



BEYOND WORK AND ROOM: EVERYDAY PUBLIC LIFE AT THE EDGES

In Muscat, the migrant men who build the city live largely between work and a rented room. Public life takes shape in the time and space left over: a few minutes at a tea stall, a chair on a rooftop. This visual essay follows where that everyday life gathers, and how it shifts. Faces are obscured throughout, a condition of the work as much as a courtesy to its subjects.

Photographed on the author's behalf, 01/2026



The workshops that anchor everything. Shifts run long and six days a week; leisure is whatever time is left over. Photo by Author, 11/2025



Sociability rarely travels far from work. A plastic table outside a carpentry shop does the work a café is assumed to do elsewhere. Photographed on the author's behalf, 04/2026



The tea stall and the alleyway: proximate, cheap, endlessly repeatable. *"Just the tea shops, what else? There's nothing else here. No spot."* (P5, 38, mechanic) Photographed on the author's behalf, 04/2026



On a highway divider, migrant groups claim a strip of green, a borrowed echo of landscapes left behind. Appropriation, not provision, makes this a place.
Photo by Author, 12/2025



On the other side, a designed plaza sits lit and empty. Formal space exists within reach yet goes unused: access is socially coded, not guaranteed by openness. Photographed on the author's behalf, 04/2026



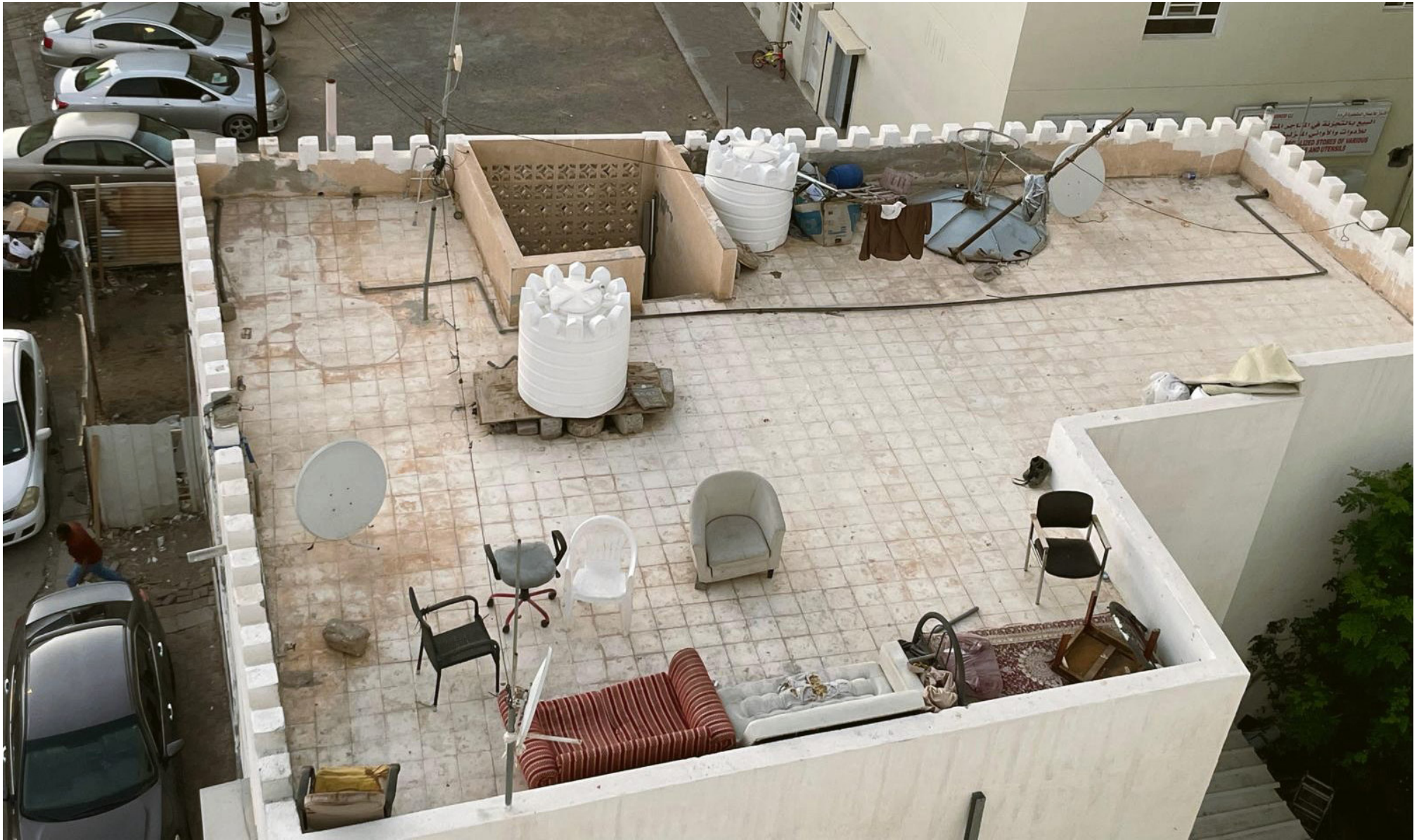
As visibility grows costly, gathering moves into the seams of the city: a game in an unlit alley, set back from scrutiny. Photographed on the author's behalf, 04/2026



A discarded sofa under a tree becomes a sitting room. Where formal space won't hold them, men assemble one from what has been thrown away. Photo by Author, 11/2025



Presence calibrated almost to absence: a man turns off the street into a residential lane, withdrawing from view as he goes. Photographed on the author's behalf, 04/2026



The deepest retreat. *"I go up from here directly. If I need to sit, sometimes roof, sometimes staircase."* (P6, 29, mechanic). A rooftop furnished for rest, public life at its least seen. Photographed on the author's behalf, 04/2026



The city that runs on them, seen whole at dusk. Their public life is thin and easily missed, but it is there, sustained night after night in the spaces the city leaves over. Photographed on the author's behalf, 04/2026

Public space is often described through what a city provides - parks, plazas, seating, shade. This essay looks instead at what the people who build and service Muscat tend to use day to day.

For South Asian blue-collar migrants, time is the first constraint. Long shifts and fragmented days off leave leisure as leftover, so social life gravitates to whatever is nearest: a shopfront edge, a tea stall, a building's threshold. Proximity outweighs quality. Formal spaces close by often stay empty, not for lack of need, but because their social codes, and the sense of being out of place, make them harder to use.

Visibility shapes things too. When being noticed feels costly, time outside is kept brief and low-profile, and gathering tends toward quieter, less exposed corners. As this unfolds, public life folds inward: from the street to the alley, the threshold, and finally the roof. Withdrawal here is not the absence of public life but one of its forms.

These frames ask not where the parks are, but under what conditions everyday presence can be sustained.

A note on method: the author, a woman, could not enter many of these male spaces. The photographs were made on her behalf, at her direction: a limit on access that is itself part of what this work documents.

Reference:

Jahan, N. (2026). Beyond work and room: Informal third places and the negotiation of public life among South Asian blue-collar migrant workers in Muscat [Master's thesis, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar].