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WOMAN TO WOMAN: COMMUNITY AND BELONGING AMONG LESBIAN AND QUEER FEMINIST ACTIVISTS IN HAIFA, ISRAEL

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By

Lauren Copeland

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Cristina Alcalde, Professor of Gender and Women's Studies

Lexington, Kentucky

2021

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

WOMAN TO WOMAN: COMMUNITY AND BELONGING
AMONG LESBIAN AND QUEER FEMINIST ACTIVISTS IN HAIFA, ISRAEL

This dissertation focuses on experiences of belonging among lesbian and queer feminist activist women in the women-only organization Isha L'Isha. As the oldest feminist organization in Israel, Isha L'Isha was established in 1983 and has roots dating back to the 1970s. I spent one year (2017-2018) engaging in participant observation and conducting 40 interviews with current and former members of the group. Using Isha L'Isha as a lens through which to examine the multilayered ways in which gendered activism shapes experiences of belonging, this project centers the experiences and narratives of four women: Talma, Sophie, Amira, and Maya.

This work centers belonging around the idea of safety at three levels: physical safety, emotional safety, and philosophical safety. I view safety through an experiential lens wherein physical and mental landscapes are dependent on each other. I argue that much of the belonging the women at Isha experience is rooted in physical safety from gendered violence. In each of the six chapters, I explore how women of differing class, race, ethnicity, and age build affective worlds through physical, emotional, and philosophical safety.

KEYWORDS: belonging, activism, feminism, Israel, safety, queer activism

Lauren Copeland
(Name of Student)

07/22/2021
Date

WOMAN TO WOMAN: COMMUNITY AND BELONGING
AMONG LESBIAN AND QUEER FEMINIST ACTIVISTS IN HAIFA, ISRAEL

By
Lauren Copeland

Cristina Alcalde
Director of Dissertation

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Date

DEDICATION

To Mikayla Hyman, the love of my life and my greatest support.

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The following dissertation, while an individual work, benefited from the dedication and support of my friends, family, and mentors. First, I want to thank my Dissertation Chair, Cristina Alcalde, whose work on gendered violence helped inspire me to get a PhD. Thank you for believing in me even when I did not. I owe so much of my success to you. Next, I want to thank Mel Stein and Charlie Yi Zhang who provided me with timely and helpful comments that elevated my dissertation. Thank you also to Jan Fernheimer and Kristin Monroe. You both provided valuable insight that helped me challenge my thinking and substantially improve my writing.

This project is for and about women, and I also want to thank three important women in my life. Thank you to my mom who taught me early in life to always think for myself and not just follow the crowd because it is convenient. You are always uniquely your amazing self. Thank you also to MaryAnn Kozlowski, my boxing partner and dear friend. I am so lucky to have such a rad and hilarious woman in my life. Finally, thank you Mikayla, my partner in life. I am so thankful that we enrolled in the School of Hebrew during the same summer and fell in love in kitah aleph. This project would not be possible without you.

Finally, thank you to the women of Isha L'Isha, who work daily to improve the lives of women and girls all over Israel. Thank you for welcoming me into your special community.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION: *CENTERING SAFETY BY APPROACHING BELONGING, LGBTQ+ ACTIVISM, AND WOMEN-ONLY SPACES*

1.1. From Personal Experiences to Academic Topics

Five years ago, I won a language scholarship to study in a small town in Morocco for a summer. I planned to improve my Arabic and prepare for my upcoming dissertation with Arabic-speaking women and thought I could even do some exploratory research while there. The reality, however, was that during that summer I experienced the most intense and frequent sexual harassment of my life. While street harassment against women has been prevalent in most of the places I have lived, in Morocco, street harassment felt especially intense. The 2017 Global Gender Gap Report, which analyzes the integration of women in terms of health, economic, educational, and political factors, rates Morocco one of the worst performing countries: 136th out of 144 countries worldwide and 12th out of 17 in the Middle East (Chafai, 2020, p. 4). Additionally, 12.4 percent of women experience violence in a public space (p. 2). Women all over the world experience gendered violence in some form, and in Morocco, street harassment is one of the main ways that it shows up. In my case, every time I left the house groups of men of all ages would yell at me and my roommate, Clara. A battery of men would yell at us in French-- screaming vile things about our bodies and often threatening us. On one occasion, a group of young men cornered us in an alley late in the morning and would not let us pass until we apologized to them, even though it was not clear what offense we had committed. Clara, a PhD student from DC who had lived all over the world and did security risk analysis part time, not only spoke fluent French and Arabic but she was much braver than I and would often yell and insult the men right back. Currently, there

are several anti-street harassment campaigns in Morocco including *Masaktach*, which means "I'm not silenced," which is a movement that urges women to use whistles when they are harassed on the street (p. 5). Every day while I was in Morocco I thought about what I could do to stop the harassment: Wear more layers? Pretend to be a boy? Leave the program? Other women in the program experienced harassment, and they too expressed fear about these daily experiences. The program staff had failed to warn us about this during our program training, and the men I talked to who had visited this small town before loved their experiences.

One day the dozen women in the program sat down with the directors and teachers to ask for advice: What could we do to feel safer? To avoid harassment? Their answer was disappointing: We couldn't avoid it. According to them, the women who lived in the city faced harassment every day and it didn't matter what they wore or what language they spoke. It was just an everyday reality, they told us. But they did have some advice: If we found ourselves in danger and alone, being harassed or touched by a strange man, we should find a group of women, any women, and stand next to them. It wouldn't matter that we were strangers to the women or that we were clearly foreigners. The women, they explained, would pretend to know us and would pull us into their space as a way to protect us until the danger passed. To me, this advice seemed both kind and sad. How often did this harassment have to occur for women in this town to reach such an understanding and develop this protective coping strategy? I realized, however, that this was not as new to me as I had initially imagined. Women seeking protection and comfort within groups, even if that group was filled with strangers, is a notion that is not bound to a specific locale or culture. Morocco is not unique in its violence against women. I realized the thread the

common thread throughout my life: seeking safety and comfort with other women, particularly in response to gendered violence. Like other women, this is what I had been doing throughout my life, in all of the places I had lived and visited. I sought safety in groups of women- safety from harassment and fear and, in some cases, from assault. Many years earlier, I had experienced this sense of solidarity and collective protection with the women employees at a Burger King in Kentucky after I was regularly threatened by unknown men at a Greyhound station in the early mornings. I experienced this with girls at my high school in Ohio, after boys busted into the girls ’bathroom and stood over my stall door. I experienced the pervasive reality of sexual violence against women again when an unregistered taxi driver in Israel sexually assaulted me and blocked me from leaving his cab on one Sukkot morning when no buses were running.

In this dissertation, belonging is a central concept, and one that is inextricably tied to safety and protection. I engage with the concept and the experience of belonging from multiple gendered perspectives and based on existing scholarship. Belonging is a complex notion that has traditionally been used in disparate, often contradictory ways (Antonsich, 2010; Wright, 2019). Here, belonging becomes a lens through which to understand how women at Isha L’Isha, or Isha as its members call it, the Israeli organization I focus on in my research, understand and describe their sense of attachment and safety from the multiple positions within society--as activist space-makers within Isha, representatives and members of the larger queer community, the creators and benefactors of feminist spaces, and citizens of the Israeli nation-state. Though this dissertation is focused on belonging, there exists tensions within every conception of belonging. I explore belonging from an ontological view with a focus on affective

modalities. I ask, how do members of Isha conceptualize belonging as a state of being through affective and physiological processes? Many early feminist theorists in the nineteenth and twentieth century devalued and ignored the body because they thought the elevation of reason to be the correct path to equality (Cleary, 2016). In theories of belonging, affect is sometimes considered but rarely focuses on the body (Halse, 2018). In this work, I examine belonging within the context and purpose of a woman-only space and center belonging around the idea of safety at three levels: physical safety, emotional safety, and philosophical safety. I view safety through an experiential lens wherein physical and mental landscapes are dependent on each other. Affect studies often sit within ontology as a mode of being (Rowe, 2005). Some scholars consider affect to be a social practice, thereby making it a social ontology (Raudaskoski et al., 2019). Ontological affect theory "positions the capacity of a body to affect and be affected as the foundation for relation both beyond and between individuals" (Bollmer, 2014, p. 298). By considering affect as a mode of being, scholars can connect affect to agency and autonomy (Raudaskoski et al., 2019).

Affect studies prevent the separation of materiality from emotional states, examine how subjects relate to others, and study the histories of emotion that shape our views (Greyser, 2012). I argue that much of the belonging the women at Isha experience is rooted in physical safety from gendered violence. In each of the chapters that follow, I explore how women of differing class, race, ethnicity, and age build affective worlds through physical, emotional, and philosophical safety. A sense of safety, both physical and emotional, has individual physiological impacts and is shaped by both the physical and non-physical world. This sense of safety and belonging is not without complication.

The women of Isha still experience harm, even from other women in Isha. Relationships between the women of Isha are often fraught and layered with unequal power. Maya, the only regular trans volunteer at Isha, feels isolated. Sophie, a queer academic, felt pressured by other women within Isha to follow a social script of coming out as lesbian after divorcing her husband. Amira and many of the activists at Isha put their bodies in very dangerous situations, such as anti-Occupation protests and anti-war protests, quite frequently. In spite or perhaps because of this, Isha creates a space of unity and belonging across these challenges and hardships. I purposefully use a lens of belonging, bolstered by intersectional considerations instead of an intersectional lens alone. Intersectionality focuses on the unique experiences of each individual and oppressions across groups. While this is a helpful lens for deconstructing lived experience and realities, belonging becomes a more suitable tool for understanding why and how actors unite towards a common cause. When thinking about ways to understand and grow activist circles, belonging may be more useful than deconstructing intersectional theories. In this dissertation, I examine fractures within the community and how they come together through shared feelings of physical safety and belonging.

In applying an affective ontological lens here, I connect safety to the creation of women-only spaces. By connecting safety with a sense of belonging and examining it through Isha, I provide insight into the harmonization of mental and physical safety. Women around the world feel unsafe in public spaces due to the prevalence of gendered violence and street harassment, which can include groping, masturbation, threats, and unwanted touching. Street harassment, specifically sexual harassment, restricts women's movement and feelings of autonomy in the world

(Alcalde, 2020, p. 2). When women feel unsafe and fear sexual violence from men, they avoid public spaces and restrict the way they move in the world (p.8). As women across the world lack safety, this study allows for deeper examination into the ways safety can be created and the development and maintenance of social networks, organizations, and group ideologies that further facilitate protection from violence.

It is helpful to position my own more personal approach to belonging as it informs my engagement with research. For me, in the realm of everyday, physical safety is the most basic level of belonging. There is a correlation between perceptions of safety and a sense of belonging (Wilson & Liss, 2020). Those who feel physically unsafe report lower levels of belonging and higher levels of psychological stress (p. 2). In this sense, belonging can be a feeling of connection with a person or group of people—such as the groups of women I point to above. Over time, belonging can change or grow and work on different levels (Wright, 2015, p. 393). For example, I don't feel the same sense of belonging with the women at Burger King as I do with women in my family, but both are important. A feeling of physical safety can be the simplest experience of belonging and it is often a necessary first step. For people who have experienced traumatic events, there is a reduced sense of belonging and increased feeling of being unsafe compared to those who have not experienced trauma (Shalka & Leal, 2020). After leaving Morocco and experiencing intense physical protection from women I didn't even know in response to gendered violence, I wanted to study more women-only spaces. How did they form? Why did they develop? Were other women as scared as I am on the street? Can a women-only space create a sphere free of fear? How might that impact belonging?

When I traveled to Haifa, Israel for the first time, I felt a sense of safety immediately with the women at Isha. I had just left my experience of constant street harassment and threats of violence from men and was feeling generally unsafe and anxious in the world. This fear went beyond the feeling of physical threats and emotional fear. Gender-based violence has been found to significantly affect women's psychological functioning and has been associated with severe mental disorders and poor physical health (Rees et al., 2011, p. 518). After leaving Morocco, when I would walk by a man in the street, my body would tense up and I would feel immense fear. I expected every man I passed to do or say something provocative or upsetting to me, but on my first trip to Israel, no man ever did. While street harassment in Israel is not the main concern among feminists in Haifa, (Hoffman, 2016) other forms of violence are pervasive including sex trafficking, especially among Russian-speaking women (Peled & Parker, 2013, p. 576). Additionally, during my year of dissertation research in Haifa, I would experience an assault by a taxi driver that would again destabilize my experience of safety in the world. Later, I would meet an Israeli woman taxi driver who drove women who felt unsafe getting into taxis with unknown men. The very existence of the service shows the experience and feeling of unsafety among many Israeli women.

Feelings of danger and unbelonging can negatively affect individuals' mental health (Wilson & Liss, 2020, p. 3). Additionally, a greater sense of belonging can have a positive correlation on an individual's mental health (p. 3). Shalka and Leal explain that a "sense of belonging may function to produce a protective factor against post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) for college students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer or questioning (LGBQ) and have experienced sexual assault" (Shalka & Leal, 2020).

When I sat for the first time in the Isha meeting room across from two seventy-year-old women who had been feminist activists for decades, I could feel my entire body sigh in relief. I didn't know them yet, but I felt welcome and safe. Emotions are intrinsically linked to all aspects of human functioning (Hastings et al., 2011). Emotions and affect are critical to belonging as they provide a path and model unto which theoretical implications about the social worlds and location there can be made (Hemmings, 2005). A year later, I would begin a year-long research study with these women, and my sense of belonging would develop much deeper than a feeling of physical safety. As my own personal sense of belonging grew, my academic engagement with the concept developed as well. I became increasingly interested in the intersection of what I personally experienced as belonging with gender, safety, and activism in the realm of scholarship and my dissertation.

Shared experiences can be an indicator of physical and emotional safety (Wilson & Liss, 2020, p. 3). The affect of one individual necessarily interacts with the affect of others—often mimicking and intensifying. Affect connects individuals in a mutually constitutive unit rather than in an oppositional capacity (Hemmings, 2005). LGBTQ+ high school students who join a gay straight alliance and are able to be in a community with other LGBTQ+ students have a greater sense of belonging and experience lower levels of depression (Wilson & Liss, 2020, p. 3). As a lesbian, I experience the world as a woman who has specifically chosen to spend my life with another woman. This part of my identity influences so many aspects of my life and my past, and I feel seen when I am able to share some of these experiences with other women. For me, feeling seen by other lesbians is about a recognition of the joy, power,

and importance of choosing to live one's life with other women and to be primarily bonded to another woman. Feeling like one belongs and is an accepted part of a social group has a positive effect on one's emotional well-being. For instance, for many lesbians and bisexual women, being part of a lesbian and bisexual group led to psychosocial well-being and positive identity formation (Battle & Harris, 2013, p. 153). When I first visited Haifa in the summer of 2016, I came directly from my traumatic experience in Morocco. Once in Haifa, I immediately met the women of Isha, many of them lesbians, and felt the immediate connection and shared experience that I feel with many lesbians. This sense of connection is important for lesbians' well-being and physical health. For lesbians over 60, being part and feeling a sense of belonging to a lesbian community has been shown to improve mental health and overall well-being (Bradford et al., 2016). A broad sense of shared experience acknowledges rather than erases internal differences and trajectories in our lives. I grew up in the U.S. South in classrooms where teachers endorsed my fellow students' homophobic slurs, and I attended college in a city where I was regularly called a "dyke" from pickup truck windows. I noticed that I was always braced for a sexist or homophobic verbal onslaught. It was only once I came to Isha that I stopped tensing when talking about my girlfriend. The women I met at Isha came from a diversity of backgrounds- sometimes liberal backgrounds where their sexuality was never viewed as a problem in their family and other times from more conservative backgrounds where they had to hide their sexuality from their family even into adulthood. As Israelis, they survived wars and terrorist attacks. Still, when they talked about their sexuality and I told them about my own, there

were shared smiles and a shared sense of understanding. At one level, I felt not only safe but understood.

Since I began graduate school, I hoped to focus my research on lesbian experiences, yet this hope did not become a real possibility until I began engaging with Isha in Israel. I wanted to center lesbian experiences because some researchers even claimed we were disappearing (Morris, 2016). In this sense, then, this project is both intimately personal and broadly activist and academic. In a world where, as Rich says, “women's choice of women as passionate comrades, life partners, co-workers, lovers, tribe, has been crushed, invalidated, forced into hiding and disguise,” I am always interested in where lesbians are and what they are up to (Rich, 1981). I feel an intense sense of belonging with other women who identify as lesbians, and I want them to live their most open and full lives. I never belonged to a lesbian activist group until I arrived at Isha (I didn’t know of any lesbian organizations in any of the places I had lived previously), and I wanted to understand how a group of lesbian activists could belong to each other and work on behalf of one another. Was their shared experience important to the forms of belonging they identified? The women who participated in Isha had different ages, races, and nationalities yet they were bonded by the desire to envision a shared feminist future and create a space of physical safety away from physical violence that many had experienced first hand. What impact would these shared experiences and sense of belonging to the group have on their individual experiences and the organization as a whole and how may these common experiences, both at Isha and before, provide insight into activist levers in efforts that cross age, race, and nationality? Does the coalition provide richness and nuance to the work of Isha?

A third level of safety related to belonging is philosophical safety. Philosophical safety is the ability to speak about one's beliefs and values in a space where one is safe from harm and allowed freedom to speak as a full and capable peer. Women activists often feel that men dominate activist discussions in mixed gender spaces and feel that women-only spaces provide them with the freedom and philosophical safety to speak up and lead (Mackay, 2011, p. 169). As Lewis et al. argue, the ability to engage with others in dialogue and interact with others is "core to citizenship and personhood" (Lewis et al., 2013, p.3). Additionally, "Experiencing public, private and virtual spaces as unsafe combined with being (self) silenced may be conceptualized as constituting threats to ontological security" (p. 3). The women of Isha have a shared vision to work for women's rights and a shared vision of the future where women have freedom from violence, freedom of movement, freedom of expression and the ability to have any life partner they want. These women are specifically working on that future for the women in Israel. The specifics of this shared dream can be very different, and I witnessed countless disagreements among the women at Isha. However, women at Isha have the freedom to speak, to lead projects and initiatives, and to disagree within the bounds of Isha. I find this kind of belonging to be one of the most important but also the most difficult. I have found it with my partner, and I have occasionally found it with women in feminist communities. Though I didn't realize that I was looking for this kind of belonging, I found it with the women at Isha and I believe that many of the women have found it and continue to find it with each other there. Affect and Safety in Belonging, LGBTQ+ Activism and Women-Only Spaces

1.1.1 Belonging

Antonsich (2010) posits that there are two major types of analyses for belonging: place-belongingness and the politics of belonging. In place-belonging theory, belonging is analyzed as a personal, intimate feeling and a sensation of being at home. In this context, belonging is not socially contested and exclusionary in nature, but rather an intimate, deeply personal self-narration. Many of the women at Isha refer to the organization as their "home," which certainly fits well with Antonsich's ideas of place-belonging. This sense of home does not stand for the domestic sphere in which patriarchal oppression, violence, and fear are replicated but instead stands for a place of comfort, security, emotional attachment, and familiarity (Antonsich, 2010). Through this definition of belonging as a feeling or experience of connection and support between people, especially a feeling of home, I engage with belonging through scholars such as Laura C. Wilson and Miriam Liss, Juan Battle & Angelique Harris, and Tricia R. Shalka and Christina C. Leal (Wilson & Liss, 2020; Shalka & Leal, 2020; Battle & Harris, 2013). Belonging can also play a part in politics. Many theorists see belonging as a force that shapes constructions of power within and between communities, identities, and nations (Fahrmeir & Jones, 2008, Ho, 2006, Rosaldo, 1994). These scholars demonstrate the connections between belonging and safety at the emotional, physical, and philosophical level particularly in regard to women and LGBTQ+ people.

The belonging spoken about in this work does not come without complications and restrictions. Women within Isha experience tensions within what and how they belong. Though belonging is described as a feeling of home, homes are rarely devoid of struggle, opposition, and conflict. Talma, while existing to many feminist communities in

the 70's, has often felt more radical than many feminist group members. Sophie thinks Isha should include more than just women as voting members (anyone can volunteer at Isha but only people who identify as women can be voting members) and the focus of the organization should be more queer. Amira, while fond of Isha, experienced a "fleeting" sense of belonging wherein sometimes more than other times she felt a deep, immediate connection to Isha. Maya felt a bit lonely being the only transwoman at Isha.

Israel as a state is often at war with surrounding countries. Amira, Talma, and Maya work in a variety of activist spaces, many of which have conflict. All spoke about the violence they faced within their activist communities. Amira has PTSD from some of her activist engagements. Knowing people who have been killed when protesting the poor treatment of Palestinians has left her scared and burnt out. Maya said that in activism, where one is already going against the norm, it is important to feel safe within that smaller community. Talma has long felt more radical than most. At Isha, all of these women feel physically safe but there are still tensions and sometimes ideological differences within Isha. Affect can be used to trace the connections and tensions that create belonging.

In this work, I examine belonging through an affective lens. Affect is a critical lens through which varied fields, including women and gender studies, philosophy, and history, have engaged with ontological views and modes of being (Hastings et al., 2011). Depending on the field, affect can be considered the same as emotion or related as emotion but intrinsically different (Hastings et al., 2011; Hemmings, 2005). Affect can be considered an embodied state or bodily intensity while emotion is a manifestation or interpretation of this state of being and a social category of feeling--narrated and socially

defined. Biomedical sciences consider affect to be the study of emotions as well as affective phenomena like bodily feelings (i.e., hunger) (Hastings et al. 2011; Hemmings 2005). Naomi Greyser uses affect and emotion interchangeably to show the porosity between the self and the social world which furthers feminism's crucial investing into complicating the division of the public and domestic sphere (2012). However, here affect will be used expansively to include the way in which a subject affects the world and is affected by it (von Scheve, 2018). Emotions are one part of this 'affect sphere 'but not the only component. The shared experience of gendered violence—instead of simply their female identity—draws the members of Isha towards each other, and becomes the basis for them to build their community as part of their quotidian embodiment and physical setting. As a result of this dynamic process, an "affective structure" that is always in the making and remaking takes its shape and generates divergent feelings and emotions on individual levels. Some people might feel belonging and stay while others might not and leave.

In chapter two, I examine in more depth demographic differences within Isha. While the group does have diverse participation in terms of age, nationality, and race, most Isha members come from a middle class and university educated background. It is their shared desire to create a feminist space, and often their affectsphere being informed by physical violence that brings the women of Isha together. By understanding a uniting force across these differences, scholars can better understand activism formation. In chapter three, I dive more into how differing identities within Isha make the space richer and more effective as a social change organization.

A women-only activist space like Isha also breaks down the domestic/private divide. Women-only spaces can allow women to speak up and take political power in a way that they sometimes feel uncomfortable doing elsewhere. Isha is a place of women's activism, consensus-building, and affective experience. Ontologies of belonging are intrinsically linked to affective experiences. In the women-only section of this chapter, I engage more with the benefits of an affective lens in feminist locales.

Academics have used a post-structuralist lens to study affect. Prior conceptions of power were founded within a theory that claimed hegemonic social structures formed subjects and ignored the impact of personal relationships on individuals. Proponents of affect theory claim that social production cannot account for all of the actions and variability of subjects and society. Affect allows theorists to gain a deeper view of subject world-building and prioritize texture to accurately represent and comment on the social world. Lastly, power/resistance and public/private models cannot solely compose the political process. Affective ties are an alternative model of subject formation. This lens can help us understand processes of Isha as constituent pieces of social transformation work.

Women at Isha felt physically and emotionally safe within the walls of the Haifa Feminist Center and within the world of Isha. Many of the women referred to Isha specifically as a "shelter" and a "home" and said that they felt safer at Isha than anywhere else in Haifa. There is a correlation between perceptions of physical safety and a sense of belonging, and those who feel physically safe report higher levels of belonging and lower levels of depression and stress (Wilson & Liss, 2020, p. 2-3). Belonging, traditionally thought of as a metaphysical process, has physiological impacts on subjects. Affective

theorists are well-aware of the ties between mental, emotional, theoretical, and conceptual ontologies with the body (Ahall, 2018; Hemmings, 2005).

A sense of physical safety is also vital for affective or emotional safety, which is a second level of belonging. LGBTQ+ young people and adults feel the strongest sense of belonging when they feel safe. If one does not feel safe to be out or to live life as one's true self, they experience a lower level of belonging. Laura Wilson and Miriam Liss write that "lack of belonging may be another general psychological mechanism by which sexual minority identity is associated with greater mental health difficulties" (p.3). LGBTQ+ college students who feel unsafe on campus report that they do not belong and experience greater mental health disparities compared to their heterosexual classmates (p.4).

A feeling of belonging can be especially important for those who experience oppression at multiple levels or who feel marginalized within their community. Those who feel marginalized are much more likely to experience belonging with other individuals who experience oppression. This may include recent immigrants, LGBTQ+ people, or people of color (Battle & Harris, 2013, p.145). As Yuval-Davis asserts, belonging can be just as much about feeling safe as it can be about an emotional connection (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 198). In marginalized groups, this feeling of safety can be especially important. For Maya, a transgender lesbian I write about in chapter five, her intersecting oppressions lead to a feeling of unbelonging in most activist spaces. However, she feels that at Isha, a space with many lesbian and queer women of many different backgrounds, she feels the safest and the most at home. Many other women at Isha feel the same.

Sometimes, too great a focus on safety combined with the desire to belong can create an oppressor/oppressed dichotomy that deeply harms those who are excluded. When those who feel unsafe side with oppressive forces in order to gain protection, they themselves may contribute to the oppression of others. For example, Adi Kuntsman finds that some queer immigrants work to erase their ethnic and nationalist pasts in order to find belonging in Israel. In doing so, they employ racism towards Palestinians and Mizrahi Jews (Kuntsman, 2009). For these queer immigrants, belonging is created through enactments of violence. In order to find safety and belonging within the dominant Israeli society, some queer immigrants figure Palestinian men as "Arab terrorists." These immigrants gain safety through discriminatory beliefs and acts of violence against Arabs. Here, to be Arab or Palestinian is to be excluded from or denied Israeli national identity (p. 125-126).

One online promotion from a queer Russian club celebrates the death of Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat. The text reads: "200,000 mad beasts are burying their leader. Palestinians mourn for 40 days. 7:40 is the name of a popular Jewish dance. I invite you for Jewish dancing- this Friday, in our club. Dance all night!!" (p. 18). Here, Russian queers align themselves with what they view as Jewish nationalist rhetoric that disregards Arabs as non-human. In a Russian lesbian online forum called Lesbi-Forum where participants communicate in Russian, the Russian lesbian participants build community, in part, through the exclusion of Arab women. In this space, the participants make claims of Russian and Israeli Jewish superiority and Arab inferiority. In this forum, the Russian lesbian participants view Arab Palestinian women as unintelligent and less evolved than Jewish Israelis. For instance, one participant writes, "To be honest I never met an honest

Arab, no offense. I met kind ones but not honest ones, just liars" (Kuntsman, 2009, p. 145). Additionally, the Russian participants discount the possibility that a forum participant, called Daughter of Palestine, can possibly be Arab because she knows Russian and is familiar with literary references that they believe an Arab woman could not possibly know (Kuntsman, 2009, p. 141). Here, racism and exclusion of Arabs is used as a form of bonding among queer Russian Israelis.

At Isha, belonging is related to exclusion, but there are no religious or ethnic conflicts in the way that Kuntsman describes. Women find safety at Isha specifically because it excludes men. However, the oppressor/oppressed dichotomy found in Kuntsman's work does not apply to Isha. The women of Isha are largely finding safety from men: emotional safety, physical safety, philosophical safety. Their work also focuses almost entirely on the intervention and prevention of violence towards women at the hands of men. Those who see themselves as oppressed or marginalized are included in Isha's activism. Still, the need to exclude is one of the most important aspects of belonging at Isha. Women at Isha find it necessary to exclude men in order to feel safe and in order to belong.

So far, I have focused on ethnographic studies to better understand forces that create and impact belonging. In this section I introduce weak theory, an emergent reading of belonging which sees "belonging as an act of becoming" (Wright, 2015, p. 393). In weak theory approach, a theoretical model with growing application in geography, affect theory, and feminist writing, when people feel as though they belong, they create subjectivities, collectivities and places. Wright is concerned with how people interact in a way that is both ever changing and inconsistent. She argues that weak theory can help

individuals consider "potential modes of knowing, relating, and attending to things that are already present" rather than "get their representation 'right'" (p. 392). Weak theory poses those entities "define and configure what it means to belong (and not belong) as they define and configure themselves . . . Belonging is created by people in places and co-constitutes those things" (p. 393). As will be expanded upon in the chapters that follow, the idea that women co-constitute belonging is apparent in many Isha member's conceptualization of self. Affect similarly has a "complex, self-referential life that gives depth to human existence through our relations with others and ourselves" (Hemmings, 2005) which makes it a helpful theoretical tool to use here.

As opposed to strong theory, which "demands comprehensiveness, exclusivity and grand claims, weak theory supports partial understandings and multiplicity, and allows for both contradictions and inconsistency" in understandings of belonging (p. 392). This method allows me to engage in multiple theories at differing times as is appropriate based on the experiences of women at Isha. It would be impossible to find a theory that accounted for all of the contradictory, sensical, and irrational views, experiences, and subjectivities of the women at Isha. Weak theory fails to define belonging and instead is used to trace the texture of the term and understand "how it is felt, used, practiced and lived" (p. 392). This type of theorization allows authors to examine how lived ontologies may be a pathway for social transformation. By understanding the lived experiences of women at Isha, I can provide insight into factors, affect, and conditions that allow for a space of social transformation and growth. The different situational definitions of belonging may be unresolvable. The unresolvable nature of weak theory allows it to be "reparative" because it brings new readings and possibilities into the fold as opposed to

“‘paranoid ’or strong theory that that defends itself against surprise by anticipating negative affect in a way that can be both reifying and totaling” (p. 392). As seen in Isha, belonging both has the power to be exclusionary and generate inclusion. The act of belonging is fraught. Weak theory allows for an analysis of these complexities.

Chavez examines how activists use coalition to work towards change concerning queer politics and migration politics. She defines queer migration politics as “activism that seeks to challenge normative, inclusionary perspectives at the intersection of queer rights and justice and immigration rights and justice” (2013, p.6). She is particularly interested in how activists imagine belonging in multiple spheres and activists ’ relationships to nation and the state. Isha is similarly positioned to question queer rights and citizenship complexities within the same activism space. Questions of citizenship appear when engaged in activism at the Palestinian border and with victims of illegal sex-trafficking. Chavez is helpful because she challenges those who claim that queer rights and migrant rights are two entirely separate issues and argues that through coalition, one can best understand how queerness and migration are linked. In examining points of intersection, she argues that both queer and migration movements suffer from assimilationist and essentialist efforts that work towards marriage rights or citizenship. In later chapters, I examine to what extent coalition work may be relevant for Isha. Chavez argues instead for moving into a gray politics that “insists on dealing with the complex, structural reasons for migration… and overtly challenges borders, militarization, security, and enforcement” (Chavez, 2013, p. 38). She argues that it is in this gray politics that queer and migration activists can come together (Chavez, 2013, p. 38).

Chavez's discussion of belonging is intersectional in its complication of queer and migration activists. While some queer and migration activists in Chavez's work downplay their differences in order to work strategically towards common goals, it is often within the tensions among activist coalitions that one can better understand identity. For instance, prior to the 2015 U.S. Supreme Court law allowing same-sex marriage, much of the mainstream LGBTQ+ activist movement in the U.S. focused on the right to marry. However, this focus assumes that queer people already have U.S. citizenship, which is not the case for many queer migrants. Chavez shows that in queer migrant coalitions, mainstream activist efforts like the right to marry highlight intersecting identities and particular vulnerabilities of queer migrants. Strategies like the right to marry not only do not work within queer migrant coalitions, but they reveal the privileged position of those who advocate for marriage equality upon the assumption of citizenship. In later chapters, we will build upon Chavez's work to engage with the extent that coalition work is helpful as opposed to a compromising of values. Understanding Chavez's work through a lens of physical safety, affective safety, and philosophical safety will be helpful here. To what extent may coalition work leverage these layers of belonging and safety to form networks of support?

Amelie Le Renard's work on Saudi women in gender- segregated Riyadh provides another important contribution to theorizing belonging. In this work, Le Renard challenges the idea that women experience belonging to other women simply because they are women. The basis of Isha's charter is that women may share common goals. Consequently, it is important to engage with scholars who do not see women as an assumed category for affective belonging. Le Renard challenges the idea that people who

share a common identity, such as women or youth, necessarily form a community with one another. Le Renard argues that identity is not a "given, a fixed notion, existing in itself, before and beyond situations of interaction" (Le Renard, 2014, p. 87). This notion is in line with weak theory, an approach that allows for porosity and flexibilities (Wright, 2015). Le Renard writes that categories like youth and women are not "obvious collectives." She writes that in her own work in Riyadh, women's shared spaces do create a useful category for scholarly analysis. However, her use of this analytic category does not mean that the individuals in her study identify with each other as part of the single group or community (Le Renard, 2014, p. 87). In fact, in each of her sites of analysis, including shopping malls, schools, and religious sites, women often do not identify with or even interact with other women. Rather, Le Renard argues that the women's identifications at sites of interaction are "shifting" and "episodic" and relationships may fall across class, family, or regional lines (Le Renard, 2014, p. 87). In the case of Isha, I argue that some of the activist women's identities are shifting and episodic in identities other than womanhood. Because Isha is a space for women to come together, the subjects set their own identity to match the location.

Yuval-Davis argues that belonging is understood differently depending on the position of the speaker. This position results from experiences, such as those related to social categories and experiences like gender, class, and stage in life. The intersection of identities for each individual and their experience combine to create a sense of belonging that might not have been apparent in all of the members from any one group (Yuval-Davis et al., 2005). This perspective differs from Le Renard's work. Weak theory approach allows theorists to keep both in mind and see commonalities through an

affective lens. Yuval-Davis claims that belonging also depends upon the situational "dynamic power relationships between individuals, collectivities and institutions" as well as "subject and situational processes" (p. 251). In each situation, the affective experience may impact ideas of belonging, and the larger context of societal power structures could play a role.

Yuval-Davis also focuses on the creation and maintenance of boundaries. Yuval-Davis writes that borders "retain strong symbolic resonances bound up with the founding mythos of the state." The boundaries created and imposed by Isha members can be compared to national borders discussed in migration studies. Isha, striving to create a place of equality for women, excludes those who did not identify as women. Today, the mythos of a women-safe haven leads many participants to exclude other queer people who do not identify as cis-men, subconsciously or not. When Yuval-Davis uses the term 'mythos, 'it implies a questioning of the validity of the idea upon which a border is formed in the creation of the state. There is truth in these founding mythoi, though she does accurately describe the ideas with the word mythos in regards to their inflated, or larger than life nature.

