

# *“Queer Space: Inclusive or Exclusive?”*

*A Comparative Study of Two Public Spaces in Tehran and Madrid*



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## **Abstract**

This work investigates how physical and social transformation of queer spaces influence social relation of inclusion and exclusion. Queer space plays a crucial role in the political and social lives of sexual minorities. They provide a platform to resist the different forms of oppression against queer identity. Tehran and Madrid have been selected as the main focus of this study to exemplify two queer spaces under a conservative and neoliberal framework. Tehran can be understood as a unique case study, for the reason that in its socio-political context queer identity is criminalized and persecuted. Madrid, on the other hand, has one of the most vanguard legal systems in terms of LGBTQI rights. Through tracing the historical evolution and socio-spatial transformation of Valiasr and Chueca, two queer neighborhoods of Tehran and Madrid, this study shows that the way these neighborhoods are perceived has changed. By adopting an intersectional approach toward queer identity, this paper argues that urban policies in Tehran and Madrid have resulted in the exclusion of certain identities. Moreover, it reveals that queer individuals have utilized other public spaces for their social and political activities.

*Keywords: Queer Identity, Queer Space, Repression, Normalaizing, Militarization, Commercializing.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Space has an inevitable role in the construction and reproduction of identities. Identities, relations, and meanings also produce physical and symbolic space (Forest, 2002). Queer identities rely on the visibility of the queer subject in urban public space for their construction. Moreover, the presence of queer identities has transformed urban space. Pride marches and the emergence of gay neighborhoods are examples which show the interconnectedness of urban space and queer identity (Ferreira, 2011).

The formation of gay neighborhoods, as highly visible elements of the urban landscape, has been understood as an alternative to heteronormative space. By the mid-1990 LGBTQI groups achieved many legal rights, especially in European and North American countries. As a result of greater freedom to be safely visible in locations outside gay spaces, a “degaying” process has been identified by geographers. Just as the neoliberal policies have deepened the notion of cities as competitive entities, gay neighborhoods as the evidence of vibrant areas started incorporating into the commodified landscapes of cities. This trend has resulted in a decrease of the significance of gay spaces in the social and political lives of queers. In this context, it has been argued that a shift from the politics of visibility, which puts emphasis on making queer identities visible, to the politics of recognition, which acknowledges the different categories of identity such as class, ethnicity, and gender as well as sexuality, has occurred (Noble, 2009; Gieseeking, 2016; Gorman-Murray and Nash, 2016).

Acknowledging the intersectionality of queer identities highlights the distinction between queer and gay space in geography. While gay spaces reinforce the heteronormativity and homonormativity at the same time, queer spaces challenge the notion that being queer is always “alternative” (Oswin, 2008, p. 98). In this framework being queer is considered as a relational condition and depends on the positionality of individuals within social categories and power relations (Nash, 2013). Based on this notion of queer space, the focus of this paper is to examine the inclusiveness of queer spaces in terms of encompassing not only a sexual aspect of identity but also class, ethnicity, and gender

## 1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Before discussion on queer spaces, I begin with the definition of the term “queer” and its different uses in academia: Queer as an identity, queer as a theory and queer as activism/movement/politics. The differences and similarities between these uses help to further develop the discussions on queer space. One definition of queer, as a term, is abnormal and strange, which was used against people whose gender or sexuality does not conform to dominant culture. Later, the term was reclaimed as a celebratory, for not fitting into those norms.

Queer theory argues that although gender identity has been understood as fixed, it can be experienced with flexibility in one’s own life (Forsyth, 2001). Judith Butler (2004 in Davies and Robinson, 2013) explores gender and sexual identities as a performance which is fluid and flexible and specific to an individual’s desires and needs. By challenging the traditional logic of adulthood in which marriage and reproduction become the determinant of “successful” life, queer theorists have questioned the relationship between queer subjectivity and family constructions (Halberstam, 2005; Davies, 2012; Robinson, 2012a in Davies and Robinson, 2013, p. 42). Therefore, the first and most popular use of “queer”, is an umbrella term for a variety of identities to oppose heteronormativity.

Later, the different forms of oppression and assimilationist policies against gay and lesbian movements, resulted in the redefinition of queer for some, as a radical and anti-assimilationist political stance that captures multisidedness of identity (Lgbtqia.ucdavis.edu, 2018). As an inclusive category, queer can be used in critical relation to the terms “gay” and “lesbian” (Forsyth, 2001). Therefore, queer is a relational term which tends to question the conventional understanding of sexual identity by deconstructing these categories (Davies and Robinson, 2013). Queer can also be understood as a verb rather than a noun, “a way of doing instead of being” (Sullivan, 2003 in Garwood, 2016, p. 6) which unsettles the assumptions about sexual being and doing (Spargo, 1999).

Cohen (1997) examines the meaning of queer in order to construct a new political identity that is truly transformative and inclusive of all those who stand on the outside of constructed norms which must be based on the recognition of numerous oppressive systems.

Nash (2013) suggests that queerness is about operating beyond powers and controls that enforce normativity. The meaning of this normativity, as she explains, encompasses not only hetero or homonormativity but also categories of race and class as well. Queer politics, therefore fight against normalizing any identity and critiques any political strategy that aims to include a deviant identity or practice within the definition of “normal” without challenging these definitions ( Seidman, 2001, p. 326). It is about creating new forms of selfhood, which emphasize democratic citizenship and is formed in non-normative social order (ibid).

Similarly, the geographical use of queer goes beyond using the definition of queer as an overarching term that describes sexual dissidents (Browne, 2006a in Nash, 2011). Queer theory in geographical research opened up new ways of thinking about sexuality, gender, and space (ibid). As noted by Ingram, et al. (1997), one of the developments in the formation of postmodern queerness has been the creative uses of space, for both resistance to various social pressures and power structures and strengthening of alliances.

### 1.1 On the Emergence of Gay Spaces

#### 1.1.1 Space and Identity

The relationship between self-identification and built environment, as Harvey (2003) noted is one of the most precious and yet neglected of human rights. The right to the city is not only about having access to urban resources but to be able to express oneself in relation to processes of urbanization. In this regard, urban regulations of physical space have inevitable effects on how people perceive themselves and are perceived by society. According to Proshansky (1978), self-identity is a link between individual personality and the physical and social world. In order to form a connection to place as human beings, we should be able to understand the reflection of our relationship with “here and now” in space (Shaw and Hudson, 2009, p. 10). As suggested by Nash (2011), the possibilities of self-understanding depend on the recognition schemes which are embodied in place. Judith Butler (2004 in Nash, 2011) explains that these schemes of recognition determine the way human beings are differently produced.

Over the past two decades, geographers have shown interest in the studies of space and identity. One specific argument is that space not only is a container in which events occur but also shapes and affects what happens and how it happens. Lefebvre’s (1991 in Butler,

2009 ) definition of three related dimensions of space- the physical, mental and lived- which operate simultaneously, questions the assumption that social space is a mere object. Massey (2009) conceptualizes space by proposing that it is a product of relations, networks, links, exchanges, connections from the personal level of our daily lives to the global scales. Space as a social product, which includes complex and unequal relations, is not a neutral site for various identities and experiences (Ferreira, 2011).

Space and identity are mutually constituted. Space is an essential part of constitution and production of identities. Moreover, identities, meanings, and relations produce material and symbolic aspects of space (Forest, 2002). Sexual identity cannot be detached from how one understands oneself. These identities depend on particular spaces for their construction. In this regard, spatial visibility has been particularly crucial in the development of lesbian and gay liberation movements. Space is also produced through the presence of those identities (ibid). An individual's sexual identity may be perceived as gay and lesbian judging by the space they occupy or space might be considered as gay or queer because of the presence of homosexual identities. Pride marches, the emergence of gay neighborhoods or the reputation of certain public spaces as gay-friendly are examples of the relationship between these identities and public urban spaces (Ferreira, 2011).

Studies of sexuality and space emerged in the 1990s, following the growing concerns around areas of identity and architecture including the perspectives of non-dominant identities such as women, gay and lesbian and ethnic groups in space ranging from geography and architecture to psychology and political science (Cottrill, 2006). One of the earliest studies on space and sexuality by Manuel Castells (*The City and The Grassroots*, 1983 in Binnie and Valentine, 1999), draws attention to the fact that there is a spatial basis for gay identity and that gay men, in particular, were playing an important role in the gentrification of the city.

The ways gender has been understood and constructed over time by different cultures are both the outcome and effects of the gendering of space (Namaste, 1996) and the performance of non-dominant identities in public spaces reveals heterosexual aspects of these spaces (Bell, 2001; Valentine, 2001 in Ferreira, 2011). Jon Binnie (1997 in Oswin, 2008, p.90) argued that spaces do not have a pre-existing sexual identity and are not naturally "straight" but they have produced this way and "heterosexualized". Bell and Valentine (1995b in ibid, p.90) state:

*The presence of queer bodies in particular locations forces people to realize (by juxtaposition of “queer” and “street” or “queer” and “city”) that the space around them, the city streets, the malls, and the motels, have been produced as heterosexual, heterosexist and heteronormative.*

Therefore, men and women who have non-heterosexual desires confront more difficulties in their interaction with public spaces (Namaste, 1996) or they might have to hide their sexual identity in public (Hubbard, 2001).

Fraser (1990, p. 67) asserted that where there is only a single public sphere, members of marginalized social groups such as women, workers, people of color, gays, and lesbians take advantage of the constitution of alternative publics. These “subaltern counterpublics” as she names them are parallel discursive arenas where marginalized groups create counterdiscourses which allow them to interpret their identities, interests, and needs. These identities, interests, and needs form in pervasive practices of everyday life by appropriating spaces where a group-specific public discourse can be understood (ibid). It is the very difference of a social group and its marginality that gives meaning and specificity to the appropriation of a physical space (Cenzatti, 2008). In this sense, queer space can be defined as a space that offers a radical alternative to heterosexual space (Oswin, 2008), by making the sexual subcultures visible. In this sense, Homophobia is fundamental in understanding the construction of these identities and the subsequent need to create social and symbolic spaces of interaction (Enguix, 2009) where, as described by Bech (1997, p. 116):

*Being together allows one to mirror oneself in them and find self-affirmation, to share and interpret one’s experiences, to learn in more detail what it means to be homosexual ... being homosexual is normal here, loses its negatively laden value. Perhaps one may even receive confirmation that it is better than being heterosexual*

### 1.1.2 Gay Neighborhood, Gay Space, Gay Ghetto

Starting around mid to late twentieth century, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals transformed urban space to the centers of social, cultural, and political utility (Ruiz, 2012). An urban-based LGBT movement was organized around the notion of radical liberation. This liberation movement was a counter-culture reaction to the widespread

oppression against gay, lesbian, transgender and bisexual people. D'Emilio (1983 in *ibid*, p. 243) noted:

*The gay liberation movement [...] began the transformation of a sexual subculture into an urban community. The group life of gay men and women came to encompass not only erotic interactions but also political, religious and cultural activity. Homosexuality and lesbianism (became) less of a sexual category and more of a human identity.*

By creating neighborhoods over which they had maximum control, gays and lesbians used the opportunity to meet their long-neglected needs (Lauria and Knopp, 1985 in Gorman-Murray and Waitt, 2009). The notion of power from concentration, which is common to the theories of minority clustering in urban social geography, can also be applied to the emergence of gay communities (Bell, 1991). As Bech (1997) argues, by seeking out the members of the same “species” they find community protection from the others and strength to resist. Castells (1983 in Ruiz 2012) identified the interconnected reasons for this urban migration movements, make demands on the urban living conditions, bond over shared cultural identities, and utilize these elements for political power at the local level. According to Forest (2002), the most important contribution of gay spaces created by gays was to provide a symbol around which gay identity is centered.

As middle-income whites cleared the inner cities in the 1960s and 1970s, gays reside in recently emptied urban neighborhoods (Ruiz, 2012). The downtown districts offered early gay migrants the opportunity to experience a free lifestyle and bond together. The construction of new gay identity was both the outcome and reason for the building of a physical territory. The presence of these exclusively gay neighborhoods as a highly visible element in the urban fabric opposed the heteronormative and homophobic closet that used to suppress homosexuality (Brown, 2014).

Castells' (1983 in Knopp, 1990) study of San Francisco's gay community in the 1970s is one attempt to consider the connections between gay community's social and political activity and urban land market, discussing gay involvement in gentrification. He concludes that in San Francisco gay gentrifiers were “moral refugees” who paid for their identity by making financial investments (*ibid*). In this process, they contributed to an urban renovation



process that made the city beautiful and alive(ibid). The debate on the relationship between gay communities and gentrification will be discussed more in the following sections of this paper.

A further focus of the literature of gay geographies as suggested by Bell (1991), has been on the institutions and leisure services of the homosexual community. The location and signing of bars as a symbol of secrecy, by hiding from the straight world outside, provide the privacy required by a client. Doan and Higgins (2010) emphasize the central role of LGBT businesses, arguing that businesses such as bookstores provide a sense of community and neighborhood identity.

Generally, studies of gay urban development and ghettos focus much on gay men. There is a little consensus on how lesbian communities appropriate public space for their social and political needs. Since the early 1990s, some researchers began to analyze processes of lesbian clustering in urban context. Podmore (2001, p.337) has demonstrated that lesbian neighborhood concentration is often found in areas that are considered as “space of difference” located in inner-city neighborhoods. Moreover, she argues that shopping streets, malls, and other business institutions can be important sites for lesbians, even if they are not lesbian-specific locations. Some geographers have asserted that the difference between gays and lesbians in appropriating space is related to the different spatial practices adopted by men and women. Women tend to plug into the existing institutions of an era such as coffee shops or restaurants and prefer to engage with their own social networks. But gay men tend to build new institutions and reclaim the space (O'Sullivan, 2016). Besides, as the lesbian businesses and institutions are rarely concentrated in a single territory, lesbian urban landscapes have been described as “invisible” comparing to the gay territories (Podmore, 2001, p.333).

Gieseeking (2013), based on her research in New York, concludes that the precarious political and economic situation of queer women makes their spaces invisible and fragmented. Other works like Valentine's (2002 in Gorman-Murray Waitt, 2009) draws attention to the influence of feminism-lesbianism and explains that these communities are regarded as more radical, political and less materially oriented than gay communities. Adler and Brenner (1992 in Sanschagrin, 2011) critiqued the argument that women do not cluster spatially, in a study which shows clear areas of lesbian concentration. While these areas may

be invisible to the public, they associated the invisibility of lesbian neighborhoods with limited financial resources rather than the lack of desire for visibility.

## 1.2 Neoliberal Citizenship and Queer Politics

Across the so-called “Global North”, the neo-liberalization of politics has fulfilled some of the demands for equality on the basis of sexual orientation. “Tolerance” has become one of the main factors associated with the economic growth of cities (Di Felicianantonio and Brown, 2015, p. 966). The result is competition which aims to attract the gay-friendly “creative class”. Duggan (2003 in Oswin, 2008, p.50) identifies this trend as the new forms of homonormativity. She introduces this concept as a “politics that doesn’t contest the dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but sustain them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption”. Agnew, et al (2017), describes homonormativity as identification of a “proper” way of being gay or lesbian based on participating in same-sex marriage, engaging in monogamous relationships, and generally practicing appropriate behaviors of the dominant social order including neoliberal consumerism. This conceptualization refers to a general visibility of certain forms of gay and lesbian identity in the public sphere such as media and politics (Di Felicianantonio, 2015). The main critique of this process of assimilation by the neoliberal regime is the exclusion patterns along race and class lines (ibid).

Arguing that “the material relations of production and reproduction constitute the fundamental matrix underlying all of the social reality”, Drucker (2015 in Reynold, 2018, p. 702) categorizes the relationship between different periods of capitalist economies and accumulation regimes with the social organization of sexualities across three periods: “the invert-dominant” regime in the classical imperialist phase of capitalism, “the gay-dominant regime” was part of the Fordist phase of capitalism and “the homonormative-dominant” started in the neoliberal phase of capitalism which continues to the present day. Although this categorization seems too simplistic, Drucker acknowledges the different forms of both accumulation regimes and homosexual formation in Europe, North America, Russia, China, Asia, Africa, and South America.

Puar (2011 in Agnew, et al. 2017, p. 15 ) develops the concept of “homonationalism” in order to explore the ways “tolerance” toward sexual diversity and the provision of human right for LGBTQI people, has become a factor to demonstrate the modern civility associated with democratic ideals of the Global North. In addition, the term “pinkwashing” is often used to describe the strategies that Israel has taken in recent years to introduce itself as the only “modern democracy” in the Middle East, by legalizing same-sex marriage and LGBTQI military service and to overcome its international reputation as an occupying country (Spade, 2013). Like governments and political parties, companies also make use of this marketing strategies, by developing LGBTQ campaigns to multiply their profit rates especially on Pride celebration dates.

In such context, many have distinguished between “gay normality” and “queer anti-capitalism” in reflecting the assimilationist or resistant positions to the neoliberal market policies and normalizing forces (Reynold, 2018, p 702). Sears (2005) propose that a queer Marxist-feminist agenda will provide a basis for discussing the needs and issues of the young, poor, ethnic groups, women, transgendered people and working-class queers. The next section explores the influences of neoliberal orders on the social and spatial configuration of gay neighborhoods.

#### 1.2.1 Post-Gay Era: De-gaying and Gaytrification

During recent decades, there has been a growing concern about the decline of gay neighborhoods across Europe and North American cities. Gorman-Murray and Waitt (2009) have observed this trend in two perspectives. One the one hand, due to a greater mainstream acceptance of certain gay and lesbian identities and lifestyles, gay neighborhoods are no longer considered as a significant part of identity formation, self-affirmation and mutual support among sexual minorities. On the other hand, decline of gay ghettos is an outcome of the domination of tourism and urban marketing strategies over these spaces (ibid). By the mid-1990s, as neoliberal policies drove an entrepreneurial and competitive urban regime, the need to market and promote the city as desirable location to live in became paramount (Harvey, 1989; Boudreau et al., 2009; Leitner et al., 2007, Stenning et al., 2010 in Agnew, et al. 2017). Many “World Cities” started competing for attracting capital by projecting themselves as “tolerant” and “gay-friendly” places. Florida (2003) has theorized the

relationship between economic performance of cities and the availability of the “3Ts”: Technology, Talent, Tolerance which are highly interlinked. Based on his theory, cities and regions that succeed in having all the three factors are able to attract the creative individuals and companies (ibid). In this model, Florida points out that “gay index”, as a measuring tool of the city’s ability to attract many diverse groups, creates a desirable environment in which “wealth creators” like to live and high tech industry concentrate (ibid).

Gay neighborhoods, as the evidence of vibrant and diverse cultural areas, become increasingly incorporated into the commodified landscapes of the cities (Florida, 2002; Bell and Binnie, 2000; Binnie and Skeggs, 2004; Rushbrook, 2002 in Agnew, et al. 2017). Many geographers started analyzing hegemonic forces that have shaped the social relations of inclusion and exclusion in the production and transformation of gay villages. Castells (1983 in Ruiz, 2012) observes that the second wave of more affluent gay and lesbians replaced poor gay migrants. By moving into the community, they started purchasing and renovating inexpensive buildings. This movement both improved the overall aesthetic quality of the neighborhood and inflated home values.

The effect of gay neighborhood on gentrification has been described in an old saying among realtors that “if you want to improve a neighborhood, rent to a gay man”(Ghaziani, 2014, p. 18). In this context, the concept of “gaytrification” has been used to identify a specific process of gentrification in which poor and deprived neighborhoods in central areas of some cities, inhabited by LGBTQI individuals, undergoes a process of regeneration, making them more attractive first to other LGBTQI residents and later to the other residents. Gay neighborhoods not only became a culturally significant destination for queer tourists but also attractive for non-queers as “cool” and “exotic” (Brown, 2014).

In this process, local governments often play a supporting role, by carrying out urban regeneration activities to increase the quality of life in those neighborhoods. For example, Brown (2006 in Doan and Higgins, 2010, p. 9) argues that city planners, working for the local urban regeneration agency in Spitalfields neighborhood of East London, reshaped the urban environment by adding street furniture and street lamps and providing a “brand” for the area. Therefore, some scholars have asserted that gay urban developments, in the forms of gay villages, has become more of an income-driven rather than an identity-based phenomenon (Ruiz, 2012).

As mentioned earlier, another reason contributing to the decline of gayborhoods is the voluntary eviction of queers due to greater freedom to be safely visible in locations outside those spaces. Consequently, many gay villages are experiencing changes that suggest they are becoming less central in the social and political lives of queers. Brown (2004 in Nash, 2013, p.199) notes that growing presence of gays, in the Spitalfields neighborhood in London, shows that some of these new spaces are experiencing a “post-gay” era, in which sexual differences are visible but not anymore considered as a significant feature of the space. Such transformation in the physical and social aspects of the gay neighborhoods have led to what Agnew, et al. (2017) refer to as “de-gaying” process and at the same time “de-politicizing” of the space.

