



Gender, Place & Culture

A Journal of Feminist Geography

ISSN: 0966-369X (Print) 1360-0524 (Online) Journal homepage: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cgpc20>

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To cite this article: Gilly Hartal (2016) The politics of holding: home and LGBT visibility in contested Jerusalem, *Gender, Place & Culture*, 23:8, 1193-1206, DOI: [10.1080/0966369X.2015.1136813](https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2015.1136813)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2015.1136813>



Published online: 01 Feb 2016.



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The politics of holding: home and LGBT visibility in contested Jerusalem

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ABSTRACT

This article explores LGBT politics of space in Jerusalem, a contested and fractured city. By interpreting the challenges and contradictions inherent in the Jerusalem Open House (JOH), a social movement and community space in Jerusalem, the article will show how the discourse and the practice of the JOH lead to a *politics of holding*. This LGBT spatial politics consists of striving to include oppositional politics, emphasizing the consolidation of public and private LGBT politics of home. The JOH persistently maintains a politics of holding, continually balancing inclusion, creating a home-like space and framing the organizational space as a shelter for all LGBT individuals in Jerusalem, while adopting a politics of visibility. This visibility enhanced processes of politicization which at many points stand in contrast to the JOH's goals of being accessible, inclusive, and safe. The politics of holding illustrates the religious, political, national, and ideological fractures' at work in producing a unique kind of LGBT spatial politics in the conservative Jerusalem space.

La política de contención: el hogar y la visibilidad LGBT en el Jerusalén en disputa

RESUMEN

Este artículo estudia la política LGBT del espacio en Jerusalén, una ciudad disputada y fracturada. Al interpretar los desafíos y contradicciones inherentes en la Casa Abierta de Jerusalén (JOH, por sus siglas en inglés), un movimiento social y espacio comunitario en esta ciudad, el artículo mostrará cómo el discurso y la práctica de la JOH conducen a una *política de contención*. Esta política espacial LGBT consiste en luchar por la inclusión de la política oposicional, enfatizando la consolidación de la política LGBT pública y privada del hogar. La JOH mantiene persistentemente una política de contención, equilibrando continuamente la inclusión, creando un espacio similar al hogar y enmarcando el espacio organizacional como un refugio para todxs los individuox LGBT en Jerusalén, mientras se adopta una política de visibilidad. Esta visibilidad resalta procesos de politización que en muchos puntos contrastan con los objetivos de la JOH de ser accesible, inclusivo y seguro. La política de contenerse ilustra la fractura religiosa, política, nacional e ideológica que funciona para producir un tipo único de política espacial LGBT en el espacio conservador de Jerusalén.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 8 October 2014
Accepted 11 September 2015

KEYWORDS

Contested cities; LGBT/queer space; public and private space; LGBT visibility; LGBT in Israel; sexuality and space

PALABRAS CLAVE

Ciudades disputadas; LGTB/espacio queer; espacio público y privado; visibilidad LGTB; LGTB en Israel; sexualidad y espacio

关键词

备受争议的城市; LGBT / 酷儿空间; 公共与私人空间; LGBT 可视性; 以色列的 LGBT; 性慾与空间

支持政治：备受争议的耶路撒冷中的家庭与LGBT的可见性

摘要

本文探讨LGBT在耶路撒冷这座备受争议且破碎的城市中的空间政治。透过诠释“耶路撒冷敞开大门”（JOH）此一耶路撒冷的社会运动与社群空间内部的挑战与矛盾，本文将展现JOH的论述与实践，如何引发“支持政治”。此一LGBT的空间政治，包含了力图将反对政治纳入其中，并强调LGBT的公共及私人家庭政治的巩固。JOH持续维持着“支持政治”，不断地平衡包容，创造了像家一般的空间，并将组织空间架构成为耶路撒冷每位LGBT的避风港，同时采取可见性的政治。此般可见性，促进了政治化的过程，该过程在诸多时刻与JOH的可接近、包容且安全的目标形成对比。“支持政治”描绘了在保守的耶路撒冷空间中创造特殊LGBT空间政治的过程中所上演的宗教、政治、国族与意识形态断裂。

Introduction

On the morning of 2 July 2014, Muhammad Abu Khdeir, a 16-year-old Palestinian from Jerusalem was kidnapped and murdered. His brutal murder immediately triggered a controversy concerning the motive and identity of the killers and was one of the factors that ignited the fighting between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. The internal Israeli security agency, Shabak (General Security Service), framed the killing as revenge for the earlier kidnapping and murder of three Israeli teenage boys by Hamas. Three Israeli suspects, who later confessed to the murder, were arrested.

The Jerusalem Open House (JOH), a social movement and a community space for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people (LGBT)¹ established in 1997, became embroiled in these events after a rumor spread that Abu Khdeir's murder was an honor killing, i.e. that he was gay and murdered by his own family. An alleged statement seemingly published by the JOH claimed Abu Khdeir was a member of the JOH. Elinor Sidi, the JOH executive director, denied the statement and made clear that the JOH was not familiar with Abu Khdeir. In a JOH news release from July 16 she articulated:

The name of the JOH was caught-up in the murder investigation of Muhammad Abu Khdeir because of a forged statement that was spread in our name through social media. In this statement it was said that Muhammad was gay and a member of [the] JOH, and suggested that his sexual orientation was the motive for his killing by his family. I condemn the use of the JOH in order to interfere with the Shabak and police investigation, in an attempt to deflect suspicion away from Jewish nationalists. I am outraged by the fact that in 2014 Jerusalem, being LGBT is still considered an acceptable and understandable motive for murder. The LGBT community in Jerusalem is not an isolated island. We have a responsibility to lead the healing of our city. Racism and homophobia are one and the same thing. One cannot tackle homophobia without combating racism.

