THE POSITIONING OF WEB-BASED MEDIA WATCHDOGS IN THE COVERAGE OF THE PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI CONFLICT:
A BOURDIEUSIAN ANALYSIS

A thesis submitted to The University of Manchester for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Humanities

2017

Amani Lowey

School of Arts, Languages and Cultures
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A consistent focus of attention in a media-saturated world, thirsty for instant analyses of even the most complex of issues and avid of quick ready-made answers, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is being extensively documented world-wide on a daily basis and has been the subject of many research projects. The constant claims from both pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli groups of unbalance and unfairness in the coverage of the conflict reflect the extent to which the agents involved in the conflict are emotionally invested in the relevant issues. As the emergence of new media has helped the rise of advocacy journalism, little or no sustained research has been undertaken so far to examine the practices and positioning of web-based media groups engaged in reporting on the Middle East conflict, from either or both perspectives. This comparative study will take as its data four web-based media watchdogs (or groups that describe themselves as such) whose main focus is the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, two explicitly pro-Palestinian and two explicitly pro-Israeli. Bourdieu's field theory and his concept of symbolic violence will be used as the main theoretical framework in order to study the positioning of these groups in the 'journalistic field': these alternative media outlets present themselves as challengers to the dominating agents in the journalistic field (the mainstream media) yet they depend on capital acquisition (be it political, economic or symbolic) for their survival. It is a delicate balancing act for the dominated agents to appear as credible, influential agents of change without jeopardizing their position as outsiders to the dominating field; this constant dilemma will be at the heart of the present thesis.
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à Maxime et Juliette
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to give special thanks to my supervisory team, especially to Professor Matthew Philpotts for his consistent, patient and kind guidance since the start of this journey. Only with his expertise and his grounded, relevant and knowledgeable input have I felt safe crossing the finish line. Thanks also to Professor Mona Baker, who took a chance on the project at its inception. I would also like to thank my parents and my two sisters for their unwavering support and generosity throughout – there simply would have been no project without them. Thanks to Dr Patrick Druggan for his time, his technical expertise and above all, his friendship. Thanks also to my friends Jen, Marie, Nelly, Elisabeth and Catherine and to my work colleagues Elizabeth, Nathalie, Aurélie and Laëtitia for their constant words of encouragement and for helping me keep things in perspective. Most importantly, my biggest thanks, apologies and gratitude are for my son Maxime and my daughter Juliette for their resilience, their understanding, their patience, their incredible support, their uplifting happiness and unconditional love through the best and the worst of times.
INTRODUCTION

Possibly more than most conflicts which have dominated international news in the past three decades, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has sparked unprecedented levels of controversy and heated passions the world over, with lobby groups and official government bodies located both inside and outside of the borders where the conflict is taking place weighing on the conflict - most notably in the US, Europe, Australia and Canada - accusing the media of bias towards one or the other party in the conflict.

For instance, on the 12th of June 2014, three Israeli teenagers were abducted in the Israeli colony of Avon Shvut in Gush Etzion, in the Occupied West Bank Territories, whilst hitchhiking back from their religious schools. The incident was related in all mainstream media internationally as headline news, both in the newspapers and on the televised news. Following the event, the Israeli government launched ‘Operation Brother’s Keeper’ in response to the killings: over 400 arrests were made, over 2000 homes were searched and 6 Palestinian civilians were killed, including a teenager. The murder of the three boys was firmly condemned by US President Obama, UK Prime Minister David Cameron and many other high-profile international political figures. The bodies of the three boys were found three weeks later in a shallow grave, after an intensive manhunt. The events following the discovery of the bodies, interviews with
grieving members of the families, the teenagers’ funerals, the arrest and trial two culprits were consistently relayed across all mainstream media.

The media treatment of the tragedy sparked controversy amongst pro-Palestinian activists, and claims of pro-Israeli bias started to appear after the incident. For instance, Palestinian journalist Susan Abulhawa notes in the Hindu Times that prior to the kidnapping of the three Israeli colons, two Palestinian teenagers were murdered by Israeli soldiers yet their killings did not receive the same treatment in the news or from political leader; for Abulhawa (2014), ‘although hundreds of Palestinian children are kidnapped, brutalised or killed by Israel, there is rarely, if ever, such a reaction from the world’. For Owen Jones, a British political activist and Guardian columnist, ‘the macabre truth is that Israeli life is deemed by the western media to be worth more than a Palestinian life – this is the hierarchy of death at work’. Jones (2014) is particularly critical of the BBC’s coverage of the events following the death of the three Israeli teenagers, specifically the fact that the murders of the 5 Palestinian adults and the Palestinian teenagers by the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) were not as widely reported. In a letter to the Guardian, musician and Human Rights activist Brian Eno (2014) also referred to the killings of the three Israelis and argued that the event ‘received an entirely disproportionate treatment’ from the BBC who, according to Eno, ‘seems to regard Palestinian lives as less valuable, less newsworthy’. These claims of under-reporting of Palestinian deaths and of pro-Israeli bias in mainstream media are counter-balanced with claims of Pro-Palestinian / anti-Israeli bias by pro-Israeli commentators: on the 17th of July
2014 Israel launched ‘Operation Protective Edge’ after rockets had been fired at Israel from Hamas militants in response to the killing of a Palestinian teenager and the blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip by Israel during ‘Operation Brother’s Keeper’. Over 2,000 Gazans were killed, the majority civilians, amongst whom over 480 children. For Raphael Ahren (2014), the diplomatic correspondent at The Times of Israel, ‘the general tone [of the international media] has steadily grown more critical of Israel, as stories on Palestinian casualties get more play than those of Israelis running for shelter’. He also notes that mentions of rockets launched by Hamas are hardly reported. In an article for the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Professor Eytan Gilboa (2014), Director of the School of Communication at Bar-Illan University in Israel, also reports ‘an anti-Israel bias and serious professional and ethical failures’ by the world press in the reporting of ‘Operation Protective Edge’: Professor Gilboa denounces Hamas censorship of the press on site, the lack of reports of rocket launches and their potential damage to the Israeli population, and incitement by the international press to view Israel as an aggressor and perpetrator of ‘war crimes’ as opposed to a democratic country defending itself rightly and justly against Palestinian terrorism.

