Ethno-national boundaries and the gendered body: Jewish women as a human shield

Sion, Liora

Published in:
Poetics

Publication date:
2014

Citation for published version (APA):
Ethno-national boundaries and the gendered body: Jewish women as a human shield

Liora Sion

Givatayim

1. Introduction

Nationalism has been demarcated by state effort to manage diversity through manipulation and the reinforcement of difference. Citizenship can be conceptualized as a set of processes of inclusion and exclusion involving the building of identities on the basis of a common or imagined solidarity on the basis of ethnic, religious and sexual assumptions (Isin and Wood, 1999). This paper follows a tradition of research that aims to understand how the imagining of a national community is intertwined with the creation of boundaries which are reinforced and reproduced subsequently...
(Anderson, 1991; Wimmer, 2006). This is achieved by analyzing how ethno-national boundary crossing and blurring are shaped by gender, class and ethnicity.

Citizens' gendered lives result in men and women experiencing political institutions differently. Rather than treating citizenship as a universal relationship between ungendered individuals and the state, scholars suggest that research must acknowledge the way gender dynamics effect both individual political participation and the impact of state policies on individuals (Seidman, 1999).

Young (2003) categorizes the state by its masculine logic of protection which demotes members of a democracy to dependants. Their protector position puts the citizens and residents who depend on state officials’ strength and vigilance in the position of women and children under the charge of the male protector (Berlant, 1997). Good citizenship in a security regime consists of cooperative obedience for the sake of the safety of all. It is not merely that dissent is dangerous, argues Young (2003); worse yet, it is ungrateful. Subordinate citizenship does not merely consent to limitations on freedom in exchange for a promise of security; the consent is active, as solidarity with the others uniting behind and in grateful love of country.

Taking on Young’s (2003) analogy of authoritarian security paradigm as a masculine protector toward his wife, I ask how the state responds when subordinate females, instead of being grateful for the state’s promise of protection, cross ethno-national boundaries by acting as the enemy's human shield. When and how does the state try to reinforce its boundaries? How are the state’s acts influenced by citizens’ gender, ethnicity and class, and what can we learn from this experience about state boundary making process?

This is especially relevant to Jewish Israeli women who enjoy fewer rights than male members of their social group in the civil and social spheres and, collectively, are denied full membership to the political community. While military service in Israel is mandatory for both men and women, only men are considered to possess military virtue as the protectors of the nation. Women’s importance is in their motherhood and especially their ever-ready wombs for war, by ‘producing’ new fighters (Ahäll, 2012).

During the second intifada (2000–2005) three women used their privileged Jewish body as a human shield to protect Palestinian militant men against the Israeli military. Neta Golan, an Ashkenazi middle-class left wing activist acted as a human shield to the Palestinian president Yassir Arafat. She is married to a Palestinian man and is raising a family in Ramallah. Angelica Yusupov, an immigrant from the former Soviet Union was only eighteen when she was sentenced to eighteen years in jail for assisting her Palestinian boyfriend, Zayed Kilani, to plant bombs in Tel Aviv in 2001. Tali Fahima, a Mizrahi working-class woman who in 2005 was convicted of aiding the enemy during wartime, supporting a terrorist organization and providing information to the enemy after she offered herself as a human shield to Zacaria Zbeidy, the Palestinian chief of Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade. She served twenty-six months in jail, including over a year in administrative detention. She was the first woman and only the second Jew in Israel to be subjected to such a harsh treatment (Kotef, 2011; Sion, 2011, 2014). After her release from jail she continued her radicalization process and converted to Islam.

These cases demonstrate that ethno-national boundaries are more permeable than they first appear although crossing them is never simple. This may however take different forms depending on an individual’s positioning. Drawing on the rich literature on boundary work (Alba, 2005; Barth, 1969; Lamont and Molnar, 2002; Wimmer, 2008a,b; Zolberg and Woon, 1999) I focus upon the intersection between ethno-national boundaries, gender, ethnicity and class. There have been not enough detailed studies that analyze ethno-national boundary crossing in light of intersectionality (Anthias, 2008; McCall, 2005). Specifically how the state responses to the crossing and boundary blurring of members of the majority group is influenced by their gender and ethnicity.

Recent feminist scholarship increasingly presents race, class, and gender as closely intertwined and argues that these forms of stratification need to be studied in relation to each other, conceptualizing them as a “matrix of domination” (Collins, 1990). Intersectionality as a process, argue Choo and Ferree (2010), highlights power as relational, seeing the interactions among variables as multiplying oppressions at various points of intersection, and drawing attention to unmarked groups.

The body of the state as well as the body of its subjects is not a neutral body, but a body already invested with the meanings of sexual difference and ethnic domination (Aretxaga, 2001). Such difference also produces different effects within the state. Intersectionality is obliterated in boundary
work theory in which the majority appears as an abstract homogenous entity. But as Grosz (1994) has noted, such an abstract universal body is de facto a male body. What is missing is the way in which boundary work operates in relation to the intersectionality of gender, ethnicity and class in order to produce specific subjectivities.

Crossing, assimilating and blurring ethno-national boundaries are often different when applied to women’s and men’s bodies. Furthermore, the same mechanism might produce different effects on sexually differentiated bodies. This lack of sexual specificity of “the body” subject to gender, ethnicity and class, is also absent to a great deal of otherwise excellent scholarship on boundary making (Alba, 2005; Wimmer, 2008a,b; Zolberg and Woon, 1999).

