Uses and abuses of 'not wanting Peace' in the context of the Israel/Palestine conflict

Abstract

Since its inception, peace has eluded the modern state of Israel and while peace can be presented as an ideal aim, talk about peace has been shown to justify further conflict and harm in and beyond Israel and Palestine. The current analysis focuses specifically on online activity, where the aim of peace is shunned as it is deemed to be not wanted. A discursive analysis of interaction on the social media website Twitter (now X) shows that (1) opponents are presented as not wanting peace, often on the grounds that (2) Palestinians, or Muslims/Arab people more generally are too hateful to want peace, which means that Palestinians can be blamed for this lack of peace. Occasionally Israelis are also presented in this way. This argument (3) presents peace as something for Israel to offer and for Palestinians to accept or not, where they are deemed responsible if they do not accept terms that are presented to them. Together, these findings show that there is a move away from the interactional requirement to be in favour of peace, where not wanting peace can be used to support ongoing violence and conflict and, in this case, justify the status-quo of ongoing violence and oppression of Palestinian people.

Keywords: Israel; Palestine; conflict; peace; discursive psychology; rhetorical psychology; discourse analysis

Introduction

Since Israel's inception, there has been a strong 'ethos of conflict' (see Bar-Tal et al, 2009) justifying a view of the other (Palestinians) as alien and dangerous, preventing comprehensive engagement with them and promoting ideas of peace as separation from them. (For more on the history of Israel/Palestine see Mock, Obeidi and Zeleznikow, 2014). Nevertheless, peace has been presented as the aim of all sides in the conflict (e.g., Gavriely-Nuri, 2010) and as Galtung demonstrates 'it is hard to be all-out against peace' (1969, p. 167) in any context in what appears to be a norm (see Billig, 1988) in favour of peace. Gavriely-Nuri argues that 'Surprisingly, research of peace discourses – but especially the definition of peace in terms of its universal components, and its political as well as cultural constructions – remains marginal in the literature' and that ''peace' and 'peace discourse' are terms whose meanings are usually taken for granted and treated as 'common knowledge'' (2010, p566). As researchers have argued, peace can often be used to justify war, rather than to push a genuine peace agenda (Gavriely-Nuri, 2010; Sambaraju and Kirkwood, 2010).. Talk about peace can therefore be used flexibly to perform a range of social actions. How this emphasis on, and supposed desire for, peace is in such contrast to actual outcomes is in need of further investigation and is therefore the focus of the current research.

The introduction reviews the literature on the way that the concept of peace features in debates about the conflict. It will be shown that despite there being an interactional requirement to be in favour of peace, that talk about peace can be used 'in the service of war' (Gavriely-Nuri, 2014), that is, talk about peace is shown to be used to justify further conflict. This can be achieved most simply by blaming opponents for their (supposed) opposition to peace. However, in the current analysis it is shown that ongoing/further conflict is presented as necessary to ensure peace, an argument that has recently surfaced in international political

debates, such as about Europe's relations with Russia. It will be shown how an interactional approach to debates about peace are an ideal way to understand these arguments and to investigate how talk about peace, including references to those allegedly not wanting peace, functions to forward non-peace agendas.

In this next section it will be shown how the 'turn to language' (Kroger & Wood, 1998) and its focus on interaction is a key way to better understand this. Gibson (2011; 2012) drawing on discursive psychology (Edwards and Potter, 1992) has shown how peace studies and a social psychology of peace should focus on interaction to understand how war and peace are understood and used to perform social actions. Applying this approach to the debates in the UK around 2003 about whether the country should go to war in Iraq (which it eventually did) Gibson (2011) shows how the concept of peace could be used to argue both for and against the war, for it by presenting a rationale for the war (regime change) as consistent with the opinion of a pro-peace campaigner and against it by presenting those pushing for the war as failing to consider peaceful options. Gibson (2012) shows how the same war could be justified on the grounds of enforcing a peace treaty, again invoking peace to forward a pro-war agenda. Kilby and Lennon (2018) support the idea that talk about violence and peace may not be distinct, are open to interpretation and can be used to justify further violence. This next section shows how interactional approaches have been applied to the Israel conflict.

Understanding peace talk in the context of Israeli conflict

Gavriely-Nuri (2010; 2014) has shown how the concept of peace has been used in the context of the Israel conflict. She distinguishes different discourses of peace, including supportive and oppressive (2010, p570), and under these two terms further distinguishes positive and negative, concrete and abstract, and bilateralism and unilateralism. Positive peace (Galtung 1969), with is supportive, refers to freedom and justice, whereas negativity, which is oppressive contains obstacles, risks and dangers. Concrete peace, which is supportive, contains tangible steps towards peace, whereas abstract concepts, such as hope, are oppressive because they lack any concrete steps that could bring peace about. Finally bilateral peace is supportive because it involves partners working together, whereas unilateralism is oppressive because it involves only one side acting. Gavriely-Nuri (2010) further identifies different 'peace phrases' (2010, p571-572) which have contrasting representations. She concludes that Israeli peace discourse is overwhelmingly negative, abstract and oppressive, concluding that 'In some cases, it appears that 'peace' is an integral part of a war discourse, especially a Just War discourse' (2010, p579). She develops this idea (Gavriely-Nuri, 2014) with the concept of 'peace in the service of war', demonstrating how politicians use the term peace far more than war during speeches at the onset of wars.

Four specific strategies are identified where peace is used in the service of war; (1) false narratives of breeched peace where the other is deemed to have breached what was otherwise peaceful times. (2) Binarism is where the only options presented are either peace or war ('we are the peace-seekers whereas the opponents are war-mongers' (2014, p9) or if you do not support Israeli violence then you support Hamas. (3) Dogma is where only war is presented as being able to bring about peace and (4) the metaphor 'we extend a hand in peace' (2014, p12), where Israeli presents itself as offering peace and having these offers rejected, so that ways are blamed on other parties. These are shown to present the in group as peace loving and good, while presenting out groups as warlike. This is supported by Mitrani (2013) who

points to Israeli speeches about conflict presenting war as a '"no-other-choice" conflict that presents a clear and simple story that while Israel ("We") wants peace, the enemy ("Them") does not (2013, p255). This is consistent with Finlay (2018) who showed that in the context of the 2014 conflict, Israeli spokespeople presented Israel as wanting peace in contrast to Hamas who did not.

Leshem & Halperin (2020) conducted research with Israelis and Palestinians about their lay understandings of peace. They showed that both groups understood peace as an absence of war and violence as well as entailing harmonious relations and with attaining justice, however the extent to which they associated peace with harmonious relations and justice varied between the two groups where the high-power Israelis associated more with harmonious relations than low-power Palestinians (43% to 32%) whereas Palestinians associated more with justice than Israelis (52% to 23%), This demonstrates that peace and violence can mean different things to different people. It is worth noting that both groups similarly associated peace with ceasing conflict (Israelis 73%, Palestinians 69%) which suggests that in Leshem and Halperin's sample, both groups overwhelmingly understand peace as an ending of violence.

