visits mixed casual, disinterested conversation with more productive activities. At the time, Khasawnih was planning two upcoming exhibits. One was a series of Sinhalese language classes to be taught by Khasawnih's Sri Lankan housekeeper, intended to raise questions about Ammanis' ignorance towards guest workers and linguistic minorities. The other was a project documenting Jordanians' tattoos, which Khasawnih collected in conversation with tattooed people she met in the street, to critique the popular assumption that tattoos are a "western" import. In conversation, Khasawnih frequently brought up these ideas, alongside more mundane topics. Such conversation allowed her to sort through the ideas for herself and to gauge reaction. Visitors were frequently excited, especially about the tattoo project. Many responded by talking about an interesting tattoo which they had seen. Others engaged more directly, offering suggestions (helpful and unhelpful) and expertise, such as to process photographs or to develop web documentation for the project.

The sociality of visitation was thus important to Khasawnih's practice and Makan's operation. This was not unusual, and visitation played a similarly important role in other art spaces around the city. While Khasawnih embraced this aspect of her curatorial practice, other artists sometimes found visitation to be a frustrating, time-consuming activity that distracted from artistic and administrative labor. When I interviewed other artists about the studios or galleries where they worked, some joked about needing places to hide away from visitors. Other artists chided themselves for being easily distracted by conversation, feeling that this was separate from the "work" of art work.

Y explained that when her studio first opened, they had an open-door policy with regular hours, five days a week, welcoming any visitors. The space became a cool hangout, and lots of people came. Y says that this was a problem because, while the space was open, they wouldn't be working, just sitting and talking. Keeping the space open was very expensive, between electricity and other costs. Y and her partners considered

closing entirely, but eventually decided to restrict access by limiting opening hours and making visitation mostly by appointment. Once they did this, their electricity bill dropped by two thirds, and when the space was open, they were more able to focus on the tasks of running the space and artistic production. Their social activity shifted to other places, especially to Rumi, where they began to take laptops and work. I first met Y at Rumi, where she was in conversation with M, another artist, who I knew from my research, and she knew from her art space. Y spends lots of time at Rumi now, and jokes that it is her office. The social labor which Y had previously performed in her studio had been seamlessly moved into Rumi in a way that allowed her to feel more productive.

After Makan's closure in 2016, several artists who had been associated with Makan shifted some of their social practice into Rumi, and I sometimes ran into them there. Other artists, like Y, continued to operate their art spaces and yet still moved most of their social labor into Rumi, feeling that this was more comfortable or efficient. In each case, we see a shift in social practices from diffuse visitation to a practice mostly centered in the café. As Rumi expanded, the shift to the sociality of the café became widely pronounced across diverse groups of artists who increasingly located their social practices there. Rumi was not the first café to play a role in artists' lives. Indeed, cafés across the city frequently figured as useful meeting points within wider activities of visitation (alongside trips to studios, institutions, homes, etc.). However, as an increasing number of artists responded to structural changes in the art world by moving their "office" into Rumi, Rumi became a focus of social activity. While visitation did not disappear completely and remained important, especially among friends, it began to supplement the dominant activity of café socialization. In the next section, I explore the consequences of this shift, examining ways café sociality differed from visitation, how this impacted artistic practice, and how this, in turn, impacted the broader organization of Jordanian art.

From Diffuse Visitation to the Centralized Café

Rumi and visitation present two distinct modes of sociality with distinct structures of social practice. Scholarly attention to practice often shows how everyday activity builds social connection, linking together people, places, and meanings (De Certeau 2011). While much attention has focused on how these connections produce individual subjects, practical constructions can be important social forms in themselves (Elyachar 2010; Simone 2004). The difference between café and visitation is important in this way. As a sociality of visitation gives way to café practice, divergent social forms result in distinct constructions of political community, both within the art scene and across the neighborhood. The transition between visitation and café marks a dramatic shift in the social organization of Amman's art world and, correspondingly, reshapes

that art world, rewriting key definitions of status, transforming power relations, and adjusting boundaries of inclusion/exclusion.