### 1.3 Queer vs Gay Space

The debate on the decreasing significance of gay space in the past few decades can be discussed through the politics of visibility around queer and gay identity. As discussed above, gay and lesbians claimed the space by establishing gay ghettos around a shared identity. If we look at gay space as political space, a platform which gives voice to queers, visibility has been the center of debate for many activists and scholars. Identity politics focus on one specific category of social identities, such as ethnicity, race, gender or sexuality (Gorman-Murray and Nash, 2016). The politics of visibility puts this categorical identity at the center of the political debate in the process of “identity formation” and “community building” (ibid, p. 4). Examples of such politics manifested in rights movements and political changes of the 1960s and 1970s, during the liberation movements based on gender (women rights), race (black rights), ethnicity (multiculturalism) and sexual minorities in terms of gay liberation movements (ibid).

The visibility of gay and lesbian identities is practiced by different deconstructive spatial tactics such as marches, gay pride parades, public protests, art performances, as well as showing affection in public (Podmore, 2001). Bell et al. (1994 in Duncan, 1996) examine the presence of two types of homosexual identities “the lipstick lesbian” (hyper-feminine) and “skinhead” (hyper-masculine) as a way to challenge the heterosexuality of public space. For “Queer Nation”, a group of activists in New York in 1990s, visibility was a crucial element for achieving their political goals (Hennessy, 2002). Instead of establishing a long-term



campaign, Queer Nation followed their strategies through short-term highly visible, media-centered activities such as same-sex kiss in public. Their political philosophy was based on the now-clichéd slogan “we’re here, we’re queer. Get used to it” (Stryker, 2004, p. 1). Discussion about queer space as a place for achieving visibility is associated with its meaning as zones for showing affection. The erotic behavior of queers, based on pre-assumed heterosexual space, is considered as a political use of public space for queer activism (Myslik, 1996). However, there is an argument that such tactics have stereotyped queers as being only concerned with sexual behaviors (Forsyth, 2001) and this kind of visibility, based on erotic performance, is what many queers would wish to avoid.

Another controversial use of space in relation to queer visibility is the Pride Parade. 28 June is known worldwide as the day of LGBTQI Pride, to commemorate the violent protest of Stonewall, a gay bar in the East Village of New York City. The LGBTQI Pride is celebrated in many cities and countries ever since, traditionally to claim and reinforce their rights and provide visibility to the community. However, many have questioned it asserting that pride has now become a tool for city marketing and profit making. According to Hubbard (2001), while these acts are assumed to “queer” public space, paradoxically they have turned into spectacles for consumptions.

Growing social, political and cultural acceptance of queers and the achievement of LGBTQI activists initiated discussion around the necessity and effectiveness of politics of visibility. Queer politics, like lesbian feminism and the gay liberation movement, put emphasis on making queers visible. The aim of queer visibility, however, is not to include queers in the dominant culture but to continually question normativity in public spheres (Hennessy, 2002). Therefore, a shift from the politics of visibility to the politics of recognition has happened which does not consider sexuality as a concrete identity but as an attribute to an individual’s personality.

Lauria and Knopp (1985 in Knopp 1990) argued that while homosexual desire and behaviors are multi-class and multi-racial phenomenon involving both men and women, the self-identification of individuals as gay is often defined as white, male and middle-class. This is because it is easier economically, for middle-class white males to identify and live as openly gay people than it is for women, non-white, and non-middle class people (ibid). Scholars across disciplines have made attempts to take an intersectional approach to LGBTQI studies,

which recognizes that identity encompasses various categories (Giesekeing, 2016). Noble (2009 in Gorman-Murray and Nash, 2016, p.5) asserts that “while sexed or gendered understanding of who we are has profound consequences for the ways we act and are treated ... those categories by no means exhaust what we can be said to have or be”. Gorman-Murray and Nash (2016), applied this argument and propose that politics of recognition should first acknowledge sexual identity of the individual to avoid neoliberal mainstreaming and at the same time recognize the intersectionality of queer and LGBTQI identities with categories that are equally important and legitimate for individuals.

The implication of this shift to the politics of recognition, instead of emphasizing mere visibility, can be traced to the growing distinction between the use of queer and gay space. Suggested by Gorman-Murray and Nash (2016) queer spaces are perceived and experienced as enabling a wider range of sexual subjects than gay spaces, including differences across class, gender, and ethnicity. In this framework, gay and lesbian-identity based communities are located within spaces of commodification and consumption, while queer spaces represent the possibility of alternative anti-capitalist ways of living (Nash, 2011) in favor of more communal needs and desires. Puar (2002: p. 936) makes this distinction more clear explaining that:

*The assumed inherent quality of space is that it is always heterosexual, waiting to be queered or waiting to be disrupted through queering, positioning a singular axis of identity which then refines a heterosexual/ homosexual split that effaces other kinds of identity –race, ethnicity, nationality, class, and gender... while it is predictable that the claiming of queer space is lauded as the disruption of heterosexual space, rarely is that disruption interrogated also as a disruption of racialized, gendered and classes space.*

Similarly, Oswin (2008) in “deconstructing queer space” notes that it is crucial to challenge the notion that homosexuality is always and everywhere “alternative” as it is to think heterosexuality as always and everywhere “dominant”. Therefore the adoption of the geographical use of queer theory goes beyond questioning heterosexual space by taking into account class, race, and gender along with sexual processes (Oswin, 2008). Cottrill (2006) defines queer space as space that questions the sexuality, gender, race, and class

divisions from political, geographical, social and historical perspectives. According to Doderer (2011) queering of urban space means building an emancipatory public and emerging from the margins of a mainstream society which has denied social realities and oppressed identities. It involves creating places for those who left outside of mainstream gay and lesbian identity and those who do not feel included in spaces produce by them (ibid). According to Tattleman (2000 in Bao, 2011, p. 99) queering of space means:

*The construction of a parallel world, one filled with possibility and pleasure, while functioning simultaneously as an intervention in the world of dominant culture. [...] Queer space provides an alternative means of worldly inhabitation, makes visible the already-in-place hierarchies, and embraces the reciprocity of space and sexual identity. In its place of opportunity, people are free to construct themselves in flexible, unspecified, and unpredictable ways*

Using the example of Queer West in Toronto, Nash (2013, p. 205) asserts that “being queer in queer spaces depends on your positioning with social categories and power relations, it depends on who you are and how you understand and use spaces”. In this framework, queerness is a relational term to describe the relationship of identities with the social hierarchies and power structures. Thus, to assume that there are more queer spaces just because there is less repression is simplistic. In this framework, queer spaces are not spaces for gays and lesbians or opposition to heterosexual space, they are understood as alternative spaces for both heteronormativity and homonormativity (ibid). The meaning associated with normativity encompasses not only those usually related to questions of sexual orientation but also gender, race, and class (ibid)

### 1.4 Summary and Conclusion

Over the past two decades, there has been growing interest in the studies of identity and space. One argument is that space and identity are mutually constituted, meaning that space is an essential part of the constitution and reproduction of identities, while meanings and relations produce material and symbolic spaces (Forest, 2002). Queer identities rely on particular spaces for their constructions. In addition, space is also produced through the performance of these identities. Pride parades and the emergence of gay neighborhoods are



examples, showing how these identities are associating with urban public spaces (Ferreira, 2011). The early work on the sexuality and space by David Bell (1991), Jon Binnie and Gill Valentine (1999), has focused on heteronormative space and how queers are marginalized in these spaces. The member of subordinated social groups according to Fraser (1990) create counterdiscourses which permit them to interpret f their identities, interests, and needs. In this context, queer space is defined as a space that resists heteronormativity by making sexual subcultures visible. Starting in the mid to late twentieth century, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals transformed urban spaces (Ruiz, 2012) by creating gay neighborhoods, around a shared identity, to oppose heteronormativity.

The achievement of LGBTQI rights and the neoliberalization of politics gave way to new forms of normativity against marginalized queers. Duggan (2003 in Oswin, 2008) uses the concept of homonormativity to indicate the general visibility of certain forms of gay and lesbian culture in the public sphere which is depoliticised and associated with the neoliberal consumerism. Moreover, the concept of homonationalism has been used by Puar (2011) to explore the ways provision of LGBTQI rights became a tool to demonstrate the democratic ideals of the “Global North”. In this context, there is a growing distinction between “gay normality” and “queer anti-capitalist” to reflect the political positions in relation to neoliberal and normalizing forces. The outcome of such politics on queer and gay space as argued by Gorman-Murray and Waitt (2009) is first a degaying process as a result of greater mainstream acceptance by society and therefore no need for community building in forms of gayborhoods and second the incorporation of gay neighborhoods as evidence of vibrant and diverse cultural areas into the commodification process of neoliberal cities.

The debate around the declining significance of gay neighborhoods can be discussed through the shift from politics of visibility to politics of recognition, in which an intersectional approach has been taken to recognize different categories of identities simultaneously. Adopting such an intersectional approach toward queer identity has changed the definition of queer spaces in the academic world. The new definition of queer space goes beyond the critique of heterosexual space by taking into account the deployment of sexuality along with racial, class and gender processes. Figure 1-1 summarizes discussion up to this point on gay and queer spaces.

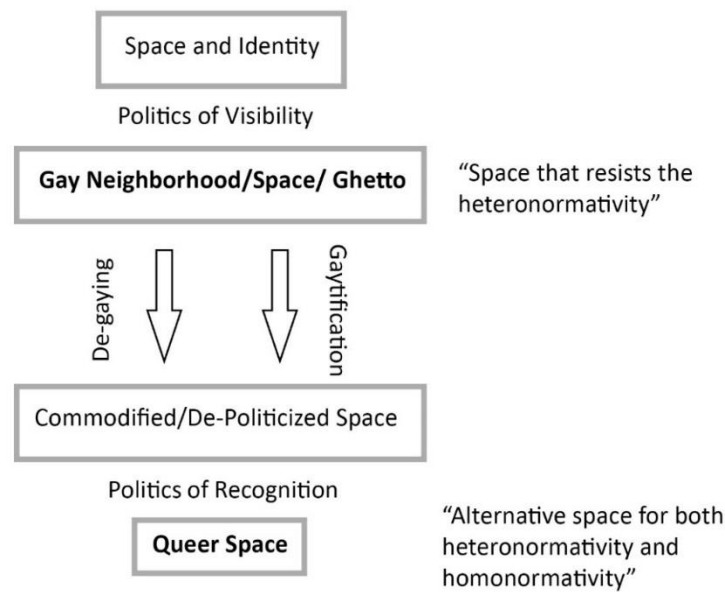


Figure 1-1 Literature Summary (Source: by Author).

Reviewing literature on queer spaces reveals that there are two gaps in these studies: First, studies on queer space have focused much on western countries where most LGBTQI people have achieved legal rights. The void in research of queer space is more evident in Islamic countries where non-heterosexual identities are legally punishable. Although it is true that the persecution of queers in conservative contexts of Muslim countries has caused less visibility in public domains, the public spaces of the city is still a significant part of queer's social and political lives. Secondly, many of the researches on the so-called "Global North" has analyzed the economic reason to explain why gayborhoods are losing initial residents. There is a vast number of articles about the gaytrification process and how as the result of a lack of affordable housing less affluent queers are being displaced. It is also important to take into consideration other factors which contributed to the declining process of gayborhoods based on the ways these space are being perceived by different social groups. The image and symbolic meaning that these spaces produce has resulted in the exclusion of certain queer identities

## 2 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Research Questions

Based on the identified research gaps in the literature, the aim of this paper is to answer two main questions:

**First, how do physical and social transformations of queer space change its function and symbolic meaning in the urban context?**

**Second, how do these changes influence the inclusiveness/exclusiveness of the queer space?**

In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to answer three sub-questions:

- 1 What are public policy approaches toward queer identity at national and local level?
- 2 How do urban policies impact the physical and social aspects of queer spaces?
- 3 Finally, how do queer individuals respond to the material and representational transformation of queer spaces based on different categories of identification?

To analyze the physical and social transformation of queer space, two main factors are taken into consideration: first, what are the national policies toward queer identity? Answering this question is important because it determines how top-down approaches shape the queer space. Secondly, at the scale of the city, how do local government planning strategies and urban projects impact these spaces? Then, I will look at the outcome of these top-down policies on the image of queer spaces, how they are produced and what are their functional role in the urban context. Finally, I will examine the impact of these functional and symbolic meanings of queer space on inclusiveness/exclusiveness patterns in terms of race, class, sexuality, and gender.

Figure 2-1 depicts the components of this study at different scales. The hypothesis of this thesis, therefore, is that top-down planning approaches by municipalities do impact social relations of inclusion and exclusion by changing the way users perceive the space.

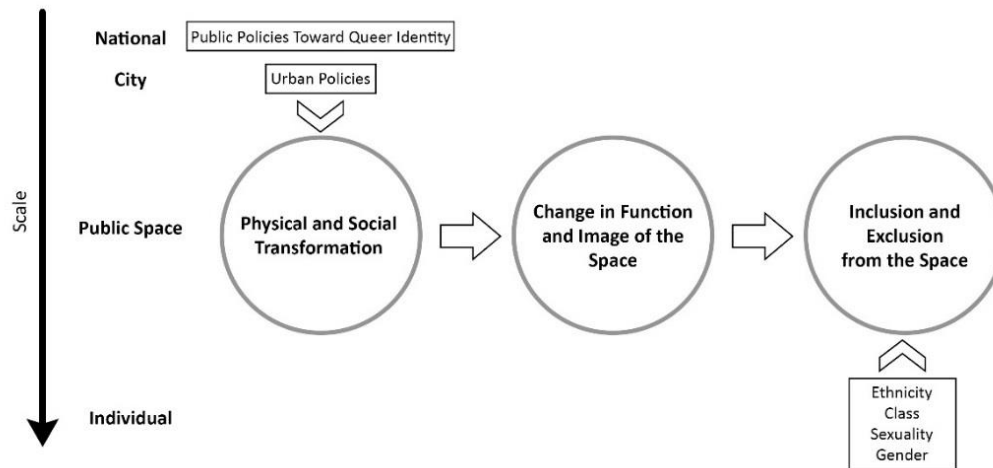


Figure 2-1 Components of the Research (By Author).

## 2.2 A Comparative Approach

Selected two case studies to investigate research questions and examine the hypothesis are Valiasr neighborhood in Tehran and Chueca neighborhood in Madrid.

Tehran, as the capital of Iran, is a unique case in the study of LGBTQI people. Under an extremely religious context, non-heterosexual identities are punished according to Sharia law. Valiasr neighborhood is situated at the heart of the city, where one of the few public spaces for queer gathering exists in Tehran. On the other hand, Madrid is one of the most internationally desired cities for LGBTQI people. Chueca, as the gay neighborhood of Madrid, has turned into a tourist destination and one of the cosmopolitan neighborhoods of the city.

The rationale behind choosing these cases is to examine the differences and similarities of these queer spaces and their interactions with queers under two different context: Tehran as a conservative case where queer identity is stigmatized and Madrid as a neoliberal city which markets itself as a gay-friendly destination.

The table below shows the positionality of Valiasr and Chueca at different spatial scales. Both of these neighborhoods are located in similar districts: Centro and 6<sup>th</sup> districts in

Tehran and Madrid are located in central areas of the city (figure 2-2 and 2-3). Likewise, both were subject to recent urban renovation plans and gentrification by the local government.

Table 2-1 Administrative Scale of Case Studies

COUNTRY	IRAN	SPAIN
CAPITAL CITY	Tehran	Madrid
DISTRICT	6 <sup>th</sup> District	Centro District
NEIGHBORHOOD	First District	Justicia Neighborhood
CASE STUDIES	Valiasr	Chueca

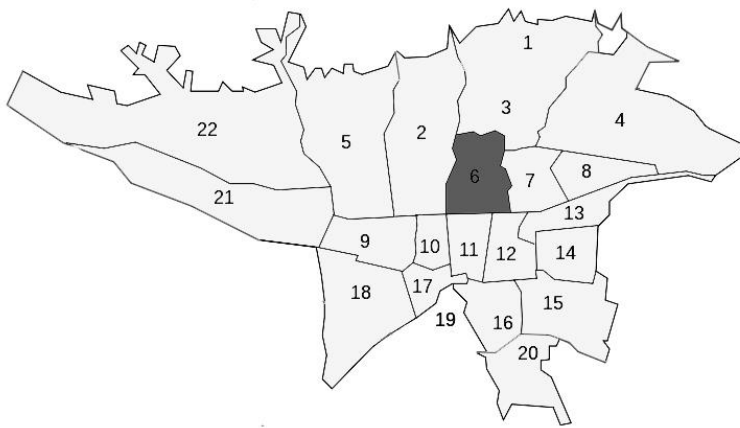


Figure 2-2 6th District, Tehran (Source: Fa.wikipedia.org, 2017).

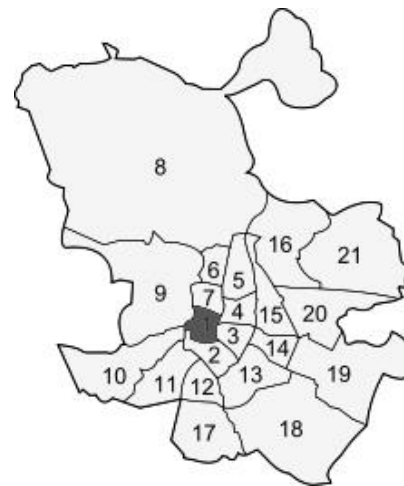


Figure 2-3 Centro District, Madrid (Source: En.wikipedia.org, 2016).

Since the 1970s, Valiasr has a reputation as the main gathering area for sexual minorities in Tehran. After 1979, due to its proximity to the two main universities of Tehran, whose students actively participated in the Revolution, the neighborhood became the most politically engaged areas in the city. As the city grew, Valiasr became the border between poorer southern neighborhoods and the richer north of the city, and an important space of encounter for different social groups. Moreover, the City Theater building and the variety of other cultural and art centers has added to its significance as an attractive place for artists.

Chueca has become the national epicenter of LGBTQI civil rights and a publically recognized gay neighborhood since the 1980s. It is the most influential LGBTQI community in Spain and the only one with a fixed physical and social structure. There is also strong political activism exemplified through the presence of political organizations, signs, and symbols

throughout the community. *Atención a Homosexuales*, Colectivo Gay De Madrid (COGAM<sup>1</sup>), Fundación Triangulo<sup>2</sup> and *Rosa Que Te Quiero Rosa (RQTR)* are four non-governmental political association for LGBTQI rights in the neighborhood. In addition, Chueca is currently home to a substantial concentration of bars, restaurants, cafes, professionals, health and social services for the LGBTQI community in Madrid.

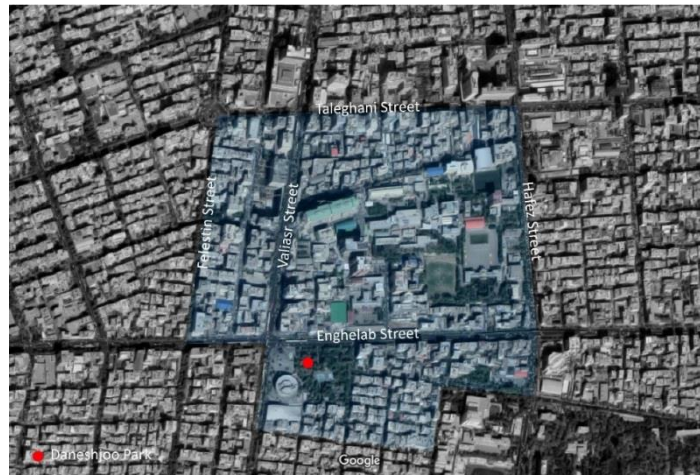


Figure 2-4 Valiasr Neighborhood



Figure 2-5 Chueca Neighborhood

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<sup>1</sup> A Spanish non-governmental association stated as a public utility and non-profit organization which works actively for the rights of lesbians, gays, transsexuals and bisexuals (En.wikipedia.org, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> A non-profit organization that promotes societal integration of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transsexuals. Founded in 1996 <sup>1</sup>, it has offices in Andalusia , Castilla y León , the Community of Madrid , the Canary Islands and Extremadura (Es.wikipedia.org, 2018).



### 2.3 Methods

This research should be understood as qualitative research. Flick (2008, p. 11) identified three different perspectives in qualitative research: Subjective, descriptive and hermeneutic analysis (table 2-2). The first approach highlights the “viewpoint of the subject”, the second group aims at describing the processes in the production of the existing situation and social order and the third approach focuses on structures generating actions and meaning in the sense of psychoanalytic conceptions. The different qualitative methods for data collecting and analyzing are located in these research perspectives. This research has employed a combination of the first two perspectives (the underlined items are the used method in this paper).