Verena Stolcke explores belonging and exclusion through her focus on anti-immigrant rhetoric used by the far right. The far right says that immigrants pose a threat. People say this is racist. The right claims that this isn't born from "asserting different endowments of human races" but comes from "a propensity in human nature to reject strangers." Stolcke argues that the far-right have a "bounded and distinct, localized national-cultural identity and heritage that is employed to rationalize the call for restrictive immigration policies." (Stolcke, 1995, p. 1). She proposes that this concept of

racism isn't new because it focuses on an organic way of belonging. This racism is new because it claims that the people from this locale have such a different culture that they are incapable of communicating across this boundary. It's just a fact of human nature. Such rhetoric is not surprising because with globalization "both old and new boundaries . . . are becoming more active and exclusive" (p. 12). Exclusion comes whenever there is domination and conflict. In the case of Isha, women certainly feel as though the patriarchal system is filled with domination and conquest. Stolcke raises issues with exclusion of a dominated group and urges readers to consider when culture stops people from connecting as human beings. She wants to examine the political meanings and contexts as well as the power dynamics involved with associations of culture difference. She argues that the "configuration of socio-political structures and relationships both within and between groups that activates differences and shapes possibilities and impossibilities of communication" (p. 12) and true tolerance is needed to "develop differences without jeopardizing themselves and solidarity among them" (p. 13). In chapter three, we will dive into Sophie's views of exclusion and tolerance at Isha. A women-only space indicates physical safety for some; however it fails to fulfill Sophie's ideas for philosophical safety. In this work we will investigate how differing conceptions of belonging may impact group dynamics and individual experience.

1.1.2 LGBTQ+ Activism

In the realm of LGBTQ+ experiences and histories, Israel specifically differs from the rest of the Middle East because of the freedoms that it guarantees its LGBTQ+ citizens, including recognition of same-sex marriages performed outside the country, a ban on discrimination based on sexual orientation, and open service of LGBTQ+ people

in the military. However, recent scholarly analyses across disciplines about queerness within Israel/Palestine have largely been concerned with issues of pinkwashing and homonationalism, which provides only a limited analysis of queer life and experience. Pinkwashing can be most clearly understood as "the process by which the Israeli state seeks to gloss over the ongoing settler colonialism of historic Palestine by redirecting international attention towards a comparison between the supposedly stellar record of gay rights in Israel and the supposedly dismal state of life for LGBTQ+ Palestinians in Occupied Palestine" (Puar & Mikdashi, 2012). The related concept of homonationalism is the practice of evaluating and judging a nation according to how its LGBTQ+ members are treated. Mikashi (2011) writes that homonationalism also assumes that all queer people around the world experience the same things, are motivated by the same desires, engage in the same practices, and are grounded in a stable and unified identity. Scholars like Schulman, Nadine Naber, Zeina Zaatari, and Jason Ritchie discuss how their understanding of pinkwashing and homonationalism affects what queerness means in Israel/Palestine (Schulman, 2012; Naber & Zaatari, 2014; Ritchie, 2010. 2012).

First, Ritchie's work in "Black Skin Splits: The Birth (and Death) of the Queer Palestinian" explores LGBTQ+ activism among Arab Palestinian and Jewish Israeli men in Israel. Ritchie writes that gay Ashkenazi men dominate LGBTQ+ activist organizations in Israel and have the loudest voice on queer issues. He argues that gay Ashkenazi men claim to work for the freedoms and benefits of queer Palestinians in Israel/Palestine, who they believe are oppressed by other Palestinians. However, Ritchie writes that this concern for "oppressed" Palestinian queers is merely a distraction that is

coopted by the Israeli state. He writes that the "propaganda machines in Israel and abroad have also discovered the utility of queer Palestinian suffering as a means of defending the state against potential criticism of its treatment of Palestinians by redirecting the attention of liberal humanists to the presumed treatment of queers by Palestinians" (Ritchie, 2012, p.116). Ritchie argues that the attempt to conflate pro-LGBTQ+ laws and practices with the progressiveness of Israel is a strategic attempt to justify the occupation and harm of Palestinians (Ritchie, 2012, p. 116). He is in line with Puar and Mikdashi's understandings of pinkwashing and homonationalism as both a distraction of the Israeli military's colonial efforts and a means to claim a progressive Israeli state. Ritchie's work does not discuss what queerness means to activists themselves but is interested in how understandings of queerness can be used to bolster nationalist efforts and can be employed strategically by those in power to maintain their power. In "Queer Palestine and the Empire of Critique," Sa'ed Atshan writes that many scholars and activists invisibilize the oppression of queer Palestinians by prioritizing anti-occupation activist work over queer activist work. Atshan argues that both activisms must work in concert (2020). This work further expands upon queer Palestinian activism representation in Chapter 3.

Naber and Zaatari are also interested in issues of pinkwashing and homonationalism in Israel/Palestine. Their work in "Reframing the War on Terror: Feminist and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ+) Activism in the Context of the 2006 Israeli Invasion of Lebanon" is primarily concerned with how queer individuals in Lebanon have been affected by Israeli militarism and argues that Israel's pro-gay narratives are undermined by its colonialism and militarization. In the context of the 2006

Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Naber and Zaatari argue that Israeli "racialized-gendered discourse blamed the Lebanese for violence and depicted them as uncivilized terrorists, compared to Israelis who were apparently defending peace, democracy, and security" (Naber and Zaatari, 2014, p. 95). While Naber and Zaatari do not specifically mention the concepts of pinkwashing or homonationalism, their argument is in line with Puar and Mikdashi's understanding of these concepts. Naber and Zaatari write that the invasion of Lebanon was justified in part through narratives about "Arab and Muslim queers oppressed by a homophobic culture and religion" (Naber & Zaatari, 2014, p. 95). However, like Puar and Mikdashi, Naber and Zaatari suggest that concerns for a queer oppressed Arab are merely strategic and claims of a superior LGBTQ+ rights record in Israel work primarily to distract from Israel's militarism.

Finally, Schulman's work in Israel/Palestine and the Queer International attempts to complicate ideas about homonationalism and LGBTQ+ efforts in Israel. She writes that the real story, in thinking about homonationalism, is that "while some gay people are adopting nationalist anti-immigration attitudes and joining imperialist militaries, others are working together across national boundaries to break down racial and gender exclusion" (Schulman, 2012, p. 105). She writes that while some queer Jewish Israelis are complicit in state colonizing projects, others are part of anti-Occupation campaigns or simply work alongside people who are different from themselves and wish to benefit those outside their own communities. Schulman's exploration of this distinction and how these two separate strands of LGBTQ+ reality can exist simultaneously is particularly important. Ritchie, Puar, Mikdashi, Naber and Zaatari's works focus only on LGBTQ+ activist efforts and discourses in Israel that are complicit in what they view as oppressive

and colonizing efforts by the Israeli state. They fail to provide a complex or intersectional view of LGBTQ+ activist groups or queer people in Israel. However, Schulman's work demonstrates the complexities involved in LGBTQ+ activism and challenges ideas about a singular queer imperialist project.

1.1.3 Women-Only Spaces

Belonging creates identity and is created by identity, sense of self and social norms. Those who are closest to a subject critically inform the self-narration of that subject and their way of being in the world (Cavarero, 2000; Hemmings 2005). Women-only spaces are unique in that they have social norms, participants, and ideologies unique to or common for women. In chapter three, I explore the implications of belonging as a co-constitutive process.

Women at Isha experience belonging and philosophical safety through women-only spaces. Women I interviewed, worked with, and spent time with at Isha were typically part of mixed gender activist groups in addition to Isha either in the past or presently. Many of these women felt more comfortable speaking at Isha than in groups that included men. As Talma, a woman who has been a part of Isha since its foundation, told me, men tend to take up all the space in the room, causing women to stay silent or fear speaking up. For many women at Isha, the woman-only space provides a freedom and safety that they have not found elsewhere. Even at Isha, though, there are times when men take up space in conversations or talk over women. Isha is a place where only women can be members but men are allowed at public talks and lectures. In the year that I spent there, only one to three men out of up to fifty women would show up at each

event. However, in many of these cases, the men visitors would speak longer than the women and would interrupt the women in the room. These intrusions complicate the discussion of belonging within women-only spaces.

It is notable that almost all the women I interviewed, who all identified as lesbian or queer, felt more comfortable in a women-only space than a queer space that included gay men. While several of the women also worked in inclusive LGBTQ+ spaces, they felt that their primary place of belonging was at Isha with other women. Spaces with gay men and lesbians do are not necessarily marked by conflict or feelings of philosophical unsafety. In the early lesbian and gay movements in Philadelphia, lesbian and gay activists worked well together despite some conflicts (Stein, 2004). By working with men, lesbian feminists at the time were able to gain access to greater resources. Gay men, through their work with lesbians, were able to remove their image, at least in part, as merely sexual perverts. Together, they were able to better struggle for basic rights as lesbians and gay men. By the 1960s, however, many gay and lesbian alliances began to fracture and many lesbian and gay activists parted ways for lesbian only or gay men specific communities (p. 237). Similarly, women at Isha may come together with gay men in mixed spaces for a time, but their longer term belongings are in women-only spaces.

Finn Mackay writes about the importance of all-women feminist spaces in terms of women's feelings of safety and freedom to speak and lead in activist spaces. In her study of an all-woman feminist group in London, women-only spaces allowed women to develop their own skills and confidence apart from men. Women felt that men dominated in mixed groups and women were more likely to defer to men (Mackay, 2011, p. 169).

The women felt underrepresented in mixed gender social movements and felt that their voices weren't being heard. One woman said, "I don't think we're taken seriously, our voice is still, like, only half of a man's. Men have more authority than us, and there's no point pretending that doesn't affect us, it does" (Mackay, 2011, p. 168). Women felt more comfortable and confident in women-only activist groups and felt that they could take on any activist role. She writes that in mixed gender spaces "All the activists recounted experiences of feeling patronized by men in activist groups" (p. 168). Many of the women participated in activism in both women-only spaces and mixed gender spaces and felt more comfortable and confident in the women-only space. These women felt belonging and psychological safety in this space. Similarly, women at Isha who engaged in activism both with and apart from men and felt most comfortable in the women-only space of Isha.

Women-only spaces can allow for women to feel safe from misogyny and to be safe to be fully human. Lewis et al. argue that "Safety from routine abuse, degradation and marginalization creates conditions for women to be fully human" (Lewis et al., 2015, p.7). In their study of 30 women in the UK who were part of a two-day women-only gathering, they found that women had an intellectual safety in dialogue and debate. As opposed to mixed gender spaces, women felt that they had freedom to speak and debate with each other and that they were free from attack (p.7). One of the women explained that she and the other participants typically lived in a state of anxiety and fear among men: "A level of fear of either expressing ourselves or speaking out or voicing our real opinions on something" (p.8). She explained that in women-only spaces, "It's not about everybody agreeing or disagreeing or, it's not about everybody having the same opinion,

it's about being able to listen and share in a way that somehow in mixed company always ends up in a more combative scenario, you know somebody's got to be right and somebody's got to be wrong" (p.8). Women described the women-only space not as calm or cuddly but as a space for intellectual discussion and debate where women could feel free and safe to explore conflict (p.8).

Lewis et al. argue that in a world where women are routinely degraded, objectified, and silenced, women can feel a threat to their ontological security. However, women-only spaces can represent a philosophical safety (p. 3). Many of the women at Isha pointed to this philosophical safety as a reason why they preferred its women-only space. While most of the women at Isha engaged in activism in public spaces where they were targets of physical, emotional, and philosophical harm, Isha served as a home base for them to work out philosophical questions in an environment that felt comfortable.

While women-only spaces can be beneficial to women, in recent years, mixed gender feminist spaces have become more common than women-only ones. In her discussion of the many reasons for separatist feminist spaces in the past, Carole Leathwood writes that sometimes a separate space was necessary so that women could talk about their issues and ideas "free from the responses of men" (Leathwood, 2004, p. 450). This idea of a space free from the negative comments and behaviors of men reflects the idea of physical, emotional, and philosophical safety and belonging. To belong to a women-only group can be to find that safety. Leathwood argues that one of the reasons that many feminists women-only spaces disappeared by the 1990s is because women in these organizations began positioning themselves not as apart from men but apart from each other and didn't view their experience of women as related to one another (p. 453).

Rather than position women against each other, Isha's goal is for women to work together across borders of race, age, nationality, and sexuality. While there are power differences and disagreements, women experience diversity as a value rather than as a disadvantage.

While Isha is a space where women can come to feel safe, it is also an important activist space that uses its social networks to create political power. Female institution building occurs when women create personal social networks that leverage public political power (Freedman, 1979). While feminist approaches have traditionally tried to bring women into the male dominated public sphere and men into the women dominated domestic sphere, an alternative option is to give women power in a public sphere that holds political power over women. Estelle Freedman argues that "at certain historical periods, the creation of a public female sphere might be the only viable political strategy for women" (p. 513). In fact, Freedman argues that it was only after the suffragettes successfully campaigned for the right to vote in 1920, women assimilated into a public male-dominated sphere that the feminist movement lost steam. The women at Isha can be seen as doing the work of "women institution building" as they form personal social networks, advance policy, and create a political power parallel and even in opposition to mainstream patriarchy.

While there are fewer women-only feminist spaces in the U.S., globally, there are more women-led peace movements than man-led activism. In anti-war spaces, women can be viewed as not simply anti-war but as activists working against patriarchal systems. In these spaces, women are able to enact their feminist convictions and fulfill their leadership potential. Yuval-Davis and Marcel Stoetzler write that in women-only anti-war spaces, women are "able to be more assertive and not shadowed and intimidated by

men in a mixed organization, although they would tend to cooperate and work closely with men's and mixed groups and organizations with similar political goal" (Yuval-Davis & Stoetzler, 2002, p. 340). Women, living under a patriarchal rule and often representing anti-war movements, can create feminist imaginings of the world that leave them "freer to cooperate with other women across ethnic and national conflict boundaries than men in a similar situation would" (p. 340). Yuval- Davis and Stoetzler argue that "It is up to us to promote some imaginings of women, borders and boundaries and actively work against others. The agency of women is particularly important because so often images of women's position in society are used more to degrade the men of the 'other 'side than as part of a comprehensive egalitarian gender perspective" (p. 342). This work raises and exemplifies Isha as an example of feminist imaginings come to life. The women maintain women-only spaces and boundaries, while breaking down divisions of nation, race, and ethnicity to work for the empowerment and equal rights of all. Just activism can occur when feminist images and imaginings are taken just as seriously as feminist views that create knowledge.

1.2 Focusing on Isha and Israel

My dissertation is centered in Haifa, Israel with the feminist all-women's organization Isha, which means "woman to woman" in Hebrew. The women of Isha work daily for women's rights including reproductive rights, violence against women prevention and intervention, and safety from human trafficking. Isha also focuses on the rights of lesbians and queer women, and many of its members are lesbian or queer. From 2017 through July 2018, I conducted anthropological research in Haifa, became a daily

volunteer at Isha, and attended ulpan, or intensive study of Hebrew, at the University of Haifa. I will return to Isha and its history later in this chapter.

When I started thinking about my dissertation, I knew that I wanted to work with lesbian feminist women activists in the Middle East. I noticed that a significant amount of the research on LGBTQ+ issues in the Middle East centered gay men and I believed it was crucial to contribute to scholarship on lesbian and queer women's experiences (Puar & Mikdashi, 2012; Ritchie, 2012). I also thought it was important to center activists when so much of what so many people know about the region through popular media and scholarship is about oppression, sexism, and violence. I didn't plan to focus on Israel. In fact, I had spent years learning Arabic to work in a Muslim majority country. However, after years of trying to find a lesbian activist group to work with and needing space from the violence I experienced in Morroco, it was only in Israel where lesbian activist groups seemed to be active and accessible to me as a researcher. Starting a year before my dissertation, I reached out to members of Meem and Helem, both Lebanese organizations, Aswat, a Palestinian organization, and Bedayaa in Egypt. I had previously hoped to work with Meem, a lesbian, bisexual, and transgender woman organization I had written about in my Master's thesis, but had difficulty finding women from the group to work with. I was also told by researchers in Lebanon that the group was not as active as it used to be. My Master's thesis focused more generally on LGBTQ+ organizations in the Middle East and led me to researcher Samir Habib who put me in contact with members of another group, Aswat. I reached out to members of Aswat, a Palestinian group, but could not find women from the organization who wanted to work with me. Like Isha, Aswat had already been part of research studies by researchers like Habib, and I understood that asking to

work with an organization for a year as a researcher was a large burden. Aswat is also composed of a small group of women while Isha has over 100 members and even more volunteers. Both Helem and Bedayaa focus on all genders, but I hoped to specifically work with the women involved in each group. However, I could not find individuals who wanted to work with me on my dissertation. Isha isn't an explicitly lesbian group, however, though there is a large lesbian population, and it does focus on many lesbian issues. It was, though, the only group that answered my many emails and had the capacity to work with me, a total stranger to them.

When I first met the women of Isha in 2016 during an exploratory trip for my dissertation research, they welcomed me into their space, gave me their time and told me I could spend as much time as I needed doing research there. They also asked that I become a volunteer there, something I hoped to do anyway, and when I returned in one year, they gave me tasks right away: helping a huge archive project, sorting books in the library, and doing odd tasks around their space. I soon met friends there and began spending time with the women outside of volunteering and research. The longer I spent there, the more I realized that their shared goals often aligned with mine. Not only did we share many experiences as women and lesbians, but we had similar goals for the future: A world where women could be free of gendered violence and where all people felt free in their movement and expression and safe. It was my goal throughout my research to understand how the women at Isha felt that they belonged to each other, and in doing so I realized the many ways that I did and did not belong. During my time at Isha, I felt the strongest sense of belonging I have felt to a group. I realized how out of place and uncomfortable I had felt elsewhere growing up in the U.S. or trying to find an activist

community in the U.S. that felt right. At the same time, of course, I didn't quite belong. I was not Israeli, I was a researcher with a limited time in Israel, and I could go back to the U.S. at any time if the country entered a war or if I felt unsafe. While I felt that I belonged, I didn't fully belong and I knew that other women at Isha felt the same. The women in Isha also didn't all feel equal amounts of belonging to one another. The fraught relationships associated with belonging are a focus of this piece.

The primary motivation for this dissertation is to understand how women at Isha understand and describe their sense of belonging within Isha, within the larger queer community, within feminist spaces, and even within Israel. Many women call Isha home and feel that it is the place where they are most comfortable, safe, and seen. This dissertation interrogates and analyzes those experiences. Like all homes, Isha is a space that also includes conflict. Women at Isha come from a diversity of backgrounds and while the organization is a collective, they certainly hold different levels of power within the group and more broadly within Israeli society. In this dissertation, I focus on four women's experiences of belonging, identity, and conflict within Isha and within their activist lives. By deeply examining four women's stories, I explore a range of experiences and identities within the larger context of Isha, the LGBTQ+ community, and Israel. The four women whose stories anchor discussions of belonging in the chapters that follow all experience an affective sense of safety. Analysis of these four women's experiences allows for new theoretical imaginings into the creation of belonging at three levels: physical, safety, emotional safety, and philosophical safety. Through studying the coalition work of Isha women, their shared experiential placement, and activist drive, this dissertation will further examine contributing factors of social transformation.

1.2.1 Israel

As of 2016, Israel has a population of 8. 5 million. The Israel Bureau of Statistics divides its population according to Jewish and Arab residents. The Jewish population makes up 74. 8 percent of the total population, and the Arab population makes up 20.8 percent. About 4.4 percent of the population is considered “other,” which refers to non-Arab Christians, members of other religions, and people not classified by religion in the Ministry of the Interior. Additionally, about 75 percent of the Jewish population is “Sabras" or people born in Israel. Israel’s nationality laws state that citizenship may be acquired by birth, the Law of Return, residence, and naturalization. Acquisition of nationality by birth is given to individuals born in Israel to a mother or father who are Israeli citizens, individuals born outside Israel if their mother or father holds Israeli citizenship, or individuals born after the death of one of their parents if the late parent was an Israel citizen. In addition, individuals born in Israel who have never had any nationality may become citizens if they apply for citizenship between their 18th and 25th birthday and have been residents of Israel for five consecutive years. Additionally, the Law of Return states that every Jew may have the right to come to Israel as an oleh (a Jew immigrating to Israel) and become an Israeli citizen. Under the law, a Jew is a person who has a Jewish mother or has converted to Judaism and is not a member of another religion. An oleh’s certificate can be denied to individuals who “engage in activity directed against the Jewish people; may endanger public health or security of the state; have a criminal past, likely to endanger public welfare” (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Since 1970, the law has been extended to the child or grandchild of a Jew, the spouse of a child of a Jew, and the spouse of the grandchild of a Jew.

Israel's Nationality Law also includes former citizens of British Mandatory Palestine. According to the law, individuals who remained in Israel from its establishment in 1948 until the Nationality Law enactment 1952 could become Israeli citizens by residence or by return. Finally, the law allows for acquisition of nationality by naturalization, which means that adults may become Israeli citizens "at the discretion of the Minister of the Interior and subject to a number of requirements" (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs). These requirements include residence in Israel for three out of five years preceding submission of the application, and individuals must prove that they have settled or intend to settle in Israel. Individuals must also renounce their prior nationality and prove that they will cease to be foreign nationals.

While there are several paths to Israeli citizenship, the enactment of nationality laws is not clear-cut. Israel defines itself as a Jewish state that was intended to create a home for Jewish people. Daphne Barak-Erez writes that while Israel has a "neutral citizenship law that contains provisions of a universal nature regarding the acquisition of citizenship," Jews are afforded special rights to enter the country and gain citizenship (Barak-Erez, 2007, p. 184). In effect, the Law of Return, which gives every Jew the right to enter Israel and acquire citizenship, makes them exempt from Israel's citizenship laws. Opponents of the law argue that it is discriminatory and creates a wider gap between Jews and Arabs in Israel (Barak-Erez, 2007). Additionally, who may be considered a Jew is up to interpretation, and many Jews outside of the recognized Jewish community have had a difficult time obtaining Israeli citizenship (Fernheimer, 2014).

Feminist organizing began in pre-state Israel in the early twentieth century. At the time, feminist activism formed within Zionist women's organizations. Activist women

demanded the right to vote and be elected, claimed their share in the labor market and other traditionally male jobs, and created social rights and welfare services that benefited women, particularly working mothers (Bernstein, 1992; Sa'ar & Gooldin, 2009). Amalia Sa'ar and Signal Gooldin write that because of this incorporation of social rights for women at the site of early state formation, many Jewish-Ashkenazi middle class and "working settler" women believed they did not need feminism and had already achieved full equal rights. This idea was heightened by the narrative that claimed Israel as a modern, Western and democratic state, which was a beacon of enlightenment in a comparatively unenlightened region (Sa'ar & Gooldin, 2009). Sa'ar and Gooldin and Dahlia Moore write that it was not until the late 1970s and early 1980s that a new feminist movement arose to address the gender equality that existed despite narratives that depicted Israeli women as liberated and equal to men (Sa'ar & Gooldin, 2009; Moore, 1998). Moore writes that until the 1980s, most feminist social action occurred within male-dominated organizations or political parties or within women's organizations that were supported by male-dominated institutions such as Wizo, a Zionist women's organization. However, in the early 1980s, several public sexual assault and gender discrimination cases became greatly publicized, and feminists demanded equality more loudly. Moore writes that these demands were supported by greater collective social action (Moore, 1998, p. 174).

Lesbian activism in Israel comes out of the feminist movement. In the 1990s, feminists became "more willing to act against existing social order," and fight for social and economic change for women. Feminist demands at the time included equal pay for women, affirmative action in the public sector, and higher occupational status (Moore,

1998). In the academy, gender and women's studies courses were formed, and now almost every Israeli college or university has at least a women's studies minor (Sa'ar & Gooldin, 2009). The major Israeli feminist NGO since the 1970s is the Annual Feminist Convention, and until 1991, most of the convention's speakers and leaders were Ashkenazi women. However, in 1991, Mizrahi feminists demanded proportional representation for Palestinians, Mizrahi Jews, and Ashkenazi Jews. In 1994, Mizrahi feminists demanded that lesbians must also be included in the proportional system, which led to a quarter system in which every workshop and panel included a lesbian, an Ashkenazi, a Mizrahi, and a Palestinian. Lavie writes, however, that this quarter system has largely disappeared outside of the annual convention, and Mizrahi and Palestinians devote their attention to their separate communities while Ashkenazi feminists are often concerned with the Israel's occupation of Palestine in the West Bank and Gaza (Lavie, 2011, p. 60).

The current feminist landscape includes a number of grassroots feminist centers in big cities, feminist reading and support groups all across the country, and several domestic violence hotlines and rape crisis centers, which are funded largely by the state. Feminist activists are involved with a variety of projects and causes including reproductive health, sexual education, coalitions against sex trafficking, support for low-income women, queer activism, the promotion of lesbian feminist politics, and work within the peace movement. Jewish and Arab organizations and feminist activities are typically separate, with most feminists remaining within their own communities. Additionally, while the structure within Palestinian Israeli groups are very similar to

Ashkenazi or Mizrahi groups, the funding for Palestinians is measurably smaller (Sa'ar & Gooldin, 2009, p. 181).

Legal rights for queer people began developing rapidly in the 1990s and 2000s (Gross, 2016). In 1988, Knesset, Israel's national legislative assembly, nullified the Penal Code clause, which prohibited "unnatural intercourse," something that was widely interpreted to refer to same-sex intercourse. In 1992, a prohibition on discrimination based on sexual orientation was incorporated into the Equal Opportunities in Employment Law. The prohibition was interpreted widely and expanded the recognition provided to same-sex partners in other contexts such as the Supreme Court decision to recognize joint-parenthood for same-sex female partners and the ruling that marriages of same-sex couples who marry abroad must be recognized in the Israeli population registry. In 1993, the Israeli Parliament allowed gays and lesbians to serve openly in the military, and in 2013 the IDF allowed a transgender woman to openly serve as a female soldier. In a 2010 Supreme Court decision, the Court recognized a comprehensive constitutional right not to be discriminated against because of sexual orientation. The Court maintained that holding a negative opinion about queer people could not justify discrimination against them. While same-sex marriages may not be performed within Israel, same-sex marriages performed abroad have been recognized since 2006 and domestic partner rights of cohabitating same-sex couples have been recognized since 2007 (Gross, 2016).

1.2.2 Haifa

Haifa was named a "mixed city" by the British who controlled it from 1917 to 1948. The term, which is still used today, references the two national communities that inhabit the city and demonstrated the desire to create peaceful coexistence in then

Mandate Palestine. However, Elizabeth Faier writes that Haifa's history as a mixed city dates back even further to the nineteenth century when Jewish and European immigration changed the formerly predominantly Arab demographics. She writes that Haifa became a symbol of modernization and served as a gateway to Israel. Construction and industry developed steadily through the 1920s and 1930s as Jews and Palestinians settled in newer and typically segregated areas of the city. During the 1930s, many Palestinians viewed Haifa as a city of opportunity, and the relationship between Jews and Palestinians was stable. However, during the War of 1948, many Palestinians fled Haifa, and in July 1948, municipal leaders grouped the remaining Palestinians into two neighborhoods in the lower city (Faier, 2005). Anot Kidron writes that Haifa has now become the symbol of Jewish and Arab coexistence within Israel (Kidron, 2016). It is still considered a mixed city with Palestinians officially constituting 10.3 percent of the population. Faier writes that that number is probably significantly higher because many Palestinians choose to register in their natal villages despite living in Haifa (Faier, 2005).

Haifa has been a central location for feminist organizing since the 1970s. In 1970, a group of eight women formed the first known consciousness- raising group in Haifa, and its participants founded Israel's feminist movement. Haifa's lesbian community took shape in this feminist philosophy, and lesbian organizing in Haifa is still very much rooted in feminist activism. In the 1980s, when feminist centers in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem were closing, Haifa's feminist center was revived, and one of its central issues was lesbian community. The feminist center included a support group for lesbians and included a lesbian perspective in all of its discussions. This led to an integration of lesbian activism within the organization. In 1987, CLaF (an acronym in Hebrew meaning

Lesbian Feminist Community), the first independent lesbian separatist organization in Israel, was founded and became an important part of feminist activist efforts in Haifa. CLaF launched several activist campaigns such as the fight against censorship of gay and lesbian content on television and the protest of Israeli president Ezer Weizman's statements against lesbian and gay people in 1997. Weizman said that he considered lesbian and gay people to be abnormal and negative. CLaF also initiated several lesbian cultural programs in Haifa, including a chamber club in which lesbian artists performed monthly. Today, Haifa continues to be a place where feminist and lesbian activism is intertwined and thrives (Frankfort-Nachmias & Shadmi, 2005).

1.2.3 Isha

Isha is the oldest feminist organization in Israel. It was established in 1983 and has roots dating back to the 1970s. Isha played a key role in Israel's earliest feminist and lesbian organizing. Chava Frankfort-Nachmias and Erella Shadmi write that from the start, Isha had a special character in its reflection of a diversity of women from different religious and ethnic backgrounds and this special character allowed for the lesbian community to flourish (Frankfort-Nachmias & Shadmi, 2005). Isha is associated with radical feminism and the "hard core" of that movement (Sa'ar & Gooldin, 2009, p. 181).

Isha has over one hundred current members and is composed of women from several ethnic, national, and religious groups, including Ashkenazi Jews, Mizrahi Jews, and Palestinian Israelis from many backgrounds. Its members believe in the inseparability of feminism and lesbian and queer activism. For lesbian and queer members of Isha, being lesbian and queer women also means working from a feminist perspective to advance the status and rights of women and promote peace and socioeconomic justice

through education, research, and legislation. Like Haifa, Isha is known for eschewing the divisions that often categorize much of the region. The organization focuses on gender-based violence and discrimination, women's legal rights, sex trafficking of women and girls, LGBTQ+ issues, issues surrounding peace and militarism, and the occupation of the Palestinian territories.

Isha's group structure is based on a system of consensus. During their official meetings, Isha members, known as the Collective, vote by consensus and do not make changes or initiate activist projects unless every member in attendance is in agreement. This practice of consensus is based on earlier feminist activist movements, which emphasized non-hierarchical structures, and demonstrates the group's investment in a feminist identity. Official group stances include anti-Occupation and the acceptance of transgender women into the organization. The group is also critical of Israeli military projects and initiated protests during the 2014 Israel-Gaza conflict.

Isha is part of the Haifa Women's Coalition and is housed in the same community building as three other women's organizations including Kayan, an Arab women's feminist organization, Aswat, an Arab lesbian organization, and the Haifa Rape Crisis Center. Isha is also a resource center that provides information for women on issues like abortion and maintains a feminist library. Additionally, the organization holds regular forums and workshops on issues like sex trafficking, discrimination in work and society, and sexuality, and invites scholars and activists to speak to Isha members. Isha members also support and accompany women who need abortions and advocate for women who do not have legal Israeli status but need abortion services.

Isha is located in a building on Arlozorov Street, which is shaded with flowers and trees that pour onto the sidewalk and is only a half-mile walk to the famous Baha'i Gardens. The two-story building includes numerous offices, two large community spaces, a feminist library crammed with books, pamphlets, and loose papers, a kitchen, and a small garden in the back. At Isha you can hear English, Hebrew, and Arabic spoken loudly over the constantly ringing phones and doorbell signaling frequent visitors. Isha's main meeting space is framed by ever-changing photos. When I first arrived, there were blown up photos of one of Isha's recent protests against domestic violence. Later there were artistic black and white photos that accompanied a lecture about emotional violence. Before I left, I helped nail up several old photos from Isha's history.

Isha's space is warm and full of furnishings and there are always several women hanging out, drinking tea, or working on something unrelated to Isha. During my time in Haifa, I didn't have an air conditioner and would sometimes come to Isha for no other reason than to feel the cool air pouring into the library. When I first started coming to Isha, I befriended a young law student who invited me to study with her. The first time we got together, she made me a lunch of a hummus and ketchup sandwich and we sat, sometimes studying, sometimes talking about girls we've dated. Isha is the place I spent New Year's Eve, a holiday not really celebrated in Israel, and there were dozens of women at Isha arguing about compulsory motherhood and local politics until late into the night. When I first started coming to Isha, I was buzzed in but later I was given a key so I could come even when no one else was there. It is a space that felt familiar to me and countless other women who met up there, who debated there, who shared sad or

wonderful news there, or who just went to sit in cool air and drink tea. It was a space that felt like home, and it had all of the comfort and the struggle that home could be.

1.3 Research Questions

The guiding research questions woven throughout the chapters in this dissertation include the following: First, how do Isha members understand their identities and describe their sense of belonging within the organization, within the wider queer community, within feminist spaces, and within Israel? How can new conceptualizations around the power of affect in spaces of belonging address theoretical concerns of affect and address alternative models of subject formation? Finally, how does the feminist and women-only space and philosophy of Isha create a unique environment that shapes identity and activist efforts and allows relationships to form across divides?

1.4 Methodology

1.4.1 Interviews

I examine personal experiences, understandings of inclusion and exclusion, local histories, and accounts related to my research questions through analysis of semi-structured interviews. These interviews helped me understand Isha members ’specific experiences in a way that could not be understood from existing literature. Scholarly work on contemporary same-sex sexuality does not often speak to the experiences of lesbian and queer women and often does not attempt to understand how women’s experiences are unique (Ritchie, 2012; Naber & Zaatari, 2014). Through interviewing, I worked to understand how lesbian and queer women in Isha form communities and understand their sense of belonging in Isha, in Israel, and in the wider queer community.

Speaking to women in person through interviews was essential to understanding their experiences.

In this work, I clarify and emphasize my own positionality: I am a white, middle-class lesbian activist working as both an “insider” and “outsider” within Isha. In feminist scholarship it has become increasingly important for researchers to reflect on their own positionality to determine how their social location may impact the data collected and the information that becomes knowledge (Dincer, 2019). By being an “insider of the lesbian and feminist community and working within Isha, I was able to glean insights that may have been otherwise difficult to find. As an American outsider, I was also able to gain perspective on cultural phenomena that may have seemed commonplace and unremarkable to an Israeli and tried to avoid the pitfalls that come with misconstruing or misunderstanding the cultures of others. I openly acknowledge and build upon my own experiences as a woman and a volunteer at Isha to further strengthen my arguments and refine the arguments of my dissertation. Overall, in accordance with best practices, I mostly focus on elevating and highlighting the experiences of the women I interview.

