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## 'We represent, here, the interests of the free world': Accountability in Israeli leaders' media talk on the Gaza Crisis <sup>1</sup>(2008-2009)

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The Palestinian-Israeli conflict has attracted attention from academics and the wider public for the best part of the last six decades. Much of the debate has centred on issues of accountability for the start and continuation of the conflict. In particular issues such as Israeli military actions in the region and the outcomes of those actions which led to the formation of armed resistance groups against Israel, for instance Hamas (Milton-Edwards & Farrell 2010) have been much debated. Scholars, historians and journalists continue to argue over issues of Israeli occupation of Palestine, violence from within Palestine and Israel's aggression against Palestine. However, in this paper we focus on social psychological aspects of the conflict, such as those of accountability (Buttny 1993). In particular, we focus on the Gaza crisis that spanned a period from the 27<sup>th</sup> of December 2008 to the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January 2009 (Gaza crisis: key maps and timeline 2009), between Israel and Hamas in Gaza Strip, resulting in a substantial loss of life and a continual economic blockade of Gaza Strip. We focus on the media news interviews with Israeli political leaders conducted during and soon after the Gaza crisis. The media apart from providing coverage of the war are also seen to engage various political actors in debates and

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<sup>1</sup> Gaza crisis: We have chosen to use this particular formulation of the events in Gaza during 27<sup>th</sup> December 2008 to 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2009 as this was used not only by the British Broadcasting Corporation but also by a variety of other media agents. Although, we have our own particular political stance towards these events we do not think this is an appropriate place to discuss or present those views.

interviews on the conflict. Our aim here is to provide a discursive analysis of how Israeli political leaders talk about the Gaza crisis and Israel's role in the conflict.

### **Discourse analysis and accountability**

Discourse analysis within social psychology is a methodology that focuses on the study of language, as members' practice, in its own right (McKinlay & McVittie, 2008). Social behaviour on this approach is better studied via a detailed analysis of members' discourse. Research within such tradition has shown that members routinely treat themselves and others as accountable for their actions (Buttny 1993). Such issues become relevant especially in cases of conflicts between nations as these conflicts have direct consequences for the populations of those nations. Routinely, political actors seem to be at the forefront of both being held accountable and providing accounts for their nations' involvement in such conflicts. For example, in justifying the war on Iraq, descriptions of Saddam Hussein were seen to be made, by the then President Bush, in ways to make the invasion seem warranted (Chang & Mehan 2008).

Members then are seen to make use of specific descriptions of actors and events in ways to warrant for the actions carried out against 'the others'. In certain instances, 'the other' is constructed to be distinct from 'the self' and this distinction then is employed in justifying acts against them. Collet (2009) shows that President Bush in his speeches constructs the actions of 'the other' as uncivilized, irrational and 'evil', which are then used to justify an armed attack on those members. Alternatively, members are also seen to present 'the other' as similar to another commonly known agent of terror. Erjavec and Volčič (2007) have shown that Serbian elites employ constructions of minority Muslims as similar to fundamental terrorists and hence essentially evil to

justify acts of aggression against them. Accountability for acts of aggression is also seen to be made via providing flexible narratives of events. For example, McKenzie (2001) has shown that members of British and American political elites selectively used actions of Iraq on Kuwait as the start of their narrative in accounting for their role in the Gulf War. Doing this then presents Iraq as the culpable party in the conflict, managing their own accountability for the war. Another way that members are seen to attend to issues of accountability is via presenting their actions as being in the interests of the wider public {Kirkwood, 2005 371 /id} or in the service of their national interests (Reicher & Hopkins 2001).

### **Discursive approach to the Palestine-Israeli conflict**

Discursive research on the Palestine-Israeli conflict has shown that, although political scientists, historians and journalists may provide versions that attribute the conflict to either of the parties or parties external to the conflict, matters are not treated with such simplicity by Israelis or Palestinians. For example, Kuzar (2008) argues that terms such as ‘the right to return’ which might be taken to imply a consistent meaning across social and political spectrums are constructed, challenged and managed in a variety of ways for differing outcomes on the nature of the conflict. More recently it has been shown that Hamas leaders in media interviews manage issues of responsibility for the conflict not only through representations of Israel and Palestine but also of parties outwith the conflict such as ‘the international community’ (McKinlay, McVittie, & Sambaraju 2010). In making references to such parties, members are seen to align themselves with those parties to both, display a wider support for their actions and manage their own role in the conflict.