I argue that the human shield bodies have become markers for the imagined boundaries of ethnic and national communities and for the discursive landscapes of class and gender differences. The human shield body is treated primarily according to its gender. First, Jewish men who cross the ethno-national boundary raise very little attention while Jewish women are condemned and demonized for performing the same role. Second, citizens who cross ethno-national boundaries are treated according to their ethnicity and as a result their social positioning. Hence, the hegemonic Ashkenazi body is treated differently than the Mizrahi inferior body. Third, the state cannot cope with unpredictable citizens who blur boundaries. If state officials fail to categorize and re-discipline unpredictable citizens they expunge them from the community. Hence in order to classify unpredictable citizens, state officials are influenced not only by citizens’ actions but also their motivations and thoughts.

By analyzing the state’s practices of inclusion and exclusion my aim is to contribute to the understanding of the specific kinds of “state-work” and how the state acts to encourage or codify certain categories of inclusion and exclusions, with regards to gender, ethnicity and class. First I discuss the theoretical concepts I use from the boundary literature which informs my research methodology. I then analyze how gender and ethnicity boundaries determine boundary crossing and blurring, and the role played by citizens’ predictability. The analysis concludes by examining how gender, ethnicity and predictability influenced the women’s interrogations and trials.

2. Boundaries blurring and crossing

Boundaries have always been a central concern of studies of ethno-national communities. Following Durkheim (1965), communities have been defined by their internal segmentation as much as by their external perimeter. States have often codified or encouraged nationalism selectively, demarcating by specified categories who is to be included and who is to be excluded (Wimmer, 2006). Boundaries which are constructed around the national community divide the world into those who are “citizens” or “friends,” and those who are “enemies” (Bauman, 1990). “Enemies” do not only reside outside of the territorial confines of the nation-state, but may also lie within, reflecting the “internal structure of social divisions” (Schlesinger, 1991).

Boundary scholars distinguish between bright and blurred boundaries (Zolberg and Woon, 1999; Alba, 2005). Bright boundaries are widely recognized, institutionalized, and extremely significant in terms of both the life chances of and social distance between actors on different sides of the divide. As a result, “The distinction involved is unambiguous, so that individuals know at all times which side of the boundary they are on” (Alba, 2005). Blurred boundaries are less recognized, less institutionalized, and not as closely correlated with life chances and social distance. When boundaries are blurred, individuals may be seen as being “simultaneously members of the groups on both sides of the boundary or that sometimes they appear to be members of one and at other times members of the other” (Alba, 2005).

Wimmer (2008a) distinguishes between strategies that attempt to change the location of existing boundaries (“boundary shifting”) and those that try to modify its meaning and implication. This is done by de-emphasizing ethnicity and emphasizing other social divisions (“blurring”) or changing one’s own position vis-à-vis the boundary (“positional moves”). Boundary blurring reduces the importance of ethnicity as a principle of categorization and social organization. Other non-ethnic principles are promoted and thus the legitimacy of ethnic or national boundaries undermined (Wimmer, 2008a).
While boundaries themselves can brighten, blur, expand, or contract, individuals can also cross boundaries, moving from one category to another “without any real change” in the boundary itself (Alba, 2005). Positional moves mean boundary crossing and re-positioning within a hierarchical system of ethnic categories. It shows those who move and those who stay that there is no ‘in-between’ and that the social world is indeed structured along hierarchical lines (Wimmer, 2008a,b).

With boundary crossing, individuals are “judged to have acquired the characteristics that meet the criteria for membership in a different category” (Loveman and Muniz, 2007, p. 917). When boundaries are crossed, a change in categorical membership is precipitated by a change in an individual’s personal profile. In contrast, boundary shifting implies that re-classification happens because the criteria for categorical membership change.

Boundary work literature takes it for granted that crossing is one way only, from a minority group to a dominant one, as research about non-whites has shown (Fox and Guglielmo, 2012; Loveman and Muniz, 2007; Schwartzman, 2007). I hope to contribute to the literature by analyzing how the state uses mechanism of inclusion and exclusion in the process of boundary crossing of a member of the privileged majority group depends on their gender, ethnicity and class.

3. Research methods

Researching security can be a daunting task because many resources are confidential. This is especially the case when it comes to the General Security Service and the classified and clandestine nature of its activities. As in other security cases in Israel, in addition to any open trial which is accessible to the public there also exists a “confidential trial” which is not accessible to outsiders. For this reason, this paper focuses only on the “open trial” of Golan, Fahima and Yusepov, and therefore upon documentation which was only partly censored or not censored at all.

My analysis relies on original as well as secondary data. First, I make use of court and interrogation protocols. Most of these protocols are taken from Fahima’s trial due to its length and complexity and the puzzling fact that her interrogation protocols were censored yet not classified (Sion, 2011, 2014). Interrogation protocols, however, cannot be considered a reliable source since they are written by the General Security Service itself and could be seen as being one sided and involve substantial ‘editing’. About 80 protocol pages were systematically analyzed and compared with media sources.

The second source is interviews with Fahima and Yusepov’s lawyers who contributed essential information and insights on the cases. They also gave me access to their files.

The third source of data comes from the media coverage of Golan, Fahima and Yusupov. I mainly used major Israeli news websites such as YNET, Haaretz, NRG, Walla and Mako. It includes a systematic analysis of media conspicuous and public images of Uri Avneri and Uri Davis. The media coverage reflects the public attitude toward them. While Fahima’s actions and trial were excessively covered, less was written about Golan and Yusepov and almost nothing about Avneri and Davis.