I followed Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber’s understanding of feminist interviewing throughout my process. Hesse-Biber writes, “As a feminist interviewer I am interested in getting at the subjugated knowledge of the diversity of women's realities that often lie hidden and unarticulated. I am asking questions and exploring issues that are of particular concern to women's lives. I am interested in issues of social change and social justice for women and other oppressed groups” (Hesse-Biber 2007, 113). Through feminist interviewing, one acknowledges one’s own standpoint as a researcher and the role one plays as an interviewer, including any authority one may have and the power dynamics

between oneself and the interviewee. Additionally, feminist interviews work to understand women's lives and the lives of oppressed groups, conduct research that prompted social justice and social change, as well as research that is aware of the power relationship between researcher and the one who is being researched (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 117). In my work, I focused on a diversity of women's subjective experiences within a feminist activist organization. Semi-structured, in-depth interviewing is an important feminist method because it allows interviewees to represent their lives in the ways that they wish and allows them the time to speak about a wide range of issues. Additionally, throughout this dissertation, I am aware of my position as an interviewer and my relationship to each interviewee. Finally, like Hesse-Biber, I do not see my research as neutral or without consequence but view this work as potentially creating positive social change through its emphasis on lesbian and queer women's voices that are often left out of scholarly discussions.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with 40 women who were employees, volunteers from abroad, current members, and former members. The interviews lasted between two and six hours. Sometimes I interviewed a woman only once, and in other cases I interviewed women up to five times. The length of the interview and the number of interviews depended on how much time women had to speak and how much they wanted to talk. Women like Talma, who I discuss in chapter two, felt that it was essential that I understood and listened to her full life experience, so those interviews tended to be closer to six hours. When I interviewed Maya, who is a student, a worker, and an activist, she was very busy and our interviews kept getting interrupted, so I met with her five times before we completed the interview. My goal was to divide the interviews in order

to provide a varied and representative understanding of the lesbian and queer women activists of Isha. It was important to speak to employees in order to understand the official positions of the organization and gain a better understanding of the policies or stances of the organization. Current members also provided information about power relations and community-making from an insider perspective. Volunteers from abroad had both an insider and outsider perspective and understood Isha in a unique way. All the volunteers from abroad that I interviewed were from Germany. About half of them were part of an organization that connected young German students to Holocaust survivors in Israel. Finally, by including former members, I hoped to examine divisions within the organization and issues related to power relations and community-making that may not have yet affected current members or which affected the organization during a different period. I also hoped that former members and members who have been in the organization for a long time would be able to provide a better view of the history and changes that have been made within the organization. Almost all of the women I interviewed identified as lesbians, with just a few identifying as queer and two women identifying as "not straight." This project focuses on the interpersonal relationships among activists as well as individual women's own feelings and beliefs about their experiences in the organization, the larger LGBTQ+ community, and Israel, and these interviews were important in understanding these concepts.

Before I began interviewing women, I made a questionnaire for women to fill out at the beginning of the interview that included questions like religion, race, and ethnicity. I wanted to understand how the women I interviewed identified and whether my interviews would include a diversity of women. However, most of the women I

interviewed refused to fill out the religion or race question on the questionnaire and took particular offense to the religion question. “Religion is a large evil,” a woman named Noa told me. “I am no religion. I want to rid myself of religion.” Many women shared this idea. What these women were telling me was that the boxes I had made for them didn’t fit and that it was more important for them to tell me how they belonged. For some, that meant being from Haifa. For others, that meant saying goodbye to their conservative family and joining Isha, and for others it simply meant identifying as feminist.

1.4.2 Event/Meeting/Activist Observations

I spent most of my time in Haifa observing the way group members interacted, informally speaking with group members, and attending events, meetings, lectures, and other gatherings. I spent the majority of my time at the Haifa Feminist Center, which is where Isha employees work and where many community meetings, lectures, and gatherings take place. The Haifa Feminist Center is also home to other feminist organizations, and I observed how members of each group interacted and created community. Additionally, I joined Isha members during several protests that involved women’s and LGBTQ+ rights, collaborations with the Communities House for Pride and Tolerance, and often attended social gatherings with Isha members. For instance, I attended “queer shabbat” with several of the members and visited multiple women’s Kibbutzim. I also led a weekly English-language feminist study group in the small garden outside of Isha. Additionally, I became a volunteer at Isha and worked in the library sorting books in Arabic, English and Hebrew and in the archives digitizing and sorting documents. I was also available around the Haifa Feminist Center to do whatever people needed included cleaning the floor, nailing pictures to the wall, and setting out food

before a gathering. During my time at Isha, I integrated into the community and intertwined my life with the lives of the women there. They became dear friends, and I didn't go a day without seeing someone from Isha.

1.5.3. Vignettes

This work is organized using four vignettes that tell the stories of Talma, Sophie, Amira, and Maya. A vignette-style analysis allows me to center women's experiences and focus deeply on women's lives. While I use data and themes gathered from all 40 women I interviewed, using four women's narratives to tell a story of belonging at Isha allows this dissertation to be more focused and grounded.

In the four vignettes that follow, I have chosen to center women who represent the range of lesbian and queer activists at Isha. The youngest woman featured here, Maya, is in her 20s, while the oldest, Talma, is in her 70s. Maya, like many younger women at Isha, is politically engaged in many activist organizations and causes. Talma, like many of the women in their 60s and 70s at Isha, is most interested in issues that work against gendered violence. While Sophie's experience, like every woman's experience at Isha, is unique, her position as an academic and activist as well as a woman who left a marriage with a man and came out speaks to experiences of many Isha members. Amira's experience at Isha as a Palestinian woman who does not find her primary place of belonging within Isha speaks to the experiences of many Palestinian women in the organization.

Finally, this work doesn't just focus on the four women's experiences but may serve as a microcosm of many women's experiences at Isha and in Haifa. These women's stories as anti-Occupation activists, activists actively working against sex

trafficking of Russian-speaking women, and specific intersectional experiences are unique to the Israeli context. Still, their desire for safety from gendered violence speaks to the experiences of countless women across the globe who look for safety and freedom with other women.

1.5 Contributions

My work contributes to feminist scholarship on belonging as presented by Yuval-Davis, Sarah Wright and others. The research on which this dissertation is based is unique in its focus specifically on a group of lesbian and queer women within a women-only space. Women in this space have chosen to be in community with other women rather than have this space thrust upon them, as is the case in Le Renard's study of Saudi women. I examine consensual kinship as members of Isha build chosen families with women they know. Additionally, as lesbian and queer women, other women within Isha are often their chosen family, which adds an important layer in what it means to belong. Nearly all the women in my study view Isha as a "home," and my work shows how this understanding of home is both comforting and fraught.

Affect has been lauded as a method through which social transformation can take place. Affect is also an expression and reification of social norms (Hemmings, 2005). Scholars in the past have critiqued affective studies as ignoring the problem reification of social norms and instead focusing naively on only the possibilities of affect as a means to social transformation (Hemmings, 2005). In fact, affect often strengthens an oppressive social order rather than challenging hegemonic power plays (Berland, 1997). This work brings together affect with women-only activism spaces, meaning the emotions and affect used within this locale is both reflective of social norms and transformative power. In this

study, the unique location allows me to explore how affect may operate through activist, feminist, and queer social norms, and assert a socially transformative power. Affect can be used as a point of connection across ethnicity, age, class, and education status.

This dissertation also responds to scholarship in Israel that focuses on pinkwashing and homonationalism. I respond to the narratives that are being told about LGBTQ+ people in Israel. Ritchie, Puar, Mikdashi, Naber and Zaatari tell a particular story about the relationship between LGBTQ+ activists in Israel and the concepts of pinkwashing and homonationalism. Their work suggests that most LGBTQ+ activists in Israel are complicit in state colonizing missions, which specifically harm Palestinians. However, these scholars do not examine LGBTQ+ activists from an intersectional standpoint and largely exclude women from their analyses. I complicate these narratives about LGBTQ+ activists in Israel by focusing on how activists in Isha work across borders of difference to create a productive activist community. While Puar and Mikdashi in particular are influential voices within queer and Middle East studies, their understandings of identity and queerness are often not intersectional and may therefore unintentionally reify universalist or essentialist understandings of identity. In my work, I disrupt popular narratives about LGBTQ+ people in the Middle East.

A final contribution of my work is related to safety within women-only spaces. One of the reasons I was drawn to women-only spaces was because of a lifetime of experiences of being unsafe around men and experiencing male violence. The literature on women-only spaces reflects the same thing. Women often do not feel comfortable or safe around men to be their full selves or to be confident in their activism. Many of the women in my study felt the same thing. They specifically view Isha as home because it is

a women-only feminist space. While many women I spoke to were part of other activist organizations and worked alongside men in their jobs, they felt the most safe, comfortable, and powerful in the women-only space of Isha. While there seems to be less and less activism on women-only spaces and fewer women-only spaces in the U.S. and elsewhere, it is essential to consider the benefits and feelings of safety that many women still feel in these spaces.

1.6 Summary

This project focuses on experiences of belonging among lesbian and queer feminist activist women in the all-women organization Isha. I spent one year (2017-2018) engaging in participant observation and conducting 40 interviews with current and former members of the group. Using Isha as a lens through which to examine the multilayered ways in which gendered activism shapes experiences of belonging, this project centers the experiences and narratives of four women: Talma, Sophie, Amira, and Maya. The second chapter focuses on Talma, a woman in her 70s who was one of the founders of Isha. More broadly, it discusses the history of feminism in Israel and the history of Isha. Here I present dominant hegemonic views of belonging within Israel. The third chapter focuses on Sophie, an academic in her 40s who is one of the founders of the Haifa Feminist Institute, a library, archive and research center at Isha. This chapter unpacks conceptualizations and everyday practices of queerness through Sophie's experiences of queer activism and efforts to make Isha more explicitly queer. The fourth chapter focuses on Amira, a Palestinian Israeli artist and student in her 30s who sees representation as a form of activism. This chapter will explore dilemmas of representation within Isha. Finally, the fifth chapter focuses on Maya, a trans woman in her 20s who is involved in

several activist communities including the animal rights community, multiple trans communities, and the Palestinian solidarity movement. This chapter analyzes the role and challenges of intersectional forms of belonging for individual activists, the organization, and more broadly in society. All chapters engage with the three levels of belonging previously mentioned and analyze belonging through an experiential lens. The concluding chapter brings together these narratives to present a view of belonging that is rooted in physical safety from gendered violence provided by the women-only space of Isha. Together, the chapters offer new ways to approach belonging based on woman-only spaces that center safety. As I emphasize throughout, women of differing class, race, ethnicity, and age build affective worlds through physical, emotional, and philosophical safety and affective theory can provide insights into social transformation.

CHAPTER 2. TALMA: *NEGOTIATING FEMINISM, SAFETY, AND BELONGING THROUGH SPACE-MAKING*

2.1 Introduction

Talma was born on a kibbutz in 1949 to a Polish mother and a German father. To escape the Holocaust, her mother falsified papers for herself and for other Jews, including Talma's sister, who was given Christian papers. In the heavily philosophical kibbutz in which Talma grew up, rules forbade her from sleeping in the same room as her parents and from owning personal property. She still bemoans that she couldn't have a bicycle because the other children on the kibbutz couldn't afford one. Mere seconds into our first conversation Talma's kitchen in her breezy apartment in Haifa, Talma explains why she hates her name.

> My parents, poor parents, you know, they didn't know Hebrew. So somebody in the kibbutz decided which name they give and Talma means conservative. It is to walk in the line, you see. So I have this horrible name. Tellim, it comes from when you are opening the agriculture in the field. Something to put seeds on. So you walk in line, the tellim. You're square. You're conservative. They wanted to call me Maya, their favorite name at the time. And the woman who was in charge of the names said you can't call her Maya because I was born in May and the neighbor's cat is called Maya. So fucking what! I love cats. But nobody asked me then.

Though Talma's name means "to walk in a straight line," Talma was never one to passively follow the path of others.

As a child on the kibbutz, Talma did not want to sleep with the other children, and instead demanded that she sleep with her parents. A kibbutz is a communal community in

Israel that typically consists of 300 to 700 people. Kibbutzim were established in pre-state Israel first as revolutionary and egalitarian societies that demanded that their members identify fully with the community and their objectives (Frankfort-Nachmias, 2005, p. 67). Auto-biographical factors, including one's childhood memories like Talma's early experiences on the kibbutz, may impact an individual's sense of belonging (Antonsich, 2010). Talma, who describes herself as rebellious growing up, relates her sense of safety and belonging to her experiences on the kibbutz. She didn't fit comfortably with the other children on the kibbutz or with the lifestyle that the kibbutz demanded of her. This theme continues throughout Talma's life. In childhood, Talma thinks that her rebellion may come from a lack of philosophical explanation from kibbutz leaders about the point of communal sharing. She knew what was expected of her: sharing everything, working, and not spending too much time with her parents. However, she never understood the philosophy behind these expectations. Talma reflects that, "So you understand this much later that it might be beautiful, but as a kid, you know, you want a bicycle, what the fuck?" Though Talma never felt a sense of belonging on the kibbutz she was raised on, she went on to be a founding member of the most enduring feminist collectives in Israel, Isha.

In this chapter, I examine the space-making of belonging through a deeper look between the interplay of physical, emotional and philosophical belonging. I engage with Yuval-Davis's concept of social location and emotion as levels of belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2006) by further examining the mutually constitutive forces of physical safety in feelings of inclusion and forms of feminist philosophical belonging. Talma, with a background in anti- domestic violence activism and rape crisis centers, along with close

friends, worked to create a common space of belonging for women across boundaries of age, race, and religion. By centering the experiences of Talma, a woman who has been involved with Isha since its beginning, I examine one of the central reasons for the creation of Isha and women's involvement in the group: belonging as it intersects with personal experiences and conceptualizations of feminism. In exploring Talma's sense of belonging in this chapter, I also discuss how histories of feminism in Israel and Talma's intimate understanding of feminism, queerness, and her past provide a lens through which to approach new forms of belonging. These forms are characterized by gendered violence as a shared experience and are rooted in ideas of physical safety that draw the members of Isha towards one another and become the basis for them to build upon their community as part of their quotidian embodiment, creation of a safe space for emotion and the constitution of affect, and physical setting.

I start the chapter by providing additional context for and theorizations around the concept of belonging to build upon existing scholarship, to fully encompass physical safety as a lens through which a home or web of belonging can be formed. I dive further into feminist organizing in Israel and the concept of social location to better understand the impact of history on the body and the body as a social location. I further refine concepts of social location as I tie it intimately to the body and place while interrogating how a social location interacts with autonomy and a sense of self. In doing this, I explore the impact physical safety has on social location as well as autonomy. A women-only space like Isha allows for a unique situating of the body and self within the social sphere.

In this chapter I also investigate how affect, as approached in the introduction, is a driver of social change and a lever by which to maintain change. Affect, rooted in

physical safety, is a way to form relationships across age, race, and religion divides and therefore has ties to belonging. Affect also has the potentiality for division (Hemmings 2005). In this chapter, I specifically build upon the work of scholars like Yuval-Davis by examining how affect can be a lever for cohesive, intersectional, and inspirational activism. In this case, belonging as created in a women-only space has affective qualities. A women-only space can be seen as boundary maintenance. Boundary maintenance has been seen as a way for oppressors to maintain political, social, and economic power (Yuval-Davis, 2002; Kuntsman, 2009). This dissertation pushes readers to investigate boundary maintenance through the eyes of women who crave women-only spaces for physical, emotional, and philosophical safety. Boundary maintenance can be important when it relates to safety, but how should women-only spaces engage with violent perpetrators and impact change? Additionally, how does this boundary maintenance interplay with philosophical and social location such as locations based on sex of the body? In this chapter, I examine what I refer to as the space-making of belonging through a deeper look at the interplay of physical, emotional and philosophical belonging.

2.2 Approaching Belonging

In this chapter, I build upon uses of belonging and specifically examine social location and boundary maintenance to understand the use of belonging, both place-based and political, in activism creation. Belonging is a common theme in social science fields including geography, anthropology, political science, and history works but undertheorized, vague, and equated to citizenship or identity (Antonsich, 2010, Buofino, 2007). Belonging is a basic component of most people's experiences and thought to be

universally understood but is often not defined within literature or conversation (Buofino, 2007). Antonsich posits that there are two major types of analyses for belonging: place-belongingness and the politics of belonging (2010). In place-belonging theory, belonging is considered a personal, intimate feeling and a sensation of being at home. In this context, belonging is not socially contested and exclusionary in nature, but rather an intimate, deeply personal self-narration. Many of the women at Isha refer to the organization as their "home," which certainly fits well with Antonsich's ideas of place-belonging. This sense of home does not stand for the domestic sphere in which patriarchal oppression, violence, and fear are replicated but instead stands for a place of comfort, security, emotional attachment, and familiarity (Antonsich, 2010). Koole describes belonging as a web of interconnected relations (Koole, 2010). Later in the chapter, I bring belonging into conversation with affect theory to better understand how home or place-belonging forms for women in Isha and how physical, emotional, and philosophical safety play into this space-creation.

According to Yuval-Davis, whose approach most deeply informs this chapter, there are three major analytical levels where belonging is constructed: "The first level concerns social locations; the second relates to individuals' identifications and emotional attachments to various collectivities and groupings; the third relates to ethical and political value systems with which people judge their own and others' belonging/s" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 199). Social location refers to classic demographic identifiers, such as man, woman, Black, or white. Isha, a woman-only organization, clearly uses social location as an in-group/out-group identifier.

Social location builds upon the structure of a basic demographic identifier and is shaped from and influenced by power relations within a particular society. Those categories of social location "have a certain positionality along an axis of power, higher or lower than other such categories" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 199). These positionalities are fluid and can change depending on a particular historical context, which is why understanding them from an intersectional framework is especially important. In her discussion of the politics of belonging and intersectionality, Yuval-Davis explains that though a person can identify exclusively with a single category of belonging, their social location is found through many different axes. In line with Crenshaw's intersectional framework, Yuval-Davis writes that "intersecting social divisions cannot be analyzed as items that are added up but, rather, as constituting each other" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 200). I engage more with this intersectional approach in the next chapter. The history of feminist activism in Israel demonstrates the ways activists understood their social location and their sense of belonging to other members of their community. It can also make visible who is counted in the feminist community and who is excluded.

Antonisch argues that Yuval-Davis's conceptions of belonging, while well-conceptualized, lean onwards the politics of belonging and fail to engage with belonging as a feeling of home and safety. In Yuval-Davis 'work, only one layer of belonging engages with emotion and even then all examples used are political in nature. The politics of belonging "constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion" (Antonsich 2010). Many theorists agree that belonging arises from the intersection of self and the social context in which belonging occurs (Halse 2018, Jones 2018). Belonging can both bridge gaps across differences in identity, experience,

and locale, as well as fortify exclusionary practices. Social identity theory posits that people within a group often create exclusionary methods to maintain in-group membership and enhance in-group benefits at the expense of the out group (Buonfino, 2007). I examine place-belonging and social location as a means for community building and social location as a way to maintain boundaries. Affect theory, focused on the capacity of the individual and material world to be affected and to affect, can be helpful for understanding the interconnecting dynamics which shape belonging (von Scheve, 2018). I engage with affect theory here to examine Talma's belongings and webs of affect, as a way to understand how the body may impact the creation of social boundaries and belongingness on the one hand and how affect can be understood as a driver of change or lever by which to maintain it on the other hand.

2.3 Feminist Organizing, Haifa, Israel, and Social Location

Early feminist organizing began in pre-state Israel in the early twentieth century. At the time, feminist activism formed within Zionist women's organizations. The concept of feminism at the time centered on Jewish women working to secure the social, legal, and political rights of other Jewish women (Safir et al., 1994). Even before Israel declared its independence, Jewish women in pre-state Israel declared their independence through feminist movements that allowed them to do "men's work," vote, and live outside of traditional family structures in kibbutzim and collectives (p. 116). Women's bodies thus became signifiers of social location. This societal identification, placed within the body, impacted their autonomy, affective ability, and sense of belonging. Women further hoped to create new webs of affect rooted in physical safety. They wanted increased control over how they could use their body, where they could take it, and what

potentialities laid within. Through the creation of new affective forms, women also created belonging.

Feminist activists in pre-state Israel founded two feminist groups, the Women Workers movement, which women created in 1911 for the right to do "men's work," such as farming and construction, and a suffrage group, which won the right for Jewish women to vote in the national institutions of pre-state Israel (Safir, Nevo & Swirski, 1994, p. 116). Activist women settling in pre-state Israel demanded the right to vote and to be elected, claimed their share in the labor market and other traditionally male jobs, and created social rights and welfare services that benefited women, particularly working mothers (Bernstein, 1992; Sa'ar & Gooldin, 2009).

As a result of the incorporation of social rights for women at the site of early state formation, many Jewish-Ashkenazi middle class and "working settler" women believed they did not need feminism because they had already achieved full equal rights (Sa'ar & Gooldin, 2009). This idea was heightened by the Zionist narrative that claimed Israel as a modern, Western and democratic state, a beacon of enlightenment in a comparatively unenlightened region (Bernstein, 1992; Sa'ar & Gooldin, 2009). Under this philosophy, women didn't need a separate movement based on their social location as women because they had equal power to men. However, the reality of domestic violence in Israel, a topic not raised in the Knesset until 1962 (Muhlbauer, 2006), contradicts this equality. Rather, the most important social location for belonging was nationalism, religion, or Zionism. Madelaine Adelman writes about the framing of domestic violence in Israel in multiple stages. First, the pre-state stage saw domestic violence largely as a marital issue. Next, in the 1960s, domestic violence was seen as not

just a family issue but a criminal one. Then, in the 1970s, a public conversation about domestic violence began in Haifa as the advent of the feminist second wave named violence against women as the primary issue (Adelman, 2017, p. 42).

The feminist movement in the 1970s arose to address the gender inequality that existed and which challenged narratives that depicted Israeli women as liberated and equal to men (Sa'ar & Gooldin, 2009; Moore, 1998). It was in Haifa, the site of the first consciousness- raising group in Israel and the site of research for this dissertation, that its founders began the contemporary feminist movement (Frankfort-Nachmias, 2005, p. 40). Since that time, Haifa has been a central location for feminist organizing (Safir, Nevo & Swirski, 1994, p. 119). The city stands as an important feminist location because of this early history and because it is the most diverse city in Israel, where women activists feel they must come together to meet many complex challenges (Adelman, 2017). In Haifa, one can also consider the diverse population that characterizes it as a contributing factor to its history of coalition building and activism (Chavez, 2013, p. 17). This dissertation furthers that idea and provides a snapshot of how one group of women who have different life experiences have come together for a common goal.

Haifa is also home to the University of Haifa, a place that has long combined grassroots activism and academic study and which helps us understand the context of Talma's activism and of feminist organizing more broadly. The founders of the first women's shelter in Israel were all connected to the university, and Deborah Bernstein, an early shelter volunteer, co-founded the women's studies program there (Safir, Nevo & Swirski, 1994, p.120). Many shelter workers who saw firsthand the trauma of gender-based violence, often worked in women's studies or in women-only spaces that focused

on violence against women by men. The University of Haifa also held the first International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women (p. 121). In her 20s, Talma was active in many early Israeli feminist projects including battered women shelters and domestic abuse hotlines. Physical safety is important to Talma and she fights for the safety of others. It informs much of her feminist philosophy and was important to many early Israeli feminists as well. The first shelter for battered women opened in Israel in 1976 and the first Israeli rape crisis center opened in Tel Aviv in 1978. Violence against women intervention was not funded by the state or recognized as a public issue until the 1990s when the Labor Party implemented state support for women experiencing violence (American Jewish and Israeli Feminism Archives Collaborative). In 1990, Isha, the rape crisis center, and the shelter for battered women created a hotline for women battered by their spouses (American Jewish and Israeli Feminism Archives Collaborative). Talma describes feminist spaces as communities where she found belonging. In the 70s and 80s, Talma worked at one of the first battered women's shelters in Israel. While she felt like everyone outside of the shelter tried to fight her for her feminist beliefs, she felt safe with the other workers in these spaces. Talma is still excited when she thinks about that early feminist experience: "They were all feminists. We agreed on philosophy. It was amazing!" In this sense, we can see belonging as relief from physical pressures (Wilson & Liss, 2020). Talma is someone who speaks with her whole body. As Talma speaks about finding the women at the shelter for the first time, her relief and excitement is palpable: When she tells me about the women's shelter, her arms gesture loudly and her voice fills up her whole apartment.

The Women's Liberation Movement in Israel existed under many different names throughout the 1970s. Isha is a formal continuation of that movement. Isha was established in 1983, making it the oldest grassroots feminist organization in Israel. The Haifa Feminist Coalition is a collaboration between Isha and the Haifa Rape Crisis Center, and now also includes the Hotline for Battered Women, Kayan, an Arab feminist group, Aswat, a queer Arab group, and Itach-Maki (which means "with you" in Hebrew and Arabic), a group of lawyers for social justice. Since the 1980s, the Israeli feminist movement has been intertwined with women's peace movements and lesbian and queer movements (American Jewish and Israeli Feminism Archives Collaborative).

In the 1980s, feminist centers in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem were closing due to their inability to recruit enough women, their image as a radical lesbian space, and burnout on the part of their members. The importance of women-only spaces and lesbian specific spaces have been downplayed and criticized as unnecessary, exclusionary, and even harmful, and the negative image of feminist centers as "radical-lesbian" women-only spaces reflects a loathing of these spaces even by other feminists (Morris, 2016). For instance, Kol Ha-Isha, the Jerusalem feminist center's majority lesbian membership status dissuaded non-lesbian women from joining. One former member of the organization explained in *Sappho in the Holy Land*, "As it turned out, 95% of the activists in Kol Ha-Isha were lesbians. Yet we were a feminist center, not a feminist/lesbian center. At first there was a lot of homophobia... we lesbians were providing services to straight women-so what about our own needs?" (Frankfort-Nachmias & Shadmi, 2005, p. 50). Lesbians at the center felt that they had specific physical and mental health needs that were not being met for fear by the non-lesbian members of the group would be seen as "lesbian" and

non-lesbian feminists would be afraid to join. There was also fear that being seen as an outwardly lesbian organization would make coalition work more difficult. Despite centers closing in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, Haifa's feminist center, Isha, was revived. One of its central facets was lesbian community (Frankfort-Nachmias & Shadmi, 2005, p. 50). While part of the reason centers closed in other cities was their lesbian image, Isha members chose to feature lesbian identity as one of the center's most important components. Many people who live in Haifa, including most of the women I met at Isha, were proud of Haifa's diverse identity, and Isha's focus on lesbian identity may be, in part, a result of that. Isha hosted a support group for lesbians and included lesbian perspectives in all its discussions. This led to the integration of lesbian activism within the organization. Isha's coordinator at the time, Hannah Levy, said that Isha intended to "encompass all components of the women's population, including lesbians and Arab women, and not to deny or ignore them" (Frankfort-Nachmias & Shadmi, 2005, p. 50-51). At the time, as now, Isha worked against gendered violence and focused on the safety and freedoms of women. Isha privileged womanhood over social locations like race and class. The power of Ashkenazi, upper- and middle-class women was leveraged to aid women in different social locations.

In 1987, CLaF (an acronym in Hebrew meaning Lesbian Feminist Community), the first independent lesbian separatist organization in Israel, was founded and became an important part of feminist activist efforts in Haifa (Frankfort-Nachmias & Shadmi, 2005). CLaF launched several activist campaigns such as the fight against censorship of gay and lesbian content on television and the protest of Israeli president Ezer Weizman's statements against lesbian and gay people in 1997

(p.59). Weizman said that he considered lesbian and gay people to be abnormal and disgusting. CLaF also initiated several lesbian cultural programs in Haifa, including a chamber club in which lesbian artists performed monthly (p. 50). Several women I interviewed at Isha said that they were part of CLaF and were originally introduced to Isha and feminist organizing through CLaF.

For members of CLaF, visibility and the common space of a feminist center were modes of safety. Students who go to schools with a gay straight alliance or visible LGBTQ+ group feel a greater sense of belonging and safety than those without such a visible group (Wilson & Liss, 2020, p. 2). CLaF also valued visibility both for lesbians who could see their identities reflected in public spaces and for non-lesbians who saw few representations of lesbians. CLaF members felt it was especially important for Israelis to see lesbians in public spaces like marches and protests (p.193). At the same time, the creation of the feminist center was also crucial to a feeling of safety. Haifa lesbians first started carving out their own physical space in the late 70s with the creation of a bookstore where lesbians could gather. One woman who was part of that safe lesbian feminist space explained that it was a place where lesbians could feel free. “It felt safer to be outrageous on our own ground,” she said (p. 46). This feeling is echoed by my research participants when they expressed the centrality of the safe physical space of Isha for them. While members of Isha go out into public squares to march and protest injustices, they also feel they need the safety of Isha to gather and recharge.

During the 1980s, Talma first became interested in lesbian identity but viewed sexual identity as “secondary to feminism.” Tensions between lesbians who identify as feminists and those who see their lesbianism as separate from feminism plagued CLaF.

Some lesbians were reluctant to join CLaF because of its feminist label and others believed that CLaF was not radical enough on feminist issues (Frankfort-Nachmias & Shadmi, 2005, p. 59). Talma was critical of women who were lesbians but not feminist and said that she was a feminist first. When she witnessed some lesbians replicating abusive heterosexual relationships, she was outraged:

> One day we were in a flat with a lesbian group and then suddenly we heard a butch woman say to her girlfriend,‘ If you don’t shut up!’ I said‘ No!’ Now it’s a woman doing violence to a woman. What could be worse? You know, it was a big shock. And then I saw all this division of, uh, macho and femme bullshit within lesbians and that pissed me off completely. Nothing feministic about it. And I was so pissed, angry because it was a curse for me that a woman could do that to a woman. And a friend asked me to come and help her because her girlfriend beat her up. So I came with another boyfriend, a big one, and we made her go out. And that was terrifying for me. Terrible. I fight in feminism against the man in the world. Now lesbians are doing it to women.

For Talma and for many women, women-only spaces are supposed to represent safety from violence. The idea that a woman can harm another woman can seem confusing and appear to replicate the violent acts of men towards women. Female same-sex partner violence can be related to internalized homophobia, discrimination, and gender stereotyping (Hassouneh & Glass, 2008). The stereotyping of women as non-violent, caring, and nurturing, can have negative implications on women who are incongruent with these characteristics. For instance, gender stereotyping can automatically place butch lesbians as aggressors and make violence within lesbian relationships difficult to

see (p. 311). For Talma, violence between lesbians is viewed as a betrayal, and she felt that her own sense of emotional safety was compromised. Feelings of unsafety and betrayal can negatively affect an individual's feeling of belonging and mental health (Wilson & Liss, 2020). After witnessing lesbians, a group she is a part of, fighting, she felt her sense of belonging diminish and saw herself as an outsider to the group.

ClaF was a feminist lesbian organization that worked against the kind of abuse and unequal power relationships that Talma saw in some butch/femme relationships in Haifa. While Talma later had exclusively lesbian relationships, she always saw herself as a feminist first and found belonging primarily with other feminist women. She also viewed butch lesbians who were not feminists as women who replicated heterosexual relationships by "acting like men" and did not see these women as part of her community. As Kuntsman demonstrates in her analysis of queer immigrants who erase their ethnic and nationalist pasts in order to find belonging in Israel, sometimes too great a focus on safety combined with the desire to belong can create an oppressor/oppressed dichotomy that deeply harms those who are excluded (Kuntsman, 2009). Talma views butch lesbians as inherently violent and therefore excludes them from her activism, seeing them not as a vulnerable part of her own community to include, but as a dangerous enemy to actively exclude.

Talma's view of butch/femme relationships can be considered exclusionary and prejudiced towards the women who exist within those relationships. Roni, a Mizhrahi lesbian woman I interviewed at Isha, told me that butch/femme lesbian relationships are common among Mizhrahi lesbians and more associated with the lower class. "Ashkenazim look down on Mizrahim and butch/femme," she

said. Talma's feelings about butch/femme relationships specifically points to racial and class inequalities among lesbians in Haifa (Frankfort-Nachmias & Shadmi, 2005, p. 149). Feminist communities are not immune to power inequities found in social locations ubiquitously. Haifa feminist leaders did not officially address the exclusion of Mizrahi feminists and unequal power relations between women until the 1990s (p. 138).

Moore writes that in the 1990s, feminists in Haifa, Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem became "more willing to act against existing social order," and fight for social and economic change for women (Moore, 1998, p. 174). Feminist demands at the time included equal pay for women, affirmative action in the public sector, and higher occupational status (Moore, 1998). In the academy, gender and women's studies courses were formed, and by 2020 almost every Israeli college or university has at least a women's studies minor (Sa'ar & Gooldin, 2009). The major Israeli feminist NGO since the 1970s is the Annual Feminist Convention, and until 1991, most of the convention's speakers and leaders were Ashkenazi women. However, in 1991, Mizrahi feminists demanded proportional representation for Palestinians, Mizrahi Jews, and Ashkenazi Jews (Frankfort-Nachmias & Shadmi, 2005, p. 138). In 1994, Mizrahi feminists demanded that lesbians must also be included in the proportional system, which led to a quarter system in which every feminist workshop and panel included equal representation of lesbian, Ashkenazim, Mizrahim, and Palestinians (Lavie, 2011, p. 60). Isha still observes this quarter system, but adherence to the system among feminist organizations in Haifa is no longer ubiquitous.

Almost every woman I interviewed at Isha mentioned the quarter system and the importance of representation. However, some women I interviewed felt that they were

included on certain boards or panels just to fill a quota. Sophie said that she was invited to be part of a board for an organization focused on Palestinian learning. She assumed that she was representing Ashkenazi women; however, when she arrived, she realized she would be representing lesbians. She said that not only did she feel like a token lesbian, she was outed without her consent:

> I was kind of outed there because when they asked me to join, I didn't know they asked me to join as a lesbian. I thought they asked me to join as an Ashkenazi, and in one of the board meetings they started to count heads. So how many Mizrahi? How many Arabs? How many lesbians? And they started to count the lesbians and then no one said my name, but then everyone looked at me because I was supposed to count myself and I wasn't actually out then. I was like, really? And it was really kind of outing me forcefully in order to have enough lesbians in their counting.

This misunderstanding points to ways that intersectionality can be complicated in practice. While the board was trying to be intersectional by including lesbian members, it was actively harmful to Sophie. A space for women is not always completely emotionally or physically safe (Hassouneh & Glass, 2008). Sophie felt emotionally unsafe after her forced outing and also physically unsafe in her body. After being outed, she said that many women hugged her and touched her in a way that she did not feel in control of or comfortable with. Additionally, she saw herself as a token lesbian and not as a complete person. Tokenism works to find a narrow place for those who are marginalized while maintaining the hegemonic structure of institutions (Kaplan & Looser, 1997, p. 156). An intersectional approach should not only be inclusive of

multiple identities but understand that everyone has overlapping identities and experiences that may play out in very different ways. Sophie's story also demonstrates that including someone in order to create diversity or appear inclusive can be tokenizing and inadvertently create harm.