What the above research shows, then, is that members across a variety of contexts treat themselves and others as accountable for a variety of actions and that this accountability is managed in a variety of ways. However, it has not always been the case that research has pointed to the ways in which these acts are made accountable within the interaction. In this paper, we attempt to show the ways in which in media news interviews, Israeli leaders are made accountable for the actions of Israel in the Gaza crisis that lasted from December 2008 to January 2009, and the ways in which they manage such accountability.

## **Method**

### *Data*

Data for this paper are transcripts of media news interviews conducted in English with Israeli political elites during the 2008–09 Gaza crisis (Gaza crisis: key maps and timeline 2009). These transcripts were collected using the News Archival Search Engine provided by Google by the use of terms: ‘Israel’, ‘minister’, ‘interview’ and ‘transcript’, and was restricted to the time period of the 2008–09 Gaza crisis. The search yielded a total of 60 items; duplicates, incomplete transcripts or transcripts in other languages were excluded. The transcripts used as data are transcriptions of interviews made by the respective news agencies and hence are likely to have been exposed to editorial processes and undergone changes for various reasons (see Ashmore, MacMillan, & Brown 2004). The transcripts retained were of interviews conducted with the then representatives of the Israeli government. These transcripts were thoroughly re-read and finally for the present paper we focused on three transcripts out of which the following extracts have been selected for further ‘fine-grained’ analysis.

*Analysis*

The three transcripts selected included discussions on the Gaza War and the extracts selected included discussions on Israel's role in the crisis, the relationship between Palestine and Israel, and the like. These were analysed using discourse analysis as outlined by McKinlay and McVittie (2008), which treats discourse as a topic of study on its own right.. The analysis here is also informed by analytic techniques of conversation analysis (Have 2007; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson 1974) and studies in interaction (Goffman 1976; Goffman 1981) which argue for a need to examine talk in its sequential organization to appreciate the various sorts of local interactional actions that get done in talk (Potter & Edwards 2001; Schegloff 2007).

As is readily seen, the present talk occurs in the context of media news interviews, which previous authors (Clayman & Heritage 2002; Hutchby 2006) have examined in detail and shown to have specific institutional features. These extracts were transcribed in the level of words and the analysis, here, proceeded via a focus on the turn-by-turn organization of interviewers' and interviewees' talk. The present study, then, focuses on how various parties are held accountable for the current Gaza conflict, how Israeli leaders negotiate and manage their actions against Palestine and Hamas and how offers of peace are made in these media interviews.

**Analysis**

The extract reproduced below is from an interview with the Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipora Livni conducted by Maggie Rodriguez, in Jerusalem, for CBS news on 28<sup>th</sup> December 2008, during the Gaza war between Israel and Hamas.

*Extract 1 (CBS: Livni):*

1       Rodriguez   We just heard you say that your objective here is to  
2                   force Hamas to stop its rocket barrages, and to limit  
3                   its military build up. But the extent -- the intensity  
4                   of your retaliation has been widely condemned, not  
5                   only in the Arab world, but across Europe. Are you  
6                   afraid this could be counter-productive?

7       Livni       This is not retaliation. We are trying to change  
8                   realities on the ground, and the realities were --  
9                   until this operation -- that Israeli citizens were under  
10                  daily attacks from Gaza Strip, a place that we left.  
11                  We drew -- took our forces out. We dismantled  
12                  settlements in order to create a vision of peace. And  
13                  Hamas took Gaza Strip with all its citizens and  
14                  abused this in order to target Israel. Now, about  
15                  your question -- about the Arab world and so -- it is  
16                  important to understand that the world and  
17                  description is being divided between extremists and  
18                  moderates.  
19                  And Israel stands together with other powers of the  
20                  Arab and Muslim world together against extremism,  
21                  which is being represented by Hamas, by Iran, by  
22                  Hezbollah. They're not fighting for any legitimate  
23                  rights of the Palestinians, so they are just trying to  
24                  deprive us from our rights.  
25                  So, in a way, I think that we need to understand that  
26                  sometimes there are some messages that leaders  
27                  maybe need to say when they see these pictures on  
28                  television, especially, in the Arab streets. But at the  
29                  end of the day, I believe that we represent, here, the

30 interests of the free world and the interests of all  
31 these moderates in the region.