4. Intifada al-Aqsa

Intifada al-Aqsa, also known as the Second Intifada or uprising, was a period of intensified Palestinian–Israeli violence. This began in late September 2000 as a result of the failure of the Oslo Accord and ended roughly around 2005. Intifada al-Aqsa took place after the establishment of the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian population centers.

Many of the confrontations during the intifada were between Israeli forces and armed Palestinian police and other gunmen as well as Palestinian suicide attacks against Israeli civilians and soldiers. Israel used Hissulim memukadim—assassination or “targeted killings”—as an effective way to eliminate without trial those responsible for terror attacks and limit collateral damage while crippling the Palestinian militia leadership (Gross, 2003). Soldiers also used Palestinians as human shields using a practice termed nohal shachen or “neighbor procedure,” which was forbidden in 2002 by the Supreme Court. In their actions, Golan and Fahima voluntarily; and Yusepov involuntarily, mirrored the military’s actions by using their privileged body as a human shield.
5. Boundary blurring and crossing in the Israeli context

In 2004 a journalist wrote an article titled “What is going on between Israeli women and armed Palestinians,” stating that, “the Likud\(^1\) voter, Tali Fahima, is having fun with the head of tanzim (the military brunch of the FATAH). . . the newcomer Angelica Yusupov accomplies a terrorist. . . and Neta Golan is embracing Arafat. . . why a young woman is willing to risk her life, act illegally and befriend armed wanted men with ‘Jewish blood on their hands’? Is it adventure? Sexual attraction? Romance? Political opinions? Or maybe mere madness? . . . in all these cases it was a woman who chose to support Palestinians. Why haven’t we heard about a Jewish man who chose to leave his one bedroom apartment in Tel-Aviv in favor of a Palestinian girl in a village?” (Aderet, 2004).

In Hebrew, the terms for sexual and national betrayal are similar. The word \\_b\_gida\_ describes both the betrayal of the state and the betrayal of a loved one. A poll conducted in 2007, found that more than half of the Israeli Jews believe intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews (especially Muslims) should be equated with “national treason” (Nachmias, 2007). Yet as the quotation above suggests, these women were treated by state officials and the media mainly according to their gender and ethnicity. State officials and the media also differentiated between ideological crossing (Golan), the perception of falling in love (Fahima), or being (so-called) “duped” into ethnossexual relationships (Yusepov).

Neta Golan, a peace activist, acted for political reasons as part of the International Solidarity Movement (ISM). She stated: “We understood . . . that we need to be the Palestinians human shield. To use our ‘blue’ blood because when it spills it has some effect; contrary to Arab blood” (Abramov, 2002).

Tali Fahima was perceived by the public as blurring the boundaries between agency and victimization by volunteering to act as a human shield because of personal/romantic reasons. Only after state officials demanded classification she became a political activist and later a Muslim convert (Sion, 2011, 2014). She explained in the first interview she gave: “If nothing else will help I think about becoming his human shield . . . if there will be no public discussion about the attempts on Zbeidi’s life I’ll try to save this man by myself (Segal, 2004).

Angelica Yusepov was portrayed in the media as a victim who was fooled by a Palestinian terrorist, a passive woman whom her voice was absent during trial. Contrary to Golan and Fahima she did not become a symbol, the political left showed no interest in her and no prominent lawyer offered to defend her. The judges in her appeal declared that “It is clear from the plaintive own words that Zayed needed her because he does not have an Israeli ID card . . . she knew that from the moment he arrives into the city her standing by his side as an innocent Israeli citizen facilitates his stay and actions” (Court protocol, 2.10.2003).

The human shield body is treated primarily according to its gender. As a result of Israel’s Colonialist ideology, Jewish men who act as human shields convey the masculine logic of the state because they protect the Palestinians within a structure of superiority and subordination. Therefore they maintain the Palestinian body as feminized and inferior body.

For instance Uri Avnery and Uri Davis, middle aged Ashkenazi men who acted as human shields to Arafat raised very little attention in Israeli public life. Avnery explained: “it was hard to harm me and brand me as a traitor because I was a soldier . . . I was a kind of a national hero” (Morris, 2013). Uri Davis converted to Islam and married a Palestinian woman. Yet his actions did not raise the same public outrage as Fahima’s conversion to Islam and Golan marriage to a Palestinian man.

The human shield body is also treated according to its ethnicity. The chosen Israeli body is not only Jewish and masculine but also Ashkenazi (Weiss, 2004). The Arab past of the Mizrahi Jews threatened to affect the coherence of the homogeneous Israeli nation and to blur the boundary between Jews and Arabs (Shenhav, 2002).

In the next sections I will show how the women were treated according to two factors. First, the women’s congruency with the “chosen Jewish body,” that is gender and ethnicity. Second, boundary blurring and the level of predictability. As we shall see, while Golan and Yusupov’s boundary crossing was done according to the state expectations from their ethnic groups, Fahima was perceived as liminal because she blurred the ethno-national boundaries and therefore ‘enjoyed’ more media coverage and was severely disciplined by the state.

---

\(^1\) Major Right wing political party.
5.1. Ethnic boundaries

State power and the ongoing Israeli-Arab conflict have shaped the ethno-national boundaries of the community and define the terms of membership and participation in it. The military is based on universal conscription for Jews and wars have been the main mechanisms for the construction of what Ben-Eliezer (1995) has conceptualized as the Jewish “ethnic nation.” Hence, membership in the Jewish nation is kept separate from Israeli citizenship.