The current feminist landscape in Israel includes several grassroots feminist centers in big cities, feminist reading and support groups all across the country, and several domestic violence hotlines and rape crisis centers, which are funded largely by the state. Feminist activists are involved with a variety of projects and causes including reproductive health, sexual education, coalitions against sex trafficking, support for low-income women, queer activism, abortion assistance, the promotion of lesbian feminist politics, and work within the peace movement and anti-occupation movement (Sa'ar & Gooldin, 2009, p. 181). The idea of who belongs within the feminist movement has expanded greatly and identities or social locations such as feminist, Mizrahi, or Palestinian are viewed as powerful modes of belonging by Israeli feminists. Social location has traditionally been linked to the body, and for feminist women in Israel, to physical safety. By harnessing a positionality that once was oppressed through increasing effective modalities, Israeli feminists can create a powerful kind of activism that does not erase their past oppression but still allows room for growth and social change.

2.4 Philosophical Freedom, Morality & Queerness

Talma has consistently viewed personal philosophical freedom as central to her life. She wants to be free to think and believe what she wants and hates when philosophies she does not agree with are imposed upon her—whether in a kibbutz, a school, or an activist space. Philosophical or intellectual freedom, a "state wherein

individuals have the right to have their own beliefs and ideas as well as the right to explore and express these ideas and beliefs without fear of reprisal" (Knox, 2020, p. 2), becomes a common theme in Talma's life. She feels that she did not experience philosophical freedom on the kibbutz where she grew up, and this feeling of unbelonging continues to affect the way she sees the world. Talma never understood how in a "kibbutz based on equal society, I was considered crazy because I was a feminist. I thought it was shocking." While kibbutzim were striving for equality, including gender equality, Talma felt that her feminist ideas were seen as radical and therefore outside of the realm of acceptable behavior. Even from early childhood in the kibbutz, she was an activist, constantly fighting for what she believed was right and fair. However, it wasn't until she went to university and met Marcia Freedman in 1970 that she became immersed in feminist activism. While some women at Isha form belonging and develop their sense of self mainly through activist acts and social relationships, Talma is highly influenced by philosophical arguments. More specifically, in our interviews it became clear that Talma was deeply impacted by Freedman's philosophies and feminist ideas.

Marcia Freedman is an American-Israeli activist known for helping to create and lead Israel's feminist movement and holds a special place in Talma's life and understanding of feminism and belonging. She worked to reform Israel's abortion laws in the 1970s, co-founded the Women's Party (which no longer exists) in 1977, and started the first battered women's shelter in Israel also in 1977 in Haifa. She was also the first woman elected to the Knesset (American Jewish and Israeli Feminism Archives Collaborative). Throughout my time in Israel, I worked on digitally archiving Freedman's personal papers with the Haifa Feminist Institute. Even though Freedman was no longer

active in the Haifa feminist community and many HFI volunteers had never met her, she was still revered by all individuals I met and viewed as an important feminist leader. Additionally, Freedman had been Talma's philosophy instructor at the University of Haifa and invited Talma to a consciousness raising group. Freedman's were the first consciousness raising groups at the time and members of the group worked to bring feminist activism to Haifa and to Israeli society (American Jewish and Israeli Feminism Archives Collaborative). Social networks like the one that Talma found through Freedman can be crucial to forming a sense of belonging. Individuals who belong to social networks may have greater feelings of intimacy, belonging, and more self worth (Fudge & Harrison, 1997, p. 21).

Freedman was popularly considered radical for her focus on women's issues, such as rape, abortion, and prostitution, as well as peace issues. When she left the Knesset, she came out as a lesbian. Talma told me, "She was considered the most extreme at the time, but I learned that I was more radical than she was." Talma, extreme in her youth, continued to feel as though she was radical throughout her life. Talma often talked about the decades she spent in free love and how she was one of the first Israeli women to travel to another country for elective "sterilization." Talma did not explain the specifics of her procedure, but most likely had a tubal ligation so that she could no longer be able to have children. Here, Talma needed to physically change her body, specifically a major part of her body that indicated her social location as a woman, to feel self-acceptance. This often put her outside of the webs of belonging of others. At times, even other feminists in her community felt that some of Talma's views and actions were extreme. For many Jewish Israeli women, having children, especially multiple children,

has been seen as a religious, Zionist, and moral duty (Stoler-Liss, 2013). For Talma to go against these ideas decades ago was considered extreme. Because motherhood is seen by the Israeli state and dominant social discourses as the only way for women to become part of the national collective, the consequence of not becoming a mother can lead to social exclusion (Frankfort-Nachmias & Shadmi, 2005, p. 252). Two married lesbian couples I visited in two different kibbutzim similarly told me that the only way that they were allowed to join a kibbutz as a couple is because they had children together. Not becoming a mother can literally bar women, especially lesbian women, from critical sites of belonging. Some sites of self-acceptance and narration may conflict with belonging within any accessible group.

Talma sometimes has disagreements with other members of Isha, yet those disagreements are within the context of common feminist goals, making Isha the place and the community where she has felt the most comfortable and philosophically safe. Talma feels comfortable expressing her feminist beliefs, which are most concerned with gender equality, the uplifting of women, and an anti-violence outlook. She further identifies as anti-war and anti-occupation. She also feels a freedom of expression, which is a freedom to safely communicate ideas and beliefs to others (Knox, 2020, p. 2) She feels comfortable talking about her choice not to have any children and does not experience exclusion from other Isha members because of this choice.

Talma feels philosophically safe at Isha because she agrees with the overarching values and feminist philosophy of most of its members. In praise of another activist at Isha, Talma said, “She’s very activist. The best woman ever objectively, and she’s not gay!” While the woman did not share Talma’s sexuality, her feminist beliefs that women

should be safe from violence and free to do what they wanted with their bodies aligned with Talma's, and Talma felt a strong sense of belonging with her. Both Talma and her friend shared a sense of urgency about fighting gendered injustice and inequality and saw themselves as feminists first in everything they did. They both looked at the world as a place that is unsafe for women and wanted to make it safer and more just.

Belonging through philosophical safety was difficult for Talma to find when she was growing up. As previously discussed, since childhood, Talma felt that those around her thought that her radical ideas and behaviors were "crazy." She always spoke up for herself and others and never felt that she could conform to "normal behavior." On the kibbutz, there was gossip that she was a "whore" and a bad person because she regularly socialized with men. In the 1960s, she was physically assaulted by a man she didn't know after kissing a man on the street of an Israeli city. A man saw her kissing a boyfriend in public and then Talma and the stranger began arguing, resulting in the man punching Talma. When she felt that Catholics in Israel were being unfairly treated, she took to wearing a giant cross over her chest for months in protest. While attempting to get an apartment for herself, she was questioned by the landlord, suspicious that she would live with a boyfriend, about why she needed such a big room. Talma, never afraid to add fuel to a fire, replied "Oh, because I am opening a whorehouse." Though Talma had planned to rent the apartment just for herself, she didn't like the idea that she wouldn't be able to live with a man while unmarried and couldn't help provoking the landlord.

Perhaps most strikingly, Talma decided to get an operation in the 1980s so that she would not be able to have children. The importance of motherhood can be a weapon for Israeli nationality (Berkovitch, 1997; Werbner, 1999). Often, women are constructed

above all as a mother and a wife rather than an individual human with agency or an Israeli citizen (Berkovitch, 1997, p. 1). This can be seen as part of the state's agenda to produce more Israeli, often Ashkenazi, Jews to populate Israel (Werbner, 1999). For instance, in response to Israeli population politics and anxieties about maintaining a Jewish and non-Arab state, there has been a heightened emphasis on Jewish and Arab women as "reproducers of the nation" (Kanaaneh, 2002, p. 79). Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh writes, "Women are considered markers of national boundaries, not only symbolically but physically as well: they have a duty to produce the babies that the nation requires" (p. 65). A woman saying that she does not want children is considered a betrayal of citizenship and womanhood in Israel. Orna Donath argues that Israeli women are taught that "Motherhood is constructed as a mythical nexus that lies outside and beyond the human terrain of regret, and therefore a desire to undo the maternal experience is conceived as an object of disbelief" (Donath, 2015 p. 1).

Regretting having children is regarded as myth, while not having children at all is considered an impossibility. During my first week at Isha, I sat in on a lecture about women who regretted having children. There were several women in attendance who said that they wished that they didn't have children as well as an academic researcher who interviewed dozens of women who said the same thing. These women said that they only felt comfortable speaking about their feelings at Isha, and if they told friends or family about their regret, there would be consequences. According to these women, there is still a great deal of pressure for women in Israel to have as many children as possible, and many women had children even though they didn't desire them. During a trip to Haifa a year before my research, I met lesbians in their late 20s who were not part of Isha who

told me that their families didn't mind that they were gay as long as they still had children.

After leaving the country to get her operation, Talma appeared on a radio show that discussed alternatives to motherhood. The listeners 'responses were harsh: "She did sterilization by choice and she should be thrown out of the country because she didn't make soldiers." Others called it mutilation. People who called into the radio show thought Talma's existence was an assault to the concept of womanhood and citizenship, and their very identity. Talma said that, at the time, people around her viewed her as crazy. She didn't see her own feminist philosophy, one that allowed her to refuse to have children as bodily autonomy, reflected anywhere around her. Because Talma values this freedom and philosophy so highly, this was incredibly difficult for her.

Talma felt that feminist ideas from Marcia Freedman and other women at Isha as well as her introduction to the term "queer" helped her understand and articulate her behavior and understanding that women should be able to do what they want with their bodies not as crazy, but as strong and feminist. For a decade, between the ages of 18 and 28, Talma had a "flirtation" with suicide because people wrote her off as insane. Talma did not understand the world through a hegemonic, dominant discourse. Consequently, her different ideals led her to thinking she was crazy, as though her reality was wrong. Since Talma was told her reality, her beliefs, her life work, was wrong, she considered suicide. However, coming to understand herself as feminist and queer helped her form an identity and sense of belonging that she believes saved her life. "I learned that I'm queer. I'm just queer. And it saved me. Wow." The term "queer" was not commonly used among the women I spoke to in Israel, and the way Talma uses it differs from the way many

people in the U.S. employ the term. Many people in the U.S. refer to "queer" as a non-normative sexuality (Levy, 2012, p. 131). However, Talma uses it in a way that means "weird" or "strange" or "free." She feels that the term, which has an ambiguous meaning, gives her permission to do and say what she wants and helps her find community with others who hold a similar philosophy. Very few women I met in Israel identified as "queer," and Talma did not have a lot of close friends who identified with the term. However, learning about the term through popular culture and online communities as well as meeting international volunteers who identified as queer helped her feel less alone.

Identity can often be fluid, and one's understanding of one's identity, as well as one's connection to others, can shift throughout one's entire life (Bansel, 2018, p. 69). When Talma speaks about finding joy in being queer, she is pointing to a way that she can relate to others and understand herself and find some sense of belonging. Queer is a term that implies fluidity, change and resistance to the norm (Levy, 2012). Talma finds belonging not in something that is unchanging or stagnant but in the fluid. Affect studies allow for ideas like fluidity to be better understood. Fluidity is important for Talma because rigidity hurt her in the past. Her personal feminist understandings rejects standard understandings of the world and of Israel. She is a woman who chose not to have children in a country where women are often defined by their ability to produce children (Kanaaneh, 2002).

2.5 Place-Belonging: Emotional Attachment and Volunteerism

Talma does not attend many feminist conferences or meetings anymore

and does not show up to as many activist events. She is in her 70s, retired, and does not want to spend her time in meetings that only make her feel frustrated. However, she maintains her connections to the women of Isha through daily emotional labor. This is a marked change from most of her life, during which she was heavily involved in public events. In this section, I track how affect, emotional safety, and place-belonging coalesce to inform Talma's methods of engagement and her current sense of identity. When I walked into Talma's home for the first time, I glanced at her computer screen and noticed several WhatsApp messages. Later she told me that she spends hours a day messaging women she met at Isha, including many international volunteers who no longer live in Israel. If a woman in her community or a volunteer at Isha needs a place to stay, she helps them find housing and even lets them stay in her apartment. Place-belonging has to do with individuals feeling at home, a sense of familiarity, comfort, and safety with one another (Antonsich 2010). Talma physically invites people into her home which in turn contributes to the creation of her belonging. "I mainly care for the volunteers," she says. If a woman in the Isha community is sick or alone in the hospital, she is often the first to go visit them. When I was in Israel, Talma helped me move twice, and though I didn't ask, she offered to help me find women to interview for my project. When German volunteers at Isha wanted to visit a kibbutz and Holocaust museum, she drove them around the country to multiple kibbutzim and museums.

Yuval-Davis writes that the second level of belonging is about "emotional attachment," "feeling at home" and about feeling safe (Yuval-Davis, 2006). In this dissertation, I posit that feeling safe should not only be considered one aspect of belonging, but the foundation of the philosophical house of belonging. Talma maintains

many emotional attachments to women from Isha and clearly still feels very deeply about women she hasn't seen in years. As she talks about international volunteers, she says things like "I love them" and "I miss them" and shares fond memories of her time with them. Talma has housed volunteers in her own home, spent thousands of hours educating them on topics that she found elementary, and became friends with many. With a smile on her face and a hand bouncing on the tabletop, Talma loudly told me that due to welcoming volunteers she has "my best friend now in Frankfurt and others and they ended up in Qiagen." Talma, noticing her volume, said, "When I'm excited, I shout. I have a very loud voice." Talma cares deeply about connecting with volunteers, often becomes friends with them, and shares her loyalty and soul with them.

Hundreds of volunteers from abroad have come to work at Isha, and many do not speak Hebrew fluently or know anyone at the organization. For Talma, taking care of international volunteers who come to Isha is one of her top priorities. Talma related, "We talk about feminism for all the women, but you came from abroad to volunteer. You give your time in my organization and you are from abroad and alone. I should, we should, be there for you. Not just take but give also." As Talma considers these volunteers displaced from their homes, Talma seems to feel the need to provide or create a new home for them. Talma describes this as her sense of "collective responsibility" that she hopes all members of Isha feel. One can relate Talma's need for "collective responsibility" to her early experiences in a kibbutz that emphasized the responsibility of each of its members to create an equal and fair society. In a kibbutz, it is seen as the responsibility of each member, including children, to create a just and equal society in which everyone's needs are cared for (Shoham, 1995).

When I arrived at Isha in September 2017, several other international volunteers and researchers were also at the organization. Some arrived shortly after I did. Every volunteer was immediately introduced to everyone at the organization (which has at least 10 people on a quiet day), invited to several events and lectures, and given work to do around the building. Shortly after I arrived, I was asked to do what would be a yearlong project of working at the archives of the Haifa Feminist Institute (HFI), housed in Isha, as well as Isha's feminist library where I catalogued books in English, Hebrew, and Arabic. In addition, a woman who attended the University of Haifa where I was set to study offered to show me around campus and help me obtain my ID card. On my first day, a second woman asked me to study with her and several women invited me to coffee. By my second day at Isha, I was hammering nails into the walls to hang up photographs around Isha and sweeping the floors. I immediately started to physically shape the space. I was changing my surroundings at Isha, just as Isha was changing and shaping me. Affect is not only apparent in relationships between people, but is co-constitutive of relationships and ontologies of people in conjunction with place, space, and objects (Gould et al. 2019). Here, having ownership of the space, shaping it, made me feel a greater sense of belonging. As I explored in more detail in the previous chapter, even though I had just arrived, I felt like I had been part of the community for a long time. Other volunteers found housing through Isha and were often seen around the building doing various maintenance or cleaning projects. When I asked some of the other international volunteers if they felt a sense of belonging at Isha, they said that they felt welcomed there and felt like they were truly part of the organization. Many of them had come to Israel for reasons other than Isha but ended up finding the most belonging at

Isha. Talma's emotional labor of being the first to greet the volunteers, helping them with any issues they had in Haifa, and keeping up with them through WhatsApp surely added to this belongingness.

The feelings of home and safety may be especially important for those who live in a country that is often in war and conflict. In times of violence or when one fears their physical safety, it is especially important to find a sense of home or belonging (Wilson & Liss, 2020). Talma believes that Isha is and should be home and safety for many types of women. According to Talma, "It's a community for many people. And when there is war, and there is a war all the time, women are coming here and sheltering here, and hiding there not to be alone. And it is home." Talma was probably referring to a national war or attack on Israel with bombs, knives, or bullets, but her quote can also apply to the war many women face at home: that of domestic violence and abuse. For these women, Isha can be a haven. Adelman writes about the connections between state and domestic violence in Israel. The "political violence that permeates people's everyday lives" contributes to a culture where individuals feel as though violent solutions are acceptable (Adelman, 2017, p. 2). A widening wealth gap in the population and political-economic policies that privilege a few further contribute to stressors that enculture domestic violence in part because women's work, and women's worth is deprioritized (Adelman, 2017). While five decades of activism led to the acknowledgement of "domestic violence as a social problem" and its "adoption and institutionalization," Israeli society still neglects to deconstruct structures of oppression (Adelman, 2017, p. 35). Isha is an important organization because it is not possible for women in Israel, like women all over the world, to easily and reliably gain

assistance for domestic violence while remaining safe. In this project we can see that constructions of affect and belonging may be a powerful force to counteract hegemonic oppression that minimizes and ignores the social struggles of women.

Kayan, an Arab feminist organization, is housed in the same building as Isha, and many of the same women who belong to that organization also belong to Isha. When I first started coming to Isha, I didn't know which women were part of Kayan and which were part of Isha or whether some women belonged to both organizations. Women from both organizations buzzed me into the building before I got my own key and greeted me warmly when I arrived. For Talma, women who belong to both Isha and Kayan may work with Kayan, but "their home is Isha." She says that at Isha women can be themselves and truly belong while in other spaces they have to hide parts of themselves. She believes that at Kayan, women sometimes hide their sexuality, or at least do not discuss it freely, and do not feel comfortable being themselves. Talma's impression of Kayan is partially based on the way she views the organization as "not taking care of their volunteers." For instance, she believes that volunteers come to Kayan, as they come to Isha, not knowing anyone or even understanding Arabic or Hebrew, and the leaders of Kayan do little to make them feel at home. However, Talma's criticism can also be viewed as subconscious prejudice towards an Arab feminist organization. While Isha includes many Mizrahi and Arab members, Talma, like almost every person, most likely holds prejudiced ideas that she is not aware of. Subconscious biases can be especially difficult to reconcile in activist spaces, and those who see themselves as being allies of those they work alongside may have a difficult time understanding that they too have biases (Nuru & Arendt, 2019). Additionally, the pressure of being a nonprofit may lead

some to undermine other nonprofits as they are competing for slim resources (Farzan & Lopez, 2018). This is against the philosophy of coalition building and a problem inherent in many nonprofits, including Isha. Belonging and coalition work are not straightforward and rarely easy.

Several women I talked to at Isha said that they needed to hide parts of themselves in other activist spaces. Most commonly, women said that they had to hide their queerness in solidarity spaces, which support Palestinian rights. Several women I interviewed said that in the Palestinian solidarity movement, many men express violent sexist and homophobic sentiments towards queer people, and queer Israelis within the movement often choose to hide their queerness to be included in the movement. Many activist movements house severe inequalities. In the People's Park Movement, a movement in Berkeley and elsewhere between the 1960s and 1980s where activists converted vacant lots into liberated zones, activists reproduced inequalities within their social justice circles (Lovell, 2018). Women in these movements were often marginalized and sexualized and people of color were erased (p. 301). Similarly, in ethnic nationalist movements in the 1960s and 1970s in the U.S., women were often oppressed and harassed and rendered invisible by male members and were given secondary and subservient positions (Ogbar, 2004). Each of these movements, as well as the Palestinian solidarity movement are often seen as utopian bastions of justice, but women in particular are harmed, erased, and the inequality they experience outside of the movement is replicated inside the movement.

Many women at Isha believe that the solidarity movement is so important that it is necessary to participate even though they have to hide or protect a part of

themselves. It may seem as though this is belonging without safety, which goes against the thesis of this dissertation. However, this is participation, which is not belonging. Here, activists have one level of belonging, philosophical alignment, which may mean they can work together. However, for people to feel a sense of belonging, there needs to be a feeling of safety. The women at Isha do not feel belonging in the solidarity movement like they do in Isha. For them, that isn't the point of their activism. As one woman told me, she can endure the difficulty of the solidarity movement because it is so important. However, Isha is where women feel safe. "I feel completely safe in Isha," the activist explained.

When I ask Talma if she belongs within Isha, she answers, "I definitely belong. I am completely feminist. I think I mainly belong to my friends." Though Talma emphasized philosophy first and as intellectually the most important part of belonging, she also admits that the emotional attachments of her friends have a tight hold on her as well. Talma's sentiment that she belongs to her friends is in line with Bansel's idea that a sense of connection is at the core of belonging (Bansel, 2018). As previously discussed, philosophy alone cannot be responsible for belonging if it is not accompanied by the other layers. Talma has been part of Isha since its founding and part of Haifa's feminist community even before that, and she has seen many new members come and go and the organization change. She feels a deep emotional attachment to the organization and feels infinitely invested. She was one of the first members of Isha and sees herself and her emotional labor in so many aspects of the organization. It is a part of her and she feels that Isha is a part of her.

2.6 Women-Only Spaces, Feminist Organizing and Safety

This dissertation pushes readers to investigate boundary maintenance through the eyes of women who crave women-only spaces for physical, emotional, and philosophical safety. In these spaces, differences among women are accepted in the context of broader, overarching feminist goals in common. Much of what brought Talma into feminist communities were spaces that specifically targeted and reacted to gendered violence- specifically violence by men toward women, especially their women partners. Her early feminist work was spent at the battered women's shelter and working the domestic violence hotline. In both of these spaces, women volunteers came together and often felt a sense of community through their fight against male violence and their own experiences as women. Isha continues to be an all-women space and a space that often targets gendered violence. The organization began its own domestic violence hotline, which is now an independent project, provides resources, information, and help to women experiencing domestic violence, and works to fight human trafficking of girls and women in Israel. The very work of Isha is intimately related to fighting against domestic and physical violence towards women. Talma describes the importance of the organization remaining an all-women space. Talma hates not being listened to and feels that men, in particular, do not listen to her or to other women.

> I've been here since the seventies. The best thing about the seventies is that we understood that we should be closed to men. They [men] took, they talked, they wouldn't let the women talk and women didn't dare to talk next to them except one or two. You want all of them to talk about rape and incest in front of

men. I mean they can't."

Many women feel uncomfortable talking about rape, assault, and issues specific to their woman-hood in front of men (Mackay, 2011). While Talma is someone who speaks loudly and freely in front of anyone, she understands that many women feel uncomfortable sharing intimate details of their lives in a space with both men and women. Talma feels a duty to the other women at Isha to keep Isha a women-only collective.

Talma often disagrees with members of the Isha community, but she also experiences a very strong connection to the dynamic community. During my time in Israel, Talma had many suggestions for women I should talk to and she had endless stories about each of them. The women, too, had stories about Talma. It seemed that all of their lives were intimately and forever linked even if they hadn't seen each other in decades. When I mentioned Talma to the women I interviewed, they would often smile or laugh or tell me a story about something especially brazen Talma did in the past. "Oh, let me tell you a Talma story," they would say. It was clear that they felt the same belonging that Talma felt to her friends. While similar relationships occurred for other women I interviewed, including Sophie and Maya, this was not the case for everyone. As I will describe in more depth later, belonging within Isha and belonging more generally does not look the same for everyone.

In "Theories and Theorizing of Belonging," Halse further speaks to the interconnectedness of belonging:

> Because the belonging that arises through connectedness is an active social process of everyday life, it is necessarily always relational. This means it is

> produced through the co-constitutive interaction of individuals with other people, things, institutions and specific socio-cultural contests. It is the intersection between the self and the social-how individuals belong- that works to‘ define and configure what it means to belong (and not belong)’ (Halse, 2018).

On each of her three levels of belonging, lives what Yuval-Davis calls the “dirty work of boundary maintenance” (Yuval-Davis, p. 204). Talma makes a strict distinction between those within her community, other feminist workers at the women’s shelter in the 1970s and 1980s, and those outside of it. She felt philosophically bound to the other workers. For instance, some of the Jewish women who came to the shelter after experiencing domestic violence did not want to be in the same space with Arab women. In response, the shelter workers took an anti-racist stance and told the women that if they didn’t want to be with Arab women, they could leave. Talma felt that this shared anti-racist feminist philosophy created a strong sense of belonging among the shelter workers that she did not feel in most of her life.

Her closeness to the community arose in part from the violence she felt from the outside world. As a a shelter worker, Talma experienced threats of violence from those who held anti-feminist philosophical views and from those who wanted to retaliate after she helped their partners. Talma accompanied women to court hearings despite her fear of violence against her and the women she was helping. She describes one such incident:

> I remember I went to Tel Aviv with someone I knew in the shelter for a long time and a little baby and I was scared to hell. The husband was very violent. And he comes to me and I know him by stories and he says, “You know this

> Talma? If I knew who she is, I would kill her." I said, "My gosh, I don't know. She's in Haifa. She's not here."

Talma is used to feeling terrified for her well-being when it comes to threats by men. Trauma and negative emotions can directly impact all aspects of human functioning (Hastings et al., 2011). The affective ability of Talma to engage with others and her surroundings is impacted by the presence and absence of certain political actors. For Talma and many other members of Isha, the boundaries that include women and exclude men are crucial to their feeling of belonging and safety. While I was at Isha, a woman spoke about how she has been affected for years by her ex-partner's (a man) emotional violence and manipulation. It was hard for her to find a place that she found safe and free from her abuser. She said that she felt most comfortable and safe in a community of women. Many women at Isha agreed and said that they felt the same way. Isha is an organization that specifically hopes to positively affect the lives of women who are often harmed at the hands of men. In Talma's experience, women do not often feel that they can speak up or feel comfortable around men. For others I interviewed, men were often seen as the ones doing harm and should not be included in Isha.

Talma often refers to herself as one of the two most veteran members of Isha, the second being her close friend Hannah. Hannah agrees with Talma that Isha should continue to be a woman's space with only women members. However, Talma says that members of Isha disagree about whether being a woman alone qualifies one to be part of the collective. For Talma, members of the collective should be philosophically similar and behave in a particular way. During our formal interview, Talma often brought up a

problematic woman who used to be part of Isha. Talma described the woman as "macho" and believed her philosophy did not fit in Isha.

> Yes, I come from a political world and for me there are things that I won't compromise. I don't want to compromise that all people are equal and have equal rights. I don't accept any kind of racism and I don't want any violence. I wish we would even throw away women like that. I was all for throwing out. They said, I'm too radical, or they can't do it. I disagree.

For Talma, the boundaries of belonging should be both philosophical and gender based.

The politics of all-women spaces have been contentious in recent years, especially when those conversations involve trans-exclusion (McConnell et al., 2016). Significantly, Isha is trans-inclusive but requires members of the Collective to identify as women. While in the U.S., it is now difficult to find explicitly women-only feminist spaces, women-only spaces are still the norm in Israel, not just for Isha. Kayan, the Arab feminist group that shares a building with Isha, is also women-only. Finn Mackay writes about the importance of all-women feminist spaces. In her study of an all-woman feminist group in London, she writes,

> "In women-only space the activists felt that women had more opportunities, motivation and confidence to share a variety of roles, including leadership roles. Partly this was because they felt men dominated such opportunities in mixed groups, but also because they felt that with men present women were more likely to defer to them, and that this gendered, formulaic process was not conducive to women developing their own skills and confidence" (Mackay, 2011, p. 169).

Leathwood agrees that women-only feminist and educational spaces can be beneficial to women. She writes that in recent years, mixed gender feminist spaces have become more common, but those spaces are not always beneficial to women. In her discussion of the many reasons for separatist feminist spaces in the past, Leathwood writes that sometimes "a separate space was founded less on any specific theoretical position and more on a straightforward desire to meet in a space with other women and to be able to talk about issues, concerns, ideas, and experiences free from negative responses from men" (Leathwood, 2004, p. 450). This idea of a space free from men's criticism about issues specific to women is something that Isha members cannot often find outside of Isha.

Several lesbian and queer Isha activists were angry about the way that men took over gay or queer spaces. One woman told me that "men don't let us talk," and they "take over" lesbians in LGBTQ+ spaces. Several women said that men are the face of LGBTQ+ activism in Israel and care primarily for their own interests (Hildebrandt & Chua, 2017). This leads lesbian and queer women to feelings of exclusion within LGBTQ+ activist spaces. Maya, a trans lesbian activist at Isha, told me that in Palestinian solidarity spaces, men assault, rape, and harass women members and see very few consequences for their actions. She calls these spaces "boys clubs" and explained what happened after one of her friends was raped by a prominent activist: "It was a struggle to keep him out of our community and our activism and keep him out of the spotlight [in a positive way] because he was a very prominent activist." Similarly, she faced similar issues in animal-rights spaces, which refused to kick out men who were abusive to women. She says that this informed her feminism and helped her understand the

importance of women-focused groups. In contrast to her feelings of discomfort in solidarity spaces, she says she feels very included in Isha. “The fact that I feel Isha is a very inclusive space for lesbian people really helps in that sense,” she says.

While Isha only allows women, including trans women, to become members of the organization and attend Collective meetings, anyone can come to the organization’s many lectures and events. During my year at Isha, I went to at least three lectures or events a week and noticed that there were sometimes one to three men in attendance. The number of women in attendance ranged from 10- 50. During these events, I noticed that the few men in attendance tended to talk disproportionately more, compared to the women, and often talked over women. I have spoken with many women who lamented this fact. Messner et al. spoke about the disproportionate power male allies commanded in feminist spaces (2015). Messner et al. found that men were applauded and praised for entering feminist spaces and given a large platform to speak due to their rarity and the unique position they held in domestic violence prevention work (2015). Additionally, when I was in all-women meetings at Isha, I noticed that women were more likely to talk about personal experiences of abuse, rape, or sex than they would if a man was present. After observing countless examples of this, Talma’s comment, “You want all of them to talk about rape and incest in front of men. I mean they can’t,” was highlighted. Social location is an important indicator of physical and emotional safety, and developing a sense of belonging seemed to be more challenging in these spaces.

As a pathway for belonging for many queer people, activism often does not require participants to have a stable LGBTQ+ identity and can support and facilitate a belonging which may shift and change over time (Jones, 2018). Talma and many other

women I met at Isha found community and belonging through activism. “ I found my home when I discovered feminism and my home is Isha L’Isha,” Talma said. Ami, a queer feminist woman I worked with at the archives, found Isha after getting involved with a campaign to free a prisoner who had killed his rapist. After this initial activist project, she found out about Isha on Facebook. Several women came to Isha after working on a domestic violence line and rape crisis center. A few came to Isha through Kvisa Shchoara, or Black Laundry, an LGBTQ+ anti-occupation group that was active from 2002 to 2005. After being drawn into the organization through these initial activist projects, many of these women found home and belonging with the women of Isha. For many women, activist projects helped facilitate community and sense of belonging that remained long after their involvement with those projects ended. Activism can be generated from powerful emotions that give ideas, ideologies, and identities to passionate individuals or collectives (Jasper, 1998). The emotional dynamics of a movement can tie people together or alienate participants (Jasper, 1998). Activism may be a signifier for complimenting philosophical safety and a stable base around which to build affect and emotional ties. Some researchers claim that affect can be an important part of furthering activism. Activists can use affect, the relationships between bodies and objects, as a method by which to strengthen coalitions, increase solidarities, and create the conditions by which people, in this case women, can survive their quotidian experiences while fighting for change (Gould et al., 2019, p. 12). Talma no longer works at women’s shelters or domestic abuse hotlines, but those projects created a way into feminist community and belonging for Talma that she feels forever tied to.

One might ask: how will men will be educated if they are not allowed into women's and feminist spaces to learn? Several authors have reflected on and analyzed this (Vernet & Butera, 2011; Bojin, 2013; Silver et al., 2019). According to these authors, men should be able to engage in some feminist spaces, but for those women who require safety in all women spaces, it may be more important for men to be excluded. This allows women who are particularly conscious of violence, either due to past experience or not, to still have a space to heal and engage in activism. Instead of centering the men's exclusion and their experiences, it is important to center the women's comfort and their affective power to start change. At the same time, excluding men underscores approaches to belonging that center exclusion (Kuntsman, 2009).

2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I examined the space-making of belonging through a discussion of physical, emotional and philosophical belonging. I further built upon my use and conception of belonging by engaging with a variety of theorists who foreground emotional belonging and political belonging as distinct entities and understand social location as a political position rather than a part of an individual's lived experience. The unique situation of the feminist women at Isha can best be examined through multiple conceptions of belonging including place-belongingness, and political belonging. Through exploring Talma's sense of belonging in this chapter, I discussed how histories of feminism in Israel and Talma's intimate understanding of feminism, queerness, and her past provide a lens through which to approach new forms of belonging. These forms are characterized by gendered violence as a shared experience and rooted in ideas of physical safety that draws the members of Isha towards each other

and becomes the basis for them to build upon their community as part of their quotidian embodiment, creation of a safe space for emotion and the constitution of affect, as well as their physical setting. I dove further into feminist organizing in Israel and the concept of social location to better understand the impact of history on the body and the body as a social location.

Additionally, I investigated feminist philosophy within the context of philosophical belonging, affective, and physical safety. Through Talma's experiences, I foregrounded how belonging is rooted in both physical and philosophical safety. While the roots of Talma's philosophy and activism are in physical safety, Sophie, the Isha member I discuss in the next chapter, ties the roots of her activism to her physical functioning--she participates in activisms in the same way she breaths--unconsciously, uncontrollably, and necessarily. Also in the next chapter, I dive deeper into the role of intersectional thought and experiences for women in Isha.

Boundary maintenance can be viewed as a way for oppressors to maintain political, social, and economic power (Yuval-Davis, 2002). This dissertation pushes readers to investigate boundary maintenance through the eyes of women who crave women-only spaces for physical, emotional, and philosophical safety. Boundary maintenance can be important, especially in cases when it allows for activism through leveraging impressions of physical safety. In chapter four, I investigate the experiences of a transwoman in Isha to further examine ties between the body, social location, belonging, and identity.