Others have addressed how different 'sides' in the debate surrounding peace in the Israel/Palestine conflict. Jaspal and Coyle (2014) addressed speeches by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in 2011 and showed that both leaders presented their nation as victims (the 'plight' on the Palestinians and the vulnerability of the Jewish state) while also accentuating the threat of the other (an occupying power and an existential threat). Similarly, McKinlay, McVittie and Sambaraju (2012) looked at media interviews with Palestinians and showed how the Palestinians rejected their categorisation as being terrorists, and instead presented themselves as freedom fighters (often drawing parallels with European resistance against the Nazis) which equates to arguments over victim status.

Katz (2022) shows that, notwithstanding how they conceive it, a majority of Jewish Israeli's do support peace, however there has been a sharp decrease in their belief that negotiations with the Palestinian Authority can lead to peace (43% in 1995 down to 22% in 2018) suggesting a difference in desire for peace and support for specific measures to bring it. However, Harsgor (2024) suggests that younger Israeli's have more hawkish opinions than older Israelis. Looking at young Palestinian's perspectives, Jabali, Halayqa and Ayyoub (2024) discuss Palestinian university students' attitudes towards the process of normalisation, establishing normal social and economic relations, between Israel and Palestine, a tangible step towards peace at a time when young Palestinians have little faith in the peace process. They show how Palestinians have contrasting opinions on normalisation, but that there is support for the idea contingent on their own rights and independence being granted. In line with the discursive approach advocated by Gibson (2011; 2012) and used by Kilby and Lennon (2018) and Finlay (2018), McVittie, Sambaraju and McKinlay (2011) showed how Hamas presented pursuing peace with Israel as unhelpful in justifying not engaging with Israel while Sambaraju and Kirkwood (2010) showed how Israeli speakers presented their (military) action as designed to bring about peace, therefore engaging in what Gavriely-Nuri (2014) calls 'peace in the service of war'. McVittie and Sambaraju (2018) show how leaders on both sides of the conflict blame each other for the lack of peace and present their own initiatives as in the service of peace (see also Kaposi, 2018, for war against Gaza being

presented as inevitable) and Katz (2022) showed that at the funeral of peace-supporting leader, Shimon Peres, media focused on his historic role with Israeli security rather than his more recent attempts to gain peace.

These studies all show the importance of the ways in which peace is talked about. While it has been shown that peace is held up as an ultimate aim, which allows it to be used to justify a range of actions, often including criticising opponents and supporting continued violence. In addition, these studies support the wider discursive approach according to which categorising peace becomes seen as less useful than a focus on what talk about peace is accomplishing in interactions, especially as it may be invoked to justify further violence and conflict. In many cases, even when invoked in the service of war, peace is presented as wanted, however in some cases peace can be rejected more directly, which may represent a move away from the norm of peace (Galtung, 1969) and pose a bigger threat to arguing for, and moving towards, realising peace. Online interactions can make group-based identities salient, which in turn can lead to lead to intergroup prejudice (Postmes Spears and Lea, 1998). It can be a place that contains a mix of pro-peace talk and group-based hate (Ron, Suleiman and Maoz, 2020) but also offers the (unrealised) possibility of conflict resolution, including in the Israel/Palestine context (Ruesch, 2013). Online interactions are therefore a key site where (anti)peace talk can be investigated.

This leads on to the current, and therefore important, research question which is: What is talk about peace not being wanted accomplishing in Twitter discussions about Israel/Palestine?

Method

Data

Data were collected in January 2020 from the social media platform Twitter which represents a key source of online debate, making it a good site for analysis. Pettersson, Payotte and Sakki (2023) show that social media offers both immediacy and combines text, visuals, sounds, videos and hashtags and is 'characterized by forceful, emotional language, rendering it an environment that nurtures political polarisation' (2023) and that these platforms are used by politicians and right-wing communication, where propaganda and 'fake news' can be shared (Pérez Curiel, 2020) and political campaigns (e.g., Jensen, 2017) and mobilisations can occur.

Data were collected using the TAGS scraping tool (https://tags.hawksey.info/) which was a useful tool for identifying a large corpus of data relevant to the RQ. This occurred before Twitter was bought and rebranded as X, when scraping the platform for data was freely allowed. TAGS was set to pick up all tweets (the name given to posts on Twitter/X) referring using the term 'peace' in the context of the Israel/Palestine conflict in November 2019 so as to pick up all tweets pertaining to peace where Israel and/or Palestine were also referred to. Data were collected as part of a larger project looking at how the concept of 'peace' was used on Twitter in 2019, which has produced this study of peace discourses in the dataset as well as a specific analysis of how journalists engaged with "peace" in the same month. The scraping exercise identified over sixty-eight thousand tweets of which 8,962 tweets were part of interaction sequences. To enable a manageable and detailed analysis, this was reduced to 750 unique tweets by selecting those from accounts with the most followers as these are likely (although not guaranteed) to suggest high levels of engagement, which is useful when

analysing interactions. These 750 tweets were coded by the third author (and this coding was checked by and discussed with authors one and two, to ensure quality) to identify tweets that were part of 'threads' (longer discussions with more than one reply) *and* which topicalised and argued about the nature of peace, specifically where peace was deemed to be not wanted by at least one party. This was done to ensure that the posts were part of interactions that were relevant to the RQ on peace. Including all the tweets in these threads gave a total of 215 tweets, of which 159 remained at the time of analysis (some have since been deleted or are from suspended accounts), that were subjected to the analysis reported in this paper. The analysis therefore addresses tweets that were part of interactions. Some tweets are analysed individually and the interaction, where available, is of analytic interest.

Ethics approval was granted by the first and second authors' institution. A number of ethical issues are raised by online research. A key issue is the anonymity of those whose data is presented. To protect the identity of members of the public involved in this debate, all private accounts have been anonymised, but tweets coming from figures or bodies, such as politicians and armies are identifiable in the analysis using a number so that the order of the posts is clear.

Analytical procedure

This analysis is part of a project analysing the various ways in which peace is discussed on Twitter in November 2019, and as such the data had already been subject to some frame analysis (conducted by authors) in which tweets were coded for who tweeted (e.g., a journalist or not; the analysis presented here does not specifically focus on journalists), who was presented as the aggressor and how peace was discussed (i.e., wanted, not wanted, not possible or dangerous). This presented the basis for an interactional analysis drawing on the rhetorical psychology (Billig, 1996) and discursive psychology (Edwards and Potter, 1992) that has been shown to be appropriate for looking at online hate interactions (Goodman, Locke, Finlay and Lobham, 2023). For this analysis, the first author conducted one more round of coding to identify all tweets that were part of an interactional thread (i.e., either elicited or were themselves responses to other tweets) so that an interactional analysis could take place. The analysis followed the steps set out by Goodman (2017) and Locke and Budds (2020) to identify what the different tweets were accomplishing in the interaction with a focus on the different ways that peace, and specifically references to not wanting peace, were invoked and used. The analysis was conducted by the first author who searched the included tweets for different uses of 'peace' not being wanted, so for example the first extract contains a tweet claiming that Israel has no interest in peace, which is used to criticise Israel's behaviour. These different uses of peace not being wanted were eventually clustered together to form the different grouping identified in the analysis. These tweets were then analysed for function and any responses they elicited. The tweets presented below are clear exemplars of the different arguments identified in the analysis.

