

# Identity Discourse in Israel:

## The Effect of Media on Palestinian Identity Formation throughout Operation Cast Lead

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Dunia Aburish

Professor Ekaterina Romanova

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### ABSTRACT

News briefings, media outlets, and speeches provide the world with public documentation that relates an action to its validation. A closer look at media and official discourse provides a mechanism of defining themes and justifications. This is especially revealing in times of violence, such as with Israeli and Palestinian attacks during Operation Cast Lead in Winter 2009. Attacks on both sides come in the wake of resonating criticism, especially concerning a lack of defense for Palestinians. Through the study of official statements by former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Yediot Ahronot and Haaretz newspaper articles, this paper explores how Israeli media and official discourse is utilized to formulate respective identities in this critical time period. The analysis of discourse revealed that media and official discourse create negative identity markers for Palestinians, positive identity markers for Israelis, and prevent Israel from developing a discourse of responsibility in the conflict situation.

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## **Introduction: The Importance of Discourse in Conflict Situations**

News briefings, media outlets, and speeches all provide the world with public documentation that relates an action to its validation. With official statements to the public, positions are analyzed, argued, and stated (Dor 2004). A closer look at this discourse provides an interesting mechanism of defining common themes and justifications that have been discussed by political officials or media outlets. This is especially true in times of war and violence, such as with Israel and Palestine. Israeli officials have launched several attacks on Palestinian territory and civilians, most recently in the Winter of 2009 (Mir'ai 2009). These attacks come in the wake of resonating criticism, especially concerning the lack of defense for the Palestinian people (Mir'ai 2009). Therefore, it is important to consider how Israeli discourse has portrayed these controversial actions to the outside world, especially during the attacks of Winter 2009. More specifically, this paper will cover the following topic: how have Israeli political officials and news outlets throughout the country justified Israeli attacks on Palestinian territories, and how have they utilized these discourses to construct the respective identities of Israeli and Palestinian populations?

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict shows how identity can play a key role in conflict situations, and consequently, why it is important to understand the meaning of identity to different ethnic groups. National identity is described as “the group’s definition of itself as a group—its conception of its enduring characteristics and basic values...its reputation and conditions of existence” (Kelman 2001, p. 191). In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the significance of a national identity is at the heart of the conflict. Essentially, the desire for a strong national identity has been a key factor for both Israelis and Palestinians. Within this definition of national identity, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has not only become a struggle for territory and

resources, but also a struggle for national identity and existence (Kelman 2001). Because each group holds such a remarkable connection between identity and justification for the “claim to ownership of the land and control of its resources,” identity has become a symbol of unity and distinctiveness in terms of cultural differences (Kelman 2001, p. 191). As a result, it is important to understand what identity means for Palestinians, and how Israelis choose to portray the identity of Palestinians in the conflict situation throughout Winter 2009.

Several authors have previously studied the topic of identity within Israel and Palestine, and how discourse analysis shapes different identities there. Nevertheless, the time period between November 2008 and February 2009 represents the most recent official military exchanges between the two groups. As a result, this is a critical time period to study because of the circumstances and high tensions between these two political entities. The military exchanges and loss of life resulted in escalated tensions between Israelis and Palestinians, making the discussion of national identity more salient than ever before. Moreover, it is important to observe how the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has proliferated over time by studying how these events are portrayed in the media and through official statements. Both media and official discourse during this time period represent the stance of each respective nation in conveying a message not only to the country, but to the outside world as well. Therefore, I will be studying news articles from two major daily newspapers and official statements by then Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, in order to observe common themes as well as rhetorical commonplaces that substantiate action on the part of the Israeli military, construct the identities of both the Israelis and Palestinians at the time, and justify the use of military force in these situations.

### **Previous Research on Palestinian Identity**

Many authors have previously studied the subject of identity in native Palestine and

Israel. Throughout the past century, the lives of every Palestinian have dramatically changed. This change has taken place as a result of the Israeli occupation of Palestine, which in turn has led to a distinctive change in how Palestinians identify themselves (Kibble 2003). In order to pursue prospects towards a peaceful future that embodies the needs of Palestinians today, it is first necessary to understand the feelings of Palestinians. More importantly, changes in identity may have a profound effect on any Palestinian or Israeli interpretation of peace.

To understand how identity is created within social discourse, it is important to first consider the meaning of identity within these nations. The meaning of identity in different cultures and contexts has led to a deeper understanding of how certain peoples develop a mode of thinking and way of life (Bowman 2008). As a result, it is necessary to grasp the context of identity in specific groups to truly understand who they are as a people (Kibble 2003), and consequently, why they carry out particular actions. This is true throughout all regions of the world, and promotes increased awareness of why people act as they do. Identity plays a pivotal role in interpreting a group's actions. Therefore, in order to understand more central questions regarding the group, it is essential to first understand identity.

To begin, Mir'ai (2009) and Kibble (2003) argue that religion is at the forefront of the mind of a Palestinian. Although they differ in their reasoning, both believe that the Muslim identity among the Palestinians has existed throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and has only intensified as opposed to dwindled. In the case of Mir'ai (2009), the occurrence of the 1948 "Nakba," or the introduction of Israeli occupation in Palestine, resulted in a strengthening of Palestinian and Muslim identity among the people. Similarly, Kibble (2003) argues that because religion is at the forefront of the Israel-Palestine conflict, and because the land is coveted by three major religions, it has become necessary to align oneself with their religion as an identity

marker. However, Mir'ai (2009) chooses to mainly focus on how strong Palestinians associated themselves with being Muslim, instead of discussing all of the possible associations. He considers the identity marker of being Palestinian in a much smaller context, and fails to incorporate other possible forms of identity that may have been used by Palestinians, like in times of conflict such as Winter 2009. Moreover, Kibble (2003) considers the identity of Palestinians solely in association with geography, whereas many areas of Israel-Palestine exist where both Arabs and Israelis coexist. In this way, various explanations of identity can be explained through different associations.

In contrast, other researchers argue that religion has been lingering in the back of the mind of native Palestinians. Yiftachel (2006), Lowrance (2006), Sayigh (1977), and Kelman (1999) argue that because of the imposition of a Jewish state, Palestinians have been forced to identify themselves according to their geographic or ethnic (Arab) roots, and the role of religion in regards to their identity has been minimized. According to these researchers, Palestinians identify themselves with their geographic location because it is easier or they believe they must because of the current political situation. Therefore, they simply classify themselves as Palestinian or Arab. However, Yiftachel (2006) has slightly different reasoning. He argues that Palestinian identity has been shaped by the Jewish population themselves. His research has outlined the prevalence of the Jewish population in the lives of the Palestinians, and he argues that the Palestinian resistance to Jewish migration and settlements has aided in forming the geographical and regional identity of Palestinians. While this represents the same idea of how Palestinians identify themselves with the presence of a Jewish population, my research differs in observing how these identifications may change in a time of violence and conflict, such as the Winter of 2009. Lowrance (2006) utilizes the scientific research design to specifically examine

the role of identity in the face of conflict, stating that it changes whether a Palestinian will identify himself or herself as Arab or Israeli. While my research uses similar ideas of describing identities within conflict discourse, my research utilizes a relational research design and studies identities in a different time frame. Sayigh (1977) distinguishes between the different regional groups of people in Palestine and acknowledges that they have different meanings for identities through “attitudes, perceptions, values, and senses of identity.” (Sayigh 1977) Though they argue about the current and future difficulties, these authors, mainly Yiftachel (2006) and Lowrance (2006), fail to outline the previous history and way of life of the Palestinians. In this aspect, they only focus on the effects of a certain stimulus, which is the presence of the Jewish population. Instead, they should first discuss Palestinian life and identity before the initial occupation in order to establish a proper comparison, and consider how identity has been shaped over time.

Some scholars, such as Khalidi (1997), Lybarger (2007), and Bowman (2008), also agree that the Palestinian identity has drifted from religion, but have different reasoning. Khalidi (1997) argues that Palestinian identity has been fragmented from the beginning, because they are associated with so many different identities to begin with. They can be classified as Arab, Muslim, Palestinian, Jerusalem-born, or Bedouin, all of which may carry the same weight to various individuals in Palestine. For that reason, they argue that Palestinians have consistently had difficulty with identity, and the Israeli occupation has only worked to exacerbate that. Khalidi (1997) provides an excellent way of demonstrating how many different identities exist within Palestine, and why they have come about. Nevertheless, it is important to consider how recent events have changed this identity, and how something like military action can transform how Palestinians may identify themselves. Through analysis of interviews and events and interpretive research, Lybarger (2007) states that conflicts evident among the Islamists and

secular nationalists are mirrored by the internal struggles and divided loyalties of individual Palestinians. Still, the research of Bowman (2008) greatly focuses on the individual level, mainly because he bases his research on interviews and very specific topics, such as how Fatah embraced the Oslo Accords or increasing secularism from the Left. Consequently, it is difficult to obtain an overarching view of how the majority of Palestinians feel because he carried out research on such an individual level.