Again, on the 9th of July 2014, as Israel’s latest military operation on the Occupied Palestinian Territories - ‘Operation Protective Edge’ – had just been launched, the Palestine Solidarity Campaign published an open letter to the Director General of the BBC (2014), in which the 45 500 signatories (including Professor Noam Chomsky, veteran
independent Australian journalist John Pilger, musician Brian Eno and film-maker Ken Loach) accused the BBC’s reporting of the military assault on Gaza to be ‘entirely devoid of context or background’. Several protests took place across the UK (including a protest in London, in front the BBC headquarters) urging the BBC to show a less biased report of the events on the ground. Similarly, the Israeli Foreign Ministry broadcast a satirical video highlighting what they perceived as a heavily pro-Palestinian bias by the international mainstream media in their coverage of the same event, ahead of the United Nations Human Rights Council Report published in June 2015 (in which both Hamas and the Israeli government were condemned of war crimes): the video was broadcast on social media and reproduced in many other platforms, both in the mainstream press (The Washington Post and The Guardian, among others) and in alternative media outlets (such as Mondoweiss, the newest independent outlet to provide news and editorials on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict), sparking comments and opinions on the ‘comments’ sections of each online media outlet about the coverage of the events in the mainstream press, and more generally about the history and politics of the conflict itself.

These cases are not isolated, and in fact illustrate the constant criticism of bias and under-reporting faced by mainstream media in Europe and in Northern America when it comes to incidents relating to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. For some, the pro-Israeli lobby at play in the international political scene, and its powerful influence in the political arena means that the Palestinians will never have a legitimate voice; for others,
‘Pallywood’\(^1\) efforts to falsely portray Israel as a powerful aggressor with fake photos, montages and media manipulation allow Israel to gain an undeserved reputation across the international press, and sway public opinion towards Palestinian terrorists. It is clear that the constant claims from both parties of imbalance and unfairness in the coverage of the conflict reflect the extent to which the agents involved in the conflict are emotionally invested in the relevant issues. In the wake of the Second Intifada (2001/2002), during which claims of bias were at their peak from both parties, many various web-based grass roots organisations known as watchdogs started to emerge, some wanting to redress the balance of justice they believe to be distorted or biased towards the Palestinians, others towards the Israelis, all pledging to give their audience a fair, accurate, honest, true and authentic account of events related to the Middle-East conflict\(^2\). My aim is to study those media watchdogs that focus on denouncing bias in the reporting of events concerning the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and specifically where they position themselves in relation to the different spheres (political, economic, journalistic) they evolve in.

\(^1\) A portmanteau for ‘Palestine’ and ‘Hollywood’

\(^2\) The Second Intifada was triggered by a visit to Al Aqsa mosque (the third holiest site in Islam) compound in Jerusalem by former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, accompanied by 1,000 Israeli police. Interpreted as an offence and a provocation by many Palestinians, the visit lead to the uprising. After four years of siege, the Second Intifada claimed nearly 5,000 deaths, over 1,000 of which children. The controversial events which started the uprising led to many claims of bias by both parties.
A number of interesting academic studies focusing on identifying and describing the relations between media and power (Street 2001) have been undertaken in recent years. Some attempt to offer a definition of Internet-based media watchdogs (Whitehouse 2001) and examine Internet-based global activist organisations (Bennett 2003) with a view to comparing alternative media and their positioning with mainstream media, but none have engaged with the emergence of those alternative media that are strictly dedicated to the Middle-Eastern conflict. Similarly, the subject of bias in the media reporting of the Middle-East conflict is well documented, with some studies comparing the coverage of events in each perspective in mainstream newspapers (for instance Philo and Berry's research on how television news have been reporting the conflict, published in 2004), but none are scholarly, academic projects specifically dedicated to the comparative study of two sides of an on-going political conflict online. Little or no sustained research has been undertaken so far as to examine the practices and positioning of web-based media groups engaged in reporting on the Middle-East conflict, from either or both perspectives. Hijazi (2009) is the first extended study dedicated to one such group, the Middle East Media Research Institute, and as such is closely related to my proposed research. The purpose of Hijazi’s study is to examine how MEMRI’s translation programme (a multi-language language service offering translations from sources in the Arabic and Iranian languages, made freely available and widely circulated amongst journalists, politicians and scholars) is used to help perpetrate the dominant pro-Israeli narrative that portrays all Palestinians as potential terrorists, and Palestinian
women, mothers specifically, as irresponsible parents purposefully raising their children as martyrs. The focus of Hijazi’s study is limited to a single organisation with a stated pro-Palestinian perspective, and to the role taken by translators within this organisation to propagate a particular narrative by manipulating and / or framing source documents to serve its political agenda. This contrasts with the aim of the present thesis, which is to present a balanced, comparative view of the two main perspectives dominant in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, namely the pro-Palestinian perspective and the pro-Israeli perspective by studying four different groups describing themselves as media watchdogs, representative of both points of view.