[...] The events in Jerusalem have played a significant role in the spread of violence around the country. Thus, the healing of Jerusalem will be at the core of a healing process for the region. The LGBT community in Jerusalem has always been a beacon of tolerance in the city.

The Jerusalem social fabric rests atop a tense and delicate stability that can easily be toppled. The events described exemplify some of the conflicts that are prominent in Jerusalem and the role of the JOH as a known LGBT space within this conflicted context. This reciprocal dynamic of the JOH and Jerusalem contested space is at the heart of this article. In order to underscore friction as an important dimension for analysis of LGBT space in a contested city, in this article I explore the role of the JOH for LGBT individuals in Jerusalem, and examine the meanings of LGBT public space and visibility in a contested city.

I refer to space as both a place (a territory) and as an indicator of power relations, a site of unequal interactions. Elden argues that space 'is about interaction, determination, and control' (Elden 2009, 267). This study looks at the JOH as an urban space, an actual place, and a performative space, taking part in producing, reflecting and sometimes queering heteronormative power relations.

Building on the conceptualizations of cities as 'the mere site of a process of contestation' (Harvey 1997, 20), I refer to Jerusalem as an urban area in which (cultural, ethnic, national, class, religious, gendered, sexual etc.) divided groups coexist (Hepburn 2004; Adelman 2014). Along with Belfast, Jerusalem

is generally seen as one of the ‘unresolved cases, [...] cities where violence has for a long time been recurrent or chronic even when it has not been savagely acute’ (Hepburn 2004, 2).

Since the decriminalization of sodomy in Israel (in 1988), LGBT public visibility has grown. Although in other Israeli cities LGBT public visibility is generally tolerated, Jerusalem is noteworthy for its many years of overt antagonism toward LGBT presence in the public space. The JOH, as the only LGBT non-commercial long-lasting space in the city, challenges this hostility.

Based on my research, in this article I aim to specify, analyze, and interpret the challenges and contradictions inherent in JOH’s mission and practice as a secular, mostly Jewish organization located in, and committed to being part of, the fabric of the fractured city of Jerusalem. I am interested in how these religious, ethnic, national, political, and ideological fractures, along with Jerusalem’s relative conservatism vis-à-vis LGBT issues and status as the capital of Israel, both shape and are (potentially) shaped by the mission and practice of JOH. The JOH’s mission and practice are influenced by Jerusalem’s very particular sociocultural fractures, and in particular on how the conflicts and contradictions involved in trying to be a safe, inclusive, yet visible LGBT organization and space in such a context lead to a *politics of holding*.

As this article will demonstrate, I define the politics of holding as striving to include oppositional politics, emphasizing the consolidation of public and private LGBT politics of home. Such a policy aims to contain contradictory politics and incorporate LGBT individuals’ diverse embodiments as well as oppositional political standpoints, accentuating a dialectic mode of holding, through a constant balancing act between normative politics and discourses of inclusion. It is an attempt to frame the LGBT space as a shelter, which is at odds with ongoing blockages, social boundaries, and socio-spatial normative divisions and with the simultaneous attempt to increase visibility and LGBT politicization.

I will apply the lens of visibility and the private–public binary in order to present and investigate the negotiations of interconnecting and conflicting discourses of the JOH as a politically significant space for public LGBT visibility and presence in Jerusalem.² The premise that visibility is a strategy for increasing LGBT political power is based on the JOH’s goals and was presented to me when I began my fieldwork.

This article opens with a discussion of LGBT individual’s experiences in the private home and public space, and the politics of LGBT visibility. I proceed with a description of LGBT activism in Jerusalem and specifically focus on the JOH and on Jerusalem pride parades – the JOH’s most visible and contested enterprise in the city space. Following a methodological section, I present and analyze the intertwined discourses of the JOH as an inclusive accessible space and a political organization, which I propose to define as a politics of holding.

LGBT between the private home and the public sphere

Jurgen Habermas (1989) considers the public sphere a rational space, one free of regulation which can be shaped by its consumers’ public opinion as part of free and open discussions. The complementary idea of privacy and private space is part of Western liberal political thought about freedom, autonomy, sovereignty, and the right to private property. This binary approach has been criticized by many, including feminists, who claim that it excludes women from public discourse, relegating them to the private space, and therefore, reducing their status (Fraser 1990; Benhabib 1995; Duncan 1996; Bondi and Domosh 1998). Another critique highlights the de-politicization of this model, which leads to a perception that individuals’ autonomy and freedom can be protected within the framework of the real and symbolic private space, concealing exclusion and disciplining (Duncan 1996). Moreover, Benhabib (1995, 411) questions the division between public and private, asserting that women’s absence from the public sphere ‘point[s] to some categorical distortions’ which cannot be ‘subsequently “corrected” by their reinsertion into the picture from which they were missing.’ She concludes ‘the exclusion of women and their point of view is not just a political omission and a moral blind spot but constitutes an epistemological deficit as well.’

The dichotomy between private and public strengthens the legitimization of sexual discipline in both spheres. Like gender, sexuality is regulated and fixed as a private aspect of life (Duncan 1996). Through the portrayal of (hetero)sexuality as a facet of the private, public space is rendered asexual, making non-heterosexual sexuality very prominent when it appears in public spaces (Valentine 1993; Skeggs 2010). Such perceptions create the illusion that the private sphere compensates for inequality in the public sphere.

The private sphere is mostly associated with the home and with the house as concrete, symbolic, or imaginary places (Easthope 2004; Blunt and Dowling 2006).³ While the characteristics of the home are perceived as universal and fundamental, various studies have shown that the home has varied meanings in different social and cultural contexts.⁴ Grounded in the value of privacy, Western liberal logic frames the home as a sheltered and intimate space in which there is no institutional intervention. Familistic approaches also influence this discourse of home, focusing on heterosexual families and strengthening patriarchal norms (Bell 1991). Thus, in Western culture, the home is perceived as a place of 'rest' from the threatening and noisy public space.

