A viable Israel and a secure Palestine: Textual intervention in a British public debate *

Jim O'Driscoll
University of Huddersfield

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Address:
Jim O'Driscoll
School of Humanities
West Building
University of Huddersfield
Queensgate
Huddersfield
West Yorkshire HD1 1DH

J.O'Driscoll@hud.ac.uk
jim.odriscoll@btinternet.com

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This paper employs the method of textual intervention (Pope 1995) to analyse an example of unscripted British public discourse surrounding the Israeli / Palestinian conflict. The example is taken from a discussion on the BBC's Question Time programme during the Israeli attack on Gaza around the start of 2009. It attempts to show that the perspective of the speakers in this data is firmly Israeli. That is, regardless of explicit opinions of right and wrongs, of where the blame is laid and what should be done - crudely, of which 'side' a speaker professes to be on - it is to Israel (and not Palestine) that British contributors to the debate presume moral proximity. This alignment entails 'natural' rights (and responsibilities) for the Israelis but rights which can only be 'granted' to Palestinians (who are absolved from responsibilities). It is also argued that this alignment - which is described as a discursive deictic centre - is to be regretted.

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1 Introduction

In one episode of the BBC satirical comedy, *Yes, Prime Minister*, Sir Geoffrey Hastings, the Head of MI5, the British Secret Service, informs the Prime Minister, Jim Hacker, that a recently deceased former Head of the Service has left papers indicating that during the fifties and sixties he was passing secrets to the Russians. Hacker is aghast at the notion that the Head of MI5 was a Russian agent. But Sir Geoffrey explains that, given the activities of double agents such as Burgess, Philby and McLean at that time, "one more didn't really make much difference". What makes the matter serious, according to him, is that this former Head was "one of us". That is, he had not, like Burgess and the others, been a student at Cambridge University but rather one at Oxford - like Sir Geoffrey himself and also like Sir Humphrey Appleby, the present Cabinet Secretary and co-ordinator of the security services.[1] What makes the matter even more serious, says Sir Geoffrey, is that that this former Head had previously been cleared of all suspicion in a security investigation led by none other than Sir Humphrey, thus pointing the finger of suspicion at him too.

At this point, the following exchange occurs:

Sir Geoffrey: Personally I find it hard enough to believe that one of us was one of them. But if *two* of us were one of them … [correcting himself] two of them, *all* of us could be ... um could be ... ..

Jim Hacker: All of them? [2]

This Kafkaesque trajectory of the dialogue is, of course, absurd. But it illustrates nicely the importance in human affairs of assumed group identity and values, of assumptions of who we think is aligned with us and of what that alignment consists. The *us* in the phrase *one of us* denotes us-the-Oxford-educated-mandarin-elite, membership of which is understood to entail adherence to a set of values and loyalties which can be taken absolutely for granted, so much so that these are ill-defined and rarely if ever made explicit. Such adherence is one of life's absolute certainties. Thus, when one member's loyalty suddenly comes into question, all members' loyalties must do so.

The aspect of this one-of-us outlook which is more important for this paper, however, is that it allows altercation, disagreement, even conflict, within safe bounds. Just as in any group in which identification and loyalty are taken for granted (most families, for instance), members can be judged by fellow members to have behaved badly, made mistakes or otherwise been foolish - and told so - but they still remain one-of-us, automatically distinguishable from any of 'them'.

This paper suggests that public debate in Britain (and therefore perhaps more generally in the western world) on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is skewed by a similar underlying us/them distinction, in which the Israelis, in a similarly inexplicit, taken-for-granted manner, are regarded as one-of-us and Palestinians as one-of-them. That is, regardless of their expressed opinions of right and wrongs, of where the blame is laid and what should be done - crudely, of which 'side' they profess to be on - it is to Israel (and not Palestine) that British contributors to the debate presume moral proximity. This

alignment entails 'natural' rights (and responsibilities) for the Israelis but rights which can only be 'granted' to Palestinians.