Media watchdogs refer to themselves as alternatives to mainstream media: they denounce the lack of objectivity, generally regarded as a fundamental principle of journalistic professionalism, shown by mainstream media and seek to distance themselves from these institutionalised media outlets (including mainstream newspapers and their online versions). Since their emergence, both the presence and the role of the media watchdogs have grown in importance and in significance, especially in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict: Baker (2007) and Hijazi (2009) note the influence of MEMRI not only in mainstream media, but also in the US Foreign Policy, with direct endorsement from official, mandated political figures. The number of media watchdogs focusing on the Middle-Eastern conflict has also steadily increased over the years, with over 12 websites specifically dealing with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.
The aim of the present thesis is not to study the whole field of web-based news outlets dealing with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and its coverage in the world press, of which they are many; the focus of the thesis will be held specifically on media watchdogs. I chose four non-mainstream outlets, two pro-Israeli and two pro-Palestinian, for which media bias in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is the sole or main focus.

Following Bourdieu, the media watchdogs are examples of the struggles which are typical of what may be identified as the 'journalistic field: the journalistic field, continually 'caught between cultural and economic power' (Benson 2006: 195), is rooted in competition within its own bounds, but also across fields (politics, economics) to secure readership, gain profits (as most of the major news outlets are also commercial enterprises), maintain and consolidate its reputation. For Benson (2006: 190), 'those news organizations that are able to accumulate both [cultural and economic capital] are precisely those which wield a symbolic power over the entire field and play a crucial role in establishing or modifying the dominant "rules" of journalistic practice'. If Bourdieu's Theory of Practice – chosen here as a theoretical framework for its sociological dimension - has gained popularity in recent years in fields such as Media Studies (see Benson 2004, 2006), Translation Studies (e.g. Inghilleri 2005, Vorderobermeier 2014 and Hanna 2016) and Politics (e.g. Schugurensky 2000), to the best of my knowledge it has not yet been applied to the study of a contemporary, on-going political conflict. Bourdieu’s Field
Theory is ideally suited to allow for a comparative study of these four fields, and will therefore be used as the main theoretical framework in order to examine the positioning of the Internet-based media outlets I propose to study in the journalistic field which, as described by Benson (2006: 195), 'tends to engage with first and foremost those agents who possess high volumes of capital'; for the purpose of my study, I will narrow the field down to political journalism.

Those watchdogs that identify themselves as independent, unbiased or objective are readily accused of distortion of facts, partisanship or bias, and this is all the truer for the media watchdogs that solely deal with the coverage of the Middle-East conflict. In fact, these watchdogs are being qualified by some scholars as suffering from ‘the hostile media effect [which] refers to a perceptual bias in which partisans – people highly involved with an issue or interest group – tend to see media coverage of that issue or group as unfairly slanted against their own position’ (Gunther 2008). For Lee, ‘“hostile media’ studies suggest […] supporters of political or social groups or issues (e.g., Middle East conflicts, or liberals versus conservatives in US politics) tend to perceive the media as being unfair or even hostile to their own cause or side while favouring their opponents, and hence a media bias is perceived. Therefore, the perception of a media bias is likely caused by an observer’s own bias ‘(Lee 2008). Some studies also suggest that the perception of hostile media coverage may cause partisans to lose confidence in conventional political avenues and resort to violence or other extreme actions (Tsfati &
Cohen 2005). In this context, it is therefore crucial for these alternative outlets to demonstrate their value and show themselves as professional, rigorous and politically non-partisan agents in the field.

The media watchdogs need to establish strategies in order to make their presence known: a central aim of the present thesis will be to identify these strategies, and the means the media watchdogs use to apply them. By rebelling against what Bourdieu describes as the ‘symbolic violence’ that institutionalised news outlets are imposing on an expectant readership through the social capital accumulated by their education and professional expertise, the media watchdogs' aim is to reclaim the symbolic capital monopolised by mainstream media and look to secure this symbolic capital for themselves using various means such as labelling (defaming the characters of those whose views they oppose), name-dropping (clearly stating for example how many supporters they have, what famous political/academic figures or institutions endorse them), among other strategies to be examined in detail in this study.

Yet many of the agents that participate in the activities of these media watchdogs are either credited, published journalists themselves or have experience in political activism, which means that they also have cultural capital as well the economic capital necessary to fund and maintain their organisations. In addition to the notions of field and capital, Bourdieu's concept of habitus should therefore prove helpful in examining the
way agents' personal and cultural capital shape their views of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

The present study sets out to address the following research questions:

1. Is there a place for alternative media watchdogs in the journalistic field in the context of an already over-exposed conflict?

2. Can Bourdieu’s conceptual framework lend itself to understanding the production of new online news reporting as an alternative source of information?

3. Is there a common habitus which would help explore the four alternative media outlets' agency in the journalistic field?

