

***A proper study of the discourse on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?  
Methodological implications of a large-scale study of the first Gaza  
war***

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on a large-scale study examining the British broadsheets' coverage of the first Gaza war, this paper proposes some methodological considerations for analyzing the particularly emotive discourse on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and suggests a reflective multi-methodological approach to account for *both* the complexities *and* the intensities of the conflict. The paper starts by arguing that, working with a large data-set, quantitative data are both required and required to be interpreted by acts of contextualisation. Two strategies of contextualization are then introduced: interpreting patterns and associations in the numerical data. Following this, the paper continues by examining the findings and dilemmas that have emerged from quantitative analysis, using qualitative analysis of editorial extracts. It therefore shows examples for how quantitative codes can be *built into* and *built up by* narratives and arguments. Doing this, it also demonstrates possible ways of connecting qualitative to quantitative research: explanation, extension, and transformation/subversion.

KEYWORDS

Israeli-Palestinian conflict, first Gaza war, Operation Cast Lead, discourse analysis, media, British broadsheets

## 1. Introduction: Discourse on Israel/Palestine and the necessity of academics

It often appears impossible to write about issues concerning Israel and the Palestinians. The metaphor of an existential ball-game accurately captures the current state of the discourse where attack and defence replace the “give and take of arguments”.<sup>1</sup> It appears that it is impossible to write about issues concerning Israel and the Palestinians, because our arguments touch not simply on other arguments but on intimate emotions and memories<sup>2</sup>; it involves writing not simply about politics and morality but about identities.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, as there is simultaneously an urge to write and a threat that this very urge destroys the space of understanding, the role of academics and their handling of data becomes ever more important. It is not so much *what* they find but *how* they find it that becomes important. Whilst truth is of course the ultimate goal, it has to be established by a certain type of discourse or, in more common academic parlance, a certain method of investigation. For this reason, this paper is not concerned with truth/bias<sup>4</sup> and moral right/wrong<sup>5</sup>, but simply with the *way we (should) write about the conflict*.

The paper therefore is a methodological paper, drawing out lessons about the analysis of the discourse on the Palestinian-Israeli predicament. It is based on a large-scale study of the first Gaza war between the State of Israel and Hamas which examined how the war had been accounted for in British broadsheets.<sup>6</sup> Although it will inevitably showcase some of the large-scale study’s findings, the predominant aim here is to demonstrate the analytical approach the study adopted. Reflecting on this, it will offer a proposal for a way to write about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, arguing that a “proper” study of the conflict’s representation, with all the attendant complexities and intensities, requires, firstly, a multi-method approach where the material is examined from different perspectives; and secondly, a reflective approach where these perspectives can dynamically account for, extend, transform or even subvert each other.<sup>7</sup>

In what follows, the first section will be concerned with the historical and methodological background of the large-scale study: the first Gaza war with its aftermath will be briefly introduced, alongside the outline of some methodological background information of the study. Having introduced the context, the two analytic sections of the paper will dwell on certain methodological issues concerning quantitative and qualitative analysis, with special consideration given to the possible ways these two may be related to each other.

## 2. Violence and understanding in the first Gaza war: a large-scale study of the British broadsheets

### 2.1. Historical background

The study that forms the basis of this paper concerned the British broadsheets’ coverage of the first Gaza war (or “Operation Cast Lead”) between Hamas and the State of Israel. Having occurred between 27 December 2008 and 18 January 2009, this war has since been cast as warranting a special page in the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. First, it was “the first major armed struggle between Israel and Hamas”<sup>8</sup>, the latter replacing the secular Fatah and the PLO as the main vehicle of Palestinian resistance to Israel. Second, in being an armed conflict which is more than a mere operation yet somewhat too one-sided for a war, it became a template for subsequent conflagrations of the conflict, as witnessed in the full-scale war in the summer of 2014.

On the ground, it led to an unequivocal Israeli victory alongside over a thousand Palestinian fatalities, many of them civilian. (Israel lost nine soldiers.) Away from the ground, it led to total impasse on the political field and a flurry of human rights investigations into the participants’ conduct of war, with NGOs as well as a closely followed and controversial UN Human Rights Council’s commission unequivocally condemning both Hamas “war crimes” and the IDF’s conduct of the war: “[Operation

Cast Lead constituted] a deliberately disproportionate attack designed to punish, humiliate and terrorize a civilian population [...]”.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, the first Gaza war led to a number of political, moral and legal dilemmas, as well as an infinitely greater number of emotionally heated discussions.<sup>10</sup> And clearly, the disparity in casualty figures, bodies on the ground or Hamas rocket explosions shown in YouTube videos did not “speak for themselves”, but had to be made sense of. It is these acts of understanding that the project wished to examine in its focus on the coverage of the war in the British broadsheets.

## 2.2. Methodological background

To accomplish this task, a sample of articles was collected from supposedly conservative “pro-Israeli” (*Daily Telegraph*, *The Times*), liberal (*Financial Times*) and left-liberal “pro-Palestinian” (*Guardian*, *Independent*) British broadsheets. Sampling from the period of 20 December 2008 to 25 January 2009 resulted in over a thousand articles, comprising a total of 7830 paragraphs.

----- INSERT TABLE 1 AROUND HERE -----

Whilst some of the best examples of academic analysis of the Western media representation of the Israeli-Palestinian involve pure qualitative inquiries<sup>11</sup>, the large amount of data thus collected prompted the necessity in this case to start with a quantitative investigation.<sup>12</sup> To establish the framework for this, a codebook was constructed consisting of codes (and their definitions) with which each of the sample’s paragraphs would then be categorised.

There were cases, of course, where the exercise of coding was fairly straightforward (e.g., talking about the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories inevitably featured the word “occupation”). At other points, it was more difficult, but only in a technical sense (e.g., to decide whether Palestinian police qualifies as a civilian or combatant institution).<sup>15</sup> And in some cases it entailed more than a simple technical problem, and embodied political-moral assumptions (e.g., what is to be coded as “war crimes” when Hamas action is rarely classified as such by the newspapers). Yet what is important to see is that, as an act of turning words into numbers and thereby erasing what is divergent between utterances at the expense of what is similar, coding is *always* an interpretative and transformative act.<sup>16</sup> Any further analysis of the numbers created will be dependent on these acts of interpretation/transformation, and will be limited to the perspective that was decided to pursue.<sup>17</sup>

In other words, and as shall equally be borne out by the following section, the act of interpretation was already present at the heart of the quantitative process of the inquiry. Data were created and then made sense of with regard to a context that the researcher had to choose.