To support my argument, I examine extracts from the BBC's Question Time programme. The examination is conducted in the general spirit of textual intervention as pioneered by Pope (1995) and makes use of his insights into (de/re)centring (1995: 14-27), (de)personalisation (1995: 17-18; 49-57) and subjectivity (1995: 46-54). As the notion of a taken-for-granted one-of-us implies, the focus of enquiry is on what is often called 'perspective' or 'point of view'. Pope (1995:46-47) prefers the term 'subject' or 'subject-position' to these terms because they imply a fixed centre of attention, whereas a subject-position, he claims, "is in effect its own centre". Pope's term is useful in this paper because the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is such a wide and fuzzy-boundaried topic that each different approach to it offers a different aspect as its centre of attention.

However, a disadvantage of *all* of the above terms is that they tend to conflate the standpoint of the subject (the place where s/he stands) and the gaze of the subject (the direction in which s/he is looking). In this paper, I want to convey a relatively fixed standpoint but a varying gaze. I therefore make some use of work in cognitive stylistics developing the notion of deixis (e.g. Stockwell 2002: 43-48; McIntyre 2006: 91-121) and offer the notion of a *discursive deictic centre*. Work in this field, like that of Pope, is designed for the examination of written or scripted texts, chiefly literary ones. This paper applies this work to unscripted discourse. It is from this kind of discourse, I believe, whose contributors have little time to choose their words carefully, that textual intervention can pick out not so much explicit arguments but rather the viewpoints that are embedded and are thus ideological in the sense used by critical linguistics (e.g. Hodge & Kress 1993) and critical discourse analysts (e.g. Fairclough 1989). It is these naturalizations which amount to a discursive deictic centre, the location from which most opinion is broadcast. Pinpointing this location can help us to understand its effect

2 The Data

2.1 *Activity Type*

Question Time is a weekly televised forum for discussion of current affairs broadcast on BBC1. Its participants comprise five invited panellists, who sit at a table at the front of the hall, and an audience of 100 or so people who have previously contacted the BBC and asked to attend.

Discussion takes place through the addressing of questions which are 'tabled' in advance, in written form, by members of the audience for the panellists to address. The panellists do not see the questions before they are introduced for discussion. Instead, the questions are given to the presenter of the programme, who selects which ones are to be discussed and in which order. The discussion of each question begins with the presenter naming the member of the audience who tabled it and inviting him/her to ask it aloud. The presenter then selects one panellist to respond and thereafter selects subsequent comments from both the panel and members of the audience (who signal their wish to speak by raising their hands).

At the time of the broadcast examined below, the presenter was David Dimbleby, who had filled that role continuously for 15 years. This long service afforded him a not inconsiderable presence. He often addressed panellists by their first name alone (see, for example, line 30 in the transcript below) and sometimes intervened in the middle of a panellist's response to ask a supplementary question or otherwise challenge their

discourse. These features, together with the conversational tone which he adopted, contributed to the relatively informal tenor of proceedings.

2.2 *The panellists and production format*

Although the panellists face the questions 'blind', most of these relate to topical public affairs, so that they have a good idea of what general topics are going to be raised. The producers have a similarly good idea and invite panellists who are likely to have something to say on these topics. At the time of the broadcast of Thursday 15 January 2009, one of the main topics of news for more than a week had been an incursion of the Israeli military into the Gaza strip. Accordingly, the panel included two people who could be relied upon to be trenchantly on opposing sides of the debate. The pro-Israeli panellist was Stephen Pollard, who had recently been appointed editor-in -chief of the Jewish Chronicle. The pro-Palestinian panellist was Jenny Tonge, a Liberal Democrat member of the House of Lords. In the context of this debate, the remaining three panellists were cast as avowedly neutral.[3]

While panellists on Question Time may fairly transparently represent the views of one or other group of people, it is axiomatic that they are speaking on no-one's behalf but their own. In terms of Goffman's (1981:145) production format, they are supposed to be not only the animators of the words they produce, not only the authors of the words they use, but also the principals of the views expressed through them.

This tradition is acknowledged in the wording of the question which elicits the discussion examined here.

