



Gaza on Their Minds: The Effect of “Operation Cast Lead” in Mobilizing Palestinian Action¹

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On December 27, 2008, Israeli armed forces launched air raids on the Gaza Strip. In what Israeli military officials coined, “Operation Cast Lead,” Israeli forces attacked the Gaza Strip with twenty-three days of aerial assaults and ground incursions in an effort to weaken Hamas’ power in Gaza and to bring an end to Hamas rockets fired into Israel. “Operation Cast Lead” was not the first Israeli attack in the Gaza Strip since Hamas seized power in 2007, but it was the largest Israeli military campaign since the Second *Intifada* and was reported to have caused the highest rates of casualties and injuries in a single day since 1948.² The Arab press decried Israel’s assault and described it as one of the worst attacks against Palestinians since the creation of Israel in 1948, what Palestinians call the “*nakba*,” or catastrophe. Populations in Arab countries took to the streets to protest Israel’s actions and their own governments’ complicity in them, with contentious demonstrations occurring in Jordan and Egypt, the only two Arab countries having formal peace agreements with Israel. But for Palestinians citizens of Israel (who are also called Arab Israelis or Arab citizens of Israel), or in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, “Operation Cast

Lead” was a reminder of the splintered nature of the Palestinian national community in the face of continued occupation, evident in the increasing political separation of the Gaza Strip from the West Bank.³

This paper seeks to address the following questions: to what extent does the political, economic and social isolation of the Gaza Strip affect its place in a larger Palestinian national consciousness, especially among Palestinians in Israel and the West Bank who are the physically closest Palestinians to their Gazan kin? Do Palestinians in Israel and in the West Bank continue to identify with those Palestinians living in Gaza as part of their own people, and, particularly for West Bankers, as part of the national project of a future Palestinian state?

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Exploring Palestinian responses in Israel and in the West Bank to “Operation Cast Lead” reveals how solidarity with the people of Gaza remains a central feature of collective Palestinian identity and national resistance, despite Gaza’s

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physical and political isolation from the West Bank and from the Palestinian diaspora. More specifically, political statements and protest activity regarding Gaza among Palestinian citizens of Israel reveal greater unity between mass public opinion and political leadership in the Palestinian community in Israel when compared to political statements and protest activity of Palestinians in the West Bank and the leadership of the Palestinian Authority (PA). Overall, internal political divisions hampered a strong response to “Operation Cast Lead” in the West Bank, a reflection of greater challenges to incorporating solidarity with Gaza into the political platforms of the Palestinian community in the West Bank.

INCREASING ISOLATION OF THE GAZA STRIP

The Gaza Strip was of tangential interest to the international community for a long time with regard to the occupied Palestinian territories, and is often referred to as the “stepchild of the West Bank” or “the forgotten man of the Middle East.”⁴

The center of the Palestinian national movement has traditionally focused elsewhere, whether in Beirut or Ramallah, although the movement’s battles were often fought on the streets of Gaza. But the deteriorating humanitarian conditions and the process of “de-development” in the Strip, as noted by scholar Sarah Roy, provides the international community with a testing ground for economic development and humanitarian aid despite its constantly evolving political circumstances and leadership.⁵

In the Palestinian national psyche, however, Gaza remains a key symbol of national resistance. This is partially due to Israeli treatment of the Strip and an Israeli policy of physical separation of Palestinians in the West Bank from those in Gaza. As Sara Roy points out, “it is important to examine the Gaza Strip as a separate entity because the Strip, more than any of the territories occupied by Israel, provides a stark clarification of the intentions as well as the consequences of

Israeli policy.”⁶ Gaza saw the building of Israeli settlements after 1967; Gazan residents also experienced some of the most repressive policies of control under the Israeli occupation and in response to Palestinian resistance during the Second *Intifada*, including thirteen percent more deaths compared to the West Bank.⁷ Hamas’ ascent to power in the 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections and its subsequent seizure of control in the Gaza Strip facilitated fragmentation of the Palestinian community in the political arena. It also resulted in increased Israeli closures of the Gaza Strip and tighter restrictions in the West Bank, including “increased security operations,” restrictions of movement between Israel and the West Bank for foreign passport holders, and reestablished roadblocks and checkpoints that had been previously dismantled.

Today, the Gaza Strip is isolated in three distinct ways: through policies of the Israeli occupation, which govern border crossings and an economic blockade on the Strip; through Palestinian politics, with the rise of Hamas to

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power in Gaza, political tension and competition with Fatah (and the Palestinian Authority) in Ramallah, and its increasing perception as an Islamist entity; and through the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Strip and the politics of humanitarian aid policies. Israel’s disengagement from its settlements in Gaza also played a role in separating

Palestinians in the West Bank and in Gaza, as the population of Gaza became “effectively sealed in, and the national dismemberment of the Palestinians, long a cornerstone of Israeli policy, has been achieved, at least with regard to the West Bank and Gaza” in the aftermath of the disengagement.

