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Territory Without Turf

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The ideas of "territory" and "turf" are important parts of both our folk theory and scholarly treatments of the city. Our territory is where we feel at home and have a measure of control outside of our private residences. Our turf suggests something similar, but less benign, highlighting the potential for exclusion, closure, and conflict. In this paper, I explore a problem for attempts to achieve territory-protecting urban policy. Justice requires territory but prohibits turf. Yet the inherently dynamic nature of territory induces attempts at preservation, most of which will be limited at best. Further, some attempts will produce illegitimate attempts at controlling territory. The result is that there is a pronounced risk of territory degenerating into turf. Realizing territory without turf—balancing control with dynamism—is one of the central challenges in the philosophy and policy of the city. I develop a moderate account of territorial maintenance as a way out of the puzzle.

Territory Without Turf

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The philosophy of the city has been invigorated by investigations of "urban territory." Philosophers have recently argued that territory in the city is an important part of the social ontology of an increasingly urban world, and that theories of the territorial rights of the nation state can illuminate important questions about neighborhood change. An account of local territory can explain what is wrong with certain kinds of neighborhood change (e.g., gentrification and racial segregation) and evaluate policy responses.[1]

Generally, theorists who appeal to local territorial rights are skeptical of the pro-market orientation we see in critiques of zoning and defenses of housing markets, seeking instead a form of local control.[2] Such local control is interestingly in tension with skepticism about a local democracy or local division approach to urban planning and power found in theorists like Young, Fainstein, and Nine.[3] A philosophy of the city that has a central place for territory thus provides potentially distinctive and powerful interpretive and evaluative tools, and so is worth examining in detail.

My interest here is in noting a tension between these plausible normative commitments and some other plausible descriptive commitments in the philosophy of the city. The tension arises from one of the central questions about the city: how do we balance control with dynamism? Justice in the city requires control over one's environment, sometimes framed in terms of the need for *territory*. It also requires deference to its essential dynamism. The city's dynamism can produce spatial conflict, sometimes framed in terms of battles over *turf*. The tension between the need for territory and the problem of turf reflects the problem of determining what accounts for legitimate spatial control and its limits.

To be sure, you won't find many proponents of "turf" in the literature on the city. And indeed, a definition of "turf" needs to be worked out and defended. The important thing I take these arguments to show is that our attempts at territory can easily overshoot,

[1] See: Kukla 2021; Nine 2022; Huber and Wolkenstein 2018; Krishnamurthy and Moore 2024; and Kim and Walton 2023. There is some dispute about whether "territory" in the relevant sense is purely urban. In my view, it need not be; suburban and rural areas can count as territory as well. Still, my focus here will be urban territory.

[2] For market-friendly philosophy of the city, see Kogelmann (2025) and Sankaran (2025).

[3] Young 1990, pp. 254–55; Fainstein 2010, p. 30; Nine 2022, p. 172.

requiring a theoretical notion of turf. That is, there are two ways to fail to achieve territory: to leave some with insufficient power to make and defend territory, and to give some too much power to make and defend their territory. While theorists in the national territory debates have offered detailed limitations on legitimate territory such as a fair-use proviso, much of the urban territory debates have yet to flesh out similar limits.[4] As a result, theories of urban territory are prone to unintentionally producing turf. The secondary goal is to defend a moderate account of territorial maintenance that can contribute to a limited theory of urban territory.

I'll begin by describing the technical terms "territory" and "turf," and connect them to normative claims about the city. Both are forms of control and authorship over the city. I argue in Section I that territory is required by justice, and in Section II that turf is prohibited by justice. I'll then argue in Section III that because territory inherits many qualities of culture and ideology, it is essentially dynamic (or Heraclitean). In Section IV, I argue that, as a result, attempts at territorial preservation risk degeneration into turf. In section V, I offer a revised notion of urban territory and its maintenance. Finally, I rely on this conception in Section VI to motivate skepticism about various local control policies grounded in the need for territory.

I. JUSTICE REQUIRES TERRITORY

Cities include (or should) our territory: the places where we feel comfortable, at home, included, where we have authorship or control. This might include a nearby park, or a local bar or café, a gym or art studio, a subway station, and so on. It might include your block, your neighborhood, as well as other places farther from home that you frequent. Still other neighborhoods, bars, gyms, or parks that might in principle be attractive places to spend time don't feel welcoming or produce a sense of belonging, and you don't pursue your plans there.

Jane Jacobs captures this sense of belonging in the city by modeling sidewalk interactions on a ballet. When things are going well in a city (always a big if), there is an emergent order. The order "of the good city sidewalk never repeats itself from place to place, and in any one place is always replete with new improvisations."[5] We know what our distinctive parts are inside our territory. Outside our territory, we are unlikely to know the dance and thus struggle to live well in that part of the city.

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[4] See, e.g., Stilz (2019) on the fair-use proviso for territory.

[5] Jacobs 1992, p. 65.

