

Chapter 12

After the Life of LGBTQ Spaces: Learning from Atlanta and Istanbul



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Abstract Many gay villages (or “gayborhoods”) arose in the wake of the gay liberation movement attracted a good deal of academic research within the last 40 years. Unfortunately, this hyper focus on certain spaces often populated by white gay men has frequently eclipsed research on other types of LGBTQ areas as well as other geographies beyond the global north. This chapter aims to address this gap, taking an ordinary cities perspective (Robinson, 2006) and asking how we can develop models that are conceptually useful for understanding the life of a more diverse array of LGBTQ spaces across the globe. To answer this question we avoid linear models of change by developing a new model based on a conceptual framework derived from physics: centripetal and centrifugal forces. The advantage of this model is its explicit recognition of the ways that social, economic, and political forces and their manifestations influence queer spaces. We use two cases from relatively understudied regions; Atlanta and Istanbul to illustrate the utility of this framework. The “in-betweenness” of these cities, linking south and north as well as west and east, makes them a haven for queers and others fleeing the conservative surroundings in the search for more attractive and welcoming places for marginalized LGBTQ individuals. This chapter draws on the authors’ lived experiences, prior research, and additional interviews to conduct a relational reading of queer spaces with emphasis on the ways that LGBTQ people circulate and congregate in a wider range of urban areas. This comparative strategy and relational reading of queer spaces expands the narrow focus from normalized narratives of gayborhoods to a broader “analysis of the heterogeneity and multiplicity of metropolitan modernities” (Roy 2009, p. 821) of queer spaces.

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The Life and Afterlife of Gay Neighborhoods: Resurgence and Renaissance

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12.1 Introduction

The most iconic gay villages (or “gayborhoods”) that arose in the wake of the gay liberation movement have attracted the lion’s share of academic research; other (see for example the introduction to this volume that cites Greenwich Village, NY, West Hollywood in Los Angeles, South Beach in Miami, Dupont Circle in Washington, DC, and the Castro in San Francisco as well as Oxford Street in London, Church and Wellesley in Toronto, le Marais in Paris, and the Schöneberg District in Berlin). Other LGBTQ neighborhoods in smaller cities both in the West as well as most cities in the Global South have received much less attention. Furthermore, lesbians have not received equal attention (cf. Valentine 1993; Podmore 2006), and transgender individuals even less (cf. Namaste 2000; Doan 2007; Nash 2010). In addition, the overwhelming whiteness of these large metropolitan neighborhoods has been noted widely (Nero 2005; Greene 2014). In order to study the life and afterlife of a more diverse array of LGBTQ spaces, in this chapter we take an “ordinary cities” perspective as suggested by Robinson (2006), by adopting an explicitly post-colonial approach and arguing “that there is potential for learning from the experiences and accounts of urban life in even quite different cities” (Robinson 2006: 41).

We have selected two cities, Atlanta and Istanbul, from relatively under-studied regions that provide us with opportunities to explore differences in the ways LGBTQ people find safety in urban areas, one city with a clearly defined gay neighborhood and the other without. One city happens to be located in the American South and the other forms a physical bridge between Europe and Asia. Both cities are surrounded by wide areas that are not at all welcoming of LGBTQ people and have served as hubs that attract a variety of LGBTQ individuals from across their respective regions. In this chapter we use evidence from these two cities derived from the authors’ lived experiences, prior research, and additional interviews to develop a more generalizable approach that incorporates the range of forces that influence the rise and decline (Life and afterlife) of LGBTQ spaces, including gay villages. We utilize a framework derived from basic physics concepts, centripetal and centrifugal forces, following a long tradition in social sciences of “borrowing” from other disciplines that has yielded key urban theory concepts such as the gravity model and the friction of distance.

Both of our chosen cities, Atlanta and Istanbul, share a cosmopolitan urban imaginary rooted in their intersectional geographies. Atlanta is an historically “southern” city, sometimes called the epitome of the New South. Its modern growth has been fueled by many northern transplants, making it a complex city blending elements of both the American North and South. Istanbul is physically located on the Bosphorus Strait that separates Europe from Asia, providing a setting that merges Europe (the West) with the Middle East and Asia (the East or the Orient). The “in-betweenness”

of these cities linking south and north as well as west and east makes them a haven for queers and others fleeing the conservative surroundings in the search for more attractive and welcoming places for marginalized LGBTQ individuals. In addition, these cities share a multicultural and ethnically diverse population base. As such, this “northern-southern” city and this “western-eastern” city provide a useful relational reading of queer spaces with emphasis on the ways that LGBTQ people circulate and congregate in a wider range of urban areas. This comparative strategy utilized in a relational reading of queer spaces expands the narrow focus from normalized narratives of gayborhoods to a broader “analysis of the heterogeneity and multiplicity of metropolitan modernities” (Roy 2009: 821) of queer spaces.