Whilst the act of contextualization and interpretation therefore played an important part in the quantitative phase of the study, they were positioned at the forefront in the qualitative phase. The question, namely, became how codes or “building blocks” themselves came in the British newspapers to be *built into* and *built up by* arguments about the war. How were these codes put together to constitute various argumentative contexts or perspectives? And how were these argumentative perspectives, in turn, re-constituted the codes themselves?

These questions were considered with regard to a smaller yet highly significant subsample of the database: the broadsheets’ editorials. They were analyzed utilizing an integrative version of discourse analysis, where discursive analysis of explicit local rhetoric co-existed both with the critical analysis of wider social-political-cultural frameworks of meaning and with affective contents that may have exerted impact on the newspapers’ constructions.<sup>18</sup> In other words, the focus of the analysis first of all encompassed the question of how elements of the text (ie, codes) are constructed in a persuasive

way and how therefore editorials created a micro-context for their arguments.<sup>19</sup> Second, attention was paid to broader, political and cultural frameworks of meaning that may form a macro-context or reservoir for this creation.<sup>20</sup> Finally, consideration was also given to the investments in these micro- and macro-contexts, and the possible affective sources that may sustain the visible constructions the editorials constructed.<sup>21</sup>

The aim of the present paper is not to give a systematic account of the findings of these endeavours, quantitative and qualitative.<sup>24</sup> Rather, it is to focus on two methodological implications of the analytic phase of the study. First, on the role contextualisation plays in the quantitative part of the study; and second, on the various ways in which quantitative and qualitative analysis may be related to each other.

### 3. Analyzing discourse

#### 3.1. Quantitative analysis of discourse

Once coding was concluded, the numerical figures generated by the process were divided into three interpretative clusters: those relating to fatalities, to action in war, and to historical context. Examples from the latter two will be used here to demonstrate the research process and the nature of quantitative analysis.

----- INSERT TABLE 2 AROUND HERE -----

Looking at Table 2, there appears a clear division on ideological lines between conservative (and “pro-Israel”) and (left-)liberal (and “critical of Israel”) newspapers<sup>25</sup>: the latter newspapers included more information about historical issues. At the same time, what Table 2 does not show could be even more important than what it does. For one thing, to say that there is a division between left and right does not mean that this division is a significant one. The percentages do not diverge from the average figure drastically, and, considering similar tables from the other two conceptual areas, we see that in *all* newspapers without exception the main emphasis was predominantly on action in war, with a secondary focus on the historical context and an even smaller one on fatalities.<sup>26</sup> Whatever the extent of the differences conveyed by Table 2 is, it seems to be a difference of degree rather than of kind.

For another thing, Table 2 is clearly not capable of addressing some of the most fundamental questions relating to the newspapers’ coverage of historical context. Namely, what do the percentages showcased by Table 2 actually mean? What exactly did the (left-)liberal tendency to write more about historical context consist of? What are the exact patterns of conservative versus (left-)liberal coverage? One can write about history for a variety of reasons, and one may therefore wonder which precise historical events were (not) chosen by the newspapers to represent the relevant historical context around the conflict. To understand what the numbers of Table 2 mean, we need more data, further context and, inevitably, more interpretation.

----- INSERT TABLE 3 AROUND HERE-----

Table 3 shows the distribution of “historical context” codes in the sample. Three types of information are represented regarding each combination of code and newspaper. First, the table shows how frequently a newspaper mentioned a code when it talked about historical context (i.e., within paper %). Second, it shows each newspaper’s share of a code when compared to how frequently the other newspapers wrote about that particular code (i.e., within code %). Third, it combines this latter figure with the overall importance of the code in the database and the importance the Gaza war *in general* played for the newspaper (cf., Table 1): it shows the divergence between how much we would expect

the newspaper to write about the code and how much it actually wrote about it (i.e., weighted divergence %).

These distinctions are clearly important. For instance, taken in themselves, both the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Times* can be said to overwhelmingly focus on the rockets Hamas fired into Israel before the war, at the expense of describing, say, the Israeli blockade of Gaza. They both devoted around twice as many paragraphs to the rockets than to the blockade, and this seems to be in clear contradistinction to the (left-)liberal newspapers where coverage was either similar (*Guardian* and *Independent*) or the blockade actually featured in more paragraphs than the rockets (*Financial Times*). However, the rather meagre weighted divergence percentages (-0.4 percent and +0.1 percent) of the conservative newspapers tell a different story. They suggest that the conservative newspapers' overall neglect of history actually prevailed *even* when it came to their critiquing Hamas. Empirically speaking, their interest in Hamas rockets was outweighed by their general disinterest in history.

As for the pattern of (left-)liberal coverage of historical context, the picture diverges to such an extent that any notion of distinct ideological poles must be questioned.

To begin with, there is no clear pattern at all that can be established in the *Independent's* coverage. On the one hand, the left-liberal newspaper wrote as much about the Israeli blockade of Gaza as it did about Hamas rockets fired into Israeli civilian territory before the war. On the other hand, it wrote hardly more about the blockade than would be expected, and less in fact about the issue of the Israeli occupation of Palestine territories than the fervently pro-Israeli *Daily Telegraph*. The reason why the *Independent* wrote more about the war appears thus to be simply that it devoted sizeable attention to historical events which its counterparts, left or right, largely found without significance (e.g., Israeli elections, Six Day War, etc).<sup>27</sup>

Regarding the *Financial Times*, at least some clear pattern seems to emerge. The liberal newspaper devoted considerable space to both the Israeli occupation and the Israeli blockade of Gaza. Coupled with its relative neglect of the Hamas rockets into Israel, its coverage may therefore be regarded as mostly critical of Israel's conduct. Certainly differing at face value, this actually mirrors in a deeper sense the conservative coverage where exclusive attention was paid to the Hamas rockets with the events of both the Israeli occupation and blockade remaining in the background.