Analysis

There are many different uses of 'peace' in the interactions. While peace can be presented as the ultimate aim, there are many reasons why it can be deemed not to be wanted. Most commonly is (1) the claim that the opposing side does not want peace, which is used as a criticism of them. (1a) Israel can be criticised for not wanting peace because it benefits from the status quo (USA can also be brought into this argument). More often, (1b) peace is

presented as impossible because of the Palestinians' (or less commonly Israel's) opposition to it, (2) often on the grounds that they (or 'Muslims'/'Arabs') are too hateful to allow it – the category Palestinian therefore is bound up with hatefulness (and often terrorism) and Palestinians, therefore, come to be blamed for a lack of peace because of their failure to accept previous peace deals (again because they are anti peace) – this means that the ongoing violence they endure is presented as their fault. It also means that (3) peace is something for Israel to offer and Palestinians to accept. Palestinians' failure to accept this peace means that they bear responsibility for the violence. Alternatively, ongoing violence can be blamed on Israel for offering some peace/concessions to Palestine. Ultimately, these references to peace are mainly used to argue for the status quo in which Palestinians continue to be oppressed and both sides (albeit disproportionately) use deadly violence.

1. Peace is not wanted as way to criticise different parties

Precisely because peace is presented as a laudable aim, not wanting peace becomes an accountable activity and the grounds for criticism and blame for the ongoing violence. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that both (1a) Israel and (1b) Palestine are subject to claims of not wanting peace.

1a. Peace is not wanted: Criticism of Israel and its supporters

The analysis begins with a criticism of Israel for beginning an attack that will lead to an escalation of violence.

Extract One

This post begins with a statement of aggression by Israel on Gaza and that Hamas will retaliate, followed up by the original poster with a call for peace. While Israel is presented as striking first, and therefore as initiating an exchange, neither side is explicitly presented as right or wrong and the stated aim is for peace, presumably for all. This post is replied to with a simple and explicit claim that Israel is not interested in peace, undermining any 'hoping for peace' and presenting this as naïve. Israel is therefore presented as the aggressor that actively avoids peace and so it is held accountable for the violence, including any response to

Palestinians. The following extract includes similar criticism, this time also including Israel's allies.

Extract two

Similar to P2 above, this post contains the claim that Israel is not interested in peace. Here it is implied that Israel benefits from its military aid so there is no financial incentive for Israel to have peace. Instead, Israel is presented as occupying neighbouring land, signalled through a long list of countries it is occupying. Another list of those financially supporting Israel is presented to support the point that Israel is benefitting from this aid. This provides the groundwork for the final claim which explicitly states that Israel is not interested in peace. This post therefore works to criticise Israel, and its financial supporters, for benefitting from military aid and using this to occupy land, and so not wanting peace. Again, hopes for peace can be presented as unrealistic.

1b. Peace is not wanted: Criticisms of Palestinians for terrorism and violence

Claiming that an opponent does not want peace is used as a way to criticise them, because if peace is the ideal and the opponent does not want it, then they are at fault. In the previous section criticisms were levelled at Israel, in the following section the same argument is levelled at Palestinians, who are presented as Islamic terrorists that do not want peace.

Extract Three

Here, the IDF very clearly present the actions of 'Islamic Jihad' as abhorrent because they fire rockets and target children, hospitals and civilians, while Israel is targeted and its army supports evacuations, rather than engages in any violence. It is, therefore, these terrorists that engage in violence against innocent Israelis, including children. The IDF is therefore presented as morally superior to the "Jihadis" (they protect children, while Jihadi's attack them), who are presented as the aggressors that the IDF must deal with.

One of the many responses to the IDF's post explicitly picks up the concept of peace and develops the IDF's comment so that Israel making peace with Palestine, here changed from the IDF's term 'terrorists' to 'killers' is presented as impossible and undesirable because of the hateful and immoral nature of the terrorists that live in Palestine. This means that the IDF's initial post provides the groundwork for a rejection of peace with Palestinians because of the (immoral and violent) actions attributed to some of them, so that attempting peace is presented as irrational (crazy). The next extract, similar to this one, is also initiated by the IDF and responded to with an upgrade that rejects peace.

Extract Four

This begins with an IDF post which (again) presents the IDF as defensively reacting to 'Islamic Jihadis' acting out of Gaza, so once more the post presents Israelis as being forced to respond to the aggression of terrorists. . This generates a supportive response, where the agreement does affiliation (Baym, 1996) with the IDF. The post suggests that peace is not the aim of the action as it should be about defeating 'radical extremists', (building on the 'Islamic Jihad' category used by the IDF) because it is their desire to take over and dominate people, rather than to achieve peace. That they (radical extremists) are deemed unable to assimilate anywhere overlooks Palestinian's connection to the land and also develops the argument that (Muslim) terrorism is a global problem and therefore not the result of the occupation of Palestine. Here the reference to peace is used to argue against peace and for the continued oppression of Palestine.

So far, this analysis has shown that both 'sides' can be criticised for not wanting peace, but this is done in different ways, so that (as seen in 1a) Israel is assumed to benefit from the current status quo and therefore has nothing to gain from peace, whereas their opponents (as seen in 1b) are presented as crazy Jihadi terrorists, for whom peace is not an aim.

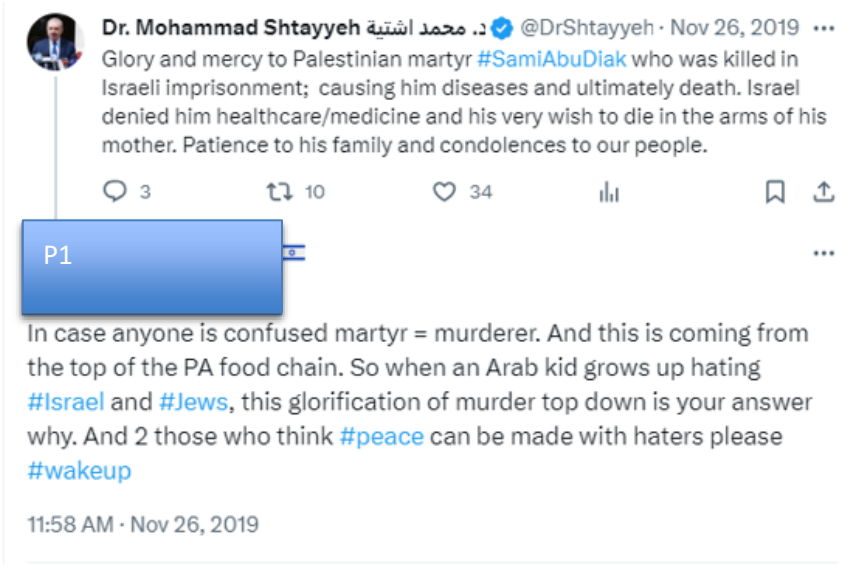
2. Peace is impossible because opponents, especially Palestinians (or Muslims/Arab people) are too hateful to allow it.

