

**NEGOTIATING QUEER PUBLIC VISIBILITY: EXPERIENCES OF LGBTI
RESIDENTS IN KURTULUŐ, ISTANBUL**

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NEGOTIATING QUEER PUBLIC VISIBILITY: EXPERIENCES OF LGBTI
RESIDENTS IN KURTULUŞ, ISTANBUL

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis focuses on the everyday spatial practices and encounters of the LGBTI residents living in Kurtuluş, İstanbul. Based on semi-structured, in-depth interviews with the residents of Kurtuluş and participant observation, the research explores how LGBTI residents negotiate the spatialized boundaries of sexuality, gender and the morality in the district. How do LGBTI residents negotiate *mahalleli* identity and the presence of queerness as a component of the neighborhood among each other and with the other residents? What are the limits of public and the private in Kurtuluş? What is the role of sexuality in the construction of these limits? What kinds of queer visibility are negotiated in the neighborhood? Departing from these questions, this thesis argues that Kurtuluş is a challenging area beyond being merely modern or traditional, since it contains the complicated mix of diverse spatial codes and practices of living together, and this very in-between terrain of Kurtuluş becomes a site for LGBTI residents to build a sense of community, to produce queer social spaces, and to reconstruct themselves variously, beyond “trans-normative” codes of visibility in the case of trans sex workers living in the district. The thesis aims to contribute to the growing literature on sexuality in Turkey as well as to the literature of cultural geography in Turkey with a critical reconsideration of the geographical concepts such as space, place, sites of resistance, the transgression of boundaries, and the concepts of public and private, and further to that, to come up with an interdisciplinary research which extends the limits of these two fields.

ÖZET

KUIR GÖRÜNÜRLÜĞÜ MÜZAKERE ETMEK: İSTANBUL KURTULUŞ'TAKİ LGBTİ SAKİNLERİN DENEYİMLERİ

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Anahtar Sözcükler: mahalle, Kurtuluş, kuir, sosyal mekan, seks işçiliği, görünürlük

Bu tez Kurtuluş'un LGBTİ sakinlerinin mekansal pratiklerine ve karşılaşmalarına odaklanmaktadır. Çalışma, yarı-yapılandırılmış, derinlemesine mülakat, kişisel deneyim ve katılımcı gözlem tekniğine dayanarak, LGBTİ sakinlerin bölgedeki mekanlaştırılmış cinsellik, cinsiyet ve ahlak sınırlarıyla nasıl müzakere ettiğini incelemektedir. LGBTİ sakinler *mahalleli* kimliğini ve "kuir-oluş"u mahallenin bir bileşeni olarak, birbirleriyle ve diğer mahalle sakinleriyle nasıl müzakere ediyorlar? Kurtuluş'ta kamusal ve özel alanın sınırları ne? Bu sınırların inşasında cinsellik nasıl bir rol oynuyor? Mahallede nasıl kuir görünürlükler pazarlık ediliyor? Bu sorulardan yola çıkarak, bu tez, Kurtuluş'un çeşitli mekansal kodlar ve bir arada yaşam pratiklerini içerdiğini, geleneksel ve modern ikiliğinin ötesinde çetrefilli bir alan olduğunu, ve bu aradallığın, Kurtuluş'ta yaşayan LGBTİ sakinlerin bir topluluk inşa ettikleri, kuir sosyal mekanlar ürettikleri ve trans seks işçileri örneğinde kendilerini "trans-normatif" görünümlerin ötesinde çeşitli şekillerde yeniden kurdukları bir zemin haline geldiğini iddia ediyor. Bu tez, hem Türkiye'de gelişmekte olan cinsellik literatürüne hem de alan, mekan, direniş mevkileri, sınır ihlali ve kamusal/özel alan gibi terimleri yeniden düşünerek kültürel coğrafya literatürüne katkı sunmayı ve bunların ötesinde, bu iki alanın sınırlarını genişleten inter-disipliner bir çalışma üretmeyi hedeflemektedir.

“— Zeliş bugün özgürlük için ne yaptın?”

— Sabah evden çıktım bir kere buradan başlıyor, sokağa çıkarak, özgürlük...”

to beloved ones I will miss

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis focuses on the everyday spatial practices and encounters of the LGBTI residents living in Kurtuluş, İstanbul by interrogating how LGBTI residents negotiate the spatialized boundaries of sexuality, gender and morality in the district. I will mainly argue that the in-betweenness of Kurtuluş with its complicated mix of heterogenous settings and practices of living together, enables LGBTI residents to establish communities to strengthen themselves and to challenge the heterosexuality of the space and also to construct subjectivities beyond the conventional ones, especially in the case of trans sex workers. On the whole, *betwixt and besides* the constructed spaces, subjectivities and visibilities, Kurtuluş provides a context to reconsider the boundaries of LGBTI subjectivities and the spatial codes of sexuality which potentially refers to new possibilities for queer subjectivities, LGBTI struggle in Turkey and the practices of sharing and negotiating the urban space.

Mahalle in the context of Turkey is an urban unit which is associated with a list of keywords such as surveillance, familiarity, conservatism, *komşuluk*, and so on.. The commonly used phrase “*mahalle baskısı*”¹ refers to the traditional connotation of *mahalle* as a “safe” living space that physically and symbolically demarcates the boundary between its residents and the others, and, in return, expects its residents to abide by its internal - often unspoken - rules. In other words, this urban unit plays a crucial role in constructing and maintaining the spatial codes of performance, identity, privacy and belonging (Mills, 2006). Kurtuluş is an area where both the traditional *mahalle* relations as well as codes of the big city life can simultaneously be experienced. It is often romanticized as one of the few *mahalle* in the city where people still know each other “just like in the old times”², accompanied by complaints about

¹ Literally means “neighborhood pressure”

² Online news about Kurtuluş; <http://www.sisligazetesi.com.tr/kurtulus-insanlarin-birbirini-gercekten-tanidigi-semt-20548h.html>
http://yemek.com/kurtulus-mekanlari/?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=istanbul-kurtulusmekanlari-post#.VnIP55OLRE7, accessed in November, 2015.

increasing vulgarization and cultural erosion over time. As some of my interlocutors emphasize, residents know and watch out for each other, yet the doors are not kept open as they used to be. On the contrary, they are locked tightly. Thereby it appears as an in-between space, a liminal space, with regard to the ongoing transformation of the district through various migration waves and urban policies. This transformation elicits paradoxical narratives on the district and its various neighborhoods.

In this chapter, I will discuss my ethnographic methodology, my positionality as a resident living in my field, and will situate my research in the existent literature on sexuality as well as in the literature on cultural geography in Turkey.

1.1. Living in the Field

I decided to study Kurtuluş one month after I moved to the area. As a new resident living in Kurtuluş I was at the beginning of a relationship with the area and I was already excited to start a new life in here as I knew it was historically a non-Muslim residential area and currently a vibrant district close to Taksim which harbors diverse groups of residents. According to the rumors, it was almost an “LGBTI ghetto”. That was indeed one of my motivations to move to Kurtuluş, to live closer to my friends with whom I socialize and politically organize together. I moved to the neighborhood with already existent questions in my head that emerged out of my initial encounters with the real estate agents while I was looking for an apartment. The agents warned me to avoid Son Durak region, emphasizing its alleged high crime rate and also about the buildings and streets with *travesti* community since we were two single *bayan*³ planning to live in Kurtuluş. That was the first time I heard about the space-bound sexual and social codes of the area. Furthermore, the LGBTI population was much larger than I expected, as I discovered after I moved to Kurtuluş, via my social network and my *gaydar*⁴ which was beeping quite often in the public spaces in the area. With all this in mind, I was quite

³ A word used for addressing women which is strongly rejected by the feminist movement in Turkey as it desexualize women. It is used to avoid the word *kadın* (woman) which is generally used for the women who are not virgin in the everyday sexist language.

⁴ “The recognition of verbal and non-verbal behavior associated with gay identity” as described by Cheryl L. Nicholas (2004: 60), will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

excited and curious about the social dynamics, the practices of *komşuluk* and specifically the encounters of LGBTI residents in Kurtuluş. Conceiving my living area as the field of my thesis project added another layer to my relationship with the district, as all my experiences and observations now constituted “ethnographic data” for me. Moreover, as the district was interesting to me in many aspects and as my everydayness was a part of my field, there were too many questions and too much initial data to frame a neat proposal before I started doing interviews. The LGBTI crowd and their community-building practices, the community of trans sex workers who work and live in the area, the context of Kurtuluş which is an old non-Muslim district, and a currently transforming site that receives various waves of migration and harbors diverse groups, provided me with an intriguing and intricate environment to deal with.

Reading the lines of Passaro (1997) about the challenges of the postmodern globalized contexts which are “chaotic, uncontrolled and unmanageable” (Jameson 1991 cited in Passaro, 1997) and the disciplinary imperatives which compel the researcher to cut down the subjects to a manageable size, to specify the sites and units of analysis, and to focus on a bounded field was quite comforting (Passaro 1997: 151). Passaro writes about how she could catch a peculiar gender difference in her study on the homeless in New York by setting foot on the field without a specified and delineated “problem,” in other words by being open to possibilities. Her piece was encouraging to let myself into the flow of the field with relatively open questions, however I had another challenge because I was not even taking a subway to the field as she was. Sometimes even my own apartment became a field site as a “queer social space” with frequent visits by LGBTI friends. It was sometimes alienating to take notes in the middle of a meeting or a conversation because I was worried whether I was taking advantage of the intimate moments I share with my friends. Basically, my daily life turned into my field and this situation elicited some questions about the limits of proximity to the field and the boundary between my everyday life and fieldwork. The participant observation obviously would be a crucial method to collect data and my research would have an auto-ethnographic quality, therefore I felt that I might be too close to “see well” just as Passaro was warned by a colleague because her distance to the field was not greater than a subway trip. Although I was geographically too close, I

was not that close to my field in terms of familiarity to my subjects. I immediately understood this after my initial interviews with the *esnaf*⁵. As I structured my methodology, I was entailed to interview *esnaf* [shopkeepers] and trans sex workers in the district and these groups were not spontaneously a part of my social interactions in the neighborhood. Of course, I shop from and encounter the *esnaf* in my daily life however I was not quite a talker before I officially started my fieldwork. Accessing trans sex workers was also a challenge because our pathways do not cross due to our different communities, engagements, daily routines and temporalities. The LGBTI residents who are spontaneously in my social network, predominantly work as white collars or freelance. They are somehow engaged in LGBTI activism and share common spaces such as LGBTI-friendly-cafes, bars and organizations in Taksim. Thanks to my activist network, I could barely reach three trans women whom I did not know beforehand, otherwise it would be hard to get to know them through my encounters in the districts as they work at night and usually socialize at home during the day. To sum up, although I shared the same neighborhood with my informants, I was also ‘distant’ enough to overcome my tension about being too much interwoven with my informants.

Another tension of studying my own living area stemmed from my research topic, which was related to sexuality. Especially in my encounters with the *esnaf*, I had some uncomfortable moments as a young woman going there alone and asking what the shopkeepers and real estate agents think about the LGBTI population in the neighborhood. In the first week, when I went out with my recorder to interview the *esnaf*, I was expecting them to bring up LGBTI visibility in the neighborhood before I overtly addressed it. Therefore I was asking indirect questions such as ‘who lives in the district? which groups would you list?’ and so on. They were naming Armenians, *Rum* [Orthodox Christians, predominantly Greeks, of the Ottoman Istanbul], Africans, Syrians, Migrants from Central Asia, *Çingene* [“Gypsy”/Roma] community, students, singles, artists, but not the LGBTIs. However, sex workers were implied when some informants wanted to emphasize the diversity in the district with such expressions as

⁵ I used the Turkish word *esnaf* as it is a category which has a specific connotation in the context of Turkey, Especially after Gezi uprising, such as the embodiment of hegemonic patriarchal and nationalist ideology.

“there are both kerchiefed and call girls”⁶ or “*everybody is here, slags etc.*”⁷. As they did not mention the LGBTIs among other groups, I was raising the question by saying that my thesis has a focus on their experiences in the neighborhood. At the moment I directly posed questions about LGBTI residents, there was this awkward moment of silence, with some facial gestures and sometimes some questions such as “couldn’t you find something better to study?,” “what would you do if you knew about them?” “Why do you ask to a man like me, find someone who hangs out with them?”. For example, the doorman of the next building told me that “go and ask someone involved, how can I know?”⁸ and reacted in an aggressive way. After that dialogue, whenever I encounter him on the street on my way home, he turns his head to the other side and ignores me. Some others thought that, irrelevant to my questions, they could tell me sexually explicit jokes and stories with details in an abusing manner and this very manner appeared usually after I brought up that I was pursuing the experiences of gays, lesbians and *travesti* community. Another important point was that my language and theirs were tangled and constantly altering as I was borrowing their expressions and using the word *travesti* or they were using the words *trans* and *seks işçisi* [sex worker] borrowing from my questions. Nevertheless, such encounters built a tension in the following encounters with some of my informants as they were on my pathway in the neighborhood.

Questioning my position was built on such tensions as I discussed above, however it was also thought-provoking to reconsider the concepts such as closeness, outsidersness, distance and otherness through my own experience.

1.2. Research Methodology

It was not easy to sharply limit the beginning and the end of my fieldwork because of my position as a resident in my field. As I mentioned above, some observations and encounters before I moved to Kurtuluş played a triggering role in

⁶ “başörtülüsü de var, telekızı da var”

⁷ “yollu yolsuz herkes burada.”

⁸ “git onlara bulaşmış birine sor ben ne bileyim?”

shaping my questions and conceptual framework. Ending the fieldwork and taking a distance to write down about the neighborhood was also challenging as the area is experiencing a dynamic transformation. Therefore, after I started writing down my chapters, I kept taking notes and adding to my text. However, the recorded interviews took place between January and August 2015.

In addition to the pages of notes I took in my everyday life, I also conducted semi-structured and digitally recorded brief interviews with 16 informants consist of 9 shopkeepers, 4 real estate agents, 1 contractor and the mukhtars of Bozkurt and Eskişehir neighborhoods. In addition to these interviews I conducted semi-structured in depth interviews with 16 LGBTI residents. According to their identifications, the group of LGBTI informants consist of 5 trans women, 1 trans⁹, 5 gay men, 4 lesbians and 1 bisexual woman. There is also one informant at the intersection of these two groups as he is a gay resident and he also runs the gay-friendly cafe in the neighborhood. I also conducted interviews with 2 real estate agents and 1 grocery owner by note taking because they didn't want me to record their voice. I asked open ended questions and I restored my questions during the interviews based on the responses and the attitudes of my informants.

The interviews with *esnaf* approximately took half an hour in average. I usually went to their shops spontaneously in the less busy times of the day, for example at around 10-11 am. or 14-15 pm. One deli owner and one shoe seller gave me appointments for later, as they were busy at the time I requested interview. I conducted the interview with the shoe seller in her apartment whereas all other interviews took place in the stores therefore we were interrupted time to time whenever a customer walks in. History of my *esnaf* informants in the neighborhood ranged from 50 to 4 years. In-depth interviews with LGBTI residents were conducted in their homes or in silent cafes and averagely took 60 to 90 minutes. Only one of them was born and raised in the neighborhood. The others are relatively newcomers as they moved to Kurtuluş within the last 5 years. Three of the trans women informants were older in the district. They chronologically moved to Kurtuluş 15, 10 and 8 years ago. Geographic

⁹ This informant identifies themselves as such without a connotation of any gender categories.

distribution of the homes of my informants and their accustomed pathways in the neighborhood were also important because, as I intend to investigate, the sexual and spatial codes were altering based on the specific contexts of the different parts of the district. Therefore I considered a commensurate spatial distribution in picking *esnaf* informants by considering the spots of their stores. However as I didn't know all of my LGBTI informants' apartments, I mapped out the spatial distribution of the LGBTI residents after I completed the interviews.

I initially intended to interview shopkeepers, real estate agents and mukhtars in order to map out the mobilities of the groups in the neighborhood by interrogating who is coming, who is leaving, and if there are meaningful clusters of certain populations in the geography of the neighborhood. I wanted to situate the context of the neighborhood with its demographic profile and I thought shopkeepers and real estate agents would have a grasp of the population traffic in the neighborhood because of their occupational position. Real estate agents know who prefer which side of the neighborhood, estate prices and the rents and they usually comment on the social cultural environment of the places. Shopkeepers, as they run small businesses, have a face to face relationship with the customers and therefore I thought they would comment on the profile of their customers which would be the residents of the neighborhood and also share their observations about the neighborhood relationships of different groups. All these interviews helped me to conceptualize and situate the social, moral, spatial and sexual dynamics of the neighborhood. Furthermore, as I detected some patterns in the narratives of *esnaf* and mukhtars, they took a larger part in my analysis than I expected at the beginning. Their narratives was going to construct a background for my analysis, however I included some important statements to discuss the spatial and sexual boundaries of the neighborhood. If I had a chance to extend my fieldwork, I would try to access to more trans sex worker informants, especially to the ones who allegedly display an 'unconventional'¹⁰ visibility as I could track in the narratives of other informants. As I analyzed the transcripts and my field notes and started to write down

¹⁰ They were pictured as unconventional because they were wearing printed long skirts, shopping from grocery in the middle of the day and socialize with their family neighbors and their children, that is to say they were doing ordinary things which anybody does. Such a visibility of a trans individual was narrated as unconventional because the stereotypical appearance of a trans woman is expected to be grotesquely sexy with heavy make-up and fetish dress.

my first draft, one of my main discussions structured around how trans sex workers construct various subjectivities by negotiating the spatial and sexual codes of neighborhood. More interviews with trans women living in the area would deepen my conceptualization.

In order to maintain the principle of confidentiality, I did not record the interviews without asking the informants, I did not share the records and transcripts with anyone and I gave pseudo names to all of my informants.

1.3. Literature Review

I strongly share the feeling of Probyn about stepping into an unfamiliar field by hesitantly getting excited about “the idea that space is gendered and that space is sexed...The reverse has also been shown: gender, sex and sexuality are all a space do.” (Probyn, 2010: 78). I hesitated because even though I undertook a thesis project which departs from such an argument, I didn't know if this basic proposal was already passé in the field. I started to review the literature and I realized that this basic proposal was treated quite late and was still full of openings to revisit the notion of space and sexuality, and their provocative relationality.

Studying a neighborhood in Turkey, by focusing on the spatial and sexual boundaries, was a challenge because of the gap between the contexts of the texts I've been reading and the context that I have been experiencing and observing. Because of the hegemony of American-European based studies in the literature of queer geography, I encountered numerous gay ghetto stories in which lesbians and gays take part in the process of gentrification with the support of the entrepreneurs and the law indirectly. That is to say, the place-based communities and districts with openly gay lesbian and trans members and residents were interrogated. These districts were hegemonically inhabited by “white, middle-class or upper-middle-class gay men” (Puar and Rushbrook, 2003: 384), and this very community usually occupies the space by displacing former residents who are usually ethnic minorities, migrants, working class

families and trans sex workers (Bell & Valentine 1995, Knopp 1992, 1997, Namaste 1996, Califia 2000, Doan 2007). On the other hand, in my field Kurtuluş, the class position of gay and lesbian residents cannot be crudely categorized as middle or upper-middle class and even though the first symptoms of gentrification are observable such as boutique cafes, franchise restaurants and art workshops, there is not an observable deterritorialization process. International migrants and the former inhabitants such as Armenians and the early Anatolian-migrants still live in Kurtuluş today and share its public urban space. Therefore, both the macro circumstances such as the legal and cultural status of being an LGBTI in Turkey and also the local experiences such as community building practices and being an LGBTI *mahalleli*, pointed out to the significant differences between the cases in the literature and my own field. Although I was challenged to support my observations with theoretical tools structured out of such different cases, catching up the similarities and comparabilities between geographically and contextually distinct areas were the most fun part of this thesis project.

Feminist and queer scholars who have contributed to the discipline of cultural geography pointed out the lack of gender and sexuality among the canonical works of the field (Knopp 1992, Bell and Valentine 1995, Massey 1994, Halberstam 2005). For example, Halberstam refers to some important names of the field such as Edward Soja, Fredric Jameson and David Harvey and argues that they “actively excluded sexuality as a category for analysis precisely because desire has been cast by neo-Marxists as part of a ludic body politics that obstructs the “real” work of activism” (2005: 5). Because the sexuality was associated with the body and the personal, and seen in local scale which was supposed to be less significant comparing to some other global struggles such as class and work. Halberstam also criticizes Harvey as he misses the chance of highlighting the normalization of being and the naturalization of gender and sexuality when he proposes the notion of *time/space compression* to explain how the time and space are constructed and work in favor of the capitalist order (2005: 8). Feminist scholars also problematize acknowledging the space as a site of power without reckoning the gendered dimension of the space. They shed light on how patriarchal hegemony operates within space and structures space itself (Rose, 1993; Massey, 1994, 2005). For example, Doreen Massey (1994) harshly criticizes Harvey for subordinating

all the political struggles to a question of class. She quotes Harvey's words; "Localized struggles have not generally had the effect of challenging capitalism " and notes that Harvey's proposal is not capable of understanding the multifaceted dimension of the movements and subjects as the feminists, gays, ethnic and religious groupings and regional autonomists demonstrate (Massey, 1994: 242-243). On the other hand, Massey (1994, 2005), in most of her discussions, defines the sovereign as the heterosexual white male and creates an expectation as if she will use the sexuality as one of the main categories of her analysis. However, she does not elaborate on the politics of sexuality or the spatial experiences of sexual dissidents and their potential contestations against the patriarchal power. Rather she mostly refers to heterosexual cis-women¹¹ as the subordinate by using gender as her main lens which is nevertheless quite important to unsettle the *malestream* imaginaries of the geography. Although feminist geography appeared as a pioneering discipline that evoked sexuality as a category, Bell and Valentine (1995) suggest to revisiting the terminology as gender, sexuality and feminism were typically grouped as one, and sometimes used interchangeably. They claim that the terms are problematically used because although the growth of the literature on masculinity alters this situation, gender generally refers to women, whereas the sexuality is used for sexual dissidents, predominantly for male homosexuality. And they also remark that the sexuality is a controversial issue among feminist groups therefore queer geography should be considered separately from the feminist geography (10). Apart from this very brief mention of the risk of equating gender and sexuality and of including the sexual geography studies into the feminist geography, I did not come across a comprehensive critique of the initial works of feminist geography as they reproduce the gender binary and skip non-heterosexual relations and spaces. All in all, since the mid 80s, sexual geography occurred as another discipline to fill the "absence of discussions of sexuality within geography by contesting the discipline as a heterosexist institution (McNee 1984)" (cited in Brown et al. 2007).

There is another discussion on the politicization of the body and its performance in the public space. Moving from the conceptualizations of Grosz (1993) and Butler

¹¹ cisgender defines a person who is not a transsexual.

(1990) as they describe the body as “a constantly reworked surface of inscription” (Bell and Valentine, 1995: 8), various authors investigate the construction of sexed bodies within the space (Cream 1993; Johnson 1990, 1993; Longhurst 1994 cited in Bell and Valentine, 1995). Bell and Valentine suggest that we can rethink the straightness of the streets and the *subversive spatial acts* to disturb the heterosexualized spaces (1995: 17), however it is not that convincing when the repertoire of the bodily performance is treated as if it is universal. Performance of a body could be deciphered based on specific codes of gender expression which are constructed differently in different geographies. Feminine walk of a man could be a cause of murder or a sign of gentlemanliness. Hence, although Bell et al. (1999) refers to Butler’s suggestion of parodic acts or *subversive bodily acts* to rupture the heterosexual space, Binnie et al. notes that “Bell et al. remain ambivalent about the politics of proclaiming the queer transgression and subversion of identity, pointing out that the performances of these identities are read differently, by different people in different places.” (1999: 182) In respect to this critique about the peculiarity of different subjects and places, I want to highlight the importance of considering the specificity of locality. For example, with its dynamic transformation and its in-betweenness, I believe that my field Kurtuluş provides an intriguing context to reconfigure the categories such as traditional *mahalle* vs. Western modern city and the generalized descriptions about this -almost essentialized- units.

There is a thriving literature on the sexuality in Turkey starting from the beginning of 2000s (Kandiyoti 2002; Özbay 2005; Selek 2007; Mills 2007; Mutluer 2008; Başdaş 2010; Savcı 2012; Selen 2012; Çakırlar & Delice 2012; Güçlü & Yardımcı 2013). However, as Ayten Alkan asserts, the studies that investigate the co-constitutive relationship of space and sexuality are still few in numbers (Alkan 2009, Özbay F 1999, Özbay 2010, Özyeğin 2001, Selek 2001, Wedel 2001 cited in Alkan 2014: 304).

Among the present studies, *Maskeler Süvariler Gacılar* by Pınar Selek (2007) deserves a special attention since it is a prominent ethnography which tackles the discourse of sexuality and nationalism in the *mahalle* context in Beyoğlu, Istanbul. The research inquires a very critical moment of Ülker Street in Beyoğlu as it was a ghetto of

the trans sex workers who were the target of the conservative residents, ultra nationalists, the police and the local authorities in 1996. Her study is a pioneering one in terms of examining an urban space with its sexually non-compliant residents by also picturing the urban transformation policies in Beyoğlu as the background of the systematic attacks entangled with nationalism, militarism and transphobia. It is also important for my research as Selek discusses the subculture of the transsexual community in relation to the spatial particularity of Ülker Street, Beyoğlu by pointing out its tense position between the modern city, where the strangers live distant lives even though they are proximately close to each other, and the traditional nostalgic *mahalle* which is historically constructed as the safe space that excludes the stranger (2007: 138). She does not delve into this tension by undertaking a conceptualization of the paradoxical contexts of transforming sites and their sexual-spatial codes and boundaries, however her discussion was inspiring for my inquiry of *mahalle*, surveillance, liminality, queer visibility and sexuality.

Cenk Özbay's research (2010) on the rent boys, who live in the peripheries of İstanbul and work in Beyoğlu, provides an analogy of the sexual boundaries and opportunities of the different parts of the city. While Beyoğlu enables these rent boys benefit from the fluidity of the sexuality and make money as gay sex workers, these men claim their heterosexual privileges in their conservative poor peripheral settlements (*varoş*). He includes geographical remarks in his analysis and discusses the "nexus of the contradictory contexts of the local [*varoş*] and the global" along with its possible openings for the sexual subjectivities (2010: 660), however he does not focus on a certain spatial unit. Begüm Başdaş (2010) also pursues the experiences of women in the public spaces of Beyoğlu by analyzing the narratives of a group of women. Some of her participants compare Beyoğlu and other districts of İstanbul such as Ümraniye and Kadıköy and they narrate how their feelings and bodily performances vary based on the sexual and spatial codes of the districts. Women also discuss how the limits of sexuality expand and also blur in the urban space of Beyoğlu. Başdaş concludes her text asserting that Beyoğlu is experienced by women as a relatively more liberated geography. Her enterprise is quite important in terms of relating the urban experiences of sexual dissidents with the sexual-spatial politics in İstanbul. A recent reader called *Yeni*

İstanbul Çalışmaları (2014) which is edited by Ayfer Bartu Candan and Cenk Özbay provided a section on body and sexuality in İstanbul. It is a remarkable contribution to the literature and I think it announces that the sexuality and gender obtained acknowledgement as one of the substantial topics of urban studies in Turkey.

As this brief overview of the literature suggests, , most of the works on sexuality, queerness and space focus on Beyoğlu and its districts. Admittedly, Beyoğlu has a historical significance for LGBTI community in Turkey as I will discuss in chapter 3. However, this very concentration on Beyoğlu also indicates lack in the literature as other areas in Istanbul, or other cities in Turkey, are not yet explored with a focus on the relationality of sexuality, gender and space. The ethnography of Kuzguncuk conducted by Amy Mills (2007) is an example, although it cannot be categorized under the queer-urban studies. It investigates the gendered cultural practices of *komşuluk*, discussing the mutual constitution of gender and space in the *mahalle* as an urban space. Her repetition of generalized categories such as “Turkish mahalle” and “Turkish women”, and her conceptualization of the Turkish tradition weakens her critical highlights on the peculiarity of Kuzguncuk. Although she gives details about the everyday life and intercommunity relations in Kuzguncuk, she tends to generalize her observation based on her field and use the categories by simplifying the contingency of the subjects and spaces. Lastly, I want to address another *mahalle* ethnography conducted by Didem Daniş and Ebru Kayaalp (2014) because it is important for my research as it investigates Elmadağ which is a district proximately and contextually close to Kurtuluş. Both shares a similar historical background and a demographic profile. This very research does not have any attempt to contextualize and spatialize the experiences of sexual dissidents of the neighborhood because they simply ignore them as a community although they are quite visible in the district since 90s. It is an important oversight as they don’t even mention the trans community as the residents of the neighborhood even though they claim to picture the demographic diversity in the district by suggesting the narratives of various inhabitant groups such as non-Muslims, Anatolian migrants, Kurdish residents, international migrants, university students, white collars and bohemian bourgeoisie.

Researching Kurtuluş as a geographical unit with a specific focus on the politics and spatial limits of sexuality though the negotiations of LGBTI residents offered me an opportunity to contribute to this flourishing discipline of sexual geography in Turkey. In both academic literature and in the agenda of LGBTI movement, the residential practices of the LGBTI communities are interrogated by focusing on the practices of exclusion such as in Ülker Street, Cihangir (Selek, 2007), or whenever there is a violation of housing rights of [mostly] trans community such as in Pürtelaş, Eryaman and recently Avcılar Meis Buildings. All these cases contribute to the knowledge about the heterosexist ideology and the discourse of the discrimination. On the other hand, the practices of sharing a space and a residential area, the boundaries and negotiations occur in such encounters are generally overlooked. This thesis aims to address this gap in the literature and make a modest contribution to the study of gender, sexuality and space in Turkey.

Kurtuluş is an intriguing field, though not yet explored anthropologically, despite of its challenging context with various groups of residents such as migrants, Turkish families, non-Muslim families, singles, students, LGBTIs, with its ongoing transformation and its in-betweenness, blurring the boundaries of the traditional mahalle codes and the modern city. As Kosnick notes that in the literature, the discussions on the new forms of urban citizenship is usually limited with “listing different groups or ‘communities’ that promote them, with ‘gays and lesbians’ often named alongside immigrants, racialized groups and others” (Castells, 1983; Mitchell, 2003; Purcell, 2003 cited in Kosnick 2015: 688), I will pursue the possibility to interrogate the boundaries and the conflictual relationships in such contexts (Kosnick 2015: 688). Throughout this thesis, I will be also revisiting the existent subjectivities and visibilities of LGBTI residents and also will be reconsidering the geographical concepts such as space, *mahalle*, sites of resistance, the transgression of boundaries, and the division of public and private.

1.4. Thesis Outline

In the next chapter I introduce Kurtuluş as my ethnographic field. First I will discuss its historical background and the nostalgia of the current residents about the non-Muslim past of the neighborhood. I also lay out the geographical distribution of certain populations and the recent demographic profile of residents as the area receives intense international and domestic migration. I, moreover, briefly explain how the recent urban transformation operates in Kurtuluş as the renovated buildings, boutique cafes and franchise restaurants increased in numbers in the neighborhood. I finish this chapter with a discussion on Kurtuluş as the space of otherness, because many narratives point out that Kurtuluş harbors various oppressed groups. I tackled the narratives which assert that LGBTI people prefer this district to live, as they perceive much less threat here compared to other parts of the city.

In the third chapter, I explored the importance of Taksim for LGBTI population in İstanbul as well as in Turkey at large, and the proximity of Kurtuluş to Taksim which renders the district an attractive alternative to live in. I discussed the community-building practices of LGBTI residents of Kurtuluş and the queer social spaces within the boundaries of the neighborhood.

In the last chapter I focus on the negotiations of gays, lesbians and trans residents vis-a-vis the sexual and spatial boundaries that shape different parts of the neighborhood. I basically investigate how Kurtuluş contains different urban settings such as traditional *mahalle* towards Son Durak side and the big modern city towards Pangaltı side and how this in-betweenness of Kurtuluş provides LGBTI residents a potential to build communities and to manifest themselves in various ways.