The failure of territory is also illuminating, and here again Jacobs has insights. She relays a resident's discussion of their public housing development in East Harlem, NY:

> Nobody cared what we wanted when they built this place. They threw our houses down and pushed us here and pushed our friends somewhere else. We don't have a place around here to get a cup of coffee or a newspaper even, or borrow fifty cents. Nobody cared what we need. But the big men come and look at that grass and say, 'Isn't it wonderful! Now the poor have everything!'[6]

This complaint about the developer choosing to build a single-use complex with a large lawn instead of a mixed-use complex with a place to satisfy one's daily needs is not primarily a complaint about the development. Or not only. The complaint begins by noting that the developers didn't care what the residents wanted. They had no control, agency, or authorship over what should be their territory.

We can make the term more precise. "Territory" also takes a central place in Quill Kukla's work on the social ontology of cities. It concerns how we move through urban spaces, the kind of "stances" we take up, how we process our environment, and crucially, how we help to constitute it. One's "territory is a space within which they have authority and spatial agency—they belong in the space in a rich sense, and to some extent control entry into it and norms within it."[7] The boundaries of territories are relatively clear, "and there are norms and practices and spatial forms in place that maintain those boundaries."[8] Residents and territory are co-created by their spatial agency, like a species and its niche.[9] This is congenial with accounts of national territory.[10]

The ontological notion of territory is related to its normativity. Because our interests and plans are "located" or "place-based," we must have some control over where we live. This is to say we have some rights to (often national) territory: to make decisions about it, to control its borders, and its resources.[11] So as a working definition, we can say that territory is the collection of places where we have a measure of legitimate control and authorship. We have a rightful claim to some territory because without it, we would be unable to satisfy interests that require stable territory.

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[6] Jacobs 1992, p. 21.

[7] Kukla 2021, p. 42.

[8] Ibid., p. 59.

[9] Ibid., p. 22.

[10] Stilz 2019; Moore 2015.

[11] Krishnamurthy and Moore 2024, p. 4; Stilz 2019, p. 40; Kukla 2021, pp. 95–96.

Local territorial claims raise an important question about local boundaries. Some identify the neighborhood as the relevant local territory.[12] For those who like the idea of the "right to the city" (an influential but difficult to understand idea from Lefebrve), the right to the city might involve a right to access and control over even more local places, particularly "third places."[13] Territory can be significant even for theorists starting with egalitarian concerns rather than a focus on the spatial aspects of our lives. We should regard the unequal spatial authority between, e.g., people working in finance in Manhattan and the residents of the East Harlem housing project as a legitimate concern about justice in the city.[14]

The ontological notion of territory further earns its keep by illuminating our understanding of neighborhood changes like gentrification. The idea of territory makes sense of the possibility of *weak gentrification*, or gentrification without physical displacement.[15] We can be deprived of our territory without being displaced. This can undermine our legitimate expectations about the future of our places.[16] There is a robust connection between our perspectives, our cultures, and the territories we help to realize in the city. Territory is a component of our identity. Kukla relies on this to explain the injustice of gentrification:

> As neighborhoods change in demographics, in economic character, and in physical layout, residents' sedimented street wisdom and territorial skills and understanding are uprooted and destabilized. This is an assault on identity. Moreover, typically the new skill set the original residents develop will leave them with less agency, territory, and authority than they had before.[17]

This is why gentrification theorists tend to find even weak gentrification objectionable, and why some worry about the unintended consequences of state-backed residential integration.[18] Leaving things up to the market *and* letting the state remake our residential patterns can equally undermine our territory.

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[12] Krishnamurthy and Moore 2024, p. 13.

[13] Lefebvre 1996.

[14] Wolff and De-Shalit 2023, p. 14.

[15] Kukla 2021, 93–95; Draper 2023, p. 5. This is important because, as Sundstrom (2023, p. 75) notes, gentrification often does not produce displacement.

[16] Quigley 2023.

[17] Kukla 2021, p. 96.

[18] Draper 2023.

II. JUSTICE PROHIBITS TURF

Whereas *territory* is appealed to in folk and scholarly contexts to describe places that underlie our agency and belonging, *turf* is typically found in folk and scholarly discussions of conflict over places. Material conflict in the attempt to preserve spatial authority is a hallmark of turf battles. These are moralized terms; turf, as I'll use the term, is unjust.

The connection between spatial conflict and turf comes out clearly in a discussion from (once again) Jane Jacobs. She describes three unacceptable options for responding to the insecurity found in cities. One option is to give up and live with insecurity. Another is to "target harden" by seeking the protection of a private space:

> This is a technique practiced in the big wild-animal reservations of Africa, where tourists are warned to leave their cars under no circumstances until they reach a lodge. It is also the technique practiced in Los Angeles.[19]

From the perspective of local governance, enough target hardening is a way of giving up because it is incompatible with lively and diverse cities, producing instead pedestrian and commercial dead-zones without local, norm-based control. A third option is to devolve policing to private communities and allow the institution of turf:

> Under the Turf system in its historical form, a gang appropriates as its territory certain streets or housing projects or parks—often a combination of the three. Members of other gangs cannot enter this Turf without permission from the Turfowning gang, or if they do so it is at peril of being beaten or run off.

Turf involves a dividing of the cityscape to the control of a subset of the city's groups or communities. The division is zero-sum; we avoid conflict under the turf system only by drastically curtailing the parts of the city where we spend time.