Given its reputation as an anti-Israeli firebrand, it might be surprising that it is the *Guardian* where we find a pattern that meaningfully transcends a dichotomous "critical of Israel" versus "critical of Hamas" ideological divide. Although the publication frequently mentioned the Israeli blockade and the occupation, its weighted average percentage of the Hamas rockets is actually by far the highest amongst all newspapers. Thus, on the basis of these patterns, what distinguishes the *Guardian* from other newspapers is not that it critiqued Israelis or Palestinians/Hamas but that it consistently critiqued *both* sides of the story.<sup>28</sup>

Looking for patterns in data has thus proved to be a useful strategy to account for the meaning of the data, and showed thereby what we can gain by contextualizing the numerical findings. For another analytical strategy, let us now reconsider the accounts of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories in the *Guardian* and the *Financial Times*. Looking back at Table 3, we see that both newspapers wrote more about the occupation than any of their counterparts. Comparing them with each other, however, shows the clear superiority of the topic for the *Guardian*. It wrote more about it as regards within paper %, within code % and even weighted divergence %. On the basis of these figures, we can say that the empirical importance of the Israeli occupation for the *Guardian* unequivocally outweighs the topic's importance for the *Financial Times*.

However, this unequivocal picture changes considerably when examining the *association* of this code with that of the type of article where the paragraph in question appeared; more specifically, when considering at how many of the paragraphs devoted to occupation featured in editorials. What we find is that only one paragraph, a mere 4.3 percent of the *Guardian's* editorial output, featured the issue of the occupation, in comparison to a significantly larger 30 percent of the *Financial Times'*. In other

words, whilst Table 3 suggests that the issue of the occupation bore more quantitative importance for the *Guardian* than the *Financial Times*, a consideration of editorial space suggests that the *Financial Times'* remarks on occupation carry far more significance than those of the *Guardian's*.

Looking for patterns therefore needs to be complemented by another act of interpretation: looking for *associations in the data*. For a further example of this, let us consider the distribution of a single code: the Israeli army's dubious use of the chemical material white phosphorous (Human Rights Watch 2009).<sup>29</sup>

----- INSERT TABLE 4 AROUND HERE -----

Table 4 has been extracted from a table similar to Table 3, showing the distribution of codes in the "action in war" conceptual area.<sup>30</sup> Taking into consideration the lack of interest newspapers generally displayed regarding white phosphorous<sup>31</sup>, the figures are arguably unique regarding the entire sample, both on empirical and theoretical grounds. One newspaper clearly and unequivocally stands out in focusing on the issue of Israel's gravely problematic use of white phosphorous during the first Gaza war. However, contrary to all expectations, it is not one of the (left-)liberal newspapers where this issue is displayed the most frequently. *Nearly half* of the paragraphs written on the issue are found in *The Times*, even though the newspaper wrote only 16.3 percent of all paragraphs covering the Gaza war (cf., Table 1). Alongside the fact that it also devoted 10.3 percent of its "action in war" paragraphs to white phosphorous, this is a remarkable state of affairs as, at face value, the IDF's use of white phosphorous can only imply a critical perspective towards Israel. It would mean, then, that it was the ostensibly "pro-Israel" conservative newspaper that wrote by far the most about this most damning of aspects of the Israeli campaign.

However, this conclusion might again be somewhat premature. We can also look at *associations* between separate codes and inquire into the frequency of their co-presence in the same paragraphs. And the *association* of the code "white phosphorous" with that of "war crimes" appears to suggest a different picture from the one presented. Namely, it was in a mere 3.4 percent of its paragraphs featuring white phosphorous that *The Times* also mentioned war crimes. This does not only pale in comparison to the *Guardian* (15.5 percent) and the *Independent* (16.0 percent), but is less than half of even the *Daily Telegraph's* coverage (7.4 percent). Considering therefore the apparently clear-cut issue of white phosphorous in *The Times* in association with that of war crimes appears to punctuate any conclusions we may be inclined to make.

To sum up, then, this subsection has hopefully demonstrated that quantitative data do not speak for themselves. They need interpretation: to understand their meaning we need to put them into the context of more data. Yet if this is so, the subsection also demonstrated the potential benefits of further acts of contextualization, such as considering how codes are *built into* and *built up by* narratives and arguments. Pursuing the meaning of our data, it is these questions that will now be examined as we turn from the quantitative approach to that of qualitative discourse analysis .

### 3.2. Qualitative analysis of discourse

In what follows, certain instances of qualitative analysis will be highlighted to illustrate possible relationships between quantitative and qualitative approaches to discourse. Looking at the newspapers' editorials and examining the overall critical argument they constructed regarding the war, the three issues to be examined will follow on from some of the quantitative findings which have surfaced in the previous section. Firstly, the *Daily Telegraph's* coverage of Hamas rockets and historical context will be further investigated; then the *Financial Times'* rendering of the Israeli blockade of Gaza and occupation of Palestinian territories will be looked at; finally, *The Times'* unique engagement with white phosphorous will be scrutinized.

As we remember from Tables 2 and 3, whilst on the whole neglecting the issue of historical context<sup>32</sup>, the *Daily Telegraph* (in common with *The Times*) devoted considerable attention to Hamas rockets. Indeed, it does not take much effort to uncover its standard argument regarding rockets. It can be found early on in the conservative newspaper's first editorial on the war:

Only one group of people can have derived any satisfaction from the footage of blood-covered children being pulled from the rubble in Gaza: the fanatics of Hamas. This terrorist organisation has been firing rockets into Israel ever since the breakdown of the ceasefire, in the hope of provoking a furious Israeli response. And that is precisely what materialised. (*Daily Telegraph* 29 December)

What is remarkable is that throughout the *Telegraph's* coverage of the war, its editorial position regarding Hamas rockets as *casus belli* coexisted with the newspapers' lack of specification regarding their material consequences. In fact, the only information we learned pointed to the very limited number of casualties they had resulted in. How to reconcile this paradox? Why are rockets quantitatively important (cf., Tables 2 and 3) and why do they qualitatively constitute the cause of war for the *Telegraph* if, at the same time, they are so insignificant? We may find the answer leaving the issue of the actual material damage they cause and consider their provenance: Hamas.