1	Dimbleby:	And this one comes from Jonathan Verve, please. Yes (extends hand)
2	Tabler	Hi, yes, I'd like to ask the panel why they think the world responds with
3		such anger whenever Israel defends herself.
4	Dimbleby	Why does the world respond with such anger whenever Israel defends
5		itself? (pause) Jenny Tonge.[4]

This question cites not only 'the world' and 'Israel' as entities involved but also 'the panel' itself. This inclusion of the addressees is an invitation to them to speak as themselves and offer their own opinions (line 2) rather than simply mouth received ones.

Although 'the panel' is promptly elided by Dimbleby (line 4), the notion of panellists as their own people expressing their opinions in unrehearsed manner is held in high regard as a guarantee of the authenticity of debate. The following extract - taken from a midpoint in the debate[5] - enacts the importance attached to this feature. Pollard has just claimed that Hamas has genocidal aims when Tonge interrupts him.

6	Tonge	Have you spoken to them?
7	Pollard	Hmm?
8	Tonge	Have you spoken to them?
9	Pollard	I've listened, Yes.
10	Tonge	Have you spoken to them?
11	Pollard	I HAVE, I have as it happens. Would you like to look (*gesturing to piece*
12		*of paper on desk*). I'm sorry Jenny Jenny -
13	Tonge	Well, they do NOT say that. I know you've got your Israeli embassy
14		cribsheet there.
15	Pollard	It's NOT my Israeli embassy- is it- if you wanna know what this is, it's
16		some notes from- some quotes that I took down this morning - It's not a
17		cribsheet from anyone - from Hamas because I knew you'd say that to
18		me. But I don't want to get- I mean we can trade quotes all day on that

Tonge's reference to a cribsheet is an attempt to devalue Pollards' assertions. As suggested by the number of false starts that follow in Pollards' riposte, he is rattled by this accusation that he is not even the author of his words (never mind principal) and

takes pains to deny not only that that the piece of paper was given to him by the Israeli embassy but also that it was given to him by *anyone*. Rather, he asserts, they are quotes that he himself - his own person - noted down. (To add credibility to this assertion, he even says when he did this.) He then retaliates in like kind, casting doubt on the value of Tonge's expressed opinions by claiming they are predictable (line 17), predictability being an undesirable feature because it could suggest an over-reliance on received opinion and/or a tendency to scripted speech

To a large extent, this ideal of panellist-independence (if not disinterest) with respect to this particular topic for discussion is borne out by their backgrounds. Pollard, as the editor of a publication dedicated to an ethnic group with a special relation to Israel, is on the shakiest ground here. Before this broadcast, he had described his publication as "Israel's candid friend", had accused the BBC's Middle East editor of "hopeless bias" and said of the current Israeli action in Gaza: "You have to understand why the Israelis are acting as they are, in defence.". However, this commitment to one side of the argument is only to be expected (just as Tonge's equally forthright stance on the other side is to be expected - that is why they are both there on the panel). And commitment does not entail lack of autonomy or assimilation The Question-Time website (from which the quotes here are taken) described his support of Israel as "outspoken", thus indicating that it is not mere following of a party line.

Tonge's autonomy is beyond doubt. Similarly characterised in the Question-Time website as outspoken (this time on several issues), she had been sacked from her position on the front bench of the Liberal Democratic party five years previously after saying of Palestinian suicide bombers: "If I had to live in that situation, I might just consider becoming one myself." Thereafter, she had been (in British political parlance) 'kicked upstairs'; that is, she had been given a seat in House of Lords where, since this body is the less powerful of the two chambers of the British legislature, she could do less rocking of the LibDem party boat than she could in her previous position as an MP in the House of Commons. Thus, although she is introduced on the programme as a Liberal Democrat, it is understood that she does not represent this party's view on this issue.

At the time of the broadcast, Shaun Woodward, the third panellist whose contributions are examined below, was the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in the British Labour government. As the only member of the government and his party on the panel, he speaks partly as a representative of both and is thus not entirely his own principal. At the same time, however, his government remit is not one with direct relevance to the issue under discussion, so that the accountability of the government for what he says on this programme is limited. If the government wished to disavow his pronouncements, it would be relatively easy to do so - much easier than if he held a position such as Foreign Secretary. And if it was really unhappy with them, he would simply be dismissed. Given this *relative* autonomy and the context of debate, following the turns of the two panellists espousing clearly the two opposing 'sides', his more significant representative stance is that of the reasonable neutral. This role is encoded in the introductory adverbial *at the end of the day*, which he uses to frame the brief assertion which follows it as a summary (see line 71 below). It implies a somewhat dismissive stance to the opposing arguments which have just been articulated at some length and passion.
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3 The opposing arguments
Tonge is the first person to take a main turn.