12.2 Centripetal and Centrifugal Forces

Case-based economic descriptions of gayborhoods in large metropolitan areas have been used to elaborate linear “models” that suggest gay villages progress from marginal areas to emergent neighborhoods, which then expand and diversify, and finally are re-integrated into society (Collins 2004). However, other scholars have suggested that the integration stage marking the decline of traditional gayborhoods might be linked to a “post gay” (Ghaziani 2014) or “post mo” (Nash 2013) identity that has shifted the fundamental chemistry of queer spaces. Other scholars have suggested that the symbolic value of queer spaces remains extremely salient. For example, Lewis (2015) described the ways that many gay men can no longer afford to live in Dupont Circle, the traditional gay area of Washington DC, but still return to the bars and shops of the area to find community. Similarly, Greene (2014) used the concept of “vicarious citizenship” to explain how certain LGBT populations continue to find gay neighborhoods symbolically essential to their sense of identity and community despite evidence signaling the decline of these spaces (Greene 2014: 103). More recently, Ghaziani proposed a more expansive notion of cultural archipelagos (2019), incorporating a spatial plurality that better reflects a broader range of queer spaces. In a similar vein, Doan (2019) argued that a planetary systems model might capture the ways in which gay villages serve as “mini suns” around which LGBTQ individuals orbit.

This chapter builds on this prior work by emphasizing the way the LGBTQ people are both drawn to and pushed away from queer urban spaces. We propose a conceptual framework that identifies both centering (centripetal) and decentering (centrifugal) forces that operate at a variety of scales from the individual to the neighborhood, city and national levels. It is the interplay between these broader socio-political influences that creates a unique signature for each LGBTQ space analyzed, providing for a more generalizable approach that might apply across different sizes of cities, various cultural and ethnic areas, and a wider array of geographies.

In general, centripetal forces (see Fig. 12.1) exert inward pressure to a central point or area. In the case of gayborhoods, these “forces” attract LGBTQ people and businesses toward the center. These “forces” might include a more progressive and

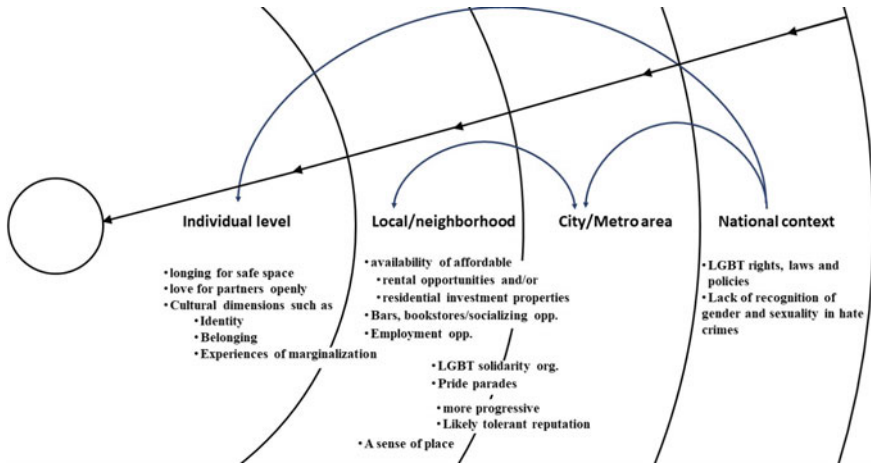


Fig. 12.1 Centripetal forces (Source Diagram by authors)

tolerant reputation of a city drawing LGBTQ individuals from a wider regional area that is less accepting, i.e., Kath Weston’s (1995) “Get thee to a big city” concept or pulling people to a particular neighborhood that is more welcoming than other parts of a city or wider region. The longing for safe space where queer people can express their identities and love for their partners openly is also a very powerful draw. In addition, there are cultural dimensions that influence the ways that individuals conceptualize themselves in terms of identity, belonging, experiences of marginalization, and religion that may influence their ability to express agency in the face of these forces (Butcher and Maclean 2018).

The availability of affordable rental opportunities and/or residential investment properties also invites new residents to move in, contributing to a critical mass of queer people. Bars, bookstores, and other opportunities for socializing also pull queer folks toward the center. Finally, a sense of “place” and an interesting built environment also can serve as attractors.

However, to fully understand the life and afterlife of gayborhoods, we must also consider those centrifugal forces (see Fig. 12.2) that cause LGBTQ people to move away from the center. The rising cost of housing makes it harder (if not impossible) for new queer residents to settle in established gayborhoods. In addition, in the aftermath of the dissolution of same sex marriages/partnerships either through divorce or through the death of one partner (especially relevant in the aftermath of HIV), more expensive housing can make it impossible for one or both partners to financially remain in the existing queer space. Changes in the overall atmosphere of the built environment due to large-scale redevelopment can alter the urban fabric in ways that increase isolation, reduce the sense of safety, and the feeling of belonging in the neighborhood. A component of this change is the increasing presence of non-queer folks and families who may not understand or approve of some of the more overtly

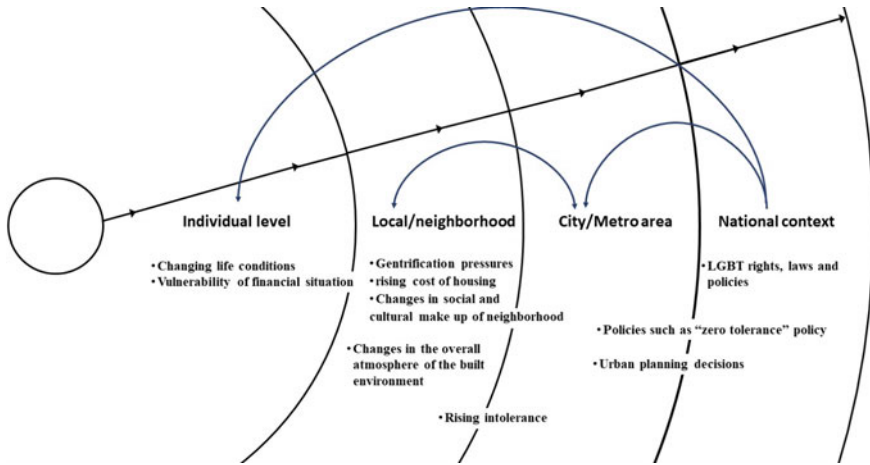


Fig. 12.2 Centrifugal forces (Source Diagram by authors)

queer aspects of life in the gayborhood (Pride parades, late nights at gay bars, public displays of affection, etc.).