Rodriguez's question, at lines 1 to 6, while displaying features of 'doing' media news interview questioning (see Heritage & Clayman 2010 chapter 16, p.227-244) also shows three features of interest. Firstly at lines 1 to 3, Rodriguez is seen to report Livni's speech – indexed by 'we just heard you', – to present one particular version of the current states of affairs (Buttny 1998). These include, describing Israel's actions and intentions as directed against what are described as military actions – 'rocket barrages' and 'military build up' – on the part of Hamas. Secondly, it presents Rodriguez as the mere 'animator' [one who is uttering those words] in presenting such states of affairs and Livni as the 'author' [one who has composed the content and the message] of that presentation (Goffman 1981). Thirdly, by attributing such intention to Livni, via the use of –'your objective here' at line 1 – Rodriguez presents Livni or Israel as the 'principal' (Goffman 1981) [the party whose point of view is expressed] of those representations as well. The outcome then is to provide for Rodriguez a 'neutralistic' footing (see Clayman 1992) via transferring the role of 'author' and 'principal' to Livni. This foregrounding then opens up a 'slot' for her to move on to one particular aspect of this conflict, namely the responses to Israel's actions against Hamas. It is the extent of Israel's armed actions that are portrayed as being reacted to in highly negative ways by parties external to the conflict. This attribution of negative evaluation to parties – 'not only the Arab world, but across Europe' – is made in ways to suggest that such reaction from 'the Arab world' might be treated as a potential display of stake (Potter 1996). The use of 'Europe' as another party that voices similar negative reactions 'the Arab world' can be heard as citing a genuine authority, readily recognizable as such by the audience of CBS News and Livni herself. This both presents those actions as having



a problematic status and deals with potential denials of those reactions as mere displays of vested interest. It is this problematic status that Rodriguez makes relevant in her questioning at lines 5 to 6. The questioning is done in ways to ascribe to Livni the position of the 'principal' – 'are you afraid' – for Israel's actions against Hamas in Gaza. Rodriguez, via reporting Livni's speech and citing other parties' reactions to Israel's actions is seen to make Livni accountable for Israel's actions against Hamas. Accountability then is seen to be produced from within the interaction rather than it being an ever present element in the social world.

Livni in her response, at line 7, is seen to produce a denial of Rodriguez's formulation of Israel's actions as constituting 'retaliation' and reformulate those actions as an attempt to 'change the realities on the ground'. The denial together with the reformulation then allows Livni to produce an elaborate account of the nature of Israel's actions against Hamas and the reasons for it, at lines 8 to 14. This account, presented as a narrative, firstly is indexed as 'the realities' and secondly, that the states of affairs presented here were temporally antecedent to the current armed conflict. By doing such presentation, Livni is seen to render these descriptions as factual and as having a bearing on Israel's current actions. The account then is started, at lines 8 to 10, with a description of acts – 'daily attacks' – that were carried out against 'Israeli citizens'. Moreover, the origin of such attacks is given in terms of the geographical location – 'Gaza Strip' – and Israel's relationship with that location – 'a place that we left'. These descriptions present Israel and its citizens as victims of repeated acts of aggression and serve to distance Israel from any sort of relationship with the origin of those attacks. Livni goes on to list Israel's previous actions in Gaza Strip – 'took our forces out' and 'dismantled settlements' – alongside providing the intentions behind such actions, namely 'to create a vision of peace'.