It is important to keep in mind how Palestinians identify themselves, especially when considering how Israeli media frames the situation and creates an identity for the Palestinians. Clearly, the way that native Palestinians identify themselves is strongly interconnected with the Israeli occupation and the history that these two cultures share. Therefore, I plan to distinguish my research from previous discoveries by exploring not just how the Palestinians define themselves, but how the Jewish population defines the Palestinian population through both media and official discourse. Observing how media and official discourse justify actions towards Palestinians provides another way of substantiating Palestinian identity and how it is shaped by Israel. In this way, it is possible to gain a better understanding of why both Israel and Palestine carry out certain actions, and how identities must be constructed in order to ensure that these actions are carried out. Moreover, it is possible to understand how identity frames the conflict situation. In the case of Palestinians, it is clear that a desire for self-determination has had a powerful impact on their identity as well as the perpetuation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

### **Previous Research on Israeli Discourse and Palestinian Identity**

In addition to literature on Palestinian identity, there has been research on the subject of Israeli discourse on Palestinian issues in different mediums. Daniel Dor (2004) conducted relational research in order to analyze media text from the first month of the Intifada in 2000. He



concludes that the media has constructed the news rather than report it, allowing beliefs and emotions to overtake reality. Dor (2005) also completed another relational research design, examining overall discourse towards Palestinians, and concluded that media has a strong emotional tie to their readers and consequently must “tell stories that are acceptable.” My research is very similar to Dor's; however my research observes a different time period than the Intifada in 2000. Bekerman (2002) combined interpretive and relational research on discourse between Israelis and Palestinians citizens in a university gathering, stating that discourse is used to formulate fixed national identities. Nevertheless, my research differs from that of Bekerman by observing the identities of populations that are not specific to one type of person, like a university would be. Specifically, my research covers how the identity of entire cities, like the Palestinian city of Gaza and the Israeli city of Ashkelon, are shaped through discourse. Bednarek (2006) combines scientific and relational research designs to measure the number of occurrences of certain words in two different types of media discourse, observing if their respective functions were different as a result. In contrast, my research observes themes within media and official discourse, in addition to the prevalence of certain words, to derive the respective identities that are established.

Other types of research are broadly based on this topic as well. Sharvit and Bar-Tal (2007) observe how the Israeli media functions as an outlet of the paramount beliefs of a society, and, consequently, must actively promote a new agenda if they wish to achieve it. In observing the events of Winter 2009, my research can play a part in determining whether Sharvit and Bar-Tal's research is accurate in terms of these more recent events. Gerstenfield and Green (2004) analyze the impacts of pro-Israel and anti-Israel media bias, and how it demonstrates the goals of the organization. This research concludes that for the most part, bias strongly shapes media

reporting, and that the majority of this bias is against the state of Israel when discussing Palestinian issues. Noting how identities are created within official and media discourse allows me to observe if these biases still exist in light of recent events, including whether they have become stronger, or whether they have waned. Yoram Bar-Gal (1994) examines the identity of Israeli officials through how the word “Palestinian” has been used in geographical textbooks for the past century, asserting that this aids in understanding the society that created the books. Bar-Gal (1994) concludes that geography textbooks have relayed a dual and ambiguous message regarding Israel's borders and boundaries, yet geography remains an important aspect of education considering the national goals of Israel. Through my own research on media and official discourse, it is possible to observe whether a more clear distinction is established regarding Israel's borders and boundaries, consequently resulting in a clearer definition of Palestinian identity.

### **Methodology**

Discourse analysis represents the analysis of language in different capacities. For my research, I have observed the relationship between different types of discourse, and how they are used to create identities in this conflict situation. Due to the heightened violence throughout Operation Cast Lead, discourse analysis provides insight into the objectives of the parties involved. Much of the existing literature provides ample analysis on different discourses in Israel, but they are mainly focused on media discourse. In contrast, I plan to discuss two different types of discourse: official and media texts. In this way, it is possible to observe potential links between different types of discourse in Israel regarding the same event. Additionally, my research focuses on the formulation of identities and justifications for actions, as some previous research has done (Dor 2005; Yiftachel 2006; Lowrance 2006). This is important because it

outlines the policy choices and responses of Israeli officials, clearly demonstrating their stance on various issues that played an important role in the policies, during Operation Cast Lead between November 25, 2008 and February 15, 2009.

The event that I have chosen to cover is the invasion of Gaza and Hamas attacks on Israel in Winter 2009. I have chosen this time period for several reasons. First, it is a time period that has received a great amount of attention as well as criticism from around the world, so there is an abundance of public discourse on the topic. The circumstances and heightened violence of the time made the discussion of national identities especially vivid. In addition, since there was a great amount of scrutiny on each action taken, it is clear that each party understood how essential any type of public discourse would be in terms of the perception and justification of their actions. As the most recent official military exchanges between the Israelis and Palestinians, research on this discourse provides a firsthand look into how the identities have transformed and changed over time, and if they have changed at all. Finally, as the prospect of peace becomes more faint, this interaction between Israel and Palestine demonstrates the position of each of these nations in the face of sheer violence. The decisions and actions made during this time represent the bold stance of each side and outline their policies and identity. The language used builds these identities by framing the situation and persuading people to agree with the actions, demonstrating a meaningful look into the reasoning behind Israeli policies towards Palestinians, and how Israelis perceive Palestinian actions.

In order to accurately analyze Israeli discourse analysis, it is necessary to narrow down the areas of study. Therefore, I have chosen to analyze media discourse by Yediot Ahronot and Haaretz daily newspapers, as well as official statements by former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert regarding the military exchanges between Israelis and Palestinians between November 25, 2008,

and February 15, 2009. More specifically, the main focus of this discourse will be the invasion of Gaza in Palestine and Hamas rocket attacks on Israel in the selected time period. Whereas Haaretz daily newspaper is considered a liberal, left wing, low circulation newspaper that is read by political elites and sophisticated intelligentsia, Yediot Ahronot daily newspaper is considered a widely circulated newspaper that has high exposure and is open to many political views, though mainly identified with the right wing (Caspi 1986). In this regard, it is possible to capture the symmetries and asymmetries of the interpretation of events found within two distinctive newspapers. In addition, I chose media articles and official statements based on their relevancy to the conflict situation and the date in which they were published. Specifically, I focused on articles and statements within the allotted time period that described Palestinian, Hamas, Israeli military operations, and Israeli civilians. In general, articles with these subjects also captured the identity of both Israelis and Palestinians. Moreover, I coded the articles by their definitions of identity and the observance of similar and common rhetorical commonplaces. In this way, I was able to establish common themes within and between the different news articles. In total, I analyzed 21 articles from Yediot Ahronot daily newspaper, 18 from Haaretz daily newspaper, and 7 statements and interviews by former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

Primarily, the main goal of my research is to observe how both the Palestinian and Israeli populations are described within official and media texts. This will allow a better understanding of the social construction of their respective identities through discourse analysis. Also, it is crucial to analyze how the situation and potential solutions are framed in the discourse. In this way, it is possible to understand the reasoning behind Israeli security policy as well as how the Israeli army and political officials were constructed in this discourse in order to make it possible to carry out these actions. Moreover, the likelihood of solving the conflict as well as the mindset

of the Israeli population can be observed through these texts. This is especially salient in the type of interconnected world we live in today, where actions by all nations are transparent, interpreted, and criticized by nations all over the world. Instant access to information and speeches makes actions and justifications even more essential, because it is understood that these texts will be internationalized. As a result, media discourse and official statements by the parties can be considered pivotal in understanding their position on the issues at hand, and the justification for Israeli action becomes more salient.