*Table 2-2 Research Perspectives in Qualitative Research (Source: Flick, 2008, p. 11).*

	<b>Approaches to subjective viewpoints</b>	<b>Description of the making of social situations</b>	<b>Hermeneutic analysis of underlying structures</b>
Theoretical positions	Symbolic interactionism Phenomenology	Ethnomethodology Constructionism	Psychoanalysis Genetic structuralism
Methods of data collection	<u>Semi-structured interviews</u> Narrative interviews	Focus groups <u>Ethnography</u> Participant observation Recording interactions <u>Collecting documents</u>	Recording interactions Photography Film
Methods of interpretation	Theoretical coding <u>Content analysis</u> Narrative analysis Hermeneutic methods	Conversation analysis Discourse analysis <u>Analysis of documents</u>	Objective hermeneutics Deep hermeneutics

In the framework of “description of the making of social situations”, to answer the first research question “how do physical and social transformations of queer space change its function and symbolic meaning in the urban context?” I relied on collecting documents (online research, media, and secondary data). Based on my personal observations and experiences over four years of bachelor study in Valiasr and four months living in a neighborhood nearby Chueca, I have gained experimental knowledge about both cases. Moreover, two weeks of daily visits at each site during summer of 2018 have been made for the purpose of this study. Moreover, Applying ethnography method for this research offered

an opportunity to make an understanding of the perceptions, cultural frameworks and the social dynamics of the neighborhoods.

The most valuable data for the second question “how do these changes influence the inclusiveness/exclusiveness of the queer space?” were gathered through semi-structured qualitative interviews with the users of space, former and current residents of the neighborhoods, business owners, and LGBTQI activists. Snowball or chain sampling method was applied for the selection of the interviewees. Through my friendship with some queers in Tehran and Madrid, I located two or three key individuals, then asking them to inform others who might be interested in participating. Secondly, to avoid focusing merely on one social group, some of the interviewees were selected randomly on the site. Table 2-3 and 2-4 describes the profile of interviewees. Some of the names have been changed to protect identities. The objective here was to encompass a wide range of individuals within different social classes, ethnic backgrounds, sexuality and gender identities. Most of the interviews were conducted in person and each took about thirty minutes. The participants were asked in the beginning for permission to record the interview. In some cases, the interviews were conducted online through Skype and Wats App platform (the full transcription of the interviews are available in the appendix).

Since Tehran is not considered as a diverse city in terms of having people with different nationalities, I have categorized ethnicity of interviewees based on their place of birth: those who were born Tehran and other provinces of Iran.

*Table 2-3 Profile of Interviewees in Tehran*

INTERVIEW	AGE	SEXUALITY	GENDER	ETHNICITY	CLASS
1-SOHEIL	20	Gay	Male	Tehrani	Working Class
2-HAMID	26	Gay	Male	Non-Tehrani	Middle Class
3-AMIR	20	Gay	Male	Non-Tehrani	Working Class
4-ERFAN	25	Gay	Male	Tehrani	Middle Class
5-OMID	35	Straight	Male	Tehrani	Working Class
6-NASIM	19	Queer	Male	Tehrani	Working Class
7- ELI	30	Trans	Male	Tehrani	Working Class



Table 2-4 Profile of the Interviewees in Madrid

NAME	AGE	SEXUALITY	GENDER	ETHNICITY	CLASS
1-OSKAR	26	Straight	Male	Ecuadorian	Working Class
2-SARA	26	Queer	Female	Malaysian/American	Working Class
3-ALEXIS	45	Gay	Male	Argentinian	Middle Class
4-SURI	30	Queer-feminist	Male	Spanish	Working Class
5-RAMZI	38	Gay	Male	Palestinian/Canadian	Working Class
6-DAVID	26	Gay	Male	Colombian/American	Middle Class
7-KRIS	26	Gay	Male	Spanish	Middle Class
8-CHLOE	24	Queer	Female	British	Working Class
9- BEA	27	Lesbian	Female	Spanish	Middle Class

The interview questions contain two main sections. First, the interviewees were asked for basic background information. In the second part, questions were specifically about the selected case studies, dealing with their personal view about the queer spaces.

Due to my lack of Spanish language skills, I acknowledge missing out on some of the existing studies and potential interviewees. Undoubtedly, this is a shortcoming of my research. In Tehran, one of the most challenging aspects of researching queer spaces is to build trust among queers, regarding legal frameworks in Iran on sexual minorities. In many cases, the potential interviewee's refusal of participating was due to their experience of getting arrested by undercover police. Unfortunately none of the female users agree to interview. Therefore the data overrepresent the experience of men in Valiasr. Moreover, having an "outsider" status as a non-queer researcher, one can argue is a barrier to having a deeper understanding of queer spaces and their social relations.

### 2.4 Structure

The remainder of this paper is devoted to empirical evidence. The third and fourth chapters will separately study Valiasr and Chueca.

To answer the sub-question “What are the public policy approaches toward queer identity at the national and local level?”, in the first sections of each chapter, I will briefly review how the political transition in Iran and Spain changed discourse around queer identity and secondly, how as a result, urban policies at the local level were influenced. In the Historical Background section, I will look through the context in which Valiasr and Chueca emerged as queer spaces in Tehran and Madrid. The top-down interventions of the municipalities and their socio-economic impacts will be analyzed next. In the fourth and fifth sections of the next two chapters, I will answer the third sub-question “how do queer individuals respond to the material and representational transformation of queer spaces based on the different categories of identification?” In order to set the common ground on which the comparison of the two neighborhoods is more feasible, I have divided the neighborhood level analysis into three parts: gentrification, business facilities, and control over the space.

The final chapter is devoted to discussion and conclusion. I hope a comprehensive comparative analysis of the two cases will enable the reader to better understand the changing trajectories of these neighborhoods under the Islamic and neoliberal contexts and their impact on the individual lives of queers in relation to space

### 3 VALIASR, AN OPEN SECRET IN TEHRAN



Valiasr is an unofficial neighborhood within the 6<sup>th</sup> district of Tehran. Confined by Taleghani Street to the north, Hafez Street at the east, Enghelab Street to the South and Valiasr Street along the west. For the purpose of the study, Daneshjoo Park on the south-west of the neighborhood is included as part of the case study. Enghelab Street (translated as Revolution Street) is home to several bookstores and the University of Tehran which is the oldest and biggest university in Tehran. Valiasr Street is the longest of all streets and one of the most important in the city. The name changed after the revolution from Pahlavi Street to Valiasr which is the name of Last Muslim's Imam.

#### 3.1 Context Analysis

##### 3.1.1 National Scale

Afsaneh Najmabadi (2013), an Iranian feminist historian, noted that before the 1979 revolution, Tehran had a reputation in the West as being a “gay paradise”. Tehran in the early 1970s offered a relational cultural and social freedom based on accepting a variety of identities including sexual ones (ibid). This imagination as she further discusses was part of a

complex, rapidly growing urban society, in which particular styles of non-heteronormative male lives were becoming visible (ibid). Later, these visible non-heterosexual practices became part of the criticism by the Islamic regime against Pahlavi for encouraging moral corruption through westernization (ibid).

The 1979 revolution led to the transformation of discourses on identity. Denying previous diverse sources of identity, based on nationalism, Marxism, modernism, etc. the Islamic revolution introduced a unifying identity around which the whole society was to be allied (Kermanian, 2014). This normative self which is advertised by the official media is defined as a “Muslim-Iranian identity” and refuses to acknowledge other aspects of identity including ethnicity, class, and sexuality. As a general rule, everything related to Western culture is forbidden (Fiuzie, 2013). Introducing it as a Western product, queerness is punishable as an unnatural behavior contradicting “sexual ethics” since the Islamic revolution (Ganji, 2015).

The denial of sexual minority’ identities is exemplified by what has been asserted by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, September 24, 2007 (Kermanian, 2014, p. 34) at Columbia University: “In Iran, we don’t have homosexuals like you do in your country... In Iran, we do not have this phenomenon”. Therefore, the enforcement of normative behavior onto the citizens’ identity makes it a political field that needs to be under the government’s control (Jafari, 2013). In a culture where homosexual desires for both men and women are denied, the adoption of queer identity is considered a political choice (Bristow, 1989), because it means challenging the political status quo that absolutely denies queer existence through its power.

Under the regime’s law, trans people are seen as individuals with an illness which should be treated through medical solutions. Since May 2016, there is only one registered NGO representing the issues of the trans community inside Iran. The Iranian Society to Support Individuals with Gender Identity Disorder (ISIGID), is the first and only legally registered trans advocacy group in the country. ISIGID’s declared mission is “to identify, organize, support and help individuals with gender identity disorder<sup>3</sup>”

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<sup>3</sup> Organization’s activities include: public education, gathering a national database of trans individuals, follow-up on Sex Reassignment Surgery cases to evaluate their level of success, collecting public donations for

(Outrightinternational.org, 2016). The government even extends loans for people who undergo Sex Reassignment Surgery and requires insurance companies to cover SRS in their policies (Vocative, 2017). This policy is based on the Islamic notion that gender is binary, refusing to recognize trans as a category per se. Therefore many gay men and lesbians had changed their sex as a result of the regime's propaganda and to fit into the binary definition of gender. The result is that apart from Thailand, Iran carries out more sex change operations than any other country (Vocative, 2017).

### Queer Activism in Iran

Much of the literature on queer identity and politics in Iran have focused on the suffrage and difficulties that LGBTQI people are facing. The dominance of human rights organizations on LGBTQI issues has demonstrated a victimized image of queers in Iran against the Islamic regime. Moreover, the conception of rights in these discourses is mainly juridical. The outcome as put by Ganji (2015, p. 120) is:

*A vicious circle of requests... from those who have certain rights on behalf of those who lack them, addressed to those who violate these very rights (Iranian officials) or have no authority to guarantee them any right (UN representative).*

There is a lack of attention to the social and political activities carried out by queer individuals inside the country in academia. Queer people in Iran have struggled to surface and reclaim their rights along with the student movement and the Green Movement. The student movement that started in the 2000s marked a return of the Left in student politics after decades of silence (ibid). During this period, open discussions on the rights of sexual minorities took place inside universities and in the form of student magazines and flyers with the beginning of a larger student movement in the second term of the reformist government, from 2000 to 2004 (Ganji, 2015). While the feminist movement could connect itself to a broader public domain outside academia, and even to some extent to official discourses of the Iranian government, queer activists remained mostly inside the safe atmosphere of big universities in Tehran (ibid).

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the trans community, connecting with international academic centres, and improving the treatment of trans individuals (Outrightinternational.org, 2018)



During the Green Movement which took place following the fraud presidency election, many official and unofficial news website acknowledged the participation of queers. Although there was no explicit sign, pro-government websites tried to marginalize the movement and its participants by presenting it as a sexual movement which tries to encourage western immorality among youths (جهان نيوز, 2011).

Despite limitations and difficulties, at the local level, public spaces are still used by queers for social meetings. Based on a conversation that I had with queers who live in cities other than Tehran, in almost every big city, there are recognized social events where the queer community meet. In Mashhad, the second biggest city in Iran and also a highly religious city, there are many social gatherings hosted by the queer community. "We have a very well-organized group and every one bond with each other very well. Some of these events are held in public spaces such as Mellat Park. These group meeting range from five to fifty people" (Arsalan 2018, personal communication, 12 May).

### 3.1.2 Tehran, Marginal Gentrification

Due to the lack of resources during the eight years of war with Iraq invasion, the government rescaled the state by prioritizing the growth of Tehran and a few other economic poles as the engine of Iran's non-oil export economy through numerous renewal projects in the capital such as investment in the underground subway system, new international airport and Navab mega projects<sup>4</sup> (Middle East Institute, 2016). The budget deficit caused by the Iraq war and the dramatic decline of oil revenue after 1985 was followed by the approval of the "Municipal Fiscal Self-Rule Act" which cuts national budget allocation for large municipalities. This became a challenge for Tehran's municipality which had few tools to raise its own revenues (ibid).

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<sup>4</sup> The first comprehensive plan of Tehran (1968) included a new north-south motorway to provide fast and easy access between the central and northern parts of the city. In this light, "the extension of the existing north-south Chamran motorway, further to the south, as a strategic plan to improve the transportation network in Tehran, has been part of the general planning activities of the City Hall of Tehran for a long time" (Bahrainy and Aminzadeh, 2007 in Sadrvaghefi, 2017, p.253). In the 1992 Maintaining and Organising Plan of Tehran, the construction of the motorway was reconfirmed and "it was to be one of four main highways, completing a ring around the central core of the city" (ibid).

During the time of gradual privatization, Tehran's mayor extracted fees and taxes from private investors and developers in return to exempting them from zoning regulations and protecting them from political-legal pressure (Bayat, 2010). In the absence of the tourist industry, which was critical for similar-sized cities such as Istanbul and Cairo, Tehran relied increasingly on the construction sector as the main motor for the urban economy. The outcome was the increasing number of high-rise buildings especially in the richer northern zones of the city, where real estate profit rates were much higher. Consequently, spatial and social segregation between the poor south and wealthy north divided the city. The coalition of the City Hall, private developers and speculators resulted in selling urban space, both vertically and horizontally (Sadrvaghefi, 2017).

Between 1990 and 1998, the municipality collected 6 billion Toman, which was mostly used to finance urban renewal projects including the expansion of cultural centers, art institutions and green areas (ibid). Although the north of the city has been subjected to the largest urban projects, since the 1990s, Tehran has engaged in a process of gentrification of the older neighborhoods in the city center, both through individual renovation of older buildings, encouraged by an intensification policy, as well as through the building of new highways, parks, mosques, and cultural centers (Esfahani, 2017). The 6<sup>th</sup> district as one of the cultural centers of Tehran was under the focus of these urban projects. In the official website of the 6<sup>th</sup> district's municipality, it has been mentioned that the district should reflect *"the historical, cultural, and political development of the contemporary and the Islamic revolution era"* (Region6.tehran.ir, 2018). Part of this strategy is pursued through *"the expansion of public space and tourism"*.

In 2011, a cultural festival was organized on KarimKhan street in the area, which has been the main focus for cultural activities of the municipality during recent years. During the festival, many art galleries were installed along the street (روزنامه دنیای اقتصاد, 2011). Moreover, the municipality has announced several times that they plan to build a "Cultural Pedestrian" from the City Theatre to Vahdat Hall to improve the cultural significance of the neighborhood. The mayor of the 11<sup>th</sup> district has asserted that:

*The neighborhood should become a tourist attraction regarding the significant number of historical buildings. In doing so a number of tours have been organized by the*

*municipality and the budget is foreseen to improve and preserve the old historical buildings (mihanemrooz.ir, 2015).*

Consequently, evidence of a marginal gentrification could be observed in the district. In this process, decaying and impoverished neighborhoods go through a transformation in the built environment, social status, and population size, however, unlike the mainstream gentrification, the outcome (still) is not a wealthy neighborhood (table 3-1).

*Table 3-1 Different Forms of Gentrification and Neighborhood Renewal (Source: Van Crieckingen, 2016, Slide 18).*

	Initially	Transformations			Outcome
	Decayed and impoverished neighbourhood	Improvements to the built environment <sup>a</sup>	Social status growth	Population change	Wealthy neighbourhood
Gentrification	X	X	X	X	X
Marginal gentrification	X	X	X	X	O
Upgrading	O	X	X	X	X
Incumbent upgrading	X	X	O	O	O

<sup>a</sup> Through rehabilitation or recycling of old decayed buildings or through construction of new buildings on previously vacant land (redevelopment).

Referring to the pioneer gentrifier, Rose (1984: Mendes, 2013) developed the concept of marginal gentrification. This process generally involves less privileged sectors of the new middle class that have a significant gap between their high levels of educational capital and culture and their low level of economic capital. She highlights the role of women, students, artists, young couples and single parents families in this process. There is an obvious parallel between the concept of marginal gentrifiers and what Florida refers to as “creative class”. Starting five years ago, the number of art galleries and other cultural centers has increased in the center of Tehran (Fa.newmediasoc.com, 2018). Moreover, private sectors investments aimed at making the city center attractive for the middle class and artists. Figure 3-1 shows that between 2005 and 2007, the 6<sup>th</sup> district along with other central districts of Tehran, experienced 57 to 67 percent rise in housing prices.



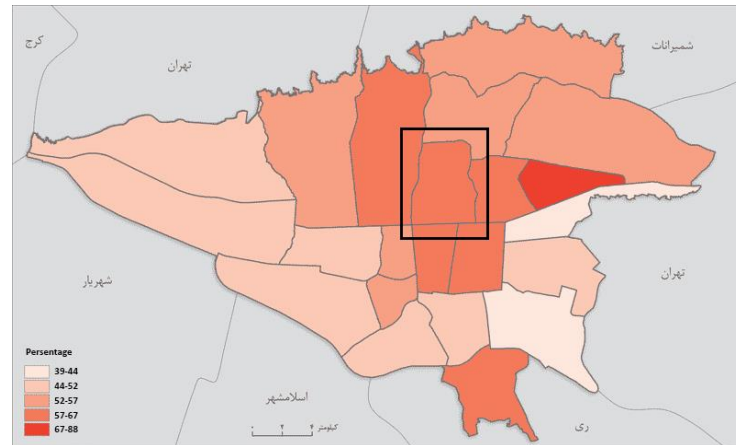


Figure 3-1 Evolution of Housing Price between 2005 -2007 (Source: *Atlas.tehran.ir*, 2018).

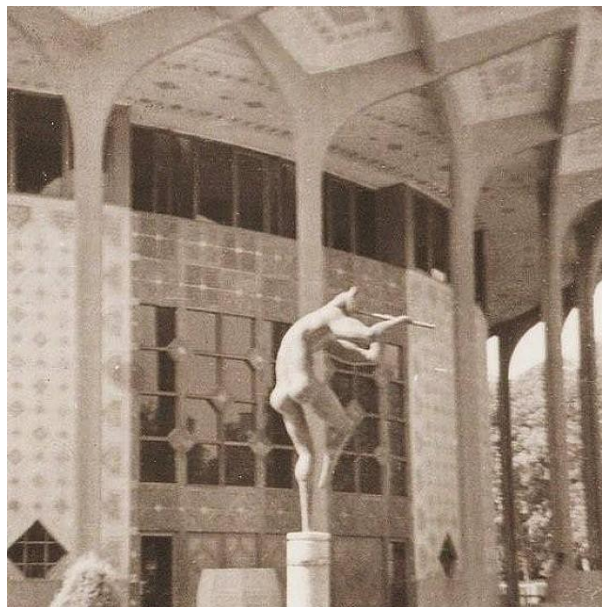
### 3.2 Historical Background

In this section, I will focus particularly on Daneshjoo Park's historical context in order to see why it became known as a queer space in Tehran. Daneshjoo Park (which is translated to Student Park in Persian) is situated at the crossroads of Enghelab Street and Valiasr Street. Beside the City Theater building, there is a mosque, public library and small playground inside the park.

By 1956, wealthy neighborhoods, as well as the Royal Palace, were located in Tehran's northern districts. As cultural facilities were in the center, middle-upper classes wanted to have their own gathering places at the center. By 1960, there was a garden at the current location of Daneshjoo Park called Shahrdari (translated to municipality) Café Garden. The café was a meeting point for writers and intellectuals of that time. The idea of designing the park and the City Theatre came up by the municipality and Farah Diba (Queen of the second Pahlavi) approximately at the same time, however, the construction of the City Theatre started after the inauguration of the park (Kermanian, 2014).

The park was built in 1967, as a part of Tehran's expansion plan. A few years after the construction of the park, the construction of the City Theatre was completed in 1972. The inauguration of the City Theatre divided the park into two parts: the eastern part composed of rectangular designs with straight paths, small gardens, square-shaped benches and rectangular pools according to traditional Iranian garden architecture and design. The western part of the park is designed based on a circular structure surrounding the National Theatre building, circular fountain, benches and the building itself (ibid).

Daneshjoo Park was officially designed for the recreation of a group of wealthy people, most of whom were part of the military or political class of Pahlavi's dynasty. Due to the high price of theatre tickets, the main audience for theatre tended to be the upper class. Nevertheless, it has been said that the park was initially designed for wealthy and powerful groups, who were also gay. The architect of the park, Bijan Saffari, an Iranian painter, and architect was gay and had the first explicit, if not official gay marriage in the history of modern Iran (ibid). The wedding took place in "Commodore Hotel" which was also designed by him and continued in Daneshjoo Park (مجله حالت, 2016). Moreover, at the same time of the inauguration of the Theater building, Bahman Mohassess who was also an openly gay artist was asked to build a sculpture in front of the building. The sculpture "Flageolet Player" (translated by author from Persian) (figure 3-2) was removed from the park a few years after the revolution because of the "erotic display" (Mehr News Agency, 2007). Therefore Daneshjoo park became a symbolic place for gays from the very first days of its inauguration.



*Figure 3-2 Flageolet Player Sculpture by Bahman Mohassess  
(Source: Picmog.com, 2014).*

During the years of revolution, due to its proximity to the University of Tehran and AmirKabir University whose students were involved in the revolution, the whole neighborhood has become a key place for socio-political movements. Since then, Valiasr is known as one of the most politically engaged neighborhoods of Tehran. Moreover, as the city grew, Enghelab Street became the border between the south and north of the city.