This listing is followed by descriptions of Hamas' actions which are presented as temporally succeeding Israel's actions. At lines 12 to 14, Hamas' actions and intentions are presented in hearably negative ways via descriptions such as 'took Gaza Strip', 'abused' and 'to target Israel'. These descriptions, present Israel's actions as withdrawal of occupation of Gaza Strip and Hamas' actions as acts of occupation of Gaza Strip to engage in aggressive acts against Israel. By the use of such descriptions and indicating the temporal succession (McKenzie 2001) of Hamas' actions, Livni can be seen to ascribe responsibility for the current conflict to Hamas.

Livni, by the use of – 'now about your question' at lines 14 to 15 – not only makes a topic shift, but also treats the preceding utterances to have answered other parts of the question. At lines 15 to 18, Livni goes onto provide a meta-discursive commentary, on the presentation of states of affairs by unmentioned parties, which is said to involve practices of categorizing 'the world' and 'description' into 'extremists' and 'moderates'. Through such commentary Livni introduces this category pair as members' practices grounded in commonsensical notions rather than as her own representation of states of affairs. This allows Livni, at lines 19 to 22, to use these categories in presenting Israel along with 'those in Arab and Muslim world' as moderates and Hamas, Iran and Hezbollah as extremists. Three features of interest can be seen in doing such categorization. Firstly, the category labels used here – 'other powers of the Arab and Muslim world' and 'Hamas', 'Iran', and 'Hezbollah' – are distinct in that the former is hearably vague and broad, and the latter is particular. One outcome of such description then is to 'particularize' (Billig 1996) these parties categorized as 'extremists' and thus presents them as hearably distinct from the general population of the Arab and Muslim worlds. Secondly, categorizing Hamas along with Iran and Hezbollah as extremists, serves

to exclude them from the ‘Arab and Muslim world’. Thirdly, doing such category ascriptions, not only serves to portray Israel in positive terms and Hamas in negative terms, but more interestingly to align the interests of Israel along with those in the ‘Arab and Muslim world’ in acting against ‘extremism’. Furthermore, Livni at lines 22 to 24 ascribes particular motivations to those described as ‘extremists’ in ways to negate any possible claims of legitimacy on their part and present them as agents engaged in activities targeted against Israel. Taken together, the categorization and undercutting of potential claims serve to present Hamas and their actions as illegitimate and as constituting aggression against Israel. This presentation then allows Livni to move onto addressing the issues of outcomes of Israel’s current actions against Hamas at lines 25 to 28. Here, Livni is seen to produce a vague description that both serves to attribute perceptions of Israel’s actions to misrepresentation in media and suggest that such misrepresentation needs to be addressed. By such description Livni is seen to transfer the need for accountability, produced in Rodriguez’s question, onto the media and parties outside Israel. Doing this allows her to make a summary statement, at lines 28 to 31, on Israel’s actions and intentions, which presents Israel as an agent of freedom and moderation.

In this extract, Rodriguez produces her question in ways to accomplish ‘making’ Livni accountable for Israel’s actions against Hamas. Livni in her response is seen to produce alternative versions of the very resources that Rodriguez refers to – actions of Hamas and Israel, and the relationships between Israel and the Arab world – in ways to present Hamas as the aggressor and responsible for the current conflict. Additionally, Livni is seen to present Israel as acting in the interests of peace and moderation in the region which while ‘doing’ positive self-presentation also serves to argue for continuing Israel’s current military actions against Hamas.

*Extract 2 (MSNBC: Livni)*

The following extract is from an interview conducted for the television programme ‘Meet the Press with David Gregory’ on December 28<sup>th</sup> 2008, by David Gregory, with Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipora Livni for MSNBC.

1 Gregory What is Israel’s goal right now? Is it to re-establish  
2 the cease-fire, or is it to invade Gaza and remove  
3 Hamas from power?

4 Livni Our goal is not to reoccupy Gaza Strip. We left  
5 Gaza Strip. We took off for the south. We  
6 dismantled all the settlements. But since Gaza Strip  
7 has been controlled by the extremists and since  
8 Gaza Strip has been controlled by Hamas and since  
9 Hamas is using Gaza Strip in order to target us, we  
10 need to give an answer to this.