### Limitations of the Research Design

Within my research, there are several limitations to the extent in which I can observe themes and justifications through Israeli discourse between November 2008 and February 2009. Mainly, the time frame with which I am working prevents extensive research and discussion of every article provided by the major newspaper and official statements that I am studying. Although this would provide more meticulous observation of the themes and rhetorical commonplaces found within the text, my research provides a snapshot of the identity discourse at a time when differences between identities were particularly relevant. In addition, the number of newspapers being studied and the number of political officials I am observing may provide a limited scope in regards to observing overall discourse and justification within the nation. Even though I am observing major newspapers from both Right and Left wings, there are many newspapers that do not side with a major political party that still represent a majority of the population. Finally, the newspaper articles I am researching in both Yediot Ahronot and Haaretz daily newspapers have been translated from Hebrew into English. This translation to English may misinterpret or misrepresent some of the content of the newspapers, and essentially, some of the messages may be “lost in translation.” As a result, it may be more effective to study and

observe newspapers in their native language in the future, in order to avoid any misconceptions regarding the message and content of the newspaper articles.

In all, the study of these texts will uncover the identity of Israeli officials and media outlets by observing how they describe the incidents of Gaza in 2009. The language used in this time formulates their identities and works to justify the actions through the use of words in language. Consequently, it is important to observe how the language used during Winter 2009 justifies the actions of Israeli policy officials, constructs social objects, and creates identities of both Israeli and Palestinian populations.

There are several things I expect to find in my research. After carrying out preliminary research, several rhetorical commonplaces have become apparent in media and official discourse. Initial rhetorical commonplaces describing Palestinians include: terrorists, murdered, attacks, Hamas, human shields, and jihad. Rhetorical commonplaces describing Israelis include: victims, civilians, killed, defense of Israel, activists, and suffering. Within these discourses, I believe a common theme will develop with Israel described as the protector of the State and a defender that must act when challenged, and with Palestinians described as aggressive individuals with negative intentions who force Israel to act as they do. Nevertheless, it is important to note how legitimization is constructed within these discourses. Through these rhetorical commonplaces, it becomes apparent that one way to get at this is to see how shared social meanings are constructed and communicated in different discourses, and see how the rhetorical commonplaces combine together within the discourses. Important aspects of research to consider include whether there are there some concepts that are more commonly used in official as compared to media discourse, and whether media and official discourse vary with one another. It is even possible to observe whether Haaretz daily newspaper and Yediot Ahronot daily newspaper,

though both media discourses, display alternative messages. Also, it is possible that there is a “hidden” narrative that portrays the Palestinians as victims suffering from Israeli aggression.

### **Study #1: Yediot Ahronot Daily Newspaper**

#### Identity Markers

The first type of discourse analysis that I have carried out is media discourse analysis of Yediot Ahronot daily newspaper. In total, 21 articles were observed covering various topics including the end of the ceasefire with Hamas, rocket attacks in Israeli territories, aid sent from the United Nations and various Middle Eastern countries, and the implementation of Operation Cast Lead. Within these articles, the main rhetorical commonplaces that are associated with Palestine and Palestinians include: Islamic, Jihad, rocket, terrorists, aggression, Hamas, Muslim, enemies, Islamist, evildoers, and gunmen. Although many of the words used in Yediot Ahronot articles correlated Palestine with Hamas, weaponry, and relentless fire, there was also a small portion of discourse that covered the Palestinian injuries and deaths that took place from the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) bombings. In general, negative identity markers and dehumanization tactics were most commonly associated with Palestinian identity.

An interesting note regarding these rhetorical commonplaces arises when constructing Palestinian identity. Figure 1 shows how several of the words are used interchangeably with Palestine and Palestinians. These words and phrases include: Islamic Jihad, terrorists, Hamas, Muslims, Islamists, enemies, and evildoers. Within the articles, there is little or no distinction between any of these words, despite the differences, for example, of being identified as a terrorist versus being identified as a Muslim. In this way, the word “Palestinians” becomes an association for all of the other words, even if that is not the case. For example, Palestinians are commonly linked with Hamas and Jihad in various news articles: “The Islamic Jihad said that the rockets

were in response to the crime of occupation in Gaza and the West Bank” (Waked, “Islamic Jihad: Jihad, resistance the only way,” 2008). While not creating a direct link, the substitution of these words creates a link between the various identities, encompassing the entirety of the Gaza population. Although these words and phrases do not target the same population, the article relates each one to another, creating the sense that they are in fact somehow related. In addition, the word choices dehumanize the Palestinian population. Rather than viewing the population as civilians, the Palestinian identity is constructed as a common enemy for Israelis. Moreover, the association of these words with the residents of Gaza insinuates that these characteristics are shared among the people who reside there. Whether intentional or unintentional, the lack of distinction on the part of the authors creates a negative correlation between the population and these phrases.

In contrast, common rhetorical commonplaces for Israel and Israelis that were utilized throughout the media articles include: fear, security, war, defensive, schools, protection, military, citizens, sovereign, duty-bound, innocent, defend, shock, deterrence, State of Israel, and power. Within this discourse, two different themes evolved. One type of discourse was aimed rocket attacks. In contrast, another type of discourse developed surrounding the government of military forces of Israel, utilizing words such as security, war of attrition, intolerable, no choice, retaliation, power, and deterrence. On the one hand, Israeli civilians are described as innocent people who are “trying to lead a normal routine” that is interrupted on a daily basis by the Hamas Qassam rocket attacks (Hadad, “Qassams, mortars hit Negev; council head says ‘war of attrition in south,’” 2008). Furthermore, the population is represented as helpless, with a strong emphasis on how the rocket attacks are affecting the lives of children and students and how they carry out their daily lives at school (Hadad, “Qassams, mortars hit Negev; council head says ‘war of



### Common Themes within Yediot Ahronot Daily Newspaper

<b>Yediot Ahronot Daily Newspaper</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Rhetorical Commonplaces</b>
<b>Israel</b>	⤴ Positive identity markers used interchangeably with "Israelis"	Security, war, protection, military, citizens, duty-bound, civilians, peaceful, power
	⤴ Population represented as victims	Fear, weakness, shelter, civilians, lives, resolve, democracy, innocent, defend, unbearable, concerns
	⤴ Government in a wartime atmosphere	Security, war of attrition, power, deterrence, military, duty-bound, responsibility, State of Israel, army, unacceptable, targets, search and destroy, strike, save lives
	⤴ Security of the Israeli state	Defend, sovereign state, intolerable, protection, army, IDF, retaliation, deterrence
	⤴ Population has constant fear of rocket attacks	Children, normal lives, daily rocket attacks, fear, shelters, kindergarten, alarm, schools, students, shock, civilians, injuries
<b>Palestine</b>	⤴ Negative identity markers used interchangeably with "Palestinians"	Islamic, Jihad, terrorists, aggression, Hamas, Muslim, enemies, terror, Islamist, evil-doers, gunmen, offensive
	⤴ Population associated with terrorists	Terrorists, Hamas, occupational army, Muslim, enemies, Iran, Islamist, evil-doers
	⤴ Collateral damage on civilians is justified	Aggression, offensive, missiles, enemies, terror, vowed, weapons, evil-doers, incessant, explosion
	⤴ Inability to aid civilian population because of associations with Hamas	Violation of ceasefire, Qassam rocket attacks, terrorists, mortars, aggression, occupational army, terror

**Figure 1**

attrition in south,” 2008). On the other hand, the Israeli government and military are presented

as “duty-bound to protect the peaceful civilians” because of the “unacceptable circumstances that cannot be tolerated” (Nahmias, “ Hamas: Willing to renew truce,” 2008). In this way, the identity of the Israeli government is framed as strengthening and protecting the civilian population, mainly because it has no other choice. Words such as resistance, power, and security help enforce this identity.

It is interesting to note the words and phrases that are utilized to construct the identity of Israel and the Israeli populations. Words that are used interchangeably with Israel and Israelis include: civilians, citizens, children, State of Israel, sovereign state, army, students, peaceful, and innocent. While again they do not create a direct link between these words and Israel, the fact that they are used interchangeably creates an automatic association that shapes the identity of this population. Whereas these identities encompass various types of people within Israeli society, such as students and the State of Israel, the lack of distinction between any of these identities promotes a sense of unity among the population. The common thread among these identities is residing in Israel, and through this connection, all of the consequent associations are made in order to create the sense that the entire population is under attack and must be defended. The theme of unity promotes a sense of nationalism as well as the mentality of a common cause and enemy that encourages action to be taken and accepts the role of the State of Israel in pursuing that action.