Café activity and visitation are strikingly different. Visitation is geographically dispersed, whereas the café is spatially concentrated. Visitation usually involves individual or small group meetings at various points throughout the city. Someone wishing to visit multiple people typically does so through multiple visits to multiple locations over an extended period. Social visitation thus demands significant effort and a notable time investment. At Rumi, in contrast, someone might see and converse with several friends in a single short visit at a single location. While some of these meetings may be planned, others are seemingly by chance, as people just happen to be in the same place at the same time. The large population of artists who are just casually at Rumi makes it an easy place for “chance” meetings. Sitting at Rumi thus enables one to perform a greater quantity of social labor, more efficiently, than through visitation. Rumi, then, offers an intensification of social activity. For some artists, this proved attractive as it eased the effort that they had previously put into socialization.

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In calling café sociality an “intensification,” I refer to a Marxist concept that describes the ways that capitalists endeavored to extract more profit from labor, either by increasing production speed or efficiency (Marx 2004). While for Marx, this was necessarily exploitative, given the class relation between capitalist and worker, the politics of artistic sociality are not so straightforward. Artists are not wage laborers and may stand to gain from increased efficiencies. They also often enjoy time spent socializing at Rumi and describe this as a break from artistic production. Artists may see benefit in intensifying their own (social) labor, as this could enhance both their class position and their enjoyment.

This intensification has two immediate consequences. First, simply due to the greater quantity of social labor being performed, the results of this labor also increase. There is more sharing and development of ideas, for example, and a faster turnaround in social aspects of artistic production. This can be seen in Sami’s success, discussed above, in completing several important social tasks in a short amount of time. Second, to the extent that social labor is an essential activity, the effort devoted to this activity is decreased, leaving artists free, should they choose, to devote more time to other activities, such as art making. In the example above, Y celebrated how moving her social practice to Rumi freed her to be more productive in the “work” of art production. While these economic benefits to sitting at Rumi were rarely so clearly articulated (most artists claimed simply to like the atmosphere), Sami and Y highlight the ways that sitting at Rumi facilitated art production, easing the social processes essential to artistic labor.

Rumi’s sociality also opens to a wider community of participation. Prior to Rumi, the art scene was often described as “cliquish.” This is understandable, given that regular visitation is necessarily limited to a relatively small group of intimates because the time-consuming practice

only allows for so much visiting. Also, it is easier for existing friends to participate in social visitation, especially on a repeating basis, than for newcomers to figure out how to access this sociality. Some places, like Makan, sought to work against this insularity, seeking staff and volunteers from outside the art scene's main demographic. Still, it was difficult to overcome the scene's exclusive reputation, as these artists readily acknowledged.

The conditions of access to Rumi are quite different. A customer doesn't have to visit friends to access the phatic infrastructure but can simply go drink a coffee. While there is still a gap between this consumer activity and access to the social channels of the art scene, the barrier is lower, and sitting at Rumi provides an opportunity to begin meeting contacts.

There are still important exclusions. The three-dollar coffee presents a class barrier, and matters of taste may police other social boundaries (Bourdieu 1984) as people who don't like Rumi are less likely to come. New visitors occasionally complain about the lack of shisha pipes, which would be found in a more "authentically Jordanian" café, for example. Nevertheless, such barriers provide a different structure of access than "cliquish" visitation does. Rumi is, at least ostensibly, open to anyone.

Being more open facilitates an absorption of formerly external elements into the scene, contributing to transformations in the city's artistic geography. Previously, Amman's artistic sociality had been more diffuse, based in galleries and working spaces distributed across many middle- and upper-class neighborhoods (Hourani 1996). Several discrete artistic scenes which had been distinguished geographically, demographically, and aesthetically increasingly moved their social practices into Rumi, forming a concentrated scene. Such concentration is profound to the extent where "Rumi" and "Jabal al Luweibde" are sometimes used in conversation as metonyms for Jordan's art world.

If a geographically concentrated scene supports the functioning and growth of an "art world" (Sooudi 2016), Rumi provided a physical space where the scene could concentrate and grow. Although Rumi initially drew on a base of artistic customers who lived or worked nearby, the readily accessible social resources at Rumi proved attractive enough to draw artists from elsewhere. For example, several artists moved to Jabal al Luweibde from Zarqa, a city of six hundred thousand residents, just outside Amman. Zarqa is poorer than Amman, known for a high refugee population and conservative politics. As one friend explained, "Zarqa had its problems, but it always had a strong cultural scene and was proud of its cultural scene. But now, the residents of Zarqa complain about a brain drain. All of Zarqa's artists have moved to Amman. I mean, they have all moved to Weibde [where Rumi is]."