One would think that adjectives as "terrorist" and, elsewhere, "antisemitic" (*Daily Telegraph*, 30 December) explicitly convey the *Daily Telegraph's* disdain as regards Hamas. Yet, arguably, the implicit characterization is even further reaching. Not only is the organisation suggested to bear no scruples regarding Israeli civilian casualties; these "fanatics" gain perverse satisfaction from the violent death of those who are nominally their own people. What is more, in the absence of any factor helping us understand why Hamas would be as it is, this meaning becomes an ahistorical essence ascribed to it. Hamas, therefore, stands in the *Daily Telegraph's* argument for timeless and total destruction and it is this *essential* destruction that is embodied by the rockets: their lack of material importance is disproportionately matched by the timeless nihilism of their provenance.

This analysis is certainly in line with the *Daily Telegraph's* relatively high frequency of occasioning the topic of Hamas rockets. Yet it also accounts for the lack of any historical context in the newspaper. Namely, it suggests that neglect of historical context in the *Telegraph* did not occur due to some oversight. It is the newspaper's focus on Hamas rockets as embodiments of timeless evil which makes historical context relatively speaking unimportant. The features defining the conflict are constructed thus as essentially ahistorical.

Let us now compare the *Daily Telegraph's* rendering of Hamas with that of the *Financial Times*'.

Yet Israel, backed by the US and the mute assent of Europe, has sought to isolate Hamas. After Hamas fought it out with Fatah and ejected it from Gaza 18 months ago, the 1.5m Gazans have suffered a blockade rationing food, fuel and medicine entering the enclave.

This policy makes Palestinians dependent on Hamas for basic needs. It makes violence an attractive alternative both when (Hamas) truces fail to lift the blockade and (Fatah) peace talks fail to deliver peace. It is in any case delusional for Israel to imagine it can make peace with half the Palestinians while waging war on the other half. (*Financial Times* 29 December)

The highly important novelty here is not that Hamas has all of a sudden become a positive character. Perhaps painted in less vivid colours than in the conservative newspaper, Hamas's action is still described in the *Financial Times* as "violent". This description is rendered in a context, however, where Israeli action (i.e., the blockade) is constructed as being partly constitutive of Hamas's identity and action. Whilst obviously not demonizing Hamas, it does not annul the Islamist organisation's responsibility either. Rather, it aspires to make sense of it with recourse to historical, political, social factors, and, as such, it opens it up for context and understanding.

It has been noted in the previous section that the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and blockade of Gaza were rendered significant by the *Financial Times* not simply by their sheer frequency but their being occasioned in editorial pieces. In line with this, what we see in the extract above is how they are weaved into an argument: how the concept of the blockade is constructed so that it gives a certain meaning to Hamas and its action (i.e., rockets), and how the State of Israel, rather than standing apart from the essence that defines Hamas, becomes *constitutive of what Hamas is and does*.

Indeed, the *Financial Times* proved to be the *only* British broadsheet in which a systematic effort to put the main agents' and their action *in historical-political context* was discernible.<sup>33</sup> It was the only newspaper where an attempt was made to attribute the reason for the conflict not to essences residing with one agent or the other, but to the outcome of the relationships between Hamas and the State of Israel:

Israel's refusal to treat with Hamas is understandable, if futile. The destructive fury of its assault on Gaza was not only intended to get over the relative failure of its 2006 war on Hizbollah in Lebanon. Israel was also determined not to repeat the outcome to its 1996 Lebanon war, which ended with codified and internationally underwritten rules of engagement with Hizbollah.

But Israeli unilateralism is a blind alley. Its unilateral withdrawal from Gaza in 2005 has resolved nothing. The existence of organisations such as Hamas and Hizbollah – which both arose as responses to Israeli occupation – cannot simply be wished away. (*Financial Times*, 5 January)

As such, extending the quantitative findings, qualitative analysis can demonstrate that the *differentia specifica* that characterized the *Financial Times'* editorials was not simply the quantity of the information they deployed about certain facts implying a perspective critical of Israel. It was the use of these facts and actions to assist the understanding of other facts and actions. Indeed, it is exactly this systematic effort which lent credit to its overall and powerful critical assessment of the situation:

It must be remembered that the root cause of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the Israeli occupation – which Israel's 2005 withdrawal from Gaza was meant to consolidate, through its subsequent expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Arab east Jerusalem. (*Financial Times* 29 December)

What qualitative analysis has been demonstrating, then, is the importance of historical-political context in the place of ahistorical essences for the *Financial Times* in understanding the war.<sup>34</sup> As such, the liberal newspaper might not have written as much about the occupation as the *Guardian* and it might not have condemned Hamas with the rhetorical flourish of the *Daily Telegraph*; yet the systematic invocation of political and historical context, unparalleled elsewhere in the broadsheets, made it construct the most radical of arguments. This is not simply as it was the *Financial Times'* line of argumentation only that could build a systematic and consistent case for the historical importance of the Israeli occupation underlying the present conflict, but also as in their story isolated essences became replaced by human relationships. That is, Israel became partly responsible for and constitutive of who Hamas was and how it acted, with Hamas equally responsible and constitutive of who Israel was and how it acted. The "other", that is, became constitutive of "us".<sup>35</sup>

So far, qualitative analysis helped us to further develop certain threads of analysis which were suggested by the quantitative examination. Words and numbers in this methodology have formed a relationship where frequency was complemented by substance and relationships. However, because qualitative analysis has been shown here to have the potential to examine what numbers stand for, this also means that qualitative findings might *transform* certain quantitative ones. It is just such a transformative (or even subversive) potential that might be witnessed when examining the final example, *The Times'* coverage of white phosphorous.