In Israel’s stratified society ethnic groups are ranked on a hierarchical scale of wealth with Israeli-born at the top of the scale and new immigrants on the bottom of the scale. Arabs are still subordinate to the Jewish population in every aspect of social stratification. At the top of the hierarchy are Jews of European or Americans origin—Ashkenazi which is commonly portrayed as a default ethnic category, an invisible yet privileged identity formed by oppression of other ethnic groups (Frankenberg, 1993; McDermott and Samson, 2005). The percentage of Ashkenazi men in the upper levels of politics, the economic elite, and the media is much higher than their proportion of the population (Shenhav, 2006).

The second ethnic group that is roughly of equal size comprises of Jews of Asian or North African origin (Mizrahi) who is subordinate to the Ashkenazi in every dimension of stratification. They have lower level of formal education, they hold occupations of lower status and attain lower earnings and enjoy lower standard of living (Cohen et al., 2007).

Following the downfall of the former Soviet Union, Israel faced mass immigration of former Soviet republics. These immigrants comprised of 16.5% per cent of the country’s total population. Many of them are still lagging behind Israeli-born and are yet to close considerable gaps both in the labor market and the housing market (Rajman and Semyonov, 2004). The immigrants were marked as others; their Judaism was questioned as well as their true motive for moving to Israel (Lemish, 2000).

The exclusionary politics of the state demarcate these interior frontiers and calls into question the tenuous artificial of rule within Jewish stratified communities and what marked their borders (Stoler, 1989). While Jewishness is an assumed image which is often invisible, one’s relation to Jewishness as something which is passed through depends on a prior history of self-identification and identification by others (Ahmed, 1999). This history plays an important role in shaping boundaries, as the differences between the three women demonstrate.

Golan grew up in a middle-class Ashkenazi family in Tel-Aviv and Canada and holds a dual citizenship. Fahima’s parents immigrated from Morocco and she was raised by her blue-collar mother in the periphery. Yusupov immigrated as a child from the former Soviet Union and faced social and economic difficulties. Their ethnicity and social status intersects with the imagined perception of group boundaries.

Research has shown that support for peace strongly corresponds with higher education, income, and Ashkenazi origin. Opposition to peace, in turn, was found to be more in concert with lower levels of income, education and Mizrahi origin. The Ashkenazi are fundamentally more inclined than weaker groups to express support for any kind of antigovernment protest because of their greater power in the system (Yuchtman-Yaar and Hermann, 1998). Hence the Israeli peace camp appeals mainly to middle-class Ashkenazi.

The close association between the fighter’s role and peace activity has pushed women to the periphery of its organizations and networks (Helman, 1999). Contrary to women’s prominent position in peace movements’ constituency, they have been marginal in leadership positions, performing mainly administrative and technical tasks. The female militant is often characterized as trapped by social circumstances and tied to gender, or as a “romantic dupe” who had been manipulated into violent acts by a male lover (Ness, 2005, p. 349).

As a member of the Ashkenazi middle class Golan fits the state’s logic of a radical peace activist. She started peace activism when she was 15 years old and refused military draft when she was 18. At the start of the second intifada in 2001 she helped founding the ISM, which brings international solidarity activists to the West Bank and Gaza to engage in nonviolence resistance. Her unusual prominent position in the organization might be a result of its internationalism. In 2002, Golan became a human shield to the Palestinian president Yasser Arafat and was voluntarily stranded in his presidential compound in Ramallah when it was besieged by Israeli forces. Her motives were perceived by the media mainly in terms of organizational and political goals, not personal. She perceived Arafat as “the
ultimate Palestinian leader” (Abamov, 2002), stating that Arafat... “is the leader who brought his people to really acknowledge Israel. Therefore as an Israeli dying in order to protect him is worthwhile” (Rosen, 2002).

Contrary to Golan, when it came to Fahima and Yusepov the media emphasized their gender, as well as being selfishly motivated by romantic cause (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007). Fahima’s peace activism marked her as an anomaly because she blurred political symbolic boundaries: She refused any political labeling and was not middle-class Ashkenazi. Jews from Arabic-speaking countries are perceived as both members of the national community, due to their Jewish religion, and as “others,” due to their Arab culture, they threatened to blur the boundary between Jews and Arabs (Shenhav, 2002). Hence the Mizrahi were subjected to a process of de-Arabization. For this social group to fight the Palestinians is another way to re-express the traditional enmity that was created between Mizrahi and Palestinians at the early stages of the Zionist Project (Shenhav, 2000).

According to Shenhav (2006, pp. 7–8) the left’s recognition of the Palestinian question is rooted in a desire to keep the Palestinians on the other side of the fence, where they will not be a threat to the perceived Western hegemony in Israel. However the Mizrahi cannot be moved to the other side. Instead their Arabness is handled by erasing it. Recognition of the Mizrahi as a collectivity would require rearticulation of Israeli society's basic assumptions and its reorganization and pose a threat to the Ashkenazi cultural and economic superiority. As a result, it is quite rare for a Mizrahi to be involved in peace organizations.

Hence Fahima did not identify herself with the (mostly Ashkenazi) peace camp which she described as “impotent” and refused any political labeling. She grew up in a “very right wing home” (Lee, 2007) and served in the military. Unlike Golan she did not adopt the human rights discourse which is irredeemably associated with western values, and in particular with liberal individualism (Turner, 2002). Instead she emphasized Palestinians’ humanity, stating the wish to become Zbeidi’s human shield because she established a personal relationship with him. “This man is worth protecting... I don’t know all of Palestine, I protect only the one I know” (Lee, 2007).