Such consolidation depends upon the physical structure of Rumi and the relatively open sociality found there. Had social visitation remained dominant, Zarqa's artists would have faced prominent social divides potentially limiting their access to the Weibde scene and its developing

social resources. This points to the broad stakes of the sociality developing at Rumi. Rumi is not just an alternate sociality to visitation but a rearrangement of access that reshapes the broad organization of Jordanian art. These impacts are felt not just in the art scene itself, and not just in Weibde, but across Jordan. As artistic sociality centralizes, there is a change in neighborhood influence and a massive redistribution of cultural resources across the city. This is felt in peripheral communities like Zarqa but also in middle-class areas of Amman, which had shared in an artistic sociality that is now increasingly concentrated in the café.

As Rumi has come to dominate Amman's artistic landscape, it is increasingly important for artists to be present. The intensifying sociality presents advantages not easily found elsewhere. This means that although creatives seemingly go to Rumi happily, this is not exactly a matter of choice but reflects gravitational compulsion, similar to what Marx calls the logic of "coercive competition" (Marx 2004). Closely related to intensification, "coercive competition" describes how, when one capitalist discovers a more efficient process of production, their competitors have no choice but to also intensify, as not doing so would create a competitive disadvantage. Coercion here does not describe a process of brute force or even any conflict of wills, but rather expresses a simple logic of the market. You must intensify alongside your peers or risk losing out.

Rumi centers the intensification of social practice in Ammani art and in this way becomes coercive. The more artists gather there, the more pressure there is to be socially present. To avoid socializing at Rumi could put an artist at a serious disadvantage, with less (or less intense) access to important channels of support. (And here, Rumi contrasts sharply with other cafés which may have been useful points for arranged meetings between friends but which less clearly centralized the wider social networks of the art scene.) As Rumi becomes a focal point, other modes of sociality become relatively weaker. Social visitation for instance, while still taking place, especially between friends, became less relevant both to individual artists and to the scene. This gravitational coercion creates a dependence upon the café, such that stopping at Rumi, while casual, is no longer exactly a matter of choice. This is not to say that artists feel explicitly coerced into going to Rumi but to emphasize the importance of being there.

I knew some artists who deliberately distanced themselves from Weibde, locating their studios in other neighborhoods because they claimed the burgeoning artistic neighborhood was "played out." These same artists, however, would still travel from their workspaces to Rumi, some on a daily basis. When asked about this contradiction, the artists were unsure. Some described Rumi as a "distraction," where the fun of seeing friends drew them away from real work. Others reiterated their sense that the neighborhood was overrated and then shrugged off their presence in the café. In my view, such practices emphasize the extent to which Rumi, an increasingly centralized node of artistic sociality, exerted a coercive gravity over the broader art world.

The Sociality of Gentrification

In addition to the distinct structural affordances of café and visitation, which support distinct realizations of artistic community, café and visitation also involve distinct spatializations of practice. Each establishes a distinct topological relationship to the city and to Jabal al Luweibde, resulting in distinct constructions of neighborhood space. Via the dispersed practice of visitation, artists moved through the neighborhood while travelling between a constellation of discrete artistic destinations, spread across the city. While some of these destinations were in Weibde, this did not constitute the neighborhood as particularly “artistic.” Rather, Weibde remained a quiet residential area where some artists were located. This changed with the rise of café sociality, however, as Rumi channeled artists into the neighborhood in new ways, forming a centralized, local scene. As I explore in this section, that scene itself then spilled over until the neighborhood itself became an important social space for artists. This is yet another artistic topology, with its own political ramifications.