Turf is often a result of governance gone wrong, or of insufficient state capacity. It arises in perhaps surprising places. As David Skarbek notes, California prisons are largely governed by gangs and their system of turf:

> Each gang claims territory, basketball courts, toilets, showers, workout equipment, tables, benches, and other common property. There are rules for when each race can use the showers and in what order they will go to lunch. A correctional officer at San

[19] Jacobs 1992, p. 60.

> Quentin describes it in terms of a battle: "This is a turf war here. Everybody's got their own turf. And they're not going to let anybody else take it from them. Inmates segregate theirselves out here. And the reason being that the gangs want it that way. So a man has no choice but to go with his own type of people."[20]

This feature of California prisons explains why they are functionally segregated by ethnicity. The requirements of governance (maintaining an orderly market to allow repeated transactions in the goods and services inmates want to consume) unmet by the prison guards necessitates an obvious and difficult-to-fake system of grouping. Ethnicity fits the bill. This example highlights that changes to the allocation of turf require coercion.

The kind of control and spatial agency we all seek in the form of territory has much in common with the institution of turf. To claim turf is to claim control over its resources, its borders, and its decision-making. People claim turf to ensure that they can pursue certain place-based interests or located life plans. The claims to space are importantly connected to the collectives or communities of which we are a member. In both cases, individuals "tinker" or modify their places.[21]

Graffiti is a clear example of tinkering and the creation of territory. The city of Berlin, notes Kukla, is itself a canvas for art, "covered from top to bottom with graffiti, street art," and interestingly, covering another's tag or art with your own is apparently not a norm violation.[22] This is plausibly a successful case of territory making.

In some places and contexts, though, graffiti can be a way of going beyond tinkering. The classic 1993 Michael Douglas film *Falling Down* provides a compact illustration of how these markers enable exclusion and contribute to conflict in a place like Los Angeles:

> Gangster 1: "You're trespassing on private property."
> D-Fens: "Trespassing?"
> Gangster 2: "Loitering too, man!"
> Gangster 1: "That's right, you're loitering too."
> D-Fens: "I didn't see any signs."
> Gangster 1: "What do you call that?"
> D-Fens: "Graffiti?"
> Gangster 1: "No, that's not fuckin' graffiti. That's a sign."

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[20] Skarbek 2014, p. 82.

[21] Kukla 2021, pp. 76–81.

[22] Ibid., pp. 145–46.

Gangster 2: "He can't read it, man."
Gangster 1: "I'll read it for you. It says, 'This is fuckin' private property. No fuckin' trespassing.' This means fuckin' you."
D-Fens: "It says all that?"

At this point in the story, the conflict becomes material. We have a good indication that we've moved from the realm of urban territory to the realm of turf when the claims are more expansive and totalizing, and the conflicts are physically realized.

We're now in a position to offer a working definition of turf. Turf involves laying monopoly and exclusionary claims to places and coercively enforcing them. Sometimes this is true for territory. I take the terms to be moralized, so there is something illegitimate about the claims to turf and their enforcement. As mentioned, turf is fixed and changeable only by coercion. Comparing this form of turf to desirable forms of territory, note that turf is claimed by a subset of the residents who live in an area (often a gang), and that it *blocks* others from satisfying their place-based interests. D-Fens, though far from a sympathetic character, wanted a place to rest for a moment and enjoy a (discounted) Coca-Cola. That is an essentially place-based interest: one must sit *somewhere*. Of course, some legitimate claims to space thwart rather than satisfy place-based interests or located life-plans. Turf is not sufficiently limited, and in the attempt to preserve or maintain territory, it unduly shrinks our possibilities for territory making.

Before moving on, it is worth flagging that turf and turf wars are not essentially "gang" conflicts. A group of people can claim and defend turf in coercive ways, even if they are not a criminal organization. They need not even be much of an organization beyond a "spatial interest group." "Positive loitering" campaigns in which certain groups occupy places like open air drug or sex markets to deter the prevailing pattern of use are an example.[23] This mobilization of community members physically reclaims parts of the city for the mobilized group. That the group being pushed out is engaging in illegal activity is not, I think, necessarily relevant to this determination.

III. DYNAMIC TERRITORY

The thesis of this section is that territory is "Heraclitean," or essentially dynamic.[24] To survive is to change. To use different jargon, territory is characterized by *autocatalytic diversity* (diversity that begets more diversity).[25] Autocatalytic diversity (and

[23] Rai 2011.

[24] Scheffler 2007.

[25] Gaus 2021.

technological and population change) explains cities' *perpetual disequilibrium*, which means our territory is constantly changing.[26] The practical upshot of this conception of the city and its territories is that its valuable nature induces attempts at preservation that, at best, can only be incomplete.

I take the name "Heraclitean" from Samuel Scheffler's discussion of cultural preservation and immigration in the context of the nation state.[27] There, Scheffler makes a series of important points about the pluralist nature of culture. First, cultural "fixity" is an illusion. What counts as Jewish culture, for instance, isn't singular or fixed. Our cultural identity is determined by salience, so Jews in different parts of the world will take different aspects of Jewish culture to be most important.[28] Cultures are not only plural but contested. There are many levels of granularity at which to ask questions of culture. Whatever level of granularity we choose, that category will be contested and diverse rather than singular and fixed.