Israel has control over most official movement of goods and people in and out of the Gaza Strip through its established border crossings and transport sites, despite its withdrawal from settlements in 2005. Palestinians

in Gaza are not able to leave the Strip through Israeli-administered borders without permission from the Israeli army. There is another crossing for Palestinians at the Rafah border, which allows for some movement of persons across the border of Gaza with Egypt. Egyptian and Palestinian authorities claim that the crossing is open every day for people to cross; however, in practice Egyptian authorities under the Mubarak regime have kept the border closed with only periodic openings since Hamas came to power in Gaza.⁸ Local Gazan businessmen and Hamas officials operate the now infamous underground tunnels between Egypt and Gaza at Rafah to illegally transport goods into the Gaza Strip, including weapons.⁹ Gazans rely on these imports from Israel and Egypt to fill Gaza's stores and markets; the lack of trade and of free movement of goods has crippled Gaza's economy.

The fragmentation of the PA government between the Gaza Strip, led by Hamas, and the West Bank, led by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, has isolated Palestinians in Gaza from Palestinians in the West Bank and from the international community. After Hamas came to power in Gaza, the political orientation of both territories seemed to head in opposite directions, as if in direct competition with one another. According to Moin Rabbani, Abbas' West Bank model sought to accept the reality of the current situation and work with international sponsorship to achieve a set of priorities acceptable to the international community, while Hamas' Gaza Strip model sought a path of resistance, refused to comply with international demands, and insisted on recognition of statehood.¹⁰ Abbas' leadership, among other external and internal factors, has weakened Fatah; the party itself is divided between those in the elite close to Abbas and those interested in continuing to resist the Israeli occupation rather than work with Israeli leaders to achieve a final peace agreement.

The Gaza Strip is also increasingly seen as a humanitarian crisis to solve rather than part of the larger project of Palestinian political and economic development. Donor strategies of international governments and some aid agencies have treated the West Bank and Gaza as two separate entities since the rise of Hamas' power in

Gaza.¹¹ Several major donor states, such as the United States, officially label Hamas a terrorist organization and prevent aid activities from benefiting the Hamas government in any way. American aid agencies, for example, must comply with U.S. legislation on anti-terrorist financing and the Patriot Act, which makes it illegal for any aid organization to provide "material support" to known terrorist organizations. Due to the fact that Hamas is the governing authority in Gaza with whom aid agencies must coordinate for long-term development projects, the space for aid activities is

reduced to primarily humanitarian relief. In addition, Israeli policies increasingly restrict the movement of foreign aid workers into the Gaza Strip from Israel, limiting the ability of the international community to conduct operations there.¹² As a result, major donor states increasingly channel bilateral aid through the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, who is also seen as the trustworthy partner for the broad project of Palestinian development and for future status negotiations.¹³

Indeed, even those working within the humanitarian aid community recognize the danger of these strategies. Karen abu-Zayed, former Commissioner General of UNRWA, has noted that the international community is complicit in maintaining the conditions for destitution in the Gaza Strip due to its inability to assist Palestinians in changing their economic reality; Gaza, she says, will become one of the first territories to remain in such a state of impoverishment with the knowledge of the international community.¹⁴ The administration of only a sufficient amount of aid contributes to what Ilana Feldman has called the "humanitarianism problem" in the Gaza Strip, in which aid influences "a political field of identity and action in ways that are not within the control of either relief workers or aid recipients."¹⁵ The international community, in addition to Israeli

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policies and internal Palestinian political divisions, has played an important role in treating the population in the Gaza Strip as separate from the West Bank.

The Imagined Palestinian Community

Palestinian nationalism and collective identity have been shaped by a shared experience of dispossession, displacement and fragmentation. This shared experience provides Palestinians throughout the world with a common narrative that is strengthened with each new denial of statehood, attack on a refugee camp, or military action in the occupied Palestinian territories or surrounding states. Rashid Khalidi notes that the *nakba* and events of 1948 “reinforced preexisting elements of identity,

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sustaining and strengthening a Palestinian self-definition that was already present. The shared events of 1948 thus brought the Palestinians closer together in terms of their collective

consciousness, even as they were physically dispersed all over the Middle East and beyond.”¹⁶ This connectedness among Palestinians, despite the lack of a physical state, evokes expressions of solidarity when one segment of the dispersed Palestinian community comes under attack or is threatened in some way. Therefore, Palestinians as a national community can be best understood using Benedict Anderson’s idea of an “imagined community,” in which the nation exists in the minds of each Palestinian as an “image of their communion.”¹⁷ Because Palestinians have no physical place to claim as a nation state, the idea of a Palestinian nation is also subjectively based on competing collective memories that conjure notions of what it means to be Palestinian. These notions can vary distinctly between Palestinians who became citizens of Israel after 1948 and those who became refugees, for example. Despite these

obstacles, the continued Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and military campaigns remain central rallying points for Palestinians for resistance and unified collective memory.¹⁸