On a hill overlooking downtown, Jabal al Luweibde is one of Amman’s oldest neighborhoods. Established in the 1920s to 1950s as a diplomatic hub for the then-new country of Jordan, it is considered Amman’s first middle-class neighborhood, as many embassy workers settled there. The focal point of the neighborhood is Paris Circle, a traffic circle at the eastern end of the hilltop, named in reference to the nearby French Institute. Two parallel roads extend west from Paris Circle for about one-third of a mile, forming the heart of the neighborhood. Rumi is on one of these roads. Further west, the neighborhood connects to governmental centers, new commercial developments, and the sprawling middle- and upper-class areas of West Amman. In all other directions, the neighborhood descends downhill towards downtown and old-Amman neighborhoods. Like other old neighborhoods in Amman, Weibde declined in the 1970s and 1980s, as wealthier families moved west to suburban-style homes. A handful of art institutions moved in in the 1990s and early 2000s, finding beautiful buildings with undervalued rents. This followed wider trends of preliminary reinvestment in Amman’s old neighborhoods and the general growth of artistic institutions citywide. Neither of these trends were focused in Weibde and in fact had greater initial impacts elsewhere. These institutions were often on the hillside (not the heart of the neighborhood) and remained oriented to structures of visitation that extended across the wider West Amman. Yet they exposed artists to the neighborhood and showed the potential for future development.

In 2013, shortly before Rumi opened, a young photographer named Linda Khouri opened her own café, Fann wa Chai (Art and Tea). Noting that there were several artistic institutions in Weibde, including her House of Photography, but no place outside of those institutions for artists to hang out, Khouri opened Fann wa Chai to fill this void. It quickly became a popular hangout. In Khouri’s words,

Rumi channeled artists into the neighbourhood in new ways

When I came here ... there was nothing. At 7:00 p.m. people closed their doors and no one was in the street. There were few restaurants. Even when I opened Fann wa Chai, there were only two other cafés ... it was the first cultural gallery. The first tea shop. You know, it was something different. Now are entering the fifth year working ... Many things have changed in Jabal al Luweibde, but I remember in the first two or three years, it [the neighborhood] was empty.

Closely linked with nearby art institutions, Fann wa Chai provided a new kind of focal point for sociality between those institutions. Artists could meet there as they travelled between institutions and home and, through that activity, began to establish a more centralized artistic presence in the neighborhood.

As Khouri mentioned, prior to this, there was a dearth of places to hang out in Weibde, which had been a quiet, residential space. Neighborhood booster/historian Salem Quna's comprehensive 2007 guide to neighborhood businesses, *My Neighborhood* only lists one café, which happened to be on the edge of Weibde, basically in downtown. (Downtown, in contrast to Weibde, had a well-known café culture, albeit of the "popular" style: somewhat seedy cafés frequented by older men who smoke water pipes and play cards—very different from the mixed-gender, hipster, European-influenced café scenes at Rumi and Fann wa Chai.) There were a couple cafés that did not make it into Quna's survey, including an art-museum-like institution at Darat al Funun, where artists frequently met when visiting the institution. These were likely skipped because they were not stand-alone cafés but functional parts of larger institutions. Yet Quna's survey shows a neighborhood that was not known for café culture, supporting Khouri's assertion that Fann wa Chai was something new. It gave a new focus for artistic sociality outside the structure of institutional visitation. It also became a nodal point for artists within the neighborhood, connecting social trajectories that linked home and institution. When Rumi opened down the block about a year later, it captured and dramatically intensified this developing sociality. Its sidewalk seating meant that passing artists might spot a friend and decide to linger. Indeed, the space outside Rumi became a space of social congestion. This in turn helped to focus artists, whose institutions were spread around the neighborhood (and more widely), into the neighborhood's center.

The developing social gravity at Rumi quickly reached beyond the neighborhood and drew in artists from further afield. Many, like Sami, moved in to be closer to the scene. Others established workspaces nearby. As they came in, these artists extended the neighborhood's gravitational reach, both increasing the neighborhood's artistic density and helping to mark the neighborhood as "artistic." Creative maps of the neighborhood, which began to appear around this time, show a dramatic increase in the number of artistic institutions and related locales, many of them within a few blocks of Rumi, which continued to act as a social focus,

connecting artists as they moved between institutions, homes, and work-spaces (Figure 1).

As artists moved through the neighborhood, their social trajectories between café, home, workspace, and various consumer locations helped to constitute the neighborhood itself as a social space where artists could expect to encounter one another, especially in the blocks around Rumi at the heart of the neighborhood. One young artist described Weibde as an “extended living room,” where she knew she would see friends and contacts. In my own experience, by mid-2017, almost any walk around the neighborhood was filled with important social encounters.