As mentioned earlier, it was with a uniquely high frequency that the conservative broadsheet occasioned the topic of white phosphorous. In line with this, alone amongst the British newspapers, white phosphorous and the dilemma of Israeli responsibility also surfaced regularly in *The Times'* editorials. Its argument culminated in the following paragraph:

White phosphorus is illegal under international law when used in built-up areas, but a legitimate weapon of war when used to provide cover for troops in open country. There is scant evidence of the IDF using it deliberately against civilians, but northern Gaza, where the fighting is concentrated, is one of the most densely populated places in the world. Civilian casualties were inevitable, and the deep burns that white phosphorus can cause are virtually untreatable. The longer that the IDF equivocate about its use, the more ammunition they hand to those who would accuse them of war crimes. (*The Times*, 16 January)

This paragraph is well and truly extraordinary. The newspaper asserts white phosphorous to be illegal when used in built-up areas, and Gaza to be “one of the most densely populated places in the world”. Adopting this perspective, there appears to be no other possible conclusion than calling for some independent investigation to look into Israel’s use of the chemical weapon. Yet, not only does the newspaper refrain from this conclusion, it attributes such a call to unspecified yet somewhat suspicious others (i.e., “those who would accuse [Israel] of war crimes”).

It would appear, then, that a closer scrutiny might transform the perspective from which we look at white phosphorous in *The Times*. Its coverage certainly cannot simply be identified with a deployment of a critical perspective, as the newspaper appears simultaneously to critique Israel *and* recoil from such criticism.

Yet qualitative research is not only transformative here in the sense that it casts a different light on quantitative endeavours. It is also transformative because it leads to a new set of research questions, transforming, therefore, our line of inquiry. Namely, what the extract above demonstrates is that when a perspective different from *The Times'* generally moderate pro-Israeli attitude “intrudes” into its critical horizon, it is as if a dynamic is set in motion to establish the original (black and white) state of affairs. Why would this be the case, we may ask? As the newspaper does not explicitly attend to the issue, we cannot be sure. Two things, however, seem clear enough. First, it is the statement that Israel does not seem to “deliberately” target civilians that appears to trump the perspective that is critical of Israel. Thus, the meaning of Israel’s action for some reason has become implicitly identified with the subjective intention of Israel. Second, the idea of an independent critical inquiry into Israeli action coincides with the emergence of the suspect characters that would use white phosphorous merely as “ammunition [to] accuse Israel of war crimes” (cf., Kaposi 2016). Thus, the topic of scrutiny has implicitly shifted from Israeli responsibility to the dubious activities of unspecified others waging rhetorical war on Israel itself.

Why would Israel’s intention possibly trump other evidence? And why does a critical inquiry into its responsibility connote the suspicious and possibly immoral position of an unspecified other? Again, these questions may throw some unexpected light on the case and do not simply explain or extend quantitative findings – the methodological point is that a qualitative approach helps us to understand what dynamics may be in place when it comes to the issue of Israel’s criticism or support. It has a potential to transform our enquiry in its entirety, and direct our attention to the core questions underpinning our inquiry.

#### 4. Discussion

What the preceding examples of analysis have attempted to demonstrate is the importance of a method of systematic reflection where, instead of the urge to reach final conclusions, meaning is

established via the continuous posing and accounting for dilemmas. The analysis started with a quantitative method capable of describing large swathes of data and of establishing findings empirically characterizing the entire dataset. Yet, it did not stop at these numbers, equating them with what is true or contrasting them with what should have been right. Rather, it acknowledged the need to interpret quantitative data by contextualizing it. Two such ways of contextualization were demonstrated: looking for patterns and for associations.

As the activity of interpretation and the ever-present necessity of contextualization came to the fore, the image we encountered was not the usual one of quantitative research. Instead of testing hypotheses and relentlessly marching towards some conclusive truth, what we saw was an analytical strategy providing us with suggestions needing confirmation, dilemmas to be pondered and, ultimately, new vistas worthy of exploration. And likewise, the categorical division between quantitative and qualitative enquiries disappeared: quantitative findings have become scrutinized both in terms of how they are *built in* arguments and narratives, and in terms of how they are *built up* by arguments and narratives.<sup>37</sup>

In what followed, instances of qualitative analysis were introduced, with a special regard to how they related to quantitative findings. First of all, we saw how qualitative inquiry could simply account for quantitative findings, as was the case of the *Daily Telegraph's* explanation of Hamas rockets. Yet, it could also make sense of relations between quantitative suggestions and thus help us extend them, as with the *Financial Times'* editorial rendering of the blockade and the occupation. Most intriguingly, we also witnessed it transforming quantitative findings and redirecting the research process by posing new dilemmas, most clearly with *The Times'* editorial engagement with white phosphorous.

Indeed, qualitative research demonstrated the potential not simply to transform but to downright *subvert* quantitative "findings": that is to say, to reflectively redirect our attention to the foundations of the quantitative approach, and to pose questions about the very assumptions which have made quantitative "findings" possible. This paper will now conclude by such an act of subversion and the concomitant deconstruction of one's research findings.

As has been suggested previously, the *Guardian's* coverage of the historical context of the war could be distinguished from the other newspapers. Counter-intuitively, perhaps, the newspaper did not just critique Israel but extended its critical perspective to both agents of the war by equally devoting space to the Israeli blockade and occupation, *and* to Hamas rockets. Yet moving now beyond the sheer frequency of paragraphs, let us have a look at two descriptions of the Hamas rockets on the left-liberal broadsheets' editorial pages.

In its first editorial on the war we read:

We do not know how many civilians died in the assault which Israel launched on Hamas in Gaza at 11.30am on Saturday, because Israel prevents foreign journalists as well as Israeli ones from entering the strip. But we do know that the air raids brought the biggest total loss of life on a single day in Gaza in 40 years: more than 230 Palestinians. *The death toll by last night had climbed to nearly 290, with more than 700 wounded. This in reply to hundreds of rockets from Hamas militants which killed one Israeli in six months. But the equation is always like this.* (*Guardian* 29 December – emphasis added)

In its last editorial of the war we read:

But what lesson has Hamas been taught? Has the bloodshed re-established the deterrence that Israel lost in Lebanon two and half years ago? Has it dramatically increased the penalty that Hamas and other militant groups incur *for continuing to fire rockets at the civilian population in southern Israel?* Israel makes great claims for the military blow Hamas has suffered, but as yet has produced little concrete evidence. (*Guardian*, 19 January – emphasis added)

The first characterization implies the relatively meagre material consequences that result from Hamas rockets, establishing their lack of significance and thereby the lack of validity of any justification of the war with recourse to them. The second characterization leaves the issue of material consequences altogether out of consideration and focuses on the morally most horrific intention one can deploy in a war, establishing thereby Hamas' morally reprehensible nature.