CHAPTER 3. SOPHIE: *INTERSECTIONALITY, QUEERNESS, AND AUTONOMY AS FACTORS IN BELONGING FORMATIONS*

3.1 Introduction

I meet Sophie during my first day at Isha. One of the volunteers has just given me a tour and introduced me to several women working around the building when I see her for the first time. She is standing in the main meeting room surrounded by several other women who seem intensely focused on what she has to say. She is gesturing with her arms and, though she is small, she is taking up a lot of space. When she sees me, she yells across the room, "Oh a new volunteer! You're coming with me!" Soon I learn that Sophie is a professor and one of the co-founders of the Haifa Feminist Institute (HFI), the largest and only feminist archive and library collection in Israel (American Jewish and Israeli Feminism Archives Collaborative). The HFI was founded at Isha. She grabs my shoulder. "Can you write grants? Have you worked in an archive? Do you know Arabic?" The questions are coming fast and I just say yes to everything and agree to join her project. Her current project, which includes digitizing archival material from Marcia Freedman's papers, becomes one of the main ways I spend my time in Israel. It is where I meet many of my friends and where I will learn all the gossip about Isha as I sit scanning document after document into an old computer.

While the last chapter focused on formations of belonging and affective potentialities, this chapter employs an interdisciplinary lens to examine the interaction of belonging with schemas, autonomy, and intersectionality as well as characteristics of belonging like temporality. Belonging is still examined as a feeling of home and a political tool by which to create power relations. Each of these themes, examined

concurrently throughout each section of this chapter, provides additional theorization into the potentiality of affect to create social belonging through which activism may occur.

While Talma's philosophy of free thinking neatly shaped much of her experience of belonging, so as to make the impact of her philosophy invisible, Sophie "lives" in different worlds, including academia and activism, which impacts and occasionally creates conflicting desires for and modalities of belonging. Schemas are a method by which social scientists can understand the reactions to and groupings of experiences, ideas, and other cultural elements into universal categories (Boutyline, 2017; Valian, 2009). In this chapter, I examine how schemas associated with Sophie's work within academia and activism may impact her ontological belonging- her expectations for, experiences of, and creation of belonging. This analysis provides additional insight into the creation of belonging from people within social groups that house and develop alternative methods by which to process information.

I also dive deeper into the discursive relationship of autonomy and belonging. Sophie's need for autonomy can both bolster creations of belongings and further complicate her experience of belonging. Autonomy is largely considered within spaces of psychology and organizational functioning (Agenor et al., 2017). It is particularly relevant in Western societies where ideas of self-determination, independence, and ability to affect change are considered essential to the self (Agenor et al., 2017; Huppert & So, 2013). Autonomy comes from an individual or group feeling based on the opportunity to choose the behavior or experience with which they are engaged (Charms, 1968) without threat, coercion, or manipulation. Self-evaluation of autonomy as well as supporting the autonomy of others can be hallmarks of positive relationships (Deci and Ryan, 2014). In

this chapter, I discuss how affect may be helpful for understanding the ability of autonomy to strengthen activism and understanding conflicts within belonging. Some authors name affect as “an autonomous force . . . that refers to bodies ’reciprocal capacities ‘to affect and be affected’” (von Scheve, 2018, p. 43). Considering affect has been theorized as an autonomous force, I suggest that an investigation into autonomy's impact on belonging is productive for understanding the relationship between affect and belonging. Contrary to the name, I propose that affective theory does not allow as much autonomy in relationship creation as may have been previously theorized (e.g. Clough, 2007, Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, von Scheve, 2018).

In this chapter, I also investigate the temporality of belonging. Sophie had long periods of time where she was active with Isha and when she disengaged from the organization. Additionally, Sophie sees knowledge production as a source of belonging and empowerment. This knowledge production has the potential to be asynchronous and atemporal. Examining Sophie’s experiences at Isha provides us with an excellent view into the temporal aspects of bond formation and affective belonging. I engage with concepts such as enduring belonging, fleeting belonging and “out of time” belonging to better understand, through an affective lens, narrations of self through emotional experiences, distributed cultural expectations, and physical locality (Bruner, 1987, Markus & Nurius, 1986, Mason, 2008, Mason-Schrock, 1996, May, 2016). In Sophie’s case, her feelings of belonging are complicated and flexible, which aligns with Yuval-Davis ’understanding of belonging as malleable and experienced differently by every person (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 199). Increased understanding of different layers of

belonging may provide more insight into belonging as an affective tool for social change over time.

The last major theme of this chapter relates to intersectionality as a lived experience important to the creation of and maintenance of belonging. Intersectionality can help make the personal political, one of Sophie's main goals with her activism. Sophie hopes to make Isha a more inclusive space for people with a variety of identities and lived experiences. Inclusion can prioritize the experiences of those in the mainstream (Heng and White, 2018). Examining Isha, an organization of middle-class, highly educated women of varying races and ages, offers a useful lens to consider the importance of an intersectional approach when it comes to belonging and to acknowledge the shortcomings of using Isha as a beacon of belonging for social change. In this chapter, I examine how affect may be a tool to make sure including programs, modalities, and actions are indeed inclusive.

As I examine the themes previously mentioned, it is useful to provide information about Sophie's journey to Isha. Sophie came to Isha rather accidentally. She was in her late twenties and working at a high tech firm when Israel's Prevention of Sexual Harassment Law was passed, prohibiting sexual harassment in the workplace. Because Sophie was seen as the feminist in the office, she was charged with incorporating the law into her workplace. Sophie did not see herself as a feminist at the time, but she quickly took charge of the task, inviting a woman from a feminist organization in Haifa to speak to the vice presidents and president of her company. She remembers the event well:

> This amazingly charismatic woman came and gave this amazing workshop to a crowd of giggling VPs and the president who weren't very serious about it at

> the beginning, but became quite serious after their workshop and introduction to the law. And I was thinking during the workshop for us, how stupid these men are. Stupid. How stupid they are, really. But the second thing I thought was that I wanted to do what this woman was doing. I don't want to come back to this work. I want to do this.

Women who accept the basic tenets of feminist philosophy are often hesitant or opposed to calling themselves feminists (Meijs, Ratliff, & Lammers, 2017, p.293). In 2000, around the time that Sophie was working at the high tech firm, over 90% of U.S. women agreed with at least some feminist philosophies but only 16.6 % identified as a feminist (Burn et al. 2000). Women often do not identify with feminism because they see themselves as unlike the stereotypes of other feminist women, and there is a disconnect between their self-view and their view of other feminists (Meijs, Ratliff, & Lammers, 2017, p. 294). This schema is not productive for women or feminist causes. Maartje Meijs et al. argues that until women identify with feminism, they are unlikely to take collective action that would benefit themselves and other women (Meijs et al., 2017, p. 294). Social constructions of feminism informed Sophie's ideas of how she could belong. Affective theory allows one to understand that social norms constrained Sophie's ability to see herself within the sphere of feminism.

Though Sophie didn't think of herself as a feminist, feminist ways of thinking came naturally to her. While men giggled over comments about sexual harassment, Sophie could not help but see them as idiots because she recognized that a lifetime of slights adds up to something bigger. For her, impact was more important than intent—a sexist joke among a group of men could result in long-term harm to a woman. Sophie

could expand the temporality of her experienced harassment to predict further negative consequences and ways of acting in the future. During the workshop, she could not stop thinking about a male colleague who jokingly slapped her butt while she was pregnant, a time when she felt such harassment was especially inappropriate and painful. Sophie wanted her body and her pride to be unassailed by her colleagues. This autonomy over herself and her space is a priority for Sophie that was disrespected in the workplace. Workplaces often privilege men's sexuality and treat women as sexualized beings. Men's sexuality is seen as biologically-driven, and sexual harassment by men towards women has been seen as "just a joke" or not a big deal (Collinson & Collinson, 1996, p. 30). In this sense, one can understand men as being trained to view themselves as above the law when it comes to workplace sexual harassment because while men typically initiate sexual encounters with women in the workplace, it is usually women who face the consequences of these encounters (p. 30). Additionally, women often do not report workplace sexual harassment and have little faith that if they were to report harassment, there would be consequences for the offenders (p. 31). As these men, who lived in the seat of privilege, brushed off threats of lawsuits, Sophie could see how their authority and lived experience trained them to think they were immune from wrong-doing and above the justice system.

Sophie did not yet know what it entailed to do feminist work. She didn't know how to participate in anti-harassment and anti-violence against women work, but she knew that this is what she wanted to do with her life. By the time Sophie was 30 and her first baby was a few weeks old, she found the rape crisis center and was beginning a weeks-long training course that equipped her to talk to victims of domestic violence.

Talma also found belonging at a rape-crisis center. While one might think of the violence of rape crisis centers as isolating places where belonging is difficult, these centers often create a feeling of safety for the advocates there and can lead to a sense of belonging (Bemiller & Williams, 2011). “I remember arriving to the course with my newborn son who was a few weeks old, and he just underwent the course with me,” she said. She was proud of her son’s early feminist training and would later take both of her sons to Germany while she completed feminist research and participated in feminist activism.

Sophie describes the building that the rape crisis center and Isha were previously housed in: “It was a beautiful space, especially because in the entrance you had a long corridor and on both sides were different organizations, so you couldn't go to your own room or space without bumping into other women or hearing about other things going on in the space.” It was that physical connection, both in terms of building and contact through bumping into one another, that allowed Sophie to start volunteering at Isha. She said that it took her a full year before she joined Isha, and she has now been part of the organization for almost two decades. Sophie, now in her 40s, is a feminist professor in cultural studies at the University of Haifa and is an essential member of Isha. Her energy fills any room she enters. Sophie’s infectious smile and classic button-up shirts defined my experience, and those of many others, at Isha.

3.2 Activism and Emotional Attachment as Pathways to Belonging

Despite Sophie’s feelings of alienation during her first couple years at Isha, she now feels like it is the place where she most belongs. During my time at Isha, it was clear that Sophie was one of the most known and loved members there. I saw her as she walked into rooms and knew every woman there. She was always in a crowd of women,

talking and laughing. Sophie attributes these experiences to both social connections and activist work. Activism is a pathway for belonging for many LGBT people (Jones, 2018). Activism often does not require participants to have a stable identity in order to belong to the activist community and can support and facilitate a belonging that may shift and change over time (Jones, 2018, p. 78). In a world defined by static, compulsive heterosexuality and hegemonic power structures, fluidity can be helpful for LGBT identities, activism, and belonging. For Sophie, activist projects have been her primary path to belonging. She first found belonging in the rape crisis center, which was primarily a hotline when she joined. It was when she began doing this work that she first considered herself a feminist and an activist. Many women begin to take on a feminist identity after joining a group or community where feminist identity is common. A feminist identity is especially adapted as part of a desire for collective action (Burn et al., 2000). For Sophie, her feminist and activist identities are about "doing something in order to change the world." Her identity as an activist and her goal of structural changes in the world provides a way of looking at the world, a lens through which she affects change, and which helps her find and feel belonging in feminist communities. Her ability to impact change, her capacity for autonomy, is intimately tied to her feeling of belonging (that can transfer from locale to locale).

Sophie has been involved in several projects that have solidified her understanding of herself as an activist and feminist. These projects center on the need for physical safety and women's freedom from male violence—a topic also discussed in chapter two. Over a decade ago, she was involved in producing a manual for UN resolution 1325, which acknowledges the disproportionate and unique impact of armed

conflict on women and girls (Olsson & Gizelis, 2015). As an organization, Isha successfully lobbied Knesset members to adopt the amendment to guarantee women's involvement in peace negotiations and security policy. Women have long been associated with peace movements where they have preferred to work primarily with other women across ethnic and national boundaries rather than with men, something Isha is known for (Yuval-Davis & Stoetzler, 2002, p. 340). Sophie was also involved in the Our Bodies, Ourselves project, which wrote and translated an Israeli-Palestinian version of the 1970 American book about women's health and sexuality. "I edited the lesbian section," Sophie said. The 1970 American *Our Bodies, Ourselves* helped create a feminist movement that centered the female body. Feminists believed that until women gained information about their own bodies, health, and sexuality, there would be no equality (Kline, 2010).

Additionally, Sophie established a women's learning center for women who live in remote areas in Israel. These centers encourage women who live in these communities to educate themselves and other women and girls within the community about sexual and gender violence and other topics that deal with their identity as women. Sophie follows a feminist framework that sees education as liberatory for women and girls. Through feminist pedagogy, which focuses on the way that women and girls have been disserved by the education system and highlights women's voices and needs, women and girls can find hope and freedom (Mejiuni, 2013, p. 2).

When Sophie was in Berlin working on her dissertation, she co-founded a group called Salaam Shalom in her neighborhood, which created space for Muslims and Jews to work together in Germany. She says that now there are several such chapters throughout Europe. It was through these projects that Sophie felt belonging and purpose. Each of

these projects focused on women's freedom of movement and philosophy and worked to make women and girls 'lives better. Sophie needs to feel as though she can affect change, change that has temporal longevity, to find contentment and belonging. These schemas, in line with activist thoughts, inform the belonging that she feels within Isha. By identifying the characteristics needed for this belonging, readers can help cultivate these traits in other activist spaces to increase belonging.

In addition to her commitment to activist projects, Sophie found a sense of belonging through the social connections she found at Isha. She explained, "I have a very strong sense of belonging to Isha. For me, it's a social space. So some of my best friends ever, you know, are here. It's easy to feel comfortable here." She says that even if she is not speaking to her friends at Isha every week or going out for coffee with them, she feels a sense of connectedness with them. Many women saw Isha as their family and the women there as "sisters and mothers." Sophie feels this sense of emotional attachment is similar to that of family ties. In many Western cultures, family is often seen as a given, wherein families do not always agree but they do offer an unending source of bonding and community (May 2016, Spencer & Pahl, 2006). It is through "enduring belonging" that has been created over time which allows friendships to act as familial ties.

Sophie explains that women of Isha, "know your life story and what has been going on with you over the years. So, in that sense, this will always be a place where I belong and it's part of my identity being a member of Isha. You know, it's something I take pride in." This sentiment was common among the women I met at Isha. While enduring belonging is created through sustained contact over longer periods of time, belonging that remains regardless of temporal and spatial lengths are considered "out of

time" and have a mystical, magical, and ungrounded nature (May, 2016). These relationships often form when someone feels as though another has seen and understood their whole self (May, 2016). However, using an affective lens, it is possible to understand these "ethereal affinities" in a new light. Affect, one's relationship with others, themselves, the world, and institutions, can be independent of time and space. Inherited trauma may pass from generation to generation and a friendship may last a lifetime. By understanding belonging through a lens of relationships, sometimes separate from time, theorists will be able to further understand and explore potentialities for belonging.

Several women had been at Isha for decades and others felt that they grew up there. While many women were attracted to Isha because they were passionate about activism and feminism, they stayed, in part because of the social connections and feeling as though they were wholly known. I observed many women coming to Isha just to hang out with friends, catch up on gossip, or simply be in the space with other women. Though activist spaces are largely influenced by a need for change and productivity, emotional bonds creating enduring belonging made it so there was not an expectation that women in the space had to work or be productive, and there was an understanding that women could come just to be among friends.

The feeling of home Sophie experiences at Isha is related to place belongingness and identifications and emotional attachments to various collectivities and groupings (Antonsich, 2011; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Yuval-Davis says that emotional attachments may shift at different times in a person's life depending on the situation and what they may desire from a group or identity (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 199). Sophie

describes her belonging to Isha and the women there as something she takes pride in and a comfort. The feeling of comfort in particular is something that resonated with many of the women I talked to at Isha. Many described the feeling of getting to be themselves or feeling less afraid. Talma, whom I focus on in chapter two, described it as a place women come for shelter. I personally felt comforted by simply being at Isha. No matter what happened before in the scorching desert sun, when I stepped in the door I knew I would be greeted by ice cold water, warm greetings, and plenty of important work to contribute to if I wanted it.

3.3 Boundary Maintenance and Belonging

Sophie experiences a sense of connection to Isha and the women there more than any other organization or place. However, she criticizes some of the ways in which some Isha members maintain boundaries. Yuval-Davis refers to the "dirty business of boundary maintenance" as "potentially meeting other people and deciding whether they stand inside or outside the imaginary boundary line of the nation and/ or other communities of belonging, whether they are 'us 'or 'them'" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 204). Here, I examine how definitions of the "not me" and Sophie's desire for autonomy in Isha relate to intersectional social locations, which Yuval-Davis claims is, "the task of social research that no theorization can replace" to connect ideas of identity to greater understanding and leverage for social action (Yuval Davis, 2010).

After Sophie started volunteering at Isha, she felt tremendous pressure from other Isha members to divorce her husband, come out as a lesbian, and begin dating a woman. Sophie says this was a common evolution among lesbians at Isha and consequently a script she was expected to follow in her life. This expectation made it harder for Sophie

to feel comfortable with her own identity and sense of self. Cultural life scripts are "shared knowledge about personal events expected to be experienced by individuals within a society and used as a framework for life story narration" (Janssen, 2021, p. 521). Life scripts can be limiting to individuals who do not identify with prescribed narratives for their lives. For instance, women experiencing violence from their male partner may understand the cultural script of "abused wife." However, if women do not identify with the narrative of the "victim" as part of that script, they may be less likely to seek help (Loseke, 2007, p. 14). Sophie recalls:

> When I did fall for a woman, it became terrifying for me because the pressure on me to do exactly that was enormous. And also people started asking my closest friends, am I going out with a woman, am I interested in a woman? And it was like, it was such a pressure which made me so uncomfortable in the women only space. It should have felt comfortable and at home to do. But there wasn't tolerance or patience for me to actually go through whatever process I needed to in order to articulate whatever identity I felt. It was kind of, you know, imposed on me.

Sophie leverages a word, "tolerance," which many gay people in the U.S. and Israel use when talking about heterosexual people who are willing to accept gay people even if they do not agree with them (Sandfort, 2000). Sophie uses "tolerance" to talk about her own community in order to show the conflict and discrepancy between herself and the other women at Isha at the time. While she was part of Isha, she also felt separate from some of the other women there at the time.

In Sophie's case, boundary maintenance for the lesbian Isha community included direct pressure for Sophie to go from identifying as a heterosexual woman working at a high tech company to a lesbian woman working within a feminist organization. While Sophie eventually came out and started dating women, she felt uncomfortable with the idea that this was a requirement to be a part of the lesbian community at Isha. Sophie wanted the autonomy to define her own self-narration, life path, and sexuality. The pressure and coercion of fellow Isha members made her defensive and more closed off. Sophie wanted to discover who she was, how she identified, and who she loved in her own time and felt rushed by some of the other women at Isha who wanted her to join lesbian culture very quickly. Sophie says that some of the other women at Isha wanted her to go to every lesbian event or party and start dating women right away. Some studies have found that groups with flexible boundaries allow for improved identity exploration and development (Townley, 2020).

Sophie did not have the same space for fluidity in Isha, and was instead pushed into an identity that made her uncomfortable. Sophie felt that such maintenance hindered her process of belonging. After she felt that she had been pushed to come out and start dating women, she stopped coming to Isha as much. Being forced out of the closet can be bad for one's mental and physical health (Steinfeld, 2020). For Sophie, it made her feel anxious and caused her to distance herself from many of the women at Isha. She remembers:

> I actually hardly came to Isha L'Isha. I just came to specific activities that, you know, were interesting to me and stuff like that. But I was hardly here. It really drove me nuts. I was very angry for being pushed and bullied. It felt like being

> bullied, and exposed. And you know, like very vulnerable to identify as something that I wasn't sure about identifying. It's really alarming. So that was a long instance of not belonging.

Belonging requires trust and those who have less trust towards social relationships and institutions feel less belonging towards these communities and institutions (Resh & Sabbagh, 2014). After being "pushed and bullied," as Sophie describes her experience, it took her a long time to trust the other women of Isha again and to feel a strong sense of belonging. Yuval-Davis writes that "The politics of belonging includes also struggles around the determination of what is involved in belonging, in being a member of a community, and of what roles specific social locations and specific narratives of identity play in this" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 205). She posits political, public levers of power on individuals: social locations and social narratives of identity. However, Sophie also resisted the "script" of lesbian exploration because she felt as though others were trying to write her emotional and affective experience. Sophie was told how to feel about her sexuality and place in Isha. This may have been a similar experience to how she was directed to feel at her tech job about sexual harassment and butt slaps by male colleagues. By examining the emotional and experiential layer of Sophie's experience, we can move beyond political analyses of belonging and further investigate the multitude of layers of belonging.

While some scholars describe affect as an "an autonomous force . . . that refers to bodies 'reciprocal capacities 'to affect and be affected,'" it is clear that affect is not autonomous. In Sophie's case, her feelings and ability to interact with other members of Isha were impacted by those around her and the social situation she was in. It is

impossible for any two bodies to interact without the outside influence of scripts. social norms, or other such players. While Sophie feels as though she needs autonomy, there is no such action that happens truly without added input. Instead, autonomy may be more helpful if thought about on a scale with some actions being more autonomous, or less directly impacted by outside forces, compared to other actions. When it comes to belonging, self-evaluation of autonomy as well as seemingly supporting the autonomy of others can be hallmarks of positive relationships (Deci & Ryan, 2014). It is necessary to understand the concept of autonomy and scale upon which it sits when thinking about belonging creation in Western societies.

To belong to the lesbian community at Isha, Sophie felt she needed to fulfill the social location of lesbianism and a narrow narration of sexuality. Discovery of sexuality was to begin with Sophie divorcing her husband and end with Sophie dating a woman and being fully out as a lesbian. However, Sophie felt like she needed more time to figure out her identity and what she wanted out of life. Sophie didn't know if she identified as a lesbian, and she is still not so sure. Many queer and trans people resist identity labels and feel that the identity labels that do exist don't accurately represent how they feel about themselves (Galupo et al., 2016). For Sophie, her sexual identity is more malleable and less firm.

3.4 Belonging and Intersectionality

For Sophie, the emotional attachment she feels to Isha and its members is not purely positive. "Belonging is complicated in the sense that I both feel belonging and many times also feel alienated. And I could, you know, on the same day feel both feelings in the same space," she told me. She says that having these conflicting feelings

at the same time is part of belonging to a community. This feeling of belonging as complicated and flexible aligns with Yuval-Davis ’understanding of belonging as malleable and experienced differently by every person (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 199). Sophie understands her sense of belonging differently, not just over time, but within the same day. This understanding is also deeply linked to emotion and feeling. Sophie explained, “I will feel a lot of pride, but then stuff can really drive me nuts! People drive me nuts. I have very limited patience, but it’s also part of being part of a place.” Questioning and complicating her experiences is part of Sophie’s activist and community life as well as her academic life. As an academic, she analyzes and critiques the world around her, never settling for clear explanations or binary answers. As an activist at Isha, she does the same. This is related to the importance of schemas for shaping affect, the way in which an individual may interact with the world, and consequently belonging. Where before academic and activist schemas were helpful for Sophie developing a sense of belonging, here they create a way of thinking that makes analyzing and critiquing a common practice. In this case, Sophie analyzes and critiques her own sense of belonging.

Much of Sophie’s conflicted sense of belonging is about emotion and feeling, but for some women at Isha, this conflict is about being seen or understood in one area of their life but not in another. Intersectionality is an important consideration here. Intersectionality allows scholars to take into account different portions of someone’s identity, as well as how those identities work together, in order to understand the personal and political experiences of a person (Heng and White, 2018). For Assia, a queer Russian woman at Isha, Isha is where she feels most at home and understood. In other

areas of her life, she says that people don't understand her feminism, her bisexuality, or her polyamory. "Women at Isha understand the different layers of oppression. I am totally comfortable here," she said. Some members of oppressed groups say that they feel a connection to those of different oppressed groups and are less likely to discriminate against other oppressed people because of those connections (Croteau, 2002, p. 248).

However, Assia said that in the past, her Russian identity was not fully understood or appreciated by the women at Isha. For instance, once Isha was putting together a project commemorating the anniversary of the organization. Assia wanted to write something in Russian but was told by another member that she should write in Hebrew. She remembers, "She said you should write in Hebrew. She thought it was an empowering message, that you should be free. But I said if a Palestinian woman came to you and said I want to write in Arabic, would you tell her, no you should write in Hebrew? No you wouldn't." Assia says that it wasn't until years later that the woman agreed with her. Now, she says that Isha includes a Russian translation of all its literature and information. Perhaps the reason that Isha literature was translated in Arabic and not in Russian is because Russian is not automatically associated with a need for representation or oppression the way that Arabic may be. In Israel, the need for Arabic writing on signs, in books, and in public spaces generally is seen as part of a wider struggle for representation of Arab people (Shohamy & Gorter, 2009). There is no comparable struggle for Russian language signs and representation. However, many of the women Isha works with who have been trafficked into prostitution are Russian speaking women who cannot read Hebrew. Members of activist organizations, particularly those who experience multiple layers of oppression, want to feel represented

within activist spaces, and a lack of representation can lead to feelings of unbelonging (Danielle, 2019). Assia remembers another story where she felt not entirely seen by her community at Isha:

> We had this discussion of having researchers together to have a research forum. And there is many Ashkenazi women and someone says, 'yes we should try to bring more Palestinian women and more Ethiopian women. 'And then I say, 'well and more Russian-speaking women. 'And this person who is Mizrahi says, 'well Russians get along fine. There's no need. 'So still there's not enough understanding. It happens everywhere and even at Isha where it's a problem that we face. And the fact that we are white and Jewish doesn't mean that all our problems are solved.

Assia points to what she considers invisible oppressions. She sees Mizrahi and Ethiopian members of Isha as more clearly oppressed, but she feels that because of Russian members 'skin color and religion, they are overlooked. Assia says that she feels happy at Isha but still struggles with her Russianness not being understood by many of the women there. Russian speaking women and women from former Soviet countries are trafficked into Israel for the purpose of prostitution at high rates. At any moment in Israel, several thousand women are sex trafficked into the country. Most of these women are brought to the country from the former Soviet Union. One third of these women are mothers (Peled & Parker, 2013, p. 576). Even without the issue of trafficking, it would still be important to represent Russian women in Isha's activism. Seventeen percent of Israelis are Russian-speakers, and it is important to represent the Russian language in Isha literature and lectures. Assia also says that Russian speaking women, though primarily white and

Jewish, are not fully accepted into Israeli society. Russian immigrants are often not seen as fully Israeli or even fully Jewish and experience discrimination and a lack of acceptance from non-Russian Israelis. While some Russian immigrants attempt to rid themselves of their Russianness, Assia believes that instead Israeli society and Isha specifically should make changes to be more inclusive (Kuntsman, 2003).

Adi Kuntsman examines a similar phenomenon in some lesbian Russians in Israel who escape othering and find belonging by adopting a lesbian identity. One of her participants said, "Through my lesbian identity I gained a sense of belonging, ceased being a foreigner, and unlike many other immigrants, cut off any connection to my Russian roots as all they could offer me was the impossibility of being my true lesbian self" (Kuntsman, 2003, p. 301).This participant sees her Russian identity as something that oppresses her and her lesbian identity as the source of greater community and belonging. Other participants voiced the same experience. Often, inclusive spaces can prioritize the experiences and norms of mainstream, in this case middle-class, white, Israeli, women (Heng and White, 2018). In Kunstman's work, perhaps this distinction is due to their Russian identity as something that was forced upon them and their lesbian identity as something they discovered over time and chose to find community with. While the women in Kuntsman's study find belonging in queer and lesbian communities and gain privilege from that, their Russian identity is erased and they are estranged from their Russian community (Kuntsman, 2003). Belonging, in this case, means exclusion of the Russian community in order to feel more at home with the lesbian community. Inclusion does not always lead to all parts of oneself being included. Though Assia does not want to erase her Russian identity and actively reminds women at Isha to include

Russian women, her known queerness, Jewishness, and whiteness often make her Russian identity invisible to other activists.

Assia's statement that "Women at Isha understand the different layers of oppression" speaks to an understanding of intersectionality. An intersectional feminism is important so that individuals feel included and accepted, and their identities and life experiences are represented within a particular space or community. While all of the women I interviewed felt belonging within Isha, some felt that parts of their identity were not represented. Many of the women I spoke to talked about how diverse Isha is, and in fact the group is known for including women across many barriers. However, Sophie says that Isha has a limited diversity. She said, "Isha is a community with a lot of diversity. But, it is a limited diversity. So it is diverse in terms of nationality and race and class, but I think that most of the women around me are lower middle class. And they are educated and most of them live in urban spaces. So I think it's quite homogenous in that way." Almost all of the women I interviewed described themselves as being from the middle class and having at least a college education. Many women also had Master's degrees and PhDs. Feminist movements around the world have been criticized by being made up of women mostly from the middle class (Epstein, 2002). While it is important that Isha includes women across age, race, and national divides, it still lacks in class diversity. By examining their own activism and taking concrete steps towards inclusion, Sophie and other activists hope that this will change and more working class women will feel comfortable and included at Isha.

3.5 Inclusivity as a Practice: Feminist Knowledge Production as a means to Empowerment

Sophie says that she hopes to make Isha more inclusive by forming more meaningful partnerships with women who, for instance, struggle with housing. She believes that her work at the HFI could be especially important in creating space for a greater diversity of women. She believes that a diversity of women should be knowledge creators at the HFI, and she hopes to provide fellowships and scholarships for women to do so. She said, "One of the things that the HFI stands for or has potential for is to be a space for women to become the owners of the production of knowledge." Historically, knowledge production has not been in the hands of women or working class people (Sandvik & Lemaitre, 2013). Isha often works with working class women and provides services for them, but Sophie believes that it is also important that these women are knowledge producers within the organization. Part of this is related to autonomy--to create knowledge is to inform the experience of future knowledge seekers.

The HFI is the largest and only feminist archive and library in Israel. Its stated mission is to "collect and document the history of feminist activism in Israel from 1970 to the present, to make women's social and political contribution visible and to inspire future generations" (Haifa Feminist). Countless women activists and women-centered organizations have donated their personal and institutional archives to the project, totaling thousands of documents in 147 collections and 12 personal archives (American Jewish and Israeli Feminism Archives Collaborative). Archives are often associated with academia (Evans, S. & Simpson, 2019). However, Sophie believes Isha should tell a

diversity of feminist stories and that those stories can be told in unconventional and compelling ways.

The HFI was founded at Isha in 2007 by a group of volunteers, including Sophie, who work inside and outside of the academy. During my time in Haifa, I worked at the HFI almost daily digitizing Marcia Freedman's papers and cataloguing books in Arabic and English. I observed a diversity of groups of women, sometimes speaking Hebrew, sometimes Arabic or English. The week before I interviewed Sophie, a group of women who were experiencing housing insecurity came to the HFI to talk about their experiences. International volunteers often helped out at the HFI, learning and relearning how to use the clunky computer and scanners. Veteran Isha members worked on identifying women in old photographs, feeling a sense of urgency to label before the memories were forgotten entirely. Since 2015, a group of volunteers has been organizing the Haifa Lesbian Archive, which works to catalogue, digitize, and create an online resource for the public (Haifa Feminist). Sophie sees knowledge production as a source of belonging and empowerment, this knowledge production has the potential to be asynchronous and atemporal. By creating these archives, she gives women the chance to form bonds and think about belonging across time and space. A woman in 2020 may be able to learn about and connect with the ideas, thoughts, and pictures (a physical embodiment of a physical embodiment) of a feminist in the 1970s.

The HFI also hosts several activities and lectures related to feminist history and scholarship, and feminist fellows affiliated with the HFI present their work. Fellows do not have to hold a PhD or come from the world of academia. When I was in Haifa, the HFI volunteers were working towards getting small grants for researchers at the HFI and

Fellows. Sophie wants everyone to be able to tell their stories, not just women with PhDs or women who are viewed as academics, and she wants all these women's experiences and stories to be taken seriously. Sophie said, "I want all these women to have ownership and develop their experiences and the experiences of others into a repository. And that could work as a means to, you know, make noise there, go to the press." For Sophie, the HFI is a way of making the personal political and connecting history to the present day in a way that will inspire action. Though the role of researcher or scholar has been assigned to those with PhDs, she believes that these roles can be and should be for everyone. This too is a way to give people power and use intersectionality as a means to engage with activism ideals.

3.6 Queering Isha and Lesbian Representation

Another way Sophie hopes to make Isha and the HFI more inclusive is by making it more queer. The term queer often refers to non-normative sexuality and can also focus on the limitation of categories of identity (Denise & Corey, 2012). For her, queering these spaces is not specific to issues of sexuality, but rather opening them up to people who may be previously excluded, particularly men. The idea of queering spaces has much in common with intersectionality--taking into account multiple aspects of an individual's identity and creating space for all parts of an individual as well as the individual as a whole to thrive. However, intersectionality studies is often more concerned with issues of equity than queer studies. Sophie says it doesn't make sense to exclude men who are feminist. Some feminists agree with Sophie and say that feminist spaces should include men but argue that men's privilege should be examined within these spaces (Peretz, 2020).

While Sophie feels a deep sense of belonging to much of the philosophy at Isha, she also feels that many aspects of Isha are outdated. Though some of the women at Isha certainly agree with Sophie, most of the women I interviewed do not. For instance, Assia told me, "Isha being all women is crucial to my belonging. Crucial! It is the most important thing." Assia and other women at Isha feel that it is imperative to their physical safety to keep Isha and all-women space. Assia and other women at Isha who know or work with women who have been trafficked into prostitution believe that women who have experienced such levels of gendered violence would feel especially unsafe or uncomfortable if Isha were to include men. For Isha to open up to male and non-women identifying members, the Collective would have to vote by consensus, which Sophie thinks it would not do any time soon. Many members of the Collective I spoke to said that they would never vote in favor of men members of Isha and the women-focused aspect of the organization made them feel safer.

This conflict was especially interesting to me because Isha's women-centered focus is one of the reasons I was attracted to the organization in the first place. In the U.S., I noticed for years that women-centered and women-only feminist organizations were disappearing, and it was interesting to me that Isha, a women-centered organization, was thriving in Haifa. I wanted to know more about how Isha could continue to be such a powerful force in Haifa.

The issue of queering Isha and including non-women members is related to the conflict between queer and lesbian women-focused identity and scholarship. Many scholars believe that for the past two decades, queer theory has pushed out lesbian identity and a focus on women specifically, in favor of a queer lens in both academia and

activism (Walters, 1996; Frankfort-Nachmias, C. & Shadmi, E., 2005). As a scholar herself, Sophie is steeped in queer theory and views queerness as more flexible and inclusive than a woman-focused approach. Suzanna Walters '1996 "From Here to Queer" explores early clashes between queer theory and activism against lesbian feminist identity and activism. She argues that through the construction of a queer hegemony, which attempts to "transcend" previous movements and identities, feminism and lesbian feminism will be marginalized and demonized as essentialist and as upholding hetero/homo male/female binaries (Walters, 1996, p. 837). While queerness is often a catch-all term and attempts to pull many identities and bodies together, lesbian activism focuses on the specificity of women and women's bodies. Walters writes that the popularity of all things *queer* inside and outside of the academy may lead to the disappearing lesbian through the erasure of lesbian specificity. She proposes that a queer hegemony threatens "the enormous difference that gender makes, evacuates the importance of feminism, and rewrites the history of lesbian feminism generally" (Walters, 1996, p. 843). Gendered violence is a type of discrimination and inequality that affects mostly women and girls. Women and girls are physically and emotionally attacked specifically because they are women and girls (Sanford et al., 2016, p. 2). This violence may include rape, sexual enslavement, forced pregnancy, which are crimes that specifically target the female body. Around the world, gender does make an enormous difference (p. 1).