For LGBT individuals,⁵ the home is as likely to serve as a space where sexuality is disciplined (Bell 1991; Valentine 1993, 1995; Johnston and Valentine 1995) as not. For youth living with their parents or LGBT individuals who are not yet 'out of the closet,' the home can be an oppressive and even dangerous space (Johnston and Valentine 1995; Duncan 1996). As a cultural cave of the socialization and reproduction of heteronormativity, oftentimes the home symbolizes what can never be for lesbians and gays (Valentine 1993). So much so that, as adults, lesbians and gays sometimes conceal their sexual identities through spatial design. For example, by hiding the features that could expose their sexual identity such as a rainbow flag, or even by creating two separate bedrooms in a couple's home. LGBT individuals' homes do not always provide the idyllic feelings supposedly characteristic of the home – belonging, security, and privacy (Gorman-Murray 2007).

Nonetheless, privacy is also what allows gays and lesbians to see their home as a shelter, a space of control, approval, belonging and even subversion, in which sexuality can be expressed through spatial and relationship design in a way that is protected from heteronormative normalization (Johnston and Valentine 1995; Duncan 1996; Valentine 2002).

The chronic normalization of public space, constantly constructed as heterosexual, leads lesbians and gays to develop negotiation as to how they are present, move within, and act in space (Skeggs 2010). Mitchell (1995) argues that the public space allows social movements and organizations to conduct two-pronged actions: to change the public space and include marginalized groups in it, as well as to make space in the public discourse. Accordingly, LGBT presence in public space is conceptualized as a strategy of resistance not restricted to visibility, but one that actually leads to the re-territorialization of the heterosexual space; expanding boundaries and distorting the sexual hegemony (see Wagner 2013). According to this line of argument, pride parades are considered actions that challenge the heterosexual space, filling the streets, even if only for a short time, with LGBT embodiments and discourses, thus exposing the daily production of space as heterosexual (Valentine 1996).

Visibility in the public space is a performative and political action (Mitchell 2000), leading to debates regarding its cost and implications (Skeggs 2010). Visibility prevents the possibility of invisibility, which to some is welcome and even necessary. Visibility could also lead to pathologization (Skeggs 2010) and could produce a space of supervision and discipline (Phelan 1993). Therefore, visibility serves as a double-edged sword which undermines the ways in which the public space is constructed and at the same time may result in politicization and regulation.

Negotiating LGBT presence is not restricted to a politics of visibility but also involves inclusion/exclusion practices and discourses. Inclusion is basically a liberal concept, which considers different identity categories as a political basis for action and representation (Laclau 2005). As a political strategy, it mostly aims for the deconstruction and transformation of power relations, articulating the struggle's aims, modes of belonging and members' visibility. The discourse of inclusion uses grammars of Otherness, putting at the forefront the concept of recognition (Monk 2000; Howitt 2007), multiculturalism, and diversity (Puar 2006). Therefore, it is viewed by scholars as a form of intersectionality (Calafell 2014). The

politics of holding that I will present is not restricted to this kind of inclusion. Rather, its goals are accessibility, openness, and a consolidation of public and private discourses, none of which are immersed in liberal logics but are based on spatial politics instead.

LGBT in contested Jerusalem

Jerusalem, Israel's capital and the largest city, is often portrayed as a religious city, one that is cognizant of its past and its history (Vinitzky-Seroussi 1998). The city displays fault lines along the intersecting splits in Israeli society – religious, political, ethnic (Hasson 1996, 2002), and gendered (Fenster 2005b). It is divided into social, cultural, and spatial fragments (re)producing symbolic and physical boundaries like walls and enclosed neighborhoods (Gedaliah and Sharkansky 2010). These boundaries expose the religious, ethnic, and national significance of divisions within Israeli society, separating religious Jews from secular Jews, Palestinians from Jews and segregating ultra-Orthodox zones. Moreover, Jerusalem is unique in that it encompasses additional physical boundaries that empower the blockage. For instance, the Green Line⁶ and the separation wall, 'a barrier constructed through the entire West Bank to separate Jewish settlements and Israeli cities from Palestinian towns and villages, [... comprised of] 8-metre-high concrete slabs, electronic fences, barbed wire, radar, cameras, deep trenches, observation posts and patrol roads' (Weizman 2007, 161), pass through the city.

There are different attitudes toward the LGBT presence in Jerusalem, the majority of which reject and even protest against the existence of LGBT individuals, specifically in Jerusalem's public space, which is considered holy by all three monotheistic religions. Sexuality in such a unique and sacred space is considered impure and polluting.

Generally, Tel Aviv is considered the 'right' place for Israeli LGBT individuals. The local rhetoric refers to Tel Aviv as a 'gay heaven',⁷ offering a sense of belonging to LGBT individuals (Fenster and Manor 2011). In Tel Aviv there are many LGBT leisure spaces and a grand Gay-Center sponsored by the municipality. Tel Aviv pride parades have been taking place since 1998, and since 2007 the municipality has been responsible for their production.

Jerusalem, on the other hand, has only a limited number of recreational spaces designated for the LGBT community. Its segregated architecture restricts everyone and LGBT individuals even more so, from many areas, limiting their space (and feeling of belonging) mostly to the city center (Fenster and Manor 2011). Moreover, there is a major difference in municipal endorsement of LGBT activities and spaces. The JOH has had to turn to the courts several times since 2002 on the grounds of financial discrimination by the Jerusalem Municipality, as well as in a battle to hold scheduled pride parades in the turbulent city.⁸ In light of all this, researchers have often described a heightened sense of alienation and estrangement among LGBT individuals in Jerusalem (Fenster and Manor 2011), for having to struggle repeatedly for every political, spatial, cultural, and financial achievement, which has led to a massive exodus of LGBT individuals from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv in the last decade.