The extent to which Palestinians identify with a Palestinian national narrative and with a collective Palestinian notion of self depends on each individual’s personal experience of what it means to be Palestinian after 1948. Brubaker and Cooper’s work on identity explains how competing external identifications, a selective self-understanding, and a feeling of commonality or connectedness with a group shape the ways in which a person understands and acts upon her identity.¹⁹ For example, in addition to competing Palestinian and Israeli national identities, Palestinians citizens of Israel may understand their strongest sense of self through their religious affiliation (be it Christian, Muslim or Druze); through their generational status; or through a broader Arab identity as reflected in Arab nationalism. If a Palestinian citizen in Israel strongly identifies with a collective national Palestinian identity, it can become the basis for political action.²⁰

The idea of “commonality, connectedness and groupness” is particularly useful for understanding Palestinian identity and nationalism in relation to the Gaza Strip. The majority of Palestinians in Gaza today, roughly 1.1 million people, fled from areas in Israel as refugees after the State of Israel was created in 1948.²¹ Many Palestinians in the West Bank and throughout Israel understand that the Gaza Strip has experienced some of the worst violence of the Arab-Israeli conflict, with the Egyptian occupation (from 1948-1956 and again from 1957-1967) and the Israeli occupation of the Strip resulting in overpopulation and destitution.²² In a sense, Gaza also represents what Palestinians see as the worst of Israeli repression in its policies of occupation and provides a rallying cry for the Palestinian national movement against the Israeli occupation.

Solidarity with the people of the Gaza Strip thus becomes a prerequisite for any type of anti-occupation efforts or rhetoric, although it does not necessarily result in concrete action to alter the

reality of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. A major military assault on Gaza, where Palestinians are already unable to leave due to restrictions on movement, automatically produces a Palestinian national response. The underlying motivations and effectiveness of Palestinian protests, however, reveal the challenges to locate the Gaza Strip as part of a common narrative of Palestinian identity.

Palestinians in the West Bank Respond to “Operation Cast Lead”

General strikes, sporadic protests, and clashes with Israeli and Palestinian Authority security forces made up the majority response of Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem to the events of “Operation Cast Lead.” Palestinians took to the streets of Ramallah almost immediately after “Operation Cast Lead” began, shouting expressions of solidarity, such as “the West Bank is with you,” and calling for national unity.²³ But political divisions were on the minds of Palestinians in the West Bank throughout the protests. The pro-Palestinian Authority newspaper, *al-Quds*, published an editorial on January 4, 2009, saying, “On the Palestinian national level, the division must end once and for all. We must all stand in one row against the aggression and the Israeli acts of killing and destruction because the war targets all of us. It also targets all our aspirations for an independent state and a national identity.”²⁴ The tension between a desire to show solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza and the political constraints tempering full support on the streets characterized the Palestinian response in the West Bank.

The reports of Palestinian news agencies based in the West Bank carried almost daily coverage of death tolls in Gaza and focused on the extent of the destruction, responses of Palestinian political parties, and official statements of the Palestinian Authority. In total, Palestinian news agencies carried hundreds of stories on “Operation Cast Lead” throughout the duration

of the conflict, with the Ma’an News Agency, based in Bethlehem, running thirty-four stories alone on the first day of hostilities.²⁵ In addition, the articles included exhortations to Arab governments to take action on behalf of the Palestinian people, op-ed pieces directed at Israeli and Palestinian leadership, and information describing the responses of the United Nations and other international aid agencies to the situation. The language of the articles themselves focused on actions taken by political party leadership to protest, decry or condemn the attacks in Gaza, almost all with language placing blame squarely on Israel.²⁶ Individual political parties, such as the PFLP and Fatah leadership in certain Palestinian cities, used Palestinian news agencies to release statements on the atrocities and call its membership to action.²⁷ Activities varied by district or major city, with Hebron’s Fatah party declaring three days of mourning, decrying an Israeli “Holocaust” in Gaza, and organizing a blood drive for Gazan hospitals.²⁸ Nablus and Ramallah saw the largest protests, with several thousand

attending the first major protest on the Friday after the attacks began, and an increase in demonstrations in the city center as “Operation Cast Lead” continued.

But tight control by the PA hampered demonstrations by political parties as PA security forces regulated the type of response allowed. From the beginning of “Operation Cast Lead,” PA governors sought to “maintain public order” by forbidding major demonstrations (such as were held during the *Intifadas*) out of fear of clashes with Israeli border police and PA security forces in the West Bank.²⁹ These fears were not without justification; a protest in Ramallah during the first week of “Operation Cast Lead” resulted in the death of two Palestinian protestors after Israeli forces responded to stone throwing at a demonstration. For the most part, Palestinian security forces worked with Israeli security forces

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to ensure that demonstrations did not spread throughout the West Bank or rise to the level of confrontations seen in the Second *Intifada*.