4. To what extent can these four alternative media outlets dealing with the ongoing Palestine-Israel political conflict be considered autonomous within the journalistic field, i.e. independent from and immune to the influence of the political and economic field?

5. How do these agents position themselves in relation to the doxa of the journalistic field and the wider field of international legal-political decision-making?

The objective of the four media outlets is to prove that mainstream media presents unreliable coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and their aim is to provide a better, more trustworthy alternative. A comparative study of these outlets will allow to determine whether one or both parties have valid claims of either pro or anti Palestinian / Israeli bias, and whether, if any, some of these outlets are successful in achieving their aim.
This thesis consists of 8 chapters, in addition to the present Introduction and a Summary of Findings and Conclusion:

Chapter 1 outlines the methodology applied to the current study, and includes a rationale of the study, the various methods and approaches used in analysing the data, as well as a profile of the data selected and the criteria used as part of the selection process.

Chapter 2 will offer an overview of the various research projects and initiatives dealing specifically with how the reporting of Palestinian-Israeli conflict is perceived to be favouring either party in mainstream media: I will be looking at published reports, research-based publications and individual initiatives to establish whether bias does verifiably exist in mainstream press, and whether these projects are systematic, detailed research projects using reliable data as opposed to being initiatives mainly relying on their authors’ perceived opinion of bias. Chapter 2 will also look into how new media have helped keep the conflict visible and current, and how both parties (either officially - through government bodies – or unofficially – through activist groups, blogs or discussion fora) have made use of these new media platforms to put their perspective across and for justifying their presence in the journalistic field, as part of the sub-field of web based alternative media.

Chapter 3 deals with analysing and presenting a framework for applying Bourdieusian concepts in the context of the Middle-East conflict in an attempt to establish the validity and usefulness of using Bourdieu’s field theory in an on-going, current political
conflict, and testing whether claims made of Bourdieu’s theory being deterministic are verified. An overview of the Bourdieusian terms in use in the present thesis will be given. I will also attempt to map the field and identify the sub-fields in which the analysis will be undertaken, and will finally briefly test Bourdieu’s theory against other potential theoretical frameworks (Gramsci’s Hegemony model and Chomsky’s Propaganda model) with the aim to justify how Bourdieu’s theory is better adapted to a comparative study involving different groups and (broadly speaking) two different perspectives.

Chapter 4 proposes a brief sample data analysis to verify the applicability of Bourdieu’s theory to the present context. One alternative media website from each perspective will be used as data so as not to affect the findings obtained from the core data.

Chapter 5 offers a detailed presentation of the four main websites under study, and more specifically will look at the individual agents involved in these projects in an attempt to establish the habitus(es) identified in the context of news reporting on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Chapter 6 offers an in-depth examination of the three main common strategies emerging from the data collection, which are: challenging the dominant agents in the journalistic field for symbolic capital by discrediting mainstream media as credible sources of information and justifying their own presence in the field through peer and outside recognition; targeting the Northern American readership specifically, arguably because it
is the largest and most influential readership both in political terms and in economic terms.

Chapter 7 looks at the strategies used by the alternative media outlets in order to build, establish, maintain and increase social capital online by maintaining and active presence on social media online, specifically using Facebook and Twitter as their main social media platforms. Drawing on Couldry’s ‘media meta capital’ as a highly-prized currency to earn and exchange within the journalistic field, I will attempt to better define and expand the concept, and to apply it in context.

Chapter 8 will look at the dominant agents’ position with regards to the doxa of the journalistic and the field of international legal-political decision-making in the view of determining whether the challengers’ claims hold some merit, as the challenging agents denounce the symbolic violence imposed by the dominant agents in the journalistic field and offer themselves as more reliable and trustworthy sources of news.

In order for these media outlets to establish and ascertain their presence in the journalistic field, they need to accumulate capital (symbolic, economic, social) validated by the journalistic field; yet in order to justify their presence as credible alternatives to the main agents in the field, they need to position themselves as viable outsiders: it is the inevitable dilemma posed by the delicate balancing act the watchdogs have to negotiate in order to make their voices heard in the journalist field all the while presenting
themselves as an alternative source of information which will be the main focus of the thesis.
CHAPTER 1. METHODOLOGY

This thesis offers the comparative study of four alternative web-based news outlets with two differing perspectives in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The study focusses on the claims and strategies used by these four outlets - the core data - to set themselves apart from mainstream media on the reporting of the conflict online. It also proposes to extend Bourdieu’s Field Theory by redefining and applying Couldry’s ‘media meta capital’ for the first time to the broadcasting of a current political situation onto various social media platforms.

The current chapter presents an overview of the methodology applied in this study. The first section presents its rationale; the second section proposes to situate the project within its area(s) of study; the third part provides a profiling of the data used, and clarifies the criteria used in the selection process of the data.

1.1 Rationale

The rise of the media watchdog as a new media phenomenon is undeniable. Its relevance and importance is profoundly affecting the way with which the news is being reported. This is especially true at a time when mistrust for mainstream media and the ‘Establishment’ is growing momentum, and when major national political campaigns are
being conducted online\textsuperscript{2}. In the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, mainstream media have been dogged by claims of misrepresentation for as long as the conflict has been reported in the news, particularly since the first Palestinian Intifada in 1987 and increasingly so since then, but are the claims of misrepresentation (whether wilful, uneducated or lazy) of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in the mainstream media justified? What are the motives and intentions - whether humanitarian, political or borne of a sense of duty to restore some integrity to the journalistic profession - of the alternative media trying to break the mould and cut free from the ‘official line’ reproduced on mainstream media? Is new media changing the game in that regard, or are they merely mirroring the situation on the ground? Most importantly, can these media outlets challenging the mainstream media narrative manage to tread the thin line between denouncing unprofessional reporting and offer a genuinely, legitimately and unquestionably better alternative themselves? Is it even possible to achieve a fair and just representation of a live, long-standing conflict without agenda?