Therefore, the neighborhood now has turned into a place for the encounter of different social groups and classes. In addition, the opening of the Valiasr metro station in 2011 multiplied the number of passersby who stopped by the park. Today, one of the most visible groups in the neighborhood are users of the City Theater and other art and cultural centers who are mainly young middle-class students or artists. Secondly, are queers, who most often come to the neighborhood later in the day. Child laborers, street vendors, drug dealers are other major users of this neighborhood.

### 3.3 Physical Interventions

In 2004, the municipality decided to build a mosque behind the City Theatre. Before this, the area officially served as the theatre's parking. The proposal of construction of a mosque in one of the most crowded public spaces faced opposition by a group of artists because the City Theatre had claimed ownership over the parking space

The first design was a traditional mosque with a dome two and a half time higher than the City Theatre building which again intensified the conflict between municipality and theatre custodians. These conflicts suspended the construction of the mosque. In spite of the opposition of religious forces, the new mayor accepted the second proposal of "Fluid Motion Architect" firm, which was dissimilar to traditional mosque architecture (figure 3-3). The construction of the mosque on a crowded crossroad which cannot even bear the existing population marks its symbolic meaning as representative of the religion dominance over public space. Civil society's success in preventing the construction of an extravagant traditional mosque might seem an achievement, yet, the presence of the mosque as discussed by Kermanian (2014, p. 43) "was a clear statement of the municipality's hegemony over civil society by occupying one of the most controversial public spaces".



*Figure 3-3 Valiasr Mosque behind the City Theater (Source: Author).*

In 2014, a food outlet, which was located at the middle of the park, was removed. According to Aminzadeh and Afshar (2004), this area was a gathering point for drug dealing. However, based on personal observation and experience, the main users were older residents and university students.

The Mayor's solution for traffic in the neighborhood was to remove pedestrians from the surface of the street, pushing them to an underground level. The aim of this project was to provide accessibility for pedestrians to the south, north, east and west of the junction without using the surface intersection (figure 3-4). At the same time of the underpass construction, the pedestrian zone was fenced, in order to prevent people from going into the street. In fact, passengers have no options, except for going down by the escalators which are installed in four-part of the crossroads and following the signage to find their way onto the surface again (figure 3-5).



Figure 3-4 Valiasr Underpass (Source: Author).



Figure 3-5 Fenced Pedestrian (Source: by Author).

There is debate among urban scholars and citizens that the construction of the underpass was not just for traffic issues, more than that, a way to eliminate citizens from this public space and to make it easier to control potential social-political conflicts. To understand the paradoxical and political planning approaches of the municipality of Tehran, I offer the example of Imam Hussein Square, which has been recently pedestrianized. Imam Hussein Square is located at the east end of Enghelab Street and the main function of the square is for religious ceremonies and events and is considered a neutral space from the political point of view. The Mayor of the district asserts that the main objective of the pedestrianization project



is to introduce the square as a ritual and cultural center in the city (ایسنا, 2015). After this project, the square has transformed into a huge arena for pedestrians; all vehicles must pass through an underground way (figure 3-6).

The contradictory planning strategy of the Mayor in these two cases shows how physical interventions are used to encourage the “desired” social and religious practices in Imam Hussein square and to repress the “unwanted” students’ activities at Valiasr crossroads.



Figure 3-6 Imam Hussein Square (Source: ایسنا, 2015).

Looking at these urban interventions in the neighborhood reveals that the municipality has been pursuing two main strategies in Valiasr. First to improve the image of the area as a cultural center to attract middle classes and desired social groups. On the other hand, by eliminating social spaces in Valiasr intersection, prevent any potential social and political movements among students and activists.

### 3.4 Inclusive or Exclusive?

#### 3.4.1 Gentrification

As discussed earlier, although Valiasr remains a mixed neighborhood in terms of the social class of its residents, the increasing number of cultural centers has changed the socio-economic profile of the neighborhood during the last couple of years. It has always been a young and vibrant neighborhood, however, now there is a general feeling that Valiasr is more “hip” and gentrified.



*They [young students] present themselves as cool and artist because it is “trendy”. Even those who live in the north of the city think they have to go to the city center cafes. They [municipality] now care more about the historical parts and instead of demolishing the old buildings turn them into cafes because it is profitable. I went to a tour once and they said they are trying to reopen the abandoned places (Interview 4, gay, 25, middle class).*

There was no explicit reference to the recent physical interventions in the neighborhood, during the interviews. Despite the gradual population and economic changes, some respondents indicated that the neighborhood continued to be identified as a queer space:

*There are more and more gays and trans people every year. It’s crazy. I have been coming here for four years now. The first year that I came here, there were like three or four people who I knew... every time I come here there is someone new...day by day the number of people is increasing and they are mostly kids (Interview 3, gay, 20, working class).*



Figure 3-7 Old Residential Building Converted to Cafe (Source: by Author).

### 3.4.2 Commercial Businesses

The interviews illustrate the importance of having a neighborhood or physical location in which the LGBTQI community can gather for socializing or to find the potential partners. Many have asserted they have a feeling of protection from discrimination outside the neighborhood.

*I feel safer to ask someone out and also I find people like me. Outside the neighborhood, you can't easily approach someone as a gay person (Interview 7, trans, 30, working class).*

Not surprisingly there are no queer-specific facilities, however, there are some “queer-friendly” cafes and the services offered by the neighborhood are affordable for a variety of users.

*I prefer one or two cafes in Valiasr. The owners are LGBTQI friendly and they know us. I go there with my friends (Interview 1, gay, 20, working class).*

*Cafes in Valiasr have good vibes. People are open-minded and more tolerant in general. Most of the owners and also users are students (Interview 4, gay, 25, middle class).*

### 3.4.3 Control over the Space

Daneshjoo Park has been represented as an unsafe place and the presence of police is very visible during most of the day. To ensure permanent control over the space and to prevent any potential social or political conflict, an outside-police station was constructed a couple of years ago. Also, plain-clothed forces, either police or Intelligence Ministry are usually present in the park.

*Police harass gays and trans people all the time. They arrest them sometimes. That's why I don't go there. It's risky (Interview 1, gay, 20, working class).*

The way police treat queers is related to their appearance. Trans and gay people who look feminine are more likely to be subject to police harassment

*If they see me they don't bother me because I don't put on makeup. But for example, if some guys put on lipstick or eyeliner or dress like a woman they would bother them. Most of the time they would arrest them... Once I was passing with my friend who is trans and police stopped us and asked my friend why don't they have hijab. And I told him they are not woman. And that happens a lot to trans people here... I have [also] heard that if the morality police see them they would immediately ask for 5 million Toman and if they don't pay they would put them in jail for 6 months (Interview 3, gay, 20, working class).*

*They would arrest you if you don't look normal to them. Even if you are not doing anything... I mean to be just there with weird makeup puts you at risk in the Park...in the police office, they would write in your documents that you have been in an "area with high-rates crime (Interview 7, trans, 30, working class ).*

The presence of police is intensified during public events. The increased control over the space aims to remove three groups: queers and drug dealers, child laborers and street vendors, and political activists. While the image of the neighborhood as a place for drug dealing and prostitution has legitimized the permanent presence of police for some, it seems that there is more concern by authorities on the potential social or political unrest.

*They never stay here like tonight. They patrol but they never stay like this. It is because of the demonstrations these days (Interview 3, gay, 20, working class).*

One of the examples of social events which initiated conflict between police forces and activists was the 2006 Women's Day. The gathering of 120 feminist activists was disrupted violently by police, asserting that the gathering was illegal (2006, رادیو فردا).



Figure 3-8 Women's Day, Daneshjoo Park (Source: امروز, 2006).

### 3.5 A Stigmatized Name

Change in the national law against queers after the revolution has resulted in the stigmatization of Daneshjoo Park, both in media and public opinion. In a famous TV series by Mehran Modiri, a well-known Iranian comedian, there is an explicit reference to the park as a sign of derision (Kermanian, 2014). Mehr News (2013), which is a pro-government news agency, indicates the presence of sexual minorities as one of the most problematic social disorders of this park. “The number of men who look like women increases as it gets darker” (ibid: translated by author). The author of this report sees the presence of “people with extreme mental disorder” as the main reason why citizens avoid this park (ibid).

*There is bullying sometimes... [Daneshjoo Park] is not very safe and it is stigmatized. It is well known for prostitution and drug dealers. Most of them are old men from lower social class (Interview1, gay, 20, working class).*

*I went there with some friends a couple of times for theatre, but I don't like spending time in the park. It is very unsafe. There are many prostitutes in Valiasr, especially when it gets darker. I don't have a problem with that, it is just not my kind of place ... There are two types of gay men in Valiasr: the masculine gays mostly old and the young prostitutes both from poor class (Interview 2, gay, 26, middle class).*

*They are from other provinces and usually under the pressure of their families and they have financial problems, so they run away from their parents' house...It's awful....Most of these people are coming here for prostitution. But when you look at them you know that this is not their job. They do it out of necessity. Some of them are even 14 years old. I have seen many times that their parents come here and beat their child and take him with them (Interview 3, gay, 20, working class).*

Even inside the park, there is an implicit division between the east and west part and its users. The plaza in front of the City Theatre, in the western part, is often used for different religious ceremonies and street theatre which are officially organized (figure 3-9). On the other side of the park, however, the undercover and less visible lives of queers are going on, who shows up mainly after the evening. There was a plan to separate the City Theater building from the rest of the park which was supported by the government and municipality, however, after the change of government and due to the conflict with the municipality, this plan was never realized (Kermanian, 2014).

*The park is divided...if you sit here [the west part] people would think you are probably waiting for a theater show or meeting a friend. But after 12 a.m if you are here and especially the eastern part, everyone looks at you as either prostitute, a homeless person or drug dealer... At this time of day you can see these very fine people, if you come back at night there is whole other life here (Interview 5, business owner, 35).*

The temporality of queer space has been pointed out in Betsky's (1997: Cottrill, 2006, p. 4) definition of queer space "By its very nature, queer space is something that is not built, only implied and usually invisible. Queer space doesn't confidently establish a clear, ordered space for itself...it is altogether more ambivalent, open and ephemeral".



Figure 3-9 Street Performance during Theatre Festival (Source: Tasnimnews.com, 2018).

### 3.5.1 Where else?

Valiasr continues to be the most famous queer space in Tehran, however, the image of Daneshjoo Park as a place for prostitution and the constant policing the neighborhood has led to the emergence of other places for queers in the city center, close to the Park. Two of the well-known areas for queers are under Karimkhan Bridge and College Bridge. The hidden spaces under the bridges provide queers with a unique invisibility from the eyes of authorities (figure 3-10).

*The main gathering area is here...in the park...sometimes they [queers] go to other places like College Bridge because of the police... it's like a cursing place. Some gay and trans prostitutes frequent between Park and College bridge to be picked up by cars (Interview 3, gay, 20, working class).*





Figure 3-10 College Bridge (Source: Author).

Among queers themselves, Karimkhan has the reputation as a place for “business”:

*Trans people who dress as women go to Karimkhan street to be safe but it has been recognized by the police lately and they have attacked them many times (interview 7, trans, 30, working class).*

Lately, there has been some queer gathering in the northern part of the city. Generally, middle and upper-class neighborhoods are considered more tolerant and queer-friendly in comparison to other neighborhoods.

*There are some cool places in the north. Generally, in some parts in the north of the city, you can see more gays who frequent certain cafes (Interview 1, gay, 20, working class).*

*I prefer northern parts of the city like Tajrish. There are cool cafés which are hip and have good vibes... They [middle-class queers] have their own place. For example, I have heard in Niavaran Park there are some queer gatherings (Interview 2, gay, 26, middle class).*

As Valiasr is subjected to police harassment more often than the northern neighborhoods, queer women are utilizing these areas for social meetings namely Tajrish and Mirdamad. One of the respondents (interview 7) mentioned that queer women organize social events on Tuesday nights after 9 p.m. in Saadat Abad. Based on a conversation with a

café owner in Tajrish, there is a growing visibility of “girls who are obviously lesbian” and are recognizable by the way they act, dress and talk. According to him police doesn’t frequent in Tajrish as much as they do in central neighborhoods.



*Figure 3-11 Tajrish Neighborhood, Growing Queer Visibility (Source: by Author).*

### 3.6 Conclusion and Summary

By the 1950s, Valiasr neighborhood was a gathering area for writers and intellectuals of that time. The idea of designing a park came up by Farah, to provide a cultural and recreational area for the middle and upper classes in the city center. The inauguration of the park and City Theatre by a group of gay artists gave it a symbolic meaning as a place for queers. The change in the discourses around queer identity in the Islamic framework affected the image of the neighborhood as a place for criminals and people with “mental disease”. The national government of Iran reinforces a unifying identity around religion and nationalism. In reaction to the westernization reform by the Pahlavi dynasty, everything which was related to Western culture was criminalized. Introducing it as a Western product, since 1979 homosexuality is punishable according to Sharia law. Since the 2000s, along with the student movement and Green Movement, young queers have struggled to find their voice in public domains, however, to this date, government repression has marginalized the social and political activities of queers in Iran.

In the post-revolutionary period, Valiasr became a problematic public space for the government. The geographical position of the neighborhood at the heart of the city and its

proximity to the two main universities of the country made it one of the most politically engaged areas in Tehran. Since 2004, a series of physical interventions have taken place to minimize the access to public space and increase control over it. Construction of a mosque in one of the most crowded areas of the city center has initiated conflicts among civil society and the municipality. After 2007's Green movement and the important role of the neighborhood in hosting street demonstrations, by cutting the access between street and pedestrian area and removing the open space food outlet, the municipality's aim was to reduce the possibility of social encounters.

At the same time, to "reflect the historical and cultural development" of the Islamic revolution, Valiasr has been subjected to a gentrification process through the expansion of cultural centers and festivals. Although housing prices have risen since 2005, the neighborhood is still affordable for lower social classes. However, as the neighborhood has become more attractive for middle social classes, there is a general sense that the neighborhood is more "hip" and "artistic". Although there are no queer-specific businesses in the neighborhood, cafes are considered as "queer-friendly" and attract queers from different parts of Tehran. The increasing control over public spaces in the neighborhood, specifically Danesjhoo Park, tends to remove "unwanted" social groups, namely queer along with child laborers and street vendors. Consequently, queers and prostitutes (gay and trans people) have been partly displacing to nearby, yet less visible areas in the district such as College and Karimkhan bridges. Furthermore, the stigmatized name of the park as an area for prostitution has resulted in the emergence of other queer spaces in more affluent parts of the city, namely Niavarand, Tajrish, and Mirdamad.



## 4 CHUECA, THE GAY NEIGHBORHOOD OF MADRID



Chueca is an unofficial area in the Justicia (the name refers to the presence of the court) neighborhood within the administrative district of Madrid Centro, delimited by Paseo de Recoletos, Gran Vía, Fuencarral street and Fernando VI (Blog Housers, 2016). The name Chueca derives from Federico Chueca, a composer of musical zarzuelas, and it is the name of the plaza at the heart of the neighborhood, and the metro stop (Robbins, 2011). Chueca has around 35 avenues and streets. It is home to major clothing stores and is one of the fashion centers of Madrid. Fuencarral and Hortaleza are central streets of the neighborhood, containing a wide number of cafes, restaurants, and bars.

### 4.1 Context Analysis

#### 4.1.1 National Scale

In the context of LGBTQI's activism and rights, Spain has gone through different stages of struggle. The different forms of this struggle are in relation to the political situation of the country throughout history. From the dictatorship of Franco until incorporation within the European Union, as well as globalization processes, the lived experience of individuals, including queer-identifying citizens, has been affected in many ways.

During the dictatorship of Franco (1939-1975), nationalism in Spain resulted in marginalization of LGBTQI communities. Franco condemned homosexuality by reinforcing heterosexual cultural domination with the help of the Catholic Church (Martinez and Dodge, 2010). Homosexuality was punished by persecution and exile. In 1954, homosexuals along with gypsies and drug addicts included in “The Crooks and Vagrants Act” to allow for repression and punishment. In 1971, the law of “Dangerousness and Social Rehabilitation” considered homosexuals as dangerous categories and separated them from the society, as a way to rehabilitate them (Galán, 2003). In June 1971, the government established institutions called “Huelva’s entre” where homosexuals were treated with electric shock (Martinez and Dodge, 2010). Since the dictator had strong control in the capital, many LGBTQI individuals fled to the Spanish Mediterranean Island of Ibiza which was later known as la tierra de libertad (the land of freedom) (ibid).

### An overnight Transition

In a relatively short period of time, Spain experienced a transition from a dictatorship that criminalized homosexuality to a democracy which legislates same-sex marriage. Franco’s death marked the beginning of the “Europeanization” of Spain in a process of cultural and political identification with Northern European countries (Giorgi, 2002). The folkloric construction of Spanish identity during the transition period (1975-1982) replaced by the image of the country based on its connection to Europe (Adams-Thies, 2007).

Spain was looking for a common ground to understand their new freedoms and La Movida was considered as one way to detach from the unpleasant past, especially for youth (Adams-Thies, 2007). La Movida Madrileña<sup>5</sup> was a post-Franco counter-culture movement which led to sexual liberation, freedom, rights, and advocacy for LGBTQI equality and justice in communities, such as Chueca (Martinez and Dodge, 2010). From 1977 onward, gay activist groups started flourishing all over the country (Enguix, 2009). Due to the lobbying work of the first homosexual organizations, such as Movimiento Homosexual de Acción Revolucionaria

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<sup>5</sup> La Movida Madrileña (English: The Madrid Scene) was a countercultural movement coincided with economic growth in Spain and the emergence of a new Spanish identity. The “Concierto homenaje a Canito” (“Canito Memorial Concert”), taking place on February 9th, 1980, is widely considered the traditional start date of La Movida Madrileña (En.wikipedia.org, 2015).

(MHAR) (Homosexual Movement of Revolutionary Action) and the Movimiento Español de Liberación Homosexual (Spanish Movement of Homosexual Liberation)<sup>6</sup>, the law of Dangerousness and Social Rehabilitation was abolished. Pedro Almadóvar, the Spanish director and filmmaker, contributed to construct the new Spanish LGBT identity and to transform the Spanish media and theater by rejecting old, traditional values, norms and morals in his films (Martinez and Dodge, 2010).

In 1991, lesbian feminists from all over Spain published a common set of demands in relation to same-sex marriage and in 1992 some groups began to meet with political parties (Platero, 2007). LGBT activist's leaders became increasingly involved in politics and left-wing political parties began to perceive gay rights as a source of political capital (ibid). In the context of European Union discourses around equality, citizenship and the inclusion of sexual minorities, the Socialist government had the chance to represent itself as a progressive party by recognizing same-sex partnership. Since joining the European Union in 1986, Spain has made considerable progress in the issues of gender and sexuality (Martinez and Dodge, 2010). In 2005, the FELGT (National Federation of LGBT organizations) and some politicians proposed the law of same-sex marriage which was admitted by Parliament. The law 13/2005 provides access to same-sex married couples rights of inheritance, residence, adaption, tax benefits and divorce (Platero, 2007).

At the same time, an evolution has happened in Spanish public opinion with regard to the acceptance of homosexual rights. According to the official Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS, Sociological Research Center) in 1997, 57% of Spaniards supported joint adaption by gay and lesbian couples. By 2003, being the fifth country of Europe with the greatest acceptance of gay rights (68%) Spanish public opinion became one of the most progressive ones in the European context (Galán, 2003). More recently a study by the Pew Research Centre (2013), shows that 88% of the Spanish population recognizes and support the rights of LGBTQI people which makes it first place in this world ranking.

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<sup>6</sup> The Spanish Movement for Homosexual Liberation (MELH), initially called the Homophile Association for Sexual Equality (AGHOIS), created in 1970, was the first organization to defend the rights of the LGBT community in Spain (Es.wikipedia.org, 2017).



Giorgi (2002) argues that the sequences of modernity around gay rights discourses are part of Spain's strategy to portray its modern and liberal image. An example of remapping of Spain as a gay tourist destination is provided by Rancho Mirage Travel, a Web-based travel agency (ibid, p.61): "The times are certainly changing in Spain. Once one of the most conservative and repressive societies in Europe, since the death of Franco and after several elections, Spain has become a European showplace". Spain now hosts the best gay events which are famous globally. In 2007, the celebration of Europride was one of the highlights of Spanish history in Madrid, recognized as the "Best Gay Event in the World" (Worldpridemadrid2017.com, 2016)

### 4.1.2 Madrid: Gentrification and Touristification

Beginning in 1997, Madrid went from being the mere administrative center of state institutions to incorporation into the global economy (García Pérez, 2014). The urban change produced in this period can be described around two axes: 1) the metropolitan expansion through housing projects and transport infrastructures and 2) urban regeneration processes in the inner city. In this process, the historic center of Madrid, home to 145,000 inhabitants underwent a series of fundamental transformations that changed its functional role and symbolic imaginary (ibid).