The role of Palestinian security forces in policing the demonstrations is illustrative of the Palestinian Authority's position during "Operation Cast Lead." President Mahmoud Abbas and officials closest to him officially appeared outraged at the atrocities occurring against the Palestinian people, while simultaneously attempting to temper Palestinian support for Hamas as the unsung hero of the war. Only one pro-Hamas demonstration of note was allowed by Palestinian security forces and covered in the Palestinian print media: a group of thirty women walked silently through Ramallah's Manara Circle, calling for national unity as a PA security jeep drove alongside them and a small number of Palestinian police walked in front of the women.³⁰ No television crews were present at the demonstration. This sanctioned protest drastically differs from various first-hand reports of the PA security forces using force against unarmed protestors in support of Hamas, arresting demonstrators, using pepper spray, and in one instance, causing the death of a protestor.³¹ Despite the actions of its security forces, the PA's official statements in the West Bank gave the appearance of a government dedicated to working with all factions, supportive of Palestinians in Israel, and outraged at Israeli aggression. The PA-sponsored Wafa (Palestine News Agency) in the West Bank published seventy-seven stories during "Operation Cast Lead," seven of which included direct calls for action, unification of Palestinian political parties, or condemnation of Israeli actions by Palestinian leadership.³² Only one of the articles included an explicit threat to cease PLO participation in negotiations with the Israeli government, which was generally seen by Palestinians in the West Bank as a necessary PA response to Israeli actions in Gaza. However, a sense of abandonment and separation between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip remained. One protester held up a cell phone connected to Gaza to broadcast the chanting at a West Bank demonstration, to which the Gaza end of the phone replied, "Really? Is the

West Bank really with us? Did you finally wake up?"³³

Even Palestinian politicians in Israel were critical of the PA's stance during "Operation Cast Lead." Former Minister of the Israeli Knesset, Azmi Bishara, said, "Abbas has a real problem. He's trying now to be a hero, but he doesn't even know how to pretend. Even when he tried to talk warmly about Gaza, he couldn't do it, because he actually blames the victims."³⁴ Despite these claims, Abbas continued to emphasize unity, describing "the current situation in Gaza as a massacre and an act of criminal aggression targeting not only the basic

rights of Gazans but of all Palestinians. Israelis have used Palestinian blood in Gaza for their election propaganda."³⁵ He also noted that the events in Gaza affect all Palestinians, explaining that he holds the Israeli government accountable for atrocities in Gaza. These statements did not convince a Palestinian public, however, of genuine PA concern, but rather reinforced the perceived disconnect between official PA statements and PA actions.

For many in the West Bank, Hamas' steadfastness during "Operation Cast Lead" recalled notions of Palestinian resistance central to the collective understanding of Palestinian identity and nationalism. A major result of "Operation Cast Lead" for Palestinian politics was the increased demand among the Palestinian public for reconciliation with Hamas, as many in the West Bank saw the war as a consequence of the division between the West Bank and Gaza.³⁶ In addition, Abbas' presidential term ended during the hostilities, causing vigorous discussion in both Palestinian and Arab media sources throughout the Middle East about a potential power vacuum and what was to be done within the Palestinian Authority. In the midst of the war, Hamas

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declared that it no longer recognized Abbas as President, but did not dispute his continued place in office in light of “Operation Cast Lead.”³⁷

Palestinians in Israel Respond to “Operation Cast Lead”

A few hours after the first Israeli bombs fell on the Gaza Strip, Palestinian citizens of Israel mobilized into action. Palestinians organized protests in the major Arab cities of Nazareth and Umm el-Fahm, and Arab political parties in Israel immediately issued statements and organized demonstrations directed at the Israeli government for their actions in “Operation Cast Lead.” Although demonstrations were held in major Arab centers, the most notable protest occurred on January 3, 2009, when approximately 120,000 Palestinian citizens of Israel demonstrated in the Palestinian town of Sakhnin in what was reported to be the largest Palestinian demonstration ever held in Israel.³⁸ The demonstration in Sakhnin was one of three national protests held in Israel on January 3, 2009, but was perhaps the most important demonstration due to the significance of Sakhnin, where Palestinian citizens of Israel hold annual Land Day protests.³⁹ Palestinians also joined in demonstrations with left-wing Jewish Israelis on a national day of protests on January 3, 2009, organizing a protest in Tel Aviv that attracted 15,000 participants, the majority of whom were Palestinian citizens of Israel.⁴⁰ The regularity and force with which demonstrations took place across Israel was matched by the strong stance taken by Palestinian politicians and heads of Arab organizations in speaking out on behalf of Palestinians in Gaza.

Palestinian citizens of Israel have taken to the streets in solidarity with Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip before. Palestinian demonstrations and political action surrounding the Second *Intifada* were held in cities with a majority of Palestinian citizens, such as Nazareth and Jaffa, in solidarity with events taking place in the West Bank. These actions represent a sense of

commonality that Palestinians in Israel feel with their kin in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Some demonstrations turned into riots, resulting in violent clashes between police and protestors.⁴¹ The events of October 2000, in which twelve Palestinian citizens of Israel were killed during one such demonstration, have come to symbolize a public display of Palestinian discontent with Israeli actions against Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. These events have also increased fears among Jewish Israelis that Palestinian citizens in Israel represent a “fifth column” in Israeli society.⁴²