Salient cultural identities and their salient elements change through time. So, imagine you found cultural preservation to be a good reason to stop movement across your nation's borders. Even if we sealed off the nation from all immigrants, the culture will be markedly different in less than a generation. Cultures are essentially dynamic. "Strong" cultural preservation is thus impossible.[29] The identity conditions of culture must be consistent with that. Survival involves integration through time, but not stasis.

This is a basic feature of human thought. Ideology, like culture, is never the result of one person executing a plan to create it. It always emerges from the cooperative and competitive interactions of groups, a point that theorists of ideology take to be textbook-basic.[30] Culture, ideology, social morality, and the like are clear cases of autocatalytic diversity.[31]

Territory involves the expression or realization of our cultural and ideological commitments. These are major ingredients for territory. As an expression or constituent of our cultural (and other) identities, territory inherits these qualities of culture.

Since territory, like culture, is Heraclitean, we can make a similar claim here. Strong territorial preservation is impossible. At the local level, attempts at preservation often, though not always, significantly change the thing trying to be preserved. Large-scale

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[26] Batty 2013, pp. 23–24.

[27] Scheffler 2007, p. 105.

[28] Ibid., p. 97.

[29] Ibid., p. 105.

[30] Freeden 2003.

[31] Gaus 2021, p. 64.

attempts at historical preservation produce places that are analogous to the large-scale corporate developments widely despised in the critical urbanism literature. Colonial Williamsburg and Greenwich Village are, in some respects, like Disneyland or Times Square—itself disparagingly compared to Disneyland. All are rather tightly controlled and choreographed.

Colonial Williamsburg is literally a museum, and so the extreme case. Less extreme is Greenwich Village; it was designated a historic preservation zone in 1969, but observers note a fundamental change:

> Complaining about newcomers and change is a long tradition in the Village. But there was no denying that the Village of 2011 was a very different place... The Village's long period as a bohemian enclave, a magnet for misfits, and an engine of culture had ended, maybe for good. Much of it was now an affluent bedroom, shopping, and dining zone; NYU seemed intent on absorbing the rest into an ever-growing campus.[32]

Despite significant policy hurdles to changing the physical aspects of Greenwich Village, forty years was long enough to drastically change it.

Urban territory has a feature that makes it even more dynamic than culture (and national territory): temporal overlap. Urban territories are time-based as well as place based. Many are essentially overlapping; perhaps the regulars only show up on Wednesdays, or the field is used only for football on Sundays and only for softball on Saturdays. This possibility of overlap is another catalyst for territorial change. If football becomes more popular, the temporal boundaries of territory can become strained (e.g., some might want to play an additional game, requiring access to the field on Saturday).

One might think that blocking newcomers, not just new physical development, would be a way to stop the shift from cultural engine to consumption district. But if the misfit artists became successful, the area would become more consumption oriented. Residents likely would come to prefer larger apartments. Household sizes might change due to the roommate lifestyle losing its appeal, or perhaps to changing parenting norms and trends. If the Village stayed a cultural engine, as a cultural engine it would be destined to change. Cultural preservation thus by itself cannot ground a compelling case for reducing or halting urban migration. Since territory inherits this from its constitutive relationship with culture, we can say the same of territory.

It is worth emphasizing that not only is this functionally impossible, we have no reason ahead of time to think that the cultural change induced by movement across

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[32] Strausbaugh 2013, p. 546.

territory would be generally bad or unwelcome.[33] This too applies to the local as much as the national. Blocking change earlier in Greenwich Village's history, for example, could have meant the lot occupied by Stonewall Inn remained a restaurant or even horse stables, and no Stonewall protests.

That territory is inherently dynamic, and strong preservation is impossible doesn't mean that people give up on maintenance and preservation. The dynamism is essentially related to the conservative urge, and it is, after all, possible to maintain territories over a span of years. Still, essentially dynamic and contested territory means that despite our best efforts, these efforts will be imperfect and incomplete, and there will always be significant change that is out of our control.

IV. DEGENERATING TERRITORY

The Heraclitean or essentially dynamic view of territory does more than undermine strong preservationism and an ideal of territorial stasis. Our need for authorship and stability conflicts with the perpetual disequilibrium of the city and the change-inducing nature of attempts at control. When we combine these claims—territory is required, but turf is prohibited, and territorial preservation inevitably bumps up against the impossibility of strong preservation—we get the result that territory is unstable. It is unstable not merely in the sense of being dynamic or in perpetual disequilibrium, but in a normative sense. Territorial maintenance can produce turf. In other words, the essentially dynamic view alerts us to the possibility of territory degenerating into turf. Responding to the difficulty requires an inquiry into what it is for territory to degenerate.

Degeneration involves individuals or groups taking spatial control into their own hands in a way that goes beyond tinkering or place-making and excludes competing uses. The conflicts are like turf battles, even if they don't rise to the level of paradigmatic conflicts like shootings. We can find examples in many cities. As Los Angeles deals with the growth of tent encampments, some are fighting back in their private capacity by illegally installing bollards or large planters to occupy the space and prevent campers from returning.[34] San Francisco has seen attacks on "techies" and the private buses that bring them to the Apple or Google campuses.[35] In Venice, some locals shoot tourists with water guns.[36]

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[33] Brock 2009, p. 197.