Fahima’s peace activism was especially rejected by fellow Mizrahi. Her mother stated:

“Mizrahi people reacted badly to Tali... the state taught them to bend their heads and tried to transform them into Ashkenazi by making them ashamed of their ethnicity, their identity and also made them hating Arabs” (Lee, 2007).

It corresponds with Mizrahi and Herzog’s (2012) argument that a common reaction of Mizrahi to questions on personal experiences of stigmatization is vehement denial. They distance themselves from such experiences and from the notion that they may be confronted with discrimination especially when Fahima went even further by blurring the tangible relationship between membership in the Jewish nation and Israeli citizenship by defining herself as an “Arab Jew” instead of a Mizrahi (Sion, 2014).

As an immigrant from the former Soviet Union, Yusupov was marked as the “other” and failed to integrate into Israeli society. Her lawyer argued that “Her feeling of being rejected was so powerful that she found herself helping a terrorist” (Aharonovitz, 2010).

Many immigrants' attachment to Judaism is weak, mainly formal and external, as a result of life under the Soviet regime and the oppression of ethnic and religious life. The immigrants’ values, concepts and behavioral patterns are in sharp conflict with those accepted in Israeli society. The media framed them as “others” with heavy emphasis on the negative and the criminal, which serves to associate immigrants with the violation of peace and order (Lemish, 2000). Women immigrants were constructed as morally and socially fragmented. Loosened from the moral bounds of familial and, by implication, national ties, the newcomer women were located beyond the boundary of the Israeli Jewish collective (Golden, 2003).

In this framework Yusepov’s story, although extreme, was perceived as plausible.

Yusupov was perceived as apolitical and her narrative alternates between the passive innocent dupe—a woman in danger—and the morally depraved dangerous woman. The judges argued that “as a result of her childhood and family life she developed obtuse personality. She became an accomplice because of love.” (Court Protocol, 14/11/2002). Auchter (2012) argues that by explaining her behavior through victimization the threat she poses to patriarchal society is diminished. By portraying her as a victim-perpetrator she is incapable of making rational decisions. As her lawyer argued, she was easily
swayed. The psychological assessment portrays her as needy, infantile, and emotionally immature. She is easily carried away after authoritative figures with whom she identified. The judges stated that “specifically because of her traits she cannot be trusted that after omitting herself from her people she won’t go back to her sordid ways…with the influence of the friends of her ex-“lover” who are not incarcerated she may—because of her special personality—to continue endangering the public” (Appeal, 15/3/2004).

5.2. Ethnosexual boundary

“So what did we have? …[a woman] who has an ‘emotional connection’ with the head of Tanzim in Jenin; a newcomer…who was convicted accomplice of assassination because of ‘blind love’ and an extreme leftist who made her ideology into her reality. Three different women found themselves in the middle of a public outcry and are hated by many Israelis” (Aderet, 2004).

Ethnic, political and national boundaries are also sexual boundaries. The borderlands dividing racial, ethnic, and national identities and communities, argues Nagel (2000, 2001), constitute ethnosexual frontiers, erotic intersections that are heavily patrolled, policed, and protected. Yet they are regularly penetrated by individuals forging sexual links with ethnic “others.” National and sexual boundaries are mutually reinforcing, since implicit in the meaning of national boundaries are certain prescriptions and proscriptions for sexual crossings (Nagel, 2000). Hence Jewish women should not be having sex with Palestinian men because women’s honor and the control of their sexuality by the community make them the reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic and national groups (Yuval-Davis, 1997).

Sexual control is a strategic site of state power, as Foucault (2003) has argued, where the sovereign state not only disciplines individual bodies but also achieves equilibrium and regularity of population (Lan, 2008). Women who cross ethnosexual boundaries remain outside the imaginary of idealized motherhood Aretxaga (2003). They are a reminder of what cannot be fully controlled in the nation. These women have become the embodiment of a threat, their bodies become the field through which violent statehood not only enacts but draws its power.

The state supervise police and patrol, regulate and restrict romantic and sexual intersections between Palestinian men and Jewish women by constructing legal, social, symbolic and physical restrictions. The Jewish and Arab communities are separated by language, place of residence, lifestyle, religion, economic, and class position. The spatial and mental segregation that exists between Arabs and Jews is supported by the law. Legally, the only marriages recognized by Israel are those between co-religionists; people of different religions cannot marry unless one converts to the other’s religion or the couple has a civil ceremony abroad. This can then be registered in Israel under international law. The ethnosexual boundary enforced by the state is supported by the Halacha, the Jewish law, according to which Jews cannot leave the collective. A Jew stays a Jew even if he/she converts and one is Jewish if born to a Jewish mother.

Hence while their precise number is unknown, Jewish-Palestinian couples are a rare phenomenon in Israel. Marriage between Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) men and Jewish-Israeli women is even rarer and the law prohibits the granting of any residency or citizenship status to OPTs residents who are married to Israeli citizens (Adalah, nd).

Golan crossed the ethno-national boundary by living in Ramallah and marrying a Palestinian man. With the exception of the very fringe, the overwhelming majority of the left refrains from cooperating with Palestinians on an ongoing basis. Yet Golan managed to sway away from a promiscuous image by not discussing her private life and by projecting an asexual image. It may help that her husband was not blamed for having “blood on his hands.” Golan, who dressed in loose cloth which hides her figure, explained why it is easier for a woman to live in the OPTs:

“...you need to be something special or a sexual object, otherwise you do not exist. In the Palestinian society I feel differently. I feel secured and respected; I like it (Kibush, 2010).”