In addition, the events of October 2000 marked a “defining moment” for Palestinians in Israel between the ages of seventeen and twenty-five, who appear to identify more with a Palestinian national identity as compared to older generations of Palestinians in Israel.⁴³ For example, the majority of the twelve Palestinian citizens of Israel killed in solidarity demonstrations during October 2000 were under the age of thirty.⁴⁴ This display of solidarity across the physical Green Line represents a bond among those who identify with the idea of a Palestinian nation. Palestinian youth in Israel were some of the most active protestors of Israeli

actions in Gaza during “Operation Cast Lead,” with reported incidents of youth throwing stones at cars along highways and at town entrances, wearing ski masks and blocking major roads.⁴⁵

Websites serving the Palestinian community carried daily announcements of when and where demonstrations would occur. The popular website, www.Arabs48.com, provided the most comprehensive directory of demonstrations, with the full geographic range of cities in Israel represented. Over the course of “Operation Cast Lead,” Arabs48.com carried 189 articles about the events in Gaza from a distinctively Arab or Palestinian point of view.⁴⁶ The articles on Palestinian websites discussed the actions of Arab

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human rights organizations in response to the attacks; these websites also ran op-eds by Palestinian political leaders in Israel. A majority of articles covering “Operation Cast Lead” on the Arabs48.com website referred to Israel’s actions in Gaza, the level of destruction caused by the daily attacks, and condemnation of Israel’s actions by international leaders. The Arabs48.com website, in addition to the equally popular www.fasl-almaqal.com website, provided an important voice for Palestinians in Israel and a venue to bring together the views and actions of the Palestinian community in Israel.

Palestinian political leaders also brought strong views of the Palestinian community into the public forums where they engage with Israeli political leaders and officials. One notable incident included an argument between a Palestinian Member of the Knesset, Muhammad Baraka, and a member of the Likud party, Gilad Arden, on the floor of the Knesset. Baraka spoke on the floor to demand accountability from the Israeli government for its military campaign and to demand an end to the attacks. At one point, Arden told Baraka to “Go to Gaza,” a common insult in Hebrew with a comparable meaning in English of “Get Lost” or “Go to Hell.”⁴⁷ Tensions between Baraka and Arden, as well as other right-wing Israeli Ministers of the Knesset, escalated to a point where Baraka was forcibly removed from the Knesset.⁴⁸

As a result of these factors, Palestinian citizens of Israel were more unified in their acts of solidarity than Palestinians in the West Bank. One major reason for this unity was the existence of a central body, the Higher Follow-Up Committee for Arab Citizens of Israel, which called for and organized pro-Gaza demonstrations. The Higher Follow-Up Committee consists of Arab leaders from political parties and major organizations, and acts as an umbrella body for representing the concerns of the Palestinian community in Israel. Not only did the Higher Follow-Up Committee plan demonstrations throughout Israel in areas with predominantly Arab populations, it also issued a “Political Communiqué of the Arab Population of Israel.” This Communiqué was a strong statement of Palestinian nationalism and identity, declaring that “the Israeli hostilities

against fellow Palestinians in Gaza are an assault against all our people everywhere ... it is our duty to oppose and resist such actions and to break the siege.”⁴⁹ It also declares Israel “a criminal state in all its constituent parts, including its political leaders and those entrusted with its security,” and accuses Israel of committing gross human rights violations of the highest legal character, including war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide in Gaza.⁵⁰

The language of the Committee’s Communiqué contradicts some of what Azmi Bishara outlines as the role of Palestinian citizens of Israel to act in solidarity but not necessarily join the activities of resistance of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In one section, the Communiqué affirms “the call for a unified Palestinian national struggle based on support for Palestinian resistance confronting Israel’s genocidal hostilities.”⁵¹ This unification of Palestinian political parties in their stance against Israel during “Operation Cast Lead” was also exemplified by the lack of infighting and competition between Arab political parties during an election year in Israel. Palestinian political parties in Israel did not have to worry about the political threat of Hamas to their own survival, as compared to Palestinian politics in the West Bank, which may have played a role in fostering this unity.

Due to their status as Israeli citizens, Palestinian citizens of Israel do not see themselves as part of the same struggle as Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, but as possessing a unique responsibility of solidarity with their Palestinian kin. Even in the midst of numerous demonstrations, there was a clear sense that Palestinians in Israel had a unique role in directly challenging the Israeli government.⁵² It is easier for Palestinian citizens of Israel to hold demonstrations to voice their discontent with Israeli policies as a means through which to air grievances, not as a mobilizing tool of resistance in service of a greater national movement. Although it arrested approximately three hundred Palestinian citizens of Israel in the first few days of “Operation Cast Lead,” the Israeli government continued to allow demonstrations to take place. In fact, the Israeli police and the Public

Security Minister met with leaders in the Arab community to discuss how to control riots among Palestinian youth after the first few days of “Operation Cast Lead.”⁵³ Unlike Palestinians in the West Bank, who must contend with the constraints of Palestinian security forces, Israeli border police, and political complications of internal Palestinian politics, Palestinians in Israel are able to organize politically under Israeli law, which provides for the freedom of expression and demonstration. Palestinians mobilized to send a direct message to the Israeli government that as citizens of Israel, they were outraged by Israel’s actions in Gaza and understood “Operation Cast Lead” as a direct attack against their own community.