CHAPTER 2

KURTULUŞ AS AN ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELD



Map of Kurtuluş showing Bozkurt, Eskişehir and Feriköy neighborhoods

In this chapter, I trace the historical background of Kurtuluş as an old non-Muslim residential area; the recent mobilities of populations in the neighborhood; and the geographical distribution of the groups of residents, in light of the interactions of these groups with each other. Before, it would be illuminating for the readers if I map out the geographical borders and the demographic data of Kurtuluş which is a central district in the European side of İstanbul and its two neighborhoods, Bozkurt and Eskişehir. I specified two neighborhoods of the district because experiences and narratives of my informants were predominantly pointing out these territories¹². Bozkurt neighborhood

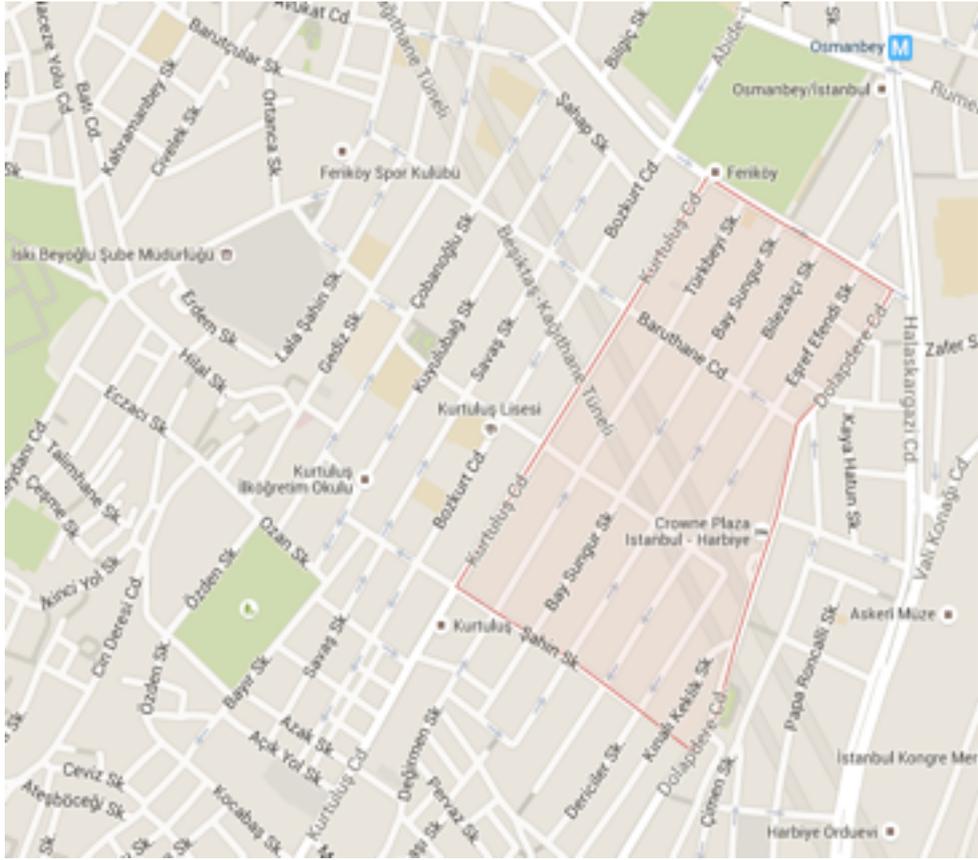
¹² I should also note that some parts of Feriköy neighborhood was also mentioned and few of my residents inhabit within the borders of Feriköy.

has 11328 habitants according to the census in 2013 whereas the inhabitants of Eskişehir neighborhood counted as 12344 in 2013¹³.

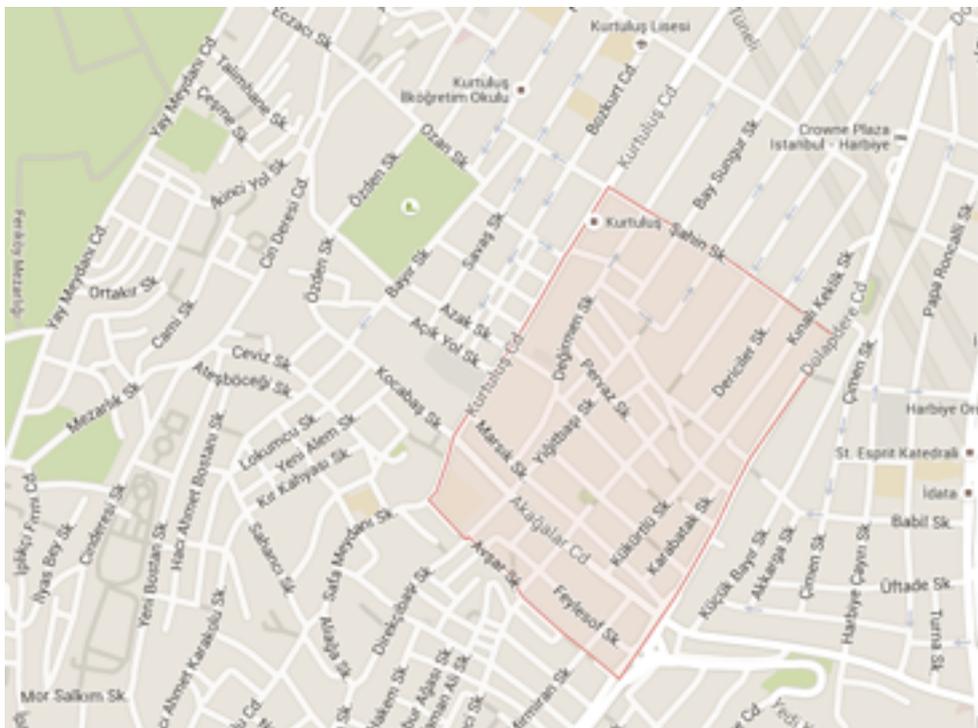
Choosing Kurtuluş as the field for an anthropological inquiry entailed learning and understanding its historical, demographical, geographical and therefore political dynamics. My fieldwork indirectly started at the moment I first stepped in Kurtuluş three years ago for a visit. Tatavla was a familiar name for me thanks to my engagement in Folklore Club (BÜFK) in Boğaziçi University because we were studying Greek music. However, the story of Tatavla was illuminated for me after my visits to Kurtuluş became frequent as my friends living in the district increased in number. During these initial contacts with Kurtuluş, I did not know that the LGBTI population was growing day by day in the neighborhood and I did not know about the remarkable trans visibility both during the day with their '*basma etek*' and also during the night as they go for *çark*¹⁴ in the district. Neither did I know about the other groups of residents or the geographical distribution of these groups. Since I often used a specific pathway which goes through Pangaltı and Eşref Efendi Street, I did not experience the area called "*Son Durak*" [Last Stop] as it has allegedly a different atmosphere in terms of its low rental value and the residential profile with a dense population of international migrants and Kurdish families who have migrated from Kurdish provinces in recent years.

¹³ Accessed in December, 2015, <https://www.sisli.bel.tr/>

¹⁴ Çark means cruising in Lubunca (a slang language used by sex worker trans women and some other members of the LGBTI community in Turkey)



Map of Bozkurt Neighborhood



Map of Eskişehir Neighborhood

In order to illustrate the context of this specific geography of which I am a resident who decided to deal with it anthropologically as well, I will start situating my field by briefly laying out the Rum [Greek] past of Kurtuluş.¹⁵

2.1. Historical Background: From Tatavla to Kurtuluş

In the last decades, *Kurtuluş* has become one of the neighborhoods where a diverse range of communities dwell, therefore it is frequently described by the cliché “mosaic” metaphor. However, the area has a history which even has an edict (*ferman*) to forbid anyone except for *Rums* to live in the district. Its first residents were Rum (Greek) sailors who were taken captive after Ottoman forces conquered the Aegean Islands. These single shipmen were brought and placed on the hills of Tatavla in the 16th century. As they settle down and start families, the population grows and the area transforms into a Rum village starting from the middle of 16th century (Türker 2007). The name of the area, Tatavla, was officially changed to Kurtuluş right after the big fire in 1929, however most of its streets and places had already been renamed after the law of 1927. As Öktem (2008) cites; “In 1927, all street and square names in Istanbul, which were not of Turkish origin, were replaced.”¹⁶ Thereby, the Turkish Republic imbues the neighborhood with the most iconic and aggressive keywords of Turkish Nationalist mythology such as Ergenekon, Bozkurt, Türkbeyi, Baruthane, Savaş, and so on. Although there were predominantly Rum residents living in Tatavla, the neighborhood was also preferred by other non-Muslim communities such as Armenians and Jews. During the 60s, 70s and 80s, it received intense domestic migration from various cities of Anatolia especially from Erzincan and Sivas, as well as from the Kurdish provinces in the 1990s, with the intensification of the war in Southeastern and Eastern Turkey. The non-Muslim communities in the neighborhood were deterritorialized by different forms of political and economic violence, such as the special capital tax law for non-Muslims (1942), the pogrom of 6-7 September 1955, and the deportation law for Greeks in 1964 (Danış and Kayaalp, 2004). Although there is still an Armenian, and fewer than that

¹⁵

¹⁶ Retrieved from <https://ejts.revues.org/2243> in December, 2015.

Jewish, population in the neighborhood, there are only around 400 people left from the Rum Tatavla (Türker 2009).

Aram Bey (63) who has lived in the neighborhood for 58 years and organizes the funeral and wedding ceremonies for the Armenian community narrates this history;

“İnönü said Greek people get out, all Kurtuluş was discharged, they kicked all of them, it was empty. They immediately replaced them. This time the ones who came for Anatolia. They came from Erzincan, Sivas, the doormen came the brought their children, they came from Mardin. They all fill, occupied their estates. Still they do. These people suddenly disappeared. This neighborhood was entirely a Greek neighborhood.”¹⁷

The displaced peoples and the silenced history of Tatavla was often expressed through nostalgia in the narratives of my informants, regardless of their own migration story and ethnicity. It was particularly interesting to hear about the nostalgia of Turkish migrants who came to the district and could witness the last periods of the non-Muslim Tatavla which corresponds to the 60s and early 70s. They were reflecting on an era that they [or their parents] had directly witnessed. It is interesting that this very nostalgia for the elite non-Muslim residents is generally followed by complaints about the later migration traffic and the recent demography of the district.

“Kurtuluş was the most elegant district of Istanbul. Perfect with its Armenians, Greeks and Jewish residents, if you are a Muslim even if you had money you couldn't enter here. I had money I will buy an apartment, no you couldn't. But after Cyprus War, 74 after Rums left, space was opened so muslims started to buy estate from here. Before that, it was the most elegant district of Istanbul. When you go to street, men were with hats and bowties, just like Beyoğlu. Now it has changed shell, İstanbul and Kurtuluş is like

¹⁷ “64'te Yunan tebaaları dedi, defolsunlar gitsinler dedi İnönü, bütün Kurtuluş boşaldı hepsini kovdular bomboş kaldı. Hemen yerlerini doldurdular. Bu sefer Anadolu'dan gelenler. Erzincandan geldiler Sivas'tan geldiler, kapıcıları geldiler çocuklarını getirdiler, Mardin'den geldiler. Hep doldurdular, mallarına mülklerine oturdular. Halen de oturuyorlar. Kayboldular bir anda yok oldu bu insanlar. Şu mahalle olduğu gibi Rum mahallesiydi şu gördüğün.”

black and white. Past Kurtuluş and today's Kurtuluş is like here and Hakkari I mean."¹⁸
(Sedat 58, real estate agent)

"The old name of here is Tatavla. Predominantly Armenians and Rums were here, they migrated in time. There was a lot of progress, a lot of buildings were constructed, many kinds of people are here. There are people from all around Turkey. All the doors were open when I was young. People used to go each others' for coffee tea dinner. Now nobody knows each other."¹⁹
(Muhktar of Eskişehir Neighborhood)

"This store is here since the end of 50s. My grandfather came from Safranbolu, Karabük. I am 26 years old, until I was 13-14 we used to play games on the streets, we grew up on the streets now there is no child on the street. In the conversations with my father, it was said that the women were ladies, men were gentlemen in here. Then it was scattered, 2-3 Gypsy families moving in to this region made quite a difference. We said Kurtuluş is ending 10 years ago."²⁰
(Harun 26, shopkeeper)

Nurten Hanım runs a shoe store in Osmanbey for more than 15 years. She also lived in Son Durak for seven years from 1996 to 2003. She is originally from Hendek, Adapazarı and comes to Istanbul in 1977. I interviewed her as her store was the most popular one among trans women because they produce big size women shoes. During the interview she said:

"The customers and the people living in Kurtuluş were more elite people in the past. Now there are diverse segments in Kurtuluş. There is a peasant group who live just like they do in their villages. I mean peasant in that

¹⁸ "Kurtuluş, İstanbul'un en nezih semtiydi. Ermenisi Rumu Yahudisi olan pırıl pırıl, hatta Müslüman bile paran varsa buraya giremiyordun yani. Param var ben buradan daire alıcam giremezdim yani. Ama bu Kıbrıs Savaşı'ndan sonra 74'ten sonra Rumların gitmesinden dolayı bir yer açıldı Müslümanlar buradan mülk almaya başladılar. Ondan önce İstanbul'un en güzel nezih semtiydi. Caddeye çıktın mı papyonlu şapkalı, Beyoğlu gibiydi. Şimdi kabuk değiştirdi, siyahla beyaz gibi oldu İstanbul ve Kurtuluş. Önceki Kurtuluş'la şimdiki Kurtuluş burayla Hakkari gibi oldu yani."

¹⁹ "Eski ismi buranın Tatavladır. Hep ermeniler rumlar çoğunlukta idi burada zamanla onlar göç etti. Çok gelişme oldu çok bina yapıldı türlü türlü insan var. Türkiye'nin her yerinden burada insan var. Valla burada küçükken bütün herkesin kapısı açıktı. Çay kahve yemek hep insanlar birbirine giderdi. Şimdi kimse kimseyi tanımıyor artık."

²⁰ "Bakkal 50lerin sonundan beri var. Safranbolu Karabük'ten gelmişler dedemler. Yaşım 26, ben 13 14 yaşına kadar sokaklarda oyun oynanırdı, biz sokakta büyüdük şimdi çocuk yok sokakta. Babamla konuşmalarımın buranın 70leri 80leri için erkeği beyefendiydi kadını hanımefendiydi denir. Sonra bozuldu. Şu kadar bölgeye 2 3 tane çingene ailenin taşınması çok fark yartmıştı Kurtuluş bitiyor falan dedik 10 yıl önce."

manner. Otherwise peasant is the master of the nation, I don't mean that When you look at women, they wear colorful skirts with colorful socks walking on the street. With the slippers. There is such a group. They came from Anatolia but they also brought the culture of their village, I mean they don't try to adjust-my mother was also an Anatolian woman but she cared when she goes to shopping. She wears her coat, fabric skirt with thin socks and shoes. Now that culture is no longer exist. Now people go out in Istanbul as they do in their villages. There is such a group in Kurtuluş. One group is foreign national minority again our nation but of minorities of Armenian origin, Rum origin. They are very kind. They are very quality people, we have many customers. I like them too much. We used to live with an Armenian neighbor in Kurtuluş. We were very good neighbors. We still greet each other when we encounter.”²¹

Her narrative is remarkable because she does not only speak highly of the non-Muslim residents and their elite cultivated profile, but also constructs a contrast group of residents; the Anatolian migrants who cannot adapt into the “civilized” urban life by insisting on wearing colorful peasant outfits just like they wear in their villages. I believe that she refers to Kurds particularly as she repeated some other complaints stemming from *Doğulular* [Easterners] throughout the interview. She implies that they don't belong here and they don't even attempt to adopt the cultural codes of urban, on the other hand she calls the non-Muslim locals *yabancı uyruklu azınlık* [foreign minorities]. That is to say, according to her narrative, the peasant residents don't belong here because they fail to adopt the modern urban codes and the elite non-Muslims don't belong here exactly neither, as she attributes them foreignness, even though they are also “our people”, “our nation” paradoxically.

Lastly, the narrative of Dikran Bey (52), an Armenian resident who runs a historical deli he took over from his father, was quite remarkable. He complained about

²¹ “Kurtuluşun müşterisi kurtuluşta yaşayan insanlar önceden daha çok böyle elit insanlardı. Ama sonra şimdi çok çeşitli kesim var kurtuluşta. Bir köylü kesim var, aynı köyündeki gibi yaşayan kesim. köylü derken o anlamda köylü diyorum. Yoksa köylü milletin efendisi o anlamda söylemiyorum. Yani kadınlara bakıyorsunuz rengarenk etek giyorlar, altında rengarenk çoraplarla caddede dolaşıyorlar. Ayağında terlikle. Böyle bir kesim var. Anadolulu anadoludan gelmişler ama köyünün kültürünü götürüyor yani hiç bir istanbula uyum gösterip de hani-benim mesela annem de anadolu kadını ama çarşıya çıkarken özen gösterir. pardesüsünü giyer, kumaş eteğini giyer ayağına da ince çorabını ayakkabısını giyer. şimdi o kültür kalmadı. şimdi öyle bir kültür var ki köyünde uzun etekle terlikle gezen insanlar istanbulda da çarşıya çıkarken aynı çıkıyor. öyle bir kesim var kurtuluşta. bir grup böyle. bir grup *yabancı uyruklu azınlık* yine bizim milletimiz ama ermeni kökenli rum kökenli azınlık var. onlar çok kibar. çok kalite insanlar onlardan da çok müşterimiz var mesela. çok da severim onları ben. kurtuluşta oturduğum evde bir ermeni komşuyla karşılıklı oturuyorduk. komşuluk ilişkilerimiz çok iyiydi. hala görünce selamlarız.”

the loss of elite stratum and expressed hateful sentences for late migrant groups such as blacks and Syrians. A fragment from the interview:

“I was born in Istanbul in 1963. Always same job, same store. We have the store for 72 years already. In the same address same spot for 72 years. Our old mosaic has changed too much. Kurtuluş was something exactly different. You cannot tell you have to live that. There was an elite quality. A very high-class of non-Muslims and also Muslims. The locals of Kurtuluş- there were gardens in Feriköy, they were planting and selling greens... The migration happened, the hugest one is September 6th-7th. It was discharged after what Adnan Menderes did. Latest discharge happened in Cyprus rising and done. The high class has left, the rubbish remained.

-Who replaced them then?

Nobody did. Anatolia Erzincan etc. Son Durak, around the church was the most quality region even better than Avenue. Now it is has a market just like Tahtakale Mahmutpaşa, the market of the blacks, Africans... Africans are dirt. Women works, they propose going into the stores at nights. Shopkeepers tell in Son Durak. Men work in drug production, they smell chemicals top to bottom.”²²

As the above narratives illustrate, there is a pattern which completes the longing for the ideal elite non-Muslim past with the discriminatory complaints about the current groups of migrants in the neighborhood. However the narrators themselves, as most of the residents in Kurtuluş, are the people who came and settled down in Kurtuluş through chronologically different waves of migration. Turkish, and fewer Armenian, migrants constitute the first migration wave from Anatolia which started in the 1930s and intensified after the 1970s. Turkish migrants, in particular, were encouraged by the state

22

“1963 istanbul doğumluyum. hep aynı, aynı ev aynı iş aynı dükkan. Dükkan zaten 72 senedir bizde. tam 72 yıldır aynı yerde aynı adreste. eski mozağımız çok değişti. kurtuluş bambaşka bir şeydi yani. anlatmakla değil yani bunu yaşamak lazım. çok elit bir kalite vardı. çok kaymak tabaka tabir ettiğimiz gayrimüslimlerden olsun müslimlerden olsun. kurtuluşun yerlileri-yerli (vurguluyor)- Feriköy’de bostanlar vardı, bahçelerde yeşillik yetiştirilip satılıyordu...Göç oldu bir kere en büyük göç 6-7 eylül. Adnan Menderes’in yaptığı akabinde bir boşaldı. En son boşalma da Kıbrıs ihtilalinde sonra bir boşalma oldu tamam. Ondan sonra döküntüler kaldı, kaymak tabaka gitti.

-Peki kim doldurdu onların yerini?

Hiç kimse doldurmadı. Anadolu, Erzincan orası burası. Kurtuluş Son Durak o kilisenin olduğu kısım en kaliteli kısımdı, ana caddeden bile kaliteliydi. Şimdi Tahtakale Mahmutpaşa gibi bir piyasa var orada ne piyasası var zencilerin piyasası var, Afrikalıların...Afrikalılar pislik. Bayanlar çalışıyor, kendileri girip teklif ediyorlarmış ya dükkanlara geceleri. Son Durak’ta esnaf söylüyor. Erkekleri uyuşturucu basımında çalışıyorlar üstleri başları leş gibi kimyasal kokuyor.”

policies to substitute the exiled non-Muslim peoples by taking over and sometimes occupying their properties (Aktar, 2014). They came and settled down in the neighborhood between two migration waves. The first wave came after the departure of the Rum and other non-Muslims in the 1930s, however the second wave is an ongoing process which consists of both international and domestic migration which gradually grew the population and diversity in Kurtuluş year by year after the 1980s. To crudely categorize, the incoming groups consist of peoples who are deterritorialized by the war or poverty in their homelands such as Kurdish families who ran away from the war in the South East or were victims of forced migration, the Iraqi migrants after the occupation of Iraq, the Syrians who ran from the war, as well as migrants from Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Mongolia, and various African countries. There is also a relatively new group of residents which predominantly consist of those who moved in recent years from the gentrified districts such as Cihangir and Tarlabası. They have increased in number, as real estate agents expressed, in last 5 to 10 years and still increasing today. The general profile of this group could be pictured as the single, young bohemian bourgeois artists, freelance workers, students and white collar workers. The LGBTI population could largely be counted among these groups. Although trans sex workers came to the district in the 90s after the gentrification of Cihangir [Pürtelaş and Ülker Street] and Tarlabası, the middle-class gays and lesbians, as much as I could trace them, came more recently.

To sum, the longtime residents, who are predominantly the Turkish shopkeepers, and fewer Armenians as I encountered, and the property owners in the neighborhood, voice a narrative of nostalgia by implying that the civilized and elite atmosphere in the neighborhood is eroded because of the late migrants. They target various groups of migrants such as peasants and Africans. Ocejó proposes that “People weave a nostalgia narrative when they sense that their attachments to a place and their future in a place are under threat.” (2011: 287). His point could be revisited in order to understand this circulating narrative of nostalgia among the early migrant residents in Kurtuluş. He analyzes the nostalgia narratives of the “early gentrifiers” of Lower East Side Manhattan by arguing that through these narratives, they “construct a new local identity

as the neighborhood's symbolic owners" and "construct a new identity that stands up to, defines, and counters change in the present," (2011: 306). The relationship between the newcomers triggering the elevation of rental values and transforming the traditional *mahalleli* relationships and the discriminatory narratives in respect to the 'newcomers' of Kurtuluş deserves a detailed interrogation which exceeds the limits of my thesis as it points out to complicated practices of living together and building a sense of belonging to the neighborhood. Nonetheless, I will take a closer look at the dynamics of the "living together" by discussing the recent distribution and interactions of the groups within the geography of Kurtuluş.

2.2. Recent Mobilities in Kurtuluş

The tension of the cliché mosaic tableaux in Kurtuluş was more overt as the interviews went further with some discriminatory and hateful expressions targeting some groups, such as Black Africans, Syrians and Kurds. Moreover, it was common for the same person who expresses hate words, to finish his or her narrative with such expressions as "*Onlar da insan*", "*Ben ayırım yapmam*" or "*Sorun yok herkes adabıyla oturuyor.*"

Even though it was not part of my in-depth field work, I have observed that the groups are generally building communities and networks based on their hometowns through the *hemşerilik* relationship or on their country of origin. For example, I encountered the networks of Sivaslı and Erzincanlı real estate agents who work separately but occasionally cooperate with each other, whereas the Armenian agents constitute another network with each other. The international migrants also construct such networks based on their country and language. However, the latest group of migrants as I tried to categorize above are the urban *bobos* [bohemian bourgeois] and they build relatively single and isolated lives, or socialize among a smaller friend group compared to *hemşeri* communities which are not only larger but also much better organized .

The intriguing point about these separate networks in Kurtuluş is the geographical distribution of the groups in the territory of Kurtuluş which is also related to the rent values of the districts. At this point, Son Durak district, with its low rent prices and dense migrant presence, appears as a specific site. Although the physical borders are not that sharp, the discursive border, I might assert, starts from Sinemköy which corresponds to the end of the “third block” from Ergenekon Avenue in other words the intersection of Şahin Street and Kurtuluş Avenue. After the third block the rents go lower as it is getting closer to Son Durak. Son Durak, literally ‘last stop’ in Turkish, is named after the bus stop in the square at the end of Kurtuluş Avenue. The district is located in the middle of Hacıahmet Mahallesi where predominantly the Kurds live, Dolapdere known for its Roma population [*çingene/gypsy* in colloquial language] and Sinemköy. Both the rents and the profile of the residents alter towards this side when we move from the entrance of the district which could be considered as Pangaltı Ergenekon Avenue that crosses Kurtuluş Avenue at its beginning. After I decided on my thesis topic, I took my first field trip to Son Durak in an effort to “observe” the environment with an anthropological lens and take field notes. I started walking from the corner of Kurtuluş and Ergenekon Avenues down to *Sefa Meydanı* which is a historical square in Son Durak. My notes recorded that, as one gets closer to the square, the black bodies in the public space increase in number, the audible non-Turkish languages are more common and the street is predominantly occupied by single men whereas the visibility of single women decreases. The first time I heard about the alleged high crime rate of Son Durak was when I started looking for an apartment in Kurtuluş in August 2014. Real estate agents warned us to keep a distance from this region as we were to live as two single women. During my field, I encountered such narratives many times, however it was interesting that although many people had heard about some fights and thieveries, none of my informants had witnessed a case to narrate. Nevertheless, this district is a peculiar ground where, for instance an Assyrian lives next door to a Nigerian, as it harbors peoples from dozens of different ethnicities and geographies.

In other parts of Kurtuluş, one can find certain groups clustered together. During my research, people pointed to two districts for being “preferred” by specific groups.

First one is the first two blocks of Bozkurt, Savaş, Kuyulubağ and Çobanoğlu Streets which are located between Feriköy and Kurtuluş Avenue. This side, as most of real estate agents remarked, was popular among Armenian families and is also known by its safety and higher prices of estates. The second zone associated with a particular population is the first two blocks of Eşref Efendi and Bilezikçi Streets, which are closer to the Dolapdere border of the neighborhood. It is frequently narrated by my informants that these blocks are preferred by trans sex workers in order to be closer to the cruising Avenues. Furthermore this area is also preferred by the recently increasing middle class residents who prefer to live here for its proximity to the subway. In this part of Kurtuluş, the atmosphere is less like a “traditional *mahalle*” with less surveillance as the narratives assert. Although my trans informants did not point out such a particular clustering of the trans community, as they narrated their history in the neighborhood, it became clear that many members of the trans community in Kurtuluş lived or still live in these blocks. This side of the neighborhood is also known for its clubs, pubs and *meyhanes*. The presence of such places were pointed as one of the reasons of this area’s “inappropriateness for families” by some of my conservative informants as they claim that these places disturb the environment with noise, fights and various immoralities of which trans presence is a part. Such statements reminded me of the words of Demet Demir as she explains the presence of *lubunya* population in particular areas, specifically Tarlabası, Taksim in her narrative, by arguing that such areas can shelter this population because there is a constructed *pavyon* culture and non-Muslim residents;

“That region could partly shelter. It is a district in where non-Muslims lived in past. Other than that in here [Taksim] there is a pub culture...it has to be a ground where the others can shelter.”²³ (Zengin; 364)

Kurtuluş also appears as one of those available neighborhoods with its *öteki* residents, however it is much more challenging to be categorized merely as a welcoming area for all the groups of *öteki*, as if there is no negotiations and tension between its residents to construct the practices of living together. For example, the

²³ “Orası biraz daha barındırabiliyordu. Gayrimüslimlerin de olduğu bir semti zamanında. Sonra bir de burası (Taksim) pavyon kültürü mültürü olduğu için de...ötekinin barınabileceği semtlerin zemini olması gerekiyor.” (Zengin; 364)

spatialized codes of sexuality play a crucial role in the everydayness of the LGBTI residents as I will discuss throughout the thesis. In the narratives of LGBTI informants, living with non-Muslims and other oppressed groups occurred with ambivalent feelings, especially in respect to safety, in addition to the repetitive statements about the strengthening aspect of this “togetherness” in the neighborhood. Nevertheless, it could be argued that LGBTI people from various districts and cities prefer to live in Kurtuluş more and more, and it indicates that the tension and the negotiations over the spatiality of the sexuality and queerness will become a more overt issue in the district as the time passes.

Before concluding the map of mobilities in the neighborhood, I want to briefly touch on the governmental consequence of the intense LGBTI population in the Kurtuluş as it is a district of the province Şişli. Situating Kurtuluş and its LGBTI population, without mentioning the Şişli Municipality, would be an incomplete attempt. The Municipality is one of the most pioneering municipalities in Istanbul in terms of its support for LGBTI rights. The 20 years of struggle of the LGBTI movement which gradually gained a significant visibility in the oppositional political scene of Turkey, and, more specifically, the presence and efforts of Boysan Yakar, a gay activist and Mayor Hayri İnönü’s adviser, whom we lost in a traffic accident in September 2015, constitute the major dynamics behind this support. In recent years, Şişli Municipality took noteworthy steps towards being an LGBTI-friendly local government. For example, it signed the LGBTI Friendly Municipality Protocol prepared by Social Policies, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Studies Association [SPOD] and became “one of the four municipalities won by candidates who had signed up to the LGBT Friendly Municipality Protocol ahead of the March 30 elections.”²⁴ . It provides free and anonymous health service such as HIV and STD tests by considering the needs of LGBTIs. The center in the district also works in the evening hours considering trans sex workers. This year there were flyers and banners all over the district hung by the municipality on the 20th of November, which is the day to commemorate the trans

²⁴ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/istanbul-district-municipality-to-provide-anonymous-and-free-health-service-for-lgbts.aspx?pageID=238&nID=73051&NewsCatID=339> accessed by 10.12.2015

victims of hate crimes. Finally, in Fall 2015, the Municipality established the Equality Unit to promote the LGBTI and women's rights along with the rights of other disadvantaged groups. All these developments, I think, stems from the fact that the LGBTI movement and community gained an important visibility and success to become a political subject. Şişli Municipality also acknowledges this progress of the LGBTI movement and the the undeniable intensity of the LGBTI population living in its district.

2.3. Kurtuluş As The Space Of Otherness

In the course of my field work, it was striking to come across a number of narratives relating the “tolerant” atmosphere of Kurtuluş for LGBTIs with its non-Muslim history and present. Below I extracted some quotes from my LGBTI informants.

Ceylan, a trans resident who lives in the first block of Baysungur Street on the Pangaltı side, describes Kurtuluş as the “center of others” and continues by differentiating Son Durak and Pangaltı;

“Here is not only for LGBTI individuals but more like a center of the others. There are many Armenians, Rums, blacks in Son Durak. There are Syrians, and a little down there Romans etc. Because all the groups after the demolition of Tarlabası came to the down parts of Kurtuluş, around Akarca slope etc. Here remained same. I think it became like the fusion of Tarlabası and Kurtuluş...

...[Son Durak] Of course I might not be comfortable as it receives migration and there is cultural difference. I am more comfortable in here, here is like people don't intervenes to each other. You don't meet your neighbors, you don't see them. The otherness of one is not a problem for another.”²⁵

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“Sadece LGBTI bireyler için değil burası aslında biraz ötekilerin merkezi gibi. Burada çok Ermeni Rumlar var ne biliyim siyahiler şimdi Kurtuluş'ta son durağın orada. Suriyeliler var biraz daha aşağıda romanlar var gibi. Çünkü şimdi Tarlabasının yıkılması oradaki o üst bölgenin binaların gitmesi falan orada gettolaşmış olan bütün kesim kurtuluşun daha alt kesimine doğru işte o Akarca yokuşuna falan geldi. Burası yine aynı kendi bölümünde duruyor. Yani Tarlabası'yla Kurtuluş'un birleşimi gibi bir şey oldu bence şu anda diye düşünüyorum...”

... (Son Durak'ta) Tabi ki göç aldığı için kültür farklılığı olduğu için daha rahat etmeyebilirim. Burada daha rahatım burada çok böyle kim kime dum duma. Böyle komşularınla çok tanışmıyorsun da görüşmüyorsun da. Bir şey de hiç kimsenin öteki olduğu bir birine çok sorun olmuyor.”