The first policies for the recovery of the degraded center of Madrid were based on the protection of heritage, included URBAN projects, Preferential Rehabilitation Areas, and the 1985 General Plan<sup>7</sup>, with the slogan "recover Madrid" (García Pérez, 2014, p. 77). The focus of these actions was based on the preservation of the historic center. The second stage, developed through the 1990s, focused on the reorientation of urban governance with greater negotiation and cooperation between public and private actors. In this stage, the urban center acquired a symbolic meaning and as a showcase to represent the city's identity through urban marketing and tourism. The goal was to change the image of Madrid, promoting the city's brand with the help of soft planning and in the forms of strategic and master plans (ibid). The statement by the Municipality of Madrid (2011 in Sequera and

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<sup>7</sup> The 1985 Plan included the issues of urban design such as the Linear Park of the Manzanares, the remodeling of Atocha, development of social housing, extension of the green areas, improvement of public transport and hierarchical road system (Arquites - [ARQUitectos Italianos en ESpaña], 2013)

Janoschka, 2015, p. 381) underlines the public policy approach in the redevelopment plan of the center:

*To transform the center of Madrid into an international reference of culture, projecting its creative potential beyond our borders.*

There are two main arguments in the discourse around urban regeneration in Madrid. First, there is the key role that different public administrations play within the promotion of tourism, especially those related to an institutionalized cultural production, and secondly the dominant rhetoric of the creative city. In Madrid, public policies have applied Florida's creative theory to establish a setting attractive for the creative class (García Pérez, 2014). These policies explicitly track qualified human capital and aim to bring them to the city, with a specific emphasis on the historical city center:

“The city needs the drive of the creative class and the center must receive the talents that will trigger economic competition. The new creative classes, university students, and small-scaled R and D entrepreneurs will be extremely well received in the center (Municipality of Madrid, 2011 in Sequera and Janoschka, 2015, p.381).

In this sense, one of the priorities was to invest in creative industries. Madrid is specifically successful in doing so, a third of all jobs in Spain's creative businesses are situated in Madrid (Sequera and Janoschka, 2015). Besides, since the transition to a post-industrial city, public administrations have been supporting a kind of employment that requires the city and its physical and cultural environment (e.g museums, libraries, festivals, etc) (ibid).

Furthermore, tourism has been central to the urban regeneration policies in Madrid. The official website of Madrid Tourism (Drupal, 2018) describes the city as “*a Beacon of Tolerance and Diversity*”:

You live in Madrid, but more than anything you feel it. It's always waiting with open arms; welcoming, accepting and integrating people from other places.

The increasing number of cultural spectacles in the historical center has meant the displacement of residential uses, turning it into merely “visit spaces” (Puga and Castro, 2008, p. 160). According to a study by the Madrid Higher Technical School of Engineering (in Luis

Meyer, 2017), the number of tourism-oriented accommodations such as Airbnb has grown by 50% (from 4000 housing units to over 6000 units between 2015 to 2017). In 2015, with more than 9 million visitors Madrid outperformed Barcelona in terms of the number of tourists (ibid). The touristification of the center is most evident during Pride in Madrid. Pride parade has turned into a major spectacle and is advertised by the official organizers and travel agencies. The organization of Pride Parade is carried out by COGAM, FELGTB<sup>8</sup>, and AEGAL<sup>9</sup>. During Pride, Centro district becomes a place for large public party from the end of June until the first week of July.



Figure 4-1 Madrid's City Branding (Source: by Author)

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<sup>8</sup> FELGTB is the federation of Spanish LGBT association

<sup>9</sup> AEGAL is a business related organization which own 55 bars and 14 other businesses like Shangay and Zero.



Figure 4-2 Madrid during Pride (Source: by Author)

The process of recovering the city center and its revaluation as a cultural axis has caused a pattern of return from peripheral municipalities and increasing interest in the city center (García Pérez, 2014). The area has become more attractive as a place of residence for young adults with considerable purchasing power. According to Leal and Sorando (2016), following regeneration interventions of the central districts, the location quotient of professionals and managers has grown since 2001. At the same time, the location quotient of the blue-collar workers, those employed in elementary occupations and the unemployed has fallen in the Centro district (ibid).

Moreover, since 2001, Spain has shifted from emigration to an immigration country, receiving a large number of immigrants each year (Puga and Castro, 2008). The majority of immigrants chose to live in the central district because of their specialization in services and commerce, a greater availability of low-income housing and the existing social and ethnic networks. Their arrival in these districts contributed to a 40% increase in the population of the central district after 2000 (268 habs/ha) (García Pérez, 2014). As the result of high demands for housing in this district, real estate price increases in the central district outperforming other neighborhoods of the city (figure 4-3).

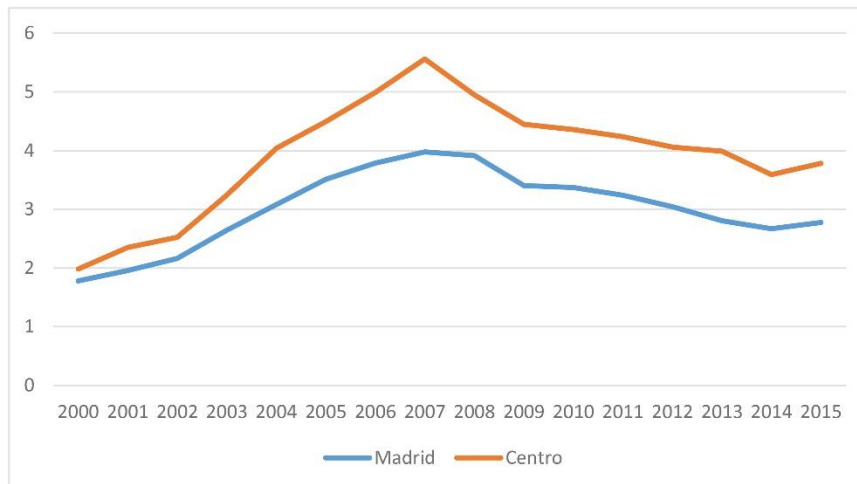


Figure 4-3 Evolution of Housing Price in Madrid and Centro District (euro/m<sup>2</sup>) (Source: Madrid.es, 2018, own elaboration).

### 4.2 Historical Background

In the mid-70s, Chueca where a lot of young people lived, was one of the grittiest neighborhoods, filled with crime and poverty. The barrio quickly became known as one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in Madrid, a place commonly referred to as “populated by scum” (Neuvel, 2018) where the most common advice to recent Madrid arrivals was “Ni pienses en pisar ni en Chueca” (Don’t even think about setting foot in Chueca) (Adams-Thies, 2007).

After Franco’s death, as the result of more social and political freedom, the Spanish LGBT community began to emerge. They started to assembly in Chueca, which was affordable for young people and students. In the 80s, gay and transgender people, and to a lesser extent lesbians, opened up bars, clubs, and other shops, creating a network of commercial facilities across the area. They invested in the cheap houses and flats and offered a range of services to the local LGBT community (European Commission, 2016). Eventually, Chueca became the official center of all social, cultural and political activities and movements of the LGBT community and as the epicenter for *la Movida Madrileña de los 80* (the Madrid Movement of the 1980s), highlighting its position as a counterculture artistic place (Neuvel, 2017). The opening of gay bars and gay/bohemian friendly cafés at the heart of the neighborhood such as Black & White (1982) and Café Agosto Figueroa (1980) initiated the first steps of the gaytrification of the neighborhood (Adams-Thies, 2007).



The first use of the word “gay” in relation to Chueca, appears in ABC the conservative newspaper, in a bar advertisement “en la zona gay” on May 24, 1985 (Adams-Thies, 2007, p. 89). In that time the gayness of the neighborhood was mainly associated with the numerous gay bars.

However, the area was still suffering from a bad reputation in media being labeled as “a drug supermarket” (ABC April 15, 1987; El Pais February 8, 1987, and November 11, 1987: Adams-Thies, 2007, p. 89), the center of “the triangle of death” (El Pais March 21, 1988: *ibid*); “a black point on the city map better forgotten” (El Pais October 11, 1988: *ibid*); and “the epicenter for drugs and prostitution” (ABC January 16, 1990: *ibid*). Although the other central neighborhoods such as Lavapiés, Maravillas (Malasaña) and Sol were also considered as socially problematic for the officials, Chueca was one of the few spaces in Madrid associated with every possible crime.



Figure 4-4 Black and White Bar (Source: by Author).

### 4.3 Transformation Process

By this time, the social-political scenes of the city were moving toward liberty, including tolerance of gayness. In the 1990s the neighborhood imaginary started changing. In 1992, the first non-bar gay business Berkana, a bookstore co-owned by a lesbian and gay man offering magazines, videos, books, and t-shirts was opened (Adams-Thies, 2007) which could be seen as a step toward the promotion of gay visibility. After Berkana, other gay businesses including restaurants and clothing stores started emerging with LGBTQI symbols such as Gay Pride flag, pink triangle, and leather pride flag, decorating the buildings and shops. The



community reappropriated the symbol of bull, which has traditionally represented machismo, sexism and male domination In Spain, by using the “rainbow bull” as an icon for Spanish LGBTQI people (Martinez and Dodge, 2010). In 1997, ABC referred to Chueca as the “pink neighborhood of Madrid where sexual minorities brought lights and colors to the neighborhood” (BOIVIN, 2016).

In this context, Madrid City Council supported the urban regeneration of the area in a number of ways. As discussed before the local government had already started an extensive regeneration process of downtown Madrid in the 90s. This regeneration was eventually extended to Chueca. Initially, the city council intervened with a “light touch” through the regulation of commercial permits (European Commission, 2016). Later on, the council made direct investments in regeneration projects in the area such as pedestrian areas, regulation of traffic and parking, street furniture and refurbishment of squares<sup>10</sup> (ibid). After 2000, a system of financial incentives was set up. The city council included Chueca in the urban regeneration scheme “Área de Rehabilitación Hortaleza” (2005 to 2008), through which financial incentives were offered for refurbishing buildings and commercial venues. Incentives were based on the type of tenancy (owner living in own property, rented houses) and the type of work to be carried out. The available Incentives were between 30% to 70% of the total expenditure (ibid).

Between 2006 and 2011, the refurbishment of Mercado de San Anton, a block away from Chueca Plaza in Barbieri street, transformed the old market into a gourmet gastronomy with high standard restaurants. The initial plan for updating the building through rehabilitation changed to a complete restructuring of the building. In the beginning, the redevelopment commission was a private contract between the Association of the Mercado San Anton and the architecture studio QVE. The project thus did not include the municipality at first but, municipal authorities agreed upon the reimbursement of 30% of the investment.

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<sup>10</sup> Some areas were pedestrianized, such as the Plaza de Chueca, and Plaza Vazquez de Mella, where a large underground car park was created (European Commission, 2016).



Figure 4-5 Mercado de San Anton (Source: by Author).

Another example of municipality's urban regeneration projects in the Centro district was remodeling of Gran Vía. In 2010, Gran Vía's pedestrian area was widened in order to be directly accessible from both Calle Fuencarral and Calle Hortaleza, giving continuity to the commercial axis of the neighborhood (Avchueca.com, 2010).

The objective of regeneration of Chueca was to promote the neighborhood as a tourist destination not just for LGBTQI people but for all. By 2008, the hospitality industry in Chueca increased to 24% which is above the average percent of Centro district (García Pérez, 2014). In 2014, the Mayor of Madrid, Ana Botella signed a tourism collaboration agreement with Berlin. According to this agreement for the period of one year, the authorities of the two cities set a collaboration basis in order to “develop actions that contribute to improving the image of Berlin and Madrid as tourist destinations” (S.L.U., 2014). Among the activities are the promotion of Madrid and Berlin as shopping, gastronomic and cultural destinations and the creation of new urban spaces for the LGBTQI market (ibid). According to the National Institute of Statistics (ibid), 5.07% of the foreign tourists in Madrid are German citizens.

In April 2016, a reform project of Chueca was introduced by the Mayor of Centro district. The new plan for “Remodeling Chueca Neighborhood” aim was to improve safety and environmental quality in the area which affects the total 11 streets<sup>11</sup> (Pongamos que Hablo

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<sup>11</sup> including, Hernán Cortés (already concluded), Santa Brígida, Farmacia, Augusto Figueroa, San Marcos, Infantas, Reina, Costanilla de los Capuchinos, San Bartolomé, Barbieri y, Libertad (Pongamos que Hablo de Madrid, 2017).

de Madrid, 2017). The intervention includes widening narrow streets, planting new trees, installing new benches, creating uniform lightings, and improving pavement.



*Figure 4-6 Remodeling Chueca (Source: Somos Chueca - Salesas, 2018).*

These urban projects in the framework of the municipality's regeneration plan have affected the image of Chueca in a number of ways. Chueca is now officially the "gay neighborhood" of Madrid, a sort of "brand" which attract tourism and pushes the economy. It is now functionally and economically integrated into the center (European Commission, 2016, p. 36) and has become a must-see for whoever visit Madrid. The emphasis on the commercial areas and the touristification of the neighborhood have introduced an urban consumerism lifestyle. According to Martinez and Dodge (2010), a new LGBT identity has been constructed in Chueca which is shaped by a capitalist market economy and international tourism. Chueca has become one of the most cosmopolitan neighborhoods of the city, often compared to SOHO in New York, known by its nightlife and historic streets full of restaurants, stores, and bars (Blog Housers, 2016).

Tourism has affected the dynamics of the neighborhood which fuels businesses, creates more jobs and improves the infrastructure of the neighborhood (Martinez and Dodge, 2010). According to the official Tourism website of Madrid, some of the names become part of the city's cultural heritage (Drupal, 2018). Museo Chicote, Black and White, Libertad 8, Ocho y Medio and Barceló TClub Theater are among some of those classic brands associated with Chueca and Madrid.

The gay neighborhood of Madrid is now one of the most desirable places with a very lively economy, a completely new demographic profile and a flourishing real estate market with increasing prices (European Commission, 2016). As the years pass, the area has become more and more a residential location for middle and upper social classes who want to live in downtown Madrid (Adams-Thies, 2007). The prices keep increasing each year because the area is being sold as a lifestyle, not just a property (Blog Housers, 2016). In the next chapter, I will examine the outcome of these changes on the inclusion/exclusion patterns of the neighborhood.

#### 4.4 Inclusive or Exclusive?

##### 4.4.1 Gentrification

Gentrification in Chueca has changed the way the neighborhood is being perceived. The “social cleansing” of gentrification can be categorized into three sections (Van Criekingen, 2016, slide 26). First, direct displacement as a result of economic, legal and physical reasons. The high prices of facilities have excluded lower social classes from the neighborhood:

*It's very expensive. A lot of my friends don't ever go there, so it's not a suggested place for us. I have coffee sometimes in Chueca but if I want to go out for a night, it doesn't happen super often (Interview 2, queer, 26, working class).*

*I think...Chueca... is very posh, very exclusive just for gay men who have money (Interview 4, queer, 30, working class).*

*In Chueca, if you are not particularly wealthy, it is not for you... Between Gran Via and Plaza, it is more rough and less expensive. Between Genova and Plaza is posh (interview 5, gay, 38, working class).*

Second, displacement pressure exists because of a lack of a familiar sense of place. There are different perceptions about the neighborhood before and after gentrification.

*Around 15 years ago it was totally different. It was dirty and dangerous and a lot of drugs. When gay people start to move here, the new shops opened and the neighborhood becomes a different and expensive place to live (Interview 3, gay, 45, middle class).*



*When I moved out, Chueca was getting gentrified. After the crisis, especially in the north part of Chueca, it started getting posh. And it didn't feel the same anymore (Interview 5, gay, 38, working class).*

*I used to like it better when I was younger because the neighborhood used to be more interesting and unique back then (Interview 7, gay, 26, working class).*

*I'd like "my" Chueca back. I'd like a more engaged neighborhood rather than such a consumer-oriented place... there has been a shift in the shops and bars in the last ten years. It has become more gentrified, very fancy... It doesn't have the meaning it used to for me. It was a huge piece in my coming out process and coming to terms with [my] sexuality... So it did play a HUGE role for my younger me. It's just different now, and basically, I've found other places that I identify with more (Interview 9, lesbian, 27, middle class).*

Some associated the decrease in the significant symbolic meaning of Chueca with gay rights achievement and greater visibility in the city:

*I remember going there when I was a teenager trying to find somewhere to be comfortable and I found Chueca to be just the right place, and it still is... Chueca was more gay centered before but now there is not that difference between neighborhoods in the center of Madrid as gay or straight so maybe what you can find now in Chueca is a place for more specific gay tribes. Still good (Interview 7, gay, 26, middle class).*

*When I moved to Madrid nine years ago, it was like an invisible line or mental mark, you would literally see a couple stop holding hands, as soon as they cross the borders of Chueca. Then when people started holding hands in other places than Chueca, it was revolutionary... There was a time when we needed a ghetto and Chueca was our only ghetto. It was a safe place to hold hands. But now you can hold hands everywhere in the city. So, what do we need Chueca for... We don't need Chueca. It is just for old people, who didn't have anywhere else to go. There is nothing new in Chueca. Half of Chueca is for rich people and half is for old gays. There is nothing*



*interesting that happens in Chueca. Why would I go to Chueca? (Interview 5, gay, 38, working class).*

Third, “exclusionary displacement”, meaning the reduction of affordable housing in neighborhoods classically hosting low-income populations, has been observed. The high prices of housing have created a pattern of residential segregation between Chueca and other neighborhoods in Madrid.

*I used to live in Chueca for one year. And then I moved to Lavapies because I needed an affordable place (Interview 5, gay, 38, working class).*

### 4.4.2 Commercial Businesses

Except for the high prices of offered services, facilities in Chueca produce another source of exclusion. Bars, clubs, and shops in the neighborhood are mainly oriented around gay men desires and needs. Boti García Rodrigo, the President of COGAM emphasized the open nature of events and parties taken place in Chueca during 2001 pride: “Chueca is not a ghetto...there are more and more businessmen and neighbors that are adding to the dynamism of Chueca” (País, 2001). However, facilities are considered as highly gay exclusive and there are only two lesbian bars in Chueca (LL and Flunita de Tal).

*It seems less diverse in sexuality when you go to bars or clubs, they are mostly gay older bears (Interview 6, gay, 26, middle class).*

*I like that Madrid has a “gayborhood” I don’t like that it’s very bourgeois “mainstream gay” expensive and focused around gay men (Interview 8, queer, 24, working class).*

The feeling of exclusion is also true for gays who do not fit to the stereotypes produced by the space, “tan, muscled, perfect clothes and hairstyles” (Adams-Thies, 2007,p. 134). The homogeneous image that Chueca has projects is the image of a community that spends money without any further political and social ambitions (Robbins, 2011). According to Adams-Thies (2007), the sanitization of gayness among the public in Spain was different from the United State, where monogamy was idealizing as a proper way of being gay. In Spain,

gayness was extremely associated with a specific consumption lifestyle and physical appearance. This image of a consumerist gay lifestyle seems to be reinforced in Chueca.



Figure 4-7 LL Bar in Chueca (Source: by Author).

### 4.4.3 Control over the Space

The selective visibility in public, especially in the Plaza, is partially imposed by the increasing control and regulations, to limit the presence of “non-legitimate” clients. As mentioned by one of the interviewees (interview 1), even during pride it is the case that undercover police approach assumingly illegal migrants and ask for their identity card.

Moreover, public spaces are being commercialized, which has limited the access of lower social classes to space. The dynamics of struggle over space between authorities, business owners, and users have been changing over time. In July 1998, police entered the Plaza and removed thirty tables from terraces because of the “excessive urban furniture”. Business owners opposed municipality’s supposed “homophobic” policy by holding banners in the plaza saying “*El Ayuntamiento se lleva nuestras terrazas. Manteniéndolas defendemos nuestro barrio! Defiéndelas! Defiéndete*” (City hall has taken our terraces. We defend our neighborhood! Defend the terraces! Defend yourself!). The next month, the business owners were able to use the terraces under a higher tax charge (Adams-Thies, 2007, p. 105). In recent cases, however, regulations over the public spaces in Chueca have been in favor of businesses. For example, during 2017 Euro Pride, Madrid City Council allowed the installation of bars and permission for late night opening hours (Telemadrid.es, 2017). The privatization of the Plaza for commercial uses have been acknowledged by some of the interviewees:

*I found it more appealing when it wasn't full of terraces. It was possible to just sit down in the Plaza and have a beer with a group of friends...there's less flexibility in the use of space (Interview 9, lesbian, 27, middle class).*



Figure 4-8 Commercial Use of Plaza (Source: Author).

### 4.5 A Political Choice

Whether interviewees identify themselves as queer or not was highly influential in their opinion about Chueca. The separation between those who identified themselves as queers and those of LGBTQI people in Madrid dates back to the 1990s, as “the pink capitalism” started growing in the country and in Madrid and later in the 2000s during Zapatero’s socialist government, who legalized gay marriage. The critical anti-assimilationist positions were developed by some groups, such as LSD and Gay Radical (interview 4, trans-feminist activist).

