Identity Change and Boundaries in situations of ethno-national conflict: The Case of Tali Fahima

Sion, Liora

Published in:
Current Sociology

Publication date:
2014

Document version
Peer reviewed version

Citation for published version (APA):
Boundaries crossing and blurring: The case of Tali Fahima
Liora Sion
Current Sociology 2014 62: 431 originally published online 24 January 2014
DOI: 10.1177/0011392113518780

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://csi.sagepub.com/content/62/3/431

Published by:
SAGE
http://www.sagepublications.com

On behalf of:
International Sociological Association

Additional services and information for Current Sociology can be found at:

Email Alerts: http://csi.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts
Subscriptions: http://csi.sagepub.com/subscriptions
Reprints: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav
Permissions: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav

>> Version of Record - Apr 17, 2014
OnlineFirst Version of Record - Jan 24, 2014
What is This?
Boundaries crossing and blurring: The case of Tali Fahima

Liora Sion
Givataim, Israel

Abstract
This article applies the case of Tali Fahima, an Israeli woman who was convicted of aiding the enemy during wartime, in order to analyse how the ethno-national community is threatened by members it fails to control and fit into existing categories. The author argues that what makes an assumingly bright boundary so sensitive and problematic to cross is not its impenetrability but its actual vulnerability. The state tries to police uncertain citizens and if necessary to expunge them from the collective in order to imagine the boundaries as bright again. The author examines how Fahima used her privileged body to protect a Palestinian insurgent and the ways in which her body is invested with the meanings of national, ethnic and sexual boundaries and analyses how the Israeli security services, courts, media and public define proper citizenship and belonging.

Keywords
Blurring, boundary crossing, conflict, ethnicity, gender, nationalism

Introduction
In December 2005, Tali Fahima, a 28-year-old Israeli woman, was convicted of aiding the enemy during wartime, supporting a terrorist organization and providing information to the enemy. She served 26 months in jail, including over a year in administrative detention prior to her conviction and was the first woman and only the second Jew in Israel who was subjected to such a harsh treatment. She was perceived by many Israelis as ‘crossing the lines’ after she offered herself as a human shield to the Palestinian chief of Al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades, Zakaria Zbeidi, to protect him from the Israeli military’s
attempts on his life. After her release from jail she continued her radicalization process. She cut her ties with the Israeli-Jewish community, moved to a Palestinian village, converted to Islam, and currently supports a radical Muslim group, the Northern Branch of the Islamic Movement in Israel.

By examining the ways in which Fahima’s body is invested with the meanings of national, ethnic and sexual boundaries, this article analyses how the Israeli security services, courts, media and public define proper citizenship and belonging. Scholars such as Appadurai (1998) have emphasized semantics of the body as a map of social and moral worlds and as a field of struggle. 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 and religious domination (Aretxaga, 2001). In this article I analyse Fahima’s body as a theatre for the engagement of uncertainty, and focus on the process of policing which marks the ethno-national community and defines boundaries’ inclusion and exclusion.

Boundaries have always been a central concern of studies of ethno-national communities. Following Durkheim (1965 [1921]), communities have been defined by their internal segmentation as much as by their external perimeter. Borders (i.e. territorial boundaries) provide most individuals with a concrete, local and powerful experience of the state, for this is the site where citizenship is strongly enforced. The modern state has a binary logic; it focuses on managing the population within its borders and maintaining territorial sovereignty in relation to other states. Internally, this means systematic gathering of information on each individual to allow for mobilization of the population for the state’s purposes (Giddens, 1987: 15). Externally, state governance is focused in part on securing its territorial sovereignty through military means and state defence policies related to the global system of modern states (Bajc, 2007). Ethno-national symbolic boundaries also both include and exclude – by separating out those who do not belong, they draw together those who do (Taylor, 2002). They constitute the very sense of society for those who are within and without it and supply the structured categories of pure and impure into which every member, or potential member, of society is made to fit. It is in terms of symbolic purity and impurity that centrality is defined, that marginal demographic status is made meaningful and high position understood as deserved or illegitimate. Symbolic boundaries which are constructed around the ‘national community’ divide the world into those who are ‘citizens’ or ‘friends’, and those who are ‘enemies’ (Alexander, 1992; 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).

Zolberg and Long (1999) followed by Alba (2005) have divided boundaries into bright, which is unambiguous, so that individuals know at all times which side of the boundary they are on and those who breach or blur the boundaries may be killed or driven out, and ‘blurry’, which involves zones of self-presentation and social representation that allow for ambiguous locations with respect to the boundary. But are boundaries, even in an intense conflict such as the Israeli–Palestinian, really as bright as they may seem?

In this article I challenge the bright/blurred dichotomy by focusing on imagined bright boundaries. I argue that what makes an assumingly bright boundary so sensitive and problematic to cross is not its impenetrability but its actual vulnerability. Ethno-national
communities are eager, especially during conflict, to imagine boundaries as brighter than they actually are. The ethno-national community is threatened by members it fails to control and fit into existing categories because their ambiguity threatens to expose the boundaries’ actual fragility. The state tries to police uncertain citizens and if necessary to expunge them from the collective in order to imagine the boundaries as bright again.