Located in the city center, the JOH aims to serve as a community center and a safe, empowering, and highly visible space for LGBT individuals in Jerusalem. The organization copes with issues that are often unique to Jerusalem, focusing on LGBT visibility in an intolerant space and responding to the Palestinian and ultra-Orthodox community living in the city.

For most of Jerusalem's LGBT community, the JOH is an intimate and home-like space, one that is comfortable and full of love. As such, it is supposed to be an alternative in times of need and a space for difference. As a shelter, the JOH's role is to allow LGBT individuals in Jerusalem to externalize their secret without endangering themselves, even temporarily. This is enabled both by the JOH serving as a place in which LGBT individuals can act freely, a place in which they don't have to feel the demands of heterosexual normalization, and by the JOH's role in consolidating LGBT visibility in Jerusalem. What could have been a minor role, as just one more LGBT space in urban surroundings, Jerusalem and its unique vectors have transformed through the conflicts, stress and many dilemmas for the JOH's activists confronted daily.

The socio-spatiality of Jerusalem constructs boundaries and spatial coercion practices. For example, the chastity limits that create actual physical boundaries by preventing women's passage through the Mea-Shearim neighborhood while 'inappropriately dressed' (Fenster 2005a). The ultra-Orthodox community maintaining this discourse is only one example of the spatial segregation which is taken to extremes in Jerusalem. This, of course, has implications for the lives of LGBT individuals as well. For instance, members of the ultra-Orthodox community have tossed stink bombs into the JOH as well as at pride parade marchers. These practices were also apparent when representatives of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism united against holding the World Pride parade in Jerusalem.

Organized solely by the JOH, the annual Jerusalem pride parades reveal the complexity of the city's political public space and its ramifications for LGBT framings and presence. For the first two years, between 2002 and 2004, the parade, which passes through the city center, was relatively quiet. In 2005, the ultra-Orthodox public protest against the parade increased, culminating in the stabbing of three marchers by an ultra-Orthodox person. The opposition was not solely from the religious community, but was also articulated by the establishment, as reflected in a quote by then Jerusalem Mayor Uri Lupolianski in *All the City*, a local newspaper: 'As far as I'm concerned, going to the Temple Mount with a pig's head [a Jewish symbol for all that is impure] and holding a pride parade [in Jerusalem] is the same provocation' (Matan 2005, 20).

In 2006, amidst threats, ultra-Orthodox demonstrations against the parade, and three petitions to the Supreme Court against holding the parade, the JOH's activists decided to hold a public rally in a sports stadium. Instead of a public March and occupation of space, LGBT visibility was concealed and limited to the stadium's space. In 2007, some rabbis decided to oppose the mass demonstrations against the parade and as a result, the protests waned and the March took place as planned. In 2008, negotiations were held between JOH activists and representatives of the ultra-Orthodox community in Jerusalem, which led to the parade taking place in a relatively relaxed environment as compared to previous years. Despite the truce, while preparations for the parade were underway, activists were subjected to violence and disturbances (such as threatening phone calls and stink bombs). Since then, each year has witnessed a smaller scale demonstration of the ultra-Orthodox community protesting against the parade, namely stink bombs are thrown at the marchers.

In August 2009 a deadly shooting at the *Bar-Noar* in Tel Aviv which killed two and injured 14 at the youth meetings of the *Aguda* (*The National Association of LGBT in Israel*), traumatized the Israeli LGBT community and dramatically changed the perceptions and discourse about the community in the political sphere. Gross (2015) argues it allowed politicians from across the political spectrum to show their support for the mourning community and it created opportunities to speak out for gay rights.

This upheaval resulted in changes to the Jerusalem pride parade, as the JOH activists decided to relocate the rally that follows the parade from the city center to the Rose Garden next to the Knesset (the Israeli parliament), the political center of Jerusalem, as well as to reschedule the parade closer to August 1st to commemorate the *Bar-Noar* shooting. This change continued the following year serves as an example of the politicization of the Jerusalem pride parade and its self-perception as the face of the battle for equal sexual and gender rights in Israel.⁹ In 2012, the original pride parade route was reinstated and participants marched through the city center, while in 2013 the route changed again – going from the city center to the Rose Garden, near the Knesset.

Methodology

This article aims to investigate LGBT politics, exploring how these politics are generated and produced by the Jerusalem fractured and contested fabric. It focuses on the JOH, an LGBT organization and space.

Data collection was conducted using an ethnographic method that was chosen as it enables the observation of and experiencing of spatial and affective embodiments, and not just emotional and conversational behaviors. It allowed me as the researcher to enter the research field, or more precisely – to enter the space and be openly physically present throughout the research process. This position is based on Browne and Nash's (2010) call to create a dynamic subjective position within the research

field as well as Halberstam's (2003) call to blur the opposition between researcher and researched. This resulted in a queer methodology that reflects my commitment to be a part of the research process in a way that is attentive to changes that occurred in the JOH throughout the research process while remaining reflexive on my part.

The research included 5 months of participant observations between January and May 2010 which included: board meetings, a cleaning day, opening hours, bi-annual plenary meetings, cultural events, political events, an exhibition opening, pride-parade organizing meetings, a family day event and more.

These were accompanied by ten open-ended interviews with leading activists in the JOH. Some of the participants are presently active, some were previously active. The interviews, which lasted from 2 to 5 h, were recorded, transcribed and transcriptions were sent to the participants for approval. Although this is unusual, all participants gave written consent for the use of their real names in this article, as they are all well-known local public figures who wanted credit for their statements. Also, the activist LGBT community in Israel is small; most of the activists are known to each other. Since many of the key activists were interviewed, their statements are recognizably their own.