[34] Solis 2024.

[35] Dougherty 2020.

[36] Nierenberg and Chaundler 2024.

Johannesburg, South Africa is the "exemplar of a divided city."[37] It is carved up by illegal fences and road closures installed privately and enforced by private security. The spatial enclosure is "'chosen' by individuals and provided by the market."[38] One major reason is that residents are pursuing their interest in security that the state often fails to provide. The carving up of the city is territorial degeneration. The roadway closures have naturally generated plenty of disagreement and fighting. According to Martin Murray,

> The distorted traffic patterns and unwanted traffic congestion provoked an angry reaction. While owners of the luxury Saxon Hotel and Hyde Park High School joined forces with irate residents to initiate legal action against the Sandhurst Heritage Foundation (the neighborhood association responsible for erecting the barrier wall), others took matters into their own hands, surreptitiously dismantling huge sections of the fence on at least five separate occasions.[39]

The city ultimately tore down a minority of them but mostly capitulated to the politically empowered residential groups claiming control over new borders. Johannesburg is thus an "archipelago of fortified spaces sealed off from the surrounding spatial landscape."[40] In both cases, though more clearly in the road closure case, we have turf conflict (and notably without paradigmatic criminal organizations).

Like the dramatic case of turf enforcement in *Falling Down*, the groups that illegally exclude people from walking down their street are acting wrongfully. They are coercively excluding people from their territory without sufficient reason. In the Los Angeles bollards case, installing bollards is a way of preventing others from claiming territory. Note that this too is a way of claiming territory: they are claiming a kind of jurisdiction and control over entry.

Importantly, the problem isn't reserved to extra-legal conflict alone. Turf can be the result of policy, as in the case of state-backed residential segregation. Because territory is in part about whom to exclude, overzealous territorial maintenance is likely to lead to (or preserve) "social closure."[41] Social closure, an essential motivation for opposing racial residential sorting, keeps the marginalized from accessing an adequate

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[37] Kukla 2021, p. 203.

[38] Ibid., p. 205.

[39] Murray 2020, p. 84.

[40] Ibid., p. 69.

[41] Anderson 2010, p. 7.

share of the economic and social capital-building opportunities. Social closure is easily exacerbated by the location-based nature of so many of the benefits and services distributed and provided by the state. Those who can't access the desirable locations are shut out from satisfying their claims. And because purchasing power is usually tied to social hierarchies, the result is that the socially marginalized become (further) politically marginalized. This is why racial segregation in housing has been deemed a principal cause of racial injustice.[42]

So far, I have identified the possibility of degenerating territory without saying anything about its likelihood. Cities are Heraclitean, one might acknowledge, but surely, they aren't all turf-bound. London has changed significantly, for example, but it is not all turf and turf battles. To see more clearly the link between territorial perseveration and turf, note the broader links between territory and policy. Turf can arise not just from insufficient state capacity, but from state capacity excised poorly.

Consider two policy regimes. One possible policy regime is a "market urbanism" approach. On this approach, cities develop according to individual choices in a basically free market. Cities must raise revenue somehow, but they won't have zoning policy, restrictions on floor-area ratios, mandatory parking minimums, preservation districts, and so on. This is to deny the neighborhood or local community all privilege, instead seeing the city as a competitive, individualist market for property claims and territory formation. Another possible approach is a "collective control" approach. A local version of the collective control approach sees neighborhoods as essentially connected to a people who have a sense of place-based community.[43] This rejects the competitive individualism of market urbanism in favor of organizing the city according to the decisions of the place-based collectives who make claims to local territory.

Until recently, municipal governments had not provided residents with the tools to preserve their territory. Urban policy was closer to the market urbanist side of the spectrum. Before laws were in place to create historical preservation districts, to separate commercial, industrial, and residential zoning, or to smooth the density gradient in a city, the pace of change in cities was rapid. There was a significant backlash to urban renewal in the United States that produced a (perhaps over-) reliance on non-profit community organizations to advocate for local interests in redevelopment.[44] The role of non-profit organizations in urban redevelopment highlights just how far contemporary policy is from both market urbanism and the top-down city control of

[42] Ibid., p. 2.

[43] Krishnamurthy and Moore 2024, p. 13.

[44] Levine 2021, p. 54.

the early 20th century. The overly dynamic nature of pure market urbanism is a point acknowledged even by some scholars critiquing today's zoning regimes who are more sympathetic to market-based land use patterns.[45]

Rejecting market urbanism in favor of collective control is not without risk. Iris Marion Young's remarks on this point are surprisingly strong. Young's worry that the "community" can be oppressive results in policy commitments that today look like something from an extreme market-YIMBY activist:

> The ideal of differentiated city life means in principle that people should not have power or authority to exclude persons or activities from public territory. People should be able to set up a store or a restaurant, build whatever dwelling they wish, set up a production facility, make a park, operate a religious center or counseling service for any population, without zoning regulations that limit their location choices. Potential neighbors must be free to discourage them, but they must not have the authority of law to exclude unwanted activities or constructions.[46]

The Youngian worries about community control are essential for seeing that some land-use policy regimes have pronounced risks of degenerating into turf. We can find a similar skepticism about local community control in Susan Fainstein's critique of the democratic proceduralism approach to urban planning which takes local democracy to be the solution. Such views have undue "faith in the efficacy of open communication that ignores the reality of structural inequality and hierarchies of power," (2010, 30).