Despite the view that Chueca is “apolitical” place, it still plays a central role in Spanish LGBTQI politics. Political and activist organizations such as COGAM and Fundación Triángulo, are a substantial part of neighborhood’s political representation. However, for some queers, their activities are not considered to be “critical” or “radical” and are often seen to operate within an assimilationist politic. The political reference of Chueca in the opinion of those queer-identified interviewees was in relation to the stereotypes of being gay which is represented by Chueca.

The tension between “assimilationist gay” and “anti-capitalist queer” can also be traced through participation in the “official” or “critical” Pride parade. While some appreciate pride to make them feel “normal” (interview 7) others believed it is exclusive and expensive:

*It is not really fun for me. It just gets more crowded and expensive and I'm not the huge fan of all the music that is played or the way that people party in these spaces, so I don't really enjoy. I don't care... It is not very welcoming (Interview 2, queer, 26, working class).*

*Party is great and I'd like it if there was a way of combining that with a bit more criticism and not just becoming the rainbow clients (Interview 9, lesbian, 27, middle class).*

In 2006, queers with the motto “Pride is Protest”, questioning the commercialization and de-politicization of the official pride, initiated the first critical pride (Orgullo Crítico, 2017). The event was organized by LIBERACIÓN (leftist LGTB)<sup>12</sup> the association RQTR<sup>13</sup> of the Universidad Complutense, la EKKA, and colectivo feminista Las Lilas. In 2017, the EuroPride in Madrid was one of the largest LGBTQI marches ever (NBC News, 2017). At the same time, *Orgullo Crítico* (Critical Pride) took a lot of attention, forcing coverage by official media sources. The number of people who took the streets to “protest, not parade” (Left Voice, 2017) was approximately 10,000 participants (interview 4). It was organized by a group of trans-feminist activists in Lavapiés who held meetings at Eskalera Karakola<sup>14</sup>, the first social center for feminist and trans-feminist movement in Madrid. As explained by one of the organizers:

*When it comes to critical pride, there is a platform created just for that. For example, last year [2017], was an entire year from September. Because of the world pride and it was a big thing to phase... This platform is open and it is called just to organize the demonstration and all the activities around that. In that platform, anyone can join. You don't have to belong to any collective (interview 4, trans-feminist activist).*

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<sup>12</sup> A socialist LGBT activist group

<sup>13</sup> RQTR (Association of Lesbians, Gays, Transsexuals, Bisexuals, Intersex and Queers of the Complutense University of Madrid). The first LGTBQI university association in Spain since 1994.

<sup>14</sup> A squat held by a group of feminist since 1996 with the idea of creating a collective space to experiment new forms of relationship between women, through the development of different cultural and artistic activities



The protest opposed the commercialization of the LGBTQI struggle, homonationalism, pinkwashing of Israel and US, pink capitalism, lesbian invisibility, biphobia, and transphobia. The march, got out of Lavapies for the first time due to a large number of participants, started from Nelson Mandela Aquare, towards Tirso de Molina, Sol, Gran Vía and finishing in Plaza de España (interview 4, trans-feminist activist).



Figure 4-9 Madrid 2018 Official Pride Parade (Source: by Author).

### 4.5.1 Lavapies: A New Chueca?

To answer the question of “what factors shape today’s spatial distribution of queer space?”, Ingram, et al., (1997) explain that although the influence of consumerism along with privatization of previously public spaces can exclude queers out of public spaces, queer’s social networks continue to achieve public presence. This is evident in what is happening to queer spaces in Madrid. The perception about Chueca and its users explain why some queers prefer alternative locations to live and socialize. Based on interviews, Chueca is not viewed as a desirable location for many queers because it is mainly considered as a place dominated by white, middle-class men. While it continues to be central in the social and political life for LGBTQI community, many queer-identified individuals are utilizing other spaces in Madrid outside the neighborhood namely Carabanchel, Vellecas, and Lavapies.

*Chueca is very famous for not being diverse. I mean it’s diverse in the number of tourists that go visit but not for the residents. It’s pretty exclusive for gay white men. I mean if you walk through the neighborhood, a lot of the sex shops, the bars are*



*oriented towards gay white men and drag queens. But if you look at Lavapies and look at the stores there are friendlier to lesbian and women and other LGBTQI+ spectrum (interview 2, queer, 26, working class).*

Although Lavapies is not a visible or publically acknowledged queer neighborhood in the same way as Chueca, the increasing number of bars and restaurants which are regarded as “queer-friendly” (either owned by queers, have a queer employee or have a high number of queer users) has introduced Lavapies as an alternative to Chueca. In this sense, Lavapies fits into what Gorman-Murray and Waitt (2009, p. 2855) referred to as “queer-friendly neighborhood”. They distinguish “gay ghettos” as the inner city neighborhoods where white, middle-class gay men dominated and the term “queer-friendly neighborhoods” referring to the areas with a visible and acknowledged presence of queer residents and businesses. However, the majority of residential and commercial uses are heterosexual, but as the term implies queer people are welcomed.

Agustín González, the president of COGAM says that Chueca and Lavapies complement each other by offering two different experiences

*Chueca has become a bit elitist, but it is a good thing that there are more clubs for gay people, and Lavapiés and Chueca are leading the way in this, attracting different kinds of people looking for different things (Hervás, 2012).*

However, the choice between Chueca or Lavapies goes beyond the personal preference and whether or not they are able to afford any of those places, it is also the matter of how they identify themselves. An article by Idealista ([idealista/news](#), 2017), introduces Lavapies as the new LGBTQI neighborhood in Madrid. The opening of Medea, one of the few lesbian exclusive clubs in Madrid attracted many lesbian populations to this area (Hervás, 2012). Furthermore, the image of Lavapies as an anti-assimilation queer neighborhood is associated with an established social and activist network of trans-feminists:

*If I just want to meet anyone new or go to disco I do go to Chueca but if I don't want to meet people who are not like me, I don't. But the thing is that in the queer community, I know lots of people and already it is like a world itself, which is very sustainable (Interview 4, queer, 30, working class).*

However, Lavapies has already started a gentrification process such as other neighborhoods of Centro district, as explained by a cafe shop owner in Lavapies (interview 5):

*Gentrification is happening so fast. The speed of gentrification is faster than Chueca... We are skipping steps. They just opened a shoe shop at Nelson Mandela square, the cheapest shoe is 280 euros. That shoe shop wouldn't survive even in Malasana. It is too expensive for Malasana and they opened at Lavapies!... The gays were in Lavapies like for two years, before the big money started coming. They didn't have a chance here. In Chueca, the process was about 30 years before the big money come and eat the neighborhood. In Lavapies it didn't last.*

He further argues that Lavapies is becoming apolitical and less critical as the "cool" people are arriving to the neighborhood:

*People who come here, I wouldn't say... they are queer-minded. They want to be cool and are looking for the next cool thing so that they can associate with that cool thing. Lavapies now has a name, but this dynamic is not very queer. They don't want to be different. They want to be cool, based on the latest mainstream trends... And what happens right now is that trend is to be marginal. But these people do not genuinely desire to be marginal. They want to take the image of marginality in a mainstream way.*

Except for Lavapies, according to Martinez and Dodge (2010), street-based sex workers have relocated to the streets of the neighboring areas such as calle de Montera and the intersection between Gran via and calle de Fuencarral. Furthermore, as the neighborhoods of Centro district are gentrifying and becoming less affordable for lower social class queers, there is a growing interest in the peripheral parts of Madrid:

*Queer people are organized mostly around active working-class quarters and in Vallecas they have a famous history of working-class quarters. They have also their own pride, Orgullo Vallecano (interview 4, queer, 30, working class).*

### 4.6 Conclusion and Summary

The current transformation of Chueca should be positioned within the contemporary political and social context in Spain around LGBTQI discourses. By the 1970s, Chueca was one of the grittiest neighborhoods in Madrid, filled with poverty and crime. Shortly after Franco's death, Spain experienced a democratization process in which homosexuality was not punished anymore. After 1977 gay activists organizations such as Movimiento Homosexual de Acción Revolucionaria and the Movimiento Español de Liberación Homosexual succeeded in abolishing laws, which reinforced discrimination against queers. During this period, the Spanish LGBTQI community in Madrid started to assemble in Chueca, which was an affordable neighborhood. Starting from the 1980s, as the number of gay facilities such as bars, cafes and shops was increasing, Chueca became known as the official center for social, cultural and political gay community. Step by step the imaginary of the neighborhood has started changing as considerable progress in areas of gender and sexuality were achieved, since joining the European Union. In 2005, the gay marriage proposal by FELGT and political actors was accepted by parliament. Today Spain hosts one of the most popular gay parades and attract LGBT tourist all over the world.

In the framework of regeneration plans to "transform the center of Madrid into an international reference of culture" (Municipality of Madrid, 2011 in Sequera and Janoschka, 2015, p. 381), Centro district was to acquire a symbolic meaning and showcase as representative of the city. Urban regeneration of Madrid's center revolves around two main discourses, the rhetoric of creative class and tourism. By applying Florida's creative class theory, urban policies were oriented toward establishing an attractive environment for qualified human capital to relocate to the city center. The promotion of tourism policies in Madrid specifically centered around the gay tourism. During the last decades tourism and cultural facilities, and hotels have replaced the local commerce and turned the center into a "visit place" (Puga and Castro, 2008, p.160).

Since the 1990s, some direct investments were made by the municipality in regeneration projects, such as regulation of traffic, parking, and square refurbishment. In 2000, a system of financial incentives was set up for building and commerce venue renovation plans. In 2010, Gran Vía street was widened and remodeled for better access to the shopping streets of the Chueca. In 2011, the refurbishment of Mercado de San Anton transformed the

market into a high-standard gourmet market. The most recent plan for remodeling Chueca includes widening the streets, installing street benches, lightening and new pavements which will affect 11 avenues in the neighborhood.

The gradual gentrification of Chueca has contributed to the social cleansing of the neighborhood through disposition a familiar sense of place and the reduction of affordable housing. As a result, lower social classes have been removed from Chueca in search of cheaper housing. Moreover, the high prices of facilities such as bars, restaurants, and clubs have marginalized less privileged people. Lastly, as the majority of leisure facilities are oriented around gay men sexuality, non-gay queers show less interest to spend time in Chueca,

The dynamic of controlling space has been changing over time in favor of business owners and commercializing the space. The excessive commercial use of the Plaza de Chueca has limited the access of users who can not afford the services. Moreover, the visibility of seemingly “illegal immigrants” is being restricted by the police. Consequently, many queers in Madrid have been utilizing other public spaces for their social and political activities. Lavapiés has been serving as a political platform for those who do not fit or reject stereotypes of gayness in Madrid. Other working-class neighborhoods such as Carabanchel and Vallecas also have become politically engaged in the counterculture movement against commercializing gay neighborhoods of Madrid.

## 5 COMPARISON AND DISCUSSION

In this thesis, my goal was to examine the impact of urban policies on social relations of inclusion and exclusion in queer spaces. The two case studies have been analyzed through the national and urban context, historical background, processes of transformation, and their current situation. In the following section, I will summarize and analyze the differences and similarities between Valiasr and Chueca.

### Context Analysis

In the 1970s, Iran and Spain went through political transitions. While in the pre-revolution time, Tehran had the reputation as being “a gay paradise” the Islamic Republic, introduced a new legal framework in which queer identities were persecuted. Conversely, after Franco’s dictatorship, as a result of more political freedom and the effort of LGBTQI activist groups, Spain turned into a country with a progressive legal system for sexual minorities. Parallel to this change at the national level, Valiasr and Chueca as the queer neighborhoods of capital cities, went through some fundamental physical and social transformations.

In 1974, Valiasr and its public spaces served as cultural and recreational places for middle and upper classes during the Pahlavi era. The symbolic meaning of the neighborhood as a gay space was associated with the collaboration of a group of queer artists in designing the Daneshjoo Park. Prior to the Islamic Revolution, it was a gathering area for gay men from upper classes. Chueca, before the death of Franco, was one of the poorest areas in Madrid. It was home to marginalized social groups including prostitutes, drug dealer, and LGBTQI people. During the years of political transition, it became the official center for social, cultural and political activities of queers in Spain. During the 80s, the first gay facilities were established in the neighborhood.

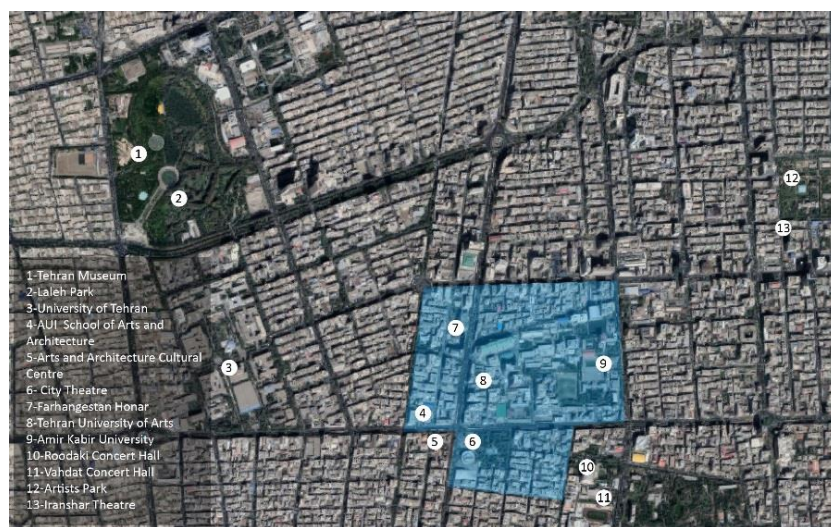
Looking at urban policies, document analysis reveals that Tehran and Madrid’s municipality took the same approach in turning the city center into cultural and historical showcase through place-based beautification and investment in cultural consumption infrastructure. Situated in the city center, both cases have undergone gentrification processes in different ways.



*Table 5-1 Municipalities Strategies in City Center (Source: by Author).*

6th District	Centro District
To reflect the historical, cultural, and political development of the Islamic revolution	A reference of culture, projecting its creative potential beyond our borders

To pursue urban strategies in changing the city center (table 5-1), the number of cultural and art centers have increased. Figure 5-1 and 5-2 show the multiplicity of the cultural infrastructures around Valiasr and Chueca.



*Figure 5-1 Art and Cultural Infrastructures around Valiasr (Base Map Source: Google map, Own Elaboration).*



*Figure 5-2 Art and Cultural Infrastructures around Chueca (Base Map Source: Google map, Own Elaboration).*

### Transformation Process

After the Green Movement in 2007, Valiasr neighborhood as one of the key gathering points, underwent a militarization process to limit the access of civil society to public space. Chueca as the gay neighborhood of the Centro district played a significant role in improving tourism and urban marketing in Madrid. Table 5-2 shows the urban projects of the two neighborhoods in the past couple of years. The construction of the mosque can be understood as a way to increase control over the space, to prevent any social-political conflict through the presence of plain-clothed forces. The removal of pedestrians and the food outlet areas aims to reduce social encounters and turn the neighborhood into a transitional space rather than a social public space. At the same time, Chueca's projects are oriented toward increasing the commercial use of the space through the refurbishment of Mercado San Anton and creating incentives for the renovation of commercial venues. Furthermore, the remodeling of Gran Via, which is the main commercial street of Madrid, improved its connection with Chueca.

*Table 5-2 Urban Projects in Valiasr and Chueca (Source: by Author).*

Valiasr	Chueca
Construction of mosque	Refurbishment of Mercado San Anton
Underground pedestrian	Widening the pedestrian
Removal of the food outlet area	Regulation of commercial permit

### Current Situation

Today, Valiasr is a space for a constant struggle between queers, political activists, and police forces. In fact, interventions by the municipality can be understood as a reaction to its significance as a truly social space which welcomes a diverse range of social groups. Chueca experienced an exact opposite trajectory; as a politicized public space for an oppressed community, in the globalized post-Franco era, it has been replaced by a comfort and consumption space with weak links to the poor, immigrants, and sexual minorities (Robbins, 2011). Consequently, the images that Valiasr and Chueca reproducing have changed the dynamic of social relations among users of the space. The change of meaning and the way they are being perceived has influenced the interaction of different social classes, ethnic groups, and sexual identities in various ways.

### Inclusive or not?

Based on the content analysis of 16 qualitative interviews with queers and users in Tehran and Madrid, the inclusiveness of queer spaces which was the focus of this study has been assessed, considering three categories: gentrification, commercial businesses, and control over the space.

As discussed earlier in the framework of Tehran's municipality to represent the cultural and social development of the Islamic Republic, the number of cultural and recreational facilities have expanded recently. This has made the neighborhood more attractive for young adults and a process of marginal gentrification can be detected in the neighborhood. Although the neighborhood has become more "hip", the economic effects of gentrification have not dramatically influenced the housing market. Since the 1980s, Chueca has gone through a process of gaytrification. Becoming incorporated within the neoliberal practices of commodification and consumerism, Chueca has turned into an urban space for cosmopolitan citizens' experiences. Consequently, the typical categories of social cleansing (displacement of marginalized group and erasure of a familiar sense of place) can be observed in Chueca. While queers are the "gentrifiers" of the neighborhood in Madrid, Tehran's municipality aims to displace queers through top-down gentrification.

The legal framework in Tehran does not allow for the establishment of queer-specific businesses, however, cafes in Valiasr are considered as welcoming and attractive places for queers in Tehran. In this sense, Valiasr is more similar to Lavapiés in offering "queer-friendly" services. In Madrid, LGBTQI-focused businesses function as important elements in Chueca. However, the higher prices of facilities and their exclusiveness for gay men have marginalized lower social classes and non-gay queers.

Thirdly, control over the space in Valiasr aims to remove or marginalize queers, homeless people and to ensure an apolitical public space through the police patrols and the presence of plain-clothed forces of the government. In Chueca, the regulation of public space has been in favor of commercialization use of space and removal of immigrants. However, being a tourist destination, Chueca is a diverse neighborhood in terms of ethnicity, especially during Pride parade and public parties.

Figure 5-4 summarizes how gentrification, commercial businesses and controlling space have excluded certain identities. "Control over the space" is the main reason for

exclusion of queers and lower social classes (homeless people and prostitutes) from Valiasr. In Chueca “gentrification”, “commercial businesses” and “control over the space” exclude working class, non-gay queers and ethnic minorities (immigrants). In terms of gender divisions, both neighborhoods are highly masculine. While the image of Valiasr as “unsafe”, “filled with prostitution and drug dealers” contributed to the less visible presence of women, the gay exclusive facilities make Chueca less of an interest for queer women. Instead, the visibility of female queers is highlighted outside the neighborhoods. In Tehran, female queer visibility have been achieved to some extent through what Podmore (2001) refers to as “deconstructive spatial tactics” by adopting a specific dressing style or behavior in upper-class neighborhoods such as Tajrish and Mirdamad. In Madrid however, queer-feminist activist groups have established a fixed social center in Lavapies for organizing political and cultural events.

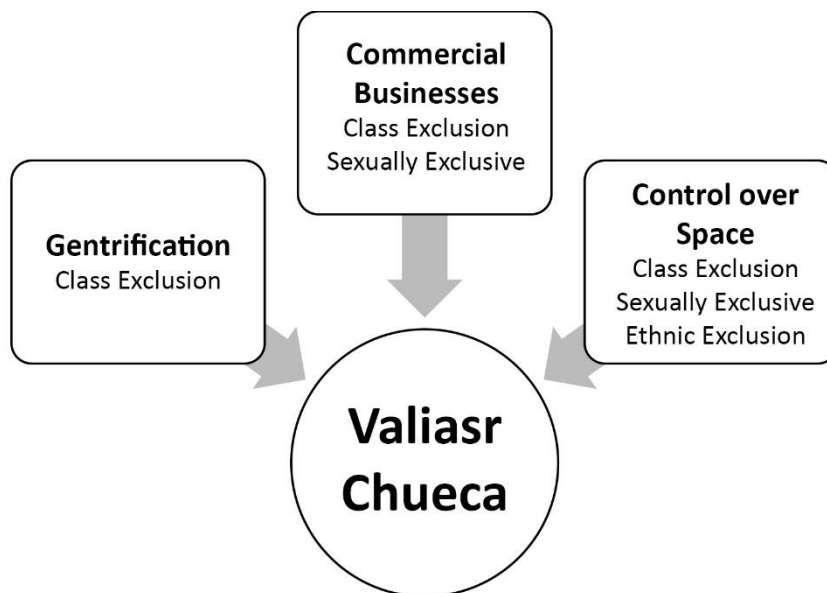


Figure 5-4 Exclusion Pattern in Valiasr and Chueca (Source: by Author).

The different forms of exclusion which are produced by neighborhoods have resulted in the emergence of alternative queer spaces in Tehran and Madrid. The reputation of Valiasr as a place for prostitution has caused many, especially queers of upper social classes, to utilize other public spaces in the north part of Tehran such as Tajrish and Niavaran. Moreover, the constant policing of these space has displaced lower social classes and gay and trans prostitutes to the proximate less visible spaces of the neighborhood, including the College Bridge and Karimkhan Bridge. In Madrid, Lavapies has become an alternative neighborhood

for those queers who feel less connected to the “new” Chueca. In addition, Carabanchel and Vaellecas are some of the emerging queer neighborhoods for those who cannot afford to live in the gentrified center of Madrid.