19 Tonge	Because this is not just about Israel defending itself against Hamas
20	rockets or against Hamas in Gaza. This is because of over 40 years of
21	occupation of Palestinian lands. (*clapping, muted cheers from audience*)
22	It's about illegal settlements that have been described as illegal by the
23	International Criminal Court, the international court of justice. (*Murmurs in*
24	*audience and one shouting "there are no settlements in Gaza".*) There are
25	no settlements in Gaza, no, but there is the equivalent of the settlements
26	that withdrew from Gaza in the west bank now. (several *voices of protest*
27	*from audience*). They just put them (*further voices of protest*) …
28 Dimbleby	Alright, can I, can I just suggest we hear- This is very, very contentious area-
29 Tonge	It's extremely import-
30 Dimbleby	Be quiet a moment, Jenny, if you would. Can you, (*some muffled laughter*)
31	can you just keep quiet while Jenny makes her point. I'll bring people in as
32	we go along. Jenny Tonge.
33 Tonge	It is over 40 years of occupation, of humiliation, of settlements, of land
34	grab, of water grab, of imprisoning people often without charge. That is what
35	this is all about. (*clapping*). It is not doing Israel any good at all to take this
36	totally disproportionate action against the trapped people of Gaza. Because
37	they are totally trapped, I was there six weeks ago. They cannot get out, they
38	are overcrowded, one point five million in a tiny area. They cannot get out and
39	they are being killed in their hundreds and it is a very, very upsetting (*broken*
40	*voice)* thing, to be happening and it is not doing Israel any good. And if you
41	don't believe me, believe the Rabbis, the lawyers, the academics, the host of
42	Jewish people who've written to the newspapers in the last two weeks saying
43	exactly what I've just said *("OK" from Dimbleby)*. It is not diminishing terrorism,
44	it will make it worse, it will make it spread, it will radicalise more and more
45	people in the Middle East to take up against Israel and the west.

The question which she addresses (lines 4-5) contains presupposition at two levels of embedding. The upper level is the world's angry response. The deeper level is the actions of Israel. Tonge starts by denying the latter of these presuppositions. In her opinion, the anger is because of its actions over the past 40 years, of which its actions in Gaza are only one example and most notable of which is the illegal occupation of Palestinian lands. She then argues (starting line 35) that Israel's actions in Gaza are wrong on both humanitarian grounds (lines 36-40) and rational grounds (lines 43-45), appealing to authoritative Jewish voices (lines 40-43) to support her argument.

Pollard's main turn follows.

46 Pollard	Well (hh pause) the world *doesn't* actually always respond with such anger. Erm,
47	the debate that we have here in Britain is very different from the debate that
48	happens across a lot of places in the world. Erm, here in Britain there is a
49	particular view about Israel which I-I'll come to in a second. But I do think it's
50	important that we separate out the two issues here. One is why did Israel act.
51	The second is the conduct of Israel's actions. Why did Israel act? Now, Jenny,
52	you talked about 40 years of occupation. Israel pulled out of Gaza in 2005.
53	(*Tonge leans forward, opens mouth as if to respond*) It said to the people in
54	Gaza- Let me, let me just finish (*Tonge leans back again and adopts knowing,*
55	*forbearing smile*) It said to the people in Gaza all that- everything we've built
56	here, even if it was built on, as some people might say, illegally, whatever,
57	everything we've built here, the factories, the farms, whatever, it's yours. Go
58	ahead. Build on it, make it prosperous. We'll even give you aid. How was the
59	response? What was the response to that? A barrage - of 6,000, over 6,000
60	rockets since it pulled out in 2005. And it's not just that. It's a narrative that keeps
61	repeating. Israel pulled out of Lebanon. What was the response? Hezbollah sent
62	the Katusha rockets into Israel. Israel pulled out- er er - ii - Israel engaged for 7
63	years in a peace process with the Palestinians. What was the response? A wave
64	of suicide bombings. Now there's a message here that people seem to be taking
65	in parts of the- in parts of Palestinians world, which is that Israel is weak. Israel