#### Common Themes within Yediot Ahronot News Articles

Clearly, the identity of the Palestinians differs greatly than the identity of the Israelis that is shaped within Yediot Ahronot texts. Mainly, an “us” versus “them” mentality is created within this type of media discourse. The Palestinian population in Gaza is mainly associated with terrorist networks, and even the civilian population is detailed as collateral damage because of

Hamas's location in the area. In this way, the killing of Palestinian families, who may not have been associated with the terrorist networks in any way, is justified because eliminating terrorist groups supersedes all other goals. Moreover, a greater amount of emphasis is placed on the constant rocket attacks on Israeli citizens, especially students and children who are innocent and peaceful. These students, civilians, and children are associated with shock from the rocket attacks and the inability to carry out daily routines as a result of these constant attacks. Specifically, one student is quoted saying the following: "It's not a normal reality for a child to live between one bomb shelter and another" (Sofer, "We know how to strike, Olmert tells southern residents," 2008). A greater amount of humanity is utilized for Israeli identity, especially regarding the usage and description of the impact of rocket attacks on civilians, whereas the Palestinian population is more consistently dehumanized and associated with the terrorists who inflict shock and pain on Israeli civilians.

Many other themes are prevalent within Yediot Ahronot media articles as well, such as themes of Israeli mobilization in order to prevent terrorists from gaining momentum, a sense of victimhood for both Israeli and Palestinian civilians, and the inability to provide aid to Palestinians because of potential associations with Hamas. Throughout many of the articles, different methods of mobilization are utilized to conclude that action must be taken against Hamas and Gaza, mainly driven by the fact that there are no other choices. Particularly, there is an emphasis on a dire need for security and deterrence to prevent Hamas and any additional Palestinian terrorist networks from capitalizing on Israeli weaknesses, such as schools. The Foreign Minister is quoted stating the following: "Any fire emanating from Gaza compels us to protect our citizens. If Hamas continues implementing terror, Israel will have no choice but to use the means at its disposal" (Sofer, "Livni: We'll respond to Gaza fire with military measures,"

2008). In this way, the situation is portrayed as a frightening one. Still, the government is also portrayed as determined, relentless, and unwavering, since this stance is necessary in order to halt the constant bombardment of rocket attacks that is paralyzing the population. The continual, daily rocket fire is also greatly emphasized in order to demonstrate the constant fear that is felt by the population because of their exposure to danger.

Within the text, the rocket attacks are described as daily occurrences that have the potential to do great harm. However, the idea of an exposed population is slightly contradicted within the text, as a result of the alarm system that is sounded whenever there is an impending rocket attack (usually 45 seconds beforehand.) Consequently, the population has time, although very little, to seek shelter and proceed with bomb training exercises that have been practiced in advance. These maneuvers allow more preparation for attacks than the bomb attacks carried out by the IDF, which the articles outline, have no warning for Palestinians. Nevertheless, the psychology of the students, schools, and children and how rocket attacks affect them is also commonly alluded to. This mainly concerns the terror they must undergo living in constant fear of a bomb attack, including the fear imposed by practicing bomb drills and memorizing safe locations of bomb shelters. Moreover, in addition to listing damage and injuries that are caused by the rocket attacks, the news articles commonly list a number of civilians who are treated for shock at the bomb scenes.

Other common themes throughout the media articles represent a sense of victimhood for Palestinians through the desire to help the civilians in Gaza, but the inability to do so because of the presence of Hamas in the area. This type of help includes humanitarian aid and basic services such as money transfers through banks. For example, the articles explain why the aid is being halted: "Israeli soldiers entered Gaza to destroy a tunnel that the army said could have been used

in a cross-border raid” (Waked, “Islamic Jihad: Jihad, resistance the only way,” 2008). Since the humanitarian aid was provided through tunnels that were also potentially linked to illegal arms smuggling, these tunnels were closed and humanitarian aid halted from all sources. In terms of the money transfers, speculation arose about whether the funds were donated to Hamas in an effort to mobilize members as well as obtain arms. For these reasons, all monetary bank transfers to Gaza were stopped during the Winter of 2009, and during the times in which Israeli forces were carrying out Operation Cast Lead. In this way, Hamas is blamed as the reason that Gazans are unable to receive humanitarian aid, not Israelis.

The presence of Hamas was also used to justify many killings that took place during Operation Cast Lead, specifically when families were killed in addition to Hamas leaders. In these scenarios, the families are looked at as collateral damage. Although the articles mention that many international actors condemned these deaths, including the United Nations and French President Sarkozy, the deaths are consistently upheld because of Hamas associations. For example, in a December 2008 article, the deaths are declared, stating that an “air strike in Rafah left three siblings dead—an infant and two teenagers” (Hadad, “Gaza reports: 7 killed, among them baby,” 2008). Following this statement, it is also stated “the strike was apparently aimed at a senior Hamas commander who was in the area” (Hadad, “Gaza reports: 7 killed, among them baby,” 2008). In this way, the killing of Palestinians is justified as a result of an unintended mistake by the IDF, since they possessed the intentions of wounding and/or killing a Hamas commander. The death of the family is understood as collateral damage: a necessary evil in order to carry out the agenda of the IDF, eliminate Hamas leaders, and provide safety to Israeli citizens. An important characteristic about these goals that raises support from the population is that the military vows to achieve them at any cost, including the lives of Palestinians.

Another common theme that is aimed at mobilization emphasizes how Hamas terrorist networks and continued Qassam rocket attacks are detrimental to Israel's security as a state. Many of the articles include discourse on sovereignty and reference the State of Israel. Furthermore, the need for deterrence and protection in order to preserve democracy is also mentioned. To push this point, the media articles highlight government officials who describe the rocket attacks as a “war of attrition” (Hadad, “Qassams, mortars hit Negev; council head says ‘war of attrition in south,’” 2008). Moreover, the articles emphasize use of the military and army as having the responsibility to provide protection for Israelis. For instance, one article outlines these sentiments: “We are trying to lead a normal daily routine here under incessant rocket and mortar fire...[the situation] is only deteriorating” (Hadad, “Qassams, mortars hit Negev; council head says ‘war of attrition in south,’” 2008). This type of discourse refers to Israelis as an inherent part of the state, whereas the Hamas population in Gaza threatens the state. In addition, there is an emphasis on preventing incapable Hamas forces from capitalizing on any weaknesses that may be present in the IDF. To push this point, the articles consistently highlight Hamas messages that describe the will of Hamas leaders to persevere, and their goals of “showering” Israel with Qassam rocket fire (Hadad, “Qassams, mortars hit Negev; council head says ‘war of attrition in south,’” 2008). With this point, Israel is identified as a strong state, and Hamas is still referred to as a weak and unworthy opponent. The idea of Hamas inflicting damage upon Israel is through luck and obsolete rocket attacks; not strategic, organized measures. As a result, Israel maintains the identity of the justified and civilized opponent.

Discourse describing the identity of Israel through references to the state may describe an inner struggle and insecurity within Israeli politics regarding protection of the state. Obtaining sovereignty over the state of Israel was a struggle that was constantly under attack and is still

questioned today by some Middle Eastern nations. The presence of Israel in the midst of many hostile, unfriendly Middle Eastern states only contributes to this insecurity. As a result, even though Gaza does not have an official army and does not pose as great a threat to the Israeli population as Israel does to the Palestinian population, media outlets and officials may still use references to self-defense, protection, and sovereignty to validate such insecurities. In this way, Israel's population feels a constant existential threat that may allow the justification of extreme measures. References to a need to defend Israel's security are consequently taken very seriously and represent a fear of national identity and existence for many Israelis.

## **Study #2: Haaretz Daily Newspaper**

### Identity Markers

The second type of discourse analysis that I have carried out is media discourse analysis of Haaretz daily newspaper. In total, 18 articles were closely surveyed for linkages, rhetorical commonplaces, and themes that were utilized to construct the identity of Israelis and Palestinians, respectively. Mainly, these articles focused on the daily effects of rocket fire and foreign policy that ensued, and the large amount of international aid that other countries attempted to send to Palestinians. The most common rhetorical commonplaces that were used to reference Palestinians and the Palestinian identity include: militants, Hamas, Islamic, territories, deadly, Qassam, breach, strike, Jihad, radical, and network. Haaretz daily newspaper was more blunt in listing the trauma (injuries and deaths) that occurred to Palestinians than Yediot Ahronot daily newspaper was, but still reported these numbers in a minimal fashion.