In this article I pose two main questions. First, how the state responds to uncertainty, or more specifically, why the Security Service showed ambivalence toward Fahima? How come they exposed negative information about her yet at the same time hid from the public other unflattering information? Why despite classifying the trial as security confidential were its protocols open to the public?

The second question is what is unique about Fahima’s case and what can we learn about the politics of belonging in Israeli? Uri Avnery, an Israeli journalist, acted as a human shield to Arafat at the same time as Fahima volunteered to act as a human shield for Zbeidi. Uri Davis, another Israeli, not only acted as a human shield to Arafat but married a Palestinian woman, converted to Islam and moved to the Palestinian city of Ramallah. Neta Golan, an Israeli woman who also acted as a human shield to Arafat, married a Palestinian man and raised her children in Ramallah. None of them captured the Israeli public imagination and were as severely sanctioned as Fahima.

I will analyse Fahima as an uncertain body and the process of expunging her from the ethno-national community through three narrative devices: identifying boundaries that Fahima blurred; the events in which these boundary are revealed; and the struggle for the construction of meaning between Fahima and those seeking to make sense of her. The article unfolds with Fahima’s intersecting identities. I will discuss her radical identity change in light of nationality, religion, ethnicity, gender and ethno-sexuality in the context of Israeli society. Then I will demonstrate how Fahima resists specific kinds of projection of identity and labelling through her arrest, interrogation, trial and finally exile and the state’s reaction through the security and juridical apparatus.

**Research method**

Despite the almost unavoidable tendency to speak of the state as ‘it’, the domain we call the state is not a thing, system or object, but a significantly unbounded terrain of powers and techniques, often in contradictory relation to each other (Brown, 1995: 174). By state I refer in this article to the Israeli security apparatus and juridical system.

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. Significantly, the General Security Service is accountable directly and exclusively to the office of the Israeli prime minister which ensures that the information about its activities remains a matter discussed in limited and exclusive circles. For these reasons, this article focuses only on the ‘open trial’ of Fahima, that is, on documentation which was only partly censored or not censored at all. As in other security cases in Israel, next to any open trial which is accessible to the public there also exists a ‘confidential trial’ which is not accessible to outsiders. However, despite the fact that it was a security trial, this trial was not classified as confidential and therefore many of the documents are open to the public.
My analysis relies on original as well as secondary data. First, I make use of the General Security Service and police interrogation protocols. These protocols, however, cannot be considered a reliable source. Since they are written by the General Security Service itself, they are one-sided. Moreover, they involve substantial ‘editing’. For example, 10 hours of investigations could be summarized into six or seven lines. Furthermore, the setting of interrogation, even if not particularly brutal, affects what is being said in the most profound manner. Therefore we should be sceptical toward the way in which Fahima is portrayed in these protocols.

The second source is court protocols. Because of its public dramaturgy this trial attracted widespread media attention. Its dramatic enactment ensured that it enjoyed ritualized attention thus serving broader educational and moral purposes (Levy and Sznaider, 2006). The court’s protocols are also censured to some extent and do not necessarily reflect the atmosphere in court since many comments did not find their way into its pages.

The third source is an interview with Fahima’s lawyer, Smadar Ben-Natan, who gave me access to the interrogation protocols. Lastly, I make use of newspaper and web articles about Fahima, including interviews with her, her video blog and comments to articles about her in order to offer ethnographic accounts of the public reaction to her.

**Israeli society and the boundaries of the ethnic nation**

Despite the fact that the Israeli and Palestinian communities take part in a high intensity ethno-national conflict where social boundaries seem to be well defined and institutionalized, and symbolic boundaries sharply oppositional, the boundaries are not as bright as they may seem. This is partly because Israel blurs the differences between internal and external and has no agreed geographical and ethno-national boundaries (Lustick, 1993; Ron, 2000). Israel struggles to maintain its blurred geographical boundaries because clarification would force either a withdrawal from the occupied territories or an extension of citizenship to the Palestinians. As a result there is no consensus as to the occupied territories, Palestinians, or who is entitled to citizenship. This ambiguity prompts the Israelis to imagine the boundaries as brighter than they actually are. The next sections will identify the national, religious, ethnic, gender and sexual boundaries that Fahima has blurred by demonstrating their complexities.

**Jewish national identity**

Since its conception, Israel made security its primary concern. This has been contributed by the reality of the Israeli–Arab conflict, exile, long years of persecution and the Holocaust (Kimmerling, 2001). State power and its construction of conflict have shaped the ethno-national boundaries of the community and defined the terms of membership and participation in it. The military is based on universal conscription for Jews (and Druze) and its wars have been the main mechanisms for the construction of what Ben-Eliezer (1995) has conceptualized as the Jewish ‘ethnic nation’. Orthodox Judaism is entrusted in Israel with defining who is a Jew, blocking free admission of non-Jews into the Israeli-Jewish population and preserving Israel’s ethno-national community. Hence, membership in the Jewish nation is kept separate from Israeli citizenship.
Within the boundaries of the ethnic nation, full and effective citizenship has been constructed in republican terms, that is, with an emphasis on the individual’s contribution to the fulfilment of collective goals. The republican principle, however, was implemented in different terms, namely according to how social groups were assigned to the different missions that the nation- and state-building project generated. This differential implementation gave rise to different types or forms of membership and participation which are ordered hierarchically and legitimated by different discourses (Peled and Shafir, 1996). At the top of the hierarchy are Jewish Ashkenazi men, while Mizrachi women, as Fahima, are at the bottom of the Jewish-Israeli hierarchy.