Miray (25), a bisexual woman resident, told me that Mecidiyeköy is also close to her workplace but she thought she would feel safer in Kurtuluş rather than Mecidiyeköy, which is why she moved in Kurtuluş. When I asked her why she felt safer in Kurtuluş, she replied:

“I think this district has this cultural neighborhood codes remained from Armenians. I think that affects. Armenians had problems. They don't judge another oppressed because they lived as oppressed. There is a gathering effect in being excluded. Maybe after all the problems are solved, they say we don't want you and push us but for now they don't have such a prejudice against different groups I think. Second, here is very complicated already, there are many groups. There are LGBT individual and also migrants. There are many separated groups. For example, it would be normal to exclude students in a district with families and old people. Because they wouldn't want people with irregular lives. They are not aggressive against students neither. People don't have such an excluding potential.”²⁶

Mavi (27), a trans resident, identifies the tendency of the LGBTİs to live in the same neighborhood as “ghettoization”:

“There is a link between people coming here and the minorities in here and their relationship with the hegemonic culture, just like there is a meaning of the presence of LGBTI organizations in Taksim, or there is a link between the streets of Trans in Tarlabası and the presence of Kurds who came there by forced migration. The presence of both the trans sex worker population and the Armenians in here is linked with LGBTI movement's struggle to build its own thing by taking example of identity politics. These things gather them together and it turns into a ghetto. I mean people don't prefer to live in Bakırköy but they live in here. It is close to city center, it also plays a role...Nevertheless it

²⁶ “Bence şöyle bir şey var; bu bölgenin yerleşim yeri olarak o ermenilerden gelen kültürel mahalle kodları var. Bence o etkili. Ermeniler belli sıkıntılar yaşamış insanlar. Tamamen öteki olarak yaşadıkları için topluma göre herhangi bir ötekiyi gördüklerinde o kadar anormal karşılamıyorlar. O dışlanmış olmanın grup dışına itilmiş olmanın birleştirici bir özelliği var. Sonradan belki, bütün problemler çözülsün biz sizi istemiyoruz diye itecekler ama şimdilik öyle bir önyargıları yok bence farklı gruplara karşı. ikincisi şey var, zaten burası çok karışık çok fazla grup var. LGBT bireyler de var diğer göçmenler de var. Ayrıştırılmış bir sürü grup var. Mesela bu kadar ailenin, yaş ortalaması yüksek insanların yaşadığı bir yerde öğrencilerin de itilmesi normal olabilirdi. Niye, istemeyecekler çünkü düzensiz hayatları olan insanları. öğrenciye karşı da agresif değiller. öyle bir dışlama potansiyeli yok insanların.”

is good information; this is a oversold residential area and if Armenians live nothing happens, I would be comfortable etc., I think that is important.”²⁷

Serhat (27) responded in the following way when I asked if he learned about the history of Kurtuluş after he became a resident:

“Of course I learned how it turned into Kurtuluş [*salvation*] from Tatavla. It is district had a previous Armenian name Tatavla then got burned on purpose and rebuilt with joy as Kurtuluş meaning we got rid off them. We as the people who know this, try not to use that Kurtuluş. But maybe %70 of them wouldn't know that. Kurtuluş, Kurtuluş why? fags and non-Muslims are very crowded. Why? It is tolerant etc. What were the hardship till this comfort/tolerance was gained? It shouldn't be considered as a salvation when the State kicked the non-Muslims here and replaced them with its own selected non-Muslims and call it salvation...”²⁸

He furthermore impressively constructs a strong parallel between the “brokenness” in a gay man’s oral expression and the “brokenness” in an Armenian woman’s Turkish, which come side by side in daily encounters:

“...They call here the future Cihangir. In terms of proximity and the location. Actually today we are benefitting from the non-Muslims. It might not be a rigt expression however the opposition of a Muslim and a non-Muslim living together is same with the opposition between the straights and LGBTIs. Let me not say the same but similar. Here is like the place of the others. There are too many homophobic, too many nationalists and racism. As many as in other places but here there is also this comfort that the lady in the queue says ‘I will

²⁷ “Nasıl ki bütün LGBTI örgütlerinin taksimde olmasının da bir anlamı ya da işte transların Tarlabasında sokaklarının olması oraya gelen yerleşip zorunlu göçle gelen Kürtlerle alakası varsa, buraya gelen insanların da buradaki o azınlık nüfusuyla ve onların ana-akım egemen kültürle ilişkilene biçimiyle çok alakası var yani. Hem burada bir seks işçisi trans popülasyonunun olması hem Ermenilerin olması ve bir şekilde LGBT hareketin de kendine kimlik politikalarını kendine prototip olarak alması ve kendi şeyini kurmaya çalışması falan bence çok etkili. Çeker bir birine o ve bir şekilde bir arada bulunma ve gettolaşma haline dönüşüyor. hani kalıp da insanlar Bakırköy’de yaşamayı tercih etmiyor da burada yaşamayı tercih ediyor. şey de etkili tabi şehir merkezine yakın bir yer... Tabi ki şey iyi bir bilgi yani; burası çok eski bir ermeni yerleşkesi ve ermeniler yaşıyorsa bir şey olmaz, daha rahat ederim falan o önemli bir şey bence.”

²⁸ “Tabi öğrendim öğreniyorsun Tatavla’dan Kurtuluş’a dönüşün nasıl bir şey olduğunu. önceki ermeni ismi Tatavla olan, bilerek yangın çıkarılıp daha sonra da üzerine güllük güllüstanlık “kurtuluş” kurtulduk anlamında isim takılan bir yer. yani o kurtuluşu aslında çok fazla kullanmamaya çalışıyoruz bilen insanlar olarak. ama belki %70i bilmiyordur. kurtuluş kurtuluş, neden? İşte ibneler çok gayrimüslimler çok. neden? Rahat falan. Aslında bu rahatlığı elde edene kadar yaşanan zorluklar neler. Devletin kendi seçili gayrimüslimlerini buraya yerleştirmesiyle buradakileri kovalayıp bunun adını da kurtuluş koyması falan çok da kurtuluş sayılmıyor aslında...”

buy a bread' with a broken Turkish. It brings, at the same time, a comfort to say 'I will buy a bread' in a broken, feminine way."²⁹

Taner (26) points out that an alliance between the LGBTI community and other oppressed groups are more likely and exciting :

“The minority understands the minority better.

-Do you think there is such a thing in here, among minorities, like a solidarity?

I think there is. White Turks don't have the same modesty of Rums and Armenians. The way they neighbor, communicate. The relationship, when they touch and approach. For example my next door is a very rich with properties etc but she is so modest. She lives like that. When she speaks about the problems of the poor etc. She is so simple, she thinks and reads, she is aware of the things.

-What about their homophobia?

You can sit and talk I think because the hegemony Turk Sunni Muslim I mean the hegemonic nation, hegemonic groups think that they own everything, they can control everything, they think the best. And it is more possible for us to build a life with minorities. I don't only speak about here, it is like this in Turkey in general. For example go to Gökçeada, there Rums and how sweet they are. I don't if this is peculiar to Rums and Armenians but I think it is about being a minority. Kurds in Turkey are also victims and you can sit and tell your problems they would understand you. Okay maybe it would be hard, their feudality could dominate, their patriarchy might render it harder but

²⁹ “...geleceğin cihangiri deniyor. Gerek lokasyon gerek yakınlık vesaire. Aslında şu anda gayrimüslimlerin ekmeğini yiyoruz. Bu çok doğru bir tabir olmayabilir ama bir Müslümanla gayrimüslimin bir arada yaşamasının getirmiş olduğu o zıtlıklarla bir heteroyle bir LGBTnin yaşamış olduğu zıtlıklar aynı aslında. Aynı demeyeyim de benzer şeyler aslında. E bu anlamda burası biraz daha öteki-lerin yeri gibi. Çok fazla homofobik var çok fazla ırkçılık milliyetçilik var. Her yerde olduğu kadar var ama burada hani şeyin rahatlığı da var. Bir kasada sırada beklerken önündeki teyzenin o kırık Türkçesiyle ekmek alıcam yavrum demesinin rahatlığı da var. Senin aynı o kırık hani biraz daha feminen dediğimiz 'ekmek alıcam' (taklit yapıyor) demenin rahatlığını da getiriyor aynı zamanda.”

nevertheless it is easier for us to communicate with a minority group. It excites me very much I mean.”³⁰

Kaya who is a gay resident born and raised in Kurtuluş also highlights Kurtuluş as the “neighborhood of others” and links this context of the neighborhood to its popularity among LGBTIs;

“The inevitable structure of here is the neighborhood of the others. Neighborhood of the others with Armenians Jewish Rums -I had my childhood in a building full of them- with all these I think trans people can breath easier in here comparing to another district of the city. It is an attractive district discharged from Rums Armenians Jewish and tolerant towards the other. The last part is LGBTs.

-[concerning the LGBTI population in Kurtuluş] We are aware of them with our radar but do you think other residents are also aware of that?

“I am afraid they wouldn’t want to be known with this. This is an exact Kurtuluş culture. The situation of Rums and Armenians to live in here without notice. Nothing should be apparent, sweet yeast bread will show up in easter,

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“yani azınlık azınlığın halinden iyi anlar.

-öyle bir şey var mı burada, bütün ötekilerin yan yana geldiği falan. dayanışma da var mı sence?

Bence var. O rumun ermeninin mütevaziliği beyaz türkte yok. Komşuluk yaparken iletişim kurarken. Kurduğu o ilişki. Dokunurken yaklaşırken. Tabi yani mesela yan koşum çok varlıklı falan evleri şusu busu var ama o kadar mütevazi ki. Böyle yaşıyor hayatını, konuşurken o yoksulun derdi vesaire. Çok kendi halinde hayatı böyle sürdürüyor düşünüyor okuyor farkında.

-homofobilerine dair-?

oturur konuşursun bence oturup konuşulabilir çünkü türk sünni müslüman yani egemen millet egemen gruplar memleketin sahibi olduklarını düşündükleri için her şeye söz geçirebileceklerini ve her şeyi en iyi kendilerinin bildiklerini falan düşünüyorlar. ve azınlıklarla bizim hayat kurmamız bence çok daha mümkün. bunu sadece burası için söylemiyorum türkiye genelinde böyle. git mesela gökçeada da orada da rumlar var o kadar tatlılar ki. bilmiyorum bu rumlara ermenilere dair bir şey mi. bence azınlığa dair bir şey. türkiyedeki kürtler de çok mağdurlar ve onlarla da oturup dertleşebilirsin ve anlarlar seni. tamam belki zor anlarsın feodal yönleri ağır basar ataerkil damarları zorlaştırabilir bizleri anlama açısından ama her şeye rağmen azınlık bir grupla bizlerin iletişim kurması çok daha kolay. beni çok heyecanlandırıyor yani.”

kosher things will be visible in certain stores but when it is time. Other than that, we will live in a closet way inside Istanbul.”³¹

The symbolic presence of non-Muslims in the bakery shops is worth pointing out. Recently, I came across a podcast by Murat Belge who talks about how one can find *topik*, an Armenian meze, in any deli in Kurtuluş. Yeliz also mentions the special pastries in the bakery for Christian holidays as reminders of the Armenian presence in the neighborhood;

“There are holidays of Christians and Jewish in the neighborhood, a history I don't know at all. There are sweets for them in the bakeries and you that it is experienced in the neighborhood, that is good. I don't have any neighbors, they are withdrawn a bit. For example, we see the names on the mail boxes in the building there are Armenian names on 7 or 8 of them, we greet each other when we encounter but we haven't met. My neighbors are my friends living here and their friends...

...African migrants are too many. I feel that Armenians and Rums have more like symbolic presence. Armenians are a huge part in the culture of here. Somehow you see on the street writings or in the bakeries but I haven't met in person.”³²

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“Buranın kaçınılmaz bir yapısı var, o da “ötekinin mahallesi”. Ötekinin mahallesi olma durumu Ermeninin Yahudinin Rumun olduğu -ki benim çocukluğum tamamen onlardan oluşan bir apartmanda büyüyerek geçti-onlarla birlikte bence translar bir şekilde şehrin başka bir yerinden daha rahat nefes alabiliyorlardır.

Rumlardan Ermenilerden Yahudilerden boşalan bu semtin ötekiye görece ‘hoşgörülü’ hali hep bu dinamiklerin çekim noktası yaratıyor burada. Son parti de LGBTler bence.

-Bütün bunları biz radarımızla farkediyoruz ama acaba mahalleli farkında mı?

Ben korkarım böyle bilinmek istemiyorlardır. Tam Kurtuluş kültürü bu. Rumların Ermenilerin burada yıllardır çaktırmadan yaşayalım abi durumu. Hiç bir şey bu kadar belirgin olmasın işte paskalya çöreği sadece paskalyada ortaya çıksın, Koşer şeylerini sadece bazı mağazaların camlarında gör ama zamanı gelince. Onun dışında biz burada İstanbulun içinde kapalı kapalı yaşayıp gidelim.”

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“Mahallede hristiyanların musevilerin vesaire dini bayramları oluyor hiç bilmediğim bir tarih yani. Sürekli fırnlarda onlara uygun tatlılar çıkıyor falan mahallede onun yaşatıldığını görüyorsun o güzel bir şey. Hiç komşu edinmedim biraz kapalılar. Mesela apartmanda posta kutularında isimlere bakıyoruz 7-8 tane ermeni ismi var, karşılaşınca selamlaşıyoruz ama bir tanışıklık olmadı. Komşularım buraya gelen diğer arkadaşlar ve onların burada yaşayan arkadaşları...

...Afrikadan gelen göçmenler çok fazla. Ermenilerin ve Rumların daha sembolik olarak hissediyorum varlıklarını. Buranın kültürünü oluşturan büyük parçalardan biri Ermenilik. Bir şekilde duvar yazılarında fırnlarda görüyorsun ama insan olarak tanışmadım hiç.

Moreover, she voices her wish for the “others” of Kurtuluş to come together in political solidarity;

“I really liked the movie Pride. I would want such a thing. I mean alliances. There, I really liked the gays and lesbians support miners, I wish it happened in here as well, for example we support the old people. Actually there are migrants, Syrian migrants African migrants, people who survived holding on to each other actually. I wish it was a neighborhood where the groups are more connected. Because here we brag about there are these these, it sounds good to live in a neighborhood where everybody lives but how these people live, there is not a joyful togetherness. Or a neighborhood center which might be opened by the municipality excites me. There are a lot of empty buildings, if it helps to turn one of them into a neighborhood center, that would be a place where everybody sees each other. And I wish we were open with our identities, I wish it was something normal and we were accepted.”³³

She indicates the tension behind this mostly romanticized ‘mosaic’ tableaux in Kurtuluş by implying the difficult conditions of the migrants and the ‘closet’ interactions of LGBTIs.

The relatively new gay-friendly cafe with its rainbow flag easily seen from the street has contributed significantly to this visibility. When I asked about the move to hang the flag above the window, Emre, who runs the cafe, spoke about his feeling of security in Kurtuluş as it predominantly harbors the oppressed;

“We would hang the flag...well [he stops] the risk is being close to Son Durak but I think Son Durak is not that scary as it was called. Everyone is stranger as it is all mixed up. When we say Kurtuluş, I think we imply there with its mix... I think everybody is distant and tolerant because they are all strangers. Nobody can say anything to another because there are blacks etc. For example, do the blacks will attack here because it is gay...I mean I don't think so. I don't think

“...Pride’ı izledikten sonra çok beğendim.öyle bir şey isterdim. ittifaklar aslında. Orada madencileri destekleyen geyler ve lezbiyenler çok hoşuma gıtmişti, burada da öyle olsa yaşlıları desteklesek mesela. Göçmenler var aslında Suriyeli göçmenler Afrikalı göçmenler birbirlerine tutunarak hayatta kalmış insanlar aslında yani. Grupların daha ilişkili daha eşit olduğu bir mahalle olsaydı. Çünkü biz burada övünerek şunlar da var bunlar da var diyoruz, herkesin yaşadığı bir mahalle bize güzel geliyor da o insanlar bir arada nasıl yaşıyor öyle güllük gülistan bir bir aradalık yok. Ya da belediyenin açacağı bir mahalle evi bana heyecanlı geliyor. bir sürü atıl bina var onlardan birini mahalle evine çevirmede yardımcı olsa orası herkesin birbirini gördüğü bir yer olur. bir de keşke açık olabilsek kimliğimizle keşke normal bir şey olsa kabul görsek.”

there are religious islamists. Will the Armenians attack; no. When we think of the groups one by one there is no danger I think. Shopkeepers may spread a rumor thats all.”³⁴

The link constructed between the presence of LGBTIs and other oppressed groups in the narratives of LGBTI informants is worth another interrogation, as they point out various aspects of conviviality and social interactions, including the practices of *komşuluk* [relations among neighbors]. Although the narratives predominantly describe the togetherness of many oppressed groups as an advantage for the LGBTI community in the district, I have come across a few contesting perspectives. For example, the “conservative Kurds” or “scared Armenians” were some of the statements used to express hesitations about feeling safe in the neighborhood. Ceyda, a trans resident living in Kurtuluş for fifteen years, comments on the interactions of non-Muslims with *lubunyas* and Turks;

“Non-Muslims don’t contact with us. They are so scared and withdrawn. They are afraid of Turks. They are not homophobic but they are distant to Turks. They don’t talk to the ones they are not close. They talk when they understand your point of view, that you are not discriminatory. They can see you as one of them, modern then they become close to you. Other than that they are definitely not open to others.”³⁵

The distance and the silence of non-Muslim peoples was also brought up by Dikran Bey (63) when he mentioned the march that took place on Kurtuluş Avenue for the commemoration of the Armenian Genocide on April 24th:

³⁴ “(Bayrağı) Dikeriz...eee(duraksıyor)...şey riski Son Durak’a yakın olması ama Son Durak da zaten aslında bence o kadar korkulduğu kadar değil yani. Karmakarışık olduğu için herkes yabancı. Hani Kurtuluş’un o...Kurtuluş Kurtuluş diyoruz hani asıl orayı kas-
tediyoruz bence karmaşıklıkla...herkes yabancı olduğu için bence herkes hoşgörülü ve mesafeli. Kimse birbirine bir şey diyemiyor
çünkü işte zencisi var şusu var busu var. Mesela zenciler mi buraya saldıracak gey diye...yani sanmıyorum. Hani öyle bir çok dinci,
ümmeççi birileri de yok diye düşünüyorum. Böyle bir grup da yok. Ermeniler mi saldıracak; yooook. Tek tek grupları düşündüğümde
öyle bir tehlike yok bence. Esnaf dedikodu çıkarır, dedikoduyla kalır.”

³⁵ “Gayrimüslimler zaten bizle muhatap olmuyorlar. çok korkaklar çok türkeler. Türklerden çok çekiniyorlar. Homofobik değiller
ama genelde Türklere karşı çok temkinliler. samimi olduklarının dışında kimseyle konuşmuyorlar. O da nasıl konuşuyor senin ayırım-
cı olmadığını anlıyor, senin hayata bakışını anlıyor. Seni modern kendinden gibi görebiliyor o zaman seninle samimi oluyor. ama
onun dışında dışarıya açık değiller kesinlikle.”

“It was very crowded, the march was for Armenians but truthfully there were more Turks than Armenian. Armenians had a fear, they are still scared. As these fellows both Melih Gökçek and the president say diaspora diaspora, Armenian Armenian on the televisions...most of people stopped greeting us.”³⁶

Later on, as I came up with some questions about the queers of neighborhood, he said;

“We are more conservative than the Muslims in these issues. We exclude even the ones from our own community. I met one and I clearly said ‘dont come over again my child’. We don't tolerate such things. Neither do Rums, although they have many.”³⁷

Kurtuluş, as the space of others, who were “thrown out” to live together, or preferred to build this togetherness as in the case of LGBTIs moving to the neighborhood, contains many tensions and unsettling encounters, similar to other places that harbor such diversity. Since the interrogation of all these encounters and narratives exceeds the extent of my research, I only discuss the narratives of LGBTIs about the neighborhood and the other residents of Kurtuluş, which both refer to the potential of exciting alliances as well as to the tensions present among the oppressed groups stemming from the different layers of otherness.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduced the non-Muslim past of Kurtuluş and the narratives of nostalgia, constructed by shopkeepers and residents, about this very past of the district. I laid out the geographical distribution of the current residents who have different backgrounds of domestic and international migration, and the sizeable LGBTI community along with their interactions with the other resident groups in the

³⁶ “Kalabalıktı baya kalabalıktı ama doğrusunu söyleyelim Ermeniler için yürüyüş yapıldı ama Ermenilerden çok Türkler yürüdü yani. Ermeniler çünkü çekindiler, hala çekiniyorlar. Çünkü bu arkadaşlar televizyonda Melih Gökçek olsun Cumhurbaşkanı olsun diaspora da diaspora Ermeni diye diye...çoğu insanlar bizimle selamı sabahı da kesiyor.”

³⁷ “Biz Müslümanlardan bu konularda daha tutucuyuzdur. Kendi cemaatimizden olanları bile dışlarız. Bir tane tanıdım öyle açık açık, ‘bir daha buraya gelme yavrum’ dedim. Biz hoş karşılamayız. Rumlar da hoş karşılamaz, ki onlarda çok vardır

neighborhood. Kurtuluş is defined by some LGBTI informants as ‘the ghetto of *öteki*’ with ambivalent narratives which state both empowerment and hesitation as I will discuss in the coming parts. The heterogeneity of the district, on the other hand, is expressed by the *esnaf* with some expressions such as “whatever you look for is here”³⁸ or “there are women with headscarf and also there call girl”³⁹

All these tensions between various resident groups construct Kurtuluş as a sociologically complicated site. The transformation of the neighborhood becomes gradually more observable with its recently open boutique cafes, franchise restaurants and renovated buildings and hostels, and this situation adds another layer to the tension and the spatial negotiations which take place in the district.

³⁸ “ne ararsan var.”

³⁹ “Başörtülüsü de telekızı da burada”.

CHAPTER 3

PRACTICES OF LGBTI COMMUNITY-BUILDING AND THE QUEER SOCIAL SPACES IN KURTULUŞ

Kurtuluş and the experiences of the LGBTI community living in the neighborhood was my interest with a spatial focus. In this chapter, I will discuss the practices of community building and the LGBTI-social spaces which render such practices possible in Kurtuluş.

3.1 “Why Kurtuluş? - *Because it is so close to Taksim*”

Remarkable intensity of the LGBTI population in Kurtuluş was my starting point for this thesis as I mentioned in Chapter 1. In the interviews, I particularly asked to - both LGBT and non-LGBT informants- about the possible motivations of LGBT residents to move to Kurtuluş. Proximity to Taksim, Beyoğlu was one of the two prominent answers⁴⁰ that came from almost everyone. In order to give an insight about the significance of Taksim for many LGBTI individuals in Turkey, a brief history of the district would be appropriate. Alp Biricik (2013) explores the practices of LGBTs to find the non-heterosexual public places in order to meet other LGBTI people. Departing from the narratives of his informants, who are mostly in their 40s and 50s today, he asserts that finding homosexual places was possible by going to the city, which is Istanbul in this case, particularly to Beyoğlu in the 1980s and 90s. Going to Beyoğlu⁴¹ and hanging out with strangers meant to be a part of the social relations that produce the space, thus to become a producers of the space (2013: 193). He also points out the different tactics of lesbians and gays due to the gendered aspect of their public presence. Whereas gay men mostly mention public spaces such as Taksim square and the parks

⁴⁰ The other answer was crudely the pluralist structure (*çoğulcu, kim kime dum duma, kırk ambar, ne idüğü belirsizler kervanı etc. in some informants' words*) of Kurtuluş as discussed at the end of the previous chapter.

⁴¹ *Beyoğlu'na “çıkma”* (2013: 193)

around Istiklal Street when they are asked about places for possible homoerotic encounters, lesbians tell a different story. Lesbian women created their own possibilities for finding each other, most notably by distributing flyers of their political organization to the cafes and bars around Beyoğlu in the 1990s (2013: 198).

Historical importance of Beyoğlu for LGBTI residents of Istanbul is still valid as most of my interviewees particularly mentioned either openly gay clubs or gay-friendly clubs in Harbiye and Taksim which are within walking distance from Kurtuluş. Parks and other outside places were not specified by my interviewees, perhaps because of the increase in the LGBTI and LGBTI-friendly spaces such as the offices of organizations and the cafes run by openly LGBTI people, or maybe because of the similar class positions of my interviewees as they mostly socialize in certain openly-gay or gay-friendly places. That is to say, parks and outside places still could be a significant social space for other class of gay men. Gendered experience of the public -of Taksim in particular-was again remarkably different several years after the period discussed by Biricik's informants. Lesbian clubs and bars are quite fewer compared to gay clubs in general. During my fieldwork, although gay residents specifically named certain clubs in Harbiye and Beyoğlu, none of my lesbian informants named the places they hang out, but rather implied the advantage of being close to Taksim, in terms of being close to the homosocial spaces, with the word "central".⁴² It gives a hint about how the non-heterosexual urban experience is quite dissimilar based on gender in the narratives of cis-gender [non-trans] lesbians and gays. This issue is worth another interrogation especially because of the fact that the literature on lesbian subjectivities and sociality in Turkey is extremely limited.

Significance of Beyoğlu has also been argued by Aslı Zengin (2014) in her work on the heterosexist aspect of urban gentrification in regard to trans women in Istanbul. Based on the narratives of trans sex workers, she proposes three main reasons for trans women to be bonded to Beyoğlu. First, since most of them make their living out of sex work, Beyoğlu is an essential cruising zone to find clients. Second, Beyoğlu is perceived as a cosmopolitan district which is tolerant to non-normative bodies and

⁴² *With the word "merkezi"*

sexualities. Third, all the places in which LGBT people feel home are in Taksim, Beyoğlu such as organizations and friendly cafes (2014: 372-73). In this very study, Zengin states that most trans sex workers were forced to move out of Beyoğlu to other close districts such as Kurtuluş, Dolapdere and Pangaltı by the gentrification projects targeting Taksim [specially Cihangir and Tarlabası]. This story of migration from Taksim to Kurtuluş, Pangaltı precisely coincides with the narratives of all my trans interviewees, except for one who moved from Ortaköy to Kurtuluş. In my ethnographic inquiry, one remarkable moving out story belongs to Ceyda who is a 58 year-old former sex worker who rarely works these days. She is known as one of the oldest *lubunya* of Kurtuluş since she has been living in the neighborhood for fifteen years. She first comes to Tarlabası when she escapes from her hometown and Beyoğlu has an important place in her first years of queerness. When she was talking about how she bought her apartment in Kurtuluş Avenue, she told the following story which is about rejecting a chance to buy an apartment much cheaper than its value:

“The girl told me that I give it to you for 500. I had 800 she will give me for 500 but i hated the police in Beyoğlu so much. I hated them so much. The apartment is in Başkurt Street, 2+1 a huge one but it is connected to Beyoğlu. Because of my hate for the police in Beyoğlu I said to the girl that I don’t want Cihangir. I said I want Şişli. There are families living in here, however the police of this region is better. When the police in Beyoğlu take us, the way they treated us... however when the police of Nişantaşı take us, they were much nicer, they even sometimes offered us tea while we were sitting. This side was always kinder. So I always hated the other side (Beyoğlu)”⁴³

During the 1990s there was systematic police violence which came to a peak in 1996 with the *Ülker Street Events*. Police operations intensified for the sake of Habitat II project [the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements] to ‘clean’ Beyoğlu from the unwanted such as street kids, transvestites, migrants, thieves, drug dealers, street animals etc. (Selek 2007, Zengin 2014, Çalışkan 2014). Ceyda’s strongest motivation to move to Kurtuluş was this violent encounter with police in Beyoğlu and

⁴³ “Kız bana dedi ki 500e vereyim sana bunu. benim 800üm var kız bana 500e verecek ama Beyoğlu polisinden o kadar nefret etmiştim ki. o kadar nefret etmiştim ki. Başkurt Sokak’ta ev de, 2 oda 1 salon kocaman ev, ama nereye bağlı Beyoğlu’na bağlı. yani Beyoğlu’ndaki o polis nefretinden kıza dedim ki kusura bakma Cihangir istemiyorum. Ben dedim Şişli istiyorum. Burada da aileler oturuyor ama bu tarafın polisi daha iyi. Mesela polis Beyoğlu’nda aldı mı bize nasıl davranırdı, Nişantaşı polisi aldı mı çok daha kibar davranırdı, bazen çay bile verirdi bize otururken. Bu taraf hep daha kibar. O yüzden o taraftan hep nefret ettim.”

“the kindness” of the Şişli Police Department. During our interview, she also gave a lot of geographic directions and descriptions by using the locations of police departments in both Beyoğlu and Şişli. Neither I had personally thought of comparing these two police departments, especially in relation to my residence preference, nor did any of my non-trans gay and lesbian informants made any similar reference. As I listened to Ceyda, one of the main axes of this thesis became crystallized and I took a deep breath. I was feeling a bit lost at that moment because of the rich and endless material this *kadim*⁴⁴ neighborhood provided for me. Encounters between LGB and Trans residents was one of my original points of interests because of the distinct public experiences, levels of visibility and class positions. As I went further in my fieldwork, the experiences and negotiations of the trans residents, within the geography of Kurtuluş, appeared more concretely in many aspects as I will discuss in the coming parts.

3.2. Gaydar beeps in Kurtuluş a.k.a. the neighborhood where you can ‘give a paw’ in the grocery⁴⁵

When I first started to talk about my possible thesis topic to my LGBT friends living in Kurtuluş, I wanted to be sure if we were really as crowded as I thought we were as LGBTI residents in the neighborhood. Therefore I was asking them if they encounter other queers as frequent as I do on the streets or at the stores. We already had a lot of moments when we would say each other ‘radar’ or ‘is she/he radar?’ when we see a potential gay and lesbian passing by. Nevertheless, this weird detection mechanism became a major source of my interest in the LGBT population of Kurtuluş. Based on my observations, I can suggest that this very radar is not used for most of the trans passersby, although such a statement carries the risk to be understood as transnormative⁴⁶ as if there is a specific way to appear as trans, It stems from their undeniable visibility most of the time. I was responded with a mocking laugh when I

⁴⁴ dictionary suggests some English words such as old, primeval, ancient which do not precisely correspond to the context of *kadim* as it is used in Turkish with a meaning of old, solid and valuable rather than only anciently old. And also I often hear *kadim* as an adjective to describe Kurtuluş just as in Hüseyin Irmak’s memoir “İstanbul’da Bir Kadim Semt Yaşadığım Kurtuluş” 2003, Aras Yayıncılık, İstanbul.

⁴⁵ It is directly quoted from an interview I conducted with a lesbian resident of Kurtuluş “*Manavımda “pati atlabilen” *mahalle*”. ‘Giving a paw’ refers to the act of liking (sending a paw sign) someone in the Wapa which is an online dating application for lesbians.

⁴⁶ refers to the normative understanding of trans subjectivity.

asked a trans interviewee if she is out to the people in the neighborhood. I got similar responses from other trans residents as well which I believe also affirms my observation that Gaydar is out of order for trans targets.

This particular radar is described as “the recognition of verbal and non-verbal behavior associated with gay identity” and named as “Gaydar.” by Cheryl L. Nicholas (2004: 60). She continues defining Gaydar as it is “simply used to label particular social meanings around an organization of behavior. Gaydar is created, named, and reified by the gay community within the interactive process” (Nicholas 2004: 61). Although there is only ‘gay’ in the name of the term, she discusses this communicative event by also referring to lesbian communities throughout the paper. To turn back to the inappropriateness of Gaydar with the trans people could be illustrated by noting that the prerequisite of the Gaydar is the norm [hetero-norm in this case] as the norm renders the target invisible and necessitates a subtle recognition mechanism. Nicholas explains this “ontological basis for Gaydar operations” by pointing out that “gay and lesbian identity recognition processes thrive in societal contexts where “invisibility” dominates as the norm for gay and lesbian cultural affiliation” (Nicholas 2004: 64). Before discussing the negotiation for the gender non-normative visibility in the public space of Kurtuluş, I want to argue some other remarkable aspects of Gaydar in order to provide a solid background about the homosocial environment in the neighborhood.

The following quote about Kurtuluş belongs to my informant Songül who is a 29 year-old lesbian woman:

“There are (LGBTs) in Çapa but there is no such thing as ‘looking into the eye’. I lived in Çapa for years, neither I looked into someone’s eyes nor someone looked into my eyes. However since everybody has a potential [to be LGBT] here, everybody is looking into each other’s eyes.”⁴⁷

Her observation about ‘looking into each other’s eye’ directly speaks to Nicholas’s proposition that “eye- gaze is employed during Gaydar activation” for

⁴⁷ “Çapa’da mesela var ama çapada işte o göze bakma durumu yok. ben kaç yıl çapada yaşadım ne kimse benim gözümün içine baktı ne ben kimsenin gözünün içine baktım. Ama burada herkes potansiyel olduğu için herkes birbirinin gözünün içine bakıyor zaten “

several specific functions such as “to show interest in the person because of the possibility that that person could be interested as well” (2004: 72). Furthermore, the possibility prevailing in such public encounters also implies another tacit recognition which could be crudely put as the exploration of a LGBTI community. Even though the result was not a face to face acquaintanceship most of the time, this was what I have experienced in my first days in the district. My Gaydar was triggered so often when I went out in public that I started building a sense of community associated with the neighborhood. In relation to this gaze-based sense of community, Nicholas stresses that “the gaze initiates a brief and secret kinship, much akin to our understanding of recognition of cultural competence behind a demonstration of a shared cultural identity” (2004: 74). Echoing this quote, Miray, a 25 year-old lesbian living in Kurtuluş, narrates the following about her tacit recognition of *the others* in the neighborhood:

“You look at each other, you understand, you smile...as if you already know her. Or if there is a situation right there and if you understand each other, you ally to react against the situation. These kinds of things happen. This is like, how to say, you see someone like you.”⁴⁸

Songül tells:

“For example when I go to Carrefour, to Migros or to a grocery, I look at her, she looks back at me and this is very lovely. We don’t need to talk at all. I feel happy when I feel that she is there. And this is what a person wants.”⁴⁹

Departing from these two narratives, which refer to the tacit recognition of a “possible member of the same in-group” (Nicholas 2004: 72), I want to lay out my interrogation around these two concepts; public and visibility. If the members of this very ‘in-group’ is somehow visible to each other, I want to pose a set of questions : What constitutes this particular group/public right here in Kurtuluş? Is it counter? Is it queer? What kind of spatial embodiments are built and contested? What are the limits of

⁴⁸ “bakışyorsun anlıyorsun gülümsüyorsun...sanki tanıyormuş gibi. ya da bir olay varsa orada ve tanıyorsan anladıysan bir birini ortaklaşıyorsun orada o olaya tepki verirken. böyle şeyler oluyor. ya bu işte nasıl anlatayım kendin gibi birini görüyorsun.”