The walk from my apartment to Rumi was two short blocks. Along the way, I ran into the graffiti artist Wessam Shadid outside of the French Institute, where he had recently finished a mural. He stopped and talked to me, telling me about the style he developed for the mural and asking me what I think of it. At Rumi itself, I saw several people I knew: a notable designer, a fellow academic, a few friends. I wrote for a while. My friend B, an architect, joined me and we talked for about an hour. We discussed a competition that he was considering entering, and we chatted about public space in Amman. Later, on the way back to my apartment, I passed L, a dramatist who works at a restaurant on the block, and we said hello. Another artist who works at the restaurant, S, was not there that day, but at other times, I had run into him, and he had had important questions or advice for my research. Further on, I bumped into Y, a German student who I know from various artistic meetup events.

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Figure 1. This promotional Art Walk highlights Weibde's growing art scene. It showcases neighborhood businesses connected to the arts, many of them new, and further links them together to mark the neighborhood as an artistic place. Rumi is #24. (Courtesy Malahi Entertainment. The design is based on a French film poster). [This figure appears in color in the online issue.]

Further still, I saw Ghaith, a cultural activist from the city of Madaba (where he owns a library) who sometimes visits Amman to sell books off the roof of his car. He invited me to sit down and join him for a coffee before he set up his books. We talked about Madaba and the challenges to developing a more energetic cultural scene there.

As has been seen elsewhere, the presence of artists marked the neighborhood as “cool” and drew other people in (Lloyd 2010). Many came to see what was going on, some stopping at Rumi, others clogging the neighborhood streets. Following a familiar pattern of gentrification, the neighborhood quickly transformed into a space of conspicuous consumption (Slater 2012). Real estate developers capitalized on the incoming crowds and rushed to build new cafés (as well as restaurants and luxury apartments) to capture overflow from Rumi’s success, seemingly cramming new cafés into every available space, including recently converted residences, alleyways, and even parked vans. A map from my fieldnotes in June 2017 (Ramadan) shows the rapid increase of cafés in the neighborhood, with at least twenty-one cafés in the neighborhood at that time, all within a few blocks of Rumi, nine having opened over the past six months and four during Ramadan alone. Before Fann wa Chai, cafés had not been a notable presence (Figure 2).

Early on, these cafés often sought to capitalize on the neighborhood’s artistic reputation and claimed to be “cultural cafés” run by artists with an eye towards cultural programming. However, as the neighborhood



Figure 2. A crowd gathers for an artistic event on a stairway connecting Jabal al Luweibde with Amman’s downtown. As Weibde’s streets became an increasingly important social space, numerous cafes opened to cater to the crowds. By June of 2017, there were at least 21 cafes open in the neighborhood, 9 having opened in the past 6 months, 4 in that month alone. Photo by Colin McLaughlin-Alcock. [This figure appears in color in the online issue.]

became more popular, it became less important to claim this artistic legitimacy. Cafés increasingly stopped claiming to be cultural, instead embracing the popular coffee-shop style found elsewhere in the city, and thus connecting with the popular crowds increasingly filling Weibde's streets. Such popular cafés are also generally more masculine. This shift indicates further changes in the neighborhood and indicates that the art scene in Weibde may already be beginning to fade to a more popular crowd. In the next section, I discuss how, because this neighborhood provided the ground upon which Amman's artistic community took shape, this neighborhood transformation put pressure on power relations within the art scene, especially along lines of gender.

These reciprocal transformations of art world and neighborhood further highlight the broader relevance of art world development. Structural change within the art world is not only channeled inward, impacting the power struggles between artists or the sorts of values that the art world sanctions, but also reaches outward, transforming social space more broadly. Rumi alone did not cause the neighborhood gentrification, but in capturing a set of wider trends (artists coming into the neighborhood through institutions which found undervalued rents there, wider changes to the city's class structure, and the budding artistic community at Fann wa Chai), Rumi gave clear shape to the intertwined trajectories of neighborhood change and artistic community. Its physical affordances, as a center of artistic sociality, spatialized emergent forms of social interaction.