Yet her idealist image did not protect her from being accused of providing sexual services to the enemy which is being associated in Israeli society with double treachery. Women activists are often attacked not on their political platform but rather on gender-related characteristics which deny their
civil voice, marginalize them by the public, and exclude them from the media (Lemish, 2000). Golan recalled: “A soldier shouted at me ‘traitor’, another soldier shouted Neta you bitch (in Hebrew bat Zona, literally a whore’s daughter), I hope that all the Arabs will screw you” (Abramov, 2002).

Golan was perceived as the exception for crossing the ethno national boundaries. Yet Fahima was perceived as a danger because as a Mizrahi she blurred those boundaries. The proximity between Mizrahi and Arabs was perceived as a problem from the early days of Zionism. From the times of the Yishuv (pre-statehood Jewish community in Palestine) the Jewish community restricted close links between Palestinians and Mizrahi women who were considered to be geographically and culturally close to Arabs (Razi, 2009).

The Israeli media ridiculed Fahima and framed her story as a love story—a girl falls in love with a guy and is willing to “sacrifice” her life for him. She was often portrayed as “Zubeidi’s Girlfriend” even though she denied any romantic involvement. The news media chose not to focus on Fahima’s political message, but rather on her relationship with Zbeidi (Lavie-Dinur et al., 2013).

Yusepov’s narrative was established by stressing her youth, naivety and Jewishness which were used by an astute Palestinian man who trapped and humiliated her. Her lawyer argued that Yusepov, who was only 18 when she met Kilani, was his victim as he battered and kidnapped her (Appeal protocol, 2.10.2003): Yusepov “was the victim of Kilani…she was young and naïve and showed no interest in political affairs…she was swept into a destructive love relationship…became a victim to her blind love to Kilani who used her love” (Court Protocol, 20.8.2001).

Paraphrasing Doezema (1999), Yusepov’s innocence serves as a perfect foil for the “evil Palestinian man:” simplifying the reality of romance to a melodramatic formula of victim and villain. Her young age is emphasized and so their “distress” situation and poverty, which make them an easy prey.

Although the judges stated that Yusupov’s actions had been particularly abhorrent “in light of the fact that the accused is Jewish, a resident and citizen of Israel” (Harel and Harel, 2002) as an immigrant she was perceived as loosened from the moral bounds of familial and, by implication, national ties and was perceived as willing to cross ethnic boundaries, via her body (Golden, 2003). As a journalist wrote, “it seems as if as an immigrant Yusupov did not know that what was accustomed in her native land—relationship between Muslims and Jews—is a complete taboo in Israel. We can see her as a victim of cultural differences and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Aderet, 2004). This quote indicates yet again that immigrant women were perceived as not complying with traditional feminine roles and as a threat to societal norms and hence negatively sanctioned by society through the process of categorizing and differentiating women as others (Lemish, 2000). In a parliamentary meeting of the committee for Immigration Absorption and Diaspora in December 2011 which discussed the “risks” of intermarriage it was said: “Russian women… do not know the difference between Arabs and Jews… they look the same; they don’t understand the problem… they are newcomers who do not know society’s norms and therefore don’t fully integrate.’’

By acting as human shields Golan and Fahima assumed the masculine role of protection that is associated with the position of male head of household who readily risks himself in the face of threats from the outside to shield women from harm (Young, 2003). Hence Golan and Fahima enjoyed a special status in the Palestinian society where women are usually victimized not only by political violence but also oppressed by men because by their actions they challenged the dichotomy of woman as victim/man as defender. Occupation means the perceived feminization of the occupied men. Men who were used to being sovereign agents are now subject to the rules, regulations, and whims of the occupier and stripped of their stereotypically masculine qualities. The negative gendered attributes associates men’s humiliation and lack of sovereignty with femininity and submissiveness (Naaman, 2007).

By using their privileged body to protect Palestinians, Fahima and Golan were perceived as powerful by the Palestinians; they were active and therefore agents, and were willing to confront the Israeli occupation. They challenge not only the images of women as victims of war but also the traditional patriarchal binary opposition that postulates women as physically and emotionally weak and incapable of determining and defending the course of their own lives (Naaman, 2007).

Fahima did not hesitate to take part in masculine acts such as shooting with Zbeidi’s M-16 gun and stated how Zbeidi praised her, stating that she is “more than a great (achla) man” (Segal, 2004). After her arrest Zbeidi and his men published an open letter praising her as a “real Palestinian man” who
serves time in jail like “men, warriors and heroes,” praising her for “crossing the barrier of fear” (Al-Awda, 2005). Golan also enjoyed a special status, asserting that her sleeping arrangements in Palestinian homes are not subjected to the locals’ severe chastity rules. “I can choose if to stay in the women’s room or the men’s because as a foreigner I have the privilege to speak to men and they have no problem with it (Ben, 2001). While their performance of political agency—so drastically different from that of typical female roles-marked Golan and Fahima as a threat to Israel societal norms, as outsiders to the Palestinian society they were praised for the exact same reasons.