Conclusion: Political Ramifications for Palestinians after “Operation Cast Lead”

As evident in the protest activity of Palestinians in the West Bank and Israel, “Operation Cast Lead” provided an opportunity for both the unification and the division of the Palestinian community. The contentious role of Hamas in Palestinian politics may have hindered the Palestinian Authority from making strong statements of Palestinian national unity, but it did not prevent the Palestinian public from taking to the streets in solidarity with Gaza. The Palestinian community in Israel was able to produce a stronger united front in response to “Operation Cast Lead.” The amount of effort put forth by Palestinian leaders and organizations in Israel to call for accountability for Israel’s actions in “Operation Cast Lead” provides evidence of a Palestinian collective identity within the Palestinian community in Israel that may trump its Israeli identity. The division of the Palestinian community in the West Bank reveals the extent to which the notion of “resistance” in the collective understanding of Palestinian identity is splintered between officials in the Palestinian Authority and the general population.

Ironically, though it is the cause for much of the division in the Palestinian community today, the Gaza Strip may become the most important catalyst in unifying Palestinians around a common cause once again.

Although they could demonstrate with minimal political obstruction, Palestinians in Israel face greater long-term political consequences for siding with their Palestinian kin in the Gaza Strip than Palestinians face in the West Bank. Political activity in support of Palestinian solidarity fuels arguments of those on the political right in Israel, such as Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, for the physical transfer of Palestinians in Israel to the West Bank in the case of the creation of a future Palestinian state.⁵⁴ The Palestinian community and many Jewish communities in Israel view such transfer policies, in which Israel would evacuate settlements in the West Bank in order to allow for the transfer of its Palestinian population to the West Bank, with disdain. Thus, the Palestinian response in Israel to “Operation Cast Lead” reveals that Israel must work to better incorporate Palestinian citizens of Israel into Israeli society and respond to Palestinian grievances, or face a growing Palestinian population frustrated with the aims and objectives of the Israeli government.

As long as successful reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas remains unlikely, the future of a Palestinian national project is in danger of remaining one of division rather than unity for Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The threat of Palestine as a nation existing solely in the minds of its people—a true “imagined community” in every sense of the word—rather than in a physical, independent state remains strong. The control of Palestinian protest activities by the Palestinian Authority during “Operation Cast Lead” also signifies a growing divide between the demands of the populace and the political actions of those who claim to represent it.

The political polarization evident in the West Bank signals an “absence of a national liberation movement among Palestinians that could create institutions to support a strategy of national resistance and reconstruction.”⁵⁵ In this sense, the Gaza Strip, as a symbol of national resistance in

the face of substantial violence and destruction, becomes a significant bastion of Palestinian resistance at the heart of Palestinian identity. Though isolated and ignored by much of the international community, the experience of Gazans under occupation acts as a symbol of resistance and justification for condemning Israel's actions and occupation of Palestinian territory. Ironically, though it is the cause for much of the division in the Palestinian

community today, the Gaza Strip may become the most important catalyst in unifying Palestinians around a common cause once again.

The views and opinions expressed in articles are strictly the author's own, and do not necessarily represent those of Al Nakhlah, its Advisory and Editorial Boards, or the Program for Southwest Asia and Islamic Civilization (SWAIC) at The Fletcher School.

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¹ The author completed the original research and writing for this article in December 2009 and recognizes that some of the media sources and reporting on “Operation Cast Lead” may be dated due to the passage of time.

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³ The majority of the Arab community in Israel refers to itself as “Palestinian citizens of Israel,” as the community of Palestinians living before 1948 within the current borders of Israel. “Identity Crisis: Israel and its Arab Citizens,” *International Crisis Group Middle East Report*, No. 25, (March 4, 2004), <<http://web.archive.org/web/20080709020917/http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=2528&l=1>> For the purposes of this article, this group does not include the Druze in the Golan Heights (who were part of Syria until 1967) or Palestinians in East Jerusalem.

⁴ Roy, Sara, *The Gaza Strip; The Political Economy of De-development*, Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1995., 3.

⁵ Roy describes the process of de-development as “the deliberate, systematic deconstruction of an indigenous economy by a dominant power...De-development is an economy policy designed to ensure that there will be no economic base, even one that is malformed, to support an independent indigenous existence.” (Roy, *The Gaza Strip*, 4). In the case of Gaza, it can be argued that both Israel and the international community, as dominant powers, have contributed to de-development in Gaza.

⁶ Roy, *The Gaza Strip*, 3.

⁷ Brym and Maoz-Shai, “Israeli State Violence during the Second Intifada: Combining New Institutional and Rational Choice Approaches,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*. 32 (2009), 617, 619.