⁴⁹ “Mesela ben bir Carrefour’a bir Migros’a ya da bir pazara gittiğim zaman ben bakıyorum mesela, o da bana bakıyor ve bu çok tatlı bir şey. hiç konuşmamıza gerek yok ben onun var olduğunu hissettiğim anda mutlu oluyorum. ve insan bunu istiyor.”

“the public”? If Kurtuluş is an LGBTI social space; what kind of tensions does this visibility provoke in public space? How do LGBT residents negotiate the presence of queerness as a component of the neighborhood among each other and with the other residents? How do LGBTI residents experience and negotiate the boundaries of public and the private in Kurtuluş? In the following parts, I will discuss the various narratives of LGBTI residents on the sense of community in Kurtuluş and the queer social spaces which enable the production of this very sense.

3.3. What binds us here in Kurtuluş?

3.3.1. Community

“I love Kurtuluş because seriously all my close friends are here. Here, the consciousness of political organizing is better. There is at least one trans living in each building in Şişli or Sıracevizler, but they are distant to each other. Indeed, I want the ghetto back that’s why I want to come back here.”⁵⁰

The quote above belongs to Tanya who is a 19 year-old trans woman who had lived in Kurtuluş for a year and then moved to Şişli. During the days we did the interview, she was looking for an apartment to come back to Kurtuluş.

Serhat, 27 year-old gay living in Kurtuluş for three and a half years, again refers to the community of which he is a part. He tells his discovery of the community by using the word ghetto just like Tanya:

“-Did you know about the LGBT population in the neighborhood before you moved in?”

No, not at all. And I guess that was my only luck, I just fell right in it, I guess this is called discovering without knowing.

⁵⁰ “Kurtuluşu seviyorum çünkü gerçekten bütün arkadaşlarım yakın çevrem burada. Burada o örgütlülük bilinci daha yüksek. Şişlide falan ya da Sıracevizler caddesinde her apartmanda en az bir tane trans oturuyor ama yani şeyler böyle...çok uzaklar bir birlerine. O gettoyu istediğim için aslında tekrar buraya gelmek istiyorum biraz. “

-What did you discover?

-There is a ghetto in here, seriously a ghetto. When I first moved in here, there was no one that I knew closely. First 3-4 months I had a hard time, I had no entourage. I was in an organization in Eskişehir, I knew Z., L. etc. but we were not close as I was away.

-What about the neighbor gays? Did you recognize them?

Of course, at that first night!”⁵¹

Taner, another gay resident living in Kurtuluş for three years, shares his conversation with another gay friend who is considering moving to Kurtuluş;

“He heard that it is crowded here. And in addition, to take advantage of the location of the district, he wants to be in touch with the people living in the same neighborhood. He also wants to benefit from that...he said there is also a cafe. You go to cafe. So, all these things are attractive.”⁵²

Compared to the above usage of the term ghetto, in the literature on queer geography, the notion of “gay ghetto” has a totally different connotation. In the literature on North America and Western Europe, the term “gay ghetto” is predominantly discussed at the intersection of gentrification and homonormativity since the process of gentrification observed in gay villages imposes a specific lifestyle, that of the middle-class, white gay male (Knopp 1995, Bell & Valentine 1995, Brown 2006, Binnie & Skeggs 2006, Ruiz 2012, Hubbard 2014). Such districts are encouraged to be ghettoized by the acceptable -mostly- gay and lesbian residents, entrepreneurs and also the urban governance policies. In Turkey, we do not have an openly LGBT ghetto neighborhood as a residential area which is publicly supported and benefitted from by the policy makers or entrepreneurs. Some of the ‘ghettos’ of Istanbul LGBTI history

⁵¹ “Hiç yoktu. Direk şak diye düştüm ve tek şanslı olduğum şey herhalde direk ortasına düştüm yani bilmeden keşfetmek deniyor herhalde buna. Neyi keşfettin? E burada bir getto hani baya baya getto var. Ben buraya taşındığımda çok samimi olduğum insanlar yoktu. İlk 3-4 ay zorlandım, çevrem yoktu. Eskişehirden örgütlüyüm falan Z’yi tanıyodum L’ı tanıyordum ama uzakta olduğum için çok samimi değildik merhaba merhaba. Komşu geyler? Onları farkettiler mi hemen? Tabi taşınır taşınmaz. Hem de ilk gece!”

⁵² Buranın kalabalık olduğunu duymuş aynı zamanda. Ve istiyor ki buraya geldiğinde lokasyonun avantajının yanında aynı mahallede yaşadığı insanlarla iletişim halinde olmak da istiyor. Onun avantajından da yararlanmak istiyor... Şey dedi a orada kafe de var zaten. Kafeye gidiyorsunuz, Kafe de açıldı orada falan. Tüm bunlar çekici dolayısıyla.”

were Abanoz, Pürtelaş and Ülker streets, and Tarlabası - Cihangir districts. These were the liberated areas of trans sex workers and have been ‘cleaned up’ by the collaboration of police and gentrifiers (Selek 2007). However there have been no visible middle class gays and lesbians who have opened up cafes, bars and stores by imbuing the urban space with rainbow flags as observed in some of the cases in *gayborhoods* (Ghaziani 2014) in other contexts. Nor do we have entrepreneurs who advice each other to build a gay village to gentrify a district in Turkey.⁵³This is obviously because of the different social, cultural, legal and economical positions of LGBTI subjects and communities in Turkey compared to other geographies studied in the literature.

Although it might be misleading in regard to the predominant use of the term “ghetto” in the literature, it is remarkable that some of my informants preferred to use the word ghetto for Kurtuluş during in the interviews. Based on my everyday life in Kurtuluş, I can say that ghetto is also used among some other LGBTI residents that I did not interview. Because, Kurtuluş [with its remarkable LGBTI population, its ‘gay-friendly’ cafe and its LGBTI organization] could be considered as a kind of a residential LGBTI ghetto especially for those who are in-the-know. In other words, Kurtuluş is not pointed as a gay town in Istanbul gay map or it is not known with its LGBTI residents, gay cafes or the rainbow flags in its public spaces, however it harbors a sizeable LGBTI community, and this community has somehow built a sense of togetherness within this particular geography of Kurtuluş. Berlant and Warner (1998) gives the example of Christopher Street⁵⁴ in New York and assert that the density of the queer population in a certain space comes along with political potential. They state that “after a certain point, a quantitative change is a qualitative change. A critical mass develops. The street becomes queer... No group is more dependent on this kind of pattern in urban space than queers. If we could not concentrate a publicly accessible culture somewhere, we would always be outnumbered and overwhelmed.” (Berlant & Warner 1998: 562-563). What does it mean to live with all these other LGBTI residents and share the same

⁵³ http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2013/11/15/detroit_is_bankrupt_could_a_gay_neighborhood_save_the_city.html

⁵⁴ The Street has an historical importance as it harbors the bar Stonewall Inn which is the place of the Stonewall Riots (the leading milestone resistance for the LGBTI rights movement in States)

neighborhood if “urban locale” is not “a community of shared interest based on residence and property” (Berlant & Warner 1998: 563). What makes them a community and what is queer about this community beyond being LGBTIs who only reside in the space?

First of all, I should note that because of my very own position as a lesbian resident living in the neighborhood, I initially accessed a community of which I am also a part. The informants who refer to a community mostly refers to the same community because of their common social environment which might not require a face-to-face acquaintance. Taner talks about this sense of community as the following;

“Even though I don't meet them face to face, most of us know each other when we encounter each other in the neighborhood, from the applications, Hornet⁵⁵, from the places, from the encounters in Taksim, from the events etc. All in all we are a small group in Istanbul, we are few. We know each other's faces. For example there is an underground cafe where people socialize, even I didn't know that.”[referring to the cafe I will mention below as it is a queer social space in Kurtuluş used by old trans women and lesbians in their 40s and 50s].⁵⁶

Taner's words give a clue about the community which is not only based on the shared physical space of the neighborhood but also on the virtual social space, activist circles and events which is not necessarily within the boundaries of Kurtuluş. Moreover, the class position and cultural-political repertoire and engagements of the members of this very community shows similarities. Although it varies, they are mostly university graduates [or students], freelance or white collar workers who follows the social and political events organized by the LGBTI groups in Istanbul. Generation wise, I can also assert that gays and lesbians who are in their 20s and 30s are more in number.

⁵⁵ Smart phone application for online gay dating

⁵⁶ “Çoğumuz birbirimizi tanıyoruz mahallede karşılaştığımızda yüz yüze tanışmamış olsam bile aplikasyonlardan Hornetten mekanlardan taksimde karşılaşmalardan etkinliklerden ne biliyim. e tabi neticede küçük bir grubuz istanbulda az kişiyiz. suratlarını biliyoruz bir birimizin.düşünsene mesela neler varmış mesela yeraltında kafeler varmış insanlar sosyalleşiyormuş ben bile bilmiyorum.”

On the other hand, the community of trans sex workers living and working in Kurtuluş and Pangaltı since the 1990s, should be discussed as another network since they have another relationship with the neighborhood and the residents. They use certain zones in the district for cruising and they usually use urban space at night because of the sex work [although in Kurtuluş there are several girls who walk around during the day].⁵⁷ Because of spatially and temporally different practices, most of the time pathways of gays and lesbians bypass those of the trans'. The reasons of their need for community and solidarity usually differ also because of some urgent and violent situations such as hate murder. The fictive kinship relationship among trans women also should be noted here as it refers to a prevalent solidarity network which is not observed among LGB communities (Çalışkan 2014). Deme who is a trans activist living in Kurtuluş for ten years expresses the following about the regional trans network:

“Ours is not like a neighborhood solidarity. There is a regional solidarity. For example, once they shot a girl, she was about to die. We were in Şişli Etfal at midnight as 40 trans women. A small forum was organized. I was right back from work and at that time of the night I went there. The girls were already there. I mean there is a regional thing. They even came from Avcılar out of the region. When something happens we inform each other through social media anyway.”⁵⁸

She also implies that the communal bonds of queer communities surpass the shared neighborhood or particular districts. Warner and Berlant (1998) note that “*community* is imagined through scenes of intimacy, coupling, and kinship; a historical relation to futurity is restricted to generational narrative and reproduction. ...as whole-person, face-to-face relations-local, experiential, proximate, and saturating. But queer worlds seldom manifest themselves in such forms.” (554). As Taner and Ceylan also illustrated, queer worlds, rather, are constituted around “a shared sexual orientation”, eventhough I would prefer to conceptualize it as the shared non-normative gender or sexuality also a shared political stance instead of “sexual orientation” (D’Emilio cited in

⁵⁷ “gündüz gezen kızlar” as one of my trans informants called.

⁵⁸ “Bizimki mahalle dayanışması gibi bir şey olmuyor. Bölgesel bir dayanışma var. Mesela kurtuluşta bir tane kızı vurdular ölmek üzereydi. Gece yarısı 40 tane falan tras kadın Şişli Etfal’deydik. Orada küçük bir forum yapıldı. Ben işten gelmiştim gittim sabah kaçta geldim ben gecenin bir yarısı geldim oraya gittim mesela. Kızlar zaten oradalardı falan. Yani bölgesel şeyler var. Bölgenin dışında atıyorum Avcılardan bile gece kalkıp geldiler. Bir olay olduğunda sosyal medya üzerinde zaten bir birimizle haberleşiyoruz.”

Berlant and Warner, 1998: 554). All in all, Kurtuluş is a residential area which provides a spatial intensity to solidify the sense of share and community.

Another definition of the community is made by Sarah Thornton (1997: 2) as it “tends to suggest a more permanent population, often aligned to a neighborhood, of which the family is the key constituent part. Kinship would seem to be one of the main building blocks of community” (Thornton cited in Halberstam, 2005: 154). Although I won't be discussing the fictive kinship dynamics among queers in detail in my case, there is an important aspect of community building for LGBTI residents of Kurtuluş in relation to the notion of family. One of the key motivations stressed by my informants to live together with the other LGBTIs in the same neighborhood was their queer future imagination which is out of heterosexual family and time. If the “queer” is, as Halberstam defines, “the non-normative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time”, this very community of Kurtuluş also displays an alternative understanding of time and family in their spatial organization (2005: 6).

Şahan who is a 32 year-old gay resident was one of my informants who clearly expressed the queer temporal motivation of the community:

“Some people don't feel safe in the neighborhood and we had a commune situation so we said lets build a network and hear about each other. Because we as the *lubunyas* are lonely, either with a lover or not. We won't get married after a while. We should be informed by each other. I mean if something happens to me, I don't have a relationship with my neighbors, my friends are my only neighbors.”⁵⁹

He was telling me how the network of LGBTI residents was built by opening up a *WhatsApp* group and coming together around a neighborhood based organization. He elaborates more when I directly ask about the ghetto potential of Kurtuluş;

“A gay person is living her whole life in isolation, therefore when she sees some people she wants to come here. Tatavla does this [referring to the neighborhood organization which is also a friend group], I don't say good or

⁵⁹ “bazıları mahallede güvende hissetmiyor ve bir komün durumu da vardı bir ağ kuralım birbirimizden haberdar olalım dedik. çünkü lubunyalılar olarak yalnızız sevgilimiz var veya yok. bir süre sonra evlenmeyeceğiz. birbirimizden haberdar olmalıyız. yani bana bir şey olsa komşu ilişkim de yok sadece arkadaşlarımla gördüm komşuluğu ben yani.”

bad. I am okay with ghettos for example, you are not. For example the people from the foundation of Lambda are now in their 50s. They also rented a building and built their own ghetto. Why? Because they are lonely. Something like this should be happen in here as well. I mean there is no child or something that we will leave behind. In our old age, we will either go to nursing house or build our own ghettos and live together. We searched for it with E., I mean at least there should be someone to take us to the hospital when there will be an illness or something someday. This is also the fear of a single straight person but our end is apparent, I mean we won't have someone in our life.”⁶⁰

During my off-the-record interviews, conversations and participant observation, I heard similar explanations about living close to each other, however Şahan also explicitly lays out the overall conventions which positions the LGBTI subjects out of the “the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance.”(Halberstam 2005: 6). At this point, I want to briefly share some data from a recent research on the social and economic problems of LGBTI individuals in Turkey (Yılmaz and Göçmen 2015). Among the 2875 LGBT participants, %62 of them state that they don't feel secure about their elderliness and %51.8 of them think that they wont be able to take the care they need in their old age.

The postmodern modes of temporality experienced by queer subjects is coined as *queer time* by Halberstam (2005: 6) and this very alternative temporality indicates one of the politically subversive aspects of the LGBTI community living in the same neighborhood besides being gender non-normative. As Halberstam borrows from Foucault (2005: 2), queer “way of life” which could be traced in Şahan’s both dark and hopeful words is the threat posed by hegemonic social institutions such as family, heterosexuality or reproduction. In Şahan’s imaginary, there will be no child and heritage to leave behind, but there will be fellows, friends and lovers to grow old together in the ghettos. His demand for a ghetto is motivated by such a dream; a dream

⁶⁰ “Eşcinsel birisi hayatı boyunca yalnızlaştırılmak üzerinden yaşıyor ya hani birini gördüğü zaman buraya gelmek istiyor. Tatavla bunu yapıyor iyi ya da kötü demiyorum. Ben gettolaşmaya okeyim mesela sen değilsin. Mesela bu Lambda’nın kurulduğu dönemki isimler şimdi 50lerinde falanlar, onlar da bir apartman tutmuşlar kendi gettolarını kurmuşlar. Neden? Çünkü yalnızlar. Bu olmalı bence burada da böyle bir şey. Yani çocuk yok bir şey yok arkada bıraktığımız. Bunun yaşlanması ya huzur evi ya da kendi gettolarımızı kurup altlı üstlü oturmak. Biz E. ile falan bakmıştık yani yarın öbür gün hastalıkta falan bir şey olduğu zaman en azından hastaneye götürecek biri olsun. Bu bekar bir heteronun da korkusu ama bizimkinin sonu belli yani birileri hayatımızda olmayacak.”

of another form of family and future which liberates the thrown out queer from the imposed conventions.

Two other informants also talked about a future plan to live in the same building with their LGBTI friends. Such dreams of queers come after the acknowledgment of being thrown out of the institution of the reproductive heterosexual family. These dreams and the belief about their possibility are built on a fear of being lonely which pushes queers to create and display an alternative form of community. Kurtuluş is spatially experienced as a possible ground for this alternative form of relationships and temporality, allowing its participants “to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience—namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death.” (Halberstam, 2005: 2). Living together with other queers and being aware of them through the everyday urban encounters encourage to get organized around a dream of a selected family and queer solidarity. In addition to solidarity, as most of my informants stressed, ‘feeling safe’ has been another empowering outcome of living within an LGBTI community in Kurtuluş, although this feeling of empowerment was not shared by all of my informants.

3.3.2. ‘Safety’?

Safety is a multidimensional issue when the public experiences of LGBTI subjects are at stake. Visibility, gender non-conformity, sex work, peculiar dynamics of geographies and several other factors play crucial roles in the conceptualization of space regarding safety. The presence of the LGBTI population was emphasized in the interviews as it empowers some of my informants’ public experience concerning potential homophobic/transphobic attacks. On the other side, I also listened to some narratives on homophobic/transphobic harassments and some informants expressed uneasiness about the neighborhood. It is not surprising to see some keywords such as “safe haven” or “safe zone” in the descriptions of the LGBTI ghettos , however as I discuss throughout my thesis, Kurtuluş is a challenging landscape to be crudely categorized as a ghetto, as a safe haven, as friendly or hostile. In relation to having a “community” in the neighborhood, here I will briefly discuss some of my informants’ statements about safety.

Let me start with the narratives that point out the empowering aspects of partaking in a lesbian-gay community in the neighborhood before discussing the ambivalent positions. The “ghetto” as an urban setting is a debated concept. Is it liberating or isolating? Is it maintaining the heterosexual power outside? Although Myslik cites from John D’Emilio (1981: 77) who observes that ‘for gay men and for lesbians, San Francisco has become akin to what Rome is for Catholics: a lot of us live there and many more make the pilgrimage’ (2005: 166), there are contesting experiences and narratives about life in these territories of queer pilgrimage just like Kurtuluş.

Tanya talked about her pre-transition period when she was looking less like a “woman”:

“For example, the reason that I was not that scared when I lived in Kurtuluş is...remember I said i didn’t have trouble, still I was not restraining myself, for example I was wearing my skinny jeans but I had this in my mind; everybody lives in here what is the worst thing the guy can do to me?”⁶¹

She notes that she did not censor herself and wore skinny jeans which increase the risk of being targeted by bashers as it could be considered as a queer outfit in regard to gender-normative dress code. Remarkably, the potential perpetrator is “the guy” as most of them indeed are (Myslik 2005).

Yeliz recounts:

“I feel safe in the neighborhood and this is definitely related to the LGBT population in the neighborhood. For example, I have a friend living in the upper side of the neighborhood. I could walk from there at 4 am, 5 am in the morning. I would worry too much in any other place that I don’t know. I mean this is not because LGBTs would run for help... at that hour I will call but who will run. If someone attacks, no one would know me, I am not a celebrity in the

⁶¹ “Mesela Kurtuluş’ta oturduğumda korkm...çok fazla şey yapmamamın sebebi hani dedim ya sorunla karşılaşmadım falan...ya yine şey yapmıyordum ödün vermiyordum atıyorum dışarı çıkarken yine skinny pantolonlarımı giyiyordum ama aklımda şey vardı yani herkes burada oturuyor en fazla ne yapabilir ki adam.”

neighborhood. But I have such a feeling, I am from here nothing happens to me anyway.”⁶²

When I asked Ateş about the possible reasons of LGBTI people to come here in Kurtuluş, she asked back;

“Could it be the comfort? She tells her, she tells the other. For example I don’t think I can live in somewhere other than here. Fulya is also very easy but I don’t think I can live there. I mean this place feels like family now.”

She repeatedly used the word *rahat* about Kurtuluş in the interview and I translated it as comfort and ease. However, they do not precisely correspond to the context of *rahat* which in her and in some other residents’ narratives⁶³ refers to being relaxed and feeling safe, thereby pictures an accepting atmosphere about the neighborhood. In order to be sure I asked if she feels safe she responded by saying “Sure.” I wanted to learn more about this clear-cut answer and because of the fact that some other informants showed the community in the neighborhood as the source of their feeling of confidence in the streets, I asked if she also feels the same. However there was another clear-cut answer from her; “No. I know that nothing bad can happen to me here” and she added “Beat a devil’s tattoo!” and knocked on wood.⁶⁴

It was surprising because Ateş is a sex worker trans woman who mostly occupies the urban space at night, although when I interviewed her she was on a break and was

⁶² “Mahallede güvende hissediyorum ve bunun kesinlikle mahalledeki LGBT popülasyonu ile ilgisi var. Mesela mahallenin başında bir arkadaşım oturuyor sabah 4te 5te çıkıp yürüyebildim. Herhangi bilmediğim bir yerde çok tedirgin olurum. Yani LGBTler koşar diye de değil, o saatte arayacağım da kim koşar. Biri saldırsa öyle kimse tanımayacak, mahallenin ünlü sakinlerinden değilim. Ama içten içe öyle bir hissim oluyor, burayım zaten bana bir şey olmaz.”

⁶³ Miray:(gey bir arkadaşı için) “geliyordu gidiyordu ve rahat buluyordu yani bir sürü evde bir çok arkadaşı var. ulaşım olabilir fiyat uygun olabilir bence böyle önceliklerimiz de var. ama onun haricinde kı arkadaşım sokakta rahat rahat yürüyebiliyorsam bugün başka seçenek gelseydi aklıma orayı da düşünürdüm ama düşünmedim.”

Tanya: “Kurtuluş’u biliyordum. Bütün arkadaşlarım falan yakın çevrem burada oturuyordu Şahanlar Serhatlar siz falan. Öyle zaten ilk sahibinden nokta komdan ev ararken sadece şişli kurtuluş diye aratıyordum. Rahat ederim falan diye. Dönüşüm sürecine girmemişim daha ev tutarken.”

İrma: “Fatih’te zaten travesti oturmaz. şimdi en çok rahat ettiğin yerde oturursun. Böyle bir şansım varken ben niye gidiyim kendimi eziyim büzüyüm de rahatsız bir yerde oturayım. Daha avrupalı gibi burası. İnsanların düşünceleri daha avrupalı. Bana ne diyor. Beni rahatsız etmedikten sonra karışmam diyor. “

Şahan: “Kurtuluş şu anda güvende hissettiğim bir yer ama önceliklerim rahat etmek mi işe kolay gitmek mi bilmiyorum.”

⁶⁴ “Rahatlıktan olabilir mi? O ona söylüyor O ona söylüyor. Mesela ben buradan başka yerde oturabileceğimi sanmıyorum. Bak fulya da çok rahat ama orada oturabileceğimi sanmıyorum. Yani burası artık şey gibi aileden bir yermiş gibi geliyor. -Güvende hissediyor musun kendini? -Tabi ki. Başına bir şey geldiğinde el atacağını bildiğin arkadaşın var diye mi burada?-Hayır. Başıma bir şey gelmeyeceğini biliyorum burada. Şeytan kulağına kurşun diyeyim.”

spending some time walking around in the neighborhood during the day and called herself one of the day roamer girls.⁶⁵When I asked about the safety of *çark* [cruising] she said, “Don’t you know there is never safety in cruising? You never know what comes from where in cruising. I mean you cannot know, bad things happened to a lot of girls.”⁶⁶Her wish and knocking on wood make sense since most of her public space engagement is in the context of *çark* / *cruising* which is loaded with tones of unfortunate possibilities as she also mentions.

Tanya is also a spontaneous sex worker which means she does not have a fixed spot in the cruising zone but is involved in paid sex time to time. She belongs to the activist gay and lesbian community in the neighborhood, even though she has connections to the trans sex workers’ network. Ateş, on the other hand, is one of the girls who came to Kurtuluş years ago and encouraged other girls from Tarlabası to come to Kurtuluş. She is known by the activist groups as well as by the local community of trans sex workers, she claims. She is 35 years old and has sex work experience for years. I want to clarify that the communities implied by the narratives of my trans informants have different contexts. Another reason of my elaboration on these two trans informants’ subject positions is the different experience of trans residents in the allegedly safe districts with sexual dissident populations. For instance, Petra L. Doan (2007) investigates the ambivalent connectedness of the transgender people to the urban queer spaces in United States and demonstrates how these queer-friendly spaces might not be a haven for gender non-conforming people since they replicate a gender dichotomy of the heterosexual world. She also notes that “physical safety remains an urgent concern for this highly vulnerable section of the population“ (Doan 2007: 65). When there is sex work involved, the vulnerability is higher, as I will discuss in the next chapter, in regard to negotiating the visibility in the public space.

⁶⁵ *gündüz gezen kızlardanım*

⁶⁶ “Çarkın hiç bir zaman güvenliği yoktur bunu bilmiyor musun. Belli olmaz çarkta nereden ne geleceği. Yani bilemezsin, kaç kızın başına neler geldi.”

To turn back to the narratives above, feeling safe is associated with a sense of belonging to the neighborhood as we see in Yeliz's expression of 'I am from here' or Ateş's words 'feels like family'. Ateş did not elaborate more on this 'family' however most of the participants implied the empowering existence of the friends, community and people that are alike.

In his study of gay ghettos, Wayne D. Myslik (2005) questions why gay men still code these queer districts as 'safe' in spite of the fact that these areas are also the hunt grounds for gay-bashers. He suggests that what binds gays to these specific districts is "an emotional and psychological safety that comes from being in an area in which one has some sense of belonging or social control, even in the absence of physical control" (Myslik 2005: 167). This is what Tanya and Yeliz point out when they are both aware of the possibility of a homophobic or transphobic encounter but also comfort themselves by remembering the other LGBTI people living around. Therefore, it could be asserted that the courage to not censor herself and wear the skinny jeans or to dare to walk alone on the street as a lesbian woman at 4 am are also the outcomes of political empowerment which lead its subjects to contest and rupture the constructed gender-norms of the space. This very risk that is taken consciously is a form of resistance within the geography of Kurtuluş which could be called as one of the sites of "cultural resistance where one can overcome, though never ignore, the fear of heterosexism and homophobia" as Myslik suggests for queer spaces (2005: 167). He concludes that "the psychological and social benefits of open association worth the physical risk taken in queer spaces. For gay men, coping with the presence of violence is an act of negotiating power in society" (Myslik 2005: 168). Thus, although it is not liberated from the unsafe homophobic/transphobic encounters, the space provides the courage, which is political, for queer subjects to manifest themselves. But which subjects and what are the limits of this manifestation?

Serhat who is also a member of the neighborhood organization Tatavla LGBTI speaks about the flyers they distributed all around the neighborhood:

“Tatavla’s Hornet account gets some messages saying like ‘it makes me smile to see these flyers in the morning at my door. It comforts us as well that people know there are somebodies out there. For example, you are in a distance that you can hear me when I shout as Nazlı from here if something somehow happens to me. Because it can happen any moment, any time. There is no guarantee that my neighbors upstairs won’t stone my windows.’”⁶⁷

He refers to his neighbors as the potential offenders and expresses a confidence stemming from the proximity of a friend. In relation to the role of neighbors, the other residents out of the community are mentioned also in Şeyda’s narrative as she depicts hesitation about a possible homophobic assault;

“I mean I witnessed two snatchings in a short range at the corner of our street. And when something like that happens, the Turkish shopkeepers are the ones who run first and get involved, these will be the ones who will come up when something happens to us someday and I don’t think that they will protect us.... We are talking about *mahalle* culture but nobody showed up at the windows when somebody shouted for example in that snatching case. I know, I am sure that there are Armenians living in that apartment but at the windows there are Turkish flag and Atatürk pictures etc. I mean they have a settled life in here and they are afraid to lose that. I don’t know who will protect us when something happens.”⁶⁸

What makes one “settled” and the other “transient”? To have a family? To have a past in the neighborhood? What is the criteria to have a settled life and how different groups negotiate this position of being a *mahalleli* in Kurtuluş? How do queers conceive themselves in regard to the *mahalleli* identity?

Kurtuluş is not an overtly queer space which is symbolically and publicly imbued with rainbow flags, shops and places as in the context of Myslik’s study. Therefore the possible offenders are not expected to be the ones who come from another district to

⁶⁷ “Tatavla’nın Hornet hesabına; ‘sabah kapıda bu flyerları görmek insanda bir gülümseme uyandırmadı değil.’ gibi mesajlar geliyor. İnsanların oralarda bir yerlerde birilerinin olduğunu bilmesi bizde de bir rahatlığa sebep oluyor. Mesela ben buradan bağırıldığında Nazlı diye duyabilecek mesafedesin, bir şekilde başıma bir şey geldiğinde. Çünkü gelebilir her an her daim. Üst kat komşumun yanındaki camımı taşlamayacağına dair bir garanti yok.”

⁶⁸ “Yani çok kısa aralıklarla iki gaspa şahit oldum bizim sokağın köşesinde. Ve yani öyle bir olay olduğunda yine ilk koşan çıkıp ilgilenen türk esnaf oluyor, yarın öbür gün bize saldırdığında da bunlar çıkacak ve bizi koruyacaklarını sanmıyorum... Mahalle kültürü falan diyoruz da birisi sokakta bağırınca mesela o gasp olayı gibi camlara kimse çıkmadı. Zaten Ermeni oturuyor biliyorum eminim ama böyle camlarında türk bayrakları atatürk resimleri falan asılı. Yani orada sabit bir hayatları var ve onu kaybetmekten korkuyorlar. Kim koruyacak bizi bir şey olduğunda bilmiyorum.”

bash the queers. For example, Serhat suspects the family living upstairs if they might throw stones on his windows or Şeyda questions the ‘scared’ Armenian neighbors and wonders if they will show up when they are needed in the case of an homophobic attack. Along with some similar suspicious statements about the neighbors and other inhabitants of the neighborhood, as I quoted in chapter 2, there were also many narratives such as Songül’s: “If they don’t cut Armenians in here, nothing happens to *lubunya* neither.”⁶⁹International migrant population was also emphasized many times in order to remark Kurtuluş as the ghetto of “others” with an implication of safety of queers in Kurtuluş among all these oppressed groups. It also brings up the geographical aspect of safety within the territory of Kurtuluş as there are distinct discourses of safety about the different areas of the neighborhood as I will scrutinize in more detail in the next chapter.

Here, I only wanted to focus on the relationship between having a community and feeling safe in Kurtuluş based on LGBTI residents’ narratives. Before passing on to next chapter for a more detailed discussion of such intricate dynamics of cohabitation and geographically distinct discourses in the light of the experiences and negotiations of LGBTI residents, I want to briefly introduce some of specific places in Kurtuluş where LGBTI community builds its networks.

3.4. Queer Social Spaces in Kurtuluş:

3.4.1. Gay-Friendly Cafe

The only openly gay-friendly cafe of the neighborhood is the most concrete spatial “victory” as a non-heterosexual “representation of space for sexual dissidents” in Knopp’s definition of the gay bars (1992: 664). It is located on the main Kurtuluş Avenue and was marked by the rainbow flag hung at the entrance for a while. Although it is mentioned as gay cafe among the LBGT residents of the neighborhood, the manager of the place defined the cafe as “straight friendly” by ironically mocking the

⁶⁹ “eğer Ermeniler burada kesilmiyorsa lubunyalara da bir şey olmaz...”

heteronormative categorizations of the places as if the straights are the sexual dissidents that are in need of friendly places. Rather than gay-cafe, I preferred to call this cafe as gay-friendly since they removed the rainbow flag for the last couple of months and the visibility of the LGBT customers decreased especially after the first floor was closed in the beginning of summer 2015. There is another cafe, I will call cafe 15, on the ground floor of the building. It was also the entrance of the gay-friendly cafe and its public front, since the cafe has no windows seeing the avenue. Cafe15 is an older cafe in the neighborhood compared to the gay-friendly cafe and the managers were partners who collaborated to build this LGBT friendly space in the neighborhood. The rainbow flag was hung at the entrance of cafe 15 and was seen by the passersby. The openly LGBT-friendly cafe was upstairs which was run by an openly gay manager and hosted weekly LGBT gatherings however for the gaze of an outsider cafe 15 could be also perceived as a non-heterosexual space, of course if this gaze knows the symbolic meaning of rainbow flag at the entrance. Therefore the cafe 15 also has an interesting ground which offers a queerly vague position for its customers. Because it is not an overt LGBT-place but an entrance passage to an openly gay-friendly cafe. That's why I've heard that this floor was mockingly mentioned as the metaphor of the stage right before coming out as if visiting a gay cafe means to come out.