The interviews, participant observation transcripts, and field notes were analyzed using content analysis, which is a method for locating and determining themes in collected textual data by noting repetitions of ideas and meanings (Coffey and Atkinson 1996; Hannam 2002). As such, recurring themes concerning LGBT politics of space in Jerusalem were uncovered.

I began my fieldwork at the JOH equipped with a formal letter from my university. Not living in Jerusalem and not being a JOH activist, I was perceived, on the one hand, as an outsider. However, as a Jewish, lesbian Israeli woman, active in LGBT organizations, I used my relationships with activists as well as prior knowledge of the field in order to expeditiously become an insider, an integral activist of the JOH. After two weeks of ethnography I was given the keys to the front door and a week later I was asked to apply for the JOH's board in the upcoming elections, and subsequently was elected and served as a board member.

This intensified my dual position as an insider and an outsider, a researcher and a fellow activist, enabling a unique perspective. This delicate standpoint is anchored in a 'hermeneutics of faith' (Josselson 2004, 5), a point of view in which 'we, as researchers, believe that the participants are telling us, as best they are able, their sense of their subjective experience and meaning-making' giving 'voice' to the research field. The hermeneutics of faith led me to try to 're-collect and reorder meanings inherent in the material,' (Josselson 2004, 6), as I was both a researcher and an activist.

LGBT visibility in a contested city

Second of January began as an ordinary day at the JOH. In the afternoon, however, the staff suddenly noticed that the rainbow flag hanging from the street window was missing. Not knowing whether the flag had been stolen or whether it had fallen down, Sivan, the administrative coordinator of the JOH, and I, tried to hang a new flag. Sivan told me that the flag gets stolen many times every year, despite its second-storey location. That day, a technical difficulty (there was no pole to hang the flag on), led to a discussion of the importance of this act of LGBT visibility in Jerusalem. The flag, I understood, is an important sign of visibility – not just an indicator of LGBT space in Jerusalem, but a sign of tolerance and presence in the fractured and contested Israeli capital. As the discussion continued, I discovered visibility was a central narrative in the JOH's activists' discourse and understanding of the JOH and its role as an LGBT space in Jerusalem.

Gorman-Murray, Waitt, and Gibson (2008) assert that the analysis of flag flying is of considerable geographical importance for the understanding of social inclusion. Leib and Webster (2004) claim the act of flag flying is a symbolic representation of power. The rainbow flag's concrete presence in the Jerusalem landscape is a volatile issue. Jerry, one of the founders of the JOH and the first chairman described the symbolic part the rainbow flag plays in creating LGBT visibility in Jerusalem:

[After the establishment of the JOH] I thought that hanging the flag would bother some of the people who have experienced shame and difficulty and stigmatization, who would never come up the stairs to the JOH if they saw a

flag flying from the balcony. After a couple of years, we had a discussion in the plenary of the JOH on this specific topic; [...] I thought that it was about time. [...] At the end of the day [...] it was decided that we would hang a flag. Indeed, a large flag was hung from the balcony, and is displayed from the JOH, even though it has been burned and stolen a couple of times.

At first, taking into account the difficulties produced by visibility and publicity, Jerry cautiously raises the issue of the flag. Later on, the permanence of the JOH in Jerusalem led to the flag being hung from the window, revealing the LGBT space in the center of Jerusalem to those who were not aware of its existence. Sometimes, as Jerry pointed out and was illustrated in the ethnography, this visibility has been disrupted as a result of theft or burning of the flag.

Hence, hanging the flag in Jerusalem was not a one-time activity but rather one that continues, repeatedly creating an LGBT presence and contesting the heteronormativity of Jerusalem. Yaron, the community coordinator, stated:

The fact is that there is a building with a rainbow flag which a lot of people pass by and know that this place exists; they are still not willing at all to think about coming in here. [...] A very significant service that the JOH provides is the mere fact that it exists.

Yaron framed the JOH's visibility as a source of empowerment and legitimization for LGBT individuals, and not only as an indicator of an LGBT place in public space. Binyamin, the Health Coordinator, added another factor, 'A rainbow flag outside is therapeutic in this city.' Paradoxically, for those who cannot enter the JOH because of its visibility, walking the streets and seeing a rainbow flag can serve as a symbolic moment of belonging, even if only through a moment's gaze.

On 3 February 2011, after one month of ethnography, I attended the biannual plenary of the JOH. The meeting began with a discussion of the migration of LGBT activists to Tel Aviv. One of the veteran activists said:

Maybe this is a much better situation than what it used to be because people no longer need their 'synagogue' – their separate community, in which they are on the margins. Maybe this flag waving on Ben Yehuda Street [contributed to the change]? Maybe it is the pride parade? Things were done which in my opinion were amazing, even though they were so scary. [We asked ourselves] will there be a flag outside? What will it be like to walk down Ben Yehuda waving [a flag]? We were up there so no one would see us [...]. Things have changed, there is no series [on TV] without [LGBT people] ... there is [even] a series about religious people [...], where there is one [character] that says that he is gay. It pops up, it is getting visibility, it is less scary, it is less 'Zalman Shoshi'¹⁰ – anyone familiar with this name? [...] *Maybe it is good because it was like a hospital, so maybe everyone has healed?*

The activist depicted the JOH as a 'synagogue,' a gathering place for the entire community, a 'temple,' a spiritually inclusive center, but which today is partly empty. Past dilemmas regarding visibility in the public sphere raised fear and controversy. The JOH's visibility reveals the identity of those LGBT individuals who enter its space or partake in its activities. As such, it marks some individuals as LGBT, an indication which can be unwanted, cause harm or even be dangerous to some. Thus, LGBT visibility in Jerusalem simultaneously symbolically closed the JOH's doors, making it impossible for some LGBT individuals to enter.