11 Gregory Foreign Minister, aren’t you making the case for  
12 pushing Hamas from power? The cease-fire,  
13 according to Israel, simply hasn’t worked. It hasn’t  
14 stopped the bombing of Sderot and Israel in the  
15 southern areas. So only the replacement of Hamas  
16 by Fatah, by more moderate leaders, appears to be  
17 the only answer.

18 Livni The goal is to give an answer to our citizens, to  
19 give them the possibility to live in peace like any  
20 other citizen in the world, and Hamas needs to  
21 understand it.

22 Gregory Is it acceptable to Israel for Hamas to remain in  
23 power in Gaza?

24 Livni It is acceptable only in time, only if and when

25                    Hamas accepts the requirements of the international  
26                    community.  
27                    Right now, Hamas didn't accept, is not willing to  
28                    accept the requirements of the international  
29                    community, is not willing to accept the right of  
30                    Israel to exist. It violates any kind of understandings  
31                    and is using terror against Israeli civilians. So it  
32                    cannot be legitimate and acceptable right now.  
33

Gregory's question at lines 1 to 3 has two parts: the first, at line 1, introduces the topic of the question, namely 'Israel's goal right now', and the second provides specific alternatives that could potentially qualify as the answer to the question. The second part of the question is of more interest as Gregory is seen to provide two distinct choices of actions available to Israel, namely 're-establish the cease-fire' and 'invade Gaza and remove Hamas from power'. These choices are hearably distinct in that they readily make available specific inferences about Israel if it were to act on one rather than the other, and are also contradictory in that the former involves actions leading to peace and the latter involves violence and aggression. Doing this form of questioning then sets up a response that orients to the very aspect of the choice and the implications of choosing one rather than the other.

Livni in her response, at line 4, is seen to orient to the latter part of the question and produce a denial of such intentions on the part of Israel. Subsequently at lines 4 to 6, Livni presents a similar sort of narrative account as seen in Extract 1 regarding Israel's actions in Gaza Strip. This is followed, at lines 6 to 10, by descriptions of current states of affairs in Gaza Strip, which present Hamas as an occupying force in control of Gaza Strip and attribute hearably negative intentions to Hamas, namely 'to target Israel'. These descriptions are then used to

warrant Israel's current actions against Hamas. In doing that, Livni is seen to elide the two options presented by Gregory in his question and reformulate Israel's actions as an 'answer' to Hamas' actions in and from Gaza Strip.

The above response to Gregory's question has a number of similarities with the response in Extract 1. However, what is of interest here is Gregory's uptake of such a response from Livni at lines 11 to 12 and his subsequent question. Gregory, is seen to reformulate Livni's response into an accusation, that of Israel's intention to 'remove Hamas from power'. This accusation is seen to be worked up by producing a question that involves the use of a redundant address term (Clayman 2010) – 'Foreign Minister' – midway in the interview and, locates the source of such a reformulation in Livni's response – 'aren't you making the case'. Subsequently at lines 12 to 15, Gregory goes on to produce a version of states of affairs that are attributed to Israel. On this account, the previously present 'cease-fire' is described in highly negative ways – 'it simply hasn't worked' – and instances of such claims – 'bombing of Sderot and Israel in the southern areas' – are recruited as evidence for the negative evaluation. In doing this, Gregory can be seen to present this account as something that could be Israel's stock response in the event that Israel is held accountable. This presentation then not only serves to count as an accusation on Israel for its intentions to 'remove Hamas from power in Gaza', but also lays-bare, as it were, the possible reasoning behind Israel's current armed actions against Hamas. By including in his question, what could have been Israel's response, Gregory is also seen to index that particular account provided at lines 12 to 15 as an indication of Israel's stake (Potter 1996) in the conflict. The outcome then is an accusation on Israel presented as grounded in commonsensical reasoning.

Livni, then, at lines 18 to 20, presents Israel's current actions as being in the service of peace for its own citizens. In doing that, Livni is seen to make references to the commonality – 'live in peace like any other citizen in the world' (lines 19 to 20) – of such intentions and actions on the part of a government towards its citizens. Juxtaposing such descriptions of Israel's intentions with descriptions of Hamas, serves to present Hamas as an obstacle to what is presented as Israel's normative duty towards its citizens and renders questions on 'cease-fire' or 'regime change in Gaza' seem irrelevant to Israel's actions.