The excessive ideological force deployed to foster national and religious unity has precluded the very possibility of perceiving the Zionist enterprise as anything other than a closed and totalizing system. The dominant Zionist model does not have an adequate definition of minorities, such as Mizrachi, Druze and Palestinians, much less one of gender, sexuality, religion or personhood (Tsoffar, 2006).

**Ethnic identity**

Mizrachi 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. (Sarah Lechiani, Fahima’s mother, in Lee, 2007)

The Israeli-Jewish society is characterized by an ethnic cleavage between Jews who emigrated from Europe and North America (Ashkenazi), and those from Asia and North Africa (Mizrachi). Fahima’s parents emigrated from Morocco and her surname clearly classifies her as Mizrachi. Oriental identity is a marked identity, while white identity is seen as ‘neutral’, transparent and unmarked (Frankenberg, 2001). There are persisting socioeconomic gaps between the ethnic groups. Ashkenazim have achieved high levels of education and earnings while their Mizrachi counterparts have not been able to catch up with them (Khazzoom, 2003).

Studies have attempted to describe the historical conception of the dominant culture through the articulation of the ‘chosen body’ (Weiss, 2004), the ‘erotic, masculine body’ (Gluzman, 1997) and the ‘neo-colonial, assimilating body’ (Boyarin, 1997). Yet it fails to describe the Mizrachi body, which is potentially more deceptive because it is an object of boundary blurring. Following Appadurai (1998), far from providing the map for a secure cosmology, a compass from which mixture, indeterminacy and danger may be discovered, the ethnic body turns out to be itself unstable and a theatre of betrayal. The Mizrachi uncertainty is a result of their traditional strong cultural ties with the Arab culture and language and the dark complexion and accent of some which may mark them as Palestinians.

Because their Arab past threatened to affect the coherence of the homogeneous Israeli nation and to blur the boundary between Jews and Arabs (Shenhav, 2002), the Mizrachi were subjected to a process of de-Arabization. As Ben Gurion put it, ‘We do not want the Israelis to be Arabs. It is our duty to fight against the spirit of the Levant that ruins individuals and societies’ (Shohat, 1988: 6). As a result, the Mizrachi have not formed a peripheral, but rather a semi-peripheral group in Israeli society, located between the
Ashkenazi Jews on top, and the Palestinians, both citizens and non-citizens, at the bottom (Peled, 2008).

By affiliating with Arab and emphasizing similarities by defining herself as an ‘Arab-Jew’ instead of a Mizrahi, Fahima blurred the ethno-national boundary between Judaism and Zionism. She blurred the tangible relationship between membership in the Jewish nation and Israeli citizenship further by converting to Islam. This transformation marked her transition from the periphery of the hegemony to the periphery of the periphery.

Blurring the solid relationship between membership in the Jewish collective and Israeli citizenship outraged many Israelis, who called to annul her citizenship. As one Israeli commented: ‘she is not Jewish anymore, hates the state and supports the Hamas so can we expunge her? Why should someone like her get social security benefits?’ Another suggested giving her a Palestinian passport and expelling her to Jenin. A third commentator suggested sending her to Gaza. The next comment, written by a Druze,1 shows how Fahima highlighted the fluidity of the political dimension of belonging and blurred boundaries that were supposed to be rigid: ‘as a proud Druze who served for 23 years in the Israeli military and as a father to sons who serve in combat units, I see you [Fahima] as a traitor who endangers the existence of Israel and the strong relationship between all its citizens. The fact that you are a Jew doesn’t mean that you are not a dirty traitor’ (Ynet, 18 July 2005).

Fahima blurred the boundary between the supposedly clearly defined categories of Jews and Arabs, loyalty and untrustworthiness and the ethnic-religious hierarchy that positions Jews above any other minority groups.

**Political identity**

**Journalist:** Are you aware of the fact that while you are incarcerated you became the darling of the radical left?

**Fahima:** It is the left’s mistake. (Weitz and Karni, 2005).

Fahima blurred political symbolic boundaries. To start with, she refused any labelling and did not perceive herself as a political activist. Furthermore, contrary to the Israeli peace camp she was not middle-class Ashkenazi, had no academic education, acted on her own and befriended Palestinians. She grew up in a ‘very right wing home’ (Weitz and Karni, 2005) and akin to over 50% of Mizrachi, voted for the right-wing Likud Party (Shapiro, 1989: 178). Fahima did not identify herself with the political left and called them ‘impotent’. She presented herself as neither pacifist nor against the military. During her stay in the Palestinian town of Jenin, for example, she practised shooting with Zbeidi’s M-16 gun.