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¹⁰ Rabbani, Moin, “Political Consequences of Israel’s Gaza War,” Lecture., *Palestine & the Palestinians Today Conference*, Washington, DC: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 24 April 2009, <<http://ccas.georgetown.edu/events-features.cfm?id=98>>

¹¹ Roy, Sara, “Before Gaza, After Gaza: Examining the New Reality in Israel/Palestine,” Lecture. *Palestine & the Palestinians Today Conference*, Washington, DC: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 24 April 2009, <<http://ccas.georgetown.edu/events-features.cfm?id=98>>

¹² “Israel denies NGOs work permits,” *Al Jazeera English*, <<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2010/02/201029143920277962.html>>, (accessed October 25, 2010)

¹³ In her lecture given at the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies as a part of the “Palestine & the Palestinians Today” conference in April 2009, Sarah Roy notes that donors “offer exclusivity to one side [the West Bank] economically, diplomatically, and politically” and criminalize the Gaza Strip in its aid efforts due to political ramifications of providing support to Hamas. The March 2009 donor conference held at Sharm al-Sheikh, Egypt for the purpose of rebuilding and reconstruction in the Gaza Strip also saw donors preferring to channel their aid through the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, much of which stayed in the West Bank, stuck in PA bureaucracy, and never found its way to Gaza.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Feldman, Ilana, “Gaza’s Humanitarianism Problem,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 38:3 (Spring 2009), 27.

¹⁶ Khalidi, Rashid, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of a Modern National Consciousness*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 22

¹⁷ Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities; Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. (London: Verso, 1991), 6.

¹⁸ Litvak, Meir, “Introduction: Collective Memory and the Palestinian Experience,” *Palestinian Collective Memory and National Identity*, Meir Litvak, ed., (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2009), 19-20.

¹⁹ In the article “Beyond Identity,” (Brubaker, Rogers and Cooper, Frederick. “Beyond ‘identity.’” *Theory and Society*. 29:1 (Feb 2000). 1-47.) Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper argue that identity as a social and political tool of analysis has been overused by the social sciences and humanities to the extent that its meaning has been obscured to the point of ambiguity. Brubaker and Cooper present three alternative terms to do “the theoretical work ‘identity’ is supposed to do without its confusing, contradictory connotations.” They use the terms “identification and categorization” to refer to the processes of identification of oneself and by others that take place in a social context; “self-understanding and social location” to refer to the ways in which individuals have certain self-understandings that are related to their specific experiences and how they conceive of themselves; and “commonality, connectedness, groupness” to refer to a feeling of belonging together in a particular social group or nation.

²⁰ It should be noted that the Palestinian community in Israel is not a monolithic entity. It is multifaceted and includes a variety of political viewpoints and religious affiliations that may differ from a dominant discourse, whether or not that discourse is publicly expressed. For example, some Druze and Bedouin communities identify more readily with an Israel identity than a Palestinian identity. See Sekkai, Rachid. “Bedouin who serve in Israel’s army.” *BBC Arabic Service*. October 20, 2009.

<<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8303634.stm>>. (accessed March 14,2011).

²¹ “Gaza,” United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), December 31, 2009, <<http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=64>>, (accessed February 28, 2011).

²² Ging, John, “The humanitarian emergency in Gaza; ‘A shocking and shameful situation,” *Speech before International Development Committee, House of Commons*, April 30, 2008.

<<http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=389>>

²³ Ess, Kristen, “Protests in the West Bank, Ramallah catches fire, Hamas women demonstrate,” *Palestinian News Network*, December 27, 2008,

<http://english.pnn.ps/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4298>, (accessed November 30, 2009).

²⁴ Mideast Wire Online, “Pro-presidency daily says ground invasion will not be easy.”

²⁵ The author calculated this figure based on archives of stories on December 27, 2008 alone, and from the period between December 27, 2008 to January 18, 2009 on the Ma’an website:

<<http://maannews.net/eng/Search.aspx>>.

²⁶ See "PFLP calls for all Palestinians to help lift Gazan spirit, encourage steadfastness." *Maan News Agency Online*, January 3, 2009, <<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=207471&MARK=operation%20cast%20lead>>, (accessed on November 29, 2009); "Fatah in Hebron condemns Israeli attacks; organizes blood drive to save Gazan lives," *Maan News Agency Online*, December 27, 2008.

<<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=207265>>, (accessed on 14 December 2009); and "West Bank factions announce protest coalition," *Maan News Agency Online*, December 28, 2008, <<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=207317>>, (accessed December 16, 2009).

²⁷ One such statement by the PFLP reiterated the central role Gaza plays in Palestinian resistance and emphasized that the attack on Gaza was an attack on all Palestinians. PFLP leader, Abu Ahmad Fuad, released the following statement: "The Israeli battle is against Palestinians, not just Gazans. We need all of the West Bank, the Diaspora and Palestinians living in Israel to resist the occupation in all kinds of ways. We need a popular movement; we need a great influence from our people to life the spirits of our fighters." "PFLP calls for all Palestinians to help lift Gazan spirit, encourage steadfastness," *Maan News Agency Online*.

²⁸ "Fatah in Hebron condemns Israeli attacks," *Maan News Agency Online*.