Gregory then reformulates his question, at lines 22 to 23, in terms of a direct relationship between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. This questioning then is different from the prior two questions in that it engages specifically with Israel's intentions on Hamas in Gaza. Livni responds, at lines 24 to 26, by shifting the position of 'principal' (Goffman 1981) for Israel's intentions on Hamas onto a vaguely described 'international community'. Doing this, allows Livni to present Israel as acting in the interests of the 'international community' rather than for its own interests. However, by providing a description of Hamas' current actions as contravening the wishes of 'international community' and describing such actions as volitional on the part of Hamas, Livni presents Hamas' rule in Gaza as illegitimate. This allows her to make an upshot – 'it cannot be legitimate and acceptable' – arguing for actions against Hamas' governance in Gaza. Livni in her response then makes use of references to parties external to the conflict in ways to manage Israel's accountability in the Gaza crisis. More interestingly, via aligning Israel's actions in line with the wishes of 'international community', Livni makes the case for continuing armed actions against Hamas in Gaza.

In this extract, Gregory via the use of two contrasting choices of action for Israel and by reformulating Livni's response to his prior

question as an accusation, is seen to accomplish making Livni accountable for Israel's actions and intentions. In doing his reformulation, Gregory is also seen to treat Livni's foregoing response as an insufficient account of Israel's actions and intentions towards Hamas. Livni's responses, at lines 4 to 10 and 18 to 21, are seen to manage Israel's accountability by shifting the blame onto Hamas and presenting Israel as acting in its national self-interest. By these and via aligning Israel with the 'international community', Livni is seen to argue for continuing armed actions against Hamas.

*Extract 3 (CBS: Netanyahu)*

The following extract is from an interview conducted by correspondent Jeff Glor on June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2009 with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for CBS news. This particular interview was conducted just after the Gaza War was declared to be over. Among various other issues, this interview includes discussion on the 'Peace proposal' made by the then Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

- 1     Glor:            Benjamin Netanyahu is the Prime Minister of  
 2                      Israel. Mr. Prime Minister, thanks for joining us. I  
 3                      wanna start by talking about this extraordinary  
 4                      speech you made yesterday. Are you surprised so  
 5                      far at the negative reaction it's received from  
 6                      Palestinians and other Arab leaders?
- 7     Netanyahu:    Well, I'm-- I'm disappointed because-- I took a--  
 8                      a step, not an easy step. And I said, "Here's what  
 9                      we are prepared to do for peace. We're prepared  
 10                     to have-- a Palestinian state next to a Jewish state."  
 11                     And there are two points here. One, that the  
 12                     Palestinian state-- recognize the Jewish state just as



13                   we're asked to recognize-- the Palestinians. And  
14                   second, that the Palestinian state would be  
15                   demilitarized so that we don't-- experience once  
16                   again the-- the-- hurling of thousands of rockets  
17                   on our cities. And I think this is an equitable  
18                   formula for peace. It's one that enjoys enormous  
19                   unity in the-- in the-- Israeli public and I think--  
20                   among Israel's friends-- and supporters abroad and  
21                   the supporters of peace abroad. So, yes, I-- I-- I  
22                   supposed I'd like a better response. And maybe it'll  
23                   sink in over time. But I think-- I've opened the  
24                   door for peace. And I hope that the Palestinians  
25                   and the Arab world responds to it.

Glor, in his question at lines 2 to 4, is seen to orient Netanyahu and the audience to one particular issue – ‘this extraordinary speech you made yesterday’ – thus foregrounding the topic of the interview. Subsequently, at lines 4 to 6, Glor goes on to report responses made to such speech by other parties, namely ‘Palestinians and other Arab leaders’, and produce a question on Netanyahu’s reactions to those responses. It is to be noted that via descriptions such as ‘extraordinary’ ‘surprised’ and ‘negative’, Glor is seen to treat the speech and the incongruous reactions to it as in need of an account.