The manager of the gay-friendly cafe is not sure how much open the cafe is as a queer space. He states that:

“They see the flag...but I don't understand who gets it who doesn't. A hetero couple come who are not aware of these issues, I get from their behavior, a quite dull couple. In front of these [showing the rainbow flags] they take pictures. I like it, I mean they share pictures in front of rainbow flag, they support without knowing.”⁷⁰

The rainbow flag is still not widely known by people therefore marking the place with this symbolic item is mostly understood by certain circles as Emre indicates;

“We first hang the flag on the day right after the Pride, then some people understand, some of them smile. Some said ‘Ay you hang the Lambda flag! [he

⁷⁰ “Bayrağı görüyor falan...Ama kim anlıyor kim anlamıyor onu ben anlamıyorum. Bir çift geliyor hetero böyle baya hani bu konulardan habersiz, hareketlerinden öyle anlıyorum ben yani odun bir çift. Bunların önünde (gökkuşağı bayrağını gösteriyor) fotoğraflar çekiliyorlar. Benim hoşuma gidiyor yani şey, gökkuşağının önünde fotoğraflar paylaşıyorlar, bilmeden destek oluyorlar.”

laughs]. Or I don't know there are some people with 'love is organizing'⁷¹, they understand. The ones who know, understand."⁷²

Therefore, the queerness of the cafe could still be a bit subtle, depending on the visitor's cultural-political baggage or her gaydar. Emre also told me that the manager of the downstairs cafe who is also his business partner said: "The ones who worries about that [the flag] shouldn't come anyway."⁷³ That is to say, they try to create a homophobia-free environment in this cafe. In the interview conducted by Kaos GL, Emre remarks that "The more visible groups such as trans people, could be exposed to different looks, even verbal abuse. At that point I never allow such a thing."⁷⁴

Among my informants who are not from the LGBTI community, noone knew about the gay-friendly, however when I told them about such a place in the neighborhood, a few of them implied that they understood which cafe I was talking about by saying that there are not many cafes around anyway. On the other hand, LGBTI residents generally talked about the importance of this promised 'safe zone' in the neighborhood.

For example, Songül sees the presence of the cafe as a sign of queer ghettoization of the neighborhood; "If that cafe is opened it means that here is a ghetto anyway. If the ones who around couldn't say a shit..."⁷⁵ The cafe's role in the ghettoization is also supported by Taner's dialogue with a friend;

"[My friend] said there is also a cafe. You go to cafe. So, all these things are attractive. Not only for the LGBT residents in here but also others hear from other districts and plan to move to here. I mean it triggers."⁷⁶

⁷¹ referring to the bags made by LGBT block during Gezi uprising.

⁷² "İlk bayrağı Pride'in hemen ertesi günü astık, sonra işte anlayan anlıyor gülümseyenler oluyor. Ay Lambda bayrağı asmışsınız diyen (gülüyor). Ya da ne biliyim işte 'Aşk Örgütlenmektir'le gelen, anlayanlar oluyor falan. Anlayan anlıyor zaten hani."

⁷³ 'zaten onu sorun yapacak olan gelmesin'

⁷⁴ "Daha görünür kesim, mesela translar, bir yere gittiklerinde farklı bakışlara, hatta sözlü tacize maruz kalabilir, o noktada ben böyle bir şeye izin vermem."

⁷⁵ "Eğer o kafe açıldıysa burası zaten gettodur. Eğer yanındaki ötesindeki berisindeki bi sikim laf edemediyse..."

⁷⁶ (Arkadaşım) şey dedi a orada kafe de var zaten. kafeye gidiyorsunuz, kafe de açıldı orada falan. tüm bunlar çekici dolayısıyla. sadece buradaki lgbtler değil başka semtlerden de duyup buraya taşınmayı planlıyorlar. tetikliyor yani.

While this cafe is an attractive social space for meeting other LGBTIs and to feel comfortable and accepted there were also some narratives which are critical to this isolating ghettoization and the risks posed by such friendly and commercial places. Şahan puts as the following;

“I mean being able to go out and doing whatever you want comfortably in an LGBT place without going to Taksim is something very good however this is not something I prefer in Taksim either. I find it more important to transform other places rather than something like that. But as a matter of fact the presence of that [cafe] is a plus for this area. Without leaving the neighborhood, going there and having a breakfast, that’s comfortable [*rahat*]. I don't know what I mean by this *rahat* by the way. If it is to show affection to your lover this is not something that I prefer. I don't like the place either. But if you ask people, they can bill and coo there and nobody can intervene. For those people that is something like ‘wow’ in the name of the neighborhood.”⁷⁷

In addition to ghettoization, these symbolic ‘victories’ such as cafes and stores with the rainbow flags have another risk which is the commodification of the space. Struggle of the LGBTI population over space as Knopp (1992) asserts “may actually be more important than those concerning the spatial organization of sexual relations. This is because, as Harvey argues, the sociospatial construction of otherness, which has as much to do with representational and symbolic space as with physical space, has become key to the survival of capitalism.” (664). Politically critical residents frequently stressed that they mostly prefer to socialize at each other’s apartments because of the commercial concerns of the places. For example, about the Tatavla LGBTI’s activities, Serhat indicates that;

“We were a group which tended to use many places. After a certain point as we are a group of friends, we get together at homes. People shouldn’t see us as

⁷⁷ “Yani Taksim’e gitmeden dışarı çıkıp bir LGBT mekanında rahat rahat istediğini yapıyor olabilmen çok güzel bir şey ama bu benim Taksim’de de tercih ettiğim bir şey değil. Başka mekanları dönüştürmeyi daha önemli buluyorum böyle bir şeyden. Ama oranın varlığı bu çevre için artı bir şey aslına bakarsan. Hiç bu mahalleden çıkmadan gidip orada kahvaltısını eden, rahat. Ya bu rahat hissetmekten kastım nedir bu arada bilmiyorum, sevgilinle sarmaş dolaş olabilme durumuysa eğer bu benim tercih ettiğim bir şey değil. Sevdiğim bir yer de değil. Ama insanlara sorsan orada öpüşüp koklaşabiliyor kimsenin müdahale edebileceği bir yer değil. O insanlar için evet vauv denecek bir şey mahalle adına.”

commercial. While we intend to transform the places we also use their business. After all we make them earn money.”⁷⁸

Homes, with various reasons of which some are similar, were pointed as one of the most popular places to socialize with other LGBTI friends and neighbors.

3.4.2. Homes

Şahan complains about the lack of cafes and pubs in the neighborhood to socialize as a mixed group of girls and boys when I asked him what he would change in Kurtuluş if he could;

“There is no bar, not like a club but a pub where everybody can go at night. I mean the pubs in the Ergenekon and Kurtuluş Avenue belong to the ones over 50 years old who go there to watch the match. It would be also good to transform these groups but I would never leave the neighborhood if there was a place for everybody. That is a lack. There are many *lubunya* but still everybody goes to Taksim for entertainment. For example, this gay bar LOVE is in Harbiye and at the end of the night at 5 everybody comes towards here. We drink at our apartments as boys and girls for example before going out, there is no place for us to go.”⁷⁹

When I ask where do they socialize, Yeliz responds as “Mostly at each others’ places. There is no place to go and sit in the neighborhood.”⁸⁰

My own experience is also similar as I mostly socialize with my friends at homes especially with other LGBTI residents both because of the lack of attractive places and also the comfort which is provided by the homes. By the comfort, I mean to be able to behave without the tension of being gazed as we are in the public. Therefore, I might say that the homes could be described as the private queer social spaces which are open

⁷⁸ “Pek çok alanı aslında kullanmaya meyilli bir gruptuk. Belli bir yerden sonra arkadaş grubuyuz ya evlerde toplanıyoruz. Dışarıda da hani insanlar böyle ticari ticari görmesin. Orayı dönüştüreceğiz derken orayı ticarethane olarak da kullanıyoruz. Oraya para kazandırıyoruz sonuçta.”

⁷⁹ “Akşam böyle herkesin gidebileceği bir bar yok, kulüp gibi değil de pub gibi. Kurtuluş Caddesi’ndeki Ergenekon’daki publar 50 yaş üstü maç izlemeye giden tiplerin yani. Dönüştürmek de güzel olur oradaki kitleyi falan ama herkesin gidebileceği bir yer olsa bu mahalleden hiç çıkmam yani. O bir eksiklik. Bu kadar lubunya var ama hala taksime gidiyor eğlenmeye yani. Şu gey bar LOVE Harbiye’de mesela, gece oradan çıkışta 5te falan herkes bu tarafa doğru geliyor. Evlerimizde içiyoruz mesela çıkmadan kadın erkek öyle gidebileceğimiz bir yer yok.”

⁸⁰ “Daha çok birbirimizin evinde. Öyle gidelim oturalım gibi bir yer yok mahallede çok.”

to the other members of the community but not to the strangers that represent the heterosexual gaze. This ‘intimate’ space of the homes which renders the assemblies possible also has the potential to produce a political act just as in the story of Tatavla LGBTI which was born out of a home gathering as an idea.

3.4.3. Virtual Queer Space of Kurtuluş: *online dating applications*

Virtual space, along with the progress in the online facilities, provides an opportunity for many LGBTI people to socialize. As Campbell asserts “online services create a safe venue for private, at-home exploration and entertainment away from prying eyes.” (2004: 11). Of course different subjects use these services based on their needs. For example while trans sex workers benefitted from the safety of ‘at home exploration’ by diminishing the time spent in cruising, gay men take advantage of the opportunity to find partners by also still staying in the closet.

Moreover, the virtual community, as Ceyda mentioned, clarified the repetitive statement of various informants from the neighborhood about the recent decrease in the numbers of trans sex workers in the public space. When I asked her that “They told me that the *gacıs* used to be more crowded, they decreased in number.”, Ceyda recounts that “No do you think they decreased, they increase as days pass. It is because of the internet. There are three times more people on the internet than on the cruising. When you check internet there are 150-200 girls in every site.”⁸¹

Online dating applications such as Hornet for gays and Wapa for lesbians appeared in the narratives as most of my informants state that Kurtuluş is kind of a center based on the crowd cruising online. Since these applications list the users according to the proximity, the closest people occupy the first pages. Within 2 kilometers, both gay and lesbian app users highlighted that, they see a remarkable crowd maybe the hugest after Beyoğlu which is still the LGBTI social capital of Istanbul. Nilgun even shows the crowd in these applications as the reason of her friend to not to move from Kurtuluş;

⁸¹ “Peki şey diyorlar bana eskiden daha kalabalıktı gacılar burada artık azalıyorlar. -Yok be azalır mı gün geçtikçe çoğalıyorlar. internetten oldu hayır. Şu an caddedeki insanların 3 katı internette. İnternete bakıyorsun her sitede 150 200 kız var.”

“For example, he says that when I log in to Hornet, there are pages of people but not in Beylikdüzü. His family lives in Beylikdüzü he lives in here. I said close the apartment don't pay rent you are out to your family, he says the closest person is in 2 kilometers away [in Beylikdüzü], here there are pages of them.”⁸²

Such virtual spaces and communities are also the monitors of the present population which shows the mobilities in the area. Emre, who is the manager of the LGBTI-friendly cafe, talks about his excitement about the neighborhood when he first moved as he discovered the traffic in Hornet;

“I cannot leave here [referring to the cafe] maybe on Sunday in a couple of weeks but everything, even *koli* [fuckbuddy in Lubunca] comes to you [he laughs]. Or I go honey he is just two streets away. It is good in that manner... They never end! (he laughs). I go to D. for example after a good spent night, I say ‘what a beautiful neighborhood here’. Someone new is coming all the time. Directly on Hornet. I mean they immediately fall into, so you understand.”⁸³

3.4.4. Cruising zones

As much I could pursue, trans sex workers are visible in the area since 90s. Especially all along the pavements of Halaskargazi Avenue in the Harbiye side, they wait for the customers standing as groups of two or three. This specific zone in Harbiye is also the ground of this recurrent encounter between gay men and trans sex workers every week, on Fridays and Saturdays, between around 11pm and 5-6 am. While gay guys who are going to or leaving from the night clubs such as LOVE and Superfabric in Harbiye, Elmadağ, their pathway crosses from the zone of trans sex workers who are cruising to pick up customers. This specific encounter has numerous aspects to delve into in terms of its temporality and spatiality since the pathways of these two groups

⁸² “Hornet’e girdiğim zaman sayfalarca insan oluyor diyor ama Beylikdüzü’nde olmuyor diyor mesela. benim bir arkadaşımın ailesi Beylikdüzü’nde oturuyor kendisi burada oturuyor. evi kapatıp gitsene ailene de açısın kira verme diyorum. en yakın insan 2buçuk km ötede gözükiyor burada sayfalarca.”

⁸³ “Ben çıkamıyorum buradan belki bir kaç haftadır sadece pazarları. Ama ayağıma geliyor her şey koliye kadar (gülüyor). Ya da ben gidiyorum canım iki sokak öte. O anlamda güzel...Bitmiyor! (gülüyor) D.’e geliyorum mesela akşam güzel geçmiş, diyorum D. ya bitmiyor diyorum ne güzel mahallemiş burası. Sürekli yeni birisi geliyor. Direk Hornet’ten! Direk düşüyor yani anlıyorsun.”

don't cross so often stemming from their different class positions and experiences. Taner tells about this distance in spite of this weekly touch;

“Harbiye, until Osmanbey metro even go further till Mecidiyeköy, is the cruising zone. Especially on Fridays and Saturdays the life is there for the *ibne* [faggot, queer in slang]. Gay bars are over there, the *gacıs* the sex workers work there. The places we live, our homes are over here. The world spins over there and we don't know each other...While a gay have fun in the gay bar LOVE, the trans woman is at work over there and I mean they are so unrelated to each other.”⁸⁴

Beyond the presence of trans sex workers in the gay social zones, they are also the visible front of the queer population in the district. Within the geography of Kurtuluş, Pangaltı where I limited my research with, Ergenekon Avenue is a quite well-known cruising zone as almost all of my interviewees pointed out. Within the certain time periods which would be between 11pm till 4-5am in the morning, at the each intersection of Ergenekon Avenue and the side streets, there are girls in groups cruising and these specific spots along with the time detail was described by various *mahalleli* such as shopkeepers agent and mukhtars. This cruising zone is the reason of the undeniable public visibility of the trans residents which came up in the interviews.

3.4.5. Bonus Discovery: The Cafe

Towards the end of my fieldwork right after the interview with Ceyda, one of my trans informants, I discovered a kind of a queer haven which is a small tea homes with lesbians, trans women and the various men from the neighborhood. Ceyda took me there as she spends most her days gambling there with other *lubunyas* and heterosexual men which do not encounter in such a ground to play games like this. From the notes of my first visit, I remembered that I was so amazed by the members of one rummikub group sitting on the same table; one quite old trans women with a headscarf, one middle-aged man, one quite butch lesbian in her late 30s or 40s and a former sex worker trans Ceyda who was my informant. It could sound problematic to sit at the corner and describe people through an outsider gaze however later I met and talked to these people

⁸⁴ “Harbiye ta Osmanbey metrodan, hatta ileriye git Mecidiyeköy’e kadar. Mecidiyeköy’den Harbiye’ye kadar orası deli gibi çark alanı. Hele Cuma Cumartesi günleri hayat orada akıyor ibneler için. Gey barlar o tarafta, gacılar işe çıkıyorlar orada seks işçileri. Yaşadığımız yerler burada evlerimiz burada. Dünya orada dönüyor ve birbirimizden haberdar değiliz...Buradaki gey biri sokaktaki trans ne biliyim o gey barda eğlenirken LOVEda oradaki trans kadın işte ve yani aralarında hiç bir alaka yok.”

except for the man and they were defining themselves as I thought, thus I shared this tableaux to describe the intriguing juxtaposition of the group. As the teahouses where gambling is at stake are predominantly heterosexual man spaces, seeing all these queer subjects in such a context excited me.

The cafe is run by a lesbian woman, that's why there were lesbians around which were not familiar and politically not much aligned with LGBTI movement based on my brief conversations. They were talking about friends and how crowded they are. I assume that these mentioned friends are also lesbians and trans as the manager told me that "Because I opened up this place my friends come. They are also like that [laughing]."⁸⁵ I visited there three times and there was no gay men around but lesbian and trans regulars were there each time. That is to say, I believe they have another network of queers who are interestingly constituted by the older lesbians and trans women than the community I know and am a part of. I couldn't interview the manager and the customers in depth but I believe that this small cafe and its regulars is worth to be studied in another research.

Conclusion

In this chapter, first I introduced the motivations of LGBTI residents to prefer Kurtuluş as a residential area. The proximity of the district to Taksim which has a significant place in LGBTI sociality was a remarkable point narrated by most of my informants. I also discussed the sense of community and concordantly narratives on safety through the spatial experiences of LGBTIs in the neighborhood. The process of building LGBTI networks is predominantly experienced by sharing the neighborhood with other LGBTIs, therefore by having a community in the district. However, this very community does not necessarily require a face to face communication, eventhough there is solidarity among certain LGBTI residents such as WhatsApp groups, the organization Tatavla LGBTI or the shared queer social spaces. Narratives on safety was also immediately linked with sharing the neighborhood with other LGBTIs and also with

⁸⁵ "Ben açınca tabi burayı benim arkadaşlarım geliyor. E onlar da öyle tabi (gülüyor)."

other minority groups such as Armenians and migrants. All these links evoked questions about being *mahalleli*, being settled and transient in addition to the complicated dynamics of living together with different aspects of being minority.

In the second part of the chapter, I briefly introduced the queer social spaces in the neighborhood which play a crucial role in community building and in negotiating the urban space. In the next chapter, I will open up some briefly abovementioned discussions about the distinct experiences of gays lesbians and trans residents in relation to public visibility and spatial boundaries of the manifestations of sexuality.

CHAPTER 4

NEGOTIATING PUBLIC VISIBILITY OF *LUBUNYA* IN KURTULUŞ

Exploring the visibility of LGBTI residents in the public space of Kurtuluş provides an opportunity to understand the spatial and sexual boundaries constructed by power and oppression, and challenged by resistance. In this chapter, I will interrogate the conditions of *lubunya*⁸⁶ visibility by focusing on different public and private performances of lesbian, gay and trans residents, and their negotiation with the discourses of spatiality and sexuality circulating in the neighborhood.

4.1. What makes ‘them’ visible?

When I first started to interview shopkeepers and *mahalleli*, I was surprised and even worried [for the sake of my fieldwork] because they did not mention or even seem aware of the gay and lesbian residents of Kurtuluş, although they did talk about trans visibility especially on the main avenues Ergenekon and Halaskargazi where they engage in sex work at night. In addition to trans sex workers, my friends and I were quite sure that the visibility of the sizeable community of gays and lesbians would be apparent to the shopkeepers and other residents. *Gaydar*, as discussed in Chapter 3, explains why my friends and I were sure about the lesbian-gay community of the neighborhood since it is defined as the recognition mechanism developed by gays and lesbians to detect the other gays and lesbians in the environment. As I proceeded in the field and asked about the presence of gay and lesbian residents apart from trans sex workers, I realized that the narratives were pointing to a set of common performances and also particular areas of the neighborhood, forcing me to delve further into the intricate aspects of the visibility.

Brigenti (2007) proposes that visibility is “a double-edged sword,” with recognition on one end and control on the other, and can hence be both empowering and

⁸⁶ I use the word *lubunya* to imply the trans sex workers as they use it for each other in *lubunca* slang, but time to time I also use it similar to queer for any non-normative subjectivity and sexuality.

disempowering. Personally, being invisible as a lesbian resident in the sight of the *mahalleli* has been frustrating, yet at the same time, it kept me at ease in my face to face encounters as a researcher. Since I was not perceived as the subject of the questions I posed, my interviewees articulated things that they may not have had they known that I was a lesbian. To the contrary, they often identified me as an “ally” in their ‘distant’ position toward queerness and formulated some sentences starting with “we...” or ending with “aren't we?”. I sometimes wondered what it would have taken for them to identify me as non-heterosexual, and whether this opaqueness should lead me to question my queerness.

Goffman's (1971) account of the co-constructive relationship between the norm and invisibility, immediately speaks to the heterosexist assumptions of my informants (Goffman 1971 cited in Brigenti 2007: 326). Vera Chouinard and Ali Grant (2005: 170) describe heterosexism as “the social relations, practices and ideas which work to construct heterosexuality as the only true, ‘natural’ sexuality whilst negating all other sexualities as deviant and ‘unnatural’.”. Therefore, they claim that it is also not a surprise to encounter “the hostility toward lesbians and gays who make themselves visible in territories [public places] dominated by the heterosexual relations and norms” (Chouinard and Grant 2005: 170). Could these three words, ‘hostility’, ‘visible’ and ‘norm’ be the keywords to crudely map the queer public experience for LGBTI individuals? Transgressing the gender-norm brings the moment of visibility along with hostility as it ruptures the flow of the normal, which is the “unmarked, unnoticed, unthematized, untheorized” (Brigenti 2007: 326).

With regard to gay visibility, Myslik juxtaposes one of the most popular statements of the ‘gender defenders’ (Bornstein 2006: 236), namely “gays would be tolerated if they didn’t ‘flaunt’ their homosexuality” (Myslik 2005: 158) with the popular t-shirt slogan among gays, “I don’t mind straight people, as long as they act gay in public” (2005: 159). Similar expressions about ‘flaunting’ occurred in my field as well, and I will try to discuss the spatial aspects of this ‘flaunting’ within the geography of Kurtuluş since being visible, and supposedly to flaunt, does not only refer to the transgression of gender norms but also to the norms of that very space. In other words,

it is also immediately related to the division of public/private since queerness is ‘tolerated’ within the boundaries of the private and flaunting usually implies any kind of public presence of LGBTIs (Brickell, 2000). Brigenti simply formulates it by stating that “visible and invisible social action depends on which subjects act in which places.” (2007: 335). Performing ‘too much’ and performing in an ‘inappropriate’ place are generally entangled when the subject bangs against the wall of the normativity of gender and space.

As I observed first hand in my social interactions with the activist circles and also encountered in the various texts in the literature (Whittle 2006, Doan 2007) trans women are usually pointed as “the most vulnerable and least protected” ones among LGBTI communities (Doan 2007: 61). Such an argument relies on the assumption of the undeniable visibility of trans people which “brings the risk of attack” (Myslik 2005: 159). However, I prefer to reconfigure visibility as a more dynamic concept to rethink and redefine the conditions of visibility, normativity, power and violence. For example, Esmeray who is a trans feminist activist and performer from Istanbul recounts that “trans people have different problems. Although LGBTs have similar problems trans people are more visible. But it is also not fair to say that they are exposed to too much violence because they are more visible, as some other is vulnerable to violence precisely because s/he is not visible. Actually there is no difference.”⁸⁷Admittedly, sex work brings dangerous encounters especially in terms of physical violence however, regardless of sex work, trans individuals are still subjected to various forms of violence more than other groups of sexual dissidents as demonstrated by various research⁸⁸. What Esmeray remarks in the quote is another aspect of the violence which is immanent in not recognizing, not acknowledging, therefore ignoring and silencing.

⁸⁷ “Transseksüellerin sorunları daha farklı. LGBT ile temelde benzer sorunlar olsa da, translar daha görünür. Ama görünür oldukları için de çok fazla şiddet görüyorlar demek de kötü bir şey çünkü öbürü de görünmediği için şiddet görüyor. Aslında farkı yok.”; <http://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/5228/gorunurluk-cok-artti-ama-halen-edinilmis-hicbir-hakkimiz-yok>

⁸⁸ <http://researchturkey.org/tr/summary-results-of-the-social-and-economic-problems-of-lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transsexual-lgbt-individuals-in-turkey-research/>

Departing from her own experience, trans academic Susan Stryker (2006) provocatively illustrates the changing circumstances of invisibility as the identities and their relations to power are constantly reconstructed within various encounters and contexts. In the 'journal' chapter of her piece "*My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamonix*", in which she metaphorically uses the Frankenstein's monster to tell the story of her own transexual body and its political power, she writes:

"Frustration and anger soon welled up in abundance. In spite of all I'd accomplished, my identity still felt so tenuous. Every circumstance of life seemed to conspire against me in one vast, composite act of invalidation and erasure. In the body I was born with, I had been invisible as the person I considered myself to be; I had been invisible as a queer while the form of my body made my desires look straight. Now, as a dyke I am invisible among women; as a transsexual, I am invisible among dykes. As the partner of a new mother, I am often invisible as a transsexual, a woman, and a lesbian. I've lost track of the friends and acquaintances these past nine months who've asked me if I was the father. It shows so dramatically how much they simply don't get what I'm doing with my body. The high price of whatever visible, intelligible, self-representation I have achieved makes the continuing experience of invisibility maddeningly difficult to bear." (Strykers, 2006: 250-251).

She underscores the tense relationship between the corporeal visibility and the invisibility of her variously constructed identities since the conditions of the recognition is reconfigured based on the power relations in each encounter and each context. Keeping this reconfiguration in mind, I will trace the gender non-conforming experiences of the LGBTI residents in Kurtuluş and will undertake a discussion on the spatial, sexual and moral negotiations of being visible, being *lubunya*⁸⁹ and being *mahalleli* in Kurtuluş by pursuing such questions as: What kind of openings does the dilemma of visibility offer for reimagining the spatial and the sexual norms and their relationship with each other? What kind of boundaries are negotiated with regard to the tension between visibility and invisibility? How do these boundaries unfold in terms of oppression and resistance? What are the spatial and sexual limits of the public and private, and what are the terms of being visible within these limits when queerness is at stake?

⁸⁹ here I refer to being 'gender non-normative'

In what follows, I will lay out the conditions of visibility which is different for gays, lesbians and trans people as these groups experience different levels of gender non-normativity. Furthermore, I will discuss the space-bound codes of sexuality which vary within the geography of Kurtuluş. I will also interrogate the potential of the in-betweenness of the district to enable LGBTIs for various manifestations of queerness through the negotiation with the boundaries of spatiality and sexuality.

4.2. Hand in Hand Lesbians, Gays with Skinny Pants, and Girls as They Are...

My frustration about the ‘invisibility’ of gays and lesbians in Kurtuluş -as I was quite sure about their dense presence thanks to my own Gaydar- evolved into further interrogation of the distinct public appearances of gays, lesbians and trans residents. Even though *travestiler* was the most commonly referred community by the shopkeepers and real estate agents, I realized that they were usually talking about any appearance or performance which is gender non-normative regardless of the subject. In addition to trans residents, they were mentioning effeminate boys and women “like men who fight just like men on the streets so you don't even have to intervene.”⁹⁰ These narratives, I argue, indicate the interwoven relationship of gender and sexuality, resulting in an entanglement of various non-normative public performances. As Namaste (1996) suggests, “effeminate” men and “masculine” women are “gaybashed” irrespective of their sexual identifications.

Moreover, the narratives on the non-normative subjects and performances were profoundly spatialized. In other words, some bodies were more acceptable in some areas whereas the moral disapproval of gender non-normative manifestations was more common in other areas in the neighborhood. But before elaborating on that, let me start with a story that points to the deceptive appearance of the gender.

The dialogue below is from an interview with one of the real estate agents, twenty nine year-old Sezgin, who was born and raised in Kurtuluş;

⁹⁰“Lezbiyen de çok burada bir de erkek gibi kavga ediyorlar ha hiç yanaşmaya falan gerek yok.”

“-When you see them, is it possible to not understand?”

-[interrupting me] Of course not. But there are some people you look at but cannot see, which happened to me. I guess it was six years ago. We gave it [the flat], supposedly we gave it to a student. For example you seem like a bayan⁹¹, or this friend seems like a man. You cannot know how this thing is, but after a while he grows his hair, has some visitors coming to his home. You can't learn the detail but we try to understand according to the appearance I mean.

-Okay she started her transition after she moved in.

-Maybe even before moving in, he might show himself to us like that but you don't know after that.”⁹²

He obviously regrets having failed in gender policing and let that [I assume a trans] person rent an apartment. He did not mention any complaints from the neighbors or any problems stemming from her tenantry, but rather describes her body change by implying that he would not have given the flat if he knew her. Such stories of deceptive appearances were mentioned by some other interviewees as well with an emphasis on how successful some of them are, you cannot even ‘distinguish’ if you don't hear ‘the voice’ or ‘see the hands’. These two details of the voice and the hands were also mentioned many times as part of the ‘evidence’ they observe as they engage in gender policing. Such policing is not only targeting trans individuals but gays and lesbians, too, become targeted when they transgress the conventional presentations of their assigned gender.

⁹¹ a word used for addressing women which is strongly rejected by the feminist movement in Turkey as it desexualize women. It is used to avoid the word *kadın* (woman) which is generally used for the women who are not virgin in the everyday sexist language.

⁹² “-onları görünce anlamama ihtimaliniz...
-yok tabi. ama bir de bakıp da göremediğin insanlar var ki başıma geldi. bunda 6 sene önce falandı galiba. verdik öğrenci diye verdik. atıyorum siz şu an bayan olarak gözüktüyorsunuz mesela ya da arkadaş erkek olarak gözüktüyor. bilemiyorsunuz nasıl bir şey olduğunu ama belli bir zaman sonrasında işte saçını uzatıyor, evine gelen giden olmaya başlıyor. detayını tam öğrenemiyorsunuz ama biz görünüş olarak yorumu yapmaya çalışıyoruz yani.
-okey. eve çıktıktan sonra dönüşüme başlamış.
-eve çıkmadan önce belki de bize görünüş olarak kendini öyle göstermiştir ama ondan sonraki süreçte bilemiyorsunuz yani.”

Namaste (1996), in her article that elaborates on the narratives and experiences of ‘gender outlaws’, discusses the gendered dimension of homophobic violence faced in public space. A brief discussion of how gender and sexuality is intertwined might clarify the distinct spatial interactions of lesbians, gays and trans residents in the urban space.

For example, the risk of beeping a homophobic’s gaydar revealed some daily strategies of my interviewees as “the threat of violence polices one’s gender presentation and behavior.” (1996: 227). On the other hand, for some of my lesbian informants even holding the hand of their partner might be ignored or perceived non-sexual because of the invisibility of woman homosexuality. Therefore, it seems necessary to highlight the role of gender in analyzing my interviewees’ neighborhood encounters and daily experiences, rather than melting down some crucial differences under the terms “non-conforming” or “gender outlaw” (Namaste 1996).

Below, there are some narratives of gay men about some of their public interactions which varies according to their outfit;

“There is a barber shop under my place and I catch the shopkeeper’s eyes too often. For example, how do they understand? From your appearance. For example I pass in front of them with a sleeveless t-shirt and shorts. But sometimes when I go to work wearing canvas pants and a shirt, I look exactly like a heterosexual. Sometimes I go out with my LGBT friends and some of them are obvious, some of them are not. I don’t know, I think that they are confused. Recently I ride bike when I pass I look exactly like a man and they are like confused. It is obvious that they cannot understand what is going on but our appearance is attracting attention. It changes when I wear mini short for sure.”⁹³

(Taner, 26)

-Do you think that you are out in the neighborhood?

⁹³ “Benim evimin altında berber var çok fazla göz göze geliyorum ben o berberle oradaki esnafla. Mesela nereden anlaşılıyor? Senin dış görünüşünden anlaşılıyor. Mesela ben kolsuz tişört çok kısa şortla geçiyorum önlere. Ama bazen işe giderken böyle keten pantolon giyip gömlek de giyiyorum böyle tam heteroseksüel olmuş oluyorum. Bazen arkadaşlarımla çıkıyorum evden LGBT arkadaşlarım işte ne biliyim çok belli eden var etmeyen var falan ve bence kafalarının karıştığını düşünüyorum. Bisiklet sürüyorum son dönem bisikletle geçiyorum tam erkek oluyorum böyle kafaları karışıyor bence. Farkediliyor anlayamıyorlar ne olduğunu ama dikkat çeken dış görünüşümüz falan. Değişiyor tabi mini şortla.

“I mean I don’t have such a contact but I walked around with my *koli*. I mean I go like this short shorts [pointing to mini shorts]. They look at me when I go out with shorts, the whole neighborhood looks at me.”⁹⁴

(Şahan, 32)

How would they protect you?

“If I was one of them for sure...also occupational. They would definitely protect me if I was someone more manly as well. These are some reasons. My style, those days, was like flattop hair and athlete etc.”⁹⁵

(Tan, 27)

Namaste claims that the masculine lesbians attract more attention and have higher risk to be a basher’s victim (1996: 238). I did not encounter such an example in the narratives of my lesbian interviewees but they rather underlined the performance of holding the hand of a partner as the “space is sexed through the relational movements of one lesbian body to another.” in Probyn’s words (2010: 81). That was the specific visible performance that needed to be self-regulated based on their feeling about the space and on their interactions with the other residents in the public space. When I asked Yeliz if she is out to the shopkeepers and if she passes in front of *bakkal* holding her girlfriend’s hand, she responded as follows:

“I mean sometimes holding hands doesn’t correspond to ‘that’ in others so you pass without a worry but I don’t want to come out. I wouldn’t come out except for to my peers and friends, friends of my friends and the ones who come to our organization called Tatavla LGBTI. For example, there was a *meyhane* Tatavla we used to go so often and we were close with the *abla* there but I don’t know if we were out sometime she was like she knew sometime she did things as if she doesn’t know. There is a *bakkal* for example, a *yurtsever* [used for

⁹⁴ “Yani öyle bir temasım yok ama buralarda dolaştım kolimle falan. Şu kadar şortla gidiyorum yani. Bakıyorlar şorta çıktığım gün bütün mahalle bakıyor.”