Developing on the previous section where Israel's opponents are accused of not wanting peace and being terrorists, in this next section peace is presented as an impossible (if not laudable) aim because of the nature of Palestinians. No equivalent if found for Israelis, so this section does not include how they are presented.

Extract Five

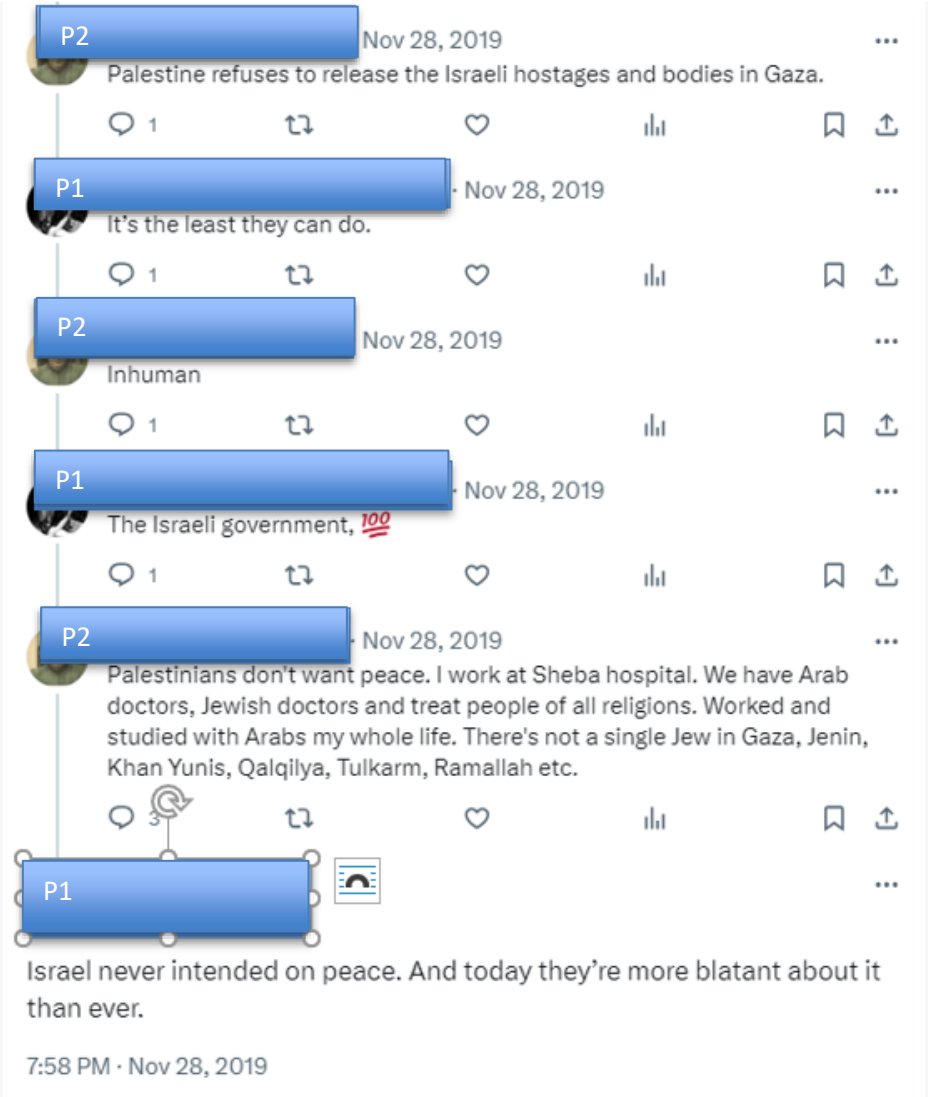
This is part of a longer thread about Jeremy Corbyn (then leader of the UK's opposition Labour party) and antisemitism. The poster presents critique of Israel as being based on fake news, which works to undermine it. He then refers to Israel as the only Jewish state which presents opposition to Israel as being anti-Jewish (see for example Chomsky [1989] and Finlay [2010] on the linking of opposition to Israel and antisemitism). This is followed up by a criticism of a pro-peace position which is presented as naïve (fawning) and through the use of scare quotes (e.g., Edwards and Potter, 2013) not really about peace at all. Instead, a criticism of Muslims is worked up. Here Muslims are presented as obsessed with 'reconquering Israel' and so not being a reasonable partner with which to attain. It is noteworthy that Palestinians or even opponents over contested territory are not referred to at all in this post; the only term here is 'Muslims', which used alongside the term Jihad signals terrorists. This description of Muslim terrorists is used to criticise 'British establishment Jews' for creating problems through their misplaced and naïve desire for peace. Here peace cannot be reached, so should not be supported, and instead violence against Palestinians, who are positioned as responsible for the situation, should continue. A similar argument is made in the following extract.

Extract Six



This begins with a post by the Palestinian Prime Minster marking the death of a Palestinian man (referred to here as a Palestinian martyr) in Israeli captivity. This is bound up with a very clear critique of Israel's treatment of this man and Palestinians more widely, with Israelis presented as lacking humanity. A response to this begins by repositioning the dead man as a murderer, which allows the poster to claim that Arabs (here not referred to as Palestinians) are taught to revere murder and to hate Israel and Jews, here making a distinction between the two, while drawing them together as the focus of Arab hatred. This is the grounds to suggesting that peace with Palestinians is not possible because Arabs are not capable of it, so that desiring peace is naïve. The use of 'haters' further constructs them as incapable of peace and warlike. Hate is presented as something that is encouraged in children, which is blamed on the Palestinian leadership (PA), and as part of their character (they are 'haters'). The hashtag 'wakeup' is used to emphasise the naivety of aiming for peace and to highlight the hateful nature of 'Arabs', so that any poor treatment they receive is self-inflicted.