\textsuperscript{2} As illustrated by both the French Presidential Election of April 2017 - during which then Presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron unveiled and disseminated his manifesto online before broadcasting it in mainstream media - and the UK General Elections of June 2017, during which Opposition Leader Labour Jeremy Corbyn led a very active political campaign on social media platforms Facebook and Twitter.
As Bourdieu states,

‘The stakes of the struggle between dominants and pretenders, the issues they dispute ... depend on the state of the legitimate problematic, that is, the space of the possibilities bequeathed by previous struggles, a space which tends to give direction to the search for solutions and, consequently, influences the present and future of production. (Bourdieu 1998: 206)’.

This statement illustrates perfectly the rationale behind the current project, which is essentially an attempt at determining the role, influence and legitimacy of the self-declared ‘pretenders’, that is the new media alternative news outlets in the present context, on such a highly controversial subject as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Reducing the discussion to a pro-Israel vs pro-Palestine issue, and therefore de facto implicitly dividing the opinion, seems to be a little simplistic on the surface. Championing or merely supporting ‘peace in the Middle East’ can have a widely differing meaning according to one’s perspective: an Israeli colon illegally settled into Occupied Palestinian land, a Gazan trying to live a purposeful life under Israeli military rule and many economic restrictions and financial constraints, an Israeli political activist opposed to their country’s actions, a Palestinian wary of political infightings and claims of corruption within the Palestinian government, an exiled Palestinian living a new life abroad, an unconcerned Jew being taken to task for not getting involved enough or paying the price for views that are not their own, a curious outside party with no vested interest, or a Western or neighbouring Middle-Eastern government fighting this war by proxy for their own strategic, geopolitical purposes will all have their own take on the issue. Yet at its core, it
is possible to argue that the manner in which the conflict is often reported in the news, Palestinians vs Israelis, often without contextualisation or historical background, perpetuates this binary vision (also an undeniable fact on the grounds, given that the two countries have been divided for decades), and to a degree helps perpetuate the conflict on the ground too. The web-based alternative media outlets claim to redress the balance of fairness and transparency in the way the conflict is being broadcast in mainstream news: the current project offers to establish whether their ‘search for solutions’ can bring about a potentially positive model in the way the conflict is being reported in the future.

1.2 Situating the Project

The current project is intended to be interdisciplinary and is situated within both media studies and sociological studies. Within media studies, the aim is for the current study to make a contribution to knowledge in understanding how the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is being reported on new web-based media platforms. Additionally, this thesis proposes to establish whether web-based alternative media outlets have a legitimacy in the journalistic field at a turning point in the way mainstream media is being perceived by senior political figures and the general public alike. Within sociological studies, the project aims at testing Bourdieu’s Field Theory to a long-standing, contentious heavily mediatised and extensively researched live political situation (still ongoing at the time of writing). Another very important aim of the thesis is to expand Bourdieu’s conceptual
toolbox by redefining media meta capital, a concept previously theorised by Nick Couldry in 2004 as a potential addition to the forms of capital originally developed in Bourdieu’s Field Theory; the concept is applied as a measure to quantify and qualify the impact and influence of the four alternative news providers under study in the journalist field in their quest for capital gain within their field and beyond, and its practicability analysed for future use.

1.3 Data Profile and Criteria

The thesis proposes an empirical approach to testing Bourdieu’s Field Theory onto the journalistic field, with a deliberate strong emphasis on contextualising the position and influence of the four main agents forming the core data of the present project, in contrast to the dominant agents and to each other. As the present section shows, the complexity and variety of the data collected – a reflection of the complex nature and function of the web-based media watchdogs under study - required at various points a quantitative approach, a qualitative approach, an empirical approach, a hermeneutic approach and a descriptive approach depending on the data set to be analysed.

The first step in looking at the viability of the project was to establish whether reliable, active alternative media outlets existed online who would reflect, broadly speaking, both the Pro Israeli perspective and the pro-Palestinian one. In order to present
a piece of research that is assessed fairly, it was crucial in my view for this project to be a comparative study between outlets representing both parties, as this thesis was not intended to be a militant project, but rather a realistic portrait of the power struggle and potential consequent power shift in the journalistic field between the mainstream media and the alternative media outlets in a specific, already over-exposed context. It was also important to consider that many websites have a very short life-span online, and it was therefore vital to identify those which would last the distance for the life of the project.

**Criteria for the selection of the core data:**

The web-based news outlets (or media watchdogs) that constitute the data for this research have been selected according to the following criteria:

- Media bias in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (on either side) is declared as the sole or main focus, with a clear objective to provide ‘fair, balanced and accurate’ reporting (as opposed to mainstream media).

- English is used as the sole or main language of reporting, reflecting the need to tap into the widest possible audience.

- The watchdogs describe themselves as alternative, independent and not-for-profit, and are not formally aligned to any governmental or official bodies.