Fahima acted outside the Israeli peace camp, which is shaped by security and its social composition appeals mainly to middle-class Ashkenazi (Helman, 1999). With the exception of the very fringe, the overwhelming majority of the left refrains from cooperating with Palestinians on an ongoing basis. Instead, they adopt the human rights discourse, which is irredeemably associated with western values, and in particular with liberal individualism (Turner, 2002). Yet Fahima did not perceive herself as cosmopolitan. Instead,
she blurred political left-wing perceptions by emphasizing Palestinians’ humanity, shared culture and equality instead of western values of human rights.

Fahima was not the only Israeli-Jew who aimed to protect a Palestinian from the Israeli military and revoke symbolic boundaries. Other Israeli-Jews, such as Uri Avnery and Uri Davis, acted as human shields for the Palestinians. Yet they were middle-class Ashkenazi men who enjoyed the support of local and international organizations and ‘spoke the language’ of human rights. Uri Davis’s conversion to Islam was also relatively ignored as he was not as politically uncertain as Fahima because his ongoing activity marked him as an outsider to the Jewish-Israeli collective.

**Gender identity stereotypes**

Fahima blurred gender classification boundaries because her activities were based neither on feminism nor on motherhood, as is usually the case with women activists in Israel. While military service in Israel is mandatory for both men and women, only men are considered to possess military virtue. Women, regardless of their occupational status, are under pressure to excel in what Berkovitch (1997) called the ‘battle of the cribs’ against Palestinians. As a result, individually, Jewish-Israeli women enjoy fewer rights than male members of their social group in the civil and social spheres and, collectively, they are denied full membership in the republican political community.

Contrary to women’s prominent position in the peace movement’s constituency, they have been marginal in leadership positions, performing mainly administrative and technical tasks. The close association between the fighter’s role and peace activity has pushed women to the periphery of its organizations and networks. Therefore, women’s peace activity mobilizes republican motherhood and womanhood within the framework of single-gender organizations (Helman, 1999). Yet Fahima was not a mother, sister or daughter of a combatant and did not perceive herself as feminist.

Furthermore, contrary to women peace activists, Fahima was not drawn to the more ‘feminine’ work of humanitarian aid or human rights. She had little interest in Palestinian children and women. Instead she was drawn to the hard, masculine core of the ‘other’ – the armed Palestinian insurgent. For example, while staying in Jenin refugee camp she preferred to spend time with men instead of women and children.

**Ethno-sexual boundary**

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 mare madness? … Why haven’t we heard about a Jewish man who chose to leave his one bedroom apartment in Tel-Aviv in favour of a Palestinian girl in a village? (Aderet, 2004)

Ethnic, political, religious and national boundaries are also sexual boundaries. The borderlands dividing racial, ethnic and national identities and communities, argues Nagel (2000), constitute ethno-sexual frontiers, erotic intersections that are heavily patrolled, policed and protected, yet regularly are penetrated by individuals forging sexual links.
with ethnic ‘others’. The quote above speaks volumes about the sexualized and gendered nature of patriotism, treason, betrayal and the relation and relative importance of men and women to the nation. 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). In this case, Jewish women should not be having sex with Palestinian men because women’s honour and the control of their sexuality by the community make them the reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic and national groups (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Women who cross ethno-sexual boundaries, argues Aretxaga (2003), remain outside the imaginary of idealized motherhood. They are a reminder of what cannot be fully controlled in the nation. These women become the embodiment of a threat, their bodies become the field through which violent statehood not only enacts but draws its power.

In Hebrew, sexual and national betrayal is similar. The word bgida 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 the ethno-sexual boundary is more blurred when it comes to Mizrachi women. From the times of the Yishuv (pre-statehood Jewish community in Palestine) the Jewish community restricted close links between Palestinians and Jews, especially Mizrachi women, who were considered to be geographically and culturally closer to Arabs (Razi, 2009).

The Israeli state makes an effort to protect, police and patrol the sexual boundaries between Jews and non-Jews, especially Jewish women and Palestinian men. The state maintains this separation by constructing legal, social and physical boundaries. As a consequence, while the precise number of mixed marriages in Israel is unknown, they are quite rare. Physically, the state’s largely segregated communities and separate education systems mean that there are few opportunities for young Palestinians and Jews to meet each other. 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, which could then be registered in Israel under international law. The ethno-sexual 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 they convert and one is Jewish if born to a Jewish mother. Therefore, the official religious authorities make an effort to bring back to the collective women who married Palestinian men.²

Because in Judaism ethnicity is maternal; it renders the men’s ethnicity irrelevant. As a result the Jewish woman is not a boundary-marker for male-defined collective ethnic identity and male republican identity is sustained by women’s ethno-religious identity (Handrahan, 2004). Yet marrying outside the collective increases the risk of producing hybrids, which may be seen as threats to the biological purity and cultural superiority of the Jewish-Israeli community, producing Jews by law but Palestinians by practice. In an account of her interrogation Fahima recalls how her interrogators gave her a gift. ‘I thought it is chocolate but when I opened the package I found a pregnancy test. He [the interrogator] asked if I’ll call my child Muhammad and if he will be a little terrorist’ (Lee, 2007).
Interestingly, while Fahima was perceived as a ‘loose woman’ and ‘Arab loving whore’, her Palestinian supporters perceived her boundary blurring quite differently. 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’. Fahima, who objected to women’s low status in the Palestinian society, was symbolically elevated to the status of man by ‘crossing the barrier of fear’.