Extract Seven



This thread contains a number of the previously identified arguments being used. It starts with Mladenov posting about meeting Israel's defence minister, accompanied with a photograph, and the stated aim of preventing an escalation of violence and therefore being both in favour of, and working towards, peace, therefore orienting to the norm of peace (Galtung, 1969). One of the responses that this elicits (P1) is a harsh criticism of meeting with the defence minister (using the disgust term 'gross') because of his supposed violence towards Palestinians (who are referred to using this category term), which is followed up with a repair to bring his supposed love of killing Palestinians into the present tense. Next a link to a news report about him refusing to release bodies of dead Palestinians is shared. This all works to build a picture of a warlike, hateful man, someone who presumably it would be difficult to make peace with and who does not adhere to the norm of peace. This is similar to the way that 'Jihadi' terrorists are presented in the previous extracts.

This challenge is responded to by P2 with the counterpoint that Palestinians (again using this category term) do the same, as well as keeping hostages, which works to present the Palestinians as (at least) equally bad. The previous poster (P1) then displays support for this aggressive practice, which results in a counterclaim from (P2) of 'inhuman', which criticised

the practice and P1's support for it, by presenting it as lacking appropriate human morality (see Tileagă, 2007 for how outgroups can be presented as less than human). P1 responds by retorting that it is the Israeli government (which the defence minister is part of) that is inhuman.

Up to this point, Ps 1 and 2 have been arguing about which 'side' is the most problematic and inhumane. It is following this exchange where each side is criticised that P2 topicalises peace not being wanted, here by making the recognisable claim that the opponent (in this case, Palestinians) do not want peace. This claim is backed up with a personal account of the writer's job, working at a mixed hospital in Israel. The writer's anti-racist credentials are backed up with references to working with Arab people and people of all religions; instead, Jews are presented as being unable to live in Palestine, while Palestinians can live and work in Israel. Palestinians are therefore presented as racist and intolerant, which may account for why they do not want peace. This post receives a rebuttal and counterpoint from P1 which is simply that Israel does not want peace and never did, so the argument here is about who does not want peace, with the party not wanting peace being presented as the problem and to blame for the violence.

It has now been shown that Palestinians can be presented as opposed to peace, often because of their supposedly problematic character. Following this logic, attempts to initiate peace can be presented as naïve and doomed to failure. In this next example it will be shown that as well as likely being futile, attempts to make peace with Palestine can therefore be presented as dangerous for Israel and Jews more broadly, which provides the grounds for arguing against even attempting peace.

Extract Eight

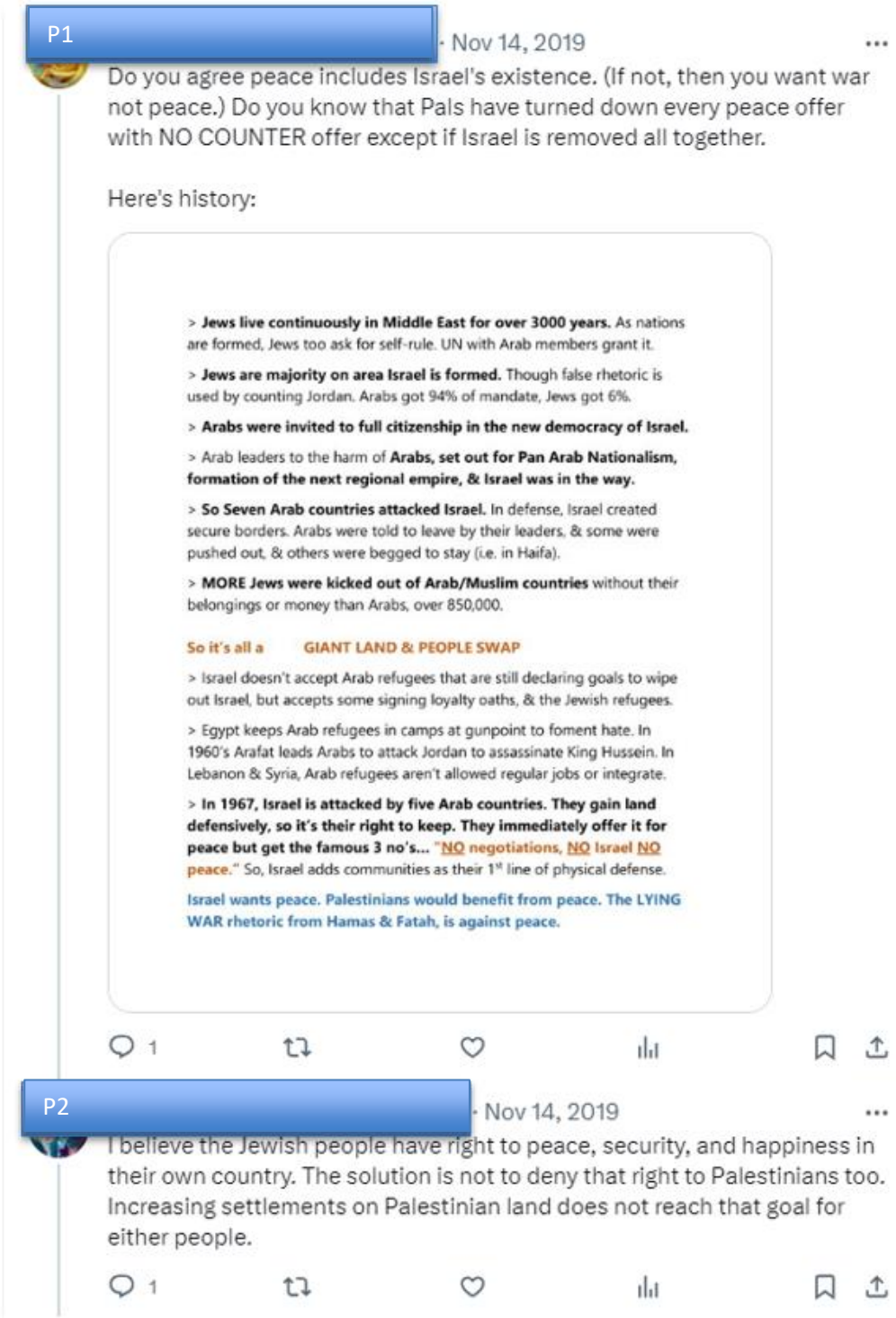
This post begins with an account of having to endure a rocket attack in Israel in an attempt to highlight the difficulties faced in Israel (signalled by the final 'think about that' statement). This post is followed up with the point about not wanting peace. It includes a claim that it is

no time for politics, which works as a disclaimer as the post does exactly that. The post is prefaced with an elaboration of the earlier post about the difficulties of enduring rocket attacks and a reference to children to emphasise their innocence. Then the political point is made, which is that the violence being experienced is presented as being due to Palestinians having control of Gaza. The 'think about that' statement is repeated and this time is clearly used to argue against working towards peace with Palestinians. Here Palestinians are presented as unreasonably violent ('endless Palestinian rockets' attacking innocent families). The occurrence of this situation that is attributed to giving Palestinians control of their land is used to present this as failed concession for peace (they were given land by Israel and now use that to attack Israel) and therefore as warrant for opposing any further concessions. In doing so, moves towards peace are presented as counterproductive, so that steps towards peace (specifically those that make concessions to Palestinians) can be criticised as being anti-peace.