- The two more prominent pro-Israeli outlets and the two more prominent pro-Palestinian outlets were chosen, based on social media traffic.
Many web-based news outlets deal with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and its coverage in the world press. Some, like MEMRI (the subject of a completed PhD thesis at CTIS as well as thorough, ongoing analysis on its nature and activities by Mona Baker, as discussed in the Introduction) or Arab Media Watch deal with other issues and regions in the Middle-East (such as Iran) and therefore do not exclusively report on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Others like The Israeli Project for freedom, security and peace (TIP) focus on issues that are not directly relevant to the conflict, and without claiming neutrality. TIP is a not-for-profit, non-governmental privately funded organisation run by Middle-East experts and former journalists whose aim is to ‘provide journalists, leaders and opinion-makers accurate [with] information about Israel’ (‘About Us’ webpage). According to TIP, ‘by providing journalists with the facts, context and visuals they need, TIP causes hundreds of millions of people around the world to see a more positive public face of Israel. This helps protect Israel, reduce anti-Semitism and increase pride in Israel’. Thus, although TIP deals with issues related to the conflict, the conflict itself is not the organisation’s main priority.

Similarly, the Palestine Monitor reports on the lives of Palestinians under Israeli occupation and presents itself as an independent non-profit organisation relaying
rigorously researched articles, but it does not claim to pursue a fair and balanced view of the conflict (even though the ‘About Us’ web page refers to the fact that the website was created because ‘Palestinian narratives were largely missing from mainstream media reportage, and Palestinian voices were still rarely being heard in situ’).

Others again, like *Palestinian Media Watch*, deal solely with the conflict but with a very specific focus: aiming to ‘give the world a precise understanding of the reality of the Palestinian Authority’ *PMW* was launched in 1996 by Israel-based Itamar Marcus\(^3\) with a focus on ‘the messages that the Palestinian leaders, from the Palestinian Authority, Fatah and Hamas, send to the population through the broad range of institutions and infrastructures they control’ (ibid.) by monitoring and analysing various pieces of literature coming from various sources: *PMW* ‘reports and studies on Palestinian summer camps, poetry, schoolbooks, crossword puzzles, religious ideology, women and mothers, children’s music videos and the PA’s indoctrination of adults and children to seek Shahada (Martyrdom)’ (ibid.), then translates them into English, French and Hebrew and distributes the translations in North America and Europe. *PMW* also sees its role as ‘report[ing] regularly on how foreign aid is misused by the PA for terror promotion’.

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\(^3\) Itamar Marcus is an Israeli counter terrorism analyst and the founder and Director of Palestinian Media Watch. He was appointed by the Israeli government to be the Israeli representative (communication specialist) to the Trilateral (Israeli-American-Palestinian) Anti-Incitement Committee established under the Wye Accords. He has also taken part in the 2006 documentary Obsession - Radical Islam’s War Against the West.
Although PMW’s main focus is the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, the organisation does not describe itself as an alternative media outlet but as an ‘Israeli research institute’ which only deals with literature originating from the Palestinian side; there is no direct focus on unbalanced reporting of the conflict nor is there any reference to mainstream media, international or otherwise.

Finally, the International Middle-East Media Center (IMEMC) is an independent news organisation founded in 2003 and run by Palestinian journalists living in the Palestinian territories, working together with international journalists, who report on events in both Israel and the Palestinian Territories. Contributors include, amongst others, Rami Almeghari, a Palestinian freelance journalist and former senior English translator and editor in chief of the international press centre of the Gaza-based Palestinian Information Service based in the central Gaza Strip and who contributes currently to other media outlets, and Canadian Jillian Kestler-D’Amours, a freelance writer and documentary filmmaker based in occupied East Jerusalem. IMEMC’s work is directed at getting alternative daily information (through podcasts and daily bulletins) about events in the Occupied Territories - including stories of non-violent resistance by Palestinians, often joined by Israeli and/or international activists – and bringing them to the attention of mainstream media around the world. IMEMC’s objective is to ‘provide coverage of news, political developments and daily incidents combined with feature stories, political analysis, interviews and selected opinion pieces’ (ibid.): therefore although IMEMC
focuses mainly on the conflict, and aims at providing ‘fair and comprehensive coverage of events and developments in Israel-Palestine’(ibid.), the organisation describes itself to as an alternative online media monitoring outlet, but as a ‘media collective’ providing news as well as commenting on it with no direct reference with mainstream media and its reporting of the conflict.

Not all web-based media outlets reporting the Palestinian-Israeli conflict claim to be media watchdogs, and the four websites selected as core data (two that promote the Israeli side of the conflict, and two that promote the Palestinian side) seem to be the only websites to fulfil all the criteria as they were specifically set out for the purpose of the present study.

The two alternative pro-Israeli online media monitors selected as core data are the Committee for Accuracy in Middle-East Reporting in America (CAMERA) and HonestReporting (HR).

The two alternative pro-Palestinian online media monitors selected as core data are Electronic Intifada (EI) and If Americans Knew (IAK).

The second step was to determine whether the claims of misrepresentation or one-sidedness made by these alternative media outlets when reporting the Palestinian-
Israeli conflict in mainstream media were backed up by credible, external sources. These sources had to be sufficient in their numbers from both sides of the argument, as opposed to only a handful of opinion pieces relating to one party only. It was also important that these were accredited, professional sources made by independent bodies, academics or journalists who were directly involved in the reporting of conflict, for obvious considerations of credibility and arguably a certain level of assurance in professional integrity.