²⁹ Blecher, Robert, "Operation Cast Lead in the West Bank," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 38:3 (Spring 2009): 65.

³⁰ Ess, "Protests in the West Bank."

³¹ Blecher 67.

³² The author calculated this figure by searching for stories related to Gaza and "Operation Cast Lead" during the period of hostilities between December 27, 2008 to January 18, 2009 on Wafa's website: <<http://english.wafa.ps/>>.

³³ Ess, "Protests in the West Bank."

³⁴ Rabbani, Moin, "Israel's Assault on Gaza: A Transformational Moment? An Interview with Azmi Bishara," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 38:2 (Spring 2009): 47.

³⁵ "Abbas greets Gazans live on television; promises to exert all efforts to stop massacre," *Maan News Agency Online*, December 31, 2008. <<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=207398>>, (accessed on December 16, 2009).

³⁶ Blecher 71.

³⁷ " Hamas says Abbas no longer legitimate president, but stopping invasion is priority," *Maan News Agency Online*, January 9, 2009. <<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=207677>>. (accessed on December 16, 2009).

³⁸ Naffa, Hisham, "The Palestinians in Israel and Operation Cast Lead: A View from Haifa," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 38:3 (Spring 2009): 57.

³⁹ Land Day commemorates the events that took place on March 30, 1976, when Palestinian citizens of Israel organized strikes and marches in response to an announcement by the Israeli government that it would expropriate thousands of dunams for land for security purposes. As a result of the protest action, six Palestinians were killed and hundreds were arrested. Land Day is one of the most important commemorations in the national politics and consciousness for Palestinian citizens of Israel.

⁴⁰ Gazzar, Brenda, Yakov Lappin and Etgar Lefkovits, "Israeli Arabs plan protests in TA, Sakhnin," *The Jerusalem Post*, December 30, 2008, <<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1230456532186&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull>> (accessed on December 1, 2009).

⁴¹ Khoury, Jack, "Israeli Arabs prepare for month to commemorate October 2000 riots," *Haaretz.com*, September 23, 2010. <<http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/israeli-arabs-prepare-for-month-to-commemorate-october-2000-riots-1.315331?localLinksEnabled=false>>, (accessed 28 February 28, 2011).

⁴² Originally a military term, the term "fifth column" refers in general use to a segment of society that actively works to undermine the stability of the state in which it lives. "Fifth column." *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/206477/fifth-column>>, (accessed March 12, 2011). See also Adalah—The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel. "'Gross Human Rights Violations and War Crimes in the Gaza Strip—The UN Human Rights Council must urge the General Assembly to act under Resolution 377' Letter by Palestinian human rights organizations," December 30, 2008. <<http://www.adalah.org/features/gaza/Letter%20to%20HRC%20Member%20States.doc>> (accessed November 28, 2009).

⁴³ Abu-Baker, Khawla and Rabinowitz, Dan. *Coffins on Our Shoulders; The Experience of the Palestinian Citizens of Israel*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 10.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 108.

⁴⁵ Gazzar, Lappin and Lefkovits, "Israeli Arabs plan protests in TA, Sakhnin."

⁴⁶ The author calculated this figure by searching for stories related to Gaza and "Operation Cast Lead" during the period of hostilities between December 27, 2008 and January 18, 2009 on the www.Arabs48.com website.

⁴⁷ "Israeli channel pulls Arafat TV game," *BBC News Online*, December 21, 2001, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/1722682.stm>, (accessed March 12, 2011).

⁴⁸ "Palestinian MK tossed out of Israeli Knesset session," *Maan News Agency Online*, December 29, 2008, <<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=207342&MARK=operation%20cast%20lead>> (accessed on November 29, 2009).

⁴⁹ Naffa 55.

⁵⁰ Naffa 55.

⁵¹ *Ibid*.

⁵² Former Minister of the Knesset, Azmi Bishara, describes the differences in the roles of Palestinians in the West Bank and Palestinians in Israel in this way: "What is expected from the Palestinians in the West Bank—and what they expect from themselves—is not solidarity with the people of Gaza, but joining with them in an *intifada* against Israel. ... That's what we have always known about the Palestinian people since the occupation began in 1967: the West Bank and Gaza were together in all the struggles. But when you come to the Palestinians in Israel, what you have—what is called for—is not joining [the *intifada*], but solidarity. And inside Israel, at least they were able to show this solidarity in their protest marches" (Rabbani, Moin, "Israel's Assault on Gaza: A Transformational Moment? An Interview with Azmi Bishara," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 38:2 (Spring 2009): 50-51).

⁵³ Gazzar, Lappin and Lefkovits, "Israeli Arabs plan protests in TA, Sakhnin."

⁵⁴ Ravid, Barak, "Lieberman presents plans for population exchange at UN." *Haaretz.com*, September 29, 2010, <<http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/lieberman-presents-plans-for-population-exchange-at-un-1.316197>>, (accessed March 14, 2011).

⁵⁵ Roy, Sara, *Failing Peace: Gaza and the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict*, (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 224.