4. Peace is for Israel to decide and for Palestine to accept

Following from the previous extract, where steps for peace are presented as Israel making concessions to Palestinians, we can see how this infers that peace can be presented as something for Israel to offer, or not, and for Palestinians to accept, or not, so that Palestinians can become accountable for a lack of peace because they have not accepted what they have been offered.

Extract Nine



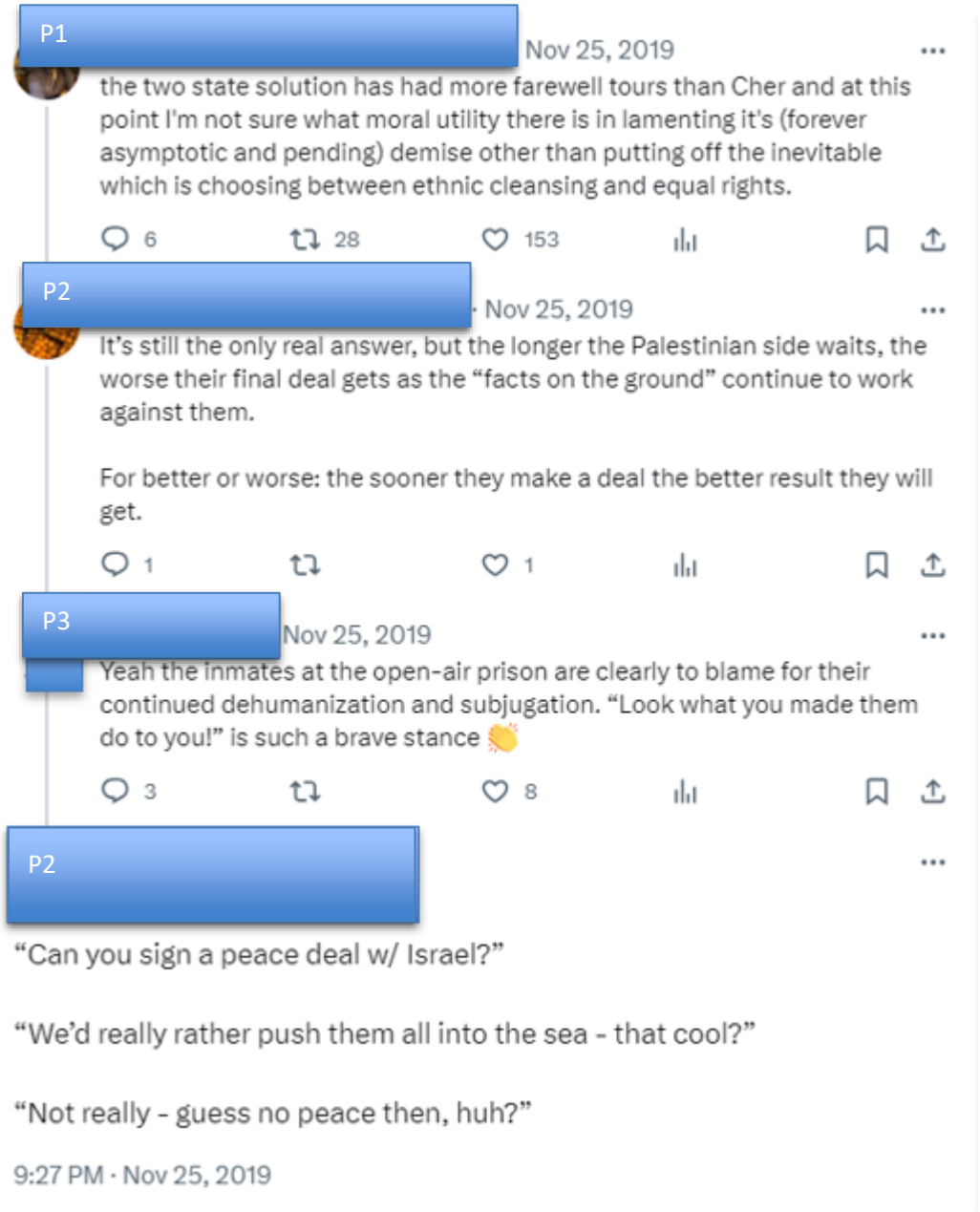
This post makes peace salient using a rhetorical question to argue that 'peace includes Israel's existence' and follows this up by saying that anything else is a demand for war, on the basis of this challenging Israel's existence. This is followed by a claim that Palestinians (here abbreviated to 'Pals') reject peace offers. That this is deemed to be done with no counter offer (written in capitals for emphasis) works to present Palestinians as interested only in the destruction of Israel, and therefore aggressors with no interest in peace, unlike Israel who are presented as aiming for peace, but being scuppered by Palestinian's failed to allow Israel to exist. This post is supported with an attachment outlining a supposed history of Palestinian aggression towards Israel which provides the rationale for the finishing statement that Israel wants peace where Hamas and Fatah (Palestinian governments, not working in the interests of Palestinians) do not.

A challenge to this (from P2) begins with a partial agreement, which is that Jewish people have a right to peace (upgraded to include a three-part list completed with 'security' and 'happiness'). This is followed by a show of support for Palestinians and a claim that Israeli expansion is at the expense of Palestinians and peace. P1, like in the previous extract, responds to this by claiming that the current violence is a result of Israel withdrawing from Gaza in an act of peace, which, consistent with their earlier claim that Palestinians do not want the peace that Israel is striving for, blames Palestinian leadership (especially in Gaza) for violence. Here then, peace is for Israel to offer and for Palestinian leaders to accept, and if they do not accept what Israel offers (or if they abuse Israeli concessions for peace) they are culpable for the violence.

Extract Ten

In this post, Sanders makes a case for both Israelis and Palestinians to live in peace and states that the US should work towards this for the common good. This proves controversial as P2 presents this as naïve ('very nice') before making Palestinians in Gaza accountable for their situation by describing them as rejecting peace. Palestinians, like in earlier extracts, are presented as being against progress, unlike Israel, which constructs their character as being backward and warlike. Again, it is their choice to reject peace that is used to criticise them and make them accountable for any violence they receive.