We use two disparate cases to illustrate the utility of this framework. The case of Atlanta in the American Southeast represents a more typical story of gayborhood development in its Midtown neighborhood. We supplement this experience with the less well-studied case of Istanbul, representing a different geographic, social, and political context.

12.3 Midtown, Atlanta

The city of Atlanta provides a set of fascinating contrasts as the birthplace of both Margaret Mitchell and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Mitchell’s 1936 novel *Gone with the Wind* depicts the complex lives of white society during and after the Civil War and is still revered by some people who mourn the loss of a southern identity idealizing Scarlett O’Hara and her not so idyllic life on Tara Plantation. At the same time King’s gravesite and the adjacent Ebenezer Baptist Church where he preached are now a powerful museum that memorializes his life and the struggles of other black Atlantans in the civil rights movement. Atlanta has evolved into a city of contrasts where “two largely separate cities: a mostly white north side of town, where economic activity is vigorous and expanding, and a mostly black south side” that is divided between the very poor and a thriving black middle class (Keating 2001: 8) (Fig. 12.3).

Midtown is located just north of downtown at the southern edge of the mostly white northern parts of Atlanta. Although Midtown attracted gay men as early as the late 1950s for cruising at the public library and in nearby Piedmont Park (Howard 1997), it wasn’t until white elites abandoned this neighborhood in favor of more

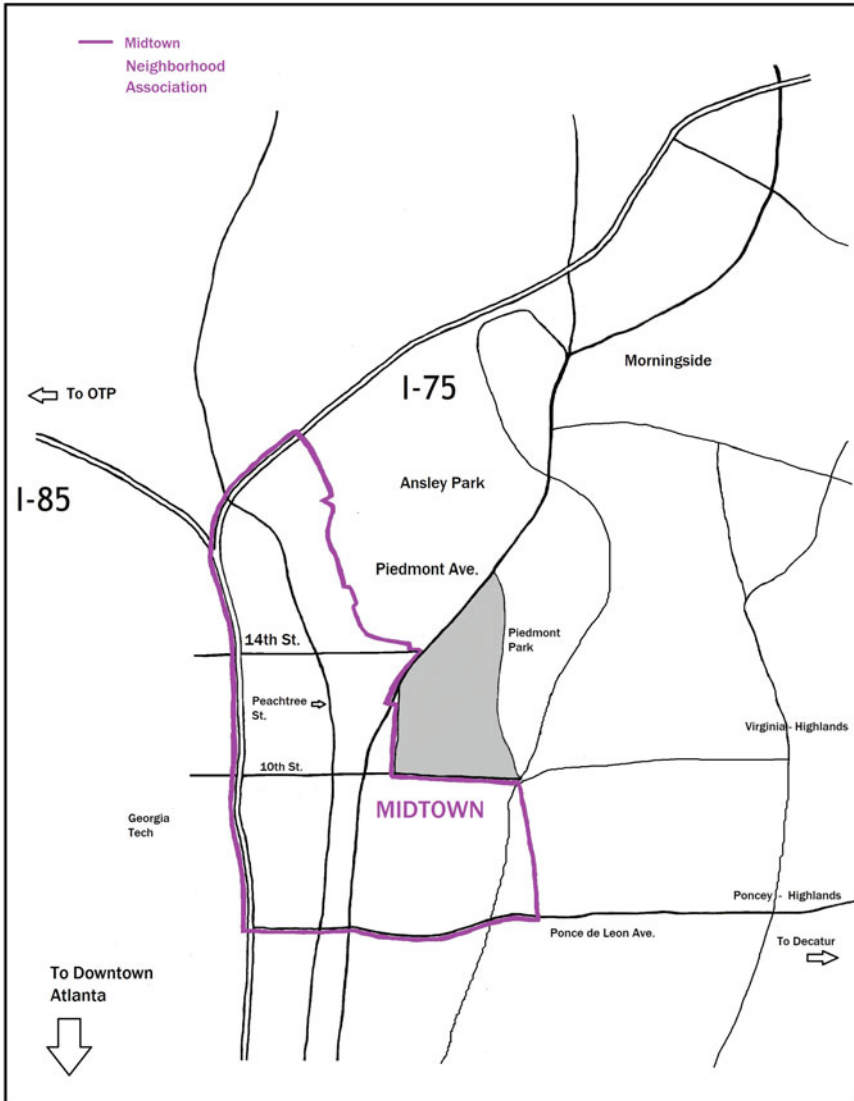


Fig. 12.3 Sketch map of Midtown, Atlanta (Source Map by authors)

modern suburbs (Kruse 2005), that gay men began moving into what had become a very sketchy area. The neighborhood was “largely restored by gays” who moved in and began fixing up some of the area’s Craftsman Style homes (Pendered 2003). A gay bookstore, Outwrite Books, and a number of gay bars opened in the vicinity and helped to create a burgeoning gay community. By the 1990s Midtown was widely recognized as the center of gay life in Atlanta and nearby Piedmont Park was the



Fig. 12.4 Typical craftsman bungalow in Midtown, Atlanta (*Source* Image by authors)

location for gay Pride events, becoming a focal point that attracted LGBTQ people from across the Deep South (Fig. 12.4).