6. Interrogation and trial

As previously noted the body of the state as well as the body of its subjects is not a neutral body, but a body already invested with the meanings of sexual difference and ethnic domination. Such difference not only gives signifying valence to bodies categorized as male and female but also produces different effects within the structures of political violence as a whole (Aretxaga, 2001; Peteet, 1994; Das, 1996). Hence there is no single abstract imprisoned body. These are real bodies, fleshy, sensate bodies that experience real pain. At the same time, these bodies are not simply given but also interpreted, mediated and in part constituted in social and cultural meanings (Wahidin and Tate, 2005). The bodies are directly involved in a political field: power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, and its construction emits socially defining norms (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1977).

The ways by which Golan, Fahima and Yusepov were treated can be understood as the use of bodily punishment to subdue them not only into the norms of the security state but also into the ethnic hierarchy of Israel, within which Ashkenazi are on top of the pyramid and Palestinians had to be put in their place. As Jewish women and citizens of Israel, Golan, Fahima and Yusepov were treated much better than Palestinian women. Palestinian female detainees and prisoners are often held in appalling, crowded conditions, suffer from severe punitive measures and are maltreated by prison authorities (Magen and Marquis, 2005). Yet the same as Palestinian women Golan, Fahima and Yusepov suffered from solitary confinement, psychological pressure and physical and verbal abuse. They were imprisoned in General Security Service facilities where detention is not merely a means of facilitating torture, but is a part of torture and other ill-treatment (Magen and Marquis, 2005, pp. 15–17).

The justice system is part of the Israeli colonial history which maintains social hierarchy via ethnic bodies. The majority of prisoners and detainees are Palestinians, both Israeli and OPTs citizens (Hamoked, 2014). Rattner and Fishman (1998) have shown that in Israel, Palestinians have been treated more harshly than Jews by the criminal justice system. This has been the case at every juncture in the system from the decision to detain, prosecute, convict and impose a severe sentence (Fishman et al., 2006). The Mizrahi is the second largest incarcerated group.

As Ashkenazi, Golan enjoyed better treatment during interrogation and arrest. She was arrested about 20 times for short periods but was never convicted. Despite her close encounters with the General Security Service no information about her was leaked to the press. Before one interrogation she stated that she intends to use her legal rights in order “to make the occupation regime into the accused rather than the accuser” (Arutz 7, 2003). About another interrogation she stated: “they summon you to the police to what they call clarification in which you find yourself in a locked room with someone who identify himself as a General Security Service agent. In the last time it happened to me he asked if I collaborate with terror. I answered that our organization is against violence and to provoke him back I asked if he uses ‘moderate physical pressure (a term often used in torture terminology)’ (Abramov, 2002).

Golan was convicted only once, in 2005, after protecting Palestinian olive trees from military bulldozers. Yet in a rare act her conviction was overturned by a judge who determined that she “acted by a positive and humanitarian ideology, aiming to protect locals [Palestinians] with no intention to damage security.” The judge was also influenced by a positive assessment on Golan (Court Protocol, 30.5.2005).

Tali Faima was the closest among the three to be treated as a Palestinian. Her attorney argued: “she willingly gave up on her Jewish privilege and the security service started treating her almost like a
Palestinian—arrests, interrogations, administrative detention, ridiculous accusations. It is hard not to believe that if she were a Jew from a different type she would have been treated differently (Ben Natan, 2005).

Fahima was arrested on 8 August 2004 and was interrogated for many hours a day for four weeks. Her interrogators employed methods such as sleep deprivation and painful handcuffing to a chair for long periods of time. On 5 September 2004, she was placed in administrative detention for three months, a measure rarely employed against Israelis. She was repeatedly punished with solitary confinement, denied visits and cigarettes and the right to make phone calls to anyone but her attorney (Magen and Marquis, 2005). Yet Fahima admitted that “because I’m a Jew I was treated better... than Palestinian prisoners (Inbari, 2007).

Fahima’s arrest was high profile and accompanied by statements from politicians and state officials. The Minister of Security argued that Fahima’s “aberrant deeds” pose immediate and tangible danger on the citizens of Israel. Judge Berliner ruled against moving Fahima to a house arrest, because “Fahima has crossed the lines. Her ideological identity made her care for the terrorists rather than the peace of the soldiers of Israel” (Weitz and Karni, 2005).

Fahima was subjected to psychological pressure. The General Security Service leaked degrading information about her to the press. For instance they leaked her complaint about the quality of food in prison, adding sarcastically that her complaints imply that she is accustomed only to gourmet food—alluding to her modest upbringing (Dvorni, 2005). The interrogators also degraded her by treating her as irresponsible girl. They called her childish during trial and in the interrogations they expressed time after time their fear that the Palestinians will use her without her knowledge, taking her if not for terrorist than to an unsophisticated naive (Interrogation Protocol, 11.8.2004).

The interrogations were based not on Fahima’s actions but on her thoughts (Atamane, 2007). It was important to the state that Fahima would accept it’s imposed boundaries by re-transforming into a “good Jew.” In her appeal in September 2004, Fahima’s attorney argued that her interrogation had the character of that conducted by “thought police” (mishteret machshavot). Fahima, she argued, was told by her interrogators that they would turn her into a “good Jewish woman” and that they would “re-educate her.” Fahima complained that she was “brainwashed” by the Service and was given history lessons about the Israeli Palestinian conflict (Shihor Aharonson, 2004). The interrogation and punishment were grounded not on what Fahima is like but on how she ‘ought’ to behave as a good Jewish female citizen. For instance, On 6 December 2004 an interrogator told Fahima that what she was doing was not ‘normal’ for a Jewish-Israeli citizen and therefore she was required to explain her acts. The judge stated that this is not the behavior expected from a member of the ethno-national community—that is, someone who “served in the military and is involved in the Israeli society.” Unlike Golan who refused to serve in the military and hence marked herself as outside the Israeli collective, the expectations from Fahima as a “devoted” citizen were higher and hence her punishment. Fahima was initially accused of planning a terror attach and obtain weapon from Palestinian terror activists,” (Weitz and Karni, 2005) but was eventually indicted for a minor charge of aiding a terror organization. She was forced to accept a plea bargain and spent twenty-six months in jail (Sion, 2011, 2014).