To summarize, the conservative and neoliberal governmental systems in Iran and Spain have adopted repression and normalizing approaches to queer identity. Consequently, queer space in Tehran and Madrid has socially and physically transformed under militarization and commercialization processes. The result of such urban policies is the marginalization and exclusion of queer individuals based on different categories of identity including social class, ethnicity, sexuality, and gender. What is common in both cases is utilizing other public spaces for marginal queers as the result of top-down policies exerted on queer identity and queer spaces in Tehran and Madrid (figure 5-5).

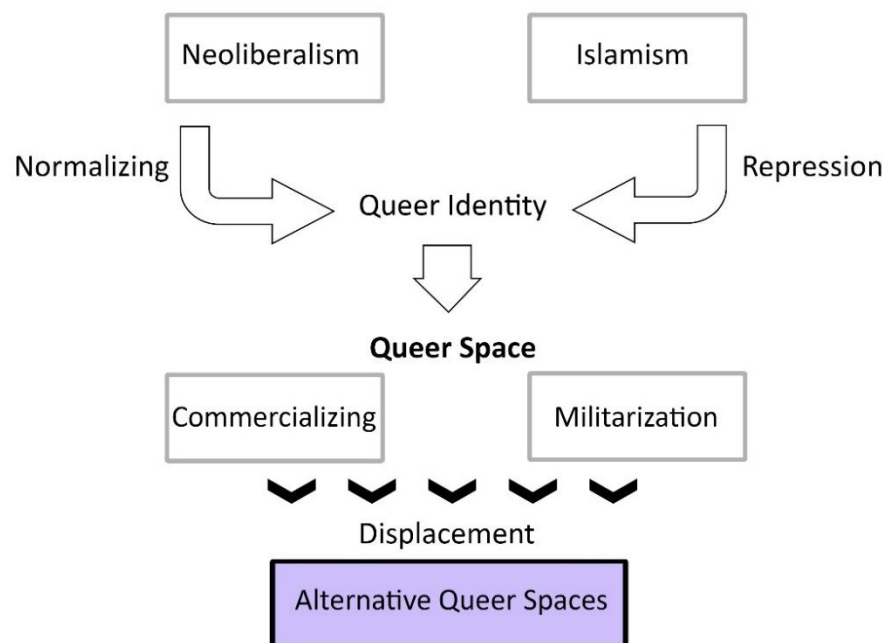


Figure 5-5 Emergence of Alternative Queer Spaces (Source: by Author).



### 5.1 Final Conclusion

The main argument of this paper was to question the view that conservative-repressive or the neoliberal-normalizing forces have undermined the significant role of urban public spaces in the social and political lives of queers.

By comparing Valiasr and Chueca as two of the most well-known queer spaces in Tehran and Madrid, I have shown that in both cases urban policies have resulted in the exclusion of certain identities based on class, ethnicity, and gender. Consequently, queers have utilized other public spaces for their social and political activities. In a time where “the visibility of sexual differences is not anymore the central marker of the space” (Brown, 2004 in Nash, 2013, p.199), the new queer spaces encompass a wider range of social identities in both cases. While in Tehran “queerness” has typically associated with prostitution, alternative queer spaces are emerging in middle and upper-class neighborhood. In Madrid, however, associating “gayness” with a specific consumption lifestyle results in the formation of political activist groups in less affluent parts of the city.

## 6 APPENDIX

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### Course Material

Van Criekingen, M 2016, UEG Urban Economic Geography: topic 7, PowerPoint slides, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, viewed 2 August 2018, <UEG Blackboard site>.

## 6.2 Interview Transcript

### 1. Oskar

User\_26\_Ecuador\_2<sup>nd</sup> of July 2018\_Plaza de Chueca\_Madrid

-Which of the public spaces in Madrid do you go most of the time?

I like Matadero. The park and the river. It is very beautiful.

-How often do you come to Chueca?

To be honest this is my second time, since October that I have been living in Madrid. But this is a very popular neighborhood for gay people.

-Do you like the neighborhood?

Yes, I like it. You can chill here. You can eat good food. And of course, if you are gay you can go clubbing and have a good time. You can also find all kinds of stores. It is not that expensive but also not cheap.

-Is there any other thing you like about the neighborhood?

Well, not really. I'm not gay. But anyway I think it is a good place if you want to party.

-Which places are your favorite in the neighborhood?

The plaza is nice. But like I said I don't come here often.

-In comparing to other neighborhoods do you think Chueca is a diverse neighborhood?

Yeah. I'm not gay but I don't feel unwelcomed here. I think if you are in Madrid Chueca is a must. It's interesting. With the gay parade, it is going to be a huge party.

-Do you think the neighborhood has been changing a lot lately?

Yeah. You can find many buildings that are being renovated. I think there is a kind of plan by the municipality to recover this place.

-Are you going to participate in the parties?

No, I'm just going to be there for business (selling pride flags).

-Have you ever seen any social conflict in the neighborhood?

No, not yet. The police are often around. There are also sometimes undercover police. They come to you and say give me your papers not just in Chueca I mean, in general. That's why it is safe

-How different do you think is the neighborhood during the pride celebration?

Oh, there is going to be millions of people dancing with loud music. Very different people who dress differently than us and different hairstyles.

-Do you like the difference?

Yeah, it is interesting.

### 2. Sara

Queer\_26\_Malasian/American\_3<sup>rd</sup> of July 2018\_ Esta es un Plaza

-Which of the public spaces in Madrid do you go most of the time?

I spend a lot of time in Nelson Mandela, even if it is not my favorite. I spend a lot of time also in Retiro.

-How often do you go to Chueca?

Once every few months.

-Do you like the neighborhood? Why? Why not?

It's very expensive. A lot of my friends don't ever go there, so it's not a suggested place for us. I have coffee sometimes in Chueca but if I want to go out for a night it doesn't happen super often. Also if I want to go, I have to take the metro and then the metro closes at 1.30.

-Which places are your favorites in the neighborhood?

The coffee place near the metro in front of the market and there is one lesbian bar called "Estopi" I go sometimes. There is just another lesbian bar, it's called "Flonita".

-In comparison to other neighborhoods do you think Chueca is a diverse neighborhood)? Chueca is very famous for not being diverse. I mean it's diverse in the number of tourists that go visit but not for the residents. It's pretty exclusive for gay white men. I mean if you walk through the neighborhood, a lot of the sex shops, the bars are oriented towards gay white men, drag queens. But if you look at Lavapies and look at the stores there are friendlier to lesbian and women and other LGBTQI+ spectrum

-Have you ever seen any social conflict in the neighborhood?

No.

Do you think the neighborhood has been changing a lot lately?

I wouldn't know if it has changed actually. I don't walk around enough to really notice if it has changed.

-How different is the neighborhood during the pride celebration?

It's a tourist destination and there are way more people. There are a lot of partying

-Do you like the difference?

It is not really fun for me. It just gets more crowded and expensive and I'm not the huge fan of all the music that is played or the way that people party in these spaces, so I don't really enjoy. I don't care. It is not very welcoming For instance, the next pride parade, the real one, is the one on 7<sup>th</sup> of July I think and I really don't care. It is not very welcoming.

### 3. Alexis

Gay\_45\_Argentina\_4<sup>th</sup> of July 2018\_ Plaza de Chueca

-Which of the public spaces in Madrid do you go most of the time?

I like Madrid in general. Most of the places I like to go. I can't say I like this plaza more than the others like retiro, plaza de Espana, la Latina, many places.

-How often do you come here?

When I was living here, I used to come here very often, maybe every two weeks

-Do you like the neighborhood?

Yes very much. Because people are very open minded. And I'm gay so Chueca is a cool place to stay.

-Which places are your favorite in the neighborhood?

There are many gay bars here that I like in the neighborhood. The one I like very much is "Fraggel pop" where there are more people around my age like 40 or so.

-Have you ever seen any social conflict in the neighborhood?

I didn't see any myself. But I heard from the TV that sometimes bad things can happen like fights or people sometimes are beaten for being gay.

-So you don't think it is completely a safe neighborhood?

No, it's not very safe sometimes.

-Do you think the neighborhood has been changing a lot lately?

Yes of course. Maybe not during the last 4 or 5 years but before that around 15 years ago it was totally different. It was dirty and dangerous and a lot of drugs. When the gay people start to move here, the new shops opened and the neighborhood becomes a different and expensive place to live

-Do you like it better now or before?



Yeah, it's very nice. I mean of course too many people and it is difficult to even walk but it is very nice. Last year was more crowded than this year during Pride.

#### 4. Suri

Trans-Feminist\_30\_Spanish\_5<sup>th</sup> of July 2018\_ Plaza de Arturo Barea

-Can you tell me a bit about your activities?

Sure, im gonna tell you a bit abothe ut history of activism in Madrid first, if you don't mind.

-Sure.

It was during the 90s when the LGBTs and queers split and references were the radical gays and lesbians and trans-feminists which basically questioned capitalism and heterosexuality as a political system. I think the trans movement was organized later. In the book "Adios Chueca", Shangay Lily who is a very famous queer activist, tells how they started the net of pink capitalism, in the early 90s and later in the 2000s with the socialist government, Zapatero, the equal marriage and gender identity law was legalized. So all these institutionalized LGBT scenes that were happening before projected on the government. And actually, Zapatero, who was in charge of changing the law for equal marriage, was the president of FELGTB, and also very much in touch with AEGAL. So all these crystalized in the socialist government and now with el PP (Popular Part), in Madrid especially, they were working with that net. We had Euro pride in 2007. It was a huge propaganda and a reference in LGBT rights, as if its a paradise for gay people basically, which is not true of course. With el PP, this business kept ongoing.

-Was there a critical pride in 2007?

As far as I know, we have critical pride for almost 10 years. But the massive one was last year, because of the world pride. There were approximately 10,000 people gathering for the critical pride, which is a lot for us, at least. Besides, it was the first time that we went out of Lavapies. It was also divided into the different section and at the end, people read the manifestos for racial, gypsies, non-binary and polyamorous people.

-Why did you decide to go out of Lavapies?

Because before it was small and also you know this place has the history of protests. Here the trans-feminist and feminist movement have a lot of power. For example, here is where the first occupied house of women was, Eskalera Karakola. The critical pride last year, which was also my first pride, was so big that we have to get out of Lavapies.

-So where did it start and finish exactly last year?

We started at the square of Nelson Mandela and then we go up to Tirso de Molina and then Sol. In Sol, it was very cool because there was a concert and they have to stoped, and the police didn't really help to make room for us to cross. Then we went to Gran Via and it ended up in Plaza de Espana.

-So you didn't even go to Chueca?

No, because they had concerts. But this year, on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June it has gone from Atocha to Callo. So it is getting more visible, in my opinion.

-What were the main objectives of critical pride?

Lots of things, because basically everything is wrong. For example racism of the state, pinkwashing of Israel, pink capitalism, gentrification, etc. and there were like ten lectures.

-OK. I want to know more about your community. Who are the members?

It is supposed to be horizontal but most of the time is not like that. There is no leader or president. We work in assemblies. The cool thing is that there is not one thing, there are

different networks. When it comes to critical pride, there is a platform created just for that. For example, last year, was an entire year from September. Because of the world pride and it was a big thing to phase. This time was almost one month before the 28<sup>th</sup> of June. So, this platform is open and it is called just to organize the demonstration and all the activities around that. In that platform, anyone can join. You don't have to belong to any collective. When it comes to the queer scene, there are many individuals and collectives and groups in Madrid. I guess in comparison to other cities, there are many people as activists in those subjects. Talking about the community, a transfeminist social center existed in 2013 or 2014, "The Bonfire", and eventually they get evicted. It was in called Madera, behind Gran via in Malasana. It was one of the first trans-feminist social centers basically run by dykes. Then there was no attempt again during this time till this year, which again failed.

-So can you explain about the squat and eviction that happened on Monday?

I can't tell you the exact date when we entered, for legal reasons. But it was more or less one week before being kicked out violently on 25<sup>th</sup>. We were six people sleeping there and in the morning suddenly we heard that they were cutting all the chains and we had to leave all of our stuff, identity cards, and phones behind. They were almost ten guys and they were shouting "fucking faggots, we are gonna kill you". It was super brutal. Now some people want to denounce but personally, I don't think we should. Because it is so long and to be honest I don't believe in justice here. We don't have any proof, nobody saw it and we don't know who were these people.

-To get back to the community, how did you get to know them in the first place?

I think it is not easy to get in if you don't know people, because it is invisible and they are a bit clicky. Two years ago, I was already identified myself as an anarchist and I started looking for an anarchist queer community. In that time I didn't know this concept existed at all. I saw a blog about the history of anarchism and homosexuality, in that time I didn't identify myself not as queer, but gay. I asked the author of the blog if there was an assembly or something similar. This person told me about three places: Asamblea Transmanibollo Sol, the other one was Orgullo Critico and Asamblea Navica (this doesn't exist because of some inner fights but there is another one, Movimiento Marika de Madrid (MMM), which is more powerful. I decided to write an email to Orgullo Critico. But it was difficult in the beginning because they were still very vague about it and didn't know what they are going to do exactly. The assemblies were happening in Eskalera Karakola (in Lavapies) and La Quimera (in Nelson Mandela). The thing is that there are a lot of fights between us. Because we are super critical. So that's why sometimes there is separation. Now there are very interesting racial queer groups Migrants named Transgresoras, and gypsies Gitanos por la diversidad. Also, deaf people are very organized and powerful in the queer movement. Now I'm in Revoluciones por minuto and la pluma

-So what is your favorite public space in Madrid?

Lavapies is so cool, I like it a lot but it is getting gentrified.

How often do you go to Chueca?

Maybe twice every four months or something. If I just want to meet anyone new or go to disco I do go to Chueca but if I don't want to meet people who are not like me, I don't. But the thing is that in the queer community, I know lots of people and already it is like a world itself, which is very sustainable. So I really don't need Chueca. I think in Chueca there is no such thing. It is very posh, very exclusive just for gay men who have money.

-Except for Lavapies are there any places for queers?

Vallecas maybe. Queer people are organized mostly around active working-class quarters and in Vallecas they have a famous history of working-class quarters. They have also their own pride, Orgullo Vallecano. It is anti-pride but not so critical and is not very transfeminist. They are influenced a lot by Podemos

5. Ramzi

Business Owner\_38\_Canadian/Arab\_9<sup>h</sup> of July 2018\_ Café in Lavapies

-How often do you go to Chueca?

I used to live in Chueca for one year. And then I moved to Lavapies because I needed an affordable place. I wasn't working and a friend offered me his flat. I used not to come here. When I moved out, Chueca was getting gentrified. After the crisis, especially in the north part of Chueca, it started getting posh. And it didn't feel the same anymore. I think half of Chueca has gentrified and half stuck in the past. I mean it's very boring.

-What do you mean by past?

I mean before gay right becomes mainstream. I'm saying all these bars or dark rooms, it seemed that they belong to the old generation. And it doesn't seem like if you are young person, who is interesting and doing cool things, want to go to Chueca. When I moved to Madrid nine years ago, it was like an invisible line or mental mark, you would literally see a couple stop holding hands, as soon as they cross the borders of Chueca. Then when people started holding hands in other places than Chueca, it was revolutionary (one of the clients laughs). You laugh but this is how experienced it. The city has changed, a lot. That's how I see it. People are sticking in the past. There was a time when we needed a ghetto and Chueca was our only ghetto. It was a safe place to hold hands. But now you can hold hands everywhere in the city. So, what do we need Chueca for? All the artists are in Carabanchel, all the cool kids are in Lavapies. What's Chueca for? We don't need Chueca. It is just for old people, who didn't have anywhere else to go. There is nothing new in Chueca. Half of Chueca is for rich people and half is for old gays. There is nothing interesting that happens in Chueca. Why would I go to Chueca? (The man started laughing out loud). This is my experience, maybe your experience is different (they started arguing in Spanish). It is frozen in time. I mean it doesn't have to be new. The generation below me, all the young queer artists and activists are doing new things and opening up new art spaces, south of the river. This is a trend. I don't have to prove, I don't have to like. I don't have to need something new. But this is a trend that I have perceived happening around me (at this point, it seems that he is more explaining to the client). I don't need something new. I need something diverse. I'm happy in Lavapies. She (referring to me) doesn't ask me what I like. She asks me to describe (continue arguing in Spanish). I'm not making a judgment of what is happening to the geographical location of gays is good or bad, which evidently you also perceived that is happening. Except that for you it is a negative, pathetic thing which is not interesting. Fantastic! I describe it as either pathetic or positive. Because she asked me.

-Can you translate for me what he is saying?

He is saying it is pathetic that we perceive anything old as uninteresting and all the artists who move to Carabanchel only because the rents are cheaper and there is nothing special about this place. Basically, he is saying it is pathetic that we think Carabanchel is more interesting place.

-Ok, thanks. Now I want to know your opinion about Chueca.

I'm bored with Chueca. It seems extremely mainstream, extremely commercial. It doesn't call my attention. When I first come to Lavapies, I was very happy. Because I thought I'm living in the city center. In a neighborhood that felt like invisible. Like I could hide here but still be close to the center. Now the center is taking over Lavapies. In Chueca, if you are not particularly wealthy, it is not for you. You can't afford to live there. Besides the shops, the amenities also reflect this. Between Gran Via and Plaza, it is more rough and less expensive. Between Genova and Plaza is posh

-How often do you go there?

Twice a year.

-Do you have any favorite place in Chueca?

I used to go to a coffee shop called Magasand, it sells independent magazines. Also a café called Mystic, because it reminds me of somewhere in France that I liked. Except for that I really don't have a favorite place in Chueca.

-What about Lavapies. Who are your regular clients?

There is a gay community in Lavapies. But like I said the queer community now are down the river. I don't know a queer community here. Suri (one of the interviews) comes to Lavapies but they [Suri] are not living here. I'm living here but I'm not queer. But Uxia, as far as I know is the only queer living in Lavapies. It is true that Lavapies is an alternative to Chueca. Gentrification is happening so fast. The speed of gentrification is faster than Chueca. We are skipping steps. They just opened a shoe shop at Nelson Mandela square, the cheapest shoe is 280 euros. That shoe shop wouldn't survive even in Malasana. It is too expensive for Malasana and they opened at Lavapies! It is going so fast. The gays were in Lavapies like for two years, before the big money started coming. They didn't have a chance here. In Chueca, the process was about 30 years before the big money come and eat the neighborhood. In Lavapies it didn't last. So I don't know if there are lots of artists or queers. I don't see them. I see people with money, people who are quite normative, who are expecting Lavapies to become like Malasana. They are here because they want it to be like Malasana. And they come to my coffee shop. I know the kind of people that are happy to spend a little bit of extra money on a cup of coffee which is better than a normal coffee is not a queer person. This is a middle or upper-middle class person. Half of my costumes are foreigners and the Spanish people that are here are not so critical. I mean the queer perspective tends to be more critical. People who come here, I wouldn't say are people who tend to think about themselves a lot and question what's happening around them and queer-minded. They want to be cool and are looking for the next cool thing so that they can associate with that cool thing. Lavapies now has a name, but this dynamic is not very queer. They don't want to be different. They want to be cool, based on the latest mainstream trends. But these people do not genuinely desire to be marginal. They want to take the image of marginality in a mainstream way. It is very mainstream and normative dynamic. It is not particularly profound. I will give you an example. The graphic artist, who painted my security closure on my windows. He painted a big wall at the end of the street and he recently painted over it and he put "this is not Lavapies". It is sarcastic. Why did he paint this is not Lavapies, on a wall in Lavapies. Because so many people are moving to this neighborhood, to be cool. And Lavapies has a bad name. Because there are immigrants, dirty people, colored people, poor people, there is crime and violence. So they are here because they want to buy into a cheap neighborhood, which is going to become expensive like Malasana, but they don't want to be associated with. So they say, this is not Lavapies, this is Cascorro. Cascorro has never been a

neighborhood in the city. There has never been a history, tradition or concept of Cascorro as a neighborhood. There is la Latina, and Lavapies, and Sol but Cascorro has never been a neighborhood. But now people with money who wanted to live in a cool neighborhood they say "oh no, we are not in Lavapies, this is Cascorro" which sounds nicer. So Lavapies attracts but it also repels. The kind of persons who calls this neighborhood Cascorro not Lavapies, is not someone who wants to be subversive. They reject subversion and embrace speculation. They appear as if they are cool and they don't want to be associated with something that has an image of poverty. People who want to appear in a certain way are not critical. People who are critical are queer, in general. Queer people don't have a need to show that they have resources, or dress in a certain way and they don't chase statues through money, through having a cool hairstyle, emphasizing how unique and special they are. And people who are saying this is not Lavapies, this is Cascorro which is the majority of people who move to this neighborhood, are people who do not want to be subversive. That is not a queer mentality. So I wouldn't say whoever comes here, even if he or she is gay, is queer minded. They are not actually the people who think for themselves, take risks. They don't want to be different. They want to be cool, based on the latest mainstream trends. And what happens right now is that trend is to be marginal. But these people do not genuinely desire to be marginal. They want to take the image of marginality in a mainstream way. Anyone who has a problem with the name Lavapies is not critical, is not queer. There is nothing queer about being scared of being associated with Lavapies. Calling this neighborhood Cascorro is not a queer mentality, it is a mainstream, boring mentality. It is a Malsana mentality. Capitalism mentality, speculation mentality.