12.3.1 Centripetal Forces in the Atlanta Case

Atlanta is located in the middle of the region called the Bible Belt known for its conservative family values and high levels of intolerance for LGBTQ individuals. Charley Brown, the hostess of a fabulous drag show at the now shuttered Backstreet nightclub in Atlanta, used to divide the south into two zones, inside the Atlanta beltway (I-285) and outside the perimeter (OTP). The OTP region was often the butt of her jokes as the home of tractor pulls and rural intolerance. This harsh attitude encouraged many queer folks from across the southeast to leave home and seek the anonymity of the big city in Atlanta where they discovered one of the most progressive locations in a region stretching from New Orleans to Miami Beach (Lewis 2006). This powerful inward migration was part of the regional centripetal force that spurred the development of Atlanta's Midtown.

[T]he strong presence of evangelicals appears to create a climate in which Southerners oppose lesbian and gay rights more strongly than demographically, religiously, and politically comparable Americans in the rest of the country. (Lewis and Galope 2014: 293) (Fig. 12.5)



Fig. 12.5 Backstreet Nightclub in Midtown, Atlanta (*Source Image by authors*)

Yet Atlanta also attracted some transplants from the North, although some of these migrants struggled to understand its complexity. In one interview a lesbian couple noted that stereotypes of the South as a home to rednecks must be carefully tempered by Atlanta's unique atmosphere.

..... when we first moved here, there were people who would come in from rural Georgia, to come into the big city to do errands that they needed to do... let's put it this way. I grew up in Connecticut. Whatever anybody tells you, we got rednecks. They are a whole lot more threatening, and not nearly as polite as the rednecks in Georgia. (interview with a lesbian, Nancy)

Yeah, rednecks may beat you up here, but they'll be polite with you until they do? I think it's...I think it's a Southern thing,... And the longer I live in the South, the more realize

I don't understand the South, not having grown up here. (interview with Nancy's partner Evelyn)

Furthermore, the relatively tolerant attitude of city officials to the gay bar scene enabled an attractive cluster of gay bars and clubs to emerge, creating a centripetal force that drew LGBTQ people to the neighborhood and city. In 1966 Atlanta had 6 gay bars (Lewis 2006: 6), but over the next three decades many other venues opened (notable gay attractants were Backstreet, the Armory, WETBar, Burkhart's, Blake's on the Park, Bulldogs, and the Metro video bar). Lesbian bars also were located in the Midtown area, first the Other Side and subsequently My Sister's Room. Other gay bathhouses and gay-oriented businesses located in the Midtown and the adjacent Cheshire Bridge area also appealed to both new residents and visitors from the wider region (Fig. 12.6).

12.3.2 *Centrifugal Forces in the Atlanta Case*

In recent years rising rents and pressure from city government to rein in the exuberant late-night life of the area caused many gay clubs to close, paving the way for the redevelopment of the Peachtree Street corridor (Doan and Higgins 2011). For example, during the 1990s as many as 17 establishments were located in Midtown, but by 2011 there were only four LGBT businesses remaining (Adriaenssens 2011). These prominent bar closures contributed to the centrifugal forces that shifted gay residential areas away from Midtown into more peripheral areas, such as East Atlanta, Decatur, and East Point.

In 2012 the *Outwrite Bookstore and Coffeeshop* located at 10th and Piedmont was sold by its owner. This iconic queer bookstore was a visible symbol of the queer community in Atlanta, and the owner of the store is clear that his decision to close the bookstore was closely tied to the closing of the key gay bars.

As the clubs closed, there were less people out on the street at night, making it, in some ways, feel less safe. At the Outwrite, we could see a sharp decline in LGBT tourists who would come to Atlanta on the weekend. Where the nightlife had been a major attraction to visitors, it now became less appealing and many of those tourists stopped visiting or shortened their trips.

(Interview with Philip Rafshoon, March 2013, cited in Doan 2014) (Fig. 12.7)

As Midtown redeveloped and more heterosexual neighbors began moving in, there was significant resistance to the crowds and noise associated with gay bars, as well as the very presence of their same sex patrons. Some of the social and cultural changes brought by development included: new attitudes toward LGBTQ venues and less tolerance for same sex partners. For instance, a member of the *Midtown Ponce Security Alliance* (MPSA) indicated to a news reporter in 2004 that he would "do what he can to ensure *Backstreet* remains closed" (Henry 2004).



Fig. 12.6 Bulldogs in Midtown, Atlanta (*Source* Image by authors)

Finally, rapid increases in population in Midtown created an excess of demand for housing over its supply. While new housing investment is continuing, much of the new housing is in modern apartments and condominiums that are not nearly as affordable as the older housing stock, especially for younger, more visibly queer, and ethnically diverse LGBTQ people.