Extract Eleven



This final extract topicalises possible routes and blocks to achieving piece, which shows an orientation to the norm for peace. It begins with P1 suggesting that because the 'two state solution' to peace will not work, the situation in Israel/Palestine will end with one of two polar opposites – ethnic cleansing or equal rights, clearly favouring equal rights and therefore putting the onus on Israel to grant these. This is responded to by P2 with some agreement, however here Palestinians are made accountable for not having agreed to a peace deal which is presented as being in their favour. This shifts the responsibility for the ongoing situation from Israel (in the first post) to Palestine (in the second), although exactly whom the responsibility of developing a peace deal lies with is rather vague. While the disagreement here is over possible *paths* to peace, both participants uphold the norm of peace as despite this disagreement, peace is the ultimate aim for both speakers. This elicits a response from P3 who sarcastically critiques the holding of Palestinians as responsible, presenting them as subjugated prisoners, which makes support for Israel appear unreasonable and lays the

responsibility for reaching peace back with Israel, which is presented as the aggressor and as able to bring about peace by discontinuing the poor treatment of Palestinians. The use of 'look what you made them do to you' points to a victim blaming argument, which helps to shift the responsibility back to Israel.

At this point, P2 responds by providing a hypothetical dialogue where Palestinians are presented as not just rejecting a peace deal, but as wanting the destruction of Israel, which is clearly not conducive to bringing about peace. These hypothetical Palestinians are therefore responsible for the violence they are receiving because of their unwillingness to make a peace deal, which in turn is based on their unreasonable stance towards Israel. This brings together a number of features from throughout the analysis, where Palestinians are presented as being too hateful towards Israel and therefore lacking any desire for peace, which in turn is used to explain and justify the violence against them.

Discussion

Different parties in the conflict are criticised for not wanting peace. This works to challenge opponents for not adhering to the norm of peace (Galtung, 1969) and to blame them for the ongoing violence. Examples in the data include Israel (extracts one and two) and its allies being blamed as well as Palestine (extracts three and four). Those (opponents) that do not want peace can be presented as to blame for the lack of peace, but this non-adherence to the norm of peace can be presented as part of their (flawed) character. This is seen through the analysis, where Palestinians and, to a lesser extent, Israelis, can be presented as too hateful to want or allow peace and are therefore not people that peace can be sought with. This finding therefore involves category work (see e.g., Stokoe, 2012) where the different categories of people involved in the conflict are contested and (re)constructed in different ways that do interactional work in the discussions. In particular, the category Palestinian, is presented in a number of different ways including Palestinian, Palestinians of Gaza, Muslims, 'Arabs' and Jihadis, in ways that become bound with negative connotations of being 'haters' disposed towards violence and terrorism (see Burke, 2018 for more on the linking of Muslims with terrorism) and having an uncivilized warlike quality, exemplified through the suggestions that Palestinians (and their leaders) will oppose peace even at their own expense (e.g. extracts nine to eleven), which works as an explanation for a lack of peace. The next logical step following this is that because of the Palestinians' lack of desire for peace, that attempts at making peace with them are futile and dangerous to Israel, and by extension Jewish people. In this argument, any attempts at making peace by (peace-wanting) Israel will be exploited by (peace-hating) Palestine. This provides the justification for opposing peace with Palestinians and allows supporters of Israel to oppose peace while attributing the responsibility for not wanting peace with the Palestinian out group.

Because Palestinians are presented as immorally inclined towards violence and exploiting any peace offer that they may be made, the next logical step is that peace comes to be presented as something for Israel (not Palestine) to dictate, with Palestine bearing the responsibility for accepting (or rejecting) peace offers that are made. There is a clearly identifiable narrative that Israel has made multiple peace offers that have all been turned down (e.g., extract nine). This further strengthens the distinction that is made between the two groups and enforces the peace wanting (Israel) and peace hating (Palestine) distinction so

prevalent in the data. It also makes for a somewhat circular argument on the lines of "they (Palestinians) do not want peace, therefore we (Israel) do not want peace with them" as a way of criticising the outgroup and managing the requirement to be in favour of peace, while simultaneously arguing against it.

All of these identified strategies are examples of peace in the service of war (Gavriely-Nuri, 2014) with some of the strategies (such as accusing the out-group of not wanting peace) recognisable features of this overall strategy. Where the findings in this analysis depart and build upon this is that where a norm towards favouring peace (Galtung, 1969) is usually not only in place, but also a necessity for the peace in the service of war argument to effectively function, in the examples presented here, peace can be more explicitly rejected as an aim. This can be seen, overwhelmingly by those supporting Israel, where Palestinians are presented as 'haters' with whom peace cannot – and therefore *must* not – be made, and in the argument that previous concessions to Palestinians have backfired and harmed Israel (argument two) and (argument three) where peace is presented as something for Israel to (not) offer because of argument two. Together, these findings mean that all of these arguments, which can all be viewed as being made in the service of war.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

There are some limitations to this study. First, the data for this analysis were collected before the 2023/2024 war in Gaza, which is ongoing at the time of writing, so it does not include data from that time. However, some of the arguments identified here are relevant to the ongoing conflict and some of the arguments identified in this analysis that are used to justify this war are being applied to other areas of conflict too (such as Russia/Ukraine). Collecting data from Twitter (now X) can be difficult, especially as contentious posts are often removed. This was the case in this dataset, where many of the posts that were part of these discussions were removed, which means that context may have been lost.

Suggestions for future research include expanding this type of investigation to more contexts, for example looking at online discussions about the more recent Gaza conflict as well as other conflicts and potential conflicts too. It would be interesting to see if and how these types of arguments are used outside of online spaces, for example in political speeches and in peace negotiations. Theoretically, there is more to know about how effective peace in the service or war arguments may be.

Conclusion

This analysis has demonstrated how peace in the service of war arguments can be extended so that as well as opponents being criticised for not wanting peace, while upholding a norm for peace, this norm can be breeched so that peace can be presented as not wanted, which has potentially serious implications for attempts to bring about and maintain peace. It is therefore imperative for social scientists to ensure that talk of peace is called out when it is used in the service of war. .

References

Bar-Tal, D., Raviv, A., Raviv, A., & Dgani-Hirsh, A. (2009). The Influence of the Ethos of Conflict on Israeli Jews' Interpretation of Jewish—Palestinian Encounters. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *53*(1), 94-118. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002708325942

Baym, N. K. (1996). Agreements and Disagreements in a Computer mediated discussion, *Research on language and social interaction*, 29, 315-345

Billig, M. (1988). The Notion of "Prejudice": Some Rhetorical and Ideological Aspects. *Text*, 8(1–2), 91–110. https://doi.org/10.1515/text.1.1988.8.1-2.91

Billig, M. (1996). *Arguing and thinking: A rhetorical approach to social psychology*. Cambridge University Press

Burke S. The discursive "othering" of Jews and Muslims in the Britain First solidarity patrol. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology* 2018; 28: 365–377. https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.2373

Chomsky, N. (1989) *Necessary illusions: Thought control in democratic societies* London: Pluto PressEdwards, D., & Potter, J. (1992). *Discursive Psychology*. London: Sage

Edwards, D., & Potter, J. (2013). Conversation Analysis and Psychology. In Sidnell, J and Stivers, T (eds.) *The Handbook of Conversation Analysis*, Wiley Blackwell, 701-725