Through these rhetorical commonplaces, Haaretz constructs a similar identity for Palestinians as Yediot Ahronot. Figure 2 shows how the word 'Palestinian' is interchanged with words such as militants, radical Islamists, and Hamas. However, as opposed to Yediot Ahronot

daily newspaper, there is little to no mention of the word 'terrorist' in these articles. Nevertheless, a negative, aggressive identity is still created for the Palestinian population. This is also signified by the types of verbs that are used in connection with their actions, such as breach, strike, and seize. This word usage highlights the necessity of identifying the entire Palestinian population as erroneous and negative, since there is little to no distinction between the Palestinian civilians, and the groups that are carrying out the attacks.

The inability to distinguish between different groups of people within the Palestinian population makes it difficult to understand some of the situations that are taking place. At one point, an author points out that there are continued rocket attacks from the Palestinian camp, but does not know which group to associate with these attacks (Ravid, "MI Chief: Hamas upholding cease-fire, but smaller Gaza groups undeterred," 2009). Consequently, the group carrying out the attacks remains nameless, and is labeled as such. No clear distinction has been made between Palestinian civilians, the Hamas group, and other potentially dangerous groups in the area. Moreover, the articles have not mentioned the potential of another armed group in the Gaza area to threaten Israel with rocket fire; Hamas has been the sole creditor for all the violence in the area. Therefore, it is confusing to note that, Hamas, the main antagonist in all of the news articles, has agreed to a ceasefire, yet rocket attacks are still taking place in Israeli cities.

In addition, several rhetorical commonplaces are used to construct Israeli identity through Haaretz media discourse as well. These words and phrases include: offensive, military, occupation, injury, wound, unilateral, aggression, kindergartens, IDF, civilian, injustice, deaths, threats, operation, and leadership. Like the Yediot Ahronot articles, there is a sense of security and military discourse here that is legitimized through the use of strong language such as

### **Common Themes within Haaretz Daily Newspaper**



Haaretz Daily Newspaper	Themes	Rhetorical Commonplaces
<b>Israel</b>	✧ Positive identity markers used interchangeably with “Israelis”	Halted, citizens, students, kindergarten, military, civilians, residents
	✧ Israel is triumphant, victorious	Leadership, wisdom, top commanders, response, long-term truce, stopping rocket attacks, halted, offensive
	✧ Security of Israeli state	Military, threats, injustice, unilateral, operation, blockade, offensive, injuries, aggression
	✧ Israel is generous and does not want to revert to military means	Allows aid, opening crossings, foreign assistance, relief supplies, medical supplies
<b>Palestine</b>	✧ Lack of clarification between “Palestinian” and other identities	Militants, Hamas, Islamic, Jihad, radical, deadly
	✧ Emphasis on factual evidence	Deaths, casualties, injuries, no property damage, Palestinians killed, Israeli attacks, Red Cross
	✧ Hamas being cooperative	Credit Hamas, ceasefire, Hamas stopping rocket crews, Hamas intercepted, Hamas preventing attacks
	✧ Negative identity markers for those who are providing humanitarian aid to Gaza	Activists, violation, protests, advocates, international protestors, outspoken, critics, Hezbollah supporters, Gaza siege, “Israel is the enemy,” swarmed, demand, denounce, demonstrations

**Figure 2**

unilateral, aggression, offensive, and military. In addition, a similar discourse towards the

civilian population is established, though not nearly as in-depth as the Yediot Ahronot articles describe. Rather, the Haaretz articles emphasize the factual evidence that exists on the topic, and highlight the official policies of Israeli military leaders and foreign policy officials. For this reason, persuasive language that gives a sense of a wartime atmosphere is utilized. In all, the Haaretz articles provide a more balanced picture of the situation compared to Yediot Ahronot, allowing the mention of Palestinian deaths and injuries. Nevertheless, the same undertones evolve in regards to Israel fighting based on the principle of no choice, and Palestinians unwavering in their violence.

#### Common Themes within Haaretz News Articles

Several themes are prevalent within the Haaretz news articles, including an emphasis on factual evidence that prevents the newspaper from being as overtly supportive of Israel as Yediot Ahronot. The news articles displayed a more neutral stance on many issues, and provided informative facts that presented the conflict as a two-sided one. For example, although the rocket attacks struck an open area in Israel, the attacks “caused neither casualties nor property damage” (“Qassam hits Negev as Ashkelon residents protest Gaza rocket fire,” 2008). This statement and others like it delegitimize Hamas as a serious threat to Israeli lives, mainly because of the obsolete weaponry that Hamas is using. While a negative image of Hamas is portrayed, it still provides a different perspective than the Yediot Ahronot idea of relentless, harmful rocket attacks.

Other examples exist demonstrating a more neutral stance for Haaretz daily newspaper. For instance, one article describes Israeli use of military force and intelligence to target and attack areas that are suspected to be Hamas sanctuaries (Ravid and Stern, “Air force bombs mosque used for rocket attacks,” 2009). However, the article also bluntly outlines the state of the

conflict for the Palestinian side as well. The article states that: “at least six Palestinians were killed yesterday in the Israeli attacks including a Palestinian doctor and a medic” (Ravid and Stern, “Air force bombs mosque used for rocket attacks,” 2009). Moreover, the author specifically articulates how many Palestinians have been wounded and killed to date: “until now, 395 Palestinians have been killed in Operation Cast Lead and 1,600 injured” (Ravid and Stern, “Air force bombs mosque used for rocket attacks,” 2009). The same details are outlined in another article that solely covers the issues faced by Palestinians throughout Operation Cast Lead, outlining statements by the Red Cross (“Red Cross: 115 Gazans missing since Operation Cast Lead,” 2009). This article also points out that “a three-week Israeli air and ground offensive killed at least 1,300 people in the Gaza Strip” (“Red Cross: 115 Gazans missing since Operation Cast Lead,” 2009). This type of detail is a stark contrast to Yediot Ahronot daily newspaper, which did not state a total number of casualties or injured Palestinian people in any of the news articles that were studied.

In addition, when a casualty or injury was stated in Yediot Ahronot daily newspaper, it was immediately justified. In contrast, the Haaretz news article does not justify the killings; rather, it outlines the Palestinian perspective on the issue by detailing some of the statements by both the Palestinian President and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), respectively. Finally, the article does not conceal the UN's stance on the issue, stating “the UN announced that at least a quarter of the Palestinian dead, over 100, were civilians, including over 40 children” (“Red Cross: 115 Gazans missing since Operation Cast Lead,” 2009). Throughout the conflict, the UN was adamant in requesting a stop to Operation Cast Lead and providing humanitarian aid to Gaza. In general, Israel was opposed to the perspectives of international organizations such as the UN and the ICRC, and felt the need to defend their initiatives in

Operation Cast Lead by describing the extent of the Palestinian threat. For this reason, it is noteworthy that the Haaretz authors included unbiased statements on the UN and ICRC's stances.

Another common theme within the Haaretz news articles outlines the action taken by Hamas to stop rocket fire and encourage a ceasefire between Israel and Palestine. One article describes Hamas's efforts to prevent continued rocket attacks with the hopes of entering into a long-term truce with Israel ("Islamic Jihad says Hamas stopping their rocket crews in Gaza," 2009). The article also outlines that "Hamas police intercepted Islamic Jihad rocket crews on three occasions over the past month," mainly to prevent further attacks in Gaza, which was already suffering from "ravaged infrastructure" as a result of Israeli military operations ("Islamic Jihad says Hamas stopping their rocket crews in Gaza," 2009). Although the article places Hamas in a positive light, this may have occurred for several reasons. Primarily, at this point in military operations, it was clear that Israel possessed the upper hand in terms of control. For this reason, it would be possible to deviate from the previous war-like discourse, and adopt a more peaceful discourse. Another possibility is that since there is a new enemy to blame, described as "Islamic Jihad rocket crews" in the text, it would be possible to shift the blame from Hamas to another group ("Islamic Jihad says Hamas stopping their rocket crews in Gaza," 2009). This is a likely alternative because the articles also suggest that Hamas was denying allegations of preventing the launch of attacks into Israel by the Islamic Jihad groups ("Islamic Jihad says Hamas stopping their rocket crews in Gaza," 2009).

#### The Role of International Assistance in Israeli Discourse

In addition to the basic discourse on Palestinian and Israeli identities, a secondary discourse developed within the Haaretz news articles that described the various countries that were attempting to supply Palestinians with aid, although there was a naval blockade being

enforced by Israel. These countries included Greece, Libya, Cyprus, and Lebanon. It is important to analyze the discourse surrounding these attempts to aid the Palestinian population because it defines whether or not Israeli media believes the Palestinians need or deserve the aid. Moreover, it is important to observe how Israel responds when various countries disregard the naval blockade that was put in place, and how these attempts are consequently described. This will demonstrate the seriousness of the situation in terms of Israel preventing the supplies from being delivered, or responding with another attack.