Fig. 12.7 Outwrite Bookstore in Midtown, Atlanta (Source Image by authors)

When I moved in.... prices on my street were between, I'd say for a single family house, a low of 130 and a high of 200 and now on the same street, you have a low of 450 thousand and a high of 1.2 million. So that completely changes the type of person who can afford to buy in the neighborhood. It takes it from being just your average middle-class person, to being a partner in a law firm, a partner in an accounting firm, which.... (Interview with Roger, gay resident of Midtown)

One effect of this intensification of gentrification has been that many of those who can't afford Midtown have begun seeking community in other areas. The following quote from one lesbian interviewee, Nancy, reflects the difficulties of finding housing.

We ended up in Poncey Highlands, and then moved away for two years, and then moved back, and lived in Decatur.... there weren't simple apartments that we could afford, so we started looking...broadening our scope a little.... when we lived in Poncey Highlands, it was a fairly transitional neighborhood at the time. And by the time we got back, I don't know that we could have afforded anything in that area... So then we moved further out, to Decatur. (Interview with Nancy)

Another lesbian couple Tamara and Katrina also had difficulty finding housing in their price range, finally considered the suburbs outside the perimeter (OTP). Karen shared that "we have been experimenting with a little farther out, but I don't want to get too far out. We looked at, what was it, Vernon, Marietta.... Roswell" (Interview with Karen).

The current situation in Midtown reflects this mixture of centripetal and centrifugal forces. Although the residential character of Midtown has changed, with housing prices making it difficult for younger and poorer LGBT people to live there, several iconic bars remain in Midtown and there is still a distinct gay vibe in a number of restaurants. Midtown's 10th and Piedmont intersection remains the virtual heart of the LGBT community in Atlanta, a place where a more dispersed LGBTQ community gathers to mourn or celebrate events in the wider political and social arena (Doan 2019).

12.4 Beyoglu, Istanbul, Turkey

Istanbul's status as the place where East meets West has contributed to its predominant position within Turkey's urban hierarchy. Its cosmopolitan character along with its respected education and abundant employment opportunities have always attracted people from outer provinces. Beyoglu's location at the center of Istanbul has made it an attractive neighborhood with a welcoming orientation toward many cultures including LGBTQ individuals from across Turkey. Over the last 40 years two sub-districts of Beyoglu, Cihangir and Tarlabasi, were especially notable for their affordable housing, diverse employment options, and multiple entertainment venues that attracted many people considered *outcasts* (Adaman and Keyder 2005; Selek 2001; Zengin 2014). The relatively permissive spaces of Beyoglu enabled LGBTQ individuals to carve out a space within which to live and work within the

broader context of a patriarchal and conservative society (Arat and Nunez 2017; Engin and Pals 2018; Ozbay 2015; Selen 2012). The neighborhood's narrow back streets, parks, inexpensive bars, always popular hammams (bathhouses) as well as numerous movie theaters provided many opportunities for interaction for queer and gender nonconforming populations. In addition, homes owned or rented by queer individuals provided venues for all-night parties as well as solidarity meetings (Atalay and Doan 2019a) (Fig. 12.8).

The unique character of Beyoglu makes it difficult to compare to typical gayborhoods such as the Castro or Greenwich Village, since Beyoglu is not dominated by gay men. More precisely, Beyoglu presents a thought provoking case of an inclusive and ephemeral queer space whose fluidity makes it less visible to outsiders (Erol 2018; Gocer 2011). Yet, the queer spaces in the district have been challenged by changes in the socio-economic conditions and the built environment over the past

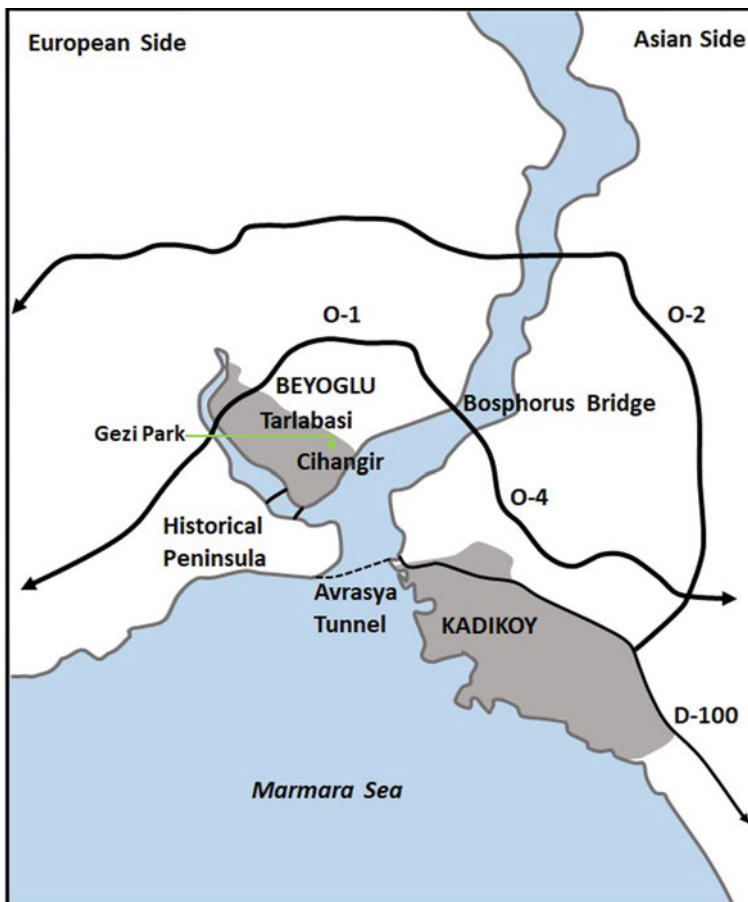


Fig. 12.8 Sketch map of Beyoglu and Kadikoy, Istanbul (Source Image by authors)

30 years. To understand the particularities of these changes, we analyze the influence of “centripetal and centrifugal forces” as they shape the lives of the queer community (Figs. 12.9 and 10.10).