A social construction of the Intifada al-Aqsa

Fahima came to the public knowledge in 2004 in the twilight of the Intifada al-Aqsa. Also known as the Second Intifada, it was a period of intensified Palestinian–Israeli violence, which began in late September 2000 and ended roughly around 2005. During this period Hissulim memukadim – assassination or ‘targeted killings’ – were used by the Israeli military 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).

In an interview in 2004, Fahima stated that she went through what she called sobering up, a transformation from being a voter for the Right to a radical activist. This process sheds some light on how the majority of the Israeli public perceives the conflict:

I was educated that Arabs are something that shouldn’t be here. One day I understood that I have many gaps of information, things that are absent in the media. I realized that it concerns human beings, and that we have responsibility on how their lives look like.

This statement refers to multiple features of the Israeli society. First is the choice of the social category ‘Arabs’. For the Israeli-Jews, this is probably the most meaningful social concept, in addition to that of their own social group. It is used as a basic term to label people who live in the Middle East and who have been in protracted conflict with the Israeli-Jews (Bar-Tal, 1996). Israeli children begin to use the word ‘Arab’ at the age of between 24 months and 30 months (Bar-Tal, 1996).

Fahima calls ‘Arabs’ ‘something that shouldn’t be here’. The psychological core of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is the perception by both parties that this is a zero-sum conflict. This is not only with respect to the territory but, most importantly, with respect to the national identity and national existence. This zero-sum view flows directly from the fact that the two national movements focus on the same land, which both claim as their national homeland (Kelman, 1999). Calling Palestinians Arabs is ignoring their self-definition.

Finally, Fahima states that she came to conclude that she was missing relevant information about the ‘Arabs’. These ‘gaps of information’, as she called them, are underlined in the Israeli educational system which emphasizes a Zionist narrative aimed at crystalizing the collective memory of Jewish students on an ethno-national basis. This exclusivist narrative leaves no room for dealing with the legitimacy of either a ‘Palestinian’ narrative or an ‘Arab’ narrative (Al-Haj, 2005). The Israeli press tends to adopt the official definitions uncritically and the reporting of extreme measures taken by Israel toward the Palestinians takes place with only little criticism (Dor, 2001).
The identity of Zbeidi, the chief of Jenin’s Al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades, was constructed by the occupation and his biography is a combination of terror and criminal activities. Twenty-eight years old at the time and married with a child, Zbeidi was a familiar face in the Israeli media. His face, which was partly blackened by scorch marks left by a bomb that blew up when he was preparing it, his fluent Hebrew and his terrorist activity made him into a desirable interviewee. As a teenager he was shot in the leg as he threw stones at Israeli soldiers. He underwent a series of operations on his leg which was left permanently shortened. He never returned to school. Instead, his life alternated between in and out of the Israeli military prison system. At age 15, he was arrested for throwing stones and jailed. After his release, Zbeidi graduated to Molotov cocktails and was jailed again. In prison, he learned Hebrew, and became politically active, joining the Fatah. In 1997 he was caught with a stolen car, and was incarcerated yet again. After he was released he returned to the camp and became head of the Jenin Al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades in November 2002.

After ‘sobering up’ Fahima decided to live in Zbeidi’s house and act as a human shield in order to protect him from what she described as the military’s attempts on his life. By becoming a human shield Fahima mirrored the military’s activity as soldiers often used Palestinians as human shields. It was termed nohal shachen or ‘neighbour procedure’ and was forbidden in 2002 by the Supreme Court. Shortly after her first interview she was arrested by the General Security Service.

The interrogation

There is an intimate secrecy in which the fictions of the state about the uncertain citizen it fears gets locked in with the fictions people at the margins have about the state (Taussig, 1997). What is interesting here is that it is not only the people who imagine the state but also the state itself in its multiple incarnations that has, and enacts, its own fantasies. This idea, argues Aretxaga (2003), suggests a subjective dynamic that produces and reproduces the state as objects of fear and attachment, of identification or disavowal, as subjects of power, elusive, unbeatable, ever present, immensely powerful, or impotent.

Fahima was arrested in August 2004 and was accused by the General Security Service of planning a terror attack (Luvitz, 2005). The interrogation protocols, although censored, reflect the state’s ambivalence toward her. It is first reflected in the conditions of her arrest. Fahima was interrogated for long hours. She was held in isolation and with constant artificial light and was often handcuffed. She was called a terrorist, went through psychological pressure and was not allowed to give her version, while the state fed the media with information about her actions. Yet quite contrary to the way Palestinians are treated, Fahima was neither tortured nor beaten. Her family and lawyer were in constant contact with her and a woman was always present during interrogations. These sessions also usually included coffee and refreshments. As a member of the privileged ethno-national community she did not hesitate to complain about the quality of food she received in prison, something that a Palestinian detainee would not have done. The state leaked her complaints to the press, adding sarcastically that her complaints imply that she is accustomed only to gourmet food (Dvorin, 2005).
National cultures, Herzfeld (1992: 109) tells us, in their capacity as ‘systems of classification’, seek to define not only who belongs and who does not, but also how to belong. In Israel, this classification creates a hierarchy in which even Jews such as Fahima who are considered as disloyal to the state are ranked higher than Arabs. A Jew always has the potential to be re-educated into a good citizen who accepts the ethno-national boundaries. As noted earlier, according to Jewish law a Jew can never really leave the collective. Yet because of Fahima’s uncertain body the state failed to classify her.