According to Walters, queer theory paints the history of feminism as homophobic and rigid and queer theory as an open or transcendent alternative to that rigidity. She argues that queerness is theorized as being beyond gender, and women-

focused movements and theories are seen as rather old-fashioned (Walters, 1996, p. 843). At the same time, however, she proposes that gay male sex and its histories have become privileged as "the very model of radical chic" or queerness (Walters, 1996, p. 850). For instance, she criticizes the centrality of drag and camp as a signifier of queerness, as seen in Judith Butler's work, particularly when "performance" is not grounded in any sort of social or cultural context and when gender is about primarily play and performance. This, too, often results in a privileging of gay men's experiences as radical and queer and a distancing from lesbian feminist ideas as essentialist and not thoroughly radical (Walters, 1996, p. 854). I will further expand on the conflict between gay men and lesbians in the fifth chapter. As Maya explains, in queer spaces that include lesbians and gay men, lesbians are not listened to and gay men dominate the space.

Erella Shadmi expands on the possible harms of queer theory on lesbians in *Sappho in the Holy Land:*

> Queer theory avoids the difference between lesbians and gay men up to the point of inclusion of female and male homosexuality in one monolithic category- the category of queer. Queer politics has been appropriated by gay men and subsume and negate lesbian sexuality (cv., Jeffreys 1990). Queer perspective represents a movement of the lesbian community toward a sexual identity that draws its meaning from the gay men's community, which rejects femininity and abandons the female body… As a theory growing in academic circles- in Israel as elsewhere- the queer perspective is distanced from socially lived experiences and femininity, that is, from the female and the lesbian experience (Frankfort-Nachmias, C. & Shadmi, E., 2005, p.).

In Isha, the exclusion of men is intimately tied to women's physical safety. As explored in chapter two, physical safety is a shaping force for many of the women who wish to belong within Isha. Perhaps it is Sophie's academic background that makes her prioritize queer experiences.

Sheila Jeffreys '*Unpacking Queer Politics* suggests that lesbian feminist activists have long resisted the idea that lesbian and gay male identity could be unified as a social category and that gay men's interests are the same as that of lesbians. The history of separatist lesbian activism illustrates specific concerns for gender equality in every sector and reproductive and bodily rights that simply do not apply to gay men. Isha has been historically a lesbian and women-focused organization that focuses on the unique struggles for women. Jeffreys writes that since at least the 1990s, an outpouring of scholarship and political theory on gay and lesbian identity has started from the idea that lesbians and gay men have a unified social identity with a homogenous agenda. Current news and popular culture articles that discuss "the LGBT community" or "the queer community" reinforce these ideas. However, she argues that this so-called unified queer or LGBT identity has always been the agenda of primarily white gay men, and in "mixed" political organizing, women's interests are routinely excluded and contradicted (Jeffreys, 2003, p. 9-10). Talma recognized this in mixed gender activist spaces and noticed that men's voices take over women's voices in these spaces.

In Haifa, many young queer people call the Communities House for Pride and Tolerance home. This space is an LGBT community center built in 2017, which includes a clinic in partnership with the Israel AIDS Task Force, offices of LGBT organizations, and three halls for events. During my time in Haifa, I visited the Communities House for

several events including drag shows, parties, and an LGBT history tour. While all the women I interviewed at Isha are queer or lesbian, they all said that they felt more at home at Isha than the Communities House. Many of them, including Sophie, said that the space was very youth-centered. Others said that it was too queer and too centered on gay male identity. While most women I talked to appreciate the space and were happy it existed, they said that it didn't feel quite right for them. Indeed, every time I visited the space, I felt that it centered very much on gay men and it had mostly gay male leaders. Lesbian and women were privileged there like they were at Isha, so it made sense that many women I interviewed didn't feel as much at home there.

Bonnie Morris writes in *The Disappearing L: Erasure of Lesbian Spaces and Culture* that queer identity and queer activism distances itself from categories of "woman" and "lesbian" and is thus replacing and erasing lesbian feminist identity. She argues that as we move further into the twenty first century, "we are witnessing the almost flippant dismissal of recent, late-twentieth century lesbian culture, particularly the loss of physical sites such as women's bookstores and women's musical festivals and their material legacies (books, journals, albums, tapes, magazines, interviews)" (Morris, 2016, p. 13). While Israel seems to have more of a focus on women-centered spaces and lesbian spaces than the U.S., much has been lost. CLaF was the longest running lesbian organization in Israel and disbanded in 2007. On CLaF's tenth anniversary in 1997, five hundred lesbians gathered in celebration, something unlikely today. When thinking about boundary-setting as a form of social identity, it is important to think about the benefits which different spaces can provide. The concerns raised by Bonnie Morris in the *The*

Disappearing L are valid and represent the dissolution of a way of being that many in Isha find necessary and that many others in the future may too identify with.

The discussion of queer and lesbian, women-only spaces is part of a conversation about the boundaries between academia and activism. Sophie feels that academics who do not do any activist work outside of academia often see themselves as activists and claim a great deal of space in the activist world. These academics also influence how those inside and outside the academy understand identity and activism. This echoes Shadmi and Walters' understanding of queer theorists as influencing the way people understand feminism, women, and gender. Walters and Shadmi suggest that queer theorists are removed from the lived experience of feminist activists and lesbians yet do harm to these communities from the comfort of their academic chairs (Walters, 1996; Shadmi, 2005). Harm comes in the erasure of women's spaces and the ignoring of women's specific needs and oppressions. Sophie spoke about her own internal conflict about being a feminist activist who is also part of the academy:

> I'm a bit ambivalent about relating to academia and teaching as activism because I think it's just still perhaps easy for people who don't do anything apart from academia just to kind of adopt this title of activist. I constantly think about hook's statement from the early eighties that feminism became a lifestyle. And I can see it around me. People actively identify as feminist and then kind of make the most horrible statements. Socially conscious is a lifestyle. It's a hipster thing. It's a middle class thing.

Sophie compares academics who are removed from activist spaces to the liberal middle class. In this case, when Sophie says that feminism and activism can be a

"lifestyle," she does not mean a constant, deep commitment to anti-oppression ideologies and movement. Instead, she uses the word lifestyle to refer to the way some people call themselves activists and feminists as part of a coded language to identify their social location: that of educated, liberal, and "woke." One of these feminists may indicate their liberal philosophy by opposing the gender pay gap but in the same breath say that all Palestinians are homophobic. Their activism consists of an occasional post on social media, and their feminism rarely takes the form of disruption. There is not a philosophical understanding of activist and feminist thought processes and moral viewpoints. Instead, according to Sophie's thinking, these middle class individuals label themselves as activists and feminists to communicate their social location: that of privileged, morally inscrutable individuals.

3.7 Conclusion

While Sophie has conflicting feelings about some of her experiences at Isha and about activism more generally, she can't imagine leaving the community for good. During one of our conversations, I asked her what she likes about her feminist activism at Isha. She responded that she couldn't see herself doing anything else:

> It's as if you would ask me about what is positive about motherhood. That's a big question. I am a mother and I am an activist, you know what I mean? It's like asking what I like about breathing. No really. Or like drinking water. It's just that I can't imagine myself not connecting in a way to some kind of activism. I guess when something is a part of my identity, like taking care of my kids, which is not necessarily something I like all the time or enjoy all the time, and from time to time I do take kind of recesses or interrupt, but it is part

> of my identity… I've been doing it for so many years that it would just be weird to stop. I guess it is a very good venue to do something with my horrible anger.

For Sophie, activism is like breathing, it is innate and inescapable. The way that she engages in activism is her ontology, her very way of being in the world. Affect can help us better understand how activism and feminism is a schema that impacts every interaction she has with grounded and metaphysical bodies. Sophie cannot exist without her activism, just as she cannot exist without her identity of motherhood--it is so much a part of her that there is no way to stop. Both enduring belonging and asynchronous "out of time" conceptions of belonging can help researchers better conceptualize belonging formation processes.

For Sophie, activism and Isha are a way for her to exert her autonomy and shape self-narratives. She used intersectionality as a means to bolster the autonomy of others. She created the HFI with the purpose of empowering those who came from a different class, race, and age than her to be knowledge makers. However, autonomy also led to a sense of conflict. Sophie 'ability to imply conflict, a definitive sense of unbelonging, plays into women's experiences at Isha. As discussed in the introduction, feelings of unsafety and unbelonging can negatively affect individuals 'mental and even physical health (Wilson & Liss, 2020, p. 3). I propose that Sophie needed to be faced with and then confront patriarchal sources in order to define and fully embrace her feminist philosophy and behavior. In this way, conflict was productive to create and maintain Sophie's sense of self and activist identity. While Talma also required conflict to help create and maintain her sense of self and activist identity, Talma's conflict came primarily

from those outside of her social group and community while Sophie's conflict came from within. Sometimes, conflict can be productive to understanding one's activist identity (Lyytikäinen, 2013). Isha used boundary maintenance to differentiate the feminist collective from other parts of society. Boundary maintenance may or may not be helpful to the mental health of feminists and the creation of activist identities. Sophie found some boundary maintenance to be helpful at times, while at other times it created conflict. Members disagreed about whether men should be allowed to be members at Isha or if it should remain a women-only organization.

Sophie's experiences of conflict are important to discuss because examining her view of Isha complicates the more straightforward sense of belonging that Talma feels. As Sophie struggles with maintaining Isha as a safe place and woman-centered against privileging a queer feminist outlook that emphasizes diversity. Though Sophie has struggled to find herself in a space that created imposing narratives and still struggles to incorporate her queer, intersectional, and academic view points into Isha, Isha is her home. Place belongingness, emotional attachment, and self-narration of her identity mark Isha as a place of belonging. Both a place for companionship as well as a locale where she can partake in activism, an activity as essential to her identity as breathing is to her body. Isha, though not always perfect and constantly changing, is still a home in the middle of a patriarchal world.

CHAPTER 4. AMIRA: *"I AM FROM THE PEOPLE THAT DON'T SHUT UP"*

4.1 Introduction

One of Amira's most potent memories from childhood took place at her family's home in a primarily Arab neighborhood in Haifa. Her father often had Jewish Israeli friends over at their home to eat and spend the afternoon together, but he and his Arab family were never invited to his friends 'homes. She remembers:

> My father had a friend, Asher, a very good friend, like every week they are having dinner on our table. And I remember, too, he had two blonde blue eyed beautiful girls that were sitting on our swing. Although the swing was big enough to have four or five kids, they were sitting there alone as princesses and me and another three sisters, and four of our brothers were standing on the side swinging them. But it was very clear for me, something, when I look back on this place. I remembered that I was looking at the situation from the outside. That there was something wrong with this situation. So I always had this understanding that there's something wrong here. It's not correct, but no one told me that.

Amira traces a lot of her understanding of herself as an activist back to that early time in her life and back to her father. Isha and other feminist and queer organizations became an important aspect of her chosen family, but her natal family certainly shaped her self-perception and understanding of the world. Amira's parents were born before the formation of the State of Israel, or what many Palestinians and activists like Amira refer to as Al-Nakba, the catastrophe, in Arabic (Sa'di & Abu-Lughod, 2007). Her father's family lived in refugee camps in Lebanon, but he lived in Israel and was a staunch

Zionist. Amira grew up seeing and experiencing inequities but failed to process them until she became an adult activist.

Amira's strength comes from her sense of identity and work. Amira is a lesbian Palestinian woman in Israel who is an actor, poet, performer, and activist. She is a member of Isha, was one of the founders of Aswat, a Palestinian activist organization in Haifa, and a member of Black Laundry, an LGBTQ+ anti-occupation activist group in Israel. She appeared in multiple television shows and is known around Israel. She is well known enough that when performing live she will draw a crowd in any circle in Israel, whether it is anarchists or religious Jews. Amira says she means something very different to different people- an actor, a poet, a powerful Palestinian activist.

I first saw Amira at a Leslie Feinberg butch-femme party in Tel-Aviv that I attended with a friend. The party was named after the author and activist who defied gender norms and saw herself as both a butch lesbian and a transgender lesbian. The party was created so lesbians in Israel could meet, and several women performed songs, poetry, and drag. Amira was a powerful spoken word performer, and the audience was enchanted. Performing and witnessing a performance can strengthen ties between a group of people and facilitate feeling of belonging (Kreutzmann, 2018). When Amira performs her spoken word, whether she is in front of a group of lesbians or a group of religious Jews, she helps facilitate a feeling of connection the audience has to her and to each other.

Amira, more so than Talma, Sophie, and Maya, sees multiplicities of political and self-narrated identities within herself and feels fleeting belonging to Isha. Fleeting belonging is when individuals often have multiple even contradictory belongings that can

be based not on sameness or static identity but “fleeting solidarity” (Delanty et al., p.45). Every feeling of belonging is fleeting in some sense, and no one has completely uncomplicated, unflinching, belonging. That was certainly true of every Isha member I spoke to. Amira represents the experiences of many Isha members, women who feel belonging within Isha but at less of an intensity than Talma, Sophie, and Maya. In this chapter, I examine the existence of fleeting solidarity and examine belonging in Isha as an influential affective experience even when it is not the central stimulus in an individual's affective landscape. I build upon concepts of temporality and the three levels of belonging to understand how fleeting solidarity may be important for understanding belonging in its space within activist movements.

I pay special attention to Amira’s relationship with physical safety as important for her self-narration and sense of belonging. Amira lacks a sense of safety within spaces of protest, which is detrimental to her ability to participate in activism, identify as an activist, and have ontological safety, a concept that I am proposing that is different than ontological security--continuity and security within daily life contributing to a stable mental, emotional state (Hawkins & Maurer, 2010). Instead, I propose that ontological safety is the ability to exist in a way that is comfortable, or at least tolerable by participating in activities that don’t threaten severe mental and physical harm.

To further understand the creation of belonging, I dive into theory about belonging as a creation of familial or familiar experiences and political in nature. One’s family can heavily contribute to one’s understanding and belief about the world and create feelings of place-belonging (Antonsich, 2009). Belonging can also be important for placing oneself in a sociopolitical landscape, making alliances and indicating who is

the ‘other ’(Yuval-Davis, 2002). This political debate is further examined by Amira’s sense that her existence is representation. In this way, affect is representation, and affect is activism. Affective belonging--how one interacts with belonging, how belonging is created, and how belonging impacts an individual--impacts Amira’s ontological experience of representation.

4.2 Fleeting Belonging in Isha

Amira has strong ties to Isha, having done a great deal of activism with the organization. While Isha is the center of Talma’s world, Amira has a much less constant relationship with the organization. Belonging is often textured--having different meanings and importance in a shifting manner over time (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Amira divides her time between multiple activist groups and causes. Her peripheral involvement in Isha represents the experience of many Isha members, especially Palestinian women. Many women find belonging and comfort in Isha but do not center all of their belonging and comfort there. This may be in part because Amira’s social group does not reside primarily at Isha. In fact, according to Amira, her social group does not reside in a single location. Individuals often have multiple even contradictory belongings that can be based not on sameness or static identity but “fleeting solidarity” (Delanty et al., p.45). Fleeting solidarity is about seeing a sameness or group desire/way of functioning while fleeting belonging is a temporal dimension looking at belonging in a short amount of time (May, 2016). Fleeting solidarity is a different kind of belonging than discussed elsewhere, but is still important. Belonging can take many unique forms, and even though Isha is not her primary place to feel seen and connected to others, it does play a unique role in Amira’s experiences.

In this case, fleeting solidarity is less about a temporal existence and more about the type of belonging felt, that she can carve in and out of it. This chapter highlights a woman whose experience at Isha is common: a member of the community whose membership doesn't occupy the largest part of her being but is still important. Isha members like Amira come in and out of the community and add to its richness and power. As Alya, another activist I met in Haifa, told me, "My heart is in Isha but not my body." Amira says that she feels comfortable at Isha and it's a place where belonging is easy, but she is not a person who belongs to only one community.

Fleeting solidarity can coincide with any one level of belonging: physical safety, emotional, and philosophical. However, there is an outside factor that prevents her from experiencing solidarity for extended periods of time. While Amira feels that Isha is a safe space she can go to, she likes to engage in activism in many other locales, in large part because she wants to be challenged. This is in line with Sophie's schema of complicating everything, but Amira brings it to a different level. She wants to be in spaces of conflict and of growth.

I didn't get to officially meet Amira until we sat down for two hours at a cafe at the Technion (Israel Institute of Technology) where Amira was previously a student. The Technion is the oldest university in Israel, with its original founding under the Ottoman Empire. It is particularly well-known for its science and engineering programs. In 2018, Arab-Israelis accounted for 16.1% of all students in bachelor's degree programs but represented 21% of the population. This was a huge increase, as the number of Arab-Israelis pursuing bachelors degrees at Israeli universities grew by 60% from 2010 to 2017 (Lieber, 2018). Amira, now in her mid 30's, was a noticeable minority when she went to

school. This made her feel hyper visible and physically vulnerable when she was walking around campus. With sounds of milk steaming in the background, Amira told me about how she had intervened during a charged conversation years ago at the same exact spot where we spoke:

> I saw a blonde guy sitting with an Arab girl and of course all the power relations, but there was nothing on the table, you know, and he didn't understand her. And they were talking about the Beduin and at some point, he was such an asshole, you know, he said, at some point, "You say about oppression and then here you are in the Technion." And then at that moment I said, "Excuse me, she's in the Technion not because of you, but despite you! It took her 10 times the effort than you to get to the Technion."

What Amira did in that coffee shop was unusual. In situations where someone is hurt or being attacked or harassed, few bystanders step in to help. This is especially true when one is part of a group where no one is acting. Social norms typically require inaction rather than action (Sanderson, 2020). However, for Amira, action and intervention is an integral part of her identity and view of herself as an autonomous person. When Amira overheard a man questioning an Arab student about her oppression, Amira knew she had to step in.

As I would soon learn, this kind of intervention with strangers is one of the ways Amira lives out her activism in daily life. While confrontation is shown to reduce the frequency of prejudicial speech, few people actually confront those (in person) who are engaging in this speech (Katz et al., 2019). However, as Amira explains, she confronts those she sees as homophobic, sexist, or racist daily as part of her everyday activism.

Spaces like Isha allow her to work on projects but don't give her the type of in-person confrontations that she is looking for.

Fleeting solidarity may go hand in hand with the most prevalent way Amira thinks about her activism--as that of representation. The main way she sees herself as an activist is through representation. As a lesbian Palestinian woman in Israel, she sees representation as an inevitable and crucial part of her life and experience as an activist. Representation is not a part of her experience, but instead comprises her very being. Amira frequently says, "I am representation." Self-narration involves the way individuals use narrative to create an individual identity, often through storytelling (Kehily, 1995, p. 23). Amira frequently made statements about herself, such as "I am representation," in order to explain or solidify her identity as an activist and as the embodiment of representation. It is important to Amira that those around her understand these identities and important to her own understanding of herself to frequently repeat these phrases.

4.3 Amira Viewing Herself as Palestinian

To understand Amira's belonging, it is necessary to understand Amira's family history and political views. When she thinks of her now deceased father, she is often emotional and has to stop for a few moments to catch her breath. She loves her father deeply, but she feels conflicted about her childhood. Because of the way her father spoke of his own identity as an Israeli Arab, she had no sense of herself as Palestinian growing up. Amira says, "My father was electing the Zionist Israeli politicians. All of his life. HaAvoda, he voted to have that. It's a Zionist party. It was the thing that he was so proud of and he had a picture of the politicians in the living room. His father's picture? No." Parents often shape their children's collective identity, or sense of belonging to a place,

religion, or group, as well as their individual belonging (Aboud-Halabi, Y., & Shamai, 2016). Zionist policies were accepted as the norm in her house. The founding of Israel was considered the great birth of their country and not an unjust Occupation, which is what many Palestinian Israelis learn growing up.

As Amira grew up, she would increasingly understand and sympathize with the latter perspective. Her father originally fled to a refugee camp but "decided not to take the humiliation" and came back to Israel. It's estimated that between 80,000 to 160,000 Palestinians remained in Israel in 1948 (Darweish & Sellick, 207, p. 354). For her father, it felt too difficult to transition from a well-respected, wealthy family to a camp that likely did not have access to basic necessities like running water, electricity, and medical supplies. Over half a century after 1948, Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon still lack a reliable water supply and drainage system and have unsafe living conditions for those who reside there (Davey & Maziliauskas, 2003). Once back in Israel, Amira says he was arrested and it took him a long time to get an Israeli ID.

"My father never said anything about Palestine, about his journey, about his pain, nothing, anything," she remembers. Only once, when someone brought a VHS of a Palestinian celebration at a refugee camp, did she start to understand what Palestine might mean to him. "There was a boy in the video and he was kind of saying poetry for belonging to Palestine. Then I remember my father was crying, but he never said anything about it afterwards and that's it." Amira cries as she explains this to me. She always wished that her father could talk about his pain and the loss of his family who chose to leave as refugees. She says that he never said anything about his trauma, and in 2010 during a deadly clash between Israel and Gaza, she saw him crying once more, but

he didn't say anything. Outwardly, Amira's father was a staunch Israeli nationalist who hung up photos of Israeli politicians but inwardly, she felt that he mourned the loss of what his life had been prior to 1948. Activists often say that they have very different views from their parents (Taft, 2017). It was common among the women I interviewed to say that they did not come from an activist family and had much more radical views than their parents. This was the case for Amira who sees her father's Zionism and her lack of early political education as something she had to overcome.

Amira's mother had a very different experience. Though she was also born before the formation of the state of Israel to a bourgeois family. She tells me," they stayed in Nazareth and they kept the wealth." Amira's maternal family was very politically active. Amira says that her uncle was one of the people who founded the Communist Party in Israel. As a political activist, he was involved in fighting against martial law. However, as a child, her family did not speak about politics except respecting the Zionist party. Amira played with Jewish friends knowing that she was not viewed as equal to them, but she didn't understand why. She began to see herself as Palestinian only in university when she understood that she had a different life experience than most of her classmates and faced conflict from her peers because she was Palestinian.

Faier writes about Palestinian identity formation of Palestinian activists within Israel: "Palestinians in Israel are Israelis, but they are not Jewish Israelis. They wish to identify with Palestine, but have no choice other than to focus on Israel. They resent the intrusion of the Israeli state into everyday life but find themselves using Hebrew when at a loss for Arabic words. They are Palestinian, yet define themselves as distinct from Palestinians outside of Israel" (Faier, 2005, p. 5). Amira's childhood and her father's

identity prevented her from initially viewing herself as Palestinian. Though most of her father's family was in refugee camps, Amira had always lived in Haifa in a home that hosted Jewish Israelis and in which her father praised the Zionist political party. In her house, it was her father who set the tone for politics and the politics of her mother's family did not come up until later. In the past, it has been common in families with a mother and a father for the father to set the political tone and the mother's political opinions, if different from the father's opinions, to be subordinate to that of the father (Jennings, & Langton, 1969). Amira's family also had much more wealth and experienced life very differently than many Palestinians. So when she did begin to see herself as Palestinian, her Palestinian identity was intrinsically linked to her experience of living in Israel.

It wasn't until Amira was 19 and she left home for university that she began to understand herself as Palestinian and view some of the things that she noticed during her childhood as wrong. She says, "The moment that I came out of an Arab environment in Haifa and moved to the general sphere, suddenly I became 100% Arab in the definition. Suddenly I have friends in my class that are 23 or 24 and they have never, never, ever in their life, met an Arab." Ninety percent of the Arab population in Israel lives in rural and homogeneous communities and cities and 10 percent live in mixed cities. It is common for young Jewish people to grow up without personally knowing any Arab-Israelis (Aboud-Halabi & Shamai, 2016, p. 206).

Amira started college in the mid-nineties, around the time that Yitzhak Rabin, a former Prime Minister of Israel, was murdered, and political leaders were becoming more and more right wing (Rabinovich & Rabinovich, 2018). This was also the time that Isha

was being formalized from an informal group of activists into a non-profit organization. Amira says that during the mid-nineties she got deeper into Israeli society, and she also got stronger and began to see herself as a Palestinian and an activist. Her activism was not anchored in ideas of Palestinian identity alone but in feminist issues and her love and support of women. She saw the inequalities that had just seemed like facts of life when she was a child and she wanted to do something about them. A 2020 study found that only 7 percent of Arab citizens of Israel define themselves as Palestinian. While this number fluctuates, the number of Arab citizens who identify as Palestinian are always in the minority. About half define themselves as Israeli-Arab and 23 percent define themselves as Israeli (Zonshine, 2020). For Amira, it is important to her activist identity to see herself as Palestinian. Like Talma and Sophie, Amira needed to be philosophically safe and find others who would allow her the freedom to speak, debate, and continue to form her understanding of activism.

Before the Second Intifada, Al-Aqsa, there were demonstrations in Haifa. The Second Intifada was a Palestinian uprising that lasted from 2000 to 2005 and resulted in thousands of Palestinian and Israeli deaths (Hoffman et al., 2011). Prior to this uprising, protests became violent and 13 Arab- Israelis were killed. Amira says that one of those killed was a dear friend that she still thinks about every day. This moment was a wakeup call for Amira. She realized that she was living with a Jewish partner in Tel Aviv and she hadn't spoken Arabic in two years. She didn't listen to Arabic in the house or watch Arabic shows or listen to Arabic music. Years after university, where she first found her Palestinian identity, she found herself without it once again. "I'm far from my authentic person," she realized. "I needed someone like me to understand the situation,

my politics, and my identity." Individuals often feel a greater sense of belonging and safety with those who they view as similar to themselves (Wilson & Liss, 2020). Her partner, though also a lesbian, is a Jewish Israeli woman who worked as part of the Intelligence in the IDF. Amira could not forgive her partner for serving in the IDF and still felt angry about this fact frequently. Multiple times during our talk, Amira mentioned yelling at her partner for being in the IDF. Individuals typically choose a partner with similar political and social views as their own, and choosing one with differing views often causes conflict (Alford et al., 2011). While Amira's partner shares her lesbian identity and some of her feminist views, the fact that her partner worked in the IDF is something that Amira believe will always cause conflict.

After struggling with feelings of unbelonging, Amira found Black Laundry, a LGBTQ+ anti-Occupation group in Israel, and began to understand her identity as a lesbian Palestinian much more. In this group of LGBTQ+ people, including many Palestinian women, who were working against the occupation, she saw her identity represented in others. As part of this organization, Amira felt that she could be both Palestinian and a lesbian. She could also speak in her own language of Arabic, something she realized was incredibly important to her. Black Laundry was a unique group in Israel in its performative activism that criticized Jewish nationalism and the primacy of the army and the nuclear family and demonstrated how citizenship is deeply impacted by identity and experience (Ziv, 2010, p. 552). For Amira, it wasn't until she was immersed in this philosophy that she fully understood herself as Palestinian and part of a Palestinian community in Israel. It was crucial for her to see other queer and lesbian Palestinian women working against the Occupation in order to understand her own identity. Amira

would work with some of the same women later in Isha and Aswat as she continued to explore the intersections of her lesbian and Palestinian identities.

4.4 Physical safety as important to health, belonging, and burn-out

Amira tells me that she is "post-traumatic from demonstrations . . . after being beaten for half a day" in a 2010 protest. Now, she says she can't tolerate someone putting their hands on her body. PTSD is a psychiatric illness that can develop after a traumatic event, and while most people experience trauma at some points in their lives, only about 8 percent of people develop PTSD (Rafaeli & Markowitz, 2011, p. 206). Individuals with PTSD often experience extreme discomfort with physical touch (p. 215). Amira's close friend was shot and killed by Israeli forces at a protest, and Amira is still mourning her loss today. She stopped attending protests because she has PTSD from the violence she experienced as an activist and feels that she needs to protect herself and her body from harm. Amira requires a basis of physical safety before she can feel as if she belongs.

Scholars have examined the impacts of activism on mental health and stress. Depending on the community, activism can either exacerbate depression, anxiety and stress caused by micro-aggressions, or protect against that stress (Hope et al., 2018, p. 27). In some college campuses, increased activism led to improved mental health, despite increased presence and awareness of micro-aggressions. In other populations, increased participation in political activism correlated with stress and depression, possibly contributing to burn-out (Hope et al., 2018, p. 26).

For Amira and many other women I talked to at Isha, activism increased stress and anxiety and led to burnout. Activist burnout is "when the accumulation of stressors associated with activism become so overwhelming they compromise activists 'persistence

in their activism" (Gorsk, 2019, p. 667). Activist burnout can be a threat to a movement's viability as well as to activists 'own mental and physical well-being (p. 668). For Ami, a woman in her 40s who is part of Isha, years of protests and activism left her feeling numb, and she moved outside of Haifa to become immersed in nature and to find herself again. Like Amira, Ami now views activism in a very personal way that comes from her own body. "My activism comes from the energy in my body," Ami told me one day in a cafe in Tzfat. "I put peaceful energy out in the world and change the world through my daily meditation and intentions." Amira feels a sense of safety in her new life. She avoids confrontation and even close contact with other people in order to protect herself from perceived harm. Another woman I spoke to, Rina, also felt traumatized by protests. She told me that she was beaten in the streets for opposing the Occupation and saw some of her friends being beaten as well. She felt that she could no longer put her body through the violence that often comes with protesting. Many other women at Isha simply felt burned out from protesting or didn't feel like their efforts were effective and wanted to put their energy into other projects. Common causes of activist burnout can include the mixture of intense commitment and emotional labor, decreased tending to one's physical and emotional well-being, and exposure to harassment and violence (p. 670-671).

One day, Amira's sister told her that she was going to a demonstration in the West Bank and asked Amira to come with her. Amira said, "the police don't count to 10 before they start shooting in the West. So I begged her. I told her, 'Go home, you cannot change anything.'" There have been many incidents where West Bank protests have led to violence and death (BBC News, 2021), and Amira has experienced that violence while demonstrating there. She told her sister that to the police and the Israeli state, "our Arab

blood is worthless. Our souls are worthless." While, "You want to fight. You want to not accept your zeroness but if you get hurt, no one will pay for it. And you're the only one that will pay for it. That's it." The dehumanization of Palestinians at protests and in everyday life left Amira feeling as though her very soul was considered worthless. For Amira, it is better to avoid violent protests, accepting that others see her as nothing, rather than give up her physical safety.

Maya, an activist I will focus on in the following chapter, said that as a Jewish Israeli, she can stand in front of Palestinian protestors to protect them from harm. Jewish allies can transfer or repel the violence caused in protests by standing with those who are more vulnerable. Several high profile cases demonstrated this philosophy when leftist Jewish women used their bodies as human shields to protect Palestinian men. For instance, Neta Golan, a leftist Jewish activist, used her body to shield Palestinian president Yassir Arafat (Sion, 2014, p. 73).This strategy is widely employed in the Palestinian solidarity movement, and I interviewed several women who had employed this strategy to protect Palestinian activists (p. 76). While Amira thinks that this can be important, the very philosophy behind this allyship is that many in the Israeli military and police view only other Jews as worthy of protection and safety. The fact that women at Isha are treated very differently by the Israeli state is a constant theme at Isha. While Isha is a Collective and women at Isha work daily on equality and inclusion of the members within the group, Isha members understand that each woman carries a different level of power and has a very different life experience. Many women like Maya focus on using their privilege as Jewish Israelis to work for Palestinians and other vulnerable

populations. However, Amira sees the need for this use of privilege as further proof that she is seen as less than and that her blood is not as valuable as Jewish blood.

4.5 Activism and affect as representation

While stepping away from activism, Amira couldn't help but to compare herself to peers still actively participating in activism. She felt that they did more for Palestine than her, which caused enormous amounts of guilt. Activists who are experiencing burnout often feel guilty for stepping away from activism and not doing enough for their cause (Gorski, 2018). Activists often feel guilty for resting or even experiencing joy, which harms their mental and physical well-being (p. 671). Amira is torn; while she feels that she cannot free Palestine through demonstrations, it still hurts her to abstain from protesting and says that it makes her feel insignificant. Often, activists feel hopeless and a lack of power due to what they consider unequal power structures like racial inequality (p. 678). Amira felt inferior for her lack of participation and wondered if she should be doing more. For Amira, activism is often defined by radical acts, outside of the daily life that most people participate in. These acts required emotional and physical labor that left Amira feeling drained. Many other women I interviewed at Isha felt similarly drained by activism. Many had experienced protest burnout or PTSD and felt guilty that they no longer put their bodies on the line like their friends and colleagues. Several women told me that they would return to activism someday, but they needed a break. Even Maya, who many women in Isha considered especially active, told me that I caught her "during a bit of a break from protests." While almost all of the women I interviewed were working towards equal rights and freedoms for women in Israel, they still felt guilty that they weren't physically putting their bodies on the line in demonstrations and protests.

Activism often involves being physically vulnerable and is often physically exhausting, which leads to burnout among participants (Gorsk, 2019).

In Norman's analysis of media and alternative activism among Palestinian youth, she shows how photographs, plays, and other media provide alternative representations of Palestinian youth "in the context of personal realties and community experiences" can "humanize [sic.] situations of conflict and oppression" (Norman, 2009, p. 273). Activism through representation creates new opportunities for both dialogue and action (Norman, 2009, p. 273). While Amira is uninterested in conventional forms of activism like marches, protests, or demonstrations, she is able to employ her very identity as a form of activism. A few weeks before we spoke, Amira performed in Jerusalem to a crowd of mostly religious Jews. The event was sold to her as an event in support of a pluralistic society in Jerusalem. There were to be both Palestinian and Jewish performers. However, once Amira had already arrived at the event, the organizer told her that all the other Palestinian performers backed out because one of the journalists titled the event under Jerusalem Day, which celebrated Israeli control over the Old City in June 1967. "For us it's not celebration, it's a kind of Nakba," Amira said. Still, she decided to perform. The title of the evening was "Getting Mixed." After speaking in Arabic for several minutes and calling out areas of Palestinian inequality, she asked, "You want to mix me or you want to mix me?" In Hebrew, to mix someone is to make a fool of them. "You want to mix with me or you want to spin me around because still we are mixed." Her use of language was clever, and she says, made the audience listen to her words more closely.

While some people criticized Amira for performing during an event catalogued under Jerusalem Day, she sees her performance as an important form of activism that

reached people who may not otherwise be in the same room as a Palestinian activist or listen to Arabic words being spoken to them. While most of the audience could not understand the Arabic words she was speaking, she feels that it was important to remind them that Arabic exists. By subverting the title "Getting Mixed" and using Arabic words to express her anger at deep inequality in Israel, Amira feels that she is creating an opportunity for dialogue and change.