Within the articles that were researched, several rhetorical commonplaces were associated with the various countries that were attempting to provide aid to Palestinians in Gaza: humanitarian, activists, violation, protest, advocates, defiance, international protestors, critics, Hezbollah supporters, swarmed, and demonstrations. In general, Israeli forces halted any of the boats that were attempting to provide foreign assistance to Palestinians in Gaza. Moreover, although the articles mentioned that the countries were attempting to provide humanitarian assistance, the people among the boats were generally labeled in a derogatory manner. For example, one article insinuates that the protestors are intentionally breaking international law (“International protestors plan to break Gaza naval blockade,” 2009), while another article insists on the same intentions (“Fourth protest boat sails into Gaza, breaching Israeli blockade,” 2008).

The people aboard the boats are consistently labeled as 'pro-Palestinian activists' who are 'violating an Israeli blockade' and questioning the authority of the State (“Fourth protest boat sails into Gaza, breaching Israeli blockade,” 2008). In this way, although members of the international community are supplying Palestinians with aid, they are de-legitimized through this language usage. These descriptions, such as advocates, boycotts, protestors, and activists, suggest that only a minority of the international population is participating in these aid missions.

Moreover, they are characterized as though this type of activity is a daily one throughout their lives. In addition, the majority of protestors from Lebanon are described as dual supporters of Palestinians as well as Hezbollah (“Thousands of Hezbollah supporters protest Gaza siege,” 2008). The implication for these classifications is that Palestinian supporters are generally members of denounced or unpopular groups in the international arena. Hezbollah has been classified as a terrorist organization around the world (“Foreign Terrorist Organizations,” 2010). Characterizing Palestinian supporters as members of the Hezbollah community helps alleviate the pressure that these protestors are placing on Israel by showing that they do not represent a realistic worry. Through these media associations, Israel is not held in such a discriminatory light: the protestors are dismissed as a given consequence of any type of Israeli action. Since the activists are pro-Palestinian, they normally oppose Israeli policies, and consequently do not represent a legitimate threat to Israeli's justification in this area.

Nevertheless, an interesting exception to the aid boats that were halted by Israel comes from Libya's attempt to provide aid to Palestinians in Gaza. One article depicts Israel as consenting to international Gaza crossings, though they are severely limited (“Palestinians: Libya sends ship to Gaza in bid to break blockade,” 2008). While the article also displays harsh criticism of Israel, with Libyans exclaiming: “the Palestinians are starving from this attack,” Israelis are represented in the article as generous in terms of allowing aid into Gaza (“Palestinians: Libya sends ship to Gaza in bid to break blockade,” 2008). Moreover, the article states that, “in addition to truckloads of food, Israel opened the crossings to gas for cooking and fuel for Gaza's sole power plant” (“Palestinians: Libya sends ship to Gaza in bid to break blockade,” 2008). While the actions do seem generous, it is also important to note the date that the article was published: November 26, 2008. At this time, the attacks between the two

countries had yet to escalate. As a result, this benevolent nature may be highlighted in order to demonstrate that Israel acted on every possible alternative before resorting to the unilateral violence that was carried out.

### **Study #3: Prime Minister Ehud Olmert**

#### **Identity Markers**

The final type of discourse analysis that I have carried out is an analysis of official statements by former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. Through the investigation of statements and official speeches, themes of identity and motives throughout the conflict have become apparent. It is important to study official discourse in addition to media discourse, mainly because it provides an alternative perspective and speaks to a wider audience. Official discourse differs from media discourse in that it represents a type of discussion that applies to the entire country of Israel. While citizens generally hold biases towards which newspaper they choose to read, the statements of the Israeli Prime Minister relate to an overall national discourse that speaks to both the Israeli population as well as international actors who are relevant to the situation. In total, seven different statements and speeches were observed. With the agenda of preparing the nation for a war-like atmosphere, the discourse more generally applies to the objectives and orientation of the country. Rather than reporting factual evidence, this type of discourse aims at framing the situation in a way that justifies Israel's actions to domestic and international actors. In this way, it represents the most important type of discourse for understanding and justifying why Israel acted as it did. Whether or not readers agree with the stance of Olmert, he is a key figure in determining the direction of Operation Cast Lead. As a result, his leadership role directly translates to a more relevant type of discourse. While media sources may bias the situation,

#### **Common Themes within Prime Minister Olmert's Statements**

Statements by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert	Themes	Rhetorical Commonplaces
<b>Israel</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appeals to humanity of Israeli civilians</li> </ul>	Children, grandchildren, innocent, shoot, kill, kindergartens, civilians, residents, innocents, fierce spirit, pain, strength, inspiration
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Israel is mobilizing towards action</li> </ul>	Stronger, force, will not hesitate, great, destructive, strength, certainly, self-defense
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Israel is strong; will respond to Hamas's attacks</li> </ul>	Severe, disproportionate, response, citizens, security forces, we choose, the time has come
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Israel is victorious</li> </ul>	Achieved, unshakeable, succeeded, targets, control, determination, sophistication, courage, ability, intelligence, deterrence, spirit, sacrifice
<b>Palestine</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appealing to humanity of Palestinian civilians</li> </ul>	Residents, appeal, danger, spirit, Islam, suffering, citizens of Gaza, humanitarian crisis, we do not hate you, we do not wish to harm you, victims, cries of pain, Palestinians
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hamas is a negative, adverse actor</li> </ul>	Hamas is enemy, against spirit of Islam, murderers, danger, against values of Islam, missiles, firing, strikes, enemy, Islamic Jihad
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Israel has defeated Hamas</li> </ul>	Badly stricken, hiding, killed, destroyed, bombed, damaged, reduced, heavy blow, threaten, rockets, mortar, shells
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Peaceful future with Palestine</li> </ul>	Peace, innocents, good neighbors, values of Islam, spirit of Islam, do not want to fight, endurance, stability, children

**Figure 3**

official statements by the Prime Minister are a clear statement of what the country of Israel



desires to communicate to the rest of the world.

One of the primary differences between official and media discourses is how they generate the identities of various parties who are involved in the conflict. Previously, both Yediot Ahronot and Haaretz daily news articles have provided a blurred distinction between Palestinians, Hamas, civilians, and other parties in the Palestinian situation. On the other hand, statements by Olmert distinguish Palestinian civilians and Hamas members in a meaningful way. Primarily, he directly addresses Palestinians in Gaza with many of his statements. In this way, he provides a significant divergence from other discourse because he recognizes that the Palestinians have an identity, and they deserve to be addressed. For example, in an interview with Al Arabiya news channel, Olmert states the following: “Israel withdrew from Gaza approximately three years ago not in order to return to it. I appeal to the residents of Gaza” (“PM Interview with Al Arabiya news channel,” 2008). Moreover, rather than downplay the importance of Palestinian civilians in the conflict, or refer to them as collateral damage as many Yediot Ahronot articles did, he understands that they have an enormous stake in the conflict situation. As a result, Olmert allows them a role in the conflict, as opposed to dismissing the Palestinians as helpless bystanders in the conflict. Later on in the interview with Al Arabiya news channel, he exclaims: “You, the citizens of Gaza, you can stop it” (“PM Interview with Al Arabiya news channel,” 2008). In this way, Olmert displays solidarity with the Palestinian civilians, and shows them that they have a stake in the conflict as well. However, it is not clear whether Olmert is addressing the Palestinian population because he believes they can make a difference, or whether it is in Israel’s best interest to have the Palestinians turn on Hamas.

To explore this link further, it is necessary to analyze a greater amount of Olmert’s comments. Specifically, the way Olmert presents Hamas in the conflict situation will explain

why he is making specific allusions to the Palestinian population. Figure 3 provides a detailed account of all the words used to describe why Hamas is a negative actor in the conflict situation. Overall, Olmert signifies an especially disapproving viewpoint towards Hamas. On December 25, 2008, Olmert specifically pinpointed Hamas as the problem: “Hamas is the enemy of the residents” (“Olmert delivers ‘last minute’ warning to Gaza,” 2008). Later in the interview, he refers to them again as the “murderers of Hamas” (“Olmert delivers ‘last minute’ warning to Gaza,” 2008). Not only does he portray Hamas as a terrorist-based organization that is harmful to the citizens of Israel, he also appeals to their negative image in the Islamic sense. In an interview with Al Arabiya news channel, he poses the question: “Is it in the spirit of Islam to kill innocent children?” (“PM Interview with Al Arabiya news channel,” 2008). Moreover, he specifically states that Hamas is “acting against the values of Islam” (“PM Interview with Al Arabiya news channel,” 2008).