Because of lack of evidence the interrogations and trial were not made on facts but mostly on their interpretation. They were based not on Fahima’s actions but on her thoughts. It was important to the state that Fahima accepted its imposed boundaries by re-transforming her into a ‘good Jew’. As a result, the interrogation and later the trial focused on the right definition of ‘good citizen’. 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 questioned about her thoughts more than about her actions. She 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. She said that her interrogators gave her history lessons about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. On 2 December 2004 an interrogator told Fahima that he had never met a Jewish-Israeli woman who planned to hurt her own people. On 6 December 2004 an interrogator told her that what she was doing was not ‘normal’ for a Jewish-Israeli citizen and therefore she was required to explain her acts.

As Fahima was left in a state of powerlessness with nothing but her body to resist institutional assault, she pretended to be pregnant. The General Security Service used it against her by leaking to the press that she was impregnated by a Palestinian terrorist. Interestingly, though, the Security Service did not use all the information it held against her, such as initial contacts she had with the Service and her sexual liaison with a Palestinian. That, together with its constant efforts to bring her back to the collective and the fact that the protocols of her trial and interrogations were not classified as confidential, suggests what Aretxaga (2003) described as a mirroring relation, which often takes the form of powerful identifications and obsessive fascination between the state and its subjects. Maybe the General Security Service felt ambivalent toward Fahima, no less than she felt toward the state.

With time, the interrogators managed to create a rift and mistrust between Fahima and Zbeidi. The General Security Service convinced Fahima that Zbeidi blamed her for assisting in the killing of his people (Interrogation protocol 19 December 2004). In January 2005, Zbeidi was reported to be off the wanted list and was blamed by Fahima as a ‘General Security Service whore’ (*Haaretz*, 2008). Like Fahima, who was forced to reach a plea bargain, Zbeidi, too, was re-educated into a ‘good Arab’ who does not rise against the Israeli state.

**The trial**

In September 2004, after Fahima was arrested, the Minister of Defence, Shaul Mofaz, signed an Administrative Detention Act that provided four months’ remand. Administrative
detention is an exceptional and radical measure. Quite similar to the Patriot Act of the Bush administration, it is detention without charge or trial, authorized by administrative order rather than by judicial decree. Israel inherited this law from the British Mandate, but subsequently restricted the authority to arrest without trial (Hajjar, 2005: 59). Since the beginning of the Second Intifada, the number of administrative detainees rose dramatically. By the beginning of March 2003, Israel held more than 1000 Palestinians in administrative detention (Bet’selem, 2011). However, this measure is rarely used against Jews. Fahima was only the second Jew who was detained and the first and only woman.6

The court determined that Fahima ‘made up her mind to perform terror acts against Israeli targets and obtain weapons from Palestinian terror activists’ (Weitz and Karni, 2005). The court declared that ‘her being Jewish, a citizen of Israel may encourage her and Palestinian terror activists to perform terror acts … as part of an image victory in the world’s public opinion and the Palestinian public’. The court also stated that Fahima could not be disciplined and threatened and therefore needed to be detained. ‘She knew that she was followed. … Her arrest and knowledge did not stop her’ (Court protocol, 5 September 2004).

Her arrest was accompanied by statements from politicians and officials and by media spin orchestrated by the security apparatus. This included occasional leaking of accusations. The Minister of Security, Shaul Mofaz, told the media that she posed immediate and tangible danger to the citizens of Israel: ‘I know perfectly all Fahima’s aberrant deeds’. Judge Goren, who authorized her arrest, said: ‘I have reached the conclusion that Tali Fahima is determined to perpetrate a terrorist attack against Israeli targets and to obtain combat material from Palestinian terror activists.’ 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.’ The state attorney contributed to the creation of Fahima’s terrorist image when he said, ‘The confidential evidence that was shown to me revealed a grave and immediate danger to human life’ (Weitz and Karni, 2005).

The judges’ statements during the trial, their utter acceptance of the General Security Service’s accusations and the discrepancies between the initial accusations and the final conviction raise questions about the involvement of the security system in the democratic legal system. The judges did not challenge the General Security Service, although there had been in the past at least two cases in which the Service had lied in court. In 1984, two detained Palestinian hijackers were beaten to death by the General Security Service agents in what became known as the Bus 300 Affair. A government report later revealed that the Service chief at the time had ordered them to be killed and then lied in court. In 1987, the Service was found to have lied in court yet again when it extracted a false confession of espionage from an Israeli army officer, Izzat Nafsu, who had been incarcerated for 18 years (see for example Gorali, 2002; Melman, 2008).