During the same performance, Amira further pushed her audience by talking about explicitly lesbian and queer issues. "I have to bring homosexuality as well. Maybe they'll be amazed by my Arab activism, but they are still homophobic within their own societies. So I have to talk about it. This is my own activism." Amira frequently stresses the importance of intersectional activism. Focusing on one aspect of her identity, her Palestinianess, isn't enough and doesn't account for the oppression and inequality she faces. She told the audience that she wants to tell her Jewish female partner that she loves her, but there is only one way to say "I love you in Hebrew," so this is what she has to use. However, there are fourteen ways to say "I love you" in Arabic. She names all the ways to say "I love you" in Arabic to the audience and tells them, "This is the language you are scared of." Using the phrase "I love you" is important because Amira is making a claim that the audience is afraid of a type of love that allows them to accept Palestinians like herself. She wanted this audience to face their own biases and be exposed to Arabic, to a Palestinian lesbian, and to the idea of same-sex love. For Amira, Arabic is a language where one can say "I love you" in many ways to convey a nuance she feels is unattainable in Hebrew. To many of the members of her audience, Arabic is a language of the enemy that one only learns in the army and a language that conveys danger. On the night of her

performance, Amira attempted to use her body and her tongue as a way to move past stereotyped and racist views of Palestinians. Amira also put herself into a tense locale where she was offering a clinching, often unpopular view. It may be that Amira holds herself at arm's-length from Isha, a safe space, and puts herself into verbally tense locales because she feels guilty for not engaging in more physically traumatic activism. She may feel as though she doesn't deserve to be in a community of like-minded individuals.

However, Amira adapted within an activist space activism and found a kind of worth and power in her body through other means. Amira says her very existence is a form of activism. Amira recalled, "I understood that my activism is me. It's my own body. My own tongue. My own voice. My own color. My own name. My actual particular body. My flesh and blood is activism itself within the Israeli sphere. Amira with the accent, and the dark brown color is activism." Amira's understanding and conceptions of her body impact her affective experience. She directly relates her processing of the world to her social location and, therefore, her body. For instance, she worked as the manager of a cell therapy center that employed and served mostly Jewish people. Her presence in that space was activism. She showed Jewish coworkers and patients that people with her name, color, and language could thrive outside of the confines of stereotypes.

Similarly, talking about herself and her partner using the "we" pronoun is activism and wearing shirts without a bra is activism. In the latter, she took back the freedom of sexuality and ownership of her body. Feminists, like FEMEN, believe that women's bodies should be free and that one important way to express that freedom is by performatively showing their naked breasts and taking back the naked body from male

oppressors (Dalibert & Quemener). Instead of patriarchal social norms defining how she could show her body, Amira could exercise her autonomy and represent the female form and those outside of normalcy. Only some of these forms of representation required Amira to make active choices but all relate to her body, identity, and existence.

Amira started thinking about her representation as activism when she lost the capacity to do more active forms of protest. This representation as activism may have come from a place of self-protection and a need for physical safety, wherein she preserved her activism identity by shifting her sense of activism from an untenable active protest to her very existence. This switch does not invalidate her argument, but it does offer a possible insight for the development of other activists and universal thought on what activism looks like.

Amira's existence is representation. In this way, affect is representation, and affect is activism. Affective belonging--how one interacts with belonging, how belonging is created, and how belonging impacts an individual--impacts Amira's ontological experience of representation. By making herself activism and not her acts, she is more likely to put herself in a space of conflict--that is where her activism and therefore herself is most needed and might make the most impact. For other women at Isha, doing activist acts, for example providing direct services to women who have been trafficked, is their activism rather than their visibility. This may grant them breaks and control over their activism and their life experiences, which may be less true for Amira. Understanding this type of ontological belonging may allow us to predict and hypothesize the future of Western activism and how certain activists understand their belonging. For Amira, belonging is created in part due to her social location. Her visible brown skin, lesbian

acts, and womanhood create her activism and create her belonging. Kunstman writes that women do not universally bond as part of a group, and that is also the case for Amira (Kuntsman, 2009). However, Amira's social location is still key to her activism.

4.6 Representation within Arab community

Amira may feel as though she is representation because of her Palestinian identity. As discussed in the last chapter, intersectionality impacts ideas of belonging and inclusivity. Amira's intersectional identities as a Palestinian lesbian woman and artist necessitate her active participation in many communities and activist spaces. Isha is an organization specifically for women. Black Laundry is an LGBTQ+ group that has many Palestinian women. While Amira feels comfortable at Isha and Black Laundry, she wants to feel represented and participate in activism in all communities that represent parts of her identities. She knows her brown skin and Palestinian name renders her Palestinian identity constantly visible. Amira feels that her lesbian identity should also be visible. Many LGBTQ+ activists believe that it is LGBTQ+ people's moral duty to be out and that to intentionally "pass" as heterosexual and receive the benefits of passing is morally unsound (Cooley & Harrison, 2012). Amira, who sees herself as easily "passing for straight," believes it is her duty to be out as a visible lesbian in all areas of her life.

Amira came out to all of her family members at once, and she says it didn't go well. Her brother- in- law discouraged her from coming out publicly, saying that she is living her life, why be public about it. "I want to come out because when your daughter wants to come out, it will be easier for her than for me," she replied. Amira hopes to create belonging for more LGBTQ+ Palestinians by first making herself uncomfortable by coming out to an unaccepting community. Amira is certainly closer to her friends than

many in her family in many respects. She spends more time with her queer activist friends than most people related to her by blood. Many LGBTQ+ people surround themselves with a "chosen family" made up of partners and friends who are supportive of them rather than one's natal family (Hunter, 2005). While Amira emphasizes the primacy of her queer chosen family, she believes that is always important to push her natal family on queer issues and use her own queerness as a form of visibility and activism.

Literature about Palestinian queerness and coming out often centers on the violence of the Israeli state, pinkwashing, and Orientalism. Jasbir Puar and Amira Mikdashi define Pinkwashing, which I will elaborate on in the following section, as a political tool that uses Israel's stellar record of LGBTQ+ rights to gloss over the ongoing occupation of the Palestinian territories (Puar & Mikdashi, 2012; Mikdashi, 2011). Ritchie writes that the discussion of coming out among Palestinians in Israel is rooted in orientalist understandings of Arab sexuality. He writes that "Mainstream Israeli gay activism's reliance on the politics of visibility and recognition is embedded in—and supportive of—an increasingly significant strain of Israeli nationalism that incorporates and normalizes Jewish 'minorities, 'even as it maintains the political, economic, and social subordination of Palestinians" (Ritchie, 2010, p. 558). These arguments focus on the oppressive nature of the Israeli state and the hegemonic power of the West. However, these arguments do not leave space for the possibility that social norms within some Palestinian communities may contribute to the oppression of queer people within those communities. Often, these discussions fail to address the lived experiences of queer Palestinian people, particularly women. For Amira, coming out to her family was difficult and she faced homophobia, in part, in her eyes, due to the cultural norms within

her family regarding sexuality and gender. Amira says she came up against these norms when she came out to her family and when she interacted with some Palestinians in the public sphere. For instance, Amira says that she frequently argues with Palestinian taxi drivers who do not see a need for LGBTQ+ rights.

Other Palestinian women I spoke to at Isha echoed Amira's experience. For instance, Karima was a lesbian in her 30s who wanted to have a baby with her female partner. She said that because of the homophobia in her family and community, she had to leave the country in order to have the child. After returning to Israel, she planned to tell the family that the child belonged to a husband who abandoned her and the child. Unlike Amira, Karima spoke of a life of hiding and living very differently in front of her family than she did in front of her queer community. Women who live in communities where they experience oppression, abuse, and violence often put their family's needs ahead of their own and remain in the community for what they view as the good of everyone else over the safety and health of themselves (Wendt & Hornosty, 2010). Palestinian women I spoke to, excluding Amira, spoke of these conflicts. These examples of Palestinian women experiencing oppression within their communities do not negate the idea that Israel may be engaging in pinkwashing, but they do speak to the lived experiences of real lesbian Palestinians in Israel. To deny the possibility that norms within specific communities may occasionally be harmful to queer people is to deny Amira or Karima's experiences and overwrite their voices.

4.7 Conclusion

For Amira, activism as representation is necessary to her sense of self. To be seen as an activist is important for her identity formation and sense of belonging. Though Isha

is not Amira's only or primary place of belonging, it is a place that allows her to exist and represent some of the most important parts of her identity in both an active and passive way. She can do discrete tasks of activism that she prioritizes while also passively representing her identities. When she goes to an Isha event, strangers know she is lesbian and Arab. Isha allows her a comfort and space to be herself in a way many other places don't allow. For Amira, Isha allows a space for representation to be activism. Amira's commitment to Isha is "fleeting." She moves in and out of Isha as an essential space of belonging for her. This represents many people's views and experiences of belonging. Though it is fleeting, the fleeting nature may be a benefit. She can gain information, value and perspectives from others and return to Isha to deliver her richness. She can build bridges, those seen and those unseen by embracing the variable and fleeting nature of her belonging. Fleeting belonging, morally considered to be inferior to enduring belonging (May, 2016), may in fact be a great strength.

By placing herself, a queer Palestinian woman, in mostly Jewish Israeli spaces, Amira represents a lived experience past or in spite of oppression. This ontology of belonging is different from many members of Isha who may define their activism as acts or largely based on their participation at Isha. Amira's philosophy that representation is activism is complicated by her queer identity being invisible. In this case, it is harder to passively represent an oppressed form and instead some kind of active representation must take place. When speaking about activism in the past, she seemed to prioritize protests as activism over other forms. Protests do not rely solely on representation to be activism, they involve actions outside of the norm to draw attention to an issue (Gorsk, 2019). From this we can learn about their importance and primacy of physical safety as

central to belonging. This dissertation emphasizes the fact that more attention needs to be paid to physical safety of all members in activist spaces.

Other women at Isha also discussed the importance of representation as activism. Sophie said that within three sentences of giving a lecture on the first day of class, every student immediately knows her political beliefs and activist tendencies. Sophie's short hair, button-up shirts, and vocabulary create her appearance, which like Amira's, indicates a denial of the patriarchal norm. Sophie, however, also experiences a form of activism even more essential--Sophie compared her activism to breathing: something essential and totally natural. Amira says her activism is her flesh and blood. Both Sophie and Amira describe activism as part of their bodies, their very being. Neither can live without it nor can they depart from it. Sophie, when she speaks of activism, refers to representation as a conscious choice to correct others and take a stand for her beliefs. Amira feels as though her very presence is a form of activism. The activism of these women requires emotional labor to address injustices and inequalities. This emotional labor can be in play whether an action is active or passive.

In the next chapter, I explore Maya's understanding and experiences with activism. Maya is a transwoman at Isha who has been involved in the Palestinian solidarity movement, the animal rights movement, and in anarchist spaces, but she feels a deep sense of belonging only at Isha. I further explore the political interplay of belonging with activism and think about how affective belonging can indeed be a venue for social change.

CHAPTER 5. MAYA: *BELONGING NEITHER HERE NOR THERE*

5.1 Introduction

Maya moved to Haifa from Tel Aviv in 2015 for two important reasons. The most important reason was because of Isha. She had heard about Isha from other feminist activist groups she had been a part of in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv and she wanted to become part of the organization. There was also a second reason why she wanted to move: "I had just broken up with my partner of five years and I had decided that we should put at least 100 kilometers between us, and I looked at the map and Haifa was exactly 100 kilometers away. It was either that or move to Beʾer Sheva. Or just leave the country. So it was Haifa." The story perfectly describes who Maya is: someone who can be hilarious even when she is struggling or experiencing heartbreak and someone who thinks practically.

As a transwoman in her late 20s, Maya is involved in several activist communities including Isha, the animal rights community, trans activism, and the Palestinian solidarity movement. This chapter focuses on how Maya experiences intersectional forms of belonging at Isha and within other activist communities. Specifically, Maya prioritizes physical safety and philosophical belonging in spaces of activism, both of which are particularly crucial for an intersectional understanding of belonging. This chapter also focuses on why, though physical safety is not a given, it must be maintained.

Maya has been a member of activist movements, such as the animal rights movement and the Palestinian solidarity movement, that didn't prioritize safety and respect for women. Some of her friends were raped by prominent activists of these movements, but the attackers received no consequences and, in fact, told Maya and other

women to keep silent about these attacks for the good of the activist movement. This made her take stock of her priorities and pushed her towards the women-only feminist community of Isha. Maya felt especially betrayed by other activists in the solidarity movement where she was already compromising her physical safety by protesting the Occupation and then experienced the added burden of physical threats from other activists. The desire for physical safety impacted Maya's affect, her way of interacting and seeing the world, as she became used to violence and even started to normalize it.

An intersectional lens allows us to understand the importance of physical, philosophical, and emotional safety. Isha, while a safe place for many women, only has one regular transgender member: Maya. Isha provides services to many transwomen, but does not have a high trans-membership. Maya claims this happens because many transwomen in Israel are still just trying to survive every day and do not have the capacity to participate in activism. According to Maya, if transwomen had the safety they needed, physically, economically, and legally, then they might be more open and able to create bonds of belonging and contribute to activist communities like Isha.

Maya emphasizes that Isha does a lot of work to create space for intersectional identity and queer perspectives. Isha includes a diversity of women across age, nationality, and race in large part because it acknowledges and works against oppression from an intersectional angle and highlights non-normative perspectives. Isha's decision making processes are also non-hierarchical and made by consensus. Maya argues that intersectionality makes an activist organization stronger. Belonging is based on some commonalities and a sense of connection, but it is strengthened by differences as well.

Belonging, and in this case physical safety such as a women-only space, can bring people together across differences in a way that is unique and powerful.

Politics is also a mechanism of power for Maya. Though she may not like patriarchal and dangerous practices that are commonplace in many activist movements, Maya still participates in those movements because they are politically motivated in a way she feels deeply. In this chapter, I dive into the importance of political motivation and narratives on participation in and feelings of belonging. I also examine narratives of belonging surrounding the queer community. In much academic literature, scholars argue that the queer community in Israel is part of an explicit pinkwashing campaign that touts Israel's stunning LGBT record in order to justify the oppression and occupation of Palestine (Mikdashi 2011; Schulman, 2005; Ritchie 2010, 2012; Puar & Mikdashi, 2012). I argue that scholars often only examine gay men activist spaces when talking about complicity in pinkwashing and don't represented lesbian and queer women's 'views, contributing to the erasure of lesbian identity. Maya laments the erasure and subjugation of opinions by lesbian and queer women within Israel. She also thinks differences in philosophy account for much of the separation between lesbian and gay communities in Israel, further emphasizing the importance of philosophical belonging in activist spaces.

Maya has been part of other feminist organizations in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, but it wasn't until she arrived at Isha that she truly felt belonging and acceptance. Unlike the other activist movements Maya has been a part of, she believes that Isha is truly feminist and fights for the rights and freedoms of all women and girls in Israel. Maya also feels that the work that Isha does is intersectional and inclusive. Inclusion that allows

individuals to feel valued and validated leads to a sense of belonging (Scorgie & Forlin, 2019, p. 10).

5.2 Belonging Through Queer and Intersectional philosophy

For Maya, belonging was also not easy to find. Throughout her life, people surprised her by engaging in violent behavior or by excluding women or trans people. She was fired from a restaurant she worked at after coming out as transgender and later won a successful lawsuit against the restaurant. She also watched as attacks against women within activist communities were covered up by other activists and ignored. Sascha Crasnow writes that "For queer and trans individuals who have a two-fold experience of non- normativity because their racial, ethnic, and/or religious identity is also treated as non-normative, feelings of liminality – belonging neither here nor there – may be multiplied" (Crasnow, 2020, p. 212). Maya had trouble finding belonging in her own life… So did other members of Isha, like Amira. Amira believes her intersectional identities made it difficult to experience belonging in any single community. She often felt that queer Israeli organizations were exclusionary of Palestinians and did not understand her Palestinian identity. Additionally, in some Palestinian groups, other members did not accept her queer identity. She found herself in a liminal space where she never quite belonged. Adi Kuntsman writes that for some queer Israelis in this position, a sense of belonging can be found through violence and exclusion of others. For instance, she explains that some queer Russian immigrants find inclusion in queer Israeli communities through exclusion of Palestinians and Arab Israelis (Kuntsman, 2009). In this sense, the exclusion of some ("others") becomes central to the creation of a sense of belonging ("us").

For Maya, in both the Palestinian solidarity movement and the animal rights movement, powerful men assaulted fellow activists with impunity. Women have often experienced violence by fellow activists, as has been extensively written about during the Arab Spring in which women activists frequently experienced assault during protests (Carter et al., 2014). Maya witnessed this most often as part of the Palestinian solidarity movement. Despite her negative experiences in activist movements that led to feelings of unbelonging, eventually Maya found belonging and a sense of home through feminism and specifically the intersectional feminism she found at Isha.

As a theoretical framework, intersectionality argues that multiple oppressions create and constitute each other to maintain a complicated system of hegemonic power (Carastathis, 2016). Intersectionality seeks to understand how intersecting power relations influence social relations on individual and societal levels (p.54). Power relations connected to race, class, or gender are not mutually exclusive but work together to affect the social world (p.143). While the members of Isha are all women and Israeli citizens, their other intersecting identities, especially related to ethnicity and religion, result in complex power relations among the women in the organization. Intersectionality is a way to understand the complexity of the world and the people in it (Collins, 2016). Since Kimberle Crenshaw coined the term interectionality in 1989 to describe the way Black women's identities and experiences of oppression in the U.S. are shaped by various intersecting differences like gender and race, feminist scholars have used intersectionality to focus on the way that gender interacts with various oppressions (Crenshaw, 1991; Narayan, 1997; Roth, 2003; Alcalde, 2010; Sklar, 2011).

Queer and transgender activists have often worked through an intersectional lens that emphasizes intersectional violence and harm. For instance, some queer and trans activists have focused on racial and economic justice. For these queer and trans activists, the focus is on work that centers people with HIV/AIDS, advocates for queer and trans immigrants, and fights for homeless services for queer and tans people (Spade, 2013, p. 1042). At Isha, women's rights includes transwomen, women forced into prostitution, Palestinian women, religious women, and lesbian women, and Isha considers how various identities and experiences affect women in specific and important ways. For instance, some religious women in particular may need help paying for and obtaining an abortion. Isha members believe that focusing on issues that affect women who experience multiple intersecting oppressions has the biggest impact. Isha's intersectional approach and focus on a multitude of issues allows for the creation of belonging that includes many women who may not otherwise be involved in such a space.

Isha works to be intersectional in the work that it does, the members within the organization, and its understanding of the way multiple experiences and oppressions affect individuals. Isha's stated mission is to "advance the status and rights of women and girls, and to promote peace, security and socio-economic justice from a feminist perspective through education, research, dissemination of knowledge, advancing legislation, and public events" (Isha L'Isha, 2021). Isha works at a local level, where it attempts to provide women and girls with a safe and supportive environment where their needs can be addressed, and at a national level, through the advocating of women's rights. Workers and volunteers at Isha focus on sex trafficking, providing women with safe abortions, disability rights, sexuality, motherhood, and reproductive technologies. The

organization is pro-peace and anti-occupation. Isha follows a long tradition of women in peace movements, as peace activism is often intersectional and women-led (Yuval-Davis & Stoetzler, 2002).

The way Isha is organized reflects its commitment to a non-hierarchical structure and its feminist roots. Isha makes decisions by consensus and anyone in the organization can create any feminist project they wish. When I went to conferences and lectures at Isha, it was clear that there is never a single leader of the organization. Even when an "expert" was brought in for lectures, the lecture would become a discussion in a matter of minutes with the women attending the lecture speaking just as much as the lecturer. At Isha, I witnessed women of all ages and who had been a part of Isha for one year to 20 years challenge each other openly. Everyone was considered an important producer of knowledge and no one was considered too senior to be challenged. During my time at Isha, Maya and other members jokingly criticized me for being too American because I was too polite, didn't speak over other women, and didn't actively challenge other Isha members. No one mode of operating will be a good fit for everyone, but there is something about Isha's non-hierarchical structure that seems to attract and retain women. Isha has over one hundred current members and is composed of women from several ethnic, national, and religious groups, including Ashkenazi Jews, Mizrahi Jews, and Palestinian Israelis from many backgrounds.

As Maya emphasized, Isha has consistently been enmeshed in lesbian activism and culture and embraced lesbian members. "There is nowhere else I feel as at home as Isha," she said. She continues, "Maybe part of that is because so many women are queer or politically queer. Isha is so connected to issues of sexuality. I have met so many women

here- even heterosexual women- who are very self-aware about gender and sexuality. I do feel very included here and I think Isha is a very inclusive space for lesbians." When Maya talks about being "politically queer" she is removing queerness from sexuality and describing it as a non-normative way of thinking. Within queer theory, to have a queer perspective or to "queer" something can mean making the normal strange or disrupting norms like "heterosexual" (Rumens et al, 2019). Maya thinks that members of Isha, including heterosexual members, have "queer perspectives," which she describes as individuals who critique normativity and understand norms as a type of philosophy rather than naturally occurring. The concept of "queering" resists norms, universality, and stable or "natural" identities (p.12). Talma also echoed this idea when she told me, "Everyone at Isha is a lesbian! Even the straight women are lesbians!" Here, Talma does not mean that every woman with Isha is partnered with or attracted to other women. Instead, she is using "lesbian" the way that Maya speaks about queer perspectives, as a non-normative and critical way of seeing the world and existing.

5.3 A Place of Belonging and a Place of Loneliness

For Maya, Isha is the place where she feels most at home. After a decade of activism where she worked toward a shared cause with people she found exclusionary and even violent in the case of men who harassed and assaulted women in the group, she says that Isha is the most comfortable. However, this is a complicated belonging. Maya explains, "I feel really really really included here and I think Isha is a very inclusive space for lesbian and bi people. But I am the only trans activist who is a regular part of Isha. Obviously I think we still have a way to go as far as trans inclusion. I would feel more comfortable and at home if there were more transgender people here." While Isha is the

most comfortable space for Maya and the place where she feels the most at home, she also feels lonely. She is the only trans member of Isha, and while the other members can understand other parts of her identity and experiences, such as her lesbian identity and experiences in the Palestinian solidarity movement, her specific identity as a transwoman is something Maya thinks that only another transwoman can fully understand.

There has been much written about tensions between some feminists and transgender activists (Hines, 2019; Williams, 2014; Minou, 2010; Truong, 2015; Heyes, 2003). In the U.S., much of the focus has centered around transgender women. Some feminist scholars such as Janice Raymond, who said that gender is based on biolgical sex in the 1970s, were considered especially hostile towards transwomen. Raymond believed that "gender transition from male to female [was] a male practice, devised by a patriarchal medical system in order to construct subservient women" (p. 146). In the U.S., the term TERF, which stands for trans exclusionary radical feminism, has become ubiquitous not just among transgender activists but among anyone who wants to position themselves as progressive whether or not they understand the politics and positions of either transgender or feminist movements (Hines, 2019, p. 147). Those who see gender and sex as largely biologically determined are considered TERFS. Many feminists contest the term and point to the actual collaboration that has existed for decades among transwomen and feminists as well the support of transwomen from feminist scholars such as Amber Hollibaugh (1989), Gayle Rubin (1989) and Carol Vance (1984) who argued against gender and sexuality as being biologically determined (p. 148). Outside of the academy, discussion around "TERFS" focuses on whether transwomen should be allowed in women's bathrooms, if transwomen can play in women's sports, and whether

transwomen should be in women's spaces generally (p. 151). Maya tells me that this discussion is just not the same in Israel. For Israeli feminists, if someone identifies as a woman, they are generally accepted and welcomed as a woman in feminist spaces. Isha's official stance is that transgender women are welcomed and should be members of the organization. However, she says that the focus of concern among women at Isha and other Israeli feminists is about transgender men. Transgender men, though not officially banned from membership at Isha, are not welcomed there. Isha is an all-women community with a focus on advocating for women and girls, so men, transgender or not, are not seen as people who belong in the organization. Some women, including Talma, have shown hostility towards transmen who wanted to be part of Isha and do not see why they, as transmen, would want to be members. This issue became clear when I texted two transmen that a member of Isha recommended I speak to for my project. I was not told that they were transmen before I messaged them, just that they were former Isha members. Both of them responded the same way: no, they would not be willing to speak to me, and they believed I wouldn't want to speak to them anyway because they were transmen. While this issue was not a common discussion among the women I spoke to at Isha, besides Maya, it is important to position the way that the Israeli context seems to differ from the U.S. one on trans/feminist issues.

While Isha's official stance is that transgender women are welcome and encouraged to become members of the organization, transgender women have largely not viewed Isha as their home. Years before I arrived at Isha, Maya brought another transgender woman into the organization in hopes of having more transwomen there. The woman, Danielle, was part of the effort to restart the feminist archives, and she was often

seen scanning and digitizing feminist documents at the archives. Maya said that two years before I arrived in Isha, Danielle died by suicide, making her one of several transwomen activists who died by suicide in recent years. The other transwomen, besides Danielle, were not part of Isha, but they were closely connected to Maya. A recent study found that 78 percent of trans people in Israel have considered suicide (Adler, 2020). Maya explains that the transwoman activist community is very small and does not feel that it has its own community space. "I want to work to build up that space, and make transwomen feel comfortable and included," she said. The reason she believes that transwomen activists don't come to Isha is because she believes they do not feel safe or included anywhere. She tells me, "I can say in my ten years in working with the trans community, it's hard to pull transwomen into anything. We are busy people. Most of us have a priority in our agenda just surviving and have very little time to do anything else. In that respect, I would say I'm in the 1 percent or maybe 5 percent of the trans community where I'm in a place to allow myself to think of more than just survival." Trans people experience discrimination in all sectors of Israeli society and experience lower incomes and lower rates of employment than the general population. A quarter of all trans people in Israel did not earn any money in 2019 (Adler, 2020). When Maya talks about trans people simply trying to survive, that often looks like trying to find stable income and housing. Physical, economic, and legal safety is an important prerequisite for being able to participate in activism.

While I did meet transwomen at Isha, these women did not participate in activism at Isha or view themselves as members. Rather, these women become involved with Isha because of urgent personal situations. Maya spoke of one Palestinian transwoman as

being “saved” by two Isha leaders. The woman was homeless, had health issues, and was being harassed for being transgender by members of her family. These Isha leaders found her a place to live, helped her with social security and money, and taught her Hebrew. Other transwomen who have interacted with Isha have had similar experiences. Maya wants to prioritize making Isha a place of sustained belonging and safety, not just a place that transwomen go in an emergency. This is a helpful framing as it puts the work of inclusion on changing Isha instead of the work on the already overwhelmed transwomen.

While Maya feels that Isha is intersectional in its feminism, she still has feelings of “belonging neither here nor there” as Crasnow described in her discussion of transgender belonging (Crasnow, 2020, p. 212). Though she feels her sense of womanhood and lesbian identity reflected at Isha, it still feels odd to be the only longterm transgender member. Additionally, while she loves her transgender community, she also feels a distance between herself and the transwomen she knows who are trying to survive above all else.

Gökarıksel and Smith write that intersectional feminism must not merely signal that it is intersectional with symbols and declarations (Gökarıksel, Banu, & Smith, 2017). Isha officially accepts and wishes to include transwomen at the organization and several members I spoke to actively worked to find resources for transwomen in Israel who need money, healthcare, and safety. However, only Maya, a transwoman herself, said that it was a priority to create an environment where transwomen felt comfortable in the long term. Maya’s experiences with activism in several organizations and communities demonstrate countless examples of exclusion. While Isha is intersectional in many ways

and feels like home to women like Maya, there are still barriers to inclusion for transwomen activists.

5.4 Physical Safety as a Necessity to Activism

Maya has been part of activist groups since she was a teenager. She became involved in anti-racist, anti-occupation, and vegan activist groups when she was 14. She started seeing herself as a political activist as a young person. While she says that leftist activists were expected to pay lip service to feminism, many members of the organizations she was involved in were anything but feminist. She recounted several experiences of men in the Palestinian solidarity movement as well as the animal rights movement sexually harassing and raping women members of these movements. "These experiences really informed my understanding of feminism within the context of power relations within activist communities," she told me. When a man in the animal rights community was found to be "hunting" and sexually assaulting several women within the group, Maya and other women members were expected to keep silent about his crimes for the good of the community. She told me, "The political argument was, this is someone who is very important in his role and in the struggle. There are millions of living beings suffering right now. How can you put the lives of a few human women above that?" Women are often told to keep silent for the good of the group, which is often really for the good of the men in the group (West, 2002). Maya's experiences in the animal rights movement led her to consider where she belonged and what truly felt like home. She wanted to be in a community where she and other women could feel physical safety and free from threats of violence from members of the community. Though animal rights

continues to be important to her, the animal rights community is not the place where she feels the most comfortable.

Maya explained that a similar situation happened within the Palestinian solidarity movement when a prominent man activist raped one of Maya's best friends. Women in the organization were expected to keep silent about the rape for the sake of the cause. Rape, in this activist community, was normalized and seen as something that women should keep silent about for the good of the community and the activist efforts. The Palestinian solidarity movement isn't the only community where rape and abuse against women is normalized. Carolyn West argues that rape and sexual abuse has been normalized in Black communities in the U.S., and Black women have been expected to keep silent about the violence they've experienced for the good of the Black community (West, 2002). West is careful to note that talking about violence of some Black men risks normalizing stereotypes that contribute to the oppression of Black men. It is also essential to understand that the abuse of women happens in nearly every community around the world and what should be discussed is not the exceptional nature of the violence against women in Black communities but the silence around it. If these abuses are not discussed, women will continue to be oppressed in a much more immediate, physical manner. Importantly, it is dangerous to a physical woman's safety to say that women are not deserving of protection over a man's reputation.

When some of the Israeli and Palestinian women in the movement spoke about their experiences of assault and harassment by Palestinian men in the movement, they were told that speaking out was a "colonialist stance." Uma Naraya explains that a colonialist stance centers around Western ahistorical representation of "Third World

cultures" as homogeneous, less than, and incorrect (Hussain, 2000, p. 144). However, in activist settings, I have mostly observed the term "colonialist stance" being lobbed at feminist women who bring attention to violence against women. Maya says most of the activists that used the language of a "colonist stance" were Jewish men within the movement. Women who talked about their experiences were told that their "colonialist gaze understands young nonwhite men as sexual predators and puts them in that position. And that it is not their job to come to Palestinian villages and educate people about feminism." When I was sexually assaulted by an unregistered cab driver who was Palestinian soon after arriving in Israel, I told Maya about my assault, and her response was unexpected. She was not shocked or demonstrably upset on my behalf. She was unsurprised by what happened and told me that sexual violence was prevalent when it came to Palestinian men. While this was not an outright dismissal of what happened to me, I did wonder whether she had also normalized violence against women when it came to Palestinian men. Additionally, though she worked toward nuance and intersectionality in most areas of her activist life, her response to me regarding Palestinian men was flattening and discriminatory.

Maya calls both the Palestinian solidarity movements and the animal rights movement in Israel a "boys club." The term "boys club" here refers to a space dominated by men where men are superior to women (Delvaux, 2017). In the Palestinian solidarity movement in particular, "You get shot at and you get teargassed and you get arrested and beaten up and you lose friends. And you lose people to that struggle. And then the people you stand shoulder to shoulder with cannot support you? That really opened my eyes. These experiences really informed me about feminism in a very direct way." Maya views

not only the sexual assaults but the lack of accountability for them and the lack of support for women in the movement as a betrayal. She and other women risked their lives and bodies for the movement and felt that they could not be supported in return. By contrast, all the women I spoke to at Isha said that Isha is a place that stands up for women and a place where they can bring their own problems. While at Isha, I witnessed women gain access to abortions, find resources after experiencing abuse in their relationships, and find jobs after leaving a life of forced prostitution. After telling women at Isha that I was afraid to take another cab, they connected me with a woman cab driver who specifically drives other women.

Maya says that it was her small group of women friends that got her through negative experiences in the solidarity movement and animal rights movement. Eventually, many women splintered off from these activist movements and did work apart from the men. She told me, "What wasn't talked about until later was that, in these groups, women had been doing a lot of the hard work and men had been getting a lot of the credit." When the women left, "we were left with all the women power and the men were left with what was left of their political capital, which a lot of the times tended to dwindle when people started seeing that they're not the ones actually doing the job."While Isha is a space where women can relax and find community, it is also a productive space, and the women at Isha are very proud of the "woman power" that takes action to support women and girls all over Israel.

Maya's experience of exclusion and discrimination reflects a history of women being discriminated against, assaulted, and ignored within social movements. This can be seen in U.S. social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. In the late 1960s and early 1970s

women were excluded or devalued in many ethnic nationalist movements (Ogbar, 2004). Ethnic nationalist movements like the Black Power movement, the Chicano movement, or the Native American movement were male-centered and privileged hyper-masculinity despite having both male and female members. Women in these groups were often oppressed and rendered invisible by men in the group and were given secondary and subservient positions within the groups. Some women left ethnic nationalist movements to join all-women feminist groups but others remained within their ethnic nationalist movements in order to attempt to raise feminist concerns from within (Ogbar, 2004, p. 220-222). Political motivations for joining groups often do not get priority over physical safety of group members.

Similarly, leftist anti-racist and anti-war movements in the 1960s like SNCC and SDS created environments where women were devalued and their concerns were ignored. While many women participated in these movements, feminist issues were typically not viewed as priorities, and women had to look outside of movements like SNCC and SDS if they wanted feminist issues to be taken seriously (Ogbar, 2004). Maya's experience within the Palestinian solidarity movement reflects this history. Maya and other women within the movement experienced abuse and discrimination from both Palestinian and Jewish Israeli men within the group and were not taken seriously when they brought up examples of abuse. Like many of the women from SNCC or SDS, women in the Palestinian solidarity movement often found meaning and belonging within specifically feminist organizations like Isha. Women at Isha come from all over Israel and many were activists for years before finding Isha. However, what Isha brings that other movements did not is physical, emotional, and philosophical safety that allows them the freedom to

achieve their activist goals without the constraints they experienced in other movements. While women at Isha do experience power differences and everyday exclusions, Isha is the place that they run to and the place where they find the most safety and support.