Netanyahu in his response, at line 7, can be seen to orient to such formulation provided by Glor and report his reaction, in terms of his emotional state, as ‘disappointed’. This reporting, however, is treated as having a problematic status by displays of hesitation – ‘Well,’ – , and false starts – ‘I’m -- I’m’ – preceding such reporting. The problematic status of this personal mental state and the nature of his reaction reported then allow Netanyahu to provide reasons for his reactions to those responses by descriptions of his initiative and a further elaboration

of what his initiative consisted in. This is done by reporting his own speech, indexed as such via the use of ‘and I said’, from lines 8 to 10. In doing that Netanyahu not only reproduces the content of the original speech but is seen to provide one specific version of his speech which is then used to argue for specific outcomes on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The speech reported here is made in terms of the sorts of things that Israel is willing to do – ‘We are prepared to do’, and ‘We’re prepared to have’ – which presents Israel as the party taking an initiative for peace while also positioning Israel as the agent that retains the power or authority to set limits on the sorts of things that go into these actions for peace. It is noteworthy, that such efforts at peace are presented as a willingness on the part of Israel to accommodate Palestine as a sovereign nation as its neighbour. It is this formulation of peace – ‘have – a Palestinian state next to a Jewish state’ that is further elaborated at lines 11 to 17 as two interrelated items. The first of these items, at lines 11 to 13, however is presented as an act of mutual and symmetrical recognition on the part of Palestine and Israel. The second of these, at lines 13 to 17, however, is seen to include actions – ‘demilitarized’ – that can be heard as a set of limitations on Palestine. This imposition on Palestine is supported by attributing to Palestine a dispositional state of initiating acts of aggression – ‘hurling of thousands of rockets’. These two items are then summarized as constituting an ‘equitable formula for peace’ at lines 17 to 18. It is by making a show concession in the first item and arguing for a ‘demilitarized’ Palestine in the second item, which is accomplished by attributing acts of aggression to Palestine, that Netanyahu is seen to present his speech as an initiative for peace. This initiative of peace then is presented as a concession on the part of Israel to accommodate Palestine as a neighbouring state, albeit with restrictions on Palestine’s sovereignty. Then, he goes on to recruit support, at lines 18 to 21, for his claims that these items

constitute a peace initiative via providing a list of agents – ‘Israeli public’, ‘Israel’s friends’, ‘supporters abroad’ and ‘supporters of peace abroad’ – that are claimed to be highly supportive of his proposal. In doing such a list, Netanyahu is seen to present various groups or agents as having common interests (Edwards & Potter 1992) and hence united in their efforts for peace. The outcome then is to present ‘Israeli public’ and ‘Israel’s friends’ as having similar interests with ‘supporters of peace abroad’ and that his speech indeed was an initiative of peace. Having done that, Netanyahu, at lines 21 to 22, presents his preference for a ‘better response’ as a consequence of the positive reactions by other parties to, what is presented as an initiative of peace.

Here, Netanyahu and Glor both treat matters of reactions or responses to Netanyahu’s speech as non-trivial. Netanyahu is also seen to make use of descriptions of his internal emotive states – ‘disappointed’ (line 7) and ‘hope’ (line 24) – and preferences – ‘like a better response’ (lines 21 to 22) – while discussing matters of international conflicts (see Edwards & Potter 2005). It is the reporting of such states that allows him to report his speech and present it as an initiative of peace. Finally, at lines 23 to 25, Netanyahu provides an upshot of his own actions – ‘I’ve opened the door for peace’ – and a preference for a response from the ‘Palestinians and the Arab world’. Doing that serves to provide a gloss over various elements of his speech as constituting an attempt at peace and also conversely provides for negative inferences on those parties that would either not respond or respond in negative ways to such offers at peace.

## **Discussion**

The analysis provided in this paper is of media news interviews of Israeli leaders conducted after the start of the recent Gaza crisis. It is readily seen that these interviews are forms of talk that occur in certain

ways and we have shown to a limited extent how such features of the talk provide various positions for the interviewer and the interviewee to effect various social actions. Our focus has been on the ways in which, members of the Israeli political leadership are made accountable and how these leaders manage such accountability. The findings of the analysis can be usefully presented as three interrelated points:

- 1) that accountability is an interactional event;
- 2) accountability is managed through particular narratives and descriptions of events and parties; and
- 3) that claims on ‘peace-making’ are closely tied to military activities.