As artists' sociality was rearranged across the neighborhood, the possibility inherent in that space transformed. It became an artistic social space and then a gentrifying, popular space. These changes pushed further transformation in the art world as it continued to rearticulate across this changing space, revealing an important feedback interaction between the developing artistic scene and its spatial context. Although there are by now numerous studies pointing to the relationship between art and gentrification, many of which resonate with these observations (i.e., Lloyd 2010; Ley 2003), few attend to this level of feedback or to the ways that artistic community is itself reorganized through this process. By locating important stakes, such as class and gender, in the political constitution of the art world as it interacts with neighborhood change, my topological analysis highlights a fluid urban politics where diverse, interrelated stakes are in perpetual imbrication and rearrangement.

Gendering Artistic Space

The emergence of the neighborhood as an important social space for artists further impacted the makeup of Amman's artistic community, influencing shifting dynamics of power, especially along lines of gender. Women have historically played an influential role in Ammani art. Almost every notable art institution in the city was founded by women,

and a significant portion of the city's notable artists are also women. The national gallery and Darat al Funun, two of Amman's largest art institutions, were opened by elite women, Princess Wijdan Ali and Suha Shoman, of a powerful banking family, respectively. Other foundational art spaces in the neighborhood, including Makan and Fann wa Chai, were led by women. (Rumi was opened by a man, albeit one well-connected to the scene.) In light of this, some in the city have celebrated the arts as a path to women's empowerment (Sawalha 2016). This dynamic was supported by the sociality of visitation, where artistic matronage moved through the private spaces of female-dominated galleries. As artistic sociality moves into the semipublic spaces of café and neighborhood, it enters a more masculine space where women's authority is less secure. While women happily frequent Rumi and continue to feel at home in Weibde, there are indications that within this space, men have easier conditions of domination.

"There's so much testosterone ... It's such a masculine space now."

During Ramadan 2017, I was riding back into Weibde with M, an influential female artist and friend, after attending an art workshop outside the neighborhood. I casually commented on the number of new cafés opening in Weibde. Already during Ramadan, four new cafés had opened on a single block. At that moment, we drove past a particularly tacky and bright new café, and we laughed at how gaudy it was. Suddenly she exclaimed, "Yeah. And there's so much testosterone. [pause] I mean, it's such a masculine space now, especially [Al Bouinya] street with all of the fast food."

M's comment correlates the increasingly masculine character of the space with the rise in café culture and shows how her gendered experience of the neighborhood is changing alongside that. She finds the space to be increasingly masculine and thus more threatening to women like her. This corresponds with how other women have described other trendy areas of Amman to me. Sexual harassment is a common problem in trendy areas. As Jabal al Luweibde popularizes, it seems to be becoming the kind of space where men are allotted more power and leeway than women, and where women are likely to experience an increase of social policing. This is a common dynamic in popular public spaces (Ghannam 2002).

Another incident occurred with J, a male friend. Although J is a non-artist from outside the neighborhood, he likes visiting Weibde to walk the streets. We passed a café where he saw a young woman smoking shisha. "I don't like that," J muttered to me. "I don't like seeing girls smoke." I pointed out that J himself likes shisha. "Yes, but that's different. Girls should not smoke. Girls should be nice ... You may not understand this [because you are a foreigner], but here, I like women who listen and take care of me. ... I don't like seeing them smoke." J's comments exhibited a male's attempt to police gender roles in the changing neighborhood, as J worried that women's inclusion may betoken greater, undesirable degrees of independence.

Scholarship on gender in the Middle East has frequently focused on a dynamic between private and public space, with private space largely gendered female and public space male, with women experiencing substantial social policing in public space (Bourdieu 1977). Recent scholarship has challenged this stark binary through attention to ambiguous, developing spaces, neither fully private nor fully public, where gender roles are unclear and thus contested (Ghannam 2002; Newcomb 2006; Deeb and Harb 2013). Weibde and Rumi are ambiguous, newly developing spaces open to negotiation in this vein. However, as café and street are historically masculine domains, moving from visitation to café and neighborhood moves artistic sociality from a feminine private space into an ambiguous, potentially masculine space. This potentially poses problems to female artists as the historically women-led art scene opens to contestation.

In May 2017, I attended the opening of *I am*, a show of works by women Arab artists, hosted at Jordan's national gallery in Weibde and organized by an international "peacebuilding" NGO. While browsing the well-attended opening, I saw B, a young, modestly successful male artist, and said hello. B whispered a complaint about "segregation." "Do you think it's good to put women in their own show?" he asked. "It's not good for them. These shows should be open to anyone. To be more inclusive."