Clearly, the skeptic of collective local control risks paying insufficient attention to changes to local territory that emerge from individual actions. Alternatively, enforcing collective control over local territory requires giving a group a set of specific political powers. If the mechanism for exercising the power is faulty, say by giving disproportionate voice to the louder or more privileged members of the community, this threatens the territory-making of others and looks turf-like. Thus, the proponent of collective local territory may advocate for a policy regime that produces lower risk of unjust territorial loss, but at a cost of more territorial degeneration.

As evidence, the homelessness and rough sleeping problem in US cities is plausibly a case of degenerating territory. Without any land use regulation, we've seen, changes might be so rapid as to make sufficient territory impossible. Yet urban economists have described the various zoning regimes that exist in the US, and which makes multifamily

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[45] Ellickson 2022, p. 3.

[46] Young 1990, p. 255.

housing illegal in most of the country, as a form of protectionism foisted upon us by an interest group sometimes called "homevoters."[47] That interest group might not be the marginalized we'd hope to empower through e.g., community review of developments, but rather an already well-off and powerful group others have dubbed "neighborhood defenders."[48] These are the problems Young and Feinstein worry about, realized by policy.

If homelessness is downstream of a lack of cheap housing, and if a lack of cheap housing is downstream of our land use and construction policies, then turf fights over bollards and encampments in Los Angeles are partly a product of bad policy. A powerful minority exploiting procedural tactics to halt development because it changes their territory has produced a housing crisis. The result is a kind of regulatory capture producing widespread reductions in quality of life for those who become rent burdened, and a deeply unjust rate of homelessness. The attempt to protect territory generated by a backlash to urban changes that were insufficiently attentive to the importance of territory has rendered large numbers of people with insufficient territory (to say the least). Some territory has degenerated into turf.

V. MAINTAINING TERRITORY

Can we achieve a regime of territory, or are we stuck between systems without enough authorship and attempts to create territory that overshoot into turf? How do we get territory without coercion, social closure, marginalization, and without carving our cities into fortified archipelagos? Essential to answering these questions is an account of what it is to maintain territory, or what kinds of changes are compatible with sufficient territorial stability.

One way of overshooting into turf is by having an overly demanding or expansive conception of territory, and to pair it with a policy regime that tries to ensure these demanding claims are satisfied. Overly preservationist policy can produce turf. To avoid creating turf, policy must be constrained by the kind of territorial maintenance we can reasonably hope for in light of the descriptive reality of the city. It must not try to do too much, like attempting to prevent some "ordinary" changes to territory.

I've argued that territory is essentially dynamic and pluralist for the same reasons that culture is. To start, then, we should regard territory as especially *fragile* and *fleeting*, rather than preservable in the strong sense. Though territory is not "strongly" preservable, it can be partially maintained.

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[47] Fischel 2001.

[48] Einstein, Glick, and Palmer 2020.

The ephemeral, fleeting conception of territory that makes sense of pluralism and change must again be supplemented with the idea of *territorial overlap*. To return the case of Greenwich Village, it famously housed the Bohemians and was a popular place for creative types in the middle of the 20th century. But it was also an Italian neighborhood.[49] Even at the height of its cultural influence, it was a space of overlapping but still largely distinct territories sharing physical space. That means that the "Fauxhemian" tourist who visited the Village and offered to explain to Jack Kerouac how "to dress and talk if they wanted to fit in with the Village scene" imposed on more than one territory.[50] An important upshot is that newcomers to a place will not necessarily (perhaps will not typically) undermine existing territory even if they change it, and so the reasons for blocking newcomers are often not very strong.

Local territory is also highly sensitive to *external factors* that its policy is unlikely to influence. Debates about gentrification and territory tend to focus on the neighborhood level. There are, naturally, broader, external trends that can change territory and entire cities. Given the city's role in regional, national, and global social systems, they will often be relatively powerless in the face of these forces. Global shifts in industrialization and technological changes, for example, had a pronounced effect on "rust belt" cities. A city like Buffalo, NY went from one of the largest and wealthiest in the country to struggling with population loss for decades. Technological changes like the St. Lawrence Seaway and the rise of containerized shipping by truck contributed to the closure of the Erie Canal, after which Buffalo was never the same. As Krugman shows in his work on economic geography, economies of scale will produce conditions where growth begets more growth and sometimes produces tipping points that make it so that economic production relocates.[51] These are structural features inherent to any economy. Today, much of the fighting over housing in San Francisco is plausibly motivated by a palpable loss of the old territory. The techies have replaced the hippies.