66   pulls out. Destroy it. Hamas is committed, not just in its charter, but in its recent,
67   in every outpouring from any Hamas leader, Hamas is committed not just to- not
68   just to a two-state solution but to the murder of every Jew in the world

In contrast, Pollard accepts the deeper level of presupposition in the question but starts by denying the upper level, that 'the world' is angry, suggesting that this reaction is peculiar to Britain (lines 47-49). He then argues that Israel's action in Gaza is justified (while hinting on lines 49-51 that their precise manner may not be) because concessionary or conciliatory actions by Israel only result in attacks on Israel (lines 55-64), thus implying that military action is absolutely necessary. In support of his argument, he refers to the purportedly genocidal aims of a Palestinian representative body (lines 66-68).

So far, so predictable. Tonge argues Israeli actions are wrong because they involve the killing and displacement of innocent Palestinians. Pollard argues they are right because they are the only way to *stop* the killing of innocent Israelis. The concern of this paper, however, is not directly on the rights and wrongs of the conflict but rather on the standpoint from which discussion of the conflict proceeds.

4 Subject-positions and discursive deictic centres
4.1 *The pro-Israeli speakers*
The question (lines 2-3) distinguishes three entities: the panel, the world and Israel. Thus, even at the outset of the discussion, there is a crucial entity which is entirely missing. This is the one which both numerically and in terms of intensity, is at the centre of the events which topicalise the question - the inhabitants of the Gaza strip. But instead, the question puts Israel firmly in subject/agent position. The clause "Israel defends herself" describes Israel as doing something which is non-transactive (in that there is no affected party - see Hodge & Kress 1993: 8-9), eminently rational and reasonable (and therefore easy identify with) and personalised (through both the pronoun *her*self and the sheer brevity of the description, evoking the reflex response of a single individual rather the considered one of an organisation).). It takes no leap of the imagination to see that the same substantive events could be described in other ways. Even the a simple addition, such as

          whenever Israel defends itself against attack
would take away much of the personalisation. And if it was
          whenever Israel attacks neighbouring territories
the self-evident reasonableness would be lost and the subject-position would shift slightly away from Israel. Or (if you think 'attacks' is too emotive), we could have
          whenever Israel takes military action against neighbouring peoples.
This would return some rationality to Israel's action because taking military action sounds more considered than the blunt attacks. But this return of subject-position to Israel would be offset by the personalisation of the affected party as animate beings. And if we combined these features and had
          whenever Israel attacks neighbouring peoples
the subject-position would shift entirely away from Israel towards the affected party and Israel would be left only with agency.

But of course, this is a rhetorical question. The stance of the questioner is clear. Likewise, it comes as no surprise that Pollard's narrative account also has Israel in subject/agent position. The actions of Israel are personalised by presenting its 2005 withdrawal from Gaza as a process of communication (lines 53-58), which is always more personable than dumb action. Through the use of direct speech, Israel becomes *we*.

In this account, the people of Gaza also appear and are also personalised by being put on the same stage and addressed as *you*.

But there is a limit to this personalisation. They do not speak; they are merely the dumb recipients of Israel's magnanimous gesture. And when, as the narrative moves on (lines 58-60), they attain agency, they are so entirely *de*personalised that not even their agency itself is articulated - *the* (not their) response is an inanimate barrage of rockets.[6] Human Israel proffers words; inhuman Gaza responds with violence. The personalisation of the Israeli side is reinforced subsequently when Pollard offers retrospective advice to the Israeli military..

69   What I would have done if I had been the Israeli Commander-in-Chief, after four to five
70   days of the initial bombardment, I would have declared a unilateral ceasefire

You have to be fairly close to someone before you can presume to advise them.