⁹⁵ “Onlardan biri olsaydım daha tabi...mesleki olarak da tabi. Daha manly şey bişe olsaydım da korurlardı kesinlikle. Bir çok noktada evet bunlar var. Tarzım da işte o zaman 3 numaraydı saçlarım falan böyle, atlet falan.”

politicized Kurdish people], we talk about Kobane, etc. but everything might suddenly change if I come out.”⁹⁶

Similarly Erge (30) also recounts that:

“We used to walk holding hands with Z. on the streets but It was more worrisome as we get closer to home, Feriköy, because it is something about anonymity. Feriköy is too much *mahalle*, there is more surveillance.”⁹⁷

Another lesbian couple also expressed such a worry to be seen holding hands when they are close to their home because they assumed that the neighbors thought about them as just friends living together. Taking the risk to be out appears to be more likely in the places far from the apartment, especially in the Pangaltı side, which is described as being more crowded and as providing anonymity of the big city. I observed that the risk to be assaulted usually force lesbian partners to censor themselves and leave the hands in the streets and districts where they feel threatened. Concerning this self-censorship mechanism, Valentine (1993: 409), who found out similar narratives with her lesbian interviewees, claims that “[they] censor themselves and don't express affection to their partners in the public space in order to avoid homophobic violence. Thereby, It perpetuates the invisibility of lesbians in everyday environments.” About the gaze of others which constructs the space, Valentine (2005: 148) makes another note: “Heterosexual looks of disapproval, whispers and stares are used to spread discomfort and make lesbians feel ‘out of place’ in everyday spaces. These in turn pressurize many women into policing their own desires and hence reinforce the appearance that ‘normal’ space is straight space.” I don't want to conclude, as Valentine suggests, that the self-censorship of queers reinforces the heterosexuality of the space by perpetuating their invisibility, but rather I want to focus on the resistance potential of this feeling of being

⁹⁶ “Yani el ele geçmek bazen öyle bir anlama gelmiyor ya karşıdakinde zaten o yüzden bazen rahat geçersin ama açılmayı istemiyorum. Kendi yaşıtım, arkadaşlarım onların arkadaşları, Tatavla LGBTI diye bir örgütümüz oraya gelen insanlar dışındakilere açılmam. Mesela hep gittiğimiz bir meyhane vardı Tatavla, oradaki ablayla baya samimi olmuştuk ama açık mıydık bilemiyorum bazen biliyor gibiydi bazen bilmiyor gibi şeyler yapıyordu. Bir bakkal var mesela yurtsever, Kobane falan da konuşuyoruz ama açılısam bir anda her şey değişebilir.”

⁹⁷ “Z’le el ele yürüyorduk sokakta ama Feriköy’e eve doğru yaklaştıkça daha tedirgin edici oluyordu, çünkü bu anonimlikle alakalı birşey. Feriköy çok mahalle, daha fazla surveillance var.”

“out of place”, as it pushes gender non-normative residents to develop daily tactics and self-reconstructions in order to avoid confronting a potential homophobic/transphobic violence. For example, Mavi (28), a trans resident, tells that she walks different paths in the neighborhood based on her outfit that day;

“For example, I don’t pass by the bakkal on the corner when I wear a dress or make-up or I pass there without looking. He makes me feel threatened, he is conservative etc. and I don’t want to take the reaction I walk around the other side.”⁹⁸

Her strategy to prefer the other street which is closer to Pangaltı side hints at the varying gender and sexuality codes of specific areas in the neighborhood. These codes interact with the various manifestations of queerness, while at the same time being negotiated with the discourses of sexuality and morality on a spatial level. Before I further analyze these negotiations, I want to turn back to lesbian invisibility to add that there are apparently some other forms of lesbian visibility beyond holding hands or showing affection, as occurred in the narrative of the plumber: “There are also too many lesbians in here and they fight just like men you don’t even have to intervene.”⁹⁹The image of a woman fighting like a man evokes the association of gender and sexuality as the transgressing the normative womanhood was translated as lesbianism by the plumber. It also affirms Namaste’s point as she argues that masculine lesbian are more visible than gender-normative lesbians (Namaste 1996).

A brief scene from my encounter with the Mukhtar of Bozkurt Neighborhood could also be considered a ‘funny’ example of lesbian invisibility as he would not even consider that I too could be a lesbian. When I asked about the LGBTI residents of the neighborhood, he said:

⁹⁸ “Mesela köşedeki bakkala elbise giydiğimde ya da makyaj yaptığımda uğramıyorum ya da oradan hiç bakmadan geçiyorum. Öyle sanki o bi tehditmiş gibi geliyor yani adam şey muhafazakar bilmem ne ve o tepkiyi almak istemiyorum diğer taraftan dolaşıyorum.”

⁹⁹ “Lezbiyen de çok burada bir de erkek gibi kavga ediyorlar ha hiç yanaşmaya falan gerek yok.”

“I don’t know how they make their preference. That is their preference. As the administrative chief of the neighborhood, my point of view for them is they are not different from you. Do you understand what I mean?”

-I understand.

There is no difference between you and them. Whatever you are, or a male citizen is, they are the same. Why? Because here I do not have a right to discriminate. I am in charge here, I have to protect their rights, also your rights and also men’s rights. I mean excuse me, even a prostitute has rights. The other issue [referring to sex work] is not my business, that is police business.”¹⁰⁰

He did not only assume me as a [heterosexual] woman but also melted all the gays, lesbians and trans people into ‘they’ or ‘that kind of people’ in spite of my separate questions for each group. By using the subject ‘they’, he usually referred to the trans sex workers who cruise on Ergenekon Avenue. Most of my *mahalleli* informants did not distinguish the groups of sexual dissidents but they generally specified the trans sex workers by using the word *travesti*. It was actually not a surprise as the *travesties* are the oldest queers visible in the district as they have worked and lived here since the 90s, with their numbers increasing with subsequent migration from Tarlabası and Cihangir to Kurtuluş Pangaltı, after the gentrification projects therein (Zengin, 2014). It was also notable that a couple of gay and lesbian informants [especially the politicized ones who know the history of the LGBT movement and of the neighborhood] expressed that they are indebted to the trans sex workers as they came earlier and struggled over space in the district, thereby things are relatively easier now for them as the newcomers.

“Watch out for Son Durak and the streets where the *travesti* live. Those parts won’t suit you as two single ladies.” This sentence belongs to a real estate agent who wanted to ‘warn’ us while we were looking for an apartment in Kurtuluş. Another real estate agent

¹⁰⁰ “Şimdi bilmiyorum onlar tercihlerini nasıl kullanmış bilmem. Onların tercihidir. Ben mahallenin mülki amiri olarak onlara bakış tarzım sizden bir farkı yok benim için. Ne demek istediğimi anladınız mı? Sizden bir farkı yok. Siz ne isenizi diğer bir erkek vatandaşım neyse o da aynı. Neden çünkü artık benim burada ayırım yapma hakkım bitti. Ben burayı aldım artık onların da haklarını sizlerin de haklarını erkeklerin de haklarını korumak zorundayım. Yani çok özür dilerim bir fahişe de olsa onun da hakkı saklıdır. Diğer konu beni ilgilendirmiyor o emniyetin işi.”

eliminated an apartment without even showing us because there were *travesti* neighbors. I heard the same warning many times from various ‘helpful’ people living in the neighborhood during our apartment search. This very sentence was also one of the triggers for me to undertake this research about Kurtuluş. One can argue that it points out the nexus of my discussion; specific areas and the *travestis* need to be avoided as a resident candidate. In order to clarify the tableaux a bit more, I asked real estate agents about the housing stories of trans residents.

“I don’t think that there would be any problem if I find an apartment for them. They pay their rents. They pay somehow. I mean I don’t think they would cause any disturbance around. People usually hold back because of their appearance. Other than that I don’t think there would be any problem stemming from their humanity. It happens for sure, because they have a tough life. Fights and quarrel happen, that is true I mean...

...Those who sell their apartments want more money from the trans. For instance if the apartment is 150 billion, they want something like 170 and trans offers it anyway. Because the owner is not much eager to sell. If it is 150 billion, she says okay I give 160 billion.”¹⁰¹

(Kenan, 31)

Do you have gay clients?

“We give them. He is just gay, its his sexual preference. There is no fight and noise in their house. And the houses they rent are like 2500 liras.”¹⁰²

Ahmet (58, real estate agent)

Trans residents’ undeniable visibility and the immediate association with sex work appeared most clearly in their housing interactions. The class difference between

¹⁰¹ “Ben mesela ev bulup versem sorun yaşayacağını çok sanmıyorum. Onlar kirasını da öderler. Bir şekilde ödüyorlar. Yani çok rahatsızlık vereceğini düşünmüyorum. İnsanların genelde onlarla görünüş olara çekiniyorlar. Yoksa insanıyet olarak sıkıntı geleceğini sanmıyorum.Oluyordur muhakkak onların hayatı çünkü zor bir hayat. Kavgası dövüşü oluyor. O da bir gerçek yani...Transtan satarken alıyorlar. atıyorum 150 milyarsa 170 falan daha doğrusu bunu trans teklif ediyor zaten. Çünkü ev sahibi satma taraftarı değil. 150 milyarsa tamam diyor ben 160milyar veriyorum.”

¹⁰² “Veriyoruz. O geydir sadece cinsel tercihidir. O’nun evinde kavga gürültü falan olmaz. Zaten tutacağı ev 2500 falan.”

gays and trans tenants in the narrative of Ahmet and the assumed fight and noise in the house of a trans as Kenan mentioned predominantly stem from the sex work which plays a crucial role in the trans presence in Kurtuluş. The perception of sex work and trans presence in the neighborhood seem to have spatialized differences in the narratives of various inhabitants. As I discuss below, the narratives I encountered mapped the altering moral manifestations and the sexual conventions of the neighborhood from Son Durak to Pangaltı, pointing to the differentiation between the geographies of the “sex worker trans” [Son Durak] and the “neighbor trans” [Pangaltı].

4.3. Trans subjectivities from Son Durak to Pangaltı: “*Ortalığı Yıkanlar*”, “*İyi Aile Kızları*”...

Elizabeth Grosz (1996: 250) proposes that “the city divides cultural life into public and private domain, geographically dividing and defining the particular social positions and locations occupied by individuals and groups... these spaces, divisions and interconnections are the roles and means by which bodies are individuated to become subjects.” Her argument not only underlines the body-space relationship which is reciprocally constitutive (Massey 2005, Duncan 2005) but also indicates the role of space to mark and thereby subjectify the bodies residing in it. I picked this particular quote since I will discuss the generative process of space and spatial divisions in relation to the reconstruction of the trans bodies between morally and spatially constructed boundaries in Kurtuluş along with the spatial conditions of being a neighbor trans and a sex worker trans.

Before elaborating on the role of sex work in negotiating the trans presence in Kurtuluş, I should lay out some dominant discourses about specific areas of the neighborhood. Based on the interviews I conducted in the neighborhood, Son Durak region was paradoxically described more like a *mahalle* with more surveillance compared to the Pangaltı side, and at the same time as the center of the undocumented migrants, thereby the center of anonymity and crime. On the other hand, Pangaltı was

generally pictured as the safer side of the neighborhood with higher rents and more elite residents where you can experience the circulation and anonymity [again] of the big city. These descriptions are summarized out of the overlapping statements of LGBTI residents and other *mahalleli* [shopkeepers, mukhtars and real estate agents]. For example Şahan (32), a gay resident, explains his changing street experience towards Son Durak:

“After Baruthane street, it changes, I feel that. S. lives on that side for example, when I walk there, 4-5 straight guys walk by throwing words around etc. and the shopkeepers, you feel that the environment changes. You know there are young people waiting at the corners in the small towns, not here but that side is a bit like that. There is movement and circulation in the first blocks. I have been living in this apartment for five years and have never seen someone sitting at the corner in the evenings. People go out and sit on the street therein, it is like this neighborhood is ours. It is similar to the guy sitting on his car, you know. I remember feeling uncomfortable when I walked there. I look at him, he looks back, I look, he looks you know. Nobody said anything but that is the next step anyway. There are stories about that side, there are some who were beaten up, some verbally abused.”¹⁰³

Songül also states that on her way from Pangaltı subway to her apartment, Seymen Street [the end of the second block towards Son Durak] is a turning point. Although she can communicate with old ladies waiting at the windows by throwing kisses and joking, her way of interaction changes as the profile changes after Seymen street;

“After Dericiler, the structure of the families start to change. It is more traditional, when you can blow a kiss to a woman over there, here you can only say good evening to same aged women, that’s all. Because I cannot blow a kiss to a woman in here, that is impossible.”¹⁰⁴

Taner (26) shares his observation about the changing profile of women in the public space towards Son Durak;

¹⁰³ “Baruthane caddesinden sonra değişiyor hissediyorum. S. de o tarafta oturuyor mesela yürürken hetero 4-5 adam laf ata ata hödö hödö yürüyen bir grup, esnaf falan hissediyorsun onu, o çevre değişiyor. Küçük şehirlerde köşe başında bekleyen gençler falan var ya buralar öyle değil orası öyle biraz. 1. ada falan biraz daha sirkülasyon olan hareket eden, ben bu sokaktayım 5 yıldır falan köşede oturan akşamları çıkan kimseyi görmedim. Orası öyle değil sokağa çıkıp direk oturuyorlar, bu mahalle bizim falan. Arabasının önünde oturan erkek var ya onun gibi. Giderken rahatsız oluyordum hatırlıyorum. Bakıyorum bakıyo bakıyorum bakıyo anladın mı? Laf eden olmuyordu ama onun bir sonrası da laf etme noktası zaten. Oranın hikayeleri var yani dayak yiyen de laf yiyen de olmuş.”

¹⁰⁴ “Dericilerden sonra biraz daha o aile yapısı değişmeye başlıyor. Daha geleneksel bir şey orada öpücük atarken aynı yaş grubundan kadınlara burada iyi akşamlar demek sadece, onda kalıyor. Çünkü ben buradaki kadına öpücük atamıyorum mümkün değil o.”

“More conservative women, like women with children. Socio-economic profile alters towards Son Durak, women are housewives who give birth rather than strong urban women who have a job.”¹⁰⁵

In contrast to the narratives above, the Mukhtars, as the administrative chiefs of the district, remarkably promote their neighborhood with alleged “safety” and “modern civilized residents”. The following dialogue illustrates how the Mukhtar of Bozkurt Neighborhood explains the difference of Son Durak and his neighborhood;

“-While I was looking for an apartment, something attracted my attention. There is an important difference in Son Durak, the rents dramatically decrease there?”

That difference...why decrease...well...do you want to live in a neighborhood where blacks live?

-I wouldn't mind but is that why the rents decrease?

Well no...no. I was gonna talk about something else. It is not only because of blacks. There are blacks. One side is with people from Batman, the others are from Mardin, one side is with Syrians, the other side is with Iraqis. That side constituted a mosaic like this and it is full. Everyone scares from each other. Well when you open your door in the evening...well I don't say uncivilized, definitely I don't say that but there is an unattractiveness. You have to admit that. When you open the door, you know that person, you call him Hasan Abi, you ask how he is, you know where he is from, how he is, what he does. Over there, you don't know these. Do you understand what I mean?

-I understand.

I mean if someone smacks you. Where is this black guy from, look for him, you might not even recognize him the day after if you see him on the street, am I right?

-You said here Bozkurt is a mosaic too, Son Durak is also a mosaic but are these mosaics different?

You talked about the difference in rents. The difference is because of this, he says I pay 500 liras more, I know whom to encounter when I opened up my

¹⁰⁵ “Daha muhafazakar kadınlar, daha böyle çocuklu kadınlar. Daha böyle kentli değil de iş sahibi güçlü kadın değil de Son Durak'a doğru o profil sosyo-ekonomik olarak değişiyor. İşte doğuran evinin kadını kadın.”

door, to whom I say hello, it would be more reasonable. Thats all. I mean I wouldn't live in Son Durak.

-What about the crime rate?

It is higher there. Crime rate is higher over there comparing to our neighborhood. Here we have just thievery issue. Mine is nothing, nothing when you look at the other neighborhoods...we have many teachers, many police commissioners well many professors and doctors. I mean when you look at the average, our cultural level is high. This provides a super environment for our neighborhood.”¹⁰⁶

Bozkurt is the neighborhood which encompasses all the blocks between Ergenekon Avenue and Şahin Street, and between Kurtuluş Avenue and Dolapdere Avenue. It is closer to the subway and it includes the Pangaltı district. The rents are higher in this area compared to the Eskişehir side which encompasses a part of the Son Durak district. When I asked about the crime rate which allegedly increases as we come closer to Son Durak, the Mukhtar of Eskişehir Neighborhood responded as follows:

¹⁰⁶ “Benim ev aradığım dönemde şöyle bir şey dikkatimi çekmişti. Son durakta çok ciddi bir fark var yani kiralar çat diye düşüyor? O fark..neden düşüyor...şimdi...ee zencilerin oturduğu bir mahallede oturmak ister misin?

-Benim bir derdim olmazdı ama öyle bir sebepten mi düşüyor?

Şimdi hayır... hayır. Başka bi şeye getircektim konuyu. Sırf zenciler için değil. Zencilerin olduğu var. Öbür tarafta Batmanlıların olduğu yer, öbür tarafta Mardinlilerin olduğu yer, öbür tarafta Suriyelilerin, öbür tarafta Iraklıların olduğu yer var. Orası böyle bir mozaik oluşturmuş ve dolu. Şimdi herkes birbirinden korkuyor. Şimdi akşam kapını açtığın zaman eee... kültürsüz demiyorum kesinlikle kültürsüz demiyorum ama bir iticilik var. Onu da kabul ediyorsunuz. Kapıyı açtığımız zaman işte tanıyoruz, işte Hasan Abi diyorsunuz merhaba nasılsın iyi misin o kişinin nereli olduğunu nasıl olduğunu ne yaptığını biliyorsunuz. Orada tanıyorsunuz. Anlatabiliyor muyum?

-Anlıyorum.

Yani size birisi tokat vursa. Bu zenci hangi ülkeden diye yani araştırın belki yolda görsen bir daha hayatta tanıyamazsın doğru mu?

-Yani burası da bir mozaik dediniz Bozkurt, Son Durak da mozaik ama mozaikler mi farklı?

Kira farkından bahsediyorsun ya işte bundan. Yani kira farkı bundan yani diyor ki ben 500 lira fazla vereyim, kapımı açtığım zaman kimle karşılaşacağımı bileyim, kimle merhaba diyeceğimi bileyim daha mantıklı olsun diyor. Bütün olay bu. Yani ben son durakta oturmam.

Suç oranı peki sizce?

Orada daha çok. Orada suç oranı bizim mahallemize göre çok. Bizde yani işte bir hırsızlık olayımız var. O da yani diğer mahallelere baktığınız zaman bendeki hiç bir şey, bendeki hiç bir şey.”

“Öğretmenimiz çok emniyet müdürlerimiz çok eee hocalarımız çok doktorlarımız çok. Yani ortalama baktığınız zaman kültür seviyemiz yüksek. Bu da bizim mahalle için süper bir ortam oluyor.”

“Here is the most modern district of Turkey. Even Binalı Yıldırım [minister] lived here for 25 years. Many professors grew up in here. If somebody does something inappropriate, he is warned. He is said; look brother stop, it is shame. But here it doesn't happen, I mean very rare, one in thousand. Snatching happens all over Turkey. Here it happens once in three months. People catch, we watch out each other here I mean.”¹⁰⁷

Both mukhtars were depicting their neighborhoods with similar highlights about the cultivated profile of residents and, as I elaborate below, the solidarity and familiarity among residents which lead them to watch out for each other. This practice of ‘watching out’ and the collective intervention of the mahalleli was mentioned by the Mukhtar of Eskişehir also when I asked about the trans residents living in ‘his’ neighborhood. He constantly referred to a moral boundary using some expressions such as *rahat durmak*, *olay çıkarmamak*, *ahlak dışı davranmamak*. Implying the trans residents, he expressed that overstepping this very boundary would cause the collective reaction of the mahalleli who know and watch out for each other;

“*Travestis* disturb if you disturb them. They come here for paper works, there is nothing. They scattered Taksim Pürtelaş, they all came to this side. There too many in Harbiye, here there are not many in here, only certain people. They are not even 20 at total. Most of them became *bayan* [female]...They had a place in Pürtelaş, it was scattered. They are also human, Allah gave them this thing, it should be approached normally as long as they behave themselves. Here nobody discriminate, they are tolerant but I mean only if they don't do anything. If something happens, everybody attacks. Otherwise its her good deed or her sin. If the landlord is disturbed then he shouldn't have rented out his home, what can I do. They are also human in my opinion.

-I think they sex work on the Avenue?

Not in here, in Harbiye, Şişli. They stand on Ergenekon, on Abide-i Hürriyet. They live in here. They never bring work to their homes, people intervene

¹⁰⁷ “Türkiye’nin en moden yeri burası. Binalı Yıldırım bile 25 sene burada oturdu. Ne profesörler çıktı buradan. Uygunsuz bir şey yaptı mı uyarılır, kardeşim bak yapma der ayıp denir. Ama burada olmaz nadir yani binde bir. Kapkaç Türkiye’nin her yerinde oluyor. Burada 3 ayda bir olur. Halk yakalar burada kollarız birbirimizi demek istiyorum.”

immediately but whatever they do outside at night, it is not our business. That's her life."¹⁰⁸

He was very eager to reduce the number of trans residents living in his neighborhood and he also pictured the ones who live within the boundaries of the neighborhood as the decent ones, the ones who have become *bayan* [lady], even getting married which means they do not cruise and engage in sex work but have adopted a heterosexual family life. They are the ones who can be acknowledged as *mahalleli*. This statement of Mukhtar which draws the line of being an acceptable decent *lubunya* in the neighborhood reminded me of the words of Ceyda about her position in the neighborhood which is exactly like a retired woman;

"I get along with shopkeepers, we are friends with all of them. They ask openly to me whatever they cant ask to them [other trans residents]. I am frank they know that. I easily talk to everyone. They consider me as a retired woman in the neighborhood.

-They don't behave as they behave to lubunya?

No they don't see me like that. Now if somebody says to my neighbors that Ceyda does this work [referring to sex work], they would say no she does not. Even if they knew, they wouldn't attribute that to me because I have women friends from the municipality. They all come to me. I have another friend who has a 17 year-old daughter. They are a family, she has a grandchild. She sends her daughter to me easily. She knows that I don't take

¹⁰⁸ "Travestiler dokunursan dokunur. Buraya geliyorlar işlemlerini yapmaya hiç bir şey yok. Taksim'deki Pürtelaşı darmadağın ettiler hepsi bu tarafa geldiler. Harbiye'de çok var bu tarafta çok yok, belirli kişiler var. Toplasan 20 tane yok. Bayan oldular çoğu evliler...Pürtelaş'ta yerleri vardı ya dağıttılar orayı. Canım şimdi onlar da insan ben Allah onlara şey vermiş normal karşılamak lazım rahat durdukları sürece. Burada kimse ayırım yapmaz hoşgörülüdür burada *bir olay yapmadıkça* yalnız. Bir olay oldu mu da herkes saldırır. Yoksa günah da O'na sevap da ona. E ev sahibi kiraya vermesin şikayetçiyse ben napabilirim. Benim nazarımda onlar da insan.

-Seks işçiliği yapıyorlar sanırım caddede?

Burada değil Harbiye'de Şişli'de. Ergenekon'da duruyorlar Abide-i Hürriyet'te duruyorlar. Burada yaşıyorlar. Evlerine kesinlikle iş getirmezler yani anında halk müdahale eder ama *dışarıda ne yapıyorsa gece ne yapıyorsa bizi ilgilendirmez*, O'nun hayatı."

anyone when her daughter is here. Everybody has infinite trust in me. I don't breach their trust.”¹⁰⁹

As Ceyda also implies, there is this strong emphasis on distinguishing the residential space and the cruising space. The very boundary between these two spaces is also the boundary between being a *mahalleli* and being the trouble-making noisy streetwalker. Transgressing this spatial boundary and bringing clients to one's home is what triggers the intervention of the *halk* [people] in Mukhtar's words. The following narratives also refer to this almost silent agreement between trans residents and their neighbors about the spatial division of sex work:

Mine, tailor (49) in Son Durak region:

They are just like 'good family girl' in here. They walk their head down so nobody say anything. They make a scene 10 steps further but that is different, they very nice here because this is where they live. It became natural for us as they are too many. They get along with their neighbors as well because they behave so nice. I don't want my children to see them, that is so bad in terms of moral. May the Allah discipline them.”¹¹⁰

Ahmet, real estate agent (58):

“If she doesn't use the same home for that, it doesn't become a problem in the building. For example, there are some of them who have a home to live, they don't take client to there. They have another place to take clients in Harbiye and other districts. Then, it is not a problem. When they bring clients, there are complaints in the building.”¹¹¹

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“Esnafla aram çok iyi, hepsiyle ahbapız. Onlara soramadıkları her şeyi bana açıkça sorarlar. Açık sözlüyüm ya bilirler. Çok rahat herkesle rahat muhabbet ederim. Onlar beni mahallede emekli bir kadın gözüyle görüyorlar.

-Lubunyalara davrandıkları gibi davranmıyorlar?

Hayır beni o gözle görmüyorlar. Şimdi komşularıma deseler ki Ceyda böyle böyle bu işi yapıyor, komşularımın hepsi der ki a hayır yapmaz. Bilse de bana konduramaz çünkü benim kadın arkadaşlarım da var belediyeden. Hepsi de bana gelirler. Başka bir arkadaşım var kızı da var 17 yaşında. Aile, torunu var. Kızını çok rahat bana gönderebilir. Bilir ki kızı buradayken ben kimseyi almam. Bana sonsuz bir güvenleri var herkesin. Kimsenin güvenini de şey yapmam yani.”

¹¹⁰“Onlar burada “iyi aile kızı” denir ya öyleler. Kimse bir şey demesin diye başları önde eğik yürüyorlar. Ha 10 adım ötede kıyame-ti koparıyorlar o ayrı ama burası yaşadıkları yer ya burada çok iyiler. O kadar çoklar ki doğallaştı artık bizim için de. Onların apart-manda falan komşularıyla araları da iyi çünkü çok iyi davranıyorlar. Çolumuz çocuğumuz görsün istemem ahlak açısından çok kötü tabi. Allah ıslah etsin.”

¹¹¹ “Aynı evi şey olarak kullanmıyorsa problem olmuyor apartmanda. Mesela bazıları var bir ev onların özel bir evi oluyor orada yatıyor kalkıyorlar oraya müşteri getirmiyorlar. Müşteri getirecek Harbiye tarafları başka yerlerde evleri var. O zaman problem olmuyor. Müşteri getirdiğinde apartmanda rahatsızlıklar oluyor.”

Kenan (31) real estate agent:

“I know that they mostly live in Bilezikçi Street. Down there in Son Durak, I don't think they would live. I mean that side wouldn't be suitable for them usually. Both maybe because of the proximity and the comfort to go in and out.

-The rents are lower actually?

Lower but there is a difference between people living there and people here. Here is closer to the subway and people are more elite, they want to live with elite people. Everybody wants that but they are more comfortable here. It is a problem that a trans living in a neighborhood where families live. People here are generally single. Tenants are also single, you also live alone I guess. Mostly women live. %70-80 of our tenant clients are women. Single women. So, it is easier go in and out in the evening.”¹¹²

Ateş, trans sex worker (35):

“I mean I used to talk to all of them but I didn't go to their homes. Families were living in every building I lived. If you behave nice, they are nice. I never lived something bad but I heard some, for example in some places of course there were people who said ‘no, you cannot’ to my friends who take clients to their homes.

-Is it not a problem when you don't bring work to home?

I mean who would want that think about it there is prostitution in the building where you live with your family, there are countless men coming and going. I don't want such a thing neither. You do it rarely but would you want when it is so overt. Nobody wants.”¹¹³

¹¹² “Ben Bilezikçi sokakta daha çok oturduklarını biliyorum. Aşağı kesimde son durak civarında sanmıyorum otursunlar. Yani onlara göre daha uygun olmuyor genelde. Hem belki mesafe açısından hem girip çıkma açısından gelirken rahat etme açısından.

-Kiralar aslında daha düşük?

Düşük ama işte orada oturan kesimle burada oturan kesim arasında da fark var. Biraz daha metroya yakın ve oturan kesim daha böyle elit kesimin içinde oturmayı istiyorlar. Herkes öyle ister ama onlar daha rahat ediyor işte. Şimdi bir mahallede ailelerin yaşadığı bir mahallede bir transın yaşaması sıkıntı. Buradaki halkın çoğu zaten bekar. Kiracılar da bekar. Siz de yalnız kalıyorsunuz galiba. Bayandır yaşanların çoğu. Bizim müşterilerimizin kiralık müşterilerimizi %70-80'i bayandır. Bekar bayandır. Akşam daha rahat girip çıkma oluyor yani.”

¹¹³ “Yani hepsiyle konuşuyordum ama evlerine gidip oturmuyordum. Her kaldığım apartmanda aile oturuyordu. Sen iyi olursan zaten iyi olurlar, sen edepli olursan zaten iyi olurlar. Yani ben hiç tatsız bir olay yaşamadım ama bazı yerlerde duyuyorum mesela müşteri alan arkadaşlarıma hayır alamazsın diyenler tabi ki oluyormuş.

-Eve iş getirmeyince sorun olmuyor mu?

Yani kim ister ki düşünsene ailenle oturduğun bir apartmanda fuhuş yapıyor giren çıkan adamların haddi hesabı yok. Ben de öyle bir şey istemem. Tek tük yapıyorsun da düşünsene göz önüne soktuğun zaman sen ister misin öyle birşeyi. Kimse istemez.”

Ceylan who is a trans landlord speaks about her trans sex worker tenant;

“I also asked if she works or not. If she sex works. Not that I didn't want but if she does or not, where does she work? She works somewhere like a brothel. She doesn't bring client to home. Maybe she does I didn't question that part. But I would think if I didn't know her and if she worked on the street and took clients to home. I don't have a prejudice about sex work but if there will be 10 men coming to the building at night, if people wont be comfortably close their doors etc. it is a problem.”¹¹⁴

The Mukhtar of Eskişehir neighborhood also pointed to the settled family residents as the legitimate basis for the collective intervention to anything “immoral” which in this case is sex work:

-What would you do if the neighborhood becomes suddenly famous?

Here is already famous, it is on internet.

-But among homosexuals. For example, what if more cafes are opened?

They would work out. They cannot survive here, those kinds of things, they leave in 1-2 months at most, they can't work.

-What about the tolerance of the neighborhood?

Look, lets agree; in here people intervene if anything noisy inappropriate, immoral occurs, other than that nothing happens. If you yell and shout with men here what happens, there are families here. Everybody knows each other. If there are 1000 families, 2 or 3 of them are not known. People watch out each other. If a thief shows up, they shout and call the police. %90 of them are here for 30 year, %10 of them comes and goes.

-What would people if two men hand in hand show up on the street on their way home? Or what would you do as a mukhtar?

¹¹⁴ “Ben de çalışıp çalışmadığını sordum. Seks işçiliği yapıyo mu diye. İstemedim değil. Yapıyor mu yapmıyor mu? Nerede yapıyor? Genelev tarzı bir yerde çalışıyor. Eve müşteri getirmiyor gibi bir durum var. Belki de getiriyor bilmiyorum onu sorgulamadım yani orasını. Ama yolda çalışıp o müşteriyile eve gelecek bilmem ne olsaydı düşünürdüm tanımıyorsam. Benim seks işçiliğiyle ilgili bir önyargım yok ama sonuç itibariyle o apartmana atıyorum günde 10 tane tanımadığımız adam gelecekte gecenin bir saatinde, O kişi kapıyı rahat kapatmayacaksa falan bu problem.”