While Fahima was initially accused of undertaking a terror attack, she was eventually indicted for aiding a terrorist organization. Fahima was accused of translating to Zbeidi and fellow insurgents a document which included pictures and details of wanted Palestinian insurgents that was inadvertently left behind by a soldier during an army raid on Jenin in May 2004. However, Zbeidi has a good command of the Hebrew language and the document was mainly graphic. Nevertheless, Fahima admitted to the accusation
and was charged with assisting the enemy in a time of war by translating a confidential document. Judge Rubinstein argued in his appeal to the supreme court that:

The accused mother tongue is Hebrew and she served in the military, even if in a minor role, and she is involved in the Israeli society … her translation shows a shift from humanitarian help of [establishing] a computer centre to allegedly assisting the enemy. … Together with carrying and shooting a gun we have a dangerous person who is identified with an ideological cause. (Court protocol, 24 January 2005)

Judge Rubinstein stated that this was not the behaviour expected from a member of the ethno-national community – that is, someone who ‘served in the military and is involved in the Israeli society’. While the court emphasized the political aspects of the case, stating that she was ‘identified with an ideological cause’, the defence tried to emphasize the human and private aspects. Fahima’s attorney said, ‘Tali Fahima does not belong to any organization. She is a young woman who acts alone … her relationship with Zbeidi is totally friendly and private.’ Yet, at the same time, her attorney accepted the state’s classification by trying to convince the court that Fahima was indeed a ‘good Jewish woman’ and therefore did not pose a threat to state security:

A real intention of the appealer to participate in terror acts against the Israeli people to whom she belongs, means that the appealer is willing to hurt her family and friends, who might be among the victims and suggests that she is willing to spend many years in jail and suffer being ostracized from the Israeli society for the rest of her life. (Court protocol, 5 September 2004)

Presenting Fahima as a ‘good citizen’ played an important role in the judge’s verdict, who stated that ‘we see a great importance in her admitting these felonies and especially her positive attitude in court, a great shift from her manner during interrogations and in court in the beginning of this trial’. Yet, there is no evidence to this shift in the court protocols. In an interview I conducted with Fahima’s attorney, Smadar Ben-Natan, she argued that Fahima regretted the way in which her actions were perceived but did not regret the actions themselves. She initiated a plea bargain only because she felt that the trial was an injustice.

Fahima’s arrest and conviction politicized her. Feeling rejected by the Jewish community and failing to find a job, she converted to Islam, stating that she ‘does not believe in the Israeli state and chose the Palestinian side’. Fahima joined the Northern Branch of the Islamic Movement in Israel, whose leader and her mentor, Raed Salah, accused Jews of using children’s blood to bake bread (Stern, 2008). She now ‘hopes to marry a Muslim and raise kids who will fight the occupation’ (Mako, 2009). Currently she lives in the Palestinian city of Ramallah, where she works in her previous occupation, what is seems as a reflection of her former life in Tel Aviv.

Conclusions

According to Ong (1996), seldom is attention focused on the everyday processes whereby people are made into subjects of a particular nation-state. By analysing how Fahima’s body is invested with the meanings of national, religious, ethnic and sexual boundaries,
this article contributes to the study of boundaries by exploring the ways in which the Israeli security services, courts, media and public(s) define proper citizenship and belonging in light of boundary blurring. Contrary to Alba (2005), I argue that what are seen as bright boundaries are in effect invested with uncertainties. Hence, the ethno-national boundaries during intense conflict are more fragile than they are perceived and imagined by the ethno-national communities.

By analysing Fahima’s body as a theatre for the engagement of uncertainty I have shown how boundaries demand policing work which decides who is included and who is excluded. This is especially relevant in the case of the uncertain Mizrachi body. Following Mary Douglas (1966), who made a symbolic-structural link between categorical mixture, the cognitive anxiety it provokes and the resultant abhorrence of taxonomic hybridity, Fahima became a ‘matter out of place’. Fahima blurred boundaries because she did not act as what is perceived as a loyal citizen, Jewish woman, political activist, feminist or humanitarian worker. Because uncertainty is impossible during a national conflict and challenges the imagined bright boundaries, her body needed policing and re-education. After the security system and the court, which acted as state apparatus, failed to bring her back to the collective, Fahima was expunged to the Palestinian periphery. Only when she became a radical Muslim could the Israeli state and the Palestinian society finally fit her into an existing social category.

Furthermore, the ambivalence of the uncertain citizen may reflect the ambivalence of the state toward the citizen. The General Security Service did not use all the information it had in order to destroy Fahima’s reputation. This fact together with the efforts to bring her back to the collective and the fact that court and interrogation protocols were unclassified go hand in hand with what Aretxaga (2003) described as a mirroring dynamic between the imaginary relation of those identified as state government officials, and those who encounter their effects.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank James Ron, Smadar Ben-Natan, John Holmwood and Jacob Katriel for their useful comments.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors. A former version of the article appeared as: Sion L (2011) Israel’s security discourse and its boundaries: The case of Tali Fahima. In: Bajc V (ed.) Security in Everyday Life. New York: Routledge.