Yusepov’s story, despite its severity, did not capture the Israeli imagination and received limited coverage in the media. Yusepov received an 18 year prison sentence jail for aiding and abetting Kilani’s attacks. Her arrest and trial were relatively short and she had an uncensored criminal trial. According to her lawyer, because the General Security Service was interested more in motives than in acts, they conducted a rather lenient interrogation when they realized that she had no interest in politics. Hence despite the severity of her punishment there was no interest in re-educating her.

The judges explained their decision for the harsh punishment as a deterrent and as a mean to restore the public trust. They argued that Yusupov had aided Kilani “without wondering, even for a moment, about the horror and pain that would befall the victims and their families.” (Harel and Harel, 2002).

After she appealed Yusepov’s sentence was reduced to 12 years. She was released a year after Kilani who was sentenced to life plus 40 years in jail for planting two explosive devices in Tel Aviv and for a murder. Kilani was discharged as part of prisoner exchange with the Hamas in 2012.
7. Conclusions

How does the State—meaning it’s judicial, legislative, and security apparatus—construct categories through which people are made to belong or not belong to the State’s claimed territory? Through what means are these boundaries enforced and under what circumstances? These questions are pushed to the fore during State interventions into individual and group identities and loyalties particularly in contexts where the State is in the midst of ethno-national conflict, or the so-called War on Terror.

This paper answers these questions through extending feminist insights in the studies of nationalism and boundary work theory. This is used to explore the interplay between national inclusion and exclusion along ethnic and gender lines and asking how the state classifies and discipline citizens who cross ethno-national boundaries according to its internal hierarchy of belonging. I have shown how the surveillance of the human shield body not only reinforces the subordination of women but also fortifies moral order. My aim is not to fetishize study of “difference” but to give attention to its relation to unmarked categories, especially to how the more powerful are defined as normative standards.

The Israeli State is an obvious case study where “security,” and ethno-religious categories are clearly defined specifications for membership and exclusion, and military style enforcement of boundaries between them, have been the State’s defining feature since its inception. The Israeli state regulates bodies as part of the ongoing construction of its collective identity and is deeply concerned with territorial borders as well as body boundaries. The chosen body, argues Weiss (2004), is “masculine, Jewish, Ashkenazi.” Using women’s bodies as human shields threaten the masculine logic of the security state that women’s bodies should be protected, not protect; submissive, not active (Young, 2003). The Palestinian body is produced as an ethnicized, feminized, inferior body. In between is the Mizrahi body which is potentially deceptive as an object of boundary blurring. Far from providing the map for a secure cosmology, a compass from which mixture, indeterminacy, and danger may be discovered the Mizrahi body turns out to be itself unstable and a theater of possible betrayal (Appadurai, 1998). Women’s performance as a human shield thus problematizes the state’s ability to control borders and bodies at an historical moment when the state is already under considerable duress from forces associated with globalization (Berman, 2003). Governments seek to recuperate the border, sovereignty, and control by policing borders, and re-educating them back to the collective.

Hence Fahima’s boundary blurring is far more dangerous than Golan and Yusepov boundary crossing and demands policing work because Fahima became a “matter out of place” (Douglas, 1996). Because uncertainty is impossible during a national conflict and challenges the imagined bright boundaries, her body needed policing and reeducation. Only when she became a radical Muslim the Israeli state and the Palestinian society could finally fit her into an existing social category.

This research has wider implications than the case discussed. First, the boundary crosser should not be treated as abstract but as an ethnicized and gendered human being. Second, the state does not hold one model of the right citizenship but has different expectations from its gendered and ethnicized citizens. The unpredictable citizen is perceives the as a threat. Hence citizens’ bodies need policing and re-educating; or if the state fails to discipline the they are expunging from the collective in order to restore state’s order and control.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to thank James Ron for his useful comments on an early draft, the attorneys Smadar Ben-Natan, Sachar Eldar and Daniel Haklai and the anonymous reviewers.

References


Ahmed, S., 1999. She’ll wake up one of these days and find she’s turned into a nigger’ passing through hybridity. Theory Cult. Soc. 16 (2), 87–106.


Atamane, N., 4.26.2007. This is Arbitrary.


Barth, F., 1969. Ethnic groups and boundaries: the social organization of cultural difference.


Inbari, I., 8.3.2007. ‘Summit’ meeting of security prisoners. NRG. http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART1/553/938.html.


Kotef, H., 2011. Baking at the front line, sleeping with the enemy: reflections on gender and women’s peace activism in Israel. Polit. Gend. 7 (04), 551–572.


Nachnia, R., 27.03.2007. More than half of the Jews: marring an Arab is treachery. YNET. http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,3381336,00.html.


Liora Sion has a PhD in sociology from Amsterdam University/the Free University and was a postdoctoral fellow at Harvard and Northwestern University. She researches post-conflict operations, ethnicity and gender.

L. Sion / Poetics 45 (2014) 72–85