What should I say, it is their private life. What can I say unless they do something inappropriate on the street. No one would do anything as long as they behave themselves.”¹¹⁵

Aram Bey who is an Armenian ceremony organizer responds to my hypothetical question “What happens if thousands of homosexuals and transsexuals move to Kurtuluş?”;

“It would be degenerated, do you know why? Children are always wannabe. Children always want to do what they see. Children who see them would be defiled. I dont know if you are married but I guess you are young. Would you like to raise a child among such a community If you had one? Whatever it is, the name of it is bad, look what you call them, you call gay, the name is bad already. Woman will be woman, man will be man.”¹¹⁶

The vague limit of being decent and the conditions to be accepted as LGBTI neighbors is apparently drawn based on the presence of families and children as we see in the narratives above. Crossing pathways of trans sex worker and the children is expressed as the most unacceptable encounter. The “clear anxiety that spaces of visible street prostitution should be off-limits to children” also legitimizes the forces of law and order to ensure the controlled environments for commercial sex via an enclosure of the bodies of sex workers and their clients by containing street sex work in specific urban neighborhoods or ‘tolerance zones’ (Hubbard 2015: 3). Concerning the ‘tolerance zones’ of sex work, my informants point out the remote places such as Pangaltı, Harbiye, [*“dışarıda ne yapıyorsa*

¹¹⁵ “-Peki naparsınız burası birden ünlü olsa?

Burası zaten ünlü internette var eski bir mahalle.

-Eşcinseller arasında ama. Daha fazla kafe açılrsa mesela?

Çalışmaz. Burada barınamazlar yani o tür şeyler en fazla 1-2 aya terkeder çalışamazlar.

-E hani hoşgörülüydü mahalle?

Bakın anlaşalım; burada herhangi bir olay patırtı kütürtü terbiyesizlik ahlak dışı bir şey yapıldığı an müdahale yapılır onun dışında hayatına karışılmaz. Sen burada bağır çağır erkeklerle gel ne olur millet var aile evi burası kardeşim. Herkes birbirini tanır. 1000 tane aile varsa 2 3 tanesi tanınmaz. herkes birbirini kollar. Hırsız gelirse bağırır polisi arar. En az %90ı burada oturanların 30 yıllık, %10u da gelir gider.

-El ele iki erke girse şu sokağa evlerine gitmek üzere, mahallelinin tepkisi ne olur? Ya da sizin muhtar olarak?

Ben ne diyeyim ki onların özel hayatı. Yolda uygunsuz bir şey yapmadığı sürece ben ne diyebilirim. Düzgün olduktan sonra kimse bir şey yapmaz ki. Güler sadece. Gülerler.”

¹¹⁶ “E yani bozulur neden biliyor musunuz? Çocuklar hep özentidir. Çocuklar hep gördüklerini uygulamak isterler. Onları gören çocukların da ahlaki bozulur. Sen şimdi evli misin bilmiyorum ama ufaksın herhalde daha. Bir çocuğun olsa böyle bir toplumun içinde yetiştirmek ister misin? Nolursa olsun ismi kötü bakın ne diyorsun gey diyorsun ismi kötü. Kadın kadın olacak erkek erkek.”

gece ne yapıyorsa bizi ilgilendirmez”], and at the same time the privacy and private space as if it is considered beyond intervention [*“ne diyeyim ki onların özel hayatı”*]. The spatial boundary between the residential *mahalle* of families and the trans communities was implied one more time by Demet Demir¹¹⁷ eighteen years ago as she reflected on Cihangir;

“We have been there for 20 years, the ones who came 20 days ago judge us. Do we go and live in a slum where families live? We don’t! Why do they come to a district with a dense travesti population?” (cited in Zengin, 2104: 370).¹¹⁸

Thereby two boundaries appear to be negotiated by the trans sex workers; first one is between the family residential area and the sex work area, and the second one is between the private space and public space. Focusing on Kurtuluş, I first want to discuss one side of this constructed boundary which is the ‘tolerant’ Pangaltı as it is indeed preferred by the trans sex workers. Second, I want to pursue what could the narratives of sex work and the presence of sex worker trans residents suggest in terms of rethinking and redefining the limits of public and private in the context of *mahalle* relations in Kurtuluş. The relationship between the spatiality and sexuality is interesting in the context of the district in particular, since there is an ambivalent definition of the legitimate space for sex work which also blurs the boundary of the private space of the trans residents.

4.3.1. Liminality of the geography of Kurtuluş

Halberstam’s notion of metronormativity “maps a story of migration onto the coming out narrative as the queer subject move to ‘a place of tolerance’ which happens to be the urban” (2004: 36). He discusses the process of creating a normative story about the urban which is supposed to be the modern and the cultivated, thus ‘tolerant’ towards the LGBTI identities. This ‘tolerance’ becomes a trademark of being the modern urbaner whereas

¹¹⁷ One of the pioneering trans activist and a former sex worker who took an active role in the resistance in Ülker Street, Cihangir in 1996.

¹¹⁸ “Yirmi yıldır oradayız, yirmi gün önce gelen ahkam kesiyor. Biz gidip ailelerin yoğun olduğu bir semtte, bir gecekondu semtinde oturuyor muyuz? Oturmuyoruz! Sen niye travestilerin yoğun olarak oturduğu yere geliyorsun?”

homophobia becomes the mark of being a rural bigot. Although Halberstam's use of metronormativity is based on the cultural codes of urban and rural, I suggest employing it to read the geography of Kurtuluş on two levels: First, Kurtuluş as a 'place of tolerance' which receives many LGBTI newcomers in recent years, and second, Pangaltı within Kurtuluş as a specifically 'tolerant' and safe district for LGBTIs.

As I quoted above, most of my informants repetitively emphasized the "cultivated" profile of the residents of Kurtuluş. People, so to say, do not intervene in each other's life [*"kim kime dum duma"* as I noted many times during the field], thus it is preferred by singles, students, artists, etc. The 'cultivated' city-dwellers of the neighborhood were also pointed as the reason for the choice of 'transvestites and some others like them' to live here. Supposedly, thanks to the "modern" and "civilized" urban culture in Kurtuluş, most of these people can live here with relatively less problem compared to other neighborhoods in Istanbul. At this point, the notion of metronormativity could be a guide to read the geography of Kurtuluş, shedding light on the descriptions of Pangaltı and Son Durak as polar opposites. Pangaltı represents the big city, crowd, chaos and anonymity and therefore more likely to harbor LGBTI subjects, on the other hand, the atmosphere changes towards Son Durak where one is expected to experience being in a small town or in a *mahalle* which is associated with conservatism and surveillance. Moreover, the allegedly higher crime rate and undocumented migrants in the case of Son Durak renders this specific area sociologically quite complicated. By many of my informants, Pangaltı area was pointed as more convenient for trans people, less dangerous and more comfortable for LGBTIs and sex workers because the expected "urban life" takes place on this side of the neighborhood with less surveillance, and with transient single residents rather than the settled families, as Muhtar E. suggests. Thereby, Son Durak sounds more like a 'rural' site with its *mahalle* atmosphere whereas Pangaltı appears as the representation of the 'urban' in Halberstam's formulation since it is narrated as a relatively comfortable district expected to harbor a gay cafe, trans residents and sex work. Especially the first block of Eşref Efendi Street located in the Pangaltı were mentioned in the narratives as a popular zone among trans sex workers;

Osman, contractor (34) :

“Eşref Efendi’s first block was not attractive. These people were there and estates were cheap, it was not preferred. They prefer that side because they don’t have to mingle with people, they directly go to their homes from their working place.”¹¹⁹

Harun (27), shopkeeper;

“The Harbiye side of Eşref Efendi is the first place where transsexuals showed up, they predominantly live there. Home should be close to work in their view as well.”¹²⁰

Kenan (31) real estate agent :

“Eşref’s first block was not known as a nice street but it is changing now. By saying a nice street, I mean there are pubs. This covers that. The residents are maybe mostly trans and lesbians or I don't know people didn't prefer first block because there might be disturbing situations. But that is changing now because there is a girls’ dormitory. There is a dormitory, they also build something like a hotel. I mean that old thing has disappeared. People used to have such a thing for first block.”¹²¹

Ceylan (36) compartmentalizes the neighborhood according to her observations :

“Considering my place in Kurtuluş, you can divide Kurtuluş like that; first two blocks are completely different in terms of class. After third block it is average but after fourth block it is different. I always lived in first block. As you go down there it is more like a traditional mahalle, like a slum. It changes also because it receives migration etc....A while ago, trans people living in Son Durak were more crowded, now it received migration, for example Kurds from

¹¹⁹ “Eşref Efendi 1. ada hiç makbul değildi. Bu insanlar oradaydı emlak değeri falan düşüktü, tercih edilmezdi. Orayı tercih ediyorlardı çünkü insan içine girmeleri gerekmiyor, direk çalışma yerinden evlerine giriyorlar.”

¹²⁰ “Eşref Efendi’nin Harbiye’ye yakın tarafı transeksüellerin ilk çıktığı yerdir, o uç tarafında çok oturuyor, ev işe yakın olsun mantığı onlarda da var.”

¹²¹ “Eşrefin birinci adası hoş bir sokak olarak bilinmiyordu ama o şu an değişiyor. Hoş bir sokak olarak derken meyhaneler var. Bu da bunun içinde. Oturan kesim belki işte translar daha çok lezbiyenler daha çok veya işte ne biliyim insanların biraz daha rahatsız olabileceği şeyler olduğundan dolayı birinci adayı tercih etmiyorlardı. Ama o şu an değişiyor çünkü orada kız yurdu oldu şu an. Hemen kız yurdu var orada, otel gibi bir şey yapıldı. Yani o eski şey kayboldu. Birinci adaya öyle bir şekilde insanların bir şeyi vardı.”

Tarlabaşı or blacks from somewhere came and they [trans population] might have moved out if they couldn't live there.”¹²²

Taner (26) recounts his story of hanging the Pride flyers starting from Son Durak to Pangaltı;

“Once I went there to distribute posters of Pride Week. Tatavla Kurtuluş is a district in where many LGBTI live and it is valuable that the poster of Pride Week is visible. I went out with some posters, I started from Son Durak side. I was very nervous as I started from Son Durak. I hung first poster it is something colorful so people were watching of course. One taxi driver asked me what it is. I explained to him. I felt so nervous.

-Was he sounding negative?

I perceived him as negative somehow maybe because of my fear. After I explained to him he said okay we are with you, he supported, I liked that. All the way from Son Durak to Pangaltı we hung posters around throughout Kurtuluş Avenue with a friend of mine from Tatavla LGBTI and we felt very confident as we get closer to subway. We hung on every wall around subway because who can do anything. It was right after elections and HDP was over the threshold and we are in the election program of HDP as movement, we are high. While we were hanging, HDP voters also thought that they are in out party's program, the parade was coming...”¹²³

¹²² “Şimdi benim açımdan benim olduğum bölge açısından Kurtuluşu şeye ayırabilirsin. Birinci ikinci ada bir kere çok daha başka bir sınıfsal konumda. Üçüncü adadan sonra biraz daha ortada kalıyor, dördüncü ada ve sonra daha başka bir yerde. Benim açımdan ben hep birinci adada oturdum. Daha aşağı gittiğinde orası daha mahalle kültürü daha kenar mahalleye yakın bir yerler. İşte göç alması sebebiyle de değişiyor falan... Kurtuluş Son Durak taraflarında translar daha yoğun oturuyordu bir süre önce, şimdi göç aldı işte atıyorum Tarlabaşı'ndaki Kürtler geldi bilmem neredeki siyahiler geldi falanla onlar biraz daha orada yaşayamayınca kendileri çekilmiş olabilirler yani.”

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“Mesela ben Onur Haftası için afişe çıkmıştım o civarlarda. Tatavla Kurtuluş bir sürü LGBTnin yaşadığı yer ve Onur Haftası'nın programının afişinin görünür olması çok değerli. Böyle bir miktar afişle beraber çıkmıştım, Son Durak'tan başladım. Son Durak'tan başlarken çok tedirgindim. İlk afişi astım tabi insanlar izliyor renkli birşey falan. Bir taksici böyle seslenmişti bu ne bu ne falan. Ben açıklamıştım kendisine. Çok gerilmiştim ona rağmen.

-Olumsuz bir tonla mı?

Olumsuz gibi algıladım ben nedense korkumdan mı hani yani. Sonra açıklayınca aa tamam sizinleyiz demişti destek vermişti ve çok hoşuma gitmişti. Kurtuluş Caddesi boyunca, Son Durak'tan Pangaltı'ya kadar bir arkadaşımın Tatavla LGBTİden bir arkadaşımın Osmanbey'e kadar asmıştı sağlı sollu ve metroya yaklaşırken artık iyice özgüven tavan. Metro civarlarında asarken gördüğümüz her duvara çünkü yani kim bir şey yapabilir tabi. Eee seçim sonrası işte HDP barajı aşmış, artık hareketimiz de HDPnin seçim programındayız, yükselmişiz. Biz asarken HDPye oy veren insanlar da bizim parti programımızda var diye düşünüyor, yürüyüş yaklaşıyor falan...”

Ceyda (58), describes the specific parts of Kurtuluş and also compares Kurtuluş and Cihangir;

“Did you ever go to down to Son Durak side, there is all kind, Çingene, Kürt Syrian. Here there is nothing like that, all kinds of people don't pass from there. Residents of skyscrapers pass from here, here is much more clean [referirng to Bomonti side of Ergenekon Avenue].

-Do you feel less safe towards there?

Sure. Second part of Kurtuluş feels unsafe when it is dark.

-Towards Son Durak?

Sure. It is worst when you cross Son Durak.

-Did you ever live something bad?

Once I went, there is no one speaking Turkish. Nobody speaks Turkish. I asked to myself if I came to another country. They speak Kurdish, Arabic. Blacks speak another language, they are African they speak tribal language. Therefore you don't understand anything. you don't feel safe. You have to be cautious all the time.

-Isn't there travesti living in that side?

There are not many. In the street behind Dolapdere slope there are 7-8 maybe 10 of them.

-Değirmen?

Everybody lives close to each other. That is a cheap place but very bad.

-The second part of Türkbeyi?

No Türkbeyi ends there. This is right behind Dolapdere. Türkbeyi is a very expensive street. Most expensive street of Kurtuluş. This is after Günaydın Garage, between Kurtuluş and Dolapdere, dirtiest and worst side and travesties are there.

What do they do there?

I guess they go by taxi up to their doors. Real estate agent told me so that is Değirmen street. That is a bad street. This side of Kurtuluş is cleaner. As you go towards the end it is bad. There is no bad here in Çobanoğlu, Bozkurt. There is no travesti in this side. Travesti is usually in the other side [showing the subway side of Kurtuluş Avenue]. There shouldn't be in Türkbeyi neither, Türkbeyi is also expensive. There are in Eşref Efendi Bilezikçi...we were all in Cihangir before. But Cihangir was not comfortable like here. We were so

cautious in Cihangir. When we look out of the window if there is a family woman I wouldn't call my client. Here is very easy. Maybe the times has changed, people developed but here is very comfortable. Travestis are quite comfortable and gays are on the streets, just like Europe.”¹²⁴

Briefly, these narratives picture Pangaltı as the district preferred by trans sex workers as it is close to the cruising zone, thus minimize the interaction with the people in the neighborhood, safer for hanging the flyer of LGBTI Pride, and according to the more conservative informants, morally “not quite appropriate for families”.

Halberstam (2005) asserts that the normative stories of gays and lesbians associate ‘urban’ and ‘visibility’ as if the ‘full expression of the sexual self’ is allowed in the urban

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“Son durak tarafı aşağı gittin mi Çingene Kürt Suriyeli hepsi dolu her çeşit var. Burada öyle bir şey yok buradan herkes geçmez. Buradan aşağıda gökdelende yaşayanlar geçiyor, burası çok daha temiz

-Peki sen o tarafa doğru daha mı güvensiz hissediyorsun?

Tabi. Hava karadıktan sonra Kurtuluş’un ilk yarısından sonrası bana güvensiz geliyor.

-Son duraka doğru mu?

Tabi. Hele son durakın ötesi en kötüsü.

-Bir şey yaşadın mı hiç?

Bir kere gittim de ay türkçe konuşan yok. Kimse Türkçe konuşmuyor. Ay dedim ben başka bir ülkeye mi geldim. Kürtçe konuşuyor Arapça konuşuyor. Zenci zaten başka dil konuşuyor. Bunlar Afrikalı bunlar kabile dili konuşuyor. O zaman sen hiç bir şey anlamıyorsun. Ama güvende hissetmiyorsun kendini. Hep temkinli olmak zorundasın.

-Orada yok mu travesti ya o tarafta oturan?

Çok yok orada. Orada bir Dolapdere yokuşu yok mu onun arka sokağında 7-8 tane belki 10 tane travesti var orada.

-Değirmen?

Herkes birbirine yakın oturuyor. Ucuz da bir yer ama yer çok kötü.

-Türkbeyi'nin devamı mı?

Hayır Türkbeyi bitmiştir orada bu ta Dolapdere'nin bir arka sokağı bu. Türkbeyi çok pahalı bir sokak. Kurtuluş'un en pahalı sokağı Türkbeyi. Günaydın garajından aşağı iniyorsun Kurtuluş'la Dolapdere'nin arasında en kötü en pis bölüm var ve bir sürü travesti oturuyor orada.

-Onlar ne yapıyor acaba?

Herhalde taksitle kapıya kadar gidiyordur ne yapacak. Emlakçı bana çok söylemişti değirmen sokak demek orası ay çok kötü bir sokak. kurtuluşun bu tarafı daha temiz. sonuna gittin mi kötü. bu taraflarda bir kötülük yok bu Çobanoğlu bozkurt. bu tarafta pek travesti yok. travesti öbür tarafta (Kurtuluş caddesinin metroya taraf kısmını işaret ediyor) Türkbeyi'de de yoktur Türkbeyi de pahalı. eşref efendide var bilezikçide var...hepimiz cihangirdeydik daha önce. ama cihangir bu kadar rahat değildi. Cihangirde biz çok dikkat ederdik. camdan bakarken müşterin geçse başka bir camda aile kadını varsa ben o müşterimi alamazdım. burası çok rahat. belki zaman değişti insanların beyni gelişti belki ama burası çok daha rahat. böyle fildir fildir çık sokağa kurtuluş caddesinde travestiler gayet rahat geyley şıkır şıkır Avrupa gibi.”

setting ‘in relation to a community of other gays/lesbians/queers’. Thereby these narratives devalue the rural experiences and codes the rural as the ‘closet’ of queer person whereas urban appears as the space of ‘coming out’ (36, 37). The narrative of Taner could be an example to disrupt this totalizing descriptions, as he points out his tension and relief in his encountered with the taxi driver. His walk from Son Durak to Pangaltı implies the limits of “the expressions of the sexual self” in the urban which contains various contexts as I discussed throughout the thesis. Halberstam also notes that the peculiar and complicated queer stories of the rural setting are dismissed by the metronormative expectations and narratives however they might suggest another epistemology (37). In my field Kurtuluş, the comfort [*rahatlık*] of the *mahalle* was frequently expressed by many LGBTI informants as the reason to move in here. I think these repetitive statements about the *rahatlık* of Kurtuluş, and Pangaltı in particular, has a metronormative aspect which carries a risk to overlook the peculiar negotiations of the conditions of visibility in the urban public space in Kurtuluş. The spatial and moral boundary between the family area and the cruising area reveals how trans residents, especially the ones who live closer to Son Durak, reconstruct themselves according to these boundaries by being almost ‘iyi aile kızı’ therefore by adopting relatively more “traditional” forms of *mahalle* relationships. Statements such as Tailor’s; “They are just like ‘good family girl’ in here. They walk their head down so nobody say anything.” or Tanya’s words as a trans resident from Son Durak; “We tried to be like good neighbor lubunya over there...” indicate the space opened up by the trans residents by regulating their performances and relations by acknowledging these boundaries.

Emre who runs the gay cafe in Kurtuluş expresses how impressed he was when he witnessed the ‘regular’ lives of trans women;

“I saw a trans who is shopping during the day for the first time in here. Or I was very impressed by one trans wearing a skirt, she is loose in her thirties. She is probably not a sex worker, she was not that fancy, she speaks with a neighbor day time...towards Son Durak...they talk about soap operas. This is something very basic but aslant so common. For example we have one B., she came here to drink wine and to talk. She is so fun, she told us that she works in Bayram Street, in one of those homes. We don't know all in all. We call it LGBTI but we don't know their lives. I thought they work everywhere freelance. She works in shift with insurance she told me details she was

sincere. Her neighbor called she said I have to go, she said she plays games with neighbor's son in the evenings [he laughs]. Actually she has a very simple life, she has a...normal...regular life. I mean you see that here."¹²⁵

Ceylan also speaks about how trans residents living in the neighborhood for years shattered the stereotypical grotesque visibility of trans women with exaggerated make-up and dresses and she adds;

“There are trans women who are close with neighbors with children, they meet for tea. Thereby they know each other and it is becoming normal, they love each other of course it will change by time. It changes both because we developed and also because we could exist inhere for a long time.”¹²⁶

As a resident in the neighborhood, I was also impressed by the visibility of trans people when I saw them working in a cosmetic shop, in a stationery, sitting and chatting with women and children in front of a building etc. All these ‘regular’ scenes impressed me because even though I was engaged in LGBTI activism and have trans people in my social environment, I realized that I also had a constructed trans image in my mind which was not coinciding with the ones I encountered in the neighborhood.

Considering the geography of Kurtuluş as a challenging landscape beyond being solely modern or traditional as it contains the complicated mix of heterogenous settings and practices of living together prompted me to define it as a liminal space. In respect to the narratives above, I argue that the trans residents benefit from the liminality of Kurtuluş by negotiating the spatial boundaries of morality and acceptance, thereby they open up space for themselves both as the *mahalleli* and the sex workers based on the socially constructed spatial boundaries of sexuality within the geography of the district. Therefore, rather than

¹²⁵ “Gündüz mesela alışveriş yapan ben ilk kez burada gördüm trans. Ya da mesela şeyden çok etkilendim, bir tane trans böyle basma etek giymiş salmış artık hani böyle otuzlarında. Seks işçisi değil muhtemelen, çok süslü püslü değildi, gündüz mesela bir komşusuyla sohbet ediyor...Son Durak’a doğru...dizi muhabbeti yapıyorlar. Bu çok basic çok basit bir şey ama hani hiç bir yerde göremeyeceğimiz bir şey...Mesela bizde bi tane B. var hep gelir, bir gün de buraya şarap içmeye falan geldi sohbete geldi. Çok eğlenceli, anlatıyor işte bize Bayram Sokak’ta çalışıyormuş o evlerden birinde. Biz hani bilmiyoruz sonuçta. LGBT diyoruz ama bilmiyoruz hayatlarını. Ben zannediyorum ki onlar her yerde serbest çalışıyor. Shiftli çalışıyormuş, sigortaları falan yatmış detayları anlattı bana baya samimiydi. Komşusu aradı, ay bir gitmem lazım işte komşu hep oğlu varmış kızma birader oynarlarmış her akşam (gülüyor)... Aslında çok basit bir hayatı var. Şey bir hayatı var, normal aslında...(duraksıyor) ...sıradan. Hani onu görüyorsun burada.”

¹²⁶ “İçli dışlı olan çoluğuyla çocuğuyla görüşen çaya kahveye giden trans kadınlar da var. E böylelikle birbirini tanıyorlar normalleşiyor seviyor tabi ki zamanla değişecek yani. O yüzden hem biz bir değişim gelişim gösterdiğimiz için hem uzun süredir burada kendimizi var ettiğimiz için değişiyor.”

reading these ‘regular’ lives of trans women as *iyi aile kızı* or *iyi komşu*, as the story of adaptation and assimilation into the heterosexual morals, I want to conceptualize these practice of negotiation as political. Massey notes that “Public’ space, unregulated, leaves a heterogeneous urban population to work out for itself who really is going to have the right to be there.” (2005: 152). The right “to be there” and to be accepted as *mahalleli* who are at the same time sex workers is obtained and regulated with certain agreements between trans residents and their neighbors. Benefitting from the fluidity of the subjectivity, trans residents, construct and negotiate the space as a terrain of power. As Halberstam (2005) incisively quotes from Steve Pile; “There is never one geography of authority and there is never one geography of resistance.” Further, the map of resistance is not simply the underside of the map of domination if only because each is a lie to the other, and each gives the lie to the other.” (Halberstam, 2005: 1).

Massey’s (2005) conceptualization of space helped me to translate my field and the political potential of the negotiations and configurations of the LGBTI residents. If the space is “constituted through interactions”, the sphere of the “coexisting heterogeneity” and “always under construction” as Massey proposes (2005: 9), the role of LGBTI residents in the construction of the dynamic and heterogenous space of Kurtuluş and of the terms of living together cannot be overlooked. Kurtuluş becomes the stage of various subversive visibilities and relationships of trans individuals as they disrupt the stereotypical trans subjectivity with their ‘regular’ appearances. In other words, the fluidity of Kurtuluş finds its correspondence in the subjectivities of trans residents whereas the multiplicity of the trans visibility also contributes to the fluidity of Kurtuluş which indicates the constant regulation of the right to be there in public in Kurtuluş. For the very reason, by imposing binaries and thresholds, metronormative stories of the sexuality of the space disregards such the political aspects of the negotiations over space and conditions of visibility which are dynamically reconstructed in the space of Kurtuluş.

To sum up, Kurtuluş could be read as a liminal space not only because it is a ground for paradoxical boundaries of morality, sexuality and spatiality, but it is also the stage where *lubunya* establish themselves with the multiple subjectivities by negotiating these spatial and moral boundaries and benefitting from this in-betweenness of the urban neighborhood

as it is defined by de Certeau as “the link between public and private space created by specific social actions.” (Mills 2004: 6). Therefore also the boundaries of public and private seem to be negotiated by lesbian, gay and trans residents as I will briefly discuss below in the light of sex work and queer homes.

4.3.2. Frontiers of the Public and Private

4.3.2.1. Homes of Trans Sex Workers

I will tackle the boundary between public and private by focusing on the narratives on sex work and the place-making practices of lesbian/gay/trans residents in the neighborhood as they establish homes as one of the queer social spaces by negotiating the surveillance of *mahalleli*. When the sex work in home is at stake, the privacy of the home is questioned and becomes more likely to be breached based on the dominant moral values. Previous cases¹²⁷ of the displacement of the trans residents also demonstrated that the sex work is one of the prominent reasons to legitimize the violation of the private, and to exclude trans people out of the residential areas. My interviews also revealed that sex work plays a crucial role in constructing and contesting the moral and sexual codes of public and private. For example, Muhtar of Bozkurt neighborhood recounts his anxiety about the challenged binary of public/private in the case of apartments of trans residents used for sex work which he calls ‘*genelev*’¹²⁸;

“But those people of ours don't do anything in their homes. We cannot intervene to main Avenue. That is the responsibility of the police, they also see that. That's the responsibility of vice unit but everybody is free in my neighborhood, they can do whatever they want behind their doors. Nobody can open the door and ask ‘why do do that?’ But at the moment it disturbs environment, people can leave that person face to face with the police...Can you imagine? You live in an apartment and upstairs constantly work. It damages you, it transgress the moral of the building...think of a brothel, everybody comes and goes, it is like a brothel. What is the moral of a building? They live there and they are settled. They have to live inside their homes as everybody does. It is not okay when you turn it into a brothel. That is a place in where families live. Building also have rules, she has to obey them. Other than

¹²⁷ Such as the case of Ülker Street, Beyoğlu researched by Pinar Selek (2007).

¹²⁸ It means brothel in English however a literal translation would be ‘public-home’.

that it is her free will, she can do whatever she wants wherever she wants but it is negative to do those things in where she lives. It is not something good.”¹²⁹

In this narrative, the home, the private space behind doors, loses its privacy anytime when a commercial sexual behavior takes place within its boundaries. The moment it transgresses the ‘*apartman ahlaki*’ [building morality], it turns into a *genelev* thereby it gains a public quality and becomes open to intervention. This is worth an interrogation because the definition of the space alters between discursively two opposite edges of the public/private binary when there is money involved in the sexual behavior. The money trade after the same sexual act turns the same space into a semi-public/public space which otherwise would be strongly linked to privacy. As the Turkish word *genelev* [public-home] itself implies, sex work juxtaposes these two notions public and home -which is predominantly coded as a private space- and unsettle the limits of public and private. Biricik (2013) quotes Meral Özbek’s discussion of the cultural and political meanings of the public which has more than one translation in Turkish, including ‘*kamusal*’, ‘*umumi*’ and ‘*aleni*’. She asserts while the concept *umumi* is associated with *ayıp* [shame] and *yasak* [prohibition], the word *kamu-kamusal* is immediately linked with a space operated by the state (190). Departing from this discussion, Biricik argues that the arbitrary operations of the police forces based on the law of misdemeanor was targeting the public visibility of trans sex workers because the modern patriarchal ideology aims to confine ‘the others’ into homes. At this point, I want to argue that the inconsistent statements about the homes of trans sex workers, as summarized in the narrative of the Mukhtar of Bozkurt neighborhood, reveal that the patriarchal morality and ideology does not only target ‘cleaning’ the public space as Biricik suggests. The abovementioned emphasis of *mahalleli* on distinguishing the living space and the sex work space does not only refer to the division of physical public space but it also implies a morally legitimate right of families

¹²⁹ “Ama şimdi o insanlarımız bizim kendi evlerinde hiç bir şey yapmazlar. Ana caddeye de bizim karışma yetkimiz yok. O emniyetin işi onlar da emniyet de görüyordur. Yani ahlak masası görüyordur onları onlar bilir ama benim mahalleimde herkes özgürdür kapısının içinde istediğini istediği şekil yapabilir... Yani eee kapıyı açıp da kimsenin sen niye böyle yapıyorsun deme yetkisi kimseye ait değil. Ama etrafa rahatsızlık verdiği an halk da doğal olarak emniyetle o kişiyi baş başa bırakabilir... Düşünebiliyor musunuz. Siz bir evde oturuyorsunuz üst katınız devamlı çalışıyor. Bu size zarar veriyor apartman ahlakını geçiyor bu artı şeye geçiyor... bir genel evi düşünün devamlı gidip gelen artık genel eve geçiyor. O değil apartman ahlakı nedir? Onlar orta oturur ve kalıcıdır. Herkes nasıl evinin içinde oturuyorsa onlar da oturmak zorunda. Ama orayı fuhuşhaneye getirdin mi olmadı. Orası bir ailenin oturduğu yer. Apartmanın da kuralları var o yasalara uymak zorunda. He öbür türlü özgür iradesi, istediği yerde istediği şey yapabilir ama apartmanın içinde oturduğu mekanın içinde o şeyleri yapması olumsuz. İyi bir şey değil.”

and settled heterosexual residents to define the private boundaries of non-heterosexual or trans homes. Concerning the definition of the private, Pat Califia (2000) argues that when the law decriminalized gay sex, it also confined it within the boundaries of the private and it caused the intense surveillance of public whereas the definition of the private remarkably shrunk. He claims that “the state always wishes the zone of privacy to be as narrow as possible” and he explains how police forces intervened to the semi-public and private spaces of gay social places such as adult bookstores and bathhouses in the State, by declaring these spaces as public in order to be able to arrest the gays who are involved in sexual behavior in these places (2000: 18). Hubbard (2015) also draws the attention to the role of legitimate privacy of the gay sexuality in the removal of visible sex work [whether male, trans or female]. Citing from Sanchez (2004), he furthermore proposes that “while domesticized gay sex can be accommodated within the emergent geographies of gentrified inner city living, sex work appears increasingly out of place. Therefore, whilst idealised gay consumers are being welcomed as a civilized presence in the city, the dangerous queer Other [in the form of the sex worker] is displaced” (2015: 9). His proposition echoes the words of real estate agent Ahmet (58) as he differentiates the homes of gays from the trans sex workers’ and states that they give apartments to gays without worries as “there is no fight and noise in their house. And the houses they rent are already like 2500 liras.” It does not only refer to the different class positions of trans sex workers and gay residents it also reminds me another point about the class difference and home preference among trans community itself. Both Ceylan and Ceyda emphasized that the trans residents, especially the sex workers, generally prefer to live in the first floor or in the ground floor. Reason was pointed as the lower possibility to encounter the neighbors when the *girls* bring client to the home. Kandiyoti also indicates that in the trans residential buildings the rents vary according to the distance of the apartment to the street. It was more expensive as it gets closer to the street (2002: 287). First blocks, as they are close to the main [Ergenekon] Avenue, and the first floors, as they are closer to the street, were pointed when the trans residential preferences were at stake. Departing from here, It could be thought that the trans sex workers also take advantage of blurring the boundaries of public and private by constructing their homes as a liminal, semi-public space both by challenging the

heterosexist patriarchal ideology that condemns their public visibility and by resisting against isolating their private space from the public and the street.

Furthermore, many gay and lesbian residents also implied that the limits of public/private binary is at stake in their everydayness in the neighborhood as different than the context referred by Califia, the private lesbian/gay sex is morally and culturally not decriminalized yet in Turkey. In the narratives, the curtains of the homes appeared as a metaphorical and physical boundary in order to maintain the privacy and safety of the homes as queer social-private spaces.