The flag symbolizes a process of politicization that the JOH went through – it moved from being a shelter and a home for LGBT individuals in Jerusalem to an organization of social change which strives to be visible in the Jerusalem public sphere and to highlight the LGBT presence in the center of Jerusalem.

Accessibility vs. visibility

Being a private space and a political organization conflict with the narrative of inclusion, which is inevitably difficult in a compartmentalized space such as Jerusalem. Enhancing LGBT visibility in the public sphere, as was presented by the debate over hanging the pride flag, accelerates the JOH's politicization and thus reduces the chances of many individuals living in Jerusalem from entering the JOH.

Even though important political issues were up for discussion, the 2011 winter plenary of the JOH was sparsely attended. In a preliminary discussion before the election of new board members, a veteran activist referred to the JOH's role as an inclusive space:

The first thing is that this is a home for all LGBT people. [...] We really need to address the needs of ultra-Orthodox LGBT people, even LGBT people who are extremely right-wing, [...] who do not want to give rights to anyone [...]. This place, in my view, is first and foremost for LGBT people. [...] Among us we have all types [of LGBT individuals], all opinions – this is everyone's home.

One of the reasons that made it extremely difficult for religious LGBT individuals to access the JOH was because of the calls between 2005 and 2008 not to hold the pride parade in Jerusalem, which came, for the most part, from the ultra-Orthodox community in Jerusalem.

These calls were punctuated by incitement and protests, violence that peaked with the stabbings, and repeated petitions and headlines in the media. Yonatan, the JOH director, described what was required for the preservation of the JOH's accessibility, as a result of this state of affairs:

In the process of reducing the great flames of 2008 in relation to the great violence [...] we did something very deliberate through quiet and constant communication with representatives of the ultra-Orthodox community, we undertook a process with ourselves as well, a process of down shifting. We do less communication; [...] we are placing boundaries. [...] Part of it is realizing [...] that there will be less media coverage of all topics of the parade.

Yonatan's desire not to provoke media attention means giving up a degree of visibility. However, visibility is not something he unequivocally endorses against the accessibility of the JOH, but rather it seems that what is important is the type of media visibility. Namely, non-adversarial visibility, which aims for inclusion, creating an all-encompassing space for LGBT individuals.

The politicization processes described aims to enhance the visibility of the JOH and influence the spatial politics of the city. Whereas the desire to be an accessible space to which LGBT individuals of all identities (of all religions, class, gender identity, ethnicity, nationality, etc.) could feel part of, calls for 'shifting down the gears,' meaning not intensifying the visibility of LGBT presence in Jerusalem. These contradictions between accessibility and visibility are caused by the social structure of the city, i.e. the religious, ethnic, national, class, political, gendered, and ideological fractures of Jerusalem. Their consolidation poses a political challenge to the JOH, a challenge that leads to a unique kind of politics, the politics of holding.

The contested space of Jerusalem brings about a dialectic mode of holding, comprising concessions and disciplining and a constant effort to balance public politics and inclusion practices. This need for visibility on the one hand, and the attempt to frame the space as a shelter produces friction and disagreements within the JOH. The next section will further illustrate the politics of holding, focusing on clashes within the JOH.

Internal politics

Activist groups which emerged as a result of the JOH's goal to serve as a home for marginalized LGBT individuals, and who subsequently left the JOH for an independent future, serve as one illustration of the complications involved in being a home for LGBT individuals in Jerusalem. *Hevruta*, a male religious Gay organization and *alQaws for Sexual & Gender Diversity in Palestinian Society (alQaws)*, a Palestinian organization, both began inside the JOH, later choosing to go their own way – *Hevruta* mainly to Tel Aviv, the most comfortable space for Jewish LGBT individuals in Israel, and *alQaws*, while physically staying part of the JOH, became a separate and independent organization. Both groups left the JOH as a result of their growth and the consolidation of their leadership.

Those two groups 'represent' opposing politics; the Jewish religious group members are associated with right-wing, conservative politics, while the Palestinian group is mostly associated with leftist queer anti-occupation politics and with BDS.¹¹

In an interview with Eyal, the first chairman of *Hevruta*, he asserted that leaving the JOH along with the foundation of an autonomous organization originated for three main reasons: religious gay migration to Tel Aviv, which transferred *Hevruta's* center of gravity and increased the need for meetings in Tel Aviv; disagreements regarding the usage of designated contributions to *Hevruta*, which became part of the JOH's budget; and a need for autonomy and self-determination which led to the establishment of the organization as an NGO, separate from the JOH's infrastructure. Eyal made clear that 'as long as

we were within the JOH we had to explain why we were not the JOH. We are *Hevruta*, an independent group functioning within the JOH,' explaining that associating *Hevruta* with the JOH reflected badly on *Hevruta*. This association tied *Hevruta* to the JOH's leftist stances, as a secular organization.

Throughout the ethnography I was unsuccessful in trying to speak with *alQaws* activists. At first I thought it was merely due to the fact that they visited the JOH at different times. Only after two months of ethnography did I understand that this refusal, even though not bluntly articulated, stemmed from my identity as a Jewish Israeli woman doing research at an Israeli University. Thus, even though *alQaws'* offices and some of its activities are located inside the JOH's space, and although, just like *Hevruta*, the organization originated as a JOH group, and Hanin, *alQaws'* chairwoman was a former coordinator for the Palestinian community at the JOH, I did not have any direct contact with the group during the research period.