Moreover, we must recognize that territory requires the assistance and cooperation of others. The *cooperative nature* of territory is often frustrating. The demise of the local bookstore, for example, is a result of not enough people sufficiently valuing the local bookstore experience to keep them afloat. The neighborhood bar is a delicate balance of norms, not just demand. *Our* territory is never made or controlled by us alone. So, we can contribute to territory, but we alone can't usually make it.

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[49] Strausbaugh 2018, p. 217.

[50] Ibid., p. 316.

[51] Krugman 1992.

In other words, not only can territory be outcompeted, it can *fade*. In some cases, there is a sort of limit on the lifespan of certain territories apart from being outcompeted. Long Beach's Cambodia Town is a useful example. For complicated reasons, many Cambodian refugees made their way to Southern California and took up work in the donut business. Given access to cheap labor, the Cambodian donut shops spread throughout the region, achieving surprising density and making Los Angeles unequivocally America's best donut city. For many Californians in the middle and late parts of the twentieth century, not just in Cambodia Town but throughout Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego Counties, their territory likely included a particular kind of donut shop that simply cannot be replicated by ordinary donut mongers, even if they use the pink donut box. But as the Cambodian population integrates and experiences upward mobility, later generations have more options and are predictably less interested in the donut business. Cambodia Town will persist, but its territories will change in significant ways.

One important takeaway is that to maintain territory is to maintain *only a subset* of it at any given time. The subset we can maintain is often out of our control in important ways. This is part of what it is for territory to be Heraclitean or essentially dynamic. The Beats moving into Greenwich Village, for example, didn't destroy all the territory of the Italian enclave. The arrival of techies didn't destroy all the territory of the hippies. At least not all at once. A hippie might look around San Francisco now and see no territory, but that was a result of decades of change. If to maintain territory is to maintain only some of it at any given time, an ideal of territory is essentially limited. This understanding of territorial maintenance helps us to think about place-making and local territorial claims in their proper bounds.

VI. TERRITORIAL CONTROL AND LOCALISM

This conception of territory acknowledges that there is a justice-related claim to territory, while also accepting that a significant amount of change is compatible with territorial maintenance. In this section, I'll argue that we should generally not regard changes as violations to the right to territory. This undermines a key justification for "localist" policy regimes. Further, though motivated by concerns about change, rather than protecting territory, such policies are often prone to producing turf.

Let's start with a crude version of the view that there is a right to territory. On this view, our right to territory means we have a right of strong territorial preservation. We can dispatch with such a view quickly: the essentially pluralist nature of territory means that it is inevitably contested and dynamic, and there is no way of preventing

change. To survive is to change. Losing our favorite Cambodian donut shop or our Saturday morning tennis game at the municipal courts is unfortunate but does not violate a claim. At least, not by itself, since losing parts of our territory is an essential part of what it is to have territory through time.

Not all changes violate control rights to territory. But recall Kukla's view that changing demographics, economics, and physical infrastructure can be an assault on identity. These changes destabilize residents' territorial skills and leave them with less territory and so agency.[52] While I want to emphasize that the explanation Kukla offers for why the loss of territory is a misfortune that can be an injustice is an important insight, it is easy to draw too much from it. Only some changes will be sufficiently undermining of territory to violate our claims to control, and probably few individual changes will rise to such a level.

The weak conception of territory and its maintenance implies that we should not regard just any loss of territory as an injustice. Ronald Sundstrom defends a nearby claim on the grounds that social identity alone doesn't legitimate territorial claims.[53] Thus, he argues, the analysis of gentrification must find its wrong-making features elsewhere. Sundstrom thinks that the harms of cultural loss can be explained in other ways. One reason to favor such a view is that, given territorial overlap, determining which social group or identity to privilege is difficult.

Still, even if one were to reject this argument, there is an additional reason to reject the change as assault or injustice view. Territorial loss clearly changes feature of our identity to whatever extent we think that our identity is material and communally constituted. But this is simply the normal and inevitable state of things, especially when it is partial and gradual. When we lose some territory because the conditions that enabled the territory to exist change, we might suffer some misfortune, but it is a further step to show it unjustly violates a claim.

Further, recall Brock's point from above: we generally can't know ahead of time whether the changes will be welcome. Preventing globalization and the rise of Silicon Valley (or even just the St. Lawrence Seaway) would entail significant costs. The anti-techies bristle at their inability to control the city, while the rest of the world uses their products and services. Moreover, the international workforce in Silicon Valley is a source of significant upward mobility for many and a valuable source of cultural exchange. Probably some hippies became techies.

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[52] Kukla 2021, p. 96.

[53] Sundstrom 2023, p. xx.

Heraclitean territory, in other words, is not all downside. Problem-solving requires cultural and intellectual progress, and dynamic cities give us that. The changing role of e.g., Greenwich Village, Times Square, or San Francisco more broadly, in various counterculture movements offer ample illustration.[54] These places allowed for the formation of a wide variety of groups and the transformation of all manner of social norms and moral worldviews. In each case, however, the places were ultimately short-lived. Providing a place for group formation and experimentation is one of the most important roles for cities.