That Pollard opposes a human, personal, reasonable, rational Israeli side to a brutish, impersonal, unreasonable Palestinian side is no surprise. But I show below that some aspects of this same opposition, the same way around, can be found in discourse of both the neutral Woodward and even the pro-Palestinian Tonge. Neither, of course, presents the Palestinians in the same negative light. But what they do display and/or invite from their listeners is the same moral proximity to the Israeli side and/or the same Israeli deictic centre.

4.2 The neutral speakers
I focus here on one utterance by Woodward.

71   At the end of the day, Israel has to feel secure and Palestine has to be viable.

This is a bald assertion, without supporting argument or hedge. Thus it is presented as self-evidently reasonable. And indeed, nobody in the panel or the audience subsequently contradicts it. In fact, a contributor from the audience subsequently reiterates it by saying "of course we want a secure Israel and a viable Palestinian state". And even if one or two members of the audience do not agree, it is very unlikely they would dare to articulate this disagreement; any voiced opinion along the lines of "Israel does not deserve to feel secure" or "Palestine does not deserve its own state" would be met with a terse rebuke from Dimbleby and the withdrawal of the microphone from his/her vicinity. .

Woodward's opinion, then, encodes a broad consensus. Moreover, in that it is one with which disagreement is not considered worthy of serious attention, we are entitled to call it ideological in the sense of Fairclough (1989). This effect of this ideology can be examined by noting that two different desiderata are predicated for the two parties. To predicate security for the Israelis is to entail that they don't possess this attribute at the time; and to predicate a viable state for the Palestinians is to entail that *they* don't possess *this* attribute at the time. But given that both security and viable statehood are generally acknowledged to be desirable attributes for any nation or polity, we may wonder why Woodward did not say

Both Israel and Palestine have to be viable and feel secure.

That he did not say this carries an implication that the converse state of affairs already holds, or at least is not at issue; that is, that the desirability of security for the Palestinians and a viable state for the Israelis does not need to be stressed. Clearly, however, the former of these conditions does *not* hold. It is unlikely that many Palestinians feel secure in the sense of freedom from the fear - or fact - of violence or dispossession. But what is important here is that the latter condition *is* taken as given. There *is* a viable - albeit not universally recognised (hence the insecurity) - state called Israel. That is why it would come across as very odd if Woodward swapped the attributes around and said

Israel has to be viable and Palestine has to be secure.

Now, along with acknowledged statehood comes a series of assumed rights. The justification for the Israeli attack on Gaza repeated by Israeli spokespeople in the media at the time (and reiterated by one contributor from the Question-Time audience) was "No country in the world would not do as we are doing" or some similar statement. That is, as a legitimate government it is our duty to protect our citizens. They are being attacked by outside agencies, so naturally we take steps to prevent those agencies from attacking us in the future.

With this discourse, Israeli spokespeople aligned themselves with western governments, of which Britain is one, and appealed to the people of the countries run by those governments. The countries of the west are ones the statehood of which and the integrity of whose borders are taken for granted. Were either to come under threat, a decisive reaction would only be natural - and expected. As Woodward later observes:

72   if someone was lobbing rockets into your back garden, you'd probably want to
73   respond

Note the invitation here to view the matter from an Israeli perspective which is domestic and personalised. It should be stressed at this point that Woodward really is avowedly neutral. He begins his turn with a measured:

74   It's essential that Israel stops. It's essential that Hamas stops firing rockets into Israel.

It is just that it so much easier for Woodward and all British observers of this conflict to identify with a community which already has a stable, workable state than to identify with one which does not. Thus Woodward fails at this point to maintain the even-handedness of his discourse and utter something such as:

> If someone had thrown you off land which you and your forbears has been using for centuries, you'd probably want to respond

And indeed it is difficult to imagine that any of the contributors to this debate would produce such an utterance. To western minds, the killing of people and destruction of their possessions has a patina of validity when perpetrated by large, military groups on behalf of a state. It is doubtless regrettable and perhaps deplorable, but less deplorable than when perpetrated by individuals or small groups without uniforms who may be willing to kill themselves in the process. This latter is known as terrorism.

From this deictic centre, it is not surprising that neutrals tend to identify with Israel when considering rational possibilities. Woodward later avers that

75   a key question is "Should Israel get rid of Hamas in the Gaza strip?"