To pose the obvious question, which of these rockets did we count when quantitatively analyzing the *Guardian*? The answer within the boundaries of this paper is impossible to give. What has to suffice is the conclusion that a reflective multi-method approach can never stop and has to ponder not simply how to progress from its existing findings but also the foundations of those very findings.<sup>38</sup> Methodologically speaking, this means that the approach advocated here is the opponent of both research as political conviction (where it is the political or moral good which the findings have to conform to<sup>39</sup>) and research as some disembodied scientific objectivity (where the researcher gives way to supposedly automatic, non-human procedures<sup>40</sup>). Decisions taken are never automatic and derive from the process of continuous reflection, or what Hannah Arendt simply called "thinking"<sup>41</sup>, whereby the point of the research activity is often to examine its own assumptions and to thereby disrupt itself.<sup>42</sup>

This might of course be seen as dangerously apolitical and defeatist, lacking in certainty and therefore also in political and moral vision as regards the Israeli-Palestinian predicament. Yet such a characterization will hopefully miss the point, for there is in fact a positive idea underlying the reflective multi-method inquiry that this paper advocates: the idea of meaning being inevitably multi-faceted and residing not in essences but human relations. Such an understanding of research becomes politically and morally important, especially in a context where facts and truths are often presented with conviction but without thought, and where alternative perspectives to the speaker's are often neglected or found threatening. Indeed, such a mode of inquiry could be argued to be subversive and dangerous, as it forces people to reconsider not simply intellectual foundations, but the very idea, somehow difficult to accept, that the "other" might have some constitutive influence on "us".<sup>43</sup>

#### Editorial sources:

*Daily Telegraph*, Hamas and Iran pose a threat to the world. 29 December 2008:17.

*Daily Telegraph*, Peace in Gaza is in the hands of Hamas. 30 December 2008: 17.

*Financial Times*, Bombing Gaza is not a solution. 29 December 2008: 8.

*Financial Times*, A dangerous gamble in Gaza. 5 January 2009: 10.

*Guardian*, Killing a two-state solution: Gaza air strikes. 29 December: 26.

*Guardian*, Gaza: Brutal lessons. 19 January: 30.

*The Times*, Israel's cause is just but some of its tactics are self defeating. 16 January 2009: 2.

#### Tables

Table 1: Distribution of paragraphs across the newspapers
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	<i>Guardian</i>	<i>Independent</i>	<i>Daily Telegraph</i>	<i>The Times</i>	<i>Financial Times</i>	Total
Paragraphs	2460	1595	1276	1276	1223	7830
% of Total	31.4	20.4	16.3	16.3	15.6	100

Table 2: Historical context across the newspapers

	<i>Daily Telegraph</i>	<i>The Times</i>	<i>Guardian</i>	<i>Independent</i>	<i>Financial Times</i>	SUMMA
Paragraphs	242	286	667	443	318	1956
% of Total	242/1276 19%	286/1276 22.4%	667/2460 27.1%	443/1595 27.8%	318/1223 26%	1956/7830 25%

	Table 3: Historical context codes across the newspapers											
		Daily Telegraph		The Times		Guardian		Independent		Financial Times		SUMM.
		within paper %	within code % weighted divergence	within paper %	within code % weighted divergence	within paper %	within code % weighted divergence	within paper %	within code % weighted divergence	within paper %	within code % weighted divergence	within paper %
Other historical events		14.4	11 (-0.8)	16.5	15.8 (-0.1)	16.3	40.8 (1.4)	13.9	22.2 (0.3)	9.9	10.2 (-0.8)	-
Hamas rockets fired into Southern Israel (before the war)		16.0	13.2 (-0.4)	16.7	17.2 (0.1)	14.4	38.7 (1.0)	10.9	18.8 (-0.2)	11.0	12.1 (-0.5)	-
The Israeli blockade on Gaza		8.9	8.1 (-1.0)	7.9	9 (-0.9)	14.0	41.8 (1.3)	10.9	20.9 (0.1)	16.5	20.3 (0.6)	-
The 2006 Lebanon war		6.2	8.8 (-0.6)	10.2	18.1 (0.1)	5.8	26.7 (-0.4)	8.6	25.5 (0.4)	10.9	20.8 (0.4)	-
Palestinian smuggling of weapons through tunnels under the Gaza-Egyptian border		8.1	12.4 (-0.3)	9.7	18.4 (0.2)	5.7	28.4 (-0.2)	6.4	20.4 (0.0)	10.0	20.4 (0.4)	-
Israeli elections		6.5	13.4 (-0.2)	4.7	12.1 (-0.2)	3.4	22.8 (-0.5)	7.0	30.2 (0.5)	7.8	21.5 (0.3)	-
Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories		4.3	9.4 (-0.3)	2.1	5.8 (-0.5)	6.9	49.6 (0.9)	3.8	17.3 (-0.2)	6.1	18 (0.1)	-
Palestinian legislative elections		1.3	3.7 (-0.5)	3.9	13.9 (-0.1)	5.0	46.3 (0.6)	4.1	24.1 (0.1)	3.2	12 (-0.1)	-
Palestinian 'civil war'		3.9	11.3 (-0.2)	4.7	17 (0.0)	2.6	24.5 (-0.3)	3.4	20.8 (0.0)	6.8	26.4 (0.4)	-
6-month ceasefire between Hamas and Israel		2.9	9.9 (-0.2)	2.4	9.9 (-0.2)	4.7	51.6 (0.7)	2.5	17.6 (-0.1)	2.4	11 (-0.2)	-
Israeli withdrawal from Gaza		2.6	10.5 (-0.2)	3.9	19.7 (0.1)	3.2	42.1 (0.3)	1.4	11.8 (-0.2)	2.9	15.8 (0.0)	-