Fig. 12.9 Back streets of Beyoglu (Source Image by authors)



Fig. 12.10 Stairs to Cihangir, Beyoglu (*Source* Image by authors)

12.4.1 *Centripetal Forces in the Istanbul Case*

Although Article 10 of the Turkish Constitution promotes the idea of equality, sexual orientation and gender identity are not explicitly listed as protected classes (Engin 2015; Muedini 2018). Not surprisingly, the lack of legal protection means the human rights of LGBTQ individuals are often violated, especially in the areas of freedom of association, employment, and housing (Muedini 2018). In addition, the religious and conservative identity of the nation is aligned with heteronormative values, thereby marginalizing same sex sexualities and gender nonconforming identities. The depth of the resistance to same sex sexuality is illustrated by the Turkish responses to two worldwide surveys. In 2012 the World Values Survey Association found that 85.4% of the Turkish participants said they would not want homosexuals as neighbors (World Values Survey 2012). Another study by the Pew Research Center (2013) found that 78% of Turkish respondents felt that homosexuality should not be accepted by society. The widespread nature of these attitudes creates a hostile environment at the national level that drives LGBTQ individuals to search for welcoming spaces, though some settle for spaces which are at least “tolerant.” Given this atmosphere, the cosmopolitan identity of Istanbul provides a more welcoming approach compared to other areas in Turkey (Atalay and Doan 2019a, 2019b).

Istanbul’s diversity and the anonymity that comes with its large size attracts not only LGBTQ individuals from across the country, but also from other nearby countries. War, civil unrest, harsh discrimination as well as the death penalty for homosexuality in other Middle Eastern and African countries push LGBTQ individuals to seek sanctuary in Turkey (ERA-LGBTI, Turkey 2017).¹ However, even in Istanbul not all neighborhoods are welcoming, creating pressures for LGBTQ individuals to cluster. For example, in some traditional neighborhoods the high levels of mutual surveillance where everybody knows everyone else’s business through the practice of “neighboring” (*komsuluk*) (Mills 2007) makes life difficult for anyone who disrupts expected gender behaviors. These broader factors increase the importance of spaces found in Beyoglu, Istanbul that are more welcoming of LGBTQ people. Istanbul’s Beyoglu district provides a variety of opportunities for the LGBTQ community to settle down, socialize, and/or work in the district (Atalay and Doan 2019a; Gocer 2011; Selek 2001). Furthermore, Pride Parades held on Istiklal Street in the heart of the area also attract LGBTQ individuals from across the country. Several interviewees described this process as follows:

I have always lived in Istanbul. I did not move from another city or anything. But, I knew I had to move from where I was living. I knew the neighborhood I was living in [in Istanbul] would not bear with me; with my appearance. I would not be able to be myself...Even just my presence...So, of course it was Beyoglu where I found myself next.

¹Istanbul is one of the very first stops for refugees from elsewhere in the Middle East, but is usually only a temporary one because Turkey does not provide asylum status to non-European refugees who must be resettled in a third country. Until these refugees are resettled permanently, they are supposed to stay in smaller urban areas designated as satellite cities in central Anatolia where they often experience harassment and violence from relatively conservative local communities (UNHCR (nd), Practice of Satellite Cities).



Fig. 12.11 A home with a rainbow umbrella in Cihangir, Beyoglu (Source Image by authors)

(From interview with Semra)

Our associations were there. Beyoglu did not belong to anybody, any group or any nation. Nobody, no nation, not even Turks could dominate the area. It had so many immigrants, ethnic groups, a mix of people from different backgrounds. Not having an identity was a way of having identity for Beyoglu. So, it was an area for us where we as LGBTQs, queers, lubunyas, lesbians, gays, trans could breathe relatively comfortably compared to the other places. This is it.

(From interview with Ayse cited in Atalay & Doan, 2019a) (Fig. 12.11)

Beyoglu is a place where othered people can live. It has been the place of artists and all othered people from the beginning. Cihangir and Tarlabasi embraced the TTs (*transvestites and transsexuals*)² 30 years ago just like they do today.

(From interview with Demet by Turan 2011)

²TTs is short for “*transvestites and transsexuals*” as used by interviewees.

And yet even in Beyoglu there is a constant struggle for survival. The LGBTQ friendly restaurants, bars, and night clubs that attract LGBTQ people are often transient, such as Club 14 (closed down), Club 20 (closed down), Prive (name and the management changed), 5. Kat (still operating), China Club (closed down) in 1990s; and Bigudi, Sahika, Gizli Bahce, Mentha, Anahit Sahne in 2000s. The struggle to claim space by these bars and clubs is mirrored by similar efforts by human rights, LGBTQ, and feminist organizations such as LambdaIstanbul (relocated from the district), the Human Rights Association (IHD), SPOD, and Amargi. Even residents attracted by the affordable housing, tolerant neighbors, and multicultural nature struggled with visibility.