Similarly, a contributor from the audience attributes moral responsibility to Israel by expressing regret at the 'tit-for-tat' attacks and then commenting that

76   Israel should be able to rise above that, it's using a sledgehammer to crack a nut.

No speaker poses the question of whether should Palestine get rid of the settlements on the west bank and no speaker remonstrates with Hamas or any other Palestinian agency for failing to act with moral maturity or over-reacting. Organisations and communities without the legitimacy of statehood cannot, it seems, be reasoned with or appealed to.

4.3 The pro-Palestinian speaker
Tonge's condemnation of the activities of Israel, which extends beyond its present activity (the attack on Gaza), is the only part of the debate in which listeners are invited to adopt a Palestinian subject-position. Tonge does this (lines 36-39) by appealing to the ideological desideratum of being able to move freely and escape danger. This ability is denied to the people of Gaza because they have no control of their borders and, to make things worse, they are overcrowded and the danger is real and extreme.

In making this emotional appeal about the helpless and hapless position of the people of Gaza, however, she only partially succeeds in drawing us into this subject-position because there is limited personalisation. No people of Gaza become individuated in her argument and none has a voice. In fact, the picture that emerges is barely human. It is one of penned-in animals, frantically but fruitlessly searching (*they cannot get out* is repeated) for an escape from some impending death. The listener's sympathy, therefore, has a somewhat sentimental flavour. It is difficult to identify with such desperate and total lack of successful agency.

Other agents and actors, however, appear in her discourse. She supports her argument that the action of the Israeli government is wrong with reference to the recently expressed opinions of four kinds of actor, two of which are identifiably Jewish and three of whom have high-prestige and credibility (lines 40-43). Thus those possibly associated with Israeli viewpoint have individuality and professions and they take actions (e.g. write to newspapers). Palestinians, on the other hand, are just *trapped*, an undifferentiated *they* who are merely acted upon.

Similarly, it is to the Israeli side that any rationality is imputed. Of particular note here are the two negatives "It [the attack by Israel] is not doing Israel any good" and "it is not diminishing terrorism". As has long been recognised, negative propositions are denials of positive ones that are somehow taken to be present in the context (Leech 1983:101). They are "typically made on the tacit assumption that the hearer either has heard about, believes in, is likely to take for granted, or is at least familiar with the corresponding affirmative" (Givón 2001: 371). The most developed discussion of this effect is found in Werth's (1999) notion of negative accommodation, which "allows the recipient to deduce the expectation which the negation itself defeats or removes.' (Werth 1999: 254). The question being addressed (and note that Tonge is the first to address it) makes no explicit mention of Israel's actions being for its or anybody else's good, so through Gricean implicature we must see the introduction and defeat of this mention as relevant to the discourse. In order to understand the denial that Israel's actions are doing any good, we must be able to conceptualise the notion of doing it good. Thus, in its cognitive and rational aspects, the deictic centre in Tonge's argument is firmly with Israel.

The notion of linguistic polyphony can also help here. Norgaard (2007) points out that negative constructions contain two mutually exclusive viewpoints, the positive being a previous assertion or expectation with which the negative enters into 'dialogue'. Through her negative constructions here, Tonge engages in a dialogue with Israel. In short, she, just like Pollard (lines 69-70) and neutrals (lines 75-76), offers advice to the Israeli side, appealing to its presumed rationality by arguing that its action will have bad consequences (which, one may note in line 45, conflate "Israel and the west"). It is presumably for this reason that, while her condemnation is clearly heartfelt, the only adjective she uses to characterize its attack on Gaza is 'disproportionate'; other adjectives that might well come to her mind (outrageous? barbaric? murderous?) would not allow for rationality and would run the risk of breaking off the dialogue.