First, accountability can be seen to be an interactional event, in that both interviewers and interviewees orient to those aspects of talk that make certain actions – Israel’s armed actions against Hamas and such – as accountable. For instance, Rodriguez in extract 1 is seen to make use of reporting Livni’s speech, and reactions from other parties in producing her question. Livni in her response is seen to orient to it as an accountable matter and is seen to manage it via descriptions that attribute blame for the current conflict to Hamas and its actions. In extract 2, Gregory and Livni are seen to go about doing the same business, however Gregory is seen to challenge such an account provided by Livni and treat it as insufficient and produce another question. This indicates that although members treat certain matters as accountable and produce accounts to manage such accountability they are also seen to negotiate what exactly constitutes as an accountable matter and as a sufficient account. In extract 3, Glor treats such matters to be accountable via descriptions of Netanyahu’s speech and presenting the reactions as incongruous. Netanyahu responds by presenting his speech as a peace plan and by recruiting support for his

peace plan, while presenting Palestine as the agent of violence in the region.

Secondly throughout these data we see that interviewers and interviewees are seen to produce descriptions of Israel, Hamas and Palestine in 'doing' accountability and managing accountability. The interviewers, in extracts 1 and 2, are seen to present Israel's actions and/or intentions as problematic via references to external parties or by the use of specific descriptions of Israel's actions. Livni in both the extracts is seen to present Hamas as the aggressor and Israel as a 'moderate' (extract 1) and as doing its normative duty towards its citizens (extract 2). Interestingly this is presented as a narrative which readily assigns blame to Hamas for the current states of affairs (McKenzie 2001). This form of presentation has been identified as a common way of justifying one's own or the representative group's action when called into account (Chang *et al* 2008; Erjavec & Volcic 2007). Additionally, Livni is also seen to make references to parties external to the conflict, such as 'the Arab and Muslim worlds' (extract 1) and 'international community' (extract 2) to argue for a continuation of Israel's current actions. One outcome of doing this then is not only to manage Israel's responsibility in the conflict but also to align Israel with other parties thus diffusing the blame for its actions. Members then are also seen to make use of parties external to the conflict as a resource in managing accountability.

Thirdly, across the three extracts the interviewees are seen to make references to 'peace' and present Israel as an agent of peace. In extract 1, Livni presents Israel as a 'moderate' and in favour of peace in the region, while arguing for continual armed actions against Hamas in Gaza. Again in extract 2, Livni in responding to an accusation that Israel intends to occupy Gaza, presents Israel's efforts to secure peace for its citizens as bound up with engaging Hamas in an armed standoff.

And, in extract 3, Netanyahu's speech is presented as a peace initiative that also includes imposing restrictions on Palestine's military capacities. Across these extracts Livni and Netanyahu are seen to present particular versions of Israel's commitments to peace and moderation in ways to argue for continuing military actions against Hamas.

Research in social psychology on issues of racism (Augoustinos, Tuffin, & Every 2005; McKenzie 2003), employment {McVittie, 2003 227 /id;McVittie, 2008 260 /id;Gill, 1993 212 /id} and others has shown that members make references to certain principles and notions that are readily recognizable as egalitarian, for instance, those of freedom and equality to all, in ways to account and justify extant practices of discrimination. Similarly, it can be seen that, Livni and Netanyahu, in these interviews present Israel as committed to peace, moderation and such in ways to argue for extant practices of armed actions against Hamas.

## **Conclusion**

Taken together, it can be seen that within the media news interviews, of the Israeli political elite analysed here, issues of war and associated issues of accountability are matters that are made relevant and oriented to, that is, are accomplished, within the interaction. Members within the interaction then are seen to manage such accountability by making use of their commitments to peace as a resource. The implication then is that actions such as holding Israel accountable for the Gaza War or Israel accusing Hamas of initiating violence in the region or other such actions can be made sense of as actions that get done within the interaction (Condor 2006).

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