4.3.2.2. Curtains

My questions about safety in public space revealed an interesting common point in the narratives of my lesbian and gay informants. They expressed that they feel more threatened with their non-heterosexual public performance as they get closer to their home. While two lesbian informants expressed worry about holding hands near their home, gay informants also implied such worries to be ‘understood’ and stigmatized by exposing their homes. These concerns of safety and to be ‘understood’ as a queer remains also within the boundaries of the home as the narratives highlighted the curtains to demarcate home and privacy from the street which is public. The gaze of neighbors was a threat to be avoided therefore to be blocked by the help of curtains. For example, Yeliz and Şeyda, a lesbian couple who live in the same apartment, express that they check the curtain if it is drawn or not especially before they kiss each other or engage in anything that might reveal their lesbian desire. Another gay couple had a tension with their roommate over the curtains of their apartment. The insistence of their roommate to open the curtains was translated by them as the violation of their private gay space because they didn't want to be exposed to the gaze of neighbors. The proximity of the buildings in Kurtuluş creates the need to be aware of the curtains for many residents, however, the worry of LGBTI residents as they want to be sure about the drawn curtains stem also from the role of homophobia/transphobia in the forced displacements and the violation of housing rights for many LGBTIs. There is the recent history of neighborhood communities allying against the presence and housing rights of queers as we have seen in the previous cases in Pürtelaş, Ülker Sokak, and Meis in Istanbul, and Eryaman in Ankara. For example, Selek's (2007)

study examines how residents, ultra nationalists and the police cooperated in order to exclude the trans sex workers from Ülker Street, Cihangir in 1996. That was a case in which the public/private boundaries of *lubunya* houses was violated by the police and some other attackers. This violation was also generally legitimized by the same violation of the public/private boundary by the trans sex workers as they were accused of “spilling” their obscenity into the street and the public space occupied by the families and the children. In most cases, even the LGBTI house-owners have had to sell their houses and move to other neighborhoods. Such a history of homophobic/transphobic displacements taught many LGBTI people about the heterosexist aspect of the housing. The effort of the dominant state-led patriarchal ideology finds a correspondence in the surveillance of the neighbors and this surveillance not only confines queerness into the private, but also regulates this very private.

The queerness which emanates from the apartments has a risk to jeopardize the housing conditions of LGBTI residents not only by being visible but also by being audible according to Songül’s dialogue with the real estate agent;

“While I was looking for an apartment, I asked if there would be a problem in building if my girlfriends boyfriends come. He said there wont be a problem if I live with manners, but there were tenants, girls sleep with girls, boys with boys and their voice was heard, such things cant be tolerated.”¹³⁰

Even the voices of homosexual desire overheard by the neighbors blurs the privacy of these homes. The home in which this desire is enacted becomes open to a possible intervention of the heterosexual moral and the residents become the target of the moral disapproval because the sexual engagements are categorized as acceptable and unacceptable even between the walls of an apartment when queerness is at stake.

The curtains and the regulation of visibility inside the apartments was mentioned especially as a response to my questions of being “out” in the neighborhood. The narratives

¹³⁰ “Ev ararken sordum benim kız arkadaşlarım gelir erkek arkadaşlarım gelir hani oturacağım apartmanda sorun olur mu falan. Yani düsturuyla oturduktan sonra kimse sorun olmaz ama şöyle kiracılar oldu kız kızla yatıyormuş oğlan oğlanla yatıyormuş sesleri geliyormuş öyle şeyler de kaldırılmaz falan dedi.”

of two gay residents pointed to the surveillance of the neighbors as being a concern. Taner (26) talks about how he wonders about the reaction of his next door neighbor when she sees his gender non-conforming performances in his apartment. He implies that these indoor engagements give a clue about his gayness although he has not come out to her verbally;

“There is no housework that I don't do, the neighbor knows what I do. She sees me cleaning the stove in the kitchen, hanging the laundry on the balcony. I don't know sometimes I ask to G. abla, there are things to put in fridge for example, she is surprised.”¹³¹

Serhat (27) also tells how he lets his gayness to be visible by the neighbors as he kisses behind the thin curtains. Even though he states that he doesn't care about the curtains, curtains are mentioned twice even in such a short response;

“My friends know yes. But knocking the doors of my heater neighbors and saying I am gay would be awkward, why would I say that. If it comes up, I tell. I kiss my lover behind the thin curtains here, the people across certainly see that. Or I walk around with my underpants without closing the curtains. Probably they see but I don't strive to close and live behind curtains.”¹³²

Ceylan narrates how neglecting the curtains ended up with a tension between her and a neighbor;

“I left a drag queen friend at home the other day as he imitates Yıldız Tilbe in somewhere close. I went to appointment to check the backstage. He put on make-up with his boxer when the curtains are open. You shouldn't sit with a boxer when the windows are open, that is something else. A neighbor saw and told to the neighbor upstairs that it is something like immoral. Something like immoral. She called me and told me that. I asked to my friend what he does and I was called. He said I put on make-up with boxer. I told him ‘stupid close the window and curtains’. After that, there is not disturbing. She complained to the neighbor

¹³¹ “Evde yapmadığım iş yok komşu biliyor neler yaptığımı ettiğimi. Mutfakta ocak silerken görüyor beni arka balkonda çamaşır sererken görüyor. Ne biliyim arada bir şey takılıyor aklıma G. abla bunu nasıl mesela buzdolabına bir şey atacak oluyorum falan şaşıyor.”

¹³² “Arkadaşlarım evet biliyor. Hetero komşularına da kapılarını çalıp “ben geyim” demek çok saçma neden diyim. Bir muhabbet geçerse çıtlattırım. Burada incecik perdelerin arkasında sevgilimle öpüşüyorum, karşımdaki mutlaka görüyordur. Ya da kapatmadan don atlet gezebiliyorum. Muhtemelen görüyorlardır ama ay kapatayım da perdeler arkasında yaşayayım diye bir gayretim de yok.”

upstairs, she told me. I shouted ‘there is nothing immoral, a man sits with a boxer what is wrong with that?’ so she can also hear.”¹³³

Based on the narratives above, I argue that the curtain is the very physical object to maintain the boundaries of the private, of the home and of the safe, queer space. The boundaries of the homes of LGBTI residents also constructs the boundaries of their visibility and therefore the curtains metaphorically represent the threshold of coming out. Therefore drawing the curtains corresponds to another negotiation of the spatial and sexual boundary undertaken by the LGBTI residents in Kurtuluş. Regardless of an actual gaze watching them, LGBTI residents either come out behind a transparent curtain or keep in the closet by tightly drawing the curtains. And the queerness that leaks between the curtains might provoke various encounters to manifest their queerness and resist against the guardians of the morals just like in the story of Ceylan.

Moreover, curtains are the barriers of the homes as queer social spaces. Referring to Davis’s (1991) analysis of heterosexism as a *panopticon*, Knopp underscores the gaze of heterosexism as it renders homes to police themselves. The curtains are drawn because even if they don’t see a literal person’s gaze across their window, the threat of being surveyed and to be outed prompt them to self-surveillance thus to take precautions such as drawing the curtains. Knopp also notes a remarkable critique about Davis’s comparison between heterosexism and panopticon since the concept of panopticon might oversee the potential of resistance of the sexual dissidents. He states that “sexually polymorphous human beings have struggled successfully under even the most oppressive of circumstances to construct counter- hegemonic spaces that are insulated, at least to some degree, from heterosexism’s panoptic gaze. This is not part of the picture in the case of the panopticon.” (1992: 663). His critique speaks to my field as well, since I would also be disregarding the political potential of the produced social space behind the curtains if I

¹³³ “Geçen gün drag queen bir arkadaşımı evde bıraktım yakın bir yere o Yıldız Tilbe tiplemesi yapıyor şey yapsın diye. Ben de görmeye gittim kulise falan bakayım diye. O da böyle pencere açıkken boxerla makyaj yapıyormuş. Pencere açıkken boxerla oturulmaz o başka birşey. O karşı komşu yukarıdaki komşumuzu görmüş işte siz tanıyorsunuz işte ahlak dışı mı ne bir şeyler oluyor bilmem ne. Ahlak dışı değil de o tarzda birşeyler söylüyor. O da beni aradı. Ay dedim ne olabilir arkadaşına ne yapıyorsun sen böyle böyle söylediler. E boxerla makyaj yapıyorum. E dedim pencere açık kapatsana salak şeyi perdeyi falan. Ondan sonra hani rahatsız olacak bir şey yok. Şikayet etmiş sonra ben buraya geldim ben işte yukarıdaki komşum şey işte Ceylan falan dedi. Ben de bağıra konuştum, gayri ahlaki değil ne dediler yaa. .birşey diyelim gayri ahlaki dediler. Ahlaksız olacak bir şey yok yani bir erkek boxerla oturuyor ne var bunda falan diye hani o da duysun diye.”

discuss the heterosexist surveillance as panoptic mechanism which condemns LGBTI residents to police and censor themselves. Although I analyzed the curtain as the physical representation of the threshold for coming out, drawing the curtains does not mean the isolation of the private home as a closet where queers don't manifest themselves. The resistance potential of the sexual dissidents crystallizes in the place-making practices of the LGBTI residents of Kurtuluş as they configure the home as the queer social space which is described as the most comfortable and safe social space to meet other LGBTIs and build networks. Socializing and networking in private homes also fill the gap of the safe LGBTI-friendly social places in the neighborhood. The drawn curtains play a role in providing such queer counter-spaces which also become the site of some political gatherings such as those of Tatavla LGBTI. Although the first steps were taken in the homes behind the curtains, this organized voice has been politically intervening into the public space of Kurtuluş negotiating the *mahalleli* subjectivity and the visibility of the LGBTI residents.

4.4. Tatavla LGBTI; “Buradayız Alışın Gitmiyoruz!”

In the last part of my discussion on the spatial and sexual boundaries negotiated by the LGBTI residents in Kurtuluş, I will investigate the political demands and the resistance practices of the neighborhood organization Tatavla LGBTI which was founded by the LGBTI community built around a social network of activism before the members became neighbors in Kurtuluş. As I discussed in chapter 3, the sense of community influences the experiences of LGBTI residents in terms of solidarity and safety. Since most of my informants were already engaged in LGBTI activism, the political meaning and the potential of the LGBTI population in the neighborhood was already in the agenda. As the sense of community was strengthened, the idea of a neighborhood-based organization became more compelling for the growth of the anti-heterosexist struggle in the residential spaces, as the space is the most significant basis of the politicization and being a group (Işın 2002: 43 cited in Zengin 2014: 370). Şahan (32), a gay resident and Tatavla LGBTI member narrates how the group was formed;

“We realized that there is a group of *lubunya* after we started to get together in Lambda and Pride Committee etc. Maybe our priorities are different. For example, mine is doing something about the same position of LGBTI movement why it is not growing. Kurtuluş, no matter what, is a place with a serious population of gay men. I always give the example of dating applications but you cannot even list 200 people within 1km. It shows many profiles within 80 meters. It was like we live together here in Kurtuluş, why don't we do something together. I asked where are these people. I mean there was this thing in Tatavla LGBTI, we are growing in number in here and everybody is aware of it. It was not only *lubunya* coming. A group who cannot stay in Cihangir also comes. I was like one minute when the same portion increased from 5 liras to 10-15 liras. It was an issue for me, I was like what is happening in the neighborhood, what do they try to do to us. Some others didn't feel safe in the neighborhood, there was a commune situation, we said let's build a network and inform each other. Because we as *lubunyas* are alone and should know about each other. What if something happens to me, I don't have neighbors, my friends are my only neighbors. Once my mother asked something and the woman downstairs was shocked. You are out of sugar but you cannot ask, you have to go to store. But now I can go and ask from my friend, that is good in this manner.

-Is Tatavla LGBTI a ground to reinforce that?

Tatavla LGBTI build a network, we tried to build a network and a commune and to show that we are here. We opened a group on WhatsApp, and there were times we handled our things indeed, we recycled our extra things; a plumber is needed but I cannot ask from the neighbor downstairs, there is a bunch of *lubunya* lives in Kurtuluş

to ask this. There is such a indifference but now we can handle these things easily. The neighborhood is our neighborhood we are already crowded. It is good.”¹³⁴

Although he emphasizes the solidarity within the community, he also briefly mentions the gentrification process of the neighborhood which could be traced by the increase in the rents and the recently opened commercial places such as franchise restaurants and boutique cafes. He mentions this process because one of the agendas of Tatavla LGBTI, as I also noted in the meetings, was the gentrification and the heterosexist aspect of deterritorialization. There has so far been no sex worker trans in the group, however gay and lesbian activists have contacts with some of them. As the previous cases demonstrated, the trans sex worker community becomes one of the first targets of the entangled discourse of morality, nationalism and heterosexism. Therefore the consequences of the gentrification in Kurtuluş was worrisome in respect to the large trans community living and working in the district. For example, Serhat (27) points out the importance of political consciousness and being organized against a possible attempt to displace the *gacılar*;

“I mean as the past cases are sample, this time, I think they wouldn’t be the ones who leave first. They burn here. This time they become the ones to convert from Kurtuluş to Tatavla. Exactly, they burn it. We know Ülker Street for example, there were a lot of things from mafia to whatever, but at those times they were not that conscious, they did it randomly. Those cases are sample for the ones here. Go and tell a trans here that she will be displace will leave her home. Never. For example there is this case of Meis Buildings. *Gacı*

¹³⁴ “Biz örgütlenmeye başlayınca Lambda’da, Onur Haftası’nda falan, Kurtuluş’ta bir grup lubunya olduğunu farkettik. Belki hepimizin öncelikleri farklı. Benim mesela LGBTI hareketin hala büyüyememesi neden hala aynı yerlerde olduğuna dair birşeyler yapabilmeyi oradan umduğum. Kurtuluş kim ne derse desin ciddi bir erkek eşcinsel nüfusu olan bir yer. Kullandığımız programlardaki kullanıcı sayısını örnek veriyorum hep ama 1kmye sığdıramıyorsun 200 kişiyi. 80 metrede tak tak çıkarıyor bir sürü. Yani Kurtuluşta birlikte yaşıyoruz, neden birlikte birşey yapmıyoruz üzerineydi. Nerede bu insanlar gibi kurmuşum. Yani Tatavla LGBTI’de şöyle bir şey de vardı, sayıca artıyoruz burada ve bunun herkes farkında. Bu sadece lubunyalar geliyor gibi değildi. Cihangir’de barınamayan bir kitle de geliyor. Yani porsiyonu 5liraya yediğimiz şeyin 10-15 liraya çıkması bir dakika ya bir şeyler oluyor dedirtti. Bu benim için bir meseleydi hani ne oluyor mahallede bize ne yapmaya çalışıyorlar falandı. Ama bazıları mahallede güvende hissetmiyor ve bir komün durumu da vardı bir ağ kuralım birbirimizden haberdar olalım dedik. Çünkü lubunyalar olarak yalnız birbirimizden haberdar olmalıyız. Yani bana bir şey olsa komşu ilişkim de yok sadece arkadaşlarımla gördüm komşuluğu ben yani. Annem geldiğinde aşağıdaki kadından bir şey istemişti ve kadın şok olmuştu yani. Şeker bitmiş isteyemiyorsun markete gitmem lazım. Ama şu an gidip arkadaşşımdan isteyebiliyorum yani o anlamda çok iyi oldu bana.

-Tatavla LGBTI bunu güçlendirmenin bir platformu muydu?

Bir ağ kurdu Tatavla LGBTI, biz burada bir ağ kurmaya burada olduğumuzu göstermeye komün kurmaya çalışıyorduk. Whatsapp üzerinden bir grup kurmuşuk gerçekten işimizi hallettiğimiz zamanlar da oldu, birbirimize fazla eşyalarımızı dönüştürdüğümüz. tesisatçı lazım ama bunu sorabildiğim kurtuluşta oturan bir grup lubunya var, buna alt kat komşumdan cevap alamam. böyle bir kayıtsızlık durumu var, ama öyle bir şey olduğunda her şeyi tak tak halledebiliyoruz artık. mahalle de bizim mahalle zaten kalabalığz baya güzel oldu.”

(trans women) don't go. Most of their homes were locked up and sealed but they still live there. There are hardships, their lives are not secure but they don't leave and go. Here, we know most of the from the movement. They don't leave they burn here. It is not like it used to be, but I can't guarantee we were marching for years, this year we couldn't. But what happened; two trans got naked completely. They couldn't have done that in Ülker Street times, they didn't know what was gonna happen...as I said we are also here. We can balance that, while people say they should go, here we are strong enough to come up with same crowd against theirs. We are strong to gather people from all around Turkey not only here. The organization consciousness is raised. It is not like it used to be, gays were not that visible, trans people had to be alone. They were scared.”¹³⁵



He refers to the power of an organized voice to reclaim the space by weaving a solidarity among the communities. In order to build a regional solidarity and resistance among LGBTI residents in the district, primary claim was to be acknowledged as a component of

¹³⁵ “Yani eski deneyimler şu anda örnek teşkil ettiği için ilk giden bu sefer onlar olmaz gibi geliyor. Yakarlar burayı. İşte bu sefer Kurtuluş’tan TATAVLA’ya çeviren onlar olur gibime geliyor. Aynen öyle yakarlar. Ülker Sokak mesela biliyoruz o zaman mafyasından cartına cartuna neler neler ama o zaman bu kadar bilinçlilik de yoktu onlar kendi el yordamlarına göre yaptılar. Onlar emsaller buradakiler için. Şu an buradaki transa de ki hadi seni evinden sürüyoruz evinden gideceksin. Yok. Mesela Avcılar Meis sitesi olayı da var. gitmiyor gacılar. Pek çoğunun evi mühürlendi ama yine çoğu orada yaşamaya devam ediyor. Zorlukları var hayatları güvence altında değil ama bırakıp gitmiyorlar. Buradakiler çoğunu tanıyoruz zaten hareket içerisinden. Bırakıp gitmezler yakarlar burayı. Eskisi gibi değil artık ama garanti veremiyorum kaç yıldır yürünüyordu bu yıl yürünemedi. Ama noldu iki tane trans çirliçiplak soyundu. Bunu Ülker sokak zamanında çok rahat yapamazlardı belki ne olacakları belli değildi... dediğim gibi bizler buradayız. Onu dengeleyebiliriz, pek çoğu gitsin derken biz onun karşısına aynı kitleyi çıkarabilecek güçteyiz. O örgütlülük bilinci daha arttı. Eskisi gibi değil, eskiden geyley çok görünür olamıyordu, translar kendi başına kalmak zorundaydı. Onlar da korkuyordu.”

the neighborhood, in other words to be *mahalleli*. For example, the first public intervention of the organization was distributing the flyers that read “I know you are around!” to the buildings and streets.

This very action aimed to reinforce a sense of community territory among other LGBTI residents, thereby to recruit more members and to raise a political demand over the space as the LGBTI dwellers of the neighborhood. Rather than being perceived as the transient newcomers, there is a claim to be a dweller, to be *mahalleli* in the neighborhood which was also expressed by Yeliz in relation to the organization;

“To be *mahalleli* (inhabitant), building a contact with other groups in the neighborhood. Not by shouting ‘we exist! get used to it!’ but by sneakily integrating into it. I think it would be more permanent and like from the bottom in people’s mind, as the a residents of the neighborhood we want to do somethings about the neighborhood. Not as if we are strangers from the outside, it is like we already live in here and we are LGBTI and lets build something together.”¹³⁶

The place-making practices was also undertaken by targeting to transform some male-dominant pubs and cafes in the neighborhood. Although first meetings took place in the gay-friendly cafe on Kurtuluş Avenue, the group decided to leave this friendly safe zone and chose a different place to meet every week in order to be visible as a crowd in the public space and interact with other public places to challenge their heterosexist atmosphere. Although the visibility as a crowd of LGBTIs could be fulfilled in various cafes and pubs in the neighborhood, a crowded street event was not organized. It was also because the group took a break towards the end of spring 2015, but other than that I believe that the street constituted somewhat of a challenging for the members. It was a threshold which in the case of overstepping would jeopardize their presence and housing safety in the neighborhood. Based on my participant observation among the group, some members had concerns about spatially overlapping their resident identity and activist

¹³⁶ “Mahalleli olmak, mahalledeki diğer gruplarla iletişim halinde olmak. Biz de varız alışın gibi bağırarak değil bence sinsice entegre olmak. Daha kalıcı daha tabandan olduğunu düşünüyorum herkesin aklında mahallenin sakini insanlar olarak mahalleyle ilgili şeyler yapmak istiyoruz. Dışarıdan yabancı insanlarmışız gibi değil eylemlerimiz zaten mahallede yaşıyoruz ve LGBTIyiz buradayız ve beraber kuralım gibi bir şey.”

identity. Meeting in a cafe as a group of 15-20 was safer compared to a public march on Kurtuluş Avenue with the flags and banners. Although this was planned for the 2015 Pride week, it was not actualized.

Instead of performing queerness in some ‘liberated’ places, spreading the queerness in the neighborhood and demanding the public spaces was also challenging because, while strengthening visibility,, such acts would simultaneously increase the risk of being targets of hate speech and hate crime. Constructing the space with a collective identity can cause such consequences as Zengin also underlines in relation to the heterosexist displacement practices of neoliberal urban policies (2014: 371). Accordingly Şahan expresses his hesitation about claiming space in the neighborhood;

“If we only come and live in here, it is just real estate, if we don't spread to the space to the neighborhood. If we become a demanding group it might cause a problem, if it is like look we are also here. I don't know what happens, do they stone us here?”¹³⁷

Rather than only focusing on identity politics to strengthen LGBTI visibility in the neighborhood, the group was also seeking alliances with other groups and politics in the neighborhood such as the organizations of migrants and the neighborhood forum. The name ‘Tatavla’ also refers to another alliance with the non-Muslim past of the neighborhood since it is the old Greek name of the neighborhood changed by the Turkish government through its Turkification policies. Choosing this name could be read as a resistance against the symbolic violence of the politics of naming which removes and silences the unwanted subjects and histories.

¹³⁷ “Gel burada otur, emlak sadece, mahalleye alana yayılmazsak mesela. Talep eden taraf olursak o biraz sıkıntı yaratabilir ama bak biz de buradayız gibi bir yerden olursa. Nasıl bir şey olur ki burada bizi taşlarlar falan mı?”

Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the spatial interactions of LGBTI residents in Kurtuluş and their changing manifestations based on the negotiated codes of moral and sexuality. The negotiations of trans residents was one of the focuses since they are narrated as the most visible queer subjects in the neighborhood. Regarding this, sex work occurred as a crucial motive in the construction of the spatial boundaries of sexuality as I traced through the narratives of Mukhtars, real estate agents and LGBTIs. I argued that Kurtuluş could be read as a liminal space because it harbors the paradoxical settings and boundaries of sexual normativity and this in-betweenness offers LGBTIs to develop strategies to produce various subjectivities and spaces for themselves.

Moreover, by focusing on the narratives on homes of trans sex workers and gay and lesbian residents, I discussed how the boundaries of public and private is negotiated based on the codes of sexuality and moral. I pointed that when the sex work takes place at home, it redefines the privacy of that space. Therefore, the privacy of the homes of trans residents was ambivalently described based on their practice of sex work. I also underscored the homes as queer social spaces which is produced by the gay and lesbian community members whom I interviewed. These private spaces are demarcated from the street and the public with tightly drawn curtains but also are occasionally turned into semi-public spaces with crowded gatherings of queer residents, thereby trigger the political organizations to raise a claim for more space in the urban, as I illustrated in the example of Tatavla LGBTI.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This thesis started with a feeling of excitement stemming from my own experience in Kurtuluş right after I moved to the district. I was excited because I discovered that there was a sizeable LGBTI population living in the neighborhood with other residents consisting of various minority groups, such as non-Muslims, *Çingene* and migrants from other provinces and countries. Exploring the negotiations over urban space and the politics of sexuality and spatiality based on the interactions of LGBTI residents in Kurtuluş appeared as an intriguing research topic for me.

Residential practices of the LGBTI communities have partly been interrogated in the academic literature, particularly with regard to cases where the residential places of the trans sex workers appeared as a site of exclusion such as in Ülker Street, Cihangir (Selek, 2007), or where a violation of housing rights of [mostly] trans community occurred such as in Pürtelaş, Eryaman and recently Avcılar Meis Buildings. All these cases, as I reviewed in the introduction, were analyzed to decipher the ideology and the discourse of the discriminatory agents. As for Kurtuluş, one can observe that the LGBTI community in Istanbul has recently started to describe the district as an LGBTI “ghetto” with its relatively large community of LGBTI residents, its openly gay-friendly cafe and the first neighborhood-based LGBTI organization. In the international literature, the studies on LGBTI ghettos have little to offer to understand the case of Kurtuluş, as they generally deal with the ‘gay’ ghettos which are “primarily located in North America and hegemonically inhabited by white, middle-class or upper-middle-class gay men.” (Puar, Rushbrook and Schein, 2003: 384). Most of these ghettos end up with the displacement of former residents who are usually ethnic minorities, migrants, working class families and trans sex workers (Bell & Valentine 1995, Knopp 1992, 1997, Namaste 1996, Califia 2000, Doan 2007). In Kurtuluş, in addition to the LGBTI community, international migrants and the former inhabitants such as Armenians and the early Anatolian-migrants continue to live in the neighborhood today, sharing and shaping its public urban space. The gentrification process, even though the first

symptoms are observable such as boutique cafes, franchise restaurants and art workshops, is not planned by the municipality-led ‘cleaning’ projects as in Cihangir, and not experienced through the destruction of buildings as in Feriköy and Tarlabası. Moreover, different than the experience in North America and Europe, there is no openly lesbian and gay gentrifiers or an intentional strategy of the speculators/developers of the housing market to increase the gay population (Knopp 1992, 1997), and consequently ‘the promotion and protection of gay neighborhoods which “reinforced the race and class stratification” (Hanhardt, 2013: 9 cited in Kosnick 2015: 700). That is to say, the district provides a site to reconsider the negotiations, possible alliances and the ‘clash of minorities’ with all these groups of residents. In this thesis, based on the experiences of LGBTI residents, I aimed to analyze this site through the lens of the intricate politics of sexuality and spatiality in the public urban space as it is both the “site where homophobic violence is rendered publicly visible and the primary arena of LGBT protest as well as self-articulation.” (Kosnick 2015: 688).

Kurtuluş has typically been described as the “space of others” or “ghetto of the oppressed” because of the fact that it is an Armenian-populated district with fewer Jewish and Rum residents, as well as domestic and international migrants, *Çingene*, *travesti*, and many other “*ne idüğü belirsiz*” [nondescript or queer] groups, as articulated in the narratives of my research participants. My research suggests that there may be a link between the alleged *rahatlık* [tolerance] of the district for the LGBTI people and the presence of other minorities. In the thesis, I analyze Kurtuluş as a promising site to investigate “the possible alliances between different collective actors rather than on possible conflicts” (Kosnick, 2015: 688). In chapter 2, I briefly summarize the historical background of the district and the mobilities of the populations. As suggested by the shopkeepers, real estate agents and mukhtars, there is a decrease in the numbers of the non-Muslim residents and an increase in the population of Muslim Anatolian migrants and international migrants. Furthermore, I briefly address the narratives of LGBTI residents on sharing the living space with other minority groups. The specificity of living in a non-Muslim populated neighborhood repetitively appeared in the narratives, particularly in relation to the perceived ‘tolerant’ atmosphere of the district.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the practices of community and space building of LGBTI residents. In the primary community I was able to reach through my research, there were mainly gays and lesbians, with a few trans identified informants, however the sex worker trans community has another network, a different temporality and various solidarity practices such as fictive kinship and cruising shifts [regional solidarity in the case of hate murders etc.]. It was also interesting to realize that the LGBTI population constructs a sense of belonging not necessarily space-bound but through the existence of a community which is described by Rubin as “quasi-ethnic, nucleated, sexually constituted” (1999: 156), and also through feeling safe with its limits and negotiations. Having a community and feeling safe was narrated by LGBTI residents around an alternative form of relationship and temporality, allowing its participants “to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience—namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death.” (Halberstam, 2005: 2). Living together with other queers and being aware of them through the everyday urban encounters encourage to get organized around a dream of a selected family and queer solidarity which also strengthen the members of the community to challenge the heteronormativity of the street by walking alone, wearing skinny jeans or holding their partner’s hand. The narratives revealed a feeling of safety that comes from being in an area in which one has some sense of belonging or social control, even in the absence of physical control in the face of a possible homophobic/transphobic encounter. Therefore, the urban space of Kurtuluş both provides the courage for queer subjects to manifest themselves and also evokes the question of “Which subjects and what are the limits of this manifestation?”

In order to explore the limits of queer visibility, as well as the spatial and sexual boundaries constructed by power and oppression, and challenged by resistance, in chapter 4, I first scrutinize the dilemma of visibility which is described by Brigenti (2007) as “a double-edged sword,” with recognition on the one end and control on the other. I highlight that the visibility of trans people is distinctly different from that of gays, lesbians and bisexuals. Therefore while gays mentioned being stared at when they wear mini shorts or skinny jeans, lesbians emphasized holding hands with a partner as the visible boundary of their ‘outness’ in public. Moreover, I discuss the spatially different experiences of LGBTI residents as there were two specific areas in the district which were pointed as almost pola-

rized due to their distinct contexts. Son Durak region was predominantly described more like a traditional *mahalle* with surveillance and conservative family residents in addition to the undocumented migrants, thereby associated with crime and vulgarization. Pangaltı side was generally pictured as the safer side of the neighborhood with higher rents and more “civilized” residents where one can experience the circulation and anonymity of the big city. Based on these distinct descriptions of the two areas, the narratives also mapped out the residential space and the cruising space of sex worker *travesti*, pointing out another boundary constructed between being a “neighbor trans” and “sex worker trans.” The neighbor trans is the one who adopts the heterosexual family life, becomes “*bayan*” (lady), and socializes with her neighbors and their children, that is to say, she does not cruise and engage in sex work, or even if she does, she never brings a client to her residential place, to her *mahalle*. On the other hand, the sex worker *travesti* lives in remote areas such as Pangaltı, Harbiye and Elmadağ and becomes visible at night. The temporality is also important as the narratives usually emphasized the different temporal frames of the condemned trans subjects as they were not sharing the normative circle of time-space experience with the rest of the *mahalleli*. While the daytime was associated with the public space and the nights were experienced in the private, trans sex workers reverse this cycle by occupying the public urban space during the night. This space-time frame of trans lives refers to another [trans]normativity and when it is ruptured, it creates bewilderment even for gays and lesbians as there were many narratives about the trans visibility in day time Kurtuluş. In the latter section of the chapter, I discuss the negotiations of the limits of public and private through the homes of trans sex workers and gay and lesbian residents. The home, the private space behind doors, basically loses its privacy anytime a commercial sexual behavior takes place within its boundaries. The moment it transgresses the ‘*apartman ahlakı*’ [morality of the building], it turns into a *genelev*, thereby it gains a public quality and becomes open to intervention in the name of honor, according to the mukhtars and shopkeepers I interviewed. Second, the curtains appear as the very physical object to maintain the boundaries of the private, of the home and of the safe, queer space.

Categorizing the space based on dichotomies such as public and private or modern and traditional, therefore emancipatory and oppressive, is “unhelpful for theorizing the mutual constitution of gender and space” as Mills asserts (2004: 30), and it also has a risk to neg-

lect the potential of resistance which takes place in the blurry boundaries and liminal spaces, as I tried to argue based on the experiences of the LGBTI residents of Kurtuluş. My research suggests that Kurtuluş as a district, with its complicated mix of heterogenous settings and practices of living together, becomes a ground for LGBTIs to weave politically transformative networks by reconstructing their spatial practices. For example, by producing homes as semi-public queer social spaces and building a sense of community and social networks, the residents have founded the first neighborhood-based LGBTI organization Tatabla LGBTI. Similarly, some trans residents have opened up space for themselves as a component of the *mahalle* by displaying various forms of queer visibility through various negotiations with their neighbors.

All these negotiations and spatial practices of LGBTI residents point out various layers of possible future discussions, as the narratives of my research participants generally move between the “tolerance” in the district by describing it as a space of otherness, and the tension stemming from this very otherness of the residents. Kosnick notes that in the literature, the debate on new forms of urban citizenship is limited as it usually does not go beyond “listing different groups or ‘communities’ that promote them, with ‘gays and lesbians’ often named alongside immigrants, racialized groups and others” (Castells, 1983; Mitchell, 2003; Purcell, 2003) and he remarks that the boundaries and the conflictual relationships are most of the time overlooked (Kosnick 2015: 688). In regard to his critique, I conceive my ethnographic research as a contribution to the analysis of the boundaries and tensions among the minority groups with a focus on the codes of sexuality and spatiality. My hope is for this research to trigger further debate and research on the interactions between space, time and difference in Kurtuluş and beyond. For instance, one can argue that the ongoing gentrification and the changing class positions of the inhabitants provides call for a class-specific analysis, whereas the *rahatlık* of the district for LGBTIs which is linked with non-Muslim inhabitants reveals an opportunity to analyze queerness, religion and ethnicity in Turkey. Due to my limited time and data, I could not develop discussions along these axes, however, again I hope my research can evoke a reconsideration of the urban space, the claims of LGBTI movement and the relatively recent literature on sexual geography in Turkey in order to provide alternative ways to understand and challenge heteronormativity.

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