These connotations regarding the identities of Palestinians and Hamas are profound for several reasons. Mainly, Olmert is identifying Hamas as the root cause of the problem, and outlining their alleged abuse of human rights and innocent civilians. In this way, their actions are portrayed in a way that makes it inexcusable for any external actor, regional or international, to defend Hamas and their actions. Even more importantly, Olmert is creating a common enemy between the Palestinian civilians and Israel, stating that Hamas is an opponent “not only in Israel but in Gaza” as well (“PM Interview with Al Arabiya news channel,” 2008). Rather than attempt to dismiss all Palestinians as enemies, Olmert is taking an important and unprecedented step in establishing a discourse aimed at cohesion between the two groups. In the Al Arabiya interview, he is clear about solidarity with the Palestinians: “We do not want to harm you...we do not want to fight the Palestinian people” (“PM Interview with Al Arabiya news channel,” 2008). At the

same time, he is showing the illegitimacy of Hamas's actions in a new way: through the lens of Islam. Clearly, Olmert understands that the majority of Palestinians are religious Muslims. As a result, he is appealing to a personal truth that would make his argument aimed at discrediting Hamas almost undeniable by many Palestinians. This strategy is undoubtedly useful for Israel's aims at defeating Hamas, which Olmert makes clear. If Hamas's own population begins turning against the group, believing that they are only causing them harm, Hamas would lose a great amount of support and legitimacy in their actions.

In contrast to the complexities of the Palestinian identities in the conflict situation, Olmert's construction of the Israeli identity is simple: strong and willing to do whatever it takes to protect Israel. In addition, the Prime Minister is careful to make this message as clear as possible. There are several instances where Olmert explicitly outlines Israel's willingness to fight Hamas. For example, on February 1, 2009, he states the following: "There will be a severe and disproportionate Israeli response to the fire on the citizens of Israel and its security forces" ("Israel vows 'disproportionate' response to Gaza rocket attacks," 2009). Moreover, in the interview with Al Arabiya news channel, he overtly shows Israel's readiness to respond to Hamas and establish superiority: "I will not hesitate to use Israel's strength to strike at Hamas and the Islamic Jihad" ("PM Interview with Al Arabiya news channel," 2008). In contrast to the previous media discourse on Israel's identity, the Prime Minister's discourse is confident and strong. Israel's legitimacy and innocence is unquestionable, and its resolve is unwavering. In this way, Olmert builds a sphere of confidence and ease for the citizens of Israel, allowing them to feel secure as a result of Israel's strong response to continuous rocket fire. In addition, the citizens can remain certain that Israel is not showing signs of weakness in the conflict situation.

#### Common Themes within Prime Minister Olmert's Statements

Several other themes are prevalent within the Prime Minister's statements, including attempts to appeal to the humanity of civilian populations in both Palestine and Israel. In terms of the Palestinian population, the Prime Minister addresses the negative aspects of being involved in the conflict. More specifically, he demonstrates compassion by empathizing with the Palestinian population and all of the losses they have encountered throughout the conflict situation. For example, on January 17, 2009, he directly addresses the population: "We feel the pain of every Palestinian child and family member who fell victim to the cruel reality created by Hamas which transformed you into victims" ("Prime Minister Ehud Olmert Declares Unilateral Ceasefire in Gaza," 2009). Although this quote was obtained from an interview following the completion of Operation Cast Lead, this type of humanity was also portrayed towards the initial stages of the conflict. In the interview with Al Arabiya news channel, he makes statements before any Israeli offensive was carried out, stating the following: "I appeal to the residents of Gaza: I speak to you as a father and grandfather and I know that there is nothing I want less than to put my children and grandchildren in danger" ("PM Interview with Al Arabiya news channel," 2008).

These direct addresses to the Palestinian population provide a new dynamic to the conflict discourse for several reasons. Primarily, a theme that has become dominant in Olmert's discourse is the common enemy of Hamas. Israel is not to blame for what has (or will) happen to the Palestinian civilians in Gaza; Hamas is. In addition, Hamas is the reason that the conflict situation is proliferating in the first place. Similarly, Olmert is openly stating what the losses of conflict have become for many Palestinians: the injury and deaths of family members and loved ones. By pinpointing the losses that the Palestinian population is facing in the conflict situation, he is forcing them to face a harsh reality. As a result, it forces them to consider whether the

losses are worth the gains in this conflict situation, and if the Palestinians can even claim any gains. However, it is interesting to note that these appeals to the humanity of Gaza are only present at the introduction and the conclusion of the conflict situation. While Operation Cast Lead was being implemented, there was no discourse aimed at the humanity of populations. Rather, the Prime Minister takes a more hard-line approach at these points. It is possible that Olmert does this to avoid showing weakness when military operations are taking place. In contrast, the humanitarian discourse plays a part when subsequent military actions are unclear, or when the military operations are over. While addressing the humanitarian aspects of the Palestinian situation importantly recognizes the loss that the Palestinian population is facing, the blame is solely placed on Hamas, and Israel does not take any responsibility for causing or inducing the conflict.

On the other hand, the main type of humanity that the Prime Minister references towards Israel revolves around the innocence of the civilian population. Particularly, Olmert references the victims of Hamas's rocket attacks in many different capacities. In the interview with Al Arabiya news channel, he states: "Could I allow more missiles against the residents of Israel? More strikes at children and civilians and do nothing?" ("PM Interview with Al Arabiya news channel," 2008). This type of discourse continues towards the end of the conflict situation. On January 17, following the implementation of the majority of Operation Cast Lead, he referred to the "hundreds of rockets and mortar shells indiscriminately fired at a population which numbers one million residents" ("Prime Minister Ehud Olmert Declares Unilateral Ceasefire in Gaza," 2009). Moreover, he appeals to the humanity of Israeli civilians by outlining the violence imposed by Hamas: "Hamas violently took control of the Gaza Strip and began attacking the communities in the South more intensely. Hamas's methods are incomprehensible" ("Prime

Minister Ehud Olmert Declares Unilateral Ceasefire in Gaza,” 2009). Harshly criticizing Hamas, Olmert finds a way to sympathize with both civilian populations in the situation without seeming biased towards either. Whereas expressing sympathy at the Palestinian situation may have caused some Israelis to accuse the Prime Minister of favoring the enemy, he balances this empathy by critiquing Hamas’s every move and portraying them as the group to blame for the totality of the conflict situation.

In addition to humanitarian discourse, another common theme in Prime Minister Olmert’s discourse is Israel’s strength and power as a state throughout all aspects of the conflict situation. While the majority of this discourse follows the completion of Israel’s military offensive, Olmert was always unwavering in voicing Israel’s strength. For example, on January 17, he describes Israel’s efforts in the conflict:

The military operation was characterized by determination, sophistication, courage, and an impressive ability in intelligence and operations, which led to significant and numerous achievements. The current campaign proved again Israel’s force and strengthened its deterrence capability vis-à-vis those who threaten us. (“Prime Minister Ehud Olmert Declares Unilateral Ceasefire in Gaza,” 2009).

This quote overtly lauds Israel’s role in the conflict, and considers Israel as a victorious party. Moreover, it demonstrates that the state of Israel measures success and defeat by its ability to compel and coerce its enemies into surrender, as opposed to achieving a peaceful solution. In general, this type of view is most commonly associated with the realist school of thought. Because the discourse emphasizes how goals are achieved through power, it is likely that the Prime Minister views the circumstances as a “zero-sum” situation, which is also a tenet of realism. In this way, a state can only gain when another actor loses. Moreover, accepting that Israel has become victorious through the use of power shows that the military used force to achieve their means. Consequently, Israel avoids taking responsibility for the negative aspects of

the conflict, because the method in which the state accomplished its goals were viewed as necessary in order to achieve those goals.