...while looking for a home and negotiating with real estate agencies or homeowners, you would not want, for sure, your sexual orientation to be known by them. I would not reveal my sexual orientation to be known by my neighbor, my grocery store...So, we were not living openly as lesbian individuals. I never kissed on the street, never held the hand of my girlfriend. I was constantly keeping myself under my own surveillance and control.

(From interview with Emel cited in Atalay and Doan 2019a)

12.4.2 Centrifugal Forces in the Istanbul Case

The imposition of renewed police enforcement empowered by ultra-nationalist and conservative groups in the 1990s in Cihangir (Selek 2001; Zengin 2014) is a clear example of centrifugal forces operating on the queer spaces of Beyoglu. Prior to this period many transgendered individuals had found safety in a cluster of group residences where they supported themselves through sex work activities (Selek 2001). However, in the 1990s their homes were raided by the police who succeeded in dispersing this marginalized community. The very centripetal forces which drove transgender individuals together, later operated as centrifugal forces and scattered the community across the city into more dangerous waters. This dispersal was part of a broader “cleansing” process by the “Cihangir Neighborhood Beautification Association” that aimed to make the neighborhood more attractive for middle class and upper-class gentrification (Atalay and Doan 2019b; Zengin 2014) by pushing the transgendered community out of Cihangir.

Purtelas, Sormagir (now Basbug Street) and Ulker Street were our hangouts. The fascist attitudes of the Beyoglu Beautification Association and the Cihangir Beautification Association towards us should not be overlooked when life in these streets is discussed. They were the ones who brought Suleyman the Hose (Suleyman Ulusoy aka Hortum Suleyman, dubbed the Hose because he used hoses to beat trans people), they all collaborated with the state back then.

(From interview with Sevvay by Turan 2011)

The residential space opened by the displacement of the trans community enabled further real estate speculations and the renovation of existing residential and commercial units in a traditional gentrification process. Nevertheless, the district retains some of its “tolerant” residents, queer friendly but not overtly visible bars and cafes,

enabling the neighborhood to continue to play a central role for the LGBTQ community. Middle and upper middle-class individuals can still reside in the district, but other less fortunate and poorer LGBTQ people must play the role of “vicarious citizens” (Greene 2014), visiting the neighborhood to socialize at its relatively tolerant venues.

More recently, the inflammatory rhetoric adopted by President Erdogan and the Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP hereafter) reinforced more conservative values across Turkey (Cindoglu and Unal 2017; Yasar 2019). This change in mindset is highlighted by the change in responses over time to one of the questions of Pew Research Survey about “whether homosexuality should be accepted by society.” In 2002, 22% were in favor of acceptance, but this declined to 14% in 2007 and 9% in 2013, reflecting a more oppressive and intolerant society, exacerbating the centrifugal forces on the queer community.

Another manifestation of this government attitude is its influence on urban planning decisions to encourage dramatic changes in the built environment, altering the character of Beyoglu. In particular, the government’s 2005 release of its “Law for the Protection of Deteriorated Historic and Cultural Heritage through Renewal and Re-use” (Law 5366, hereafter the Renewal Law) stimulated a wave of redevelopment in this area (Islam and Sakizlioglu 2015). The effect of the Renewal Law as a centrifugal force on both queer establishments and the wider community can be clearly identified in Tarlabasi another sub-district of Beyoglu. This neighborhood’s long-standing importance for the LGBTQ community has been undermined by a bitter state-led gentrification process, resulting in the displacement of low-income groups including minorities and marginalized groups such as the Kurds, African immigrants, and trans individuals. Properties in the district deteriorated for many years until *the rent gap* potential of the area reached its maximum and a redevelopment process was initiated at the prompting of government officials. Using the Renewal Law, Tarlabasi and six other sub-districts of Beyoglu were declared urban renewal areas in 2006 (Tarlabasi Renewal Project, n.d.). As a result of the public–private partnership project developed in the area, many local residents were displaced in favor of new developments targeting upper-class luxury condo and office clients. Today, Tarlabasi is on the verge of losing its critical role particularly for the transgendered community.

A brand-new Tarlabasi

At the heart of Istanbul and its storied past

A glittering lifestyle awaits, exclusively for you

Modern streets, fashionable cafes, and restaurants

Concept streets and world-famous brands

(From the website of Tarlabasi Renewal Project, Taksim360). (Fig 12.12)

The neoliberal restructuring of Beyoglu under the governance of AKP is a part of the government’s attempt to change the social and cultural make-up of the area through “social engineering” (Yasar 2019). The centrifugal impacts of these changes made the district more appealing to conservative and international tourists and distinctly less appealing to LGBTQ people. The intensity of these redevelopment initiatives also



Fig. 12.12 Tarlabasi Renewal Project, Beyoğlu (*Source Image by authors*)

reduced the multicultural welcome to anybody who wished to enjoy the nightlife of the district, sit on its sidewalks until the early morning, or who chose the area as their communal living place. One Turkish urban planning scholar, Murat Cemal Yalcintan described the *real* intent behind the urban renewal programs as a desire “to suppress dissident cultures that had been flourishing in and around Beyoğlu’s various streets and local establishments...” (Yalcintan 2012 cited in Yasar 2019: 52).

The demolition of a movie theatre (in Beyoğlu) was required and legitimized with the fact that it was one of the scenes of homosexuality and public sex.

(From the interview with Mucella Yapici³ conducted by KAOS GL⁴ in Gocer 2011, no page number cited in Atalay and Doan 2019b: 116).