Despite this political opposition between *Hevruta* and *alQaws*, the JOH cultivated both groups spatially and organizationally, simultaneously being a home to religious Jewish gays and to Palestinian queers. This clear tension was managed for many years in which no direct disputes surfaced – an indication of a politics of holding.

However, eventually both groups left the JOH and went their own way, demonstrating some fractures and rifts in the JOH's politics of holding. Eyal articulated:

I think that the JOH runs like a ... in my opinion it is impressive. Even though the outcome [of leaving the JOH and establishing an independent organization], is the same for Palestinians and for *Hevruta*. I can say that this [leaving the JOH] is very much due to the inner needs of these groups for self-determination. Having said that, I do think that there could have been a way to manage this differently and to keep these groups part of the JOH.

Although *Hevruta* and *alQaws* both responded to their groups' needs, the JOH, according to Eyal, could have kept them both as part of the JOH. Eyal does not directly imply that this break was due to political disagreements between these groups. However, he does point to the JOH's lack of success in keeping the groups together in one organization, indicating that he considers the JOH should not serve merely as a platform for new organizations' establishment, but as a space for all Jerusalem LGBT individuals. The case of *Hevruta* and *alQaws* brings attention to the boundaries of the politics of holding.

Managing a politics of holding

Achieving a politics of holding necessitates balancing opposing discourses: A narrative of a homelike safe space, a narrative of visibility and politicization, and a narrative of inclusion and accessibility for divergent and even conflicting political communities. By politicization I refer to the politics of space or to 'a struggle over how lives are to be lived' as articulated by Staeheli and Mitchell (2009, 191). As such, politicization involves struggles of belonging and conflicts over 'which individuals and groups are to be granted the power to determine futures' (Staeheli and Mitchell 2009, 191). In the context of the JOH, this politicization adheres to the spatial politics of the segregated city, receiving the assignment of a secular Jewish individuals' space with a leftist liberal orientation. Moreover, its location in the capital pushes the JOH to be at the forefront of national LGBT rights struggles as well as to represent an LGBT position in the constitutive splits of Israeli society (such as Arab-Jewish or secular-religious).

The presence of the JOH in Jerusalem is both symbolic and concrete, as Yonatan made apparent:

I think that it was much more comfortable and easy for Jerusalem without the JOH; [It's] much easier to speak about pluralism when it is all a spectrum between black [religious] and white [secular]. The JOH suddenly brings color. [...] It is much easier to look at Israeli society in general as religious and secular. For secular [individuals], when they need a 'synagogue' they will come [to the JOH ...]. We pose challenges to Jerusalem [...] without intending to, the reality is we are the greatest demonstration of human rights and pluralism in the city.

According to Yonatan, Jerusalem is a space where the political differences are stark. Referencing the rainbow flag and its colorfulness, he presents LGBT individuals in Jerusalem as colorful, although ignoring the reality that Jerusalem is actually diverse in terms of culture, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, etc. Thus, according to Yonatan, LGBT individuals are not just rainbow colored, but also colored in pluralism. Yonatan interprets the colors of the JOH as part of its essence, interwoven into the fabric of Jerusalem,

and as such, the JOH can only be seen as a political space, despite its limitations. Yonatan attributes this politicization to the Jerusalem context, essential in light of the prominent lack of LGBT presence in Jerusalem public space, the segregated city and the complex human fabric.

Sheikh-Jarrah is a predominantly Palestinian neighborhood in East Jerusalem, the center of a number of property and human rights disputes between Palestinians and Jewish Israelis. In 2009–2010, weekly demonstrations took place in the neighborhood, in which LGBT activists participated. Noam, the JOH chairwoman, linked manifestations of tension to the political activist spaces in Sheikh-Jarrah:

[The JOH deals with] a great variety of religious communities regarding the perceived leftist stance of the JOH, and elsewhere we face opposition to the gay community from struggles we support like in Sheikh-Jarrah. [...] These are pressures we live with, and they sometimes paralyze us since we can't move in any direction [...] there are] too many reasons not to move. [...] There is a good reason for all this to be happening here, it's not just coincidence ... we have the platform for all this here.

The JOH is perceived to have a leftist orientation according to a liberal projection of LGBT issues onto 'humanist' paradigms, and thus it is criticized by right-wing LGBT individuals for its support of Palestinian rights, land and property struggles. Noam was referring to the criticism of Jewish LBT (women) activists who participated in the demonstrations and were accused of wearing immodest clothing or carrying pride flags, despite a request to honor the spaces they had entered and dress accordingly.¹² This, as she narrated, is a direct product of contested Jerusalem, becoming a nuanced space where there are no easy solidarities or identifications, rendering the JOH a place of many contesting beliefs, identities, politics, and communities.

This mode of holding offers the JOH as an open, accessible, and inclusive space for every LGBT individual in Jerusalem. As part of the framework of heterotopia, Foucault (1986) defines accessibility as the ability to move in space, and enter or leave a space. As such, it reflects power and is constructed by boundaries and their contestation. Yaron, the community coordinator, recalled a situation in which JOH activists were called to participate in a neighborhood protest against the encroachment of the ultra-Orthodox community:

Someone called us from Kiryat Yovel to invite us to protest there, and told us 'we want to invite you [the JOH's activists] for a Shabbat, to fill the place up with rainbow flags', they don't do this because they want LGBT visibility [in their neighborhood], they do it because they want to annoy the ultra-Orthodox people who come to live there. We need to explain to them that we don't want to [help them] because we don't want to annoy the ultra-Orthodox communities who live in the neighborhood, we want to befriend everyone.