Nevertheless, it is important to consider the weight of Olmert's statements in light of the political significance that they have for the conflict situation. A majority of the discourse is aimed at cooperation with the Palestinians, or showing the Palestinians that Israelis have attempted to cooperate with them throughout the conflict situation. However, the Haaretz daily news articles show that there was an extensive amount of humanitarian relief sent to Gaza throughout the conflict. Whether the aid was necessary or not, the initiative taken by several external actors to provide Palestine with relief items shows that there was a strong international reaction to Israel's actions. Even the United Nations condemned Israel's actions in Gaza. As a result, it is the job of the Prime Minister to convey a message of peace and cooperation to the outside world, in order to show that Israel is not acting unethically, and to avoid extensive criticism on the matter. Distinguishing Hamas from the rest of the Palestinian population is a carefully planned approach. In this way, Israel can maintain the ability of attacking Hamas, yet still avoid the blame for the casualties that take place. Likewise, despite the daily rocket attacks that are taking place, it is clear that the Prime Minister will not allow Israel to look weak. On the contrary, several remarks are made to show Israel as an even stronger country after the attacks. Politically and internationally, this is an important step to take. Israel is surrounded by hostile neighbors in a region of the world where many countries do not recognize it as a state. Furthermore, there have been significant challenges to Israel's power, especially since the war with Lebanon in 2005. As a result, the Prime Minister may feel the need to show that Israel has not declined in importance, despite various challenges to its power and capabilities.

### **Conclusion: Understanding the Meanings Behind the Discourse**

In conclusion, I have carried out three different types of discourse analysis. Each set of articles and rhetorical commonplaces elicited different themes and understandings of the conflict situation that took place in Gaza from November 2008 until February 2009. Yediot Ahronot news articles focused on utilizing positive identity markers with Israelis, using negative identity markers with Palestinians, showing how the Israeli population were victims of the conflict, emphasizing the importance of security for the Israeli state, and labeling Palestinian injuries and deaths from the conflict as collateral damage. In addition, Haaretz daily news articles focused on positive identity markers used interchangeably with Israel and Israelis, negative identity markers for those providing humanitarian aid for Gaza, an emphasis on Israel's security as a state, and an ambiguity regarding the different actors who took part in the action on behalf of the Palestinian side. Finally, statements by former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert focused on establishing a humanitarian discourse towards both the Israeli and Palestinian civilian population, blaming Hamas for the entirety of negative consequences from the conflict situation, and demonstrating Israel's strengths in the face of challenges.

Observing themes within the different types of discourse, there exist several similarities and differences. Understandably, there is an overarching theme describing the importance of Israel's security and strength. All three of the sources boast nationalist discourse regarding needs for defensive measures against Hamas and terrorist-based organizations. In this way, security measures taken by Israeli security and defense forces are justified in their actions. Moreover, the three discourses are united in their vehement opposition and denigration of the Hamas group. Mainly, Hamas is blamed for all of the injuries, deaths, and destruction that have taken place throughout Winter 2009, in both countries. Moreover, the attacks are what compelled the state of Israel to respond with such strong actions, even though all the articles also assert that Israel



approached the possibility of violence with caution, and avoided it at all costs. Finally, all of the articles have positive identity markers with Israel and Israeli populations. While this theme is also expected, it is important to note that the state of Israel is taken in a generally positive light by all the sources. In this way, there is an inherent bias to the situation. Ideally, there would at least be minimal criticism of any Israeli actions in the conflict. This type of impartial, constructive analysis of events, however, is absent.

The discourses also presented diverging themes within the text. Primarily, the texts address Palestinian identities in different ways. Whereas the media discourses generally group together all the different Palestinian identities, the official discourse observed differences between the civilian and Hamas populations. Utilizing this method was beneficial to each party. For the media discourse, grouping together the different parties created a common enemy for the readers to refer to. In contrast, for the official discourse, recognizing the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian population showed a type of compassion that legitimized Israel's actions internationally. Similarly, the media and official discourse diverge in their discourse on coexistence with the Palestinian population. While the Prime Minister emphasizes the importance of cooperation in order to promote a peaceful future with the Palestinians, there is little to no reference to this type of collaboration in the media discourse. Nevertheless, this divergence may be as a result of the Prime Minister's role as an international political figure. It may be necessary to demonstrate the importance of the future in current actions, to show that the Prime Minister is not only thinking about immediate gains. However, for the media, immediate and attention-grabbing concerns are the most important. In terms of the other issues that are addressed within these discourses, the majority of the remaining themes did not show stark differences between the media and official texts.

Noting the similarities and differences between the text sources is important because it allows an explanation and interpretation of the overall themes in Israeli discourse. It seems that over time, the discourse shifts from justifying a war-like atmosphere, to becoming more calm and understanding of the Palestinian plight. When victory was near, it seems as though it was easier to openly appeal to the humanity of the Palestinian cause, at least for the media sources. Some important messages can be understood from this discourse analysis. Above all, the media and official discourse emphasize that Israel did not want to involve itself in the conflict situation, and did not want to resort to violence. Rather, a discourse on humanity evolved demonstrating the plight of Israeli civilians as a result of Hamas's constant rocket attacks. In this way, it became inevitable and necessary for Israel to respond. In addition, Palestinian injuries and deaths were not as a result of the Israeli offensive; rather, they occurred as a result of Hamas's presence in the conflict situation. The media and official discourses explain this point in different ways. Whereas media texts describe Palestinians injuries and deaths as collateral damage due to Israel's needs to defeat Hamas, official texts describe Palestinian injuries and deaths as a result of Hamas's terrorist capabilities.

This storyline is distinctly present in each of the discourses that were studied. Essentially, Israel does not take any responsibility for eliciting the conflict situation. In contrast, the text is framed to suggest that Hamas and the Palestinian population forced Israel into violence. The IDF's actions, although commonly referred to as a military offensive, are also labeled as self-defense of the Israeli state. However, it is important to note that unlike Israel, the Palestinians do not have a state to defend. Likewise, there are little to no negative comments made about Israel's role in the conflict situation. The absence of unbiased reports prevents a balanced judgment of the actions that took place throughout the conflict.

One of the most important and consistent themes, perhaps, is that Hamas is continuously referred to as a terrorist organization, or an organization that possesses terrorist-like capabilities. The actions they carry out are comparable to those of many terrorist organizations: instilling terror into the population and taking lives wherever possible. In this way, the main objectives of the IDF are portrayed as an overarching fight against terrorism. When explained in this way, it is very difficult to compose an argument against Israel. If the ultimate goals of Israel were to prevent terrorist attacks from taking place, then many would agree. However, it is also important to take into account why Hamas is conducting such extensive attacks against Israel. Previous literature on Palestinian identity explains that the Palestinians desire a land in order to associate themselves with, and a country to represent their population. The key, unanimous demand for Palestinians is national self-determination. However, this fact is strikingly absent from all Israeli discourse. Even more startling is the absence of any discourse regarding Israel's undoubted goals in the area. These foreign policy goals include maintaining settlements on land that is occupied by Palestinians, occupying the West Bank, and destroying the Palestinian authority (Dor 2005). While these goals are well known by the international community, they are not referred to in the discourse. By avoiding the declaration of these goals, Israeli media and official discourse also avoids addressing the root causes of the conflict.

In all, the analysis of Yediot Ahronot media discourse, Haaretz media discourse, and the Prime Minister's official discourse reveals distinct observations about the respective identities of Palestinians and Israelis, and also why they are portrayed in that way. Disregarding the root of the problem has led to a perpetuation of conflict between Israel and Palestine. Rather than addressing the Palestinian's needs for self-determination, Israel adopts a discourse culminating in decrees of self-defense and preventing the proliferation of terrorists in the Middle East.

Similarly, rather than hold themselves responsible for the plight of the Palestinians, they blame Hamas. While Hamas may have exacerbated the conflict in recent years, they are not the reason why the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has become as prolonged and complicated as it is today. Consequently, Israeli discourse avoids the subject of occupation, self-determination, and responsibility. In this way, Israeli media and official discourse actually sustain and continue the conflict situation between Israel and Palestine. Moreover, as long as Israeli discourse continues this trend, allowing the citizens of Israel to believe that they are not responsible for the situation in Palestine and that defeating Hamas will result in a solution, it will not be possible for Israel and Palestine to approach peaceful relations with one another, and the violence will only continue. In conclusion, the lack of Israeli discourse on the goals of the Palestinians as an ethnic group prevents the establishment of realistic goals, objectives, and solutions in the conflict situation; rather, these discourses play a key role in perpetuating the conflict situation because of their inability to associate military and national objectives with the Palestinian desire of self-determination.

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