5.5 Pinkwashing and the Erasure of Lesbian Identity

Maya is conscious and upset with the erasure of lesbian identity. This happens when discourses of queer and LGBTQ+ spaces are dominated by the narratives of gay men who often don't represent queer and lesbian women in terms of philosophy or experience. Maya has experienced this in her own life and there are examples of this in academic literature. Queer studies scholars including Puar, Mikdashi, Sarah Schulman, and Jason Ritchie argue that queer activists in Israel are complicit in pinkwashing projects that work to obscure what they view as the colonialism, racism, and militarization of Israel towards Palestinians (Mikdashi 2011; Schulman, 2005; Ritchie 2010, 2012; Puar & Mikdashi, 2012). Schulman writes that examples of pinkwashing may be seen in marketing campaigns like the Israeli government's "Brand Israel" campaign aimed at gay men around the world, which seeks to depict Israel as "relevant and modern," because of the freedoms it allows its queer citizens, and reposition its global image. According to Schulman, in 2010, the Tel Aviv tourism board also spent about $90 million to brand the city as "an international gay vacation destination" and claim its superiority over the rest of the Middle East (Schulman, 2011). Schulman proposes that these campaigns are examples of the ways that the Israeli state has used Israel's gay community to claim modernity and superiority over what it views as the oppressiveness of Palestinian culture (Schulman, 2011). However, Mikdashi argues that Israel's gay community is not merely being manipulated by these campaigns but that gay

Israeli activists are complicit in state projects that seek to claim the superiority of Israel over the oppressiveness and backwardness of the Palestinians (Mikdashi, 2011). Not only is Isha as an organization not involved with these campaigns, but the women of Isha actively discount narratives of Israel's moral superiority over the rest of the Middle East. Activists at Isha are critical of the Israeli government, and during times of war and conflict go out in the public sphere to visibly air their criticism. Several women at Isha recounted a peace march in Haifa that resulted in several Isha members being beaten by fellow Haifa residents. The women at Isha, lesbian and otherwise, work against what they see as colonialist projects and work with Palestinian women.

In each of Puar, Mikdashi, and Schulman's arguments, they discuss the queer community as a unified force without attention to gender specificity. For instance, the Israeli government's "Brand Israel" campaign privileges gay male subjectivity in the queer community through its specific targeting of gay men and attempts to appeal to gay men's interests and experiences. However, Schulman does not complicate the conflation of queer with gay men in her analysis nor does she examine where lesbians or queer women fit within these discussions. Additionally, Mikdashi similarly conflates the term LGBT with gay male activists in her criticism of pinkwashing and fails to include a gendered analysis or discuss how lesbian activists, particularly lesbian feminist activists, may diverge from gay male activist projects (Schulman, 2011; Mikdashi, 2011). Politics can shape narratives of belonging that are often different from lived experience. Puar, Mikdashi, and Schulman paint Israel as morally bankrupt and deceptive, and anti-Israel activists all over the world have a stake in upholding this narrative. However, the lived

experience of the women at Isha and the lesbian activists there like Sophie, Talma, Amira and Maya is very different from the pinkwashing narrative.

Ritchie's work in particular illustrates the ways that some scholars refer to Israel's queer community or LGBT activist organizations when what they are really discussing is gay male activism and communities. During my year with the women of Isha, none of the women I spent time with believed in the idea of a unified queer or LGBTQ+ community and many women did not work with men at all. Maya and other activists saw gay male activists as separate from themselves and separate from the work that Isha was trying to do. In almost every instance, women at Isha did not feel that they were in community with gay male activists and did not appreciate being lumped together with them. Still, in scholarly works like, "How Do You Say 'Come Out of the Closet 'in Arabic," the LGBT community in Israel is viewed as unified (Ritchie, 2010).

In this piece, Ritchie criticizes Israeli LGBT organizations for their missionary projects towards gay Palestinians, their stereotyping and essentializing of Palestinian culture as inherently different and less than Jewish Israeli cultures, and their complicity in colonizing state projects that harm Palestinians (Ritchie, 2010). At several points in the article, Ritchie refers to queer or gay and lesbian people when he is only actually discussing gay male actions and interests. For instance, Ritchie discusses the exclusion that gay Palestinians face in gay bars, parks, and saunas without specifying the gender of those who are excluded or doing the exclusion. However, each of these spaces are primarily gay male spaces and do not speak to the experiences of lesbian or queer women (Ritchie, 2010).

Ritchie argues that many queer Israeli activists work to disassociate themselves from "'the conflict 'as a 'political 'issue that has no necessary connection to 'gay and lesbian 'issues" (Ritchie, 2010, p. 561). He suggests that for many mainstream gay activists, the act of addressing "the conflict" between Israel and Palestinians is outside of their sense of justice. This analysis may be true for some gay activists, but does not speak to the realities of Isha activists. In fact, this analysis does not speak to lesbian activism in Israel more generally, as groups like Aswat, CLaF, and Black Laundry focused on politics and the Occupation. Isha has stated: "We are strongly opposed to militarism, racism and occupation and believe that these issues are closely connected to each other as well as to women's security and safety" (Isha L'Isha). Members of Isha see the liberation of all women as related to the liberation of Palestinians and view the Occupation as part of their sense of justice. In the countless meetings at Isha I attended, there wasn't one where the Occupation was not mentioned. Ritchie also argues that queer Israeli activists are primarily motivated by a desire to "ensure their proper place in the nation" through the exclusion of Palestinians, who are represented as the common enemy of Israeli Jews (p.561). Though marginalized themselves as part of a queer minority, the exclusion of Palestinians allows them to claim a respectable place within the Israeli nation. This is similar to Kuntsman's discussion of Russian immigrants in Israel who exclude Palestinians in order to align themselves with Israeli nationalism (Kuntsman, 2009)

Additionally, Ritchie argues that queer Israeli activists continue to equate Israeli with Jewish and "continually enforce the invisibility of non-Jewish Israelis- Palestinians and other" (Ritchie, 2010, p. 561-562). Isha is an organization made up of Jewish Israelis and Palestinians and to focus entirely on gay activists who erase Palestinian identity is to

ignore the experiences of many lesbian and queer activist women there. In each of Ritchie's examples, he cites gay male sources, such as the Israeli journalist Yossi Halevi, who writes about the "epidemic" of antigay violence in Palestinian society and holds a missionary view towards gay Palestinians, and Shaul Gannon, the leader of HaAguda's (an Israeli LGBT organization) Palestinian Rescue Project and a man who claims to "save" Palestinians from the violence of their culture (Ritchie, 2010). Significantly, in all of his arguments, Ritchie uses words like gay, queer, and LGBT yet only focuses on gay men.

While Ritchie's focus on gay male activists is important, given the types of exclusionary and missionary projects many of these activists participate in, the way he discusses these activists suggests that he is referring to both gay men and lesbians, and perhaps the entire LGBT community. In doing so, he ignores the specificity of women's experiences and identities and assumes that the queer community is fairly homogenous. This speaks to larger issues within scholarship and popular discourse, as discussed in Jeffreys and Morris 'work, on queer communities and activism that privileges gay male subjectivity and ignores the gendered experiences of queer women (Jeffreys, 2003; Morris, 2016). In the context of Israel, these issues are particularly important because of the close association of pinkwashing with queer activism. However, in Isha, a group with challenged.

Maya says that the difference between the feminist lesbian community and the mainstream gay men community is huge. She first noticed a rift between the two communities in 2009 after the shooting in the Tel Aviv Gay Center, which killed two people and injured several others (France-Presse, 2009). The police have yet to

apprehend the shooter. The shooting devastated the LGBTQ+ community in Israel and sparked large protests. Maya says that prior to the shooting, the Tel Aviv municipality took over producing Tel Aviv pride, making it apolitical and tourist-focused, and many gay men supported this shift. After the shooting, which left the entire LGBTQ+ community reeling, Maya says that there was a meeting called at the Gay Center in which a group of gay men decided that they would be in charge of the center from now on. The longtime lesbian feminist activists thought differently. Maya remembers the event: "We were just in the big hall in the Gay Center in Tel Aviv. So a large room with 60 people sitting around. One of my friends had the brilliant idea that if they were going to sit in the center of the room and try to take control of the situation, we were going to make it clear that it was our meeting too. What she did is that she went to another room and she pulled a table in front of two of the gay men and suddenly at one side of the room there were three of four women sitting at the head of a table and unsurprisingly that meeting completely blew up. One gay male activist ended up physically assaulting one of the lesbian activists to get her to leave the room. By then it was pretty clear that these were two different communities: the Tel Aviv gay men's community and us." While both the gay men and lesbians were in mourning and wanted peace and safety for the LGBTQ+ community, there was still separation and disagreement between the two groups. The gay men believed that they should be in charge during this difficult time, and the lesbian group expected to share power with gay men. However, after it was clear that the gay men wanted to be at the head of the table, it became a power play between the two groups.

For Maya, the very physical disagreement that took place that day at the Gay Center represented a rift between the gay and lesbian community that exists to this day. Maya says that much of the disagreement is about strategy. She views many gay men in the community as more mainstream, aligning themselves with pinkwashing campaigns and a highly commercialized Tel Aviv pride. Lesbian feminists, she says, tend to be more political and more concerned with issues outside of LGBTQ+ rights. In many of my discussions with lesbian and queer women at Isha, there was an agreement that the gay male community and lesbian and queer women community was divided. While Maya traces the divide to the attacks at the Tel Aviv Gay Center, it may be traced much further than that. As discussed in the first chapter, the Israeli feminist movement has been intertwined with women's peace movements and lesbian-queer movements since the 1980s (Brandeis). Chen Misgav writes that gay male communities in Israel have been associated more with tourism, the mainstream and the queer patriarchy. Tel Aviv became the capital of gay male life and gay tourism in the 1990s. Misgav writes, "Since the mid-90's the gay community's local political influence increased, and with it the allocation of municipal resources and services for the community. The community's growing power and media visibility were the outcome of the gay legal revolution of the late 1980s, prefigured by the 1988 amendment of the penal code prohibiting homosexual intercourse" (Misgav, 2016, 1521). Many Israelis believe that the Gay Center, which opened in 2008, as well as the gay tourism industry in Israel and media visibility of gay men has mainstreamed gay community members. At the same time, more marginalized members of the LGBT community such as lesbians and transgender women feel excluded from political power (Misgav, 2016, 1522).

When academics focus on issues of pinkwashing to the exclusion of lesbians and queer women, they contribute to the erasure of lesbian women's identities. Queer women's experiences are often very different from gay men's experiences because of the ways that queer communities, the state, and other entities are gendered and because of the very specific history of lesbian feminism in Israel that continues to affect how groups like Isha work and what its members value and believe. While Isha, like any activist organization, engages in forms of exclusion, it is also important to understand the work it does and the women's specific life experiences in order to produce a fuller understanding of queer activism in Israel.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has shown how Maya does and does not experience intersectional forms of belonging at Isha and within other activist communities. While Maya feels the most at home at Isha, she also feels lonely as the only transwoman in the organization. In that way, she is neither here nor there (Crasnow, 2020, p. 212). Maya believes that the reason for the low trans membership at Isha is because transwomen are mostly trying to survive in Israel, but if transwomen felt safe and had their needs met, there may be a much greater chance for them to belong in communities like Isha.

In her own life and in her activism, Maya prioritizes physical safety and philosophical belongings. Specifically, she wants women to feel free from gendered violence within their own activist movements and believes that is most possible within the all-women feminist space of Isha. philosophically, she also believes that activist groups must be intersectional. While she believes in the motivations of the animal rights movement and the Palestinian solidarity movement in Israel, she sees these spaces as not

intersectional and not feminist. In contrast, Isha is a specifically feminist and intersectional space where she and other women can find safety and philosophical belonging. For Maya, safety is not a given in activist spaces, but it must be maintained.

This chapter has also demonstrated why lesbian identity must not be erased in academic writing and political narratives. The political narrative of pinkwashing flattens the LGBTQ+ movement in Israel and erases lived experience, particularly the experience of lesbian and queer women. This chapter and this dissertation in its entirety demonstrate that the lived experiences of the women and lesbian activists at Isha is very different from the one-dimensional portrayals of the LGBTQ+ movement that pinkwashing narratives create. While belonging at Isha can be fraught, the diversity of women activists advocate against the Occupation and bring attention to violence, including domestic violence and state violence, against Palestinian and Israeli women.

Belonging is often based on what individuals have in common with other individuals but it can also be strengthened by differences among people. Isha is strongest when it is also intersectional and when its activist members are aware of the intersecting oppressions that affect different women's lives.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

In this dissertation, I have shown how belonging can become a lens through which to understand how women at Isha understand and describe their sense of attachment and safety. I explored belonging from an ontological view with a focus on affective modalities. Ontological affect theory "positions the capacity of a body to affect and be affected as the foundation for relation both beyond and between individuals" (Bollmer, 2014, p. 298). By considering affect as a mode of being, I connect affect to agency and autonomy (Raudaskoski et al., 2019). Additionally, by examining belonging through an affective lens, I better understood how activist communities create and cultivate belonging.

I have examined belonging within the context and purpose of a woman-only space and center belonging around the idea of safety at three levels: physical safety, emotional safety, and philosophical safety. Belonging demonstrates individuals ʼfelt articulation of the otherwise nebulous "safety," which draws activists to the all-women community of Isha that constitutes the affective structure of this community. The central theme of my project shows how the affectsphere of belonging takes its shape at Isha and allows members to transcend entrenched differences of age, sexuality, ethnicity, and nationality to build coalition for social change.

To understand how women at Isha form belonging and their affectsphere, I examined three main research questions throughout this piece through a critical engagement with four womenʼs experiences in and out of Isha. First, I asked how Isha members understand their identities and describe their sense of belonging within the

organization, within the wider queer community, within feminist spaces, and within Israel. Second: How can new conceptualizations around the power of affect in spaces of belonging address theoretical concerns of affect and address alternative models of subject formation? Finally: How does the feminist and women-only space and philosophy of Isha create a unique environment that shapes belonging and activist efforts and allows relationships to form across divides?

6.2 Belonging and Identity through Isha, feminism, and Israel

Belonging is a powerful lens through which to examine group membership, self-narratives, and larger political structures within society. I first asked how Isha members understand their identities and describe their sense of belonging within the organization, within the wider queer community, within feminist spaces, and within Israel. Talma, Sophie, Amira, and Maya all found belonging within Isha and all but Amira view Isha as their primary place of belonging, but their lived experiences and intersectional identities led them to understand their belonging very differently. Still, all women experienced and witnessed gendered violence and understood that Isha's women-only space was important to many of its members.

Ontological belonging, expectations for, experiences of, and creations of belonging are created through a variety of mechanisms. Talma's experience with belonging can be traced alongside the Israeli feminist movement, beginning in the 1970s. At that time, she lived in Haifa, which happened to be the site of the first consciousness- raising group and where the founders of the contemporary feminist movement started the movement (Frankfort-Nachmias, 2005, p. 40). Social location can be considered a level of belonging which is based in the body. Often major aspects of social location are visible, but even

when social location is not visible (and it is rarely completely visible) it has impacts on the body. This can be literal, visible race and gender, or it can be less visible queerness that nevertheless impacts anxiety and sense of well-being (Guerin & McMenamin, 2019).

History impacts the creation of social location and the body as well. The history of feminism in Israel is a lens through which to approach new forms of belonging (namely those that put social location in context of the body). A past of gendered violence within Israel has impacted the way women experience the world there (Muhlbauer, 2006). Similarly, perceptions of equal work and rights have made Israeli women more likely to speak up than women of other locations, which too is expressed in physical manifestations (Sa'ar & Gooldin, 2009).

Talma, for example, is well-aware of gendered violence within Israel. Through a group of feminists in the 1970s as well as the members of a rape crisis center where she advocated for women who were victims of violence alongside other advocates, Talma began to find belonging. In the radical feminist and lesbian space of Isha, she realized that she could be non-normative and feminist. At Isha, she found physical, emotional and philosophical safety that she had not fully experienced anywhere else. The women-only space of Isha makes her feel safe from violence, and safe to think freely and express herself without fear, providing philosophical safety. She also has an emotional attachment to Isha, which she expresses through her friendships and emotional labor with international volunteers. She feels that she is forever connected to the women at Isha, even those who were there just for a short time.

In contrast, Sophie's understanding of her identity and belonging is more fraught. While she views activism as a physical function, as natural as breathing, her own

experience with Isha and identity makes her feel conflicted. When she first came to Isha, she felt pressured to follow a cultural script, which said she should begin identifying as a lesbian before she was ready and start dating a women. She was outed without her consent at an activist event and felt uncomfortable in her role as what she saw as the "token lesbian." Cultural scripts, like the one Sophie felt she had to follow, can be limiting to people who do not identify with prescribed narratives for their lives (Loseke, 2007).

As someone who has been at Isha for nearly twenty years, Sophie feels comfortable at Isha and sees it as her home. She feels a strong emotional attachment to Isha and the women there. She also pushes against Isha's norms, such as its all-women membership policy, and sometimes bumps heads with other members. She wants to push boundaries and make Isha more inclusive of many types of people. Within the span of a single day, she may understand her belonging differently: at times feeling at peace there and at other times critiquing everything around her. This temporal view of belonging can offer certain benefits- Sophie is critical of the belonging she feels at Isha and may be able to question practices of Isha more than other women, allowing her to grow. She calls this a conflicted belonging, but it is belonging nonetheless.

Amira belongs to Isha the way that many women belong: peripherally. She is an activist who belongs to many different communities, and Isha satisfies one part of her identity. As a Palestinian lesbian who has experienced violence, it is important to do activism in her own way: through representation and through her performances as a spoken word poet. Her commitment to Isha is "fleeting," but that doesn't mean that she doesn't add to its richness with her unique experiences and participation. Like Sophie,

belonging to activist groups is something that is rooted in her body, activism is part of her very being.

Like Talma and Sophie, Maya believes that Isha is the place where she belongs the most. After experiencing and witnessing violence in other activist movements, she found that feminist activism at Isha was a place of safety. She felt physically and philosophically safe there and felt that her identity as a transwoman was accepted and appreciated. philosophical safety is essential, and often linked to political views and motivations. While Maya agreed with many of the political views of other activist spaces, she did not feel safe due to prevalent misogynistic biases. This dissertation shows how philosophical safety is beyond political motivations and, rather, is associated with a more holistic view.

Academics approach pinkwashing as a political tool that uses Israel's stellar record of LGBTQ+ rights to gloss over the ongoing occupation of the Palestinian territories. However, when scholars write about pinkwashing, they tend to omit lesbian and queer women's experiences (Puar & Mikdashi, 2012; Mikdashi, 2011). This omission is especially significant because the gay man and lesbian communities in Israel are often quite separate and have distinct histories. Maya believes that there are divisions between the gay and lesbian community to philosophical differences. However, the reality of those lived, experiential differences can be overwritten by pinkwashing political narratives.

While Maya feels very safe at Isha, she sometimes Maya feels a sense of loneliness because she is the only transwoman there, and the other transwomen she knows experience great difficulty in everyday life. While she shares many aspects of her identity with the women at Isha and agrees with them philosophically, she believes that her sense

of belonging would be stronger if there were more transwomen at Isha who understood the trans aspect of her identity.

By examining belonging around the idea of safety at three levels: physical safety, emotional safety, and philosophical safety, I demonstrate the complex ways that many women at Isha understand their sense of belonging and come to call Isha home. Here, safety is an experiential lens wherein physical and mental landscapes are dependent on each other. While each of the women have very different life experiences, they all experience belonging, at least in part, through the lens of their experience with gendered violence. Isha offers a space where women can experience some freedom from that violence. Still, belonging to Isha can be complicated, and with the feelings of safety are also feelings of being misunderstood or ignored or unequal at times. When women of Isha say that Isha is home, they carry with them all the baggage that "home" can bring.

6.3 Affect impacting belonging and subject formation

Affect is a powerful tool for understanding creations of belongings. As previously mentioned, all of the women I spoke to at Isha had experiences of gendered violence which led them to seek physical safety. This constitution of affect creates places of belonging wherein physical safety is supposedly guaranteed. Understanding and applying affect provides new conceptions of belonging that is rooted in physical safety. By priming safety as a necessary and influential topic, it proves that affect can be a helpful lens to interpreting different societal conceptualizations, like that of belonging. Also, it prioritizes the need to center safety within discussion of belonging.

It is also important to examine when understandings of affective spaces are 'punctured 'to show the full range of experiences and further complicates notions of

activist community building. Talma reflects on lesbian relationships that are violent. She is disgusted, in part because these dynamics violated the sphere of safety as created by all-women spaces where she lived. To make a repair in her conceptualization of women-only spaces as safe, she equates the violence of the outside world with heteronormativity. She relates the abusive couple to that of straight couples, thereby reaffirming her boundaries of safety through women.

As mentioned throughout this dissertation, there are also struggles and tensions within Isha. Isha is not a place exempt from emotional harm, oppressive practices and culture, or completely without problems: No place is exempt from this reality. However, Isha's strong commitment to inclusivity, non-hierarchical decision-making processes, and adaptation make Isha a location where differences and conflict can contribute to constructive dialogue and collective improvement. The temporal aspect of belonging is a part of this process. Belonging has a temporal aspect, which inherently implies change and flexibility. This is in line with an affective view of belonging where bodily impulses are malleable and liable to change. Viewing belonging as temporally unstable, allows affect, a way of interacting with the world, to change and constitutively create belonging over time.

Temporal belonging gives activists the chance to make enduring relationships, withstanding periods of hardships and victories, as well as fleeting belonging, where members can co-mingle and interact before departing on their separate ways once again. This fleeting interaction may be more symbolic for someone like Amira, who feels a deep and strong connection to Isha but often is involved in many other spaces as well. She provides new insights and views into the space of Isha, like that of many Palestinian

women, which has the potential to change how Isha functions. Similarly, in chapter four, it is clear that most transwomen who interact with Isha belong in a fleeting, temporally unstable manner. Still, Isha can shape an individual's affective landscape, even if Isha is not the central concept of that landscape. Amira is impacted by Isha and brings her feminist views into other locations. By understanding these mutually constitutive forces, we have the opportunity to examine a new, intersectional lens between affect and belonging as well as the power of belonging to make social change.

6.4 Women-only Spaces Can Lead to Intersectional Belonging

Finally, I asked: how does the feminist and women-only space and philosophy of Isha create a unique environment that shapes belonging and activist efforts and allows relationships to form across divides? The women-only space of Isha allowed a feeling of safety from gendered violence. At Isha, women felt physically, emotionally, and philosophically safe. Most of the women I spoke to at Isha believed that the women-only membership policy was key in allowing women to feel safe. For many women, these feelings of safety may have more to do with freedom from gendered violence than female identification. In past activist movements, Maya witnessed unchecked violence by men towards women. In these movements, women were expected to remain silent for the good of the group, which really meant for the good of the aggressors. Many of the women who were part of these organizations left for feminist and women-only organizations, including Maya. Women-only spaces were a chance to experience ontological safety--the ability to exist in a way that is comfortable, or at least tolerable by participating in activities that don't threaten severe mental and physical harm. To participate in activism, which is already a space of pushing against long-standing societal norms, and therefore

‘unsafe, ’Maya needs to feel support and safety within her activist community. For Maya, the women-only feminist space of Isha allows for her to belong without the threat of violence she witnessed in other spaces.

Talma believes that many women would not feel philosophically safe without the women-only space of Isha. In other activist spaces, she has witnessed women who are too uncomfortable to speak about certain topics, such as reproductive freedom, in front of men. Additionally, she believes that when men are present, they take up all the space and talk on top of women, allowing the women less freedom and ability to speak. Several other women I interviewed agreed and said that Isha’s women-only membership policy is what makes Isha special. While Amira appreciated the women-only space of Isha, it wasn’t her top priority in her activist work. She belongs to several activist movements and sees her identity as a woman just one important aspect of her whole identity. However, she does feel comfortable at Isha and has found a sense of belonging and philosophical freedom with the women there.

Boundary maintenance inherent in women-only spaces can lead to activism through leveraging impressions of safety. While traditionally boundary maintenance may be thought of as oppressive, there are certain instances, specifically in the gathering and empowerment of oppressed groups, that can be positive. Exploring ontologies of belonging through women-only spaces can provide valuable insights into uncommon conceptions of boundary maintenance roles.

Sophie stands out in her opposition to the women-only membership requirement at Isha. She believes that Isha should be open to feminist men and that feminist men have just as much to offer the organization as feminist women. She understands that many

women at Isha feel most comfortable away from gendered violence in a women-only space, but she wants to push Isha's boundaries and allow men in as well. This is just one of the ways that she hopes to open up the space and make Isha more inclusive. In addition to including feminist men, she hopes that working class women will also feel comfortable at Isha.

Intersectionality can be a helpful lens through which to understand belonging. Women in Isha come from a range of ages, races, and nationalities. This large variety of backgrounds allows them to successfully advocate for peace work, anti-human trafficking and accomplish many other broad, large issues. Belonging can still form despite differences as seen through understanding intersectional identity. Belonging is based on some commonalities and a sense of connection, but it is strengthened by differences as well. Intersectional approaches, like efforts in Isha to include more low-income women and transwomen can lead to strong activist ties. Belonging, and in this case physical safety such as a women-only space, can bring people together across differences in a way that is unique and powerful.

In addition to viewing the women-only space as a place of physical, emotional, and philosophical safety from gendered violence, it is also a place to examine specifically lesbian and queer women activists. Since Isha's founding, it has focused on lesbian activists and all the women discussed in this dissertation identify as lesbians. Previously, scholars have focused primarily on gay men in their discussions of the LGBTQ+ community (Puar & Mikdashi, 2012; Ritchie, 2012). These discussions have primarily focused on the topics of homonationalism and pinkwashing and have omitted the life experiences of lesbian and queer women. By focusing entirely on lesbian activists who

are part of a feminist community, I show demonstrate the gulf between the lived experience of many lesbian activists and the academic description of pinkwashing. Isha is an anti-Occupation organization that advocates specifically for Palestinian women.

6.5 Conclusion

This dissertation has used belonging as a lens to understand how women at Isha understand and describe their sense of attachment and physical, emotional, and philosophical safety. Talma, Sophie, Amira, and Maya as well as the 36 other women I interviewed provided so much insight into how women at Isha understand their identities and sense of belonging within the organization. In the future, there will be a few more areas necessary to explore. First, while Isha includes a diversity of women across age, nationality, and ethnicity, it fails to include more than one transwoman or low income women. I wonder, how might Isha be more inclusive to those women? While affect is a viable lens for understanding intersectional practices, the theory could be further explicated on to detail the interactions of different types of intersectional identities within women-only spaces. What barriers exist that prevent other transwomen and low income women from joining the organization? How might the historical plight of transwomen and those with other marginalized identities overlap with, differ from, and compound the historical trauma that women faced. It will be important to understand these issues in more depth to further build upon the framework detailed in this dissertation. Intersectional locales, like Isha, can be an important lever for social change and become only more powerful with increased inclusion.

Secondly, it was important to demonstrate how lesbian and queer women's lived experience was much different from scholarly depictions of LGBTQ+ people within the

frame of pinkwashing and homonationalism. Atshan claims that queer Jewish Israelis are some of the most vigorous non-Palestinian supporters of anti-homophobia, anti-Arab racism, and the Israeli state (2020). In fact, queer Palestinian Israelis, specifically many lesbian women, "catalyzed the rise of the Palestinian LGBTQ social and political sphere" (p. 1, Atshan 2020). Groups like Isha and Aswat are major contributors in this space. Women at Isha also say that there is a rift between the gay man community and the lesbian and queer community. However, in the future, it would be important for a feminist scholar to also examine the lived experience of gay men in Israel. Would an ethnographic examination of gay men activists 'lives in Haifa also complicate pinkwashing and homonationalism claims? It is clear that political motives shape narratives of belonging. By understanding an ethnographic view of gay men's experiences in Israel an important perspective will be representative and there will be more theoretical depth in the question: how much and how do political motives shape narratives of belonging?

Finally, this dissertation looked at belonging specifically within an all-women space and argued that women at Isha found belonging through safety from gendered violence. In the future, it would be important to test whether women in other all-women spaces also found belonging through safety from gendered violence. For example, do women at women-only shelters or other lesbian activist groups find belonging in the same way? Does the affectsphere created in Isha from a sense and longing for physical safety take shape in other locales and look any different? This will further provide insight into the importance of physical safety within conversations of belonging and affect.

Affect is a powerful lens through which belonging can be understood. Belonging in women-only spaces often relates to and comes from a desire for physical safety. This thesis investigates the creation of activist spaces and cites lessons that may allow for the multiplication of social change locations in the future- creating safer and more just communities. Woman to woman, it is possible to create inspirational, transnational, and powerful activisms that generate a better future.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1. IRB APPROVAL

University of Kentucky | Office of Research Integrity
IRB, RDRC

Initial Review

Approval Ends
July 10, 2018

IRB Number
17-0489-P4S

TO: Lauren Copeland
Gender and Women's Studies
PI phone #: (513) 706-3696

FROM: Chairperson/Vice Chairperson
Non-medical Institutional Review Board (IRB)

SUBJECT: Approval of Protocol Number 17-0489-P4S

DATE: July 17, 2017

On July 11, 2017, the Non-medical Institutional Review Board approved your protocol entitled:

Woman to Woman: Community and Belonging Among Queer Feminist Activists in Haifa, Israel

Approval is effective from July 11, 2017 until July 10, 2018 and extends to any consent/assent form, cover letter, and/or phone script. If applicable, attached is the IRB approved consent/assent document(s) to be used when enrolling subjects. **[Note, subjects can only be enrolled using consent/assent forms which have a valid "IRB Approval" stamp unless special waiver has been obtained from the IRB.]** Prior to the end of this period, you will be sent a Continuation Review Report Form which must be completed and returned to the Office of Research Integrity so that the protocol can be reviewed and approved for the next period.

In implementing the research activities, you are responsible for complying with IRB decisions, conditions and requirements. The research procedures should be implemented as approved in the IRB protocol. It is the principal investigators responsibility to ensure any changes planned for the research are submitted for review and approval by the IRB prior to implementation. Protocol changes made without prior IRB approval to eliminate apparent hazards to the subject(s) should be reported in writing immediately to the IRB. Furthermore, discontinuing a study or completion of a study is considered a change in the protocol's status and therefore the IRB should be promptly notified in writing.

For information describing investigator responsibilities after obtaining IRB approval, download and read the document "PI Guidance to Responsibilities, Qualifications, Records and Documentation of Human Subjects Research" from the Office of Research Integrity's IRB Survival Handbook web page [http://www.research.uky.edu/ori/IRB-Survival-Handbook.html#PIresponsibilities]. Additional information regarding IRB review, federal regulations, and institutional policies may be found through ORI's web site [http://www.research.uky.edu/ori]. If you have questions, need additional information, or would like a paper copy of the above mentioned document, contact the Office of Research Integrity at (859) 257-9428.

N. Van Tubergen, PhD/ah
Chairperson/Vice Chairperson

see blue.

315 Kinkead Hall | Lexington, KY 40506-0057 | P: 859-257-9428 | F: 859-257-8995 | www.research.uky.edu/ori/

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APPENDIX 2. CONSENT

IRB Approved 17-0489
Valid: 07/11/17-07/10/18

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

TITLE OF STUDY: Woman to Woman: Community and Belonging Among Queer Feminist Activists in Haifa, Israel

WHY ARE YOU BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

You are being invited to take part in a research study about community building and belonging among queer feminist activists in Isha L'Isha. You are being invited to take part in this research study because you are a current of former member, volunteer, or staff member of Isha L'Isha. If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be one of about forty people to do so.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?

The person in charge of this study is Lauren Copeland, a doctoral student at the University of Kentucky, Department of Gender and Women's Studies. She is being guided in this research project by Dr. Cristina Alcalde.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

By doing this study, we hope to learn about how queer feminist activists in Isha L'Isha form community with each other across borders of difference like race, religion, or nationality. We also hope to learn how activists understand their belonging within the group, within the wider queer community, and within Israel. The concept of belonging refers to individuals' feelings of inclusion and acceptance within Isha L'Isha, the queer community, and Israel, and whether they feel that their identity and life experiences are represented in these three spaces.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

There are no reasons to not take part in the study unless you choose not to. Being involved in Isha L'Isha is the only requirement. Individuals under the age of 18 cannot participate.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

The bulk of the study will take place at the Haifa Feminist Center or in meeting or conference rooms at the University of Haifa where Isha L'Isha events take place. Your participation will last approximately 90 minutes for the interview. The interview will include topics such as activism, your participation in Isha L'Isha, and working with people who are different from yourself.

WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete a one-page demographic survey and to participate in one interview. All interviews will be audiotaped.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life. Although unlikely, there is always a possibility of interview questions triggering unexpected feelings.

WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

If you decide to participate in this study, there will be no direct benefit to you. However, it is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit the larger society by adding to the literature about activism in Israel and the specific experiences of queer activist women.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering.

IF YOU DON'T WANT TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY, ARE THERE OTHER CHOICES?

If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except not to take part in the study.

WHAT WILL IT COST YOU TO PARTICIPATE?

There are no costs associated with taking part in the study.

WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY REWARDS FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

You will not receive any rewards or payment for taking part in the study.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT YOU GIVE?

We will make every effort to keep confidential all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law. Your information will be assigned/attributed to a pseudonym in all analysis and written work about the study. Your name will only appear on the demographic survey which will be kept confidential to the extent possible.

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be personally identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. To ensure confidentiality to the extent possible, the following measures will be taken: participants will be assigned pseudonyms during the first interview process. Each interview will be recorded using a hand held recording device/tablet. All study data and records, including audio recordings, will be transcribed and saved as pseudonymous participant. Hard copies of materials will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home office. All electronic

data (including original audio files) will be stored on a private server that is password protect and not cloud accessible. Data analysis and work emerging from the data collection will be stored on the principal investigator's laptop which is password protected. Some files without personal identifying (stored as pseudonym as necessary) information may be stored on password-protected private cloud storage during the transcription stages. Audio files will be erased/destroyed after transcription.

We may be required to show information which identifies you to people who need to be sure we have done the research correctly; these would be people from such organizations as the University of Kentucky.

CAN YOUR TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY?

If you decide to take part in the study you still have the right to decide at any time that you no longer want to continue. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study.

WHAT ELSE DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?

There is a possibility that the data collected from you may be shared with other investigators in the future. If that is the case the data will not contain information that can identify you unless you give your consent or the UK Institutional Review Board (IRB) approves the research. The IRB is a committee that reviews ethical issues, according to federal, state and local regulations on research with human subjects, to make sure the study complies with these before approval of a research study is issued.

Contacting Research Subjects for Future Studies

Do you give your permission to be contacted in the future by Lauren Copeland regarding your willingness to participate in future research studies about this topic?

☐ Yes ☐ No _____Initials

WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS, CONCERNS, OR COMPLAINTS?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact the investigator, Lauren Copeland at lecope2@uky.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the staff in the Office of Research Integrity at the University of Kentucky between the business hours of 8am and 5pm EST, Mon-Fri. at +1 859 257 9428. You may also access the Office of Research Integrity's website at http://www.research.uky.edu/ori/. The Office of Research Integrity staff can only communicate in English. We will give you a signed copy of this consent form to take with you.

_____ _____
Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study Date

_____
Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

_____ _____
Name of (authorized) person obtaining informed consent Date

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