The opening was capped by a lecture from noted female Iraqi artist, Hanaa Malallah, on the topic of arts and women's empowerment. Possibly ill-advisedly, Malallah focused her talk on statistics, drawn from western art museums in the 1980s, highlighting the lack of woman-made art in (those) museum collections. She also presented an extended discussion of the work of the Guerilla Girls, a New-York based feminist art collective.

In the middle of her talk, Malallah was interrupted by a young male artist who shouted out, "But it isn't like that here." The complainant noted how many Amman galleries and museums were owned by powerful Jordanian women (including the national gallery itself). This outburst challenged the event's goal of raising female artists' profiles, suggesting that women already held power.

Later, I found B and this artist in the lobby, complaining about the exhibition. "Women artists have it so easy," B complained. "They can just do art as a career [without being responsible for heading a household or maintaining family prestige]. I just want to be able to do art as a career." Complaining about male "exclusion," these men articulated a challenge to the status quo, where women hold significant power in the arts. (I should note here that such comments are unusual and many male Jordanian artists are committed to feminist politics). B's ability to articulate this complaint reflects the changing sociality of the art scene, where important social structures have moved away from woman-dominated private spaces into a public neighborhood space where men claim more authority. No longer dependent on institutional matriarchs for access to

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social resources, B does not risk his position when he makes aggressive challenges to female control of the arts. That he felt comfortable making these claims within Princess Wijdan's national gallery shows the extent to which authorial control of matriarchal gallery spaces has been weakened as the artistic neighborhood has become the dominant social structure of the art scene.

Conclusions

The patterns of change traced in this paper explore the shifting relationship between an artistic community and its spatial ground. As artists' practices shifted from diffuse visitation to a concentrated café sociality to a third sociality integrated with a transforming neighborhood, the artistic community was itself transformed as it adjusted to the spatial affordances of these new topologies. Consequences included boosted artistic productivity, geographical transformations of power (as artistic communities merged and moved across space), broadened class inclusion, and emerging challenges to gendered relations of power.

As spatial change continues to push further transformation in the art scene, driving a feedback loop between spatial and community formation, this interaction reveals a fluid and dynamic process of change with an urban politics that is always emergent. Indeed, the situation explored in this paper remains unstable. The gentrifying café boom threatens to overwhelm the artistic character of the neighborhood, as seems to be a common dynamic in gentrifying areas (Ley 2003), and challenges to the gender dynamics in the art scene remain unresolved. Several artists have suggested to me that if neighborhood change continues its current direction, artists will be forced out. This is presented as an emic theory of neighborhood change, with the presumption that artists would then find another neighborhood to move into, leading to the gentrification of that second neighborhood as well. While this certainly coincides with processes of gentrification observed elsewhere, attention to the way that artistic community is reshaped by this process raises its own set of concerns and suggests that the relationship between art and neighborhood change is not quite as neat as this emic theory would hold. If artists do move on, the question is not only where they will go (what neighborhood will gentrify next) but how they will go there, who will be included or excluded in the move, in what ways artistic community will arrange itself in that new space, how social relations and power will attach to a new topology; and how that will reach across the city.

Such changes have profound stakes. I have already noted how the growth of Jabal al Luweibde "drained" cultural resources in peripheral areas. The impact on those areas remains to be studied, but the cultural exodus certainly poses new political challenges in those communities. Further, the rise of Jabal al Luweibde as an artistic neighborhood has likely contributed to the growing political profile of the arts in Amman

by providing a point where the arts are hyper-visible. Recent years have seen the rise of mega events like “Amman Design Week” catering to Amman’s creatives, increases in NGO funding to the arts via a burgeoning aid sector, and the municipality’s increasing interest in arts programming as a tool of governance. While the full scope of these developments is beyond the focus of this paper (and a worthy topic for future writing and research), they highlight the political stakes associated with artistic development in Amman. Who counts as an artist and how this community and its power relations are restructured is of significant consequence, not just for the arts or even Jabal al Luweibde, but for all of Amman, as the developing art world integrates into, and transforms, the cityscape.

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