-How was the situation in Lavapies during Pride?

I hate pride. I don't like to drink or party, so pride is not for me. Pride in Madrid is carnival now. It is just an excuse to party and not a protest. Last year I went to critical pride here in Lavapies. I think it is an interesting development for people who feel that pride is no longer represents them and that says a lot, that the LGBTQI space is disintegrating.

#### 6. David

Gay\_26\_Colombian/American\_13<sup>th</sup> of July 2018\_wats app

-Which of the public spaces in Madrid do you go most of the time?

Dos de mayo, really young open space.

-How often do you go to Chueca?

Rarely.

-Do you like the neighborhood?

I like it. But it's also the most expensive of Madrid's center. It's a nice place to take my friends from out of town.

-Which places are your favorite in the neighborhood?

Plazas and bars. Honest greens is really good.

-In comparison to other neighborhoods, do you think Chueca is a diverse neighborhood?

I don't know-never live there. But i have gone out there and I can say It seems less diverse in sexuality when you go to bars or clubs, they are mostly gay older bears.

-Have you ever seen any social conflict in the neighborhood

I have not. I barely see police there but I've actually seen the opposite, people really getting along. For example, at one restaurant I went to on the rooftop of Mercado san Anton everyone was chatting and gabbing. It was an extraordinary experience really with everyone



from the host to the waiters to the other costumers being gay and making jokes amongst each other at Sunday lunch.

-Do you think the neighborhood has been changing recently?

I couldn't say.

-Have you been here for pride celebration?

Yes! It's much livelier, many more people around. I like it during pride. It's full of so much good energy and tourists. Where usually it's mostly gay bars, during pride everyone goes.

## 7. Kris

Gay\_26\_Spanish\_17<sup>rd</sup> of July 2018\_wats app

-Which of the public spaces in Madrid do you go most of the time?

I spend almost all my time in the neighborhood of Malasaña, it's the cool neighborhood where everyone goes to, also to la Plaza del 2 de Mayo where everyone goes to drink beer and hang out

-How often do you go to Chueca?

A couple of times per month.

-Do you like the neighborhood?

I used to like it better when I was younger because the neighborhood used to be more interesting and unique back then. I still enjoy it because of the clubs and the people

-Which places are your favorite in the neighborhood?

My favorite places in Chueca are the plaza de Chueca because it is the main plaza just when you get there and its surrounded by many cool bars; also the plaza Pedro Zerolo. That's a huge plaza where people use to gather around and it's just nice to be there, also there is one cool club called Bearby for gay men.

-In comparison to other neighborhoods, do you think Chueca is a diverse neighborhood?

I remember going there when I was a teenager trying to find somewhere to be comfortable and I found Chueca to be just the right place, and it still is. I can see all kinds of people, all kind of sexuality, ages and altogether respectful

-Have you ever seen any social conflict in the neighborhood?

I have never seen anything critical but there are always problems you can see everywhere else, like thief, drunk fights, things like that.

-Do you think the neighborhood has been changing recently?

Chueca was more gay centered before but now there is not that difference between neighborhoods in the center of Madrid as gay or straight so maybe what you can find now in Chueca is a place for more specific gay tribes. Still good. I like these changes because you have more options as a gay person in Madrid. You don't have to go to Chueca just to enjoy your sexuality but it's still a good place to start.

-Have you been here for pride celebration?

Yes, I have been here for pride, and I am always here for it. It is a time where the center is celebrating freedom, sexuality, individuality. Even though it is really crowded it is really happy and you can see how nice people are and everyone is in a good mood, so it is always a pleasure to be there. As a gay man I feel normal finally, I feel at home, protected and free to live as I

8. Chloe

Queer\_24\_British\_17<sup>rd</sup> of July 2018\_wats app

-Which of the public spaces in Madrid do you go most of the time?

I spend a lot of time in Lavapies, on Argumosa. I like the vibrancy and choice of different cafes/bars – from hipster to cheap

How often do you go to Chueca?

Extremely rarely

Do you like the neighborhood?

I like that Madrid has a “gayborhood” I don’t like that it’s very bourgeois “mainstream gay” expensive and focused around gay men.

Which places are your favorite in the neighborhood?

Urrrrrr..... Can’t really think of any- I don’t go there all that much.

-In comparison to other neighborhoods, do you think Chueca is a diverse neighborhood?

I guess less diverse than Lavapies. Hard to say because the “users” of Chueca e.g. gay men aren’t necessarily the residents.

-Have you ever seen any social conflict in the neighborhood?

Not above the general drinking-related loutiness, no, but I’m sure the police harass people for no reason all the time.

-Do you think the neighborhood has been changing recently?

I’m guessing it’s become way more gentrified. Would like it to be less “rich gay men” and more diverse queer-ness in terms of being the queer space in Madrid.

-Have you been here for pride celebration?

TOO FULL. VERY FILTHY. But lots of people having fun. I very much like the streets being taken over by pedestrians in any sense and I like pride. I think it’s important to celebrate it. But other parts of Madrid have a nicer less “let’s get drunk and party” pride vibe than Chueca in my opinion, but that’s down to personal taste I guess!

9. Bea

Lesbian\_27\_Spanish\_23<sup>rd</sup> of July 2018\_ Wats app

-How often do you go to Chueca?

I used to go several times a month when I was younger, between 18 and 22 maybe. It was my primary area of partying. Now I only go there a couple of times a year, sometimes with an old friend to party, sometimes to the bookstore Berkana, sometimes for nostalgia.

-Do you like the neighborhood?

I found it more appealing when it wasn’t full of terraces. It was possible to just sit down in the Plaza and have a beer with a group of friends. Also, there has been a shift in the shops and bars in the last ten years. It has become more gentrified, very fancy ... I still like it because of the symbolic power that it has, also during pride at night, the plaza is usually lit up with rainbow colors which is lovely, but It doesn’t have the meaning it used to for me. It was a huge piece in my coming out process and coming to terms with (my) sexuality, I’ve participated in events and demos and video recordings and what not, I spent so many evenings there, I even used to interview young people there for my studies. So it did play a HUGE role for my younger me. It’s just different now, there’s less flexibility in the use of space and basically, I’ve found other places that I identify with more.

-Which places are your favorite in the neighborhood?

I'm gonna speak in past tense because I don't go to Chueca that often anymore, so maybe some of these places don't exist anymore. I liked a small bar called *Smoke*, I used to be there a lot to play billiard, it was usually empty. The bar Truco was also an option because of the mix of people and the cheap entry price. I went often to Escape and Fulanita de Tal (back in the time where it was in calle Conde de Xiquena). There was a bar called Nike that had THE BEST sangria I've ever tried, but they closed a couple of years ago. Also, a bar called The Planet (what can I say, we were all very influenced by The L Word) that lasted for maybe a year or two. Restaurants I never cared much about. My favorite streets are Augusto Figueroa, Gravina and Barquillo, I guess because they're very lively and most of the bars concentrate around there. Regarding plazas, Plaza del Rey was very nice to sit around, a quiet place in the neighborhood, although generally I always hung around Plaza de Chueca and Plaza de Pedro Zerolo (formerly called Vazquez de Mella).

-Which of the public spaces in Madrid do you go most of the time?

Usually the ones in Lavapiés/Embajadores, I feel very comfortable in that neighborhood. I like seeing and hearing the people in the street. There are so many squares to hang around at, Tabacalera... Also social centers and queer places.

-In comparison to other neighborhoods, do you think Chueca is a diverse neighborhood?

I wouldn't know anymore but from my memories, no. Chueca is white and Chueca is definitely not working class. It's more diverse in terms of sexuality but there's a high preponderance of men or what I at least read as gay men.

Have you ever seen any social conflict in the neighborhood?

Police started coming at night on the weekends a few years ago to scare the "botellón" away (which they managed). I haven't seen much conflict but then again I wouldn't know now. There IS conflict in Lavapiés though, there are frequent raids against racialized people.

-Do you think the neighborhood has been changing recently?

Definitely. I'd like "my" Chueca back. I'd like a more engaged neighborhood rather than such a consumer-oriented place

-Have you been here for pride celebration?

In the past, always. I enjoyed a lot all the events and the street parties and just being around hundreds of people listening to the music in the stages. I'm not sure how it is now because I've avoided Chueca during pride for the last three years maybe, but it's just SO crowded. I'm not a big fan of hundreds of people surrounding me anymore. Party is great and I'd like it if there was a way of combining that with a bit more criticism and not just becoming the rainbow clients.

#### 1. Soheil

Gay\_20\_8<sup>th</sup> of August 2018\_ over the Phone

-How often do you go to Valiasr?

Maybe 5 or 6 times a month.

-Do you like the neighborhood?

I don't like it. There are bullying sometimes and it is not very safe. There are people who look for dates but you have to be careful.

-Which places are your favorite in the neighborhood?

I prefer one or two cafes in Valiasr. The owners are LGBTQI friendly and they know us. I go there with my friends.

-Which of the public spaces in Tehran do you go most of the time?

There are some cool places in the north. Generally, in some parts in the north of the city, you can see more gays who frequent certain cafes.

-In comparison to other neighborhoods, do you think Valiasr is a diverse neighborhood?  
It depends. In Daneshjoo Park for example, there is bullying sometimes is not very safe and it is stigmatized. It is well known for prostitution and drug dealers. Most of them are old men from lower social class

-Have you ever seen any social conflict in the neighborhood?

Hmm. Yes. Police harass gays and trans people all the time. They arrest them sometimes. That's why I don't go there. It's risky

-Do you think the neighborhood has been changing recently?

I think the number of cafes are growing and they make the neighborhood more welcoming.

## 2. Hamid

Gay\_26\_8<sup>rd</sup> of August 2018\_ over the Phone

-How often do you go to Valiasr?

I used to go there every day because I was studying there. But I wouldn't hang out in Valiasr that much.

-Do you like the neighborhood?

I went there with some friends a couple of time for theatre, but I don't like spending time in the park. It is very unsafe. There are many prostitutes in Valiasr especially when it gets darker. I don't have a problem with that, it is just not my kind of place.

-Which places are your favorite in the neighborhood?

The city theatre and Vahdat hall. I like theatre.

-Which of the public spaces in Tehran do you go most of the time?

I prefer northern parts of the city like Tajrish. There are cool cafés which are hip and have good vibes... They (middle-class queers) have their own place. For example, I have heard in Niavaran Park there are some queer gatherings.

-In comparison to other neighborhoods, do you think Valiasr is a diverse neighborhood?

Hmm. There are two types of gay men in Valiasr: the masculine gays mostly old and the young prostitutes both from poor class.

-Have you ever seen any social conflict in the neighborhood?

I wouldn't know. I don't go that often. I think our generation doesn't really go there. They used Grinder, Hornet and Surge to meet people. It is easier and safer. Maybe it was more popular in 90s because there weren't social media.

-Do you think the neighborhood has been changing recently??

Physically yes and I certainly don't like it. The underpass is a disaster. But maybe it used to be more diverse in terms of social class.

## 3. Amir

Gay\_20\_10<sup>rd</sup> of August 2018\_ Daneshjoo Park

-How often do you come here?

People come here almost every day. But I come here once every three or four days because I'm living with my parents and I have a job as a hairdresser. So I come here usually on weekends.

-Which time of the day would you come here usually?

I come here during the day too but at the night when it is getting very crowded.

-Do you like the neighborhood?

Yes I feel comfortable here.

-Which of the public spaces in Tehran do you go most of the time?

I come here more often comparing to other places. Everyone's know about this place. It is for transgender and gays. I think there are not any other places like here in Tehran where you can be comfortable.

-Is there any social network among people here?

Yes I have some friends here. I would say there are groups of 4 or 5 people.

-In compare to other neighborhoods, do you think Valiasr is a diverse neighborhood?

Hm I would say 90 percent of people coming here are from Shahrestan (cities other than Tehran) and if you look they even have their hand bag with them. But yeah I would say it is very mixed. This street (Shahriari) is the most crowded place during the night but on the other side of the park where there are less trees is emptier at these times.

-Do you think the neighborhood has been changing recently?

There are more and more gays and trans people every year. It's crazy. I have been coming here for four years now. The first year that I came here, there were like three or four people who I knew. But now day by day the number of people is increasing and they are mostly kids. They are from other provinces and usually under the pressure of their families and they have financial problems, so they run away from their parents' house. There are also old gays but the majorities are youngsters. It's awful. I mean in the past there were not so many people. Now every time I come here there is someone new. Most of these people are coming here for prostitution. But when you look at them you know that this is not their job. They do it out of necessity. Some of them are even 14 years old. I have seen many times that their parents come here and beat their child and take him with them.

-What about the police? Why there are so many of them tonight?

They never stay here like tonight. They patrol but they never stay like this. It is because of the demonstrations these days.

-But what if they realize someone is here for prostitution or just think they look different, would they take them or arrest them?

If they see me they don't bother me because I don't put on makeup. But for example, if some guys put on lipstick or eyeliner or dress like a woman they would bother them. Most of the time they would arrest them. I have heard that if the morality police see them they would immediately ask for 5 million Toman and if they don't pay they would put them in jail for 6 months

-Are there any other places for gay or trans gathering nearby?

Sometimes they go to other places like College Bridge because of the police... it's like a cursing place. Some gay and trans prostitutes frequent between Park and Hafez bridge to be picked up by cars. But the main gathering area is here where we are standing in the park.

-What about the recent changes in the physical features of the neighborhood?

The underpass I try to avoid. Once I was passing with my friend who is trans and police stopped us and asked my friend why don't they have hijab. And I told him they are not woman. And that happens a lot to trans people here.

#### 4. Erfan

Gay\_25\_16<sup>rd</sup> of August 2018\_ Valiasr

-Which of the public spaces in Tehran do you go most of the time?



Cafes in Valiasr have good vibes. People are open-minded and more tolerant in general. Most of the owners and also users are students.

-Do you think the neighborhood has changed?

I think the design and the building types is changing. The old buildings are being renovated. Socially I think the neighborhood is more hip now. They present themselves as cool and artist because it is "trendy". Even those who live in the north of the city think they have to go to the city center cafes. They (municipality) now care more about the historical parts and instead of demolishing the old buildings turn them into cafes because it is profitable. I went to a tour once and they said they are trying to reopen the abandoned places. Even though I think people there are just "cool kids", I liked that the city center now becomes more important. Because personally, I prefer the architecture of the old ones rather than the new ones in the north.

-How often do you go there?

I used to study there but I wasn't going to the park that much. Because I think the people who go there are very poor and they are mainly there for prostitution. Generally, I don't like the idea of having such a place. I think queers should be among people like others. I live in Milan and I go to gay bars and I think it is necessary for queers to have their own places like bars but to segregate queers in forms of the f the queer neighborhood I wouldn't like. I prefer gay pride. they are more effective I guess.

-Have you ever seen any social conflict in the neighborhood?

I didn't see myself but I heard that t couple of years ago the police arrested many queers and they changed their gathering point to College Bridge.

##### 5. Omid

Business Owner\_35\_\_22<sup>nd</sup> of August 2018\_ Valiasr

-How long have been working in this neighborhood?

For almost ten years.

-What do you think about the park? Who are the main users?

There are prostitutes and drug dealers. The prostitutes are mainly young boys running away from their home in proveniences. I wouldn't say they are gays, they are here for money. You wouldn't find many people from Tehran who are gays and are here or dating.

-And the prostitutes, are they only male prostitutions?

There four and five women that I know. They come here often for prostitutions. Also between the mosque and city theater young girls come for prostitutions.

-What about the city theater and the festivals. Do you think they have caused any change in the park?

No I think no one really cares. It looks cool and fun but much is happening under the skin of the park. For me this park is very mysterious. The park is divided. If you sit here people would think you are probably waiting for a theater show or meeting a friend. But after 12, am if you are here and especially the eastern part, everyone looks at you as either prostitute, a homeless person or drug dealer. At this time of day you can see these very fine people, if you come back at night there is whole other life her I know many people who become addicted in this park even some of my friends.

-What about the police?

I would say they are more tolerant about queers. But before there was a project by Municipality to remove the homeless people and child labors. There are lots of plain clothes.

I know all of them after these years. You see that building in the third floor there is national security police.

-In your opinion the underpass, and the mosque has caused any difference in the neighborhood?

From social point of view not at all

6. Nasim

Trans\_19\_20<sup>th</sup> of August 2018\_ Valiasr

-How often do you come to this park?

Two or three times a week.

-Why are you coming here this often?

This is the main gathering point for LGBTQI people, to see my friends. It is well known place for queers so there is less social pressure. Also I think police let more freedom for queers here rather than other places. Daneshjoo Park has a symbolic meaning for LGBTQI people .

-Have you ever been arrested by police?

There is morality police and plain clothes. If your dressing is obvious for them that you are queer they would arrest you. But once one of my friend got arrested even though she didn't have make up. Trans people have so many issues. Even though they are recognized by law, in the society they are not accepted. I gave you an example. Once my phone was stolen and when I went to the police office, he told me it is my mistake and that's because of my behavior and I'm too feminine. Many trans people are suffering from depression and many of them commit suicide because they are not accepted by society at all. Anyway, many gays or lesbians pretend to be a trans. Because they are the only group who are recognized by the government. You know, if someone says that he is gay for example, they would be under threat.

-Who are the main users of the park?

Hmm I would say many come here for prostitutions, especially young people who run away from home. They come to Tehran and they don't find jobs. If you are trans and you were born in a small conservative city what would you do? They should come to Tehran. It is more liberating here. Many of them don't even have a place to sleep so they have to work as prostitutes.

-Are there any other places you would like to go?

There are some cafes in Tajrish. I would say in the north since there are more educated people they are more tolerant about queers. But I wouldn't generalize it really depends on the person. Café Rasht 29 is also one of the well-known places for queers.

-As I understood so far, not so many women come to this park. In your opinion why is that? This place is generally for M to F (male to female) trans people. F to M trans don't normally show off. They are not visible as much as M to F in my opinion or sometimes they don't want to be visible

7. Eli (Saeed)

Trans\_30\_28<sup>th</sup> of August 2018\_ Valiasr

-How often do you come here?

Every two days.

-Why?

This park is for two groups. Normal people like students and people like us.

-Do you like the park?

First I feel safer to ask someone out and also I find people like me. Outside the neighborhood, you can't easily approach someone as a gay person.

-Does police come here often?

Hmm we dress like women they would annoy us.

-Who are the main users of the park based on your experience and observations?

I would say 80 percent of gay and trans people are here for prostitution. Others like me come here for dating. Because outside this area you can't meet a guy as a gay person. Because it is illegal and it is risky. Here you feel more safe approaching people it is more welcoming here in general.

-What about the other public spaces in Tehran?

Here I feel safer. Hafez College and Karimkhan have bad reputation. In Hafez sometime I get bullied, sometimes people throw out things to me or mucking me. You have to come with me one day and see for yourself. It is so strange. So the park is much more comfortable for me.

-Have you ever been arrested or harassed by police?

Just two times. The first time was ok but the second time they treated me in a bad way.

-What do you mean? What did they do?

They take us to Vozara and the next day to court. Then it depends on jury. Either they put us in jail either they let us go.

-Jail?

Yes individual jail. Because we are trans and they don't put us with other men or women in jail.

-Have you ever been put in jail?

No they took me twice to Vozara but then they let me go.

-And if they put someone in jail how long would they keep them there?

One night they keep you and the next day to the court then it depends on the judges.

-And why they would arrest you? I mean what do they tell you when they take you?

It depends. For example if they arrest me in Enghelab square they can't say anything. But if they take me here the reason would be "being here". What they wrote in your document is that you "were residing in an area with high rates crime".

-Even if you are doing nothing?

Like I said since this place is known for prostitutions, being here means committing a crime.

-Why there are not many women here?

Because this park is specifically for gays, trans and bisexual people. Straight girls do not come here.

-What about lesbians?

No they go to Mirdamad every night. Also in Saadat Abad every Tuesday after 9 p.m.

-Where else except for Daneshjoo Park do you go more often?

Hafez College and Karimkhan College are also famous among gays. But Karimkhan is for businesses. trans people who dress as women go to Karimkhan street to be safe but it has been recognized by the police lately and they have attacked them many times. If police car stops here and see anyone suspicious, they come in a group of like 7 or 8 people and they treat you like you are a real criminal or you killed someone. Like we are dangerous. The way they behave is really offensive.

-Do you use social media for dating?

You know 80 percent of people that I see in Hornet I know they come here. I saw many of them. It is sometimes filtered but after a while it is not anymore.