It might be argued that addressing Israel rather than Palestine is only to be expected because the focus of discussion is the actions of Israeli, not those of Palestine. But it should be noted that such an approach to ongoing events on the world stage is not inevitable. When, for example, the Soviet Union invaded Hungary in 1956 or Czechoslovakia in 1968 in response to goings-on in those countries, discussion in the west, though it likewise presented the Czechs and the Hungarians as helpless victims, did not presume to offer advice to the USSR or discuss the wisdom or otherwise of its

motivation. The USSR at the time was understood to be not one-of-us, so there would have been no point. Similarly, no dialogue with Palestine can be found in the data here. Palestine is also not one-of-us.

5 Final word

There are, of course, given the European genesis of modern Israel, historical reasons for the exclusively Israeli deictic centre from which this paper has shown British debate on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict being conducted. Moreover, it is only right that the actions of the more powerful party in a dispute should be subjected to greatest scrutiny. But when debaters, as shown here, align themselves deictically with that powerful party, the other party is dehumanised, reduced to mere phenomenon. It may be doing a disservice to that party to reduce them in this way, blocking their representatives from participation in debate. The continual focus on the right or wrongs of Israeli government actions is itself a valorisation of that government and its statehood. It allows Israel to set the agenda. As each new action by it becomes the latest focus for discussion, its past, even recent past, actins are consigned to history, to ineradicable fact. As Noorgard (2007: 39) has observed, the very negating of arguments can, by raising them when the context does absolutely demand they be raised, actually reinforce those arguments as much as challenge them.

Curiously, the apparently absurd speculation in that Yes, Prime Minister quote with which this paper starts offers a possible way out of the dichotomy. If all of us really are all of them, the opposition between us and them dissolves. We are all in the same boat. But if this realisation is to appear in discourse about this conflict, the same rationality, personality and agency which is assumed in Israeli participants needs to accorded to Palestinian participants as well. The attempts at textual intervention in this paper offer brief examples of how this can be done.

Notes

* In the preparation of this paper, I am greatly indebted to Lisa Nahajec. The final product, however, is not her fault.

1. Historically, while the two institutions have an equally high academic reputation, Cambridge does not have as much establishment caché as Oxford in British society. Even today, there are more graduates of the latter than the former in the higher ranks of the Civil Service and other positions of state-validated power. (And note that popular parlance never refers to 'Cambridge English'.) Cambridge's real strength is supposed to be in hard sciences, Oxford's in the humanities. It is more serious and earnest than fun-loving Oxford. It has a *comparatively* nonconformist image. From the point of view of Sir Geoffrey and his kind, Cambridge graduates cannot always be trusted and it is not surprising that communist sympathisers should have emerged from there rather than from Oxford.

2. This representation is adapted slightly from http://www.rubberturnip.org.uk/yesminister/shawn.html, an unofficial script site. I do not have access to the published video of the episode. The relevant extract from the book Yes, Prime Minster, which is written with Hacker as the narrator, runs as follows:
    Geoffrey rose from his chair, and straightened his baggy pinstripe suit. 'Personally,' he concluded, 'I find it hard enough to believe that *one* of us was one of them. But if *two* of us were one of them …' he realised that this was a logical impossibility and tried to correct himself. '*Two* of them, then all of us could be … could be …'
    He had painted himself into a corner. 'All of them?' I suggested helpfully. (Lynn & Jay 1989:241)

3. They were Shaun Woodward, a member of the Labour cabinet, Chris Grayling, a member of the Conservative shadow cabinet, and Willie Walsh, the chief executive of British Airways

4. Because precise timings of interjections and paralinguistic features have no bearing on the investigation here, I have adopted neither Conversation Analysis nor musical stave formats of speech representation in this paper. I have opted instead for conventional dramatic script because it is easier to read. I have retained some of the false starts of speakers but inevitably a great deal of tidying up has taken place. To save space, the transcript is not presented in one unit. Instead, extracts appear whenever they are first needed for my discussion. Line numbers are used for ease of reference.

5 For convenience, lines of the transcript are *not* numbered according to their chronological occurrence in the actual debate but rather according to their appearance in this article.

6. One can imagine a strategic reason for this impersonalisation. Pollard would not want to claim baldy that the people of Gaza en masse have been active in firing rockets into Israel. However, by putting them on stage as the addressees of Israel' speech, 'the response' which immediately follows the speech, and therefore is taken as happening on the same stage, can *implicitly* be attributed to them.

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