Finlay, W.M.L. (2005), Pathologizing dissent: Identity politics, Zionism and the self-hating Jew. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 44: 201-222. https://doi.org/10.1348/014466604X17894Finlay, W.M.L. (2018), Language and Civilian Deaths: Denying Responsibility for Casualties in the Gaza Conflict 2014, *Political Psychology*, 39: 595-609 https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12426

Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, peace, and peace research. *Journal of Peace Research*, 6, 167–191. https://doi.org/10.1177/002234336900600301

Gavriely-Nuri, D. (2010). The idiosyncratic language of Israeli 'peace': A Cultural Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CCDA). *Discourse & Society*, *21*(5), 565-585. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926510375934

Gavriely-Nuri, D. (2014). 'TALKING PEACE – GOING TO WAR' Peace in the service of the Israeli just war rhetoric, *Critical Discourse Studies*, 11:1, 1-18, https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2013.835979

Gibson, S. (2011). Social psychology, war and peace: Towards a critical discursive peace psychology, *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 5, 239–250. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2011.00348.x

Gibson, S. (2012). 'I'm not a war monger but…': Discourse analysis and social psychological peace research. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, *22*(2), 159–173. https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.1099

Goodman, S. (2017). How to conduct a psychological discourse analysis. *Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis across Disciplines*, 9, 142-153.

https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/journals/cadaad/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/09-Goodman.pdf

Goodman, S., Locke, A., Finlay, M, Lobham, R (2023) Applying Discursive Methodologies to Understanding Hate Speech on Social Media Platforms. In Tseliou, E., Demuth, C., Georgaca., E., Gough, B. (eds) *The Routledge International Handbook of Innovative Qualitative Psychological Research*. London; Routledge

Harsgor, L. (2024). The young and the hawkish: Generational differences in conflict attitudes in Israel. *Research & Politics*, *11*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/20531680241258512

Jabali, O., Halayqa, I., Ayyoub, A (2024) University students' attitudes toward the stalled peace process and normalization with the Israeli occupation, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 101,101994 https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2024.101994.

Jaspal, R., & Coyle, A. (2014). Threat, Victimhood, and Peace: Debating the 2011 Palestinian UN State Membership Bid. *Digest of Middle East Studies*, *23*(1), 190-214. https://doi.org/10.1111/dome.12041

Jensen, MJ (2017) Social media and political campaigning: changing terms of engagement? The International Journal of Press/Politics 22(1): 23–42. https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161216673196

Katz, Y. (2021). When media events fail: the transformation of the Israeli peace discourse at the funeral of Shimon Peres. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, *39*(2), 63–77. https://doi.org/10.1080/15295036.2021.1999481

Kaposi, D. (2018). In the Shadow of the Other: Arguments About the First Gaza War in British Conservative Editorials: Discursive Psychology Perspectives. In: Gibson, S (ed.) *Discourse, Peace & Conflict. Discursive psychology perspectives*. Peace Psychology Book Series. Springer, 119-132 https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-99094-1_7

Kilby, L and Lennon, H. (2018). Charlie Hebdo and the prophet Muhammad: a multimodal critical discourse analysis of peace and violence in a satirical cartoon. In: Gibson, S (ed.) *Discourse, Peace & Conflict. Discursive psychology perspectives*. Peace Psychology Book Series. Springer, 303-321. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-99094-1_17

Kroger, R. O., & Wood, L. A. (1998). The turn to discourse in social psychology, *Canadian Psychology*, 39, 266–279, https://doi.org/10.1037/h0086818

Locke, A. & Budds, K. (2020) Applying critical discursive psychology to health psychology research: a practical guide, *Health Psychology and Behavioral Medicine*, 8:1, 234- 247, https://doi.org/10.1080/21642850.2020.1792307

Leshem OA, and Halperin E. (2020) Lay theories of peace and their influence on policy preference during violent conflict. *PNAS*, 117(31):18378-18384. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2005928117

McKinlay, A., McVittie, C. and Sambaraju, R. (2012), 'This is ordinary behaviour': Categorization and culpability in Hamas leaders' accounts of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 51: 534-550. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8309.2011.02021.x

McVittie, C., Sambaraju, R & McKinlay, A. (2011) "There Will Only Be Lots of Chit-Chat": How Hamas Leaders and Media Interviewers Handle Controversial Topics, *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 44:1, 92-105, https://doi.org/10.1080/08351813.2011.546057

McVittie, C., & Sambaraju, R. (2018). Constructing peace and violence in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In S. Gibson (Ed.), *Discourse, Peace, and Conflict Discursive Psychology Perspectives* (pp. 101-118). (Peace Psychology Book Series (PPBS)). Springer. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-99094-1_6

Mitrani, M. (2013). (Re-)telling societal beliefs: Changing narratives in Israel's political discourse regarding transition to peace. *International Journal of Conflict Management, 24*(3), 245–264. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCMA-12-2012-0090

Mock, S., Obeidi, A. & Zeleznikow, J. (2014). A Brief Outline of the Israel–Palestinian Conflict. Group Decision and Negotiation, 23, 1245–1262 https://doi.org/10.1007/s10726-012-9293-7

Pérez Curiel, C (2020) Trend towards extreme right-wing populism on Twitter. an analysis of the influence on leaders, media and users. *Communication and Society* 33(2): 175–192. https://doi.org/10.1177/14687968221148574

Pettersson, K., Payotte, S., & Sakki, I. (2023). Harsh punisher or loving mother? A critical discursive psychological analysis of Marine Le Pen's presidential Twitter campaign. *Ethnicities*, *23*(6), 905-930. https://doi.org/10.1177/14687968221148574

Postmes, T., Spears, R., & Lea, M. (1998). Breaching or Building Social Boundaries?: SIDE-Effects of Computer-Mediated Communication. *Communication Research*, *25*(6), 689-715. https://doi.org/10.1177/009365098025006006

Ron, Y., Suleiman, C., & Maoz, I. (2020). Women for Peace: Promoting Dialogue and Peace through Facebook? *Social Media + Society*, *6*(4). https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120984461

Ruesch, M. (2013). "A Peaceful Net? Intergroup Contact and Communicative Conflict Resolution of the Israel-Palestine Conflict on Facebook". In *Communication*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9781848882096_003

Sambaraju, R., & Kirkwood, S. (2010). 'We represent, here, the interests of the free world': Accountability in Israeli leaders' media talk on the Gaza Crisis (2008-2009). *eSharp*, *15*, 133-156. http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_153495_en.pdf

Stokoe, E. (2012). Moving forward with membership Categorization analysis: Methods for systematic analysis. *Discourse Studies*, *14*(3), 277–303. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445612441534 Tileagă, C. (2007), Ideologies of moral exclusion: A critical discursive reframing of depersonalization, delegitimization and dehumanization. British Journal of Social Psychology, 46: 717-737. https://doi.org/10.1348/014466607X186894