Notes

1. The Druze are an Arab minority which serves in the military.
2. See for example the organization Yad le’Achim, which helps to bring back into the Jewish collective women who have married Palestinians. According to this organization, the Israeli police and military are often involved in the attempt to retrieve these women; at: www.yadleachim.co.il/Index.asp?CategoryID=238&ArticleID=792. Also see the LEHAVA organization, which fights intermarriage; at: www.sos-israel.com/24501.html
3. Letter: ‘Camp residents send love to Tali Fahima’; at: oznik.com/words/050110.html
5.  A Palestinian political party and the largest faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).
6.  The first detainee was the extreme right-wing activist Noam Federman, who was accused of involvement in an anti-Arab underground organization and was incarcerated without trial for nine months. Since Fahima’s arrest at least 16 more Jews were put in administrative detention, all of them men and from the extreme right-wing.

References


Bet’selem (2011) Administrative detention. Available at: www.btselem.org/hebrew/administrative_detention


Dvorin M (2005) To forbid personal information about Fahima. *News 1*. Available at: www.news1.co.il/Archive/001-D-81130–00.html

Theory and Criticism 11: 145–162 [in Hebrew].
Gross ML (2003) Fighting by other means in the Mideast: A critical analysis of Israel’s assassina-
Haaretz (2008) Tali Fahima: Zbeidi is a GSS whore. Available at: www.haaretz.co.il/ 
misc/1.1528787
Berkeley: University of California Press.
35.
Helman S (1999) From soldiering and motherhood to citizenship: A study of four Israeli peace 
292–313.
Kelman HC (1999) The interdependence of Israeli and Palestinian national identities: The role of 
Khazzoom A (2003) The great chain of Orientalism: Jewish identity, stigma management and 
Berkeley: The University of California Press.
Lee V (2007) To be there. Haaretz, 9 January. Available at: www.haaretz.co.il/misc/1.1378264 
Lustick I (1993) Unsettled States, Disputed Lands: Britain and Ireland, France and Algeria, Israel 
articles/0,7340,L-3119244,00.html.
Mako news 2 (2009) Tali Fahima: I want to marry a Muslim. Available at: www.mako.co.il/news-
military/security/Article-b25bae4e2f79421004.htm
Melman Y (2008) The ‘torture police’ / Every Shin Bet move is watched by its legal team. Haaretz, 
14 June. Available at: www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/992353.html
Nachmias R (2007) More than half of the Jews: Marrying an Arab equal treason. Available at: 
www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3381836,00.html
Ong A (1996) Cultural citizenship as subject making: Immigrants negotiate racial and cultural 
345.
Peled Y and Shafir G (1996) The roots of peacemaking: The dynamics of citizenship in Israel, 


Weitz G and Karmi Y (2005) Tali Fahima talks: The GSS is a terror organization. *Ynet*, 16 June. Available at: www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3099521,00.html

*Ynet* (2005) Shulamit Aloni. 18 July Available at: www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3114375,00.html


**Author biography**

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.

**Résumé**

En s’appuyant sur le cas de Tali Fahima, une femme israélienne qui a été inculpée pour assistance à l’ennemi en temps de guerre, cet article analyse comment une communauté ethno-nationale est menacée par certains de ses membres qu’elle ne parvient pas à contrôler et à classer dans des catégories existantes. Il suggère que le fait qu’une frontière supposée indiscutable soit si difficile et délicate à franchir s’explique non par son impénétrabilité mais par sa vulnérabilité effective. L’état tente de surveiller les citoyens imprévisibles et, si nécessaire, de les éliminer de la collectivité dans le but d’imaginer une représentation aussi indiscutable que possible des frontières. J’examine comment Fahima a utilisé son corps privilégié pour protéger un insurgé palestinien et comment son corps est investi par les concepts de frontières nationales, ethniques et sexuelles.
J’analyse aussi comment les services de sécurité, les tribunaux, les médias et le public israélien définissent leur propre citoyenneté et appartenance.

**Mots-clés**
Franchissement des frontières, effacement, conflit, nationalisme, ethnicité, genre

**Resumen**
Este trabajo analiza el caso de Tali Fahima, una mujer israelí que fue condenado por ayudar al enemigo en tiempos de guerra, con el fin de analizar cómo la comunidad étnico-nacional se ve amenazada por los miembros que no consigue controlar y encajar en las categorías existentes. Sostengo que lo que hace una frontera, presumiblemente clara, tan sensible y problemática para cruzar no es su impenetrabilidad, sino su vulnerabilidad real. El Estado trata de vigilar los ciudadanos dudosos y, si es necesario, expurgarlos del orden colectivo, para imaginar los límites claros nuevamente. Examino cómo Fahima utiliza su cuerpo privilegiado para proteger a un insurgente palestino, y las formas en que su cuerpo es investido con los significados de las fronteras nacionales, étnicas y sexuales. Y analizo cómo los servicios de seguridad israelies, los tribunales, los medios de comunicación y el público define qué es una ciudadanía adecuada y qué es pertenencia.

**Palabras clave**
Cruce de fronteras, desdibujar, conflicto, nacionalismo, etnicidad, género