

Shaping Palestinian Identity: The Bounding Practices of Nonviolent Activists

Maia Hallward*

This paper examines the processes through which Palestinian national identity is constituted in the words and deeds of Palestinian activists who nonviolently resist the Occupation. It examines the processes through which these Palestinians



frame their identiti(es) and the ways in which they articulate the boundaries of 'Palestine' and 'Palestinian' society as compared to other such narratives, including those of mainstream 'Western' scholars. Based on dozens of formal interviews and informal encounters in 2004-2005 and July 2006 as well as document analysis, the paper draws on the theoretical processes of 'bounding,' narrating, and deploying categories of identity as articulated in scholars of political sociology and critical geopolitics. In particular, the paper discusses the mechanisms through which activists bound Palestinian identity and the symbols, narratives, and principles they use in this process. The paper will also explore how these same activists bound Palestinian identity vis-à-vis 'Israeli' identity in political, cultural, and geographic terms. After explaining the theoretical framework used to analyze the emergence and maintenance of categories of identity, the paper traces how Palestinian identity claims are legitimized through use of key terms, symbols, and ideas*including democracy, international law, and historical events*directed at audiences not only within Palestine, but also the international community. While the paper illustrates the bounding practices of these Palestinian activists as an example of how bounding

* Assistant Professor ,Political Science & International Affairs, Kennesaw State University.

mechanisms work in a particular context, the theoretical mechanisms discussed can be used to examine the processes of identity formation in a wide variety of contexts. Thus, the contribution of this paper is not only an examination of specific Palestinian discourses and symbols of identity, but also a framework for how identities are formed, challenged, adapted and sustained which could be used to further explore how to best intervene in the contemporary discourses, activities and events shaping present and future Palestinian identiti(es).