The end of the 6-month ceasefire		3.3	13.2 (-0.1)	2.9	14.5 (0.0)	2.9	38.2 (0.2)	2.5	21.1 (0.0)	2.4	13.2 (-0.1)	-
Palestinian terror		2.9	18 (0.0)	2.1	16 (0.0)	1.6	32 (0.0)	1.7	22 (0.0)	1.5	12 (-0.1)	-
The 'Six-Day War'		1.3	8.2 (-0.1)	0.5	4.1 (-0.2)	2.3	46.9 (0.3)	2.8	36.7 (0.3)	0.5	4.1 (-0.2)	-
The Iraq war		3.3	20.4 (0.1)	2.1	16.3 (0.0)	1.8	36.7 (0.1)	2.0	26.5 (0.1)	0.0	0 (-0.3)	-
The Palestinian 'nakba'		1.0	6.2 (-0.2)	1.6	12.5 (-0.1)	1.4	29.2 (0.0)	3.3	43.8 (0.4)	1.0	8.3 (-0.1)	-
Palestinian intifadas		2.0	13.6 (0.0)	1.3	11.4 (-0.1)	1.2	27.3 (-0.1)	1.9	27.3 (0.1)	2.2	20.5 (0.1)	-
The first Arab-Israeli war		1.0	7.1 (-0.1)	1.0	9.5 (-0.1)	1.5	35.7 (0.1)	3.1	47.6 (0.4)	0.0	0 (-0.2)	-
The war in Afghanistan		2.9	28.1 (0.1)	1.3	15.6 (0.0)	1.2	37.5 (0.1)	0.9	18.8 (0.0)	0.0	0 (-0.2)	-
Other Arab-Israeli wars		0.0	0 (-0.2)	0.3	3.2 (-0.1)	0.6	19.4 (-0.1)	3.1	64.5 (0.5)	1.0	12.9 (0.0)	-
Israeli military incursion into Gaza		0.7	7.7 (-0.1)	0.5	7.7 (-0.1)	1.1	42.3 (0.1)	1.2	30.8 (0.1)	0.7	11.5 (0.0)	-
Holocaust		0.3	4.2 (-0.1)	2.6	41.7 (0.2)	0.5	20.8 (-0.1)	1.2	33.3 (0.1)	0.0	0 (-0.1)	-
The Oslo peace process		0.3	4.5 (-0.1)	0.5	9.1 (-0.1)	0.5	22.7 (-0.1)	0.9	27.3 (0.1)	1.9	36.4 (0.2)	-



2.8	11.8 (-0.2)	10.3	46.9 (1.3)	3.6	25.4 (-0.3)	2.7	11 (-0.4)	1.6	4.8 (-0.5)	-	100 (0)
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<sup>1</sup> Brian Klug, "A time to move on," in *Time to speak out: Independent Jewish voices on Israel, Zionism and Jewish identity*, ed. Anne Karpf, Brian Klug, Jacqueline Rose, Barbara Rosenbaum, (London: Verso, 2008), 286-296, 287.

<sup>2</sup> c.f., Steven Beller, "In Zion's hall of mirrors: a comment on Neuer Antisemitismus?" *Patterns of Prejudice*, 41 (2007): 215-238; Matti Bunzl, *Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: Hatreds all and new in Europe*, (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2007); Robert Fine, "Fighting with phantoms: a contribution to the debate on antisemitism in Europe," *Patterns of Prejudice*, 43 (2009): 459-479; Raimond Gaita, ed, *Gaza: Morality, law and politics*. (Crowley: UWA Publishing, 2010); David Hirsh, "Accusations of malicious intent in debates about the Palestine-Israel conflict and about antisemitism," *Transversal* 1 (2010): 47-77; Klug, "A time to move on"; Idem, *Offence: The Jewish case*, (London: Seagull Books, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> See Amy Gutmann, *Identity in democracy*, (Oxford: Princeton UP, 2003); Will Kymlicka, *Liberalism, community and culture*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Michael Walzer, *Politics and passion: Towards a more egalitarian liberalism*, (London: Yale UP, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> C.f., Greg Philo and Mike Berry, *Bad news from Israel*, (London: Pluto Press, 2004); Greg Philo and Mike Berry, *More bad news from Israel*, (London: Pluto Press, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> C.f., Howard Friel and Richard Falk, *Israel-Palestine on record: How the "New York Times" misreports conflict in the Middle East*, (London: Verso, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> Author (2014)

<sup>7</sup> Author 2013; John E. Richardson, *Analysing newspapers: An approach from critical discourse analysis*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, *The 'Gaza war': a strategic analysis*, (Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Adam Horowitz, Lizzy Ratner, Philip Weiss, eds, *The Goldstone Report*, (New York: Nation Books, 2011), 295, 311; c.f., Amnesty International, "Israel/Gaza: Operation 'Cast Lead': 22 days of death and destruction." <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE15/015/2009/en/> (accessed 19 September 2015); The State of Israel, "Gaza Operation investigations: update," [http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA\\_Graphics/MFA%20Gallery/Documents/GazaOperationInvestigationsUpdate.pdf](http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA_Graphics/MFA%20Gallery/Documents/GazaOperationInvestigationsUpdate.pdf)

(accessed 19 September 2015); The State of Israel, "Gaza Operation investigations, second update," [http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA\\_Graphics/MFA%20Gallery/Documents/GazaUpdateJuly2010.pdf](http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA_Graphics/MFA%20Gallery/Documents/GazaUpdateJuly2010.pdf) (accessed 13 September 2015); Human Rights Watch, "Rain of fire: Israel's unlawful use of white phosphorous in Gaza," <https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/03/25/rain-fire/israels-unlawful-use-white-phosphorus-gaza> (accessed 13 September 2015).

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Asha Kasher, "The ethics of protective edge," *Jewish Review of Books* 5 (2014): 13-18; Avishai Margalit and Michael Walzer, "Israel: Civilians and combatants," *New York Review of Books* 56 (2009): 21-22; Michael Walzer, "On proportionality: How much is too much in war?" *The New Republic*, (2009); Idem, "Responsibility and disproportionality in state and nonstate wars," *Parameters*, 39 (2009): 40-52.

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, Jiska Engelbert and Patrick McCurdy, "The plasticity of impartiality: On the BBC's argument not to carry the 2009 Gaza DEC appeal," *Critical Discourse Studies* 8 (2011): 183-201; Idem, "A threat to impartiality: Reconstructing and situating the BBC's denial of the 2009 DEC appeal for Gaza," *Media War & Conflict*, 5 (2012): 101-117; John E. Richardson and Leon Barkho, "Reporting Israel/Palestine: ethnographic insights into the verbal and visual rhetoric of BBC journalism," *Journalism Studies*, 15 (2009): 594-622.