To be sure, changes can be antagonistic, hostile, stigmatizing, dangerous, and too fast. Can this account of territory explain actual assaults on identity and territory? I think so; it is not ultimately quietist on matters of policy and territorial preservation. In the extreme case of hostility, we might imagine an evil billionaire buying up and transforming all my territories for the purpose of ruining my life. Though we might be willing to concede that this is an assault or an attack leveraging my territory, it does not come close to the kind of control most urban planners or developers generally exercise over the city.

Still, some policy violates control rights. In the housing project example from Jacobs, the complaint wasn't just that there was no place to buy a newspaper, but that they were split up from their friends and their community. Coercive relocation plausibly counts as an assault, especially if done to deliberately undermine the wellbeing of residents, or without sufficient attention to their interests. The use of infrastructure projects to modify residential patterns and communities can plausibly be described as a violation of territorial control. Yet, certain infrastructure projects just will require relocating people and businesses, so a view of territorial rights that prohibited any such relocation would be problematically strong.

Setting aside intentional cases of undermining territory, does the speed of change make a difference? If things change rapidly, you might struggle to maintain your plans. The case for zoning policy even economists accept appeals to the problem of overly rapid change. Though there is something right about this idea, it is unlikely to be speed of change alone. Scope matters. Change can be rapid, and if it is partial, it will not constitute an unjust deprivation of territory. We should expect some kinds of rapid change: a factory might need replacement, and the best option is to relocate to another neighborhood. Some infrastructure may have reached the end of its useful life, and the best option may be to tear it down and build something new. This can rapidly change

[54] See, respectively: Strausbaugh 2018; Traub 2005; and Dougherty 2020.

the territory of many city residents, while being consistent with much of their overall lifestyles and place-based interests remaining stable.

Again, I don't mean to suggest that this means we have no policy responsibilities. The problem here is the justice requirement of local territory constrained by the requirement to avoid turf. The view is not that we need not do anything to help people claim territory. Rather, it is that the permanently dynamic nature of territory constrains the policy options for supporting and enabling territory.

Are there forms of "soft preservation" we might turn to? One clear example is the practice of naming neighborhoods for their residents (as in Little Tokyo or Cambodia Town), or changing cultural markers to better reflect the current, dominant group. Still, even such forms of weak preservation are inevitably capable of reflecting only some territorial claims.

Another option is simply to subsidize, through cash transfers, the ability to claim territory. Sufficient market power won't stop territory from shifting, but it will enable even marginalized groups to prioritize their territorial claims and to shift their behavior accordingly. Given that we must make our own territory, subsidizing market access is likely one of the more effective policy options.

To bring all the threads together, I want to return to the spectrum of urban policy anchored by "market urbanism" and "collective control." This will highlight the risk that certain policies aimed at local control (instead of supporting participation in the urban ecosystem) can backfire by producing something like a turf system. To accept the turf system is to allow groups to carve up the landscape into places of zero-sum conflict where outgroup members are generally prohibited. Local control over development and movement throughout the city can unintentionally produce such a system.

Some defend a defeasible right not just to local control over parks and other public spaces, but also a right to control the densification and "effective incorporation" of newcomers into the community.[55] The problem is that urban spaces are sites of overlapping territory and claims to control that, if resolved in majoritarian fashion, are likely not to advance the interests of minorities. More fundamentally, whatever local group is empowered to ensure incorporation is likely to run afoul of the value of diversity; people often seek city life precisely because they can be non-conformist, and local control policies can undermine such opportunities. Such a system essentially carves up the city into distinct geographic spaces and allocates control to a politically privileged group. Veto power over development is quite likely to empower just one of the groups with a claim to territory.

[55] Krishnamurthy and Moore 2024, p. 19.

Local control also produces social closure. This is for reasons of self-interest in the paradigmatic cases of NIMBYism. Everyone wants there to be a landfill, but no one wants it to be near them. Of course, there are important legitimate expectations one might have that can be thwarted by new development.[56] A system of local control, as discussed above, is widely held by social scientists to have caused the housing crisis. Devolving territorial power to the neighborhood level can be a way to ensure responsive policy, but it can also be a way to make policy problems insoluble (or, to repeatedly give to the weakest neighborhoods most of the burden, as in the location of urban highways). Meanwhile, more powerful areas can use policy to prevent outsider access to valuable resources.[57] Local control has an inherent risk of producing degenerating territory and even turf. The closer our policy regime is to collective control on the spectrum, the higher the risk of the city falling into a turf system.

VII. CONCLUSION

I've defended two kinds of claims here. First, extant work on urban territory needs to be supplemented with an essentially dynamic conception of territory that recognizes the possibility of degeneration and the problem of turf. This highlights the risks of policy regimes that prioritize local preservationism. Second, my revisionary account of territory and its maintenance succeeds at this task and is otherwise acceptable. (One can accept the former without the latter.)

Justice in the city requires territory. But in the search for territory, we find the threat of turf. A theory of urban justice, then, requires a moderated understanding of territory and its maintenance that makes sense of how it can be prevented from degenerating into turf. Policy can produce turf if it provides insufficient local control. But it can also do so with too much local control.

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[56] See Quigley (2023) for discussion.

[57] See Miller 1981.

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The author declares that they have no competing interests.

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