The next step was to research the biography, personal and professional background, past publications and personal interests of all main contributors to the four alternative media outlets under study, in view to establish common ground. Too disparate a professional background between the agents would have made it difficult to conduct a homogenous piece of research, and the profiles of at least the majority of the agents had to be easily accessible. This was for pragmatic reasons – there had to be sufficient data to sustain detailed scrutiny, and the information available online had to be easily verifiable and traceable (see Chapter 5).

Once the viability of the project was established and the core data chosen, a theoretical framework applicable to multi-layered data had to be selected. In my time as a student, Bourdieu’s theory of class inequalities was a staple of the economics and philosophy curriculum in the French education system, which is when I first familiarised
myself with his work. I was aware of his thoughts on the media, having often watched him debate his political position against neoliberalism on French television, and further research found his field theory, and the concepts of capital, doxa and habitus especially, to be particularly convenient for the purposes of the current study. Before adopting the theory, I tested it against Herman and Chomsky’s Propaganda model and Gramsci’s Hegemony model, the result of which is in Chapter 3. I then undertook a short sample data analysis using two media outlets (one representing each perspective) previously considered as potential core data and briefly tested some of the key concepts of Bourdieu’s Field Theory to assess their practical adaptability (see Chapter 4).

The next step was to undertake the comparative study of these four media watchdogs by analysing how these outlets compare to mainstream media and to each other in terms of: their set-up, their funding, the type of audience they are looking to attract, the strategies they use to set themselves apart from the mainstream media and the degree to which their claims of political and financial independence are substantiated, if at all (see Chapter 6).

In order to investigate potential economic and political links, all individuals associated with the four websites as named in their websites in any capacity at the time of writing were systematically researched, with a special focus given on either specific trends or particularly
strong connections, either with the organisations themselves or with the main agents involved in running the four outlets.

In order to establish the four outlets’ financial profile, the four agents’ tax returns, which, as charitable organisations principally depending on donations by the general public, they are bound to be made available and easily accessible to all. Data was collected from independent American charity evaluator Charity Navigator for all four agents for tax years 2010 to 2013, that is the 3 most recent tax return forms at the time of research. Data from previous tax years was not accessible online at the time of study.

In order to assess the four outlets’ success in reaching their targeted readership, that is the American readership, three different website traffic analysis trackers were used to provide an estimate the traffic for each of the four outlets’ website: this has helped determine the most popular website by ranking as given by the website trackers, and has helped provide a list of the countries generating the most visits over a period of 90 days. The three website trackers chosen were Alexa, Ulrmetrics and SimilarWeb for being the most widely used, easily accessible at the time of writing (in Chapter 7).

In order to determine the four agents’ activity on Twitter and Facebook, the tweets and Facebook posts for the four organisations were scraped for information on the time and date of postings. The data were analysed within MS Excel to determine if there was
any pattern to the periodicity of their social media activities within a thirty-day framework. The data were analysed using the data-analysis tool-pack in MS Excel to generate histograms. The bin ranges for these histograms were based on day of the week, for the analysis of day of the week; and by hour in a 24-hour period for analysis of when posts were made during the day. These data were analysed to determine what day of the week and what hour of the day the tweets were made, and what day of the week and what hour of the day Facebook posts were made. I chose social media tracking, analytic and measuring toolkits Docteur Tweety and Twitonomy to collect and the data of the four agents’ Twitter lists of followers and what accounts they are following, and export and convert the data into Excel form for ease of analysis, and I used Facebook analytics tools SimplyMeasured and Hootsuite for collection and analysis of Facebook posts (in Chapter 7).

In order to illustrate the connections and interactions between Twitter followers and between Twitter accounts of all four outlets, I used data visualisation tool Gephy to create a multilayer network graph. I specifically chose the Yifan Hu modular graph algorithm as, after trialling many other algorithms, I have found it to give clearer, more easily readable representation of the various connections between all sets of data (in Chapter 7).
Finally, I collected, compiled and analysed all news items pertaining to the Middle-East in general, and to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in particular, as they were published in the four main international dominant agents within the English-speaking journalistic field, *The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Guardian* and *The BBC* over a period of a month, by researching each website’s archives. I specifically chose to analyse the period covering the latest United Nations Resolution vote requesting Israel put an end to the development of illegal Israeli settlements in Palestine in December 2016, partly because it was a determining event in the field of international legal-political decision making, and partly because it was the most relevant and most recent development in connection to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict at the time of writing.

Having presented the methodology behind the realisation of the current project, and a rationale triggered by the increasing prominence of alternative media outlets in the reporting of a highly contested arena in the political sphere and the media sphere, the next chapter will propose a review of the different of material (be they in print or online) in their various forms (academic research, commissioned independent reports, professional journalists’ insider reports, official channels, blogs or citizen journalism).
CHAPTER 2. OLD AND NEW MEDIA PERSPECTIVES ON THE PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI CONFLICT

Reports and scholarly research have pointed to the fact that, perhaps unsurprisingly, mainstream media from either Israel or the Arab-speaking world display clear signs of bias in favour of their own allegiances. For instance, Israeli journalist Yonatan Mendel, who draws on his experience as a journalist in mainstream Israeli media to argue that Israeli media is very heavily biased in favour of Israel. According to him, ‘military discourse, which is the only discourse allowed, trumps any other possible narrative’ even though ‘Israeli journalists are not embedded with the security establishment; and they haven’t been asked to make their audience feel good about Israel’s military policy. The restrictions they observe are observed voluntarily, almost unconsciously – which makes their practice all the more dangerous’ (ibid.). Similarly, a study comparing the two most influential mainstream news networks in the Arab world, Al Jazeera and Al Arabya and their reporting of the 2008 / 2009 Gaza conflict, found that both outlets offer an overwhelmingly pro-Palestinian perspective in the way they report Palestinian casualties as victims of the Israeli oppressors and occupants (Elmasry et al. 2013).