<sup>12</sup> Kimberly Neuendorf, *The content analysis guidebook*, (London: Sage, 2001); Philo and Berry, *More bad news...*

<sup>15</sup> C.f., Horowitz, Ratner, Weiss, *Goldstone Report*, 60-70; The State of Israel, "Operation in Gaza," 89-95.



<sup>16</sup> Richardson, *Analyzing newspapers...*

<sup>17</sup> Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, (London: Cambridge UP, 1991).

<sup>18</sup> Author, 2013.

<sup>19</sup> Derek Edwards and Jonathan Potter, *Discursive Psychology*, (London: Sage, 1992).

<sup>20</sup> Richardson, *Analyzing newspapers...*; Margaret Wetherell, "Positioning and interpretative repertoires: conversation analysis and post-structuralism in dialogue," *Discourse and Society* 9 (1998): 387-412.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Billig, "A psychoanalytic discursive psychology: from consciousness to unconsciousness," *Discourse Studies* 8 (2006): 17-24; Stephen Frosh, Anne Phoenix, Robert Pattman, "Taking a stand: Using psychoanalysis to explore the positioning of subjects in discourse," *British Journal of Social Psychology* 42 (2003): 39-53.

<sup>24</sup> Author, 2014, 2016.

<sup>25</sup> See David Cesarani, "Anti-Zionism in Britain, 1922-2002: Continuities and discontinuities," *Journal of Israeli History* 25 (2006): 131-160.; Bernard Harrison, *The resurgence of anti-Semitism: Jews, Israel, and liberal opinion*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006).

<sup>26</sup>

Fatalities across newspapers						
	<i>Daily Telegraph</i>	<i>The Times</i>	<i>Guardian</i>	<i>Independent</i>	<i>Financial Times</i>	SUMMA
Paragraphs	204	156	333	261	99	1053
% of Total	204/1276 16.0%	156/1276 12.2%	333/2460 13.5%	261/1595 16.4%	99/1223 8.1%	1053/7830 13.4%

Action in war across newspapers						
	<i>Daily Telegraph</i>	<i>The Times</i>	<i>Guardian</i>	<i>Independent</i>	<i>Financial Times</i>	Summa
Paragraphs	681	671	1157	646	518	3673
% of Total	681/1276 53.4%	671/1276 52.6%	1157/2460 47.0%	646/1595 40.5%	518/1223 42.4%	3673/7830 46.9%

<sup>27</sup> The reason for this is probably the unprecedented dominance of the *Independent's* comment and analysis coverage by its highly idiosyncratic columnist, Robert Fisk. See Author 2014, 99-103, 189, 193.

<sup>28</sup> Of course, as we recognize the importance of interpretative activity in making sense of data, we also have to recognize the contingency of these decisions. Interpretation here was based on an important assumption as priority was given to but three codes: Hamas rockets, Israeli blockade of Gaza and the Israeli occupation of territories. "Patterns" in this sense were limited to the three codes and neglected any of the other ones. This seemed a reasonable decision: each of the codes was quite prevalent in the data and, uniquely amongst "historical context" codes, they may be taken to embody critical perspectives regarding the agents of the war. It can of course come with a variety of intensity and quality, but mentioning the occupation and the blockade generally implies a perspective that is critical of Israel, whereas occasioning the rockets cannot but invoke criticism towards Hamas.

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<sup>29</sup> White phosphorous is a highly incendiary chemical material. It was used during the war by the Israeli forces as smokescreen and as such not automatically illegally. However, its use in heavily built-up areas is very problematic even as an obscurant, for its incendiary nature is almost inevitable to cause serious side-effects. It is for this reason that all the human rights investigations condemned Israel's manner of deploying white phosphorous, with the Human Rights Watch concluding that it was "indiscriminate or disproportionate, and indicate[d] the commission of war crimes" (Human Rights Watch, "Rains of fire," 65). Although at the time Israel heavily contested these positions, in 2013 it announced that it would fully stop using the material in built-up areas. See Human Rights Watch, "Israel: High Court rejects legal ban on white phosphorous," <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/07/12/israel-high-court-rejects-legal-ban-white-phosphorus> (accessed 13 September 2015).

<sup>30</sup> For the full table, see Author, 2014, 50-51.

<sup>31</sup> A mere 2.9 percent of all paragraphs in the sample, with 4.3percent of all "action in war" paragraphs, were devoted to white phosphorous. See Author, 2014, 47.

<sup>32</sup> That is, of course, "historical context" as operationalized by this study in the form of codes. See Author, 2014, 56-70.

<sup>33</sup> For our purposes and surely reflecting a sorry state of affairs: *any* historical-political context. As is elaborated on elsewhere, the overwhelming characteristic of newspapers was a focus on categorical blame (and innocence) in the place of degrees of responsibility. It is this pattern that the *Financial Times* broke. See Author, 2014, 2016.

<sup>34</sup> See footnote above.

<sup>35</sup> As is elaborated elsewhere, the *Financial Times* was not capable of sustaining this relational perspective throughout its editorial output. Its coverage of Israel's conduct began to exhibit the essentializing characteristics of the rest of the newspapers. See Author, 2014, 2016.

<sup>37</sup> The present inquiry happened to have concluded with the qualitative phase. Yet there was no theoretical reason to stop there. Qualitative findings can in turn inform further quantitative investigations.

<sup>38</sup> Stephen Frosh, "Disintegrating qualitative research," *Theory and Psychology*, 17 (2007): 635-653.

<sup>39</sup> See Martyn Hammersley, *Questioning qualitative research: Critical essays*, (London: Sage, 2008).

<sup>40</sup> See Richard Rorty, "The pragmatist's progress: Umberto Eco on interpretation," in idem, *Philosophy and social hope* (London, England: Penguin Books, 1999), 131-137.

<sup>41</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The life of the mind*, (London: Harcourt, Inc, 1978).

<sup>42</sup> See Frosh, "Disintegrating qualitative research".

<sup>43</sup> Jessica Benjamin, *Shadow of the other: Intersubjectivity and gender in psychoanalysis*, (London: Routledge, 1998).