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There Goes the Gayborhood?

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BOOK REVIEW

There goes the gayborhood? by Amin Ghaziani, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2015, 360 pp., £24.95, \$35.00 (hardback), ISBN: 978-0691158792

Nearly a decade ago, *The New York Times* ran the article 'Gay Enclaves Face Prospect of Being Passé' (2007) and debates about the demise, rise, and sprawl of LGBTQ neighborhoods have been ongoing within these communities since. Beginning with this same article, Amin Ghaziani's sociological study of the shift in gay and lesbian neighborhoods, *There Goes the Gayborhood?*, has received national attention from the popular press and extended the thinking about the present day changes in 'gayborhoods' to a wider audience. Along with findings from census studies of same-sex data and other large-scale quantitative reports, Ghaziani conducted 150 interviews with lesbian, gay male, and straight men and women in Chicago, and analyzed newspaper clippings on gayborhoods from across the United States. While a profoundly geographical text and series of arguments, the book largely lacks geographic scholarship that could afford a more critical, nuanced analysis in regard to geographies of gender, race, and generation. The weakness of the text is that it grants too much credit to same-sex census data and draws from the voices of those in power which, in turn, leaves out and obscures the stories of LGBTQ people of color and working-class people who feel such areas were less passé and more so are being gentrified out of LGBTQ neighborhoods (cf. FIERCE, Paper Tiger Television, and The Neutral Zone 2007).

The introduction, six chapters, and conclusion of the book are divided into two parts of three chapters each. In the first part, 'Gayborhoods are Changing ...', Ghaziani provides a history of trends in 'gayborhoods' (US gay and lesbian neighborhoods) through processes of gentrification and community building. After a general introduction to the state of lesbian and gay enclaves, the first chapter, 'Beyond the Gayborhood', introduces the reader to recent shifts in gay and lesbian neighborhoods through a mix of US census data and newspaper reporting from across the country. In 'The Happiest Ending', the author provides a closer exploration of the recent history of Chicago's two gayborhoods, the wealthy and largely white Boy's Town — still a meeting place and home to many gay men—and, less so, the nearby and more historically lesbian neighborhood of Andersonville. A unique and underutilized approach, Ghaziani interviews heterosexuals regarding their experiences in these areas. He unpacks the illogical assumption that processes of 'assimilation' will leave much room for the continued development of LGBTQ cultures and identities in the form of a neighborhood. The third chapter, 'Triggers', describes the role of life stages in defining meaning in and about gay and lesbian neighborhoods.

In the second part, 'But are They Disappearing?', Ghaziani presents his notion of 'cultural archipelagos', to describe the enclave-like sprawl of gay and lesbian spaces into more plural 'queer geographies'; the distinction in the terminology is unpacked in brief terminology appendix that defines queer as an umbrella term for LGBTQ and seemingly unrelated to politics. In the final two chapters, 'Resonance' and 'Reinvention', Ghaziani shifts gears from the dominant post-gay perspective of his interviewees we come to expect to arguing for continued 'gay ghettos' on the basis of safety. He devotes a large section to arguing for the memorialization and monumentalization of gay and lesbian history in gay and lesbian neighborhoods as a project of 'ancestral legacy'. The author's final chapter gives attention to the gendered experiences gayborhoods, as well as touching on the experiences of people of color in neighborhood-building, in describing gay men's gentrification of the lesbian neighborhood of Andersonville into 'Mandersonville'.

As is often the case in geographers reading the work of sociologists, an argument is made for the rich work in geographies of sexualities that would have been heavily informative for the book's assumptions of a post-gay society. For example, in 2001 conservative gay blogger Andrew Sullivan extolled the 'post-gay' era as time when gays and lesbians were no longer defined at their core by their sexuality. Instead, they were as 'normal' as everyone else. Feminist, queer, and critical scholars argue the ability to claim a post-gay position requires a significant level of privilege (cf. G. Brown 2006). We only learn on the final page of the appendix that between 76 and 88% of the interviewees are white, and well over half own their homes. Furthermore, two-thirds of the LGB interviewees are male-identified, on average then often garnering greater wages and purchasing homes earlier than women as the author himself points out (234). Yet, there is no note by the author that his research targeted a privileged group but rather 'everyday people'. Still, and sometimes against his participants' stories, Ghaziani demonstrates holes in the post-gay era logic, but also asks the reader to situate themselves in post-gay society which makes the narrative difficult to navigate.

From a feminist perspective, the book lacks a nuanced analysis of the politics and participation. The spatialities of gender remain largely unexplored in the majority of the text as the author often confuses the experiences of gay men's spaces and lives as identical to lesbian's spaces and experiences. While 'the world itself is becoming much safer' (24), who is made safe and under what conditions of oppression of other minority groups is not asked (see Hanhardt 2013). While there is repeated mention of LGBTQ youth's disinterest in gay and lesbian neighborhoods as an indicator of the gayborhoods' uncertain futures, the average age of interviewees is 34–46. Ghaziani reveals he does not interview youth as the Institutional Review Board would have required parents' permission. Still, he notes that youth now have an average coming out age of 16; youth's overpoliced of experience of public space would have radically expanded the adult and solvent frameworks that the interviewee's express (cf. Billies 2016). With Brown and Knopp's (2006) article 'Places or polygons?' in mind, we can also see how the assumptions that census data as exacting evidence can limit critical conversations, rather than addressing how such data reveals as much as it covers up. For example, little attention is paid to how census tracts do not align with neighborhood boundaries. Further and most importantly, census only counts (some) partnered couples and does not recognizing the shifting dynamics of sexual identities or account for transgender people at all. Regardless of these issues, new work on LGBTQ experiences and spatialities in Chicago was long overdue. The text provides insightful work regarding those who identify and can afford to live a 'post-gay' existence. Most importantly, it is exciting to see academic work on space and sexuality reach the public eye, the most overdue project of all.

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