The well-known opposition of the ultra-Orthodox to the LGBT community is almost dragged into a spatial occupation debate, save for the fact that the JOH's activists declined the invitation. Yaron stressed that accessibility was a guiding principle in decision-making, articulating what he thought it meant for the JOH to be an inclusive space, a home for LGBT individuals in Jerusalem irrespective of nationality, ethnicity, class, gender, religion or religiosity. In this sense, the JOH is a space for LGBT convergence, transcending political boundaries.

Conclusion

In this article I have argued that in the contested context of Jerusalem, the JOH has corresponding and contradictory narratives of safety, accessibility, politicization, and visibility. These are shaped by Jerusalem's sociocultural fractures and conflicts leading to *the politics of holding*.

The JOH represents the LGBT visibility that is otherwise concealed in the public space of Jerusalem and thus politicizes LGBT identifications in Jerusalem. This politicization, the negotiation of the JOH's discourses and their amalgamation expose JOH's status as simultaneously a private and a public space, subverting ongoing blockages, social boundaries and socio-spatial normative divisions. General changes in Israel regarding LGBT visibility as well as the constancy of the JOH in the Jerusalem landscape enabled its politicization. Located within the complex spatial politics of Jerusalem (Fenster 2004; Hepburn 2004; Fenster and Manor 2011; Adelman 2014), this politicization led to a narrative in which the public actions of the JOH and its visibility in the city produce the JOH as a marker of symbolic and concrete

demonstrations of pluralism. The Jerusalem scene, highlighting the contrast between 'fun' or 'party-like' (which represents Tel-Aviv) and 'political' (which is associated with Jerusalem) and the measure of friction in Jerusalem brings the JOH's activists to articulate their politics, assuming responsibilities to create pluralism and social change. As a result, the JOH is very different than any other LGBT space in Israel.

Another narrative sees in the JOH *an accessible and inclusive space* for all LGBT individuals in Jerusalem, regardless of their political, national, ethnic, and economic status. The integration of these narratives into a unified voice of the organization/space culminates in *the politics of holding*, a unique outcome of the articulation of Jerusalem's spatiality, as well as of the possibilities such a contested space creates. This politics is represented in the subversion of the private–public binary (Fraser 1990; Benhabib 1995; Duncan 1996; Bondi and Domosh 1998) and in the creation of a dialectic web of in between. It is the simultaneous becoming of the JOH as a space of belonging for LGBT individuals which allows for a sense of affinity in a contested urban space that is generally intolerant toward LGBT individuals, alongside processes of politicization, marking the importance of visibility in the Jerusalem public sphere. All of which is complemented by a rigorous and cautious politics that strives not to differentiate or to discipline individuals, communities, spaces, and agendas. This ethos is also expressed through the determination that accessibility must be translated into concrete politics since the very space and sociocultural structure of Jerusalem makes entering the JOH harder for some.

The JOH is an organization that aims to create social change, and as such presents itself as part of the history of human rights struggles, which create change in part through visibility (Valentine 1996; Wagner 2013). Since LGBT visibility is contingent, the JOH serves as an 'alternative body' or an alternative space – it makes visible the invisible LGBT body in Jerusalem. In order to allow for the integration of many LGBT people in the JOH, there is a need for an alternative division than the public and private binary division, in which heteronormative and heterosexual normalization regimes proliferate.

Thus, the spatial essence of LGBT politics in Jerusalem exceeds binaries such as the public/private, left/right, or radical/liberal queer politics. This politics of space, manifested at the JOH, produce a new kind of spatial politics which I call the politics of holding.

Notes

1. I use the term LGBT. Whenever the term homosexual or gay/lesbian was originally utilized, the original term is applied.
2. My usage of the public and private binary is political and serves to illustrate the possibilities of subversion. It does not indicate compliance with its disciplining agenda or with the power structure and logic it represents.
3. In Hebrew there is no linguistic difference between the word home and house [Ba-yit]. This distinction refers to the affective function of the space and charges it with emotive meanings relating to security, privacy, intimacy, and belonging (Blunt and Dowling 2006).
4. For further reading on experiences of the home see: gender (McDowell 1999), race (Hooks 1991), relating to age (Dupuis and Thorns 1996; Gorman-Murray 2007), sexuality (Johnston and Valentine 1995), and nationalism (Blumen, Fenster, and Misgav 2013).
5. As well as for heterosexuals who do not live within traditional family structure.
6. The Green Line is the common term used to mark the dividing line between Israel and the Palestinian occupied territories.
7. Michael Oren, Israeli ambassador to the US, speech on 5/5/2012 at the 'Equality Forum' in Philadelphia.
8. For further information see <http://joh.org.il/index.php/english/legal-struggle-history-of-joh>.
9. For more on Jerusalem pride parades and the religious vs. LGBT conflict see *Sex and the City: The Politics of Gay Pride in Jerusalem* (Adelman 2014).
10. Zalman Shoshi is the name of a well-known cross-dressing Israeli sex worker. He is mentioned here to symbolize the shame and embarrassment that characterized gayness in the 1980s, relegating it to sex-work. It is also an indication of the change the Israeli LGBT community has gone through since. As such, mentioning his name in this context serves to highlight longevity and the tendency to forget past hard times.
11. Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions [BDS], a global campaign to end the Israeli occupation and colonization of Palestinian or Arab land, equality for Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel, and respect for the right of return of Palestinian refugees.
12. See, e.g. Saar (2010) http://www.mouse.co.il/CM.articles_item,1018,209,53009.aspx. Or the formal request of Sheikh-Jarrah activists (Solidarity-Sheikh-Jarrah 2010) for people participating in the demonstrations to wear modest clothing <http://www.justjlm.org/358>.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Orna Sasson-Levy for her invaluable assistance with this article. I am grateful to Sarai Aharon, Lital Pascar, Tanya Zion-Waldoks and my doctoral working group, as well as the anonymous reviewers, for their insightful comments.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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