Another example of the government’s effort to suppress the dissident cultures and voices in Beyoğlu is the planned change to turn the existing Gezi Park in Beyoğlu, a well-known cruising ground adjacent to Taksim Square and one of the few remaining open spaces in Istanbul, into a shopping mall based on a replica of Ottoman Barracks (Erol 2018). The Gezi Protests started as a demonstration to protest this decision and soon turned into a wider resistance against the ongoing authoritarian regime. During the Gezi Protests in 2013 and the following year, Pride parades witnessed

³Mucella Yapici is the secretary general of Environmental Impact Assessment Department of the Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects.

⁴One of the LGBTQ organizations in Turkey.

record attendances due to a solidarity synergy, acting as a renewed centripetal force. However the visibility of this movement also caught the attention of the government and the resulting overt suppression became a centrifugal force.

Although the multicultural diversity of Beyoglu was targeted by government and real estate developers for a neoliberal restructuring process, the area still preserves its critical role for the LGBTQ community. Pride parades (although officially banned since 2015) are still held on Istiklal Street which remains the heart of the district. A number of queer friendly bars and cafes at a variety of affordability options provide the opportunity for the LGBTQ community to socialize. While there is not a complete cultural or political displacement yet (Hyra 2015), the changing character of the district continues to act as a centrifugal force pushing the LGBTQ community to search for other “friendly” places where they can carve out their spaces such as Besiktas and Kadikoy.⁵

12.5 Discussion

To better understand the queer afterlife of gayborhoods, we need to expand our understanding of the ways in which gayborhoods (and other queer spaces) form and reform. The linear model suggested by Collins (2004) uses a narrowly economic model to describe a possible end point of a gayborhood as it is integrated into heteronormative society; perhaps this imagined afterlife of a gayborhood occasionally happens, but this is clearly not the case in all gayborhoods and especially not true in a global sense. Our model of centripetal and centrifugal forces aims to improve our understanding of the ways that LGBTQ spaces evolve and change in a more dynamic context, suggesting a different understanding of the “afterlife” of gayborhoods. In place of the linearity of gay village growth this chapter has emphasized that LGBTQ people create spaces with varying degrees of openness or visibility depending on the influence of the centripetal and centrifugal forces. This focus on the complex interplay of forces that influence queer decision-making can be applied to a wider variety of “ordinary” cities that reflect an array of political and cultural contexts at different scales. This approach urges us to look at the diverse ways that communities are formed and may be reformed in the future at different visibility levels. In effect we are arguing for a queering of the unilinear model that seeks to “transform the material relations of oppression...[and] harness the productive power of representation and discourse to produce social space through performance and parody that explode the restrictive, oppressive grammar of binaries” (Foucault 1977 as cited in Derickson 2009: 4).

⁵Kadikoy is a municipality on the Asian side of Istanbul where queer spaces have started to emerge day by day. It appears that the emergence of these alternate queer spaces is a result of the centrifugal forces gaining power in Beyoglu and pushing the LGBTQ community to seek for alternatives. LGBTQ individuals living or socializing in Kadikoy also show tremendous efforts to be included in the city and planning decisions. Kadikoy municipality also acts toward building a gender and LGBTQ inclusive planning process.

In the Atlanta case understanding the forces driving young queer people away from Midtown might prompt different policy measures to reinvigorate Midtown as a neighborhood welcoming a diverse and often queer population. For example, the lack of affordable housing as well as behavior by recent Midtown residents sends messages to visibly queer individuals and especially those of color that they are not welcome (Doan 2014) and may be driving away the very people that will ensure that Midtown continues to be vibrant. Rainbow crosswalks are unlikely to be sufficient to arrest this trend. Efforts to ensure that a diverse housing stock is maintained (rather than redeveloped into expensive condos) and investments in community building efforts to address lingering homophobia may be more effective.

Applying this framework to Beyoglu yields other insights. If we looked for the afterlife of a gay village in Turkey, we would be trying to find something that never actually existed (gayborhood). Yet, in Turkey and many other locales, queer spaces often occur in ways that may be visible only to the queer community itself. While some others may be aware of such spaces, they may not be noticed by the intolerant representatives of authority. And yet these places are also influenced by the centrifugal forces such as rapidly rising rents that may make it harder to queer welcoming establishments to thrive as well as help queer people to find housing. This framework emphasizes a focus not on the birth and death of spaces, but rather differing degrees of existence. Our duty as scholars is to recognize and differentiate these types of spaces in order to identify the complex mixture of forces that helped to create and sustain them.

Understanding these underlying conditions and the role they are playing in shaping queer spaces in different contexts may enable interventions to transcend the hegemonic constructs of heterosexist urban planning with its focus on the use of order and efficiency as tools of oppression by the state (Yiftachel 1998; Foucault 1980), resulting in the exclusion of marginalized communities (Doan 2011, 2015; Frisch 2002; Yiftachel 1998). Instead of planning models that celebrate and fixate on the “city beautiful,” it is important to broaden our vision and recognize that what is a centripetal force to “heteronormativity” can be a centrifugal force to queer individuals who may thrive in the anonymous interstices of urban life. Similarly, an LGBTQ inclusive planning process should support the forces that act as centripetal for the community and not undermine them with needless beautification projects. This kind of recognition may open new possibilities for broader empowerment of the full range of the LGBTQ community and the spaces they crave.

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