Independent reports and academic, research-based publications which have proliferated on the subject of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, particularly in the last decade, also seem to indicate that mainstream media from Europe and North America
principally also tend to show inaccurate or slanted reporting of the conflict towards one or the other party: the present chapter will give an overview of the most recent reports on the purported media bias in mainstream media from both the Israeli and the Palestinian perspectives with an emphasis on a small number of representative cases to explore in detail, most notably those dealing with the widely spread perceived bias from the BBC. It will also attempt to establish whether the claims of partiality, bias and / or incomplete reporting are justified and if so, which of the Palestinian or the Israeli perspective mainstream media are more likely to favor. The chapter will also look at how the development and rapid growth of social media have also had a role to play in propagating and perpetuating the idea that the conflict is not fairly and objectively reported in mainstream media.

2.1 Published Reports and Research-based Publications on Media Bias in Reporting the Middle East Conflict in Old Media

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is rarely out of mainstream media. Daily reports of events related to the conflict have become a constant feature on television and in the printed press, as have accusations of bias levelled by pressure groups or individuals lobbying on behalf of either party to the conflict. This is fertile ground for anyone who has a strong interest and investment in the conflict to bring about their views on the bias perpetuated by mainstream media, be they journalists’ accounts, published reports or scholarly research.
2.1.1 Professional Journalists’ Accounts

One of the events that further brought the issue of media bias into sharp relief during the Israeli attacks on Gaza between 27 December 2008 and 18 January 2009 was the refusal of the BBC and Sky News to broadcast a humanitarian appeal for Gaza issued by the Disasters Emergency Committee (an association comprising 15 high-profile charity organisations, including Oxfam and the British Red Cross). The reason given by the BBC was that it did not wish to compromise its commitment to impartiality (other concerns about the difficulty of getting aid through to Gaza were also reported but later downplayed). This sparked considerable controversy, with the BBC in particular being accused of bias despite its claims of impartiality. Here, as elsewhere, the issue of bias can be seen to frame practically all discussions of media coverage of the conflict.

The 2008 / 2009 attacks exacerbated the tension further, not least because Israeli authorities banned international media from accessing Gaza during the military offensive on security grounds⁴. The ban sparked outrage amongst journalists, kept away from Gaza

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⁴ Many organisations, including the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and Reporters Without Borders (RWB), have reported on Israel's conduct towards local (and international) journalists in Gaza during the attacks which started in late December 2008. Four journalists were killed ‘under unconfirmed circumstances’ (CPJ 14 January 2009), two Palestinian journalists were held by Israeli authorities for 10 days under spying charges (RWB 15 January 2009), the building which hosts journalists working for local and Arab media as well as the headquarters of Al-Aqsa TV were shelled, and the offices of the Hamas-affiliated Al-Risala news weekly were bombed (CJP 9 January 2009). Even before the 2008/2009 attack on
for a four-week stretch, who saw it as 'a severe violation of press freedom' (the Foreign Press Association, 6th January 2009). Aside from a number of local reporters on the ground, mainly working for Al-Jazeera or for Palestinian outlets, only a few Western journalists managed to offer first hand coverage of the conflict, and only after the worst attacks were over. Most notably, veteran British journalist Jon Snow reported on the Israeli management of the media in an extended television programme which featured images not normally seen in mainstream media. Besides the lack of access to information on the ground denounced in his report, Jon Snow (2009) also refers to the ‘strict code’ that governs broadcasts from the UK, ‘determining what they can and cannot show [...] based on judgements of potential harm or offence to the viewer’ by media regulator Ofcom, especially when dealing with dead bodies or injured civilians before the 9 pm watershed imposed by Ofcom and designed to protect children from particularly sensitive images. Jon Snow illustrates the different ways various news agencies deal with the same event using the specific example of a sequence released by a hospital in Gaza which featured the barely recognisable body of a 5-months old baby believed to have been crushed by an Israeli tank and left on the streets for a couple of days. Although full footage of raw images of the incident was already available on the Internet, Reuters chose to edit the shots and release a ‘sanitised version’ of the footage (Julian Rake of Reuters, in Snow 2009). Channel

Gaza, RWB, CPJ and similar reputable organisations had been accusing Israel of deliberately obstructing media coverage in the area, sometimes lethally, for years (since 1999 according to CPJ archives and 2002 according to of RWB).
4 (broadcasting before the 9 p.m. watershed) was the only UK terrestrial channel to show any images of this particular tragedy. Thus, although international news agencies are not subjected to the same regimented codes as UK media and apply their own rules when it comes to selecting images to be distributed to the news providers they feed, they too seem to exercise their prerogative (sometimes based on personal judgements made in a very short time-span, according to Rake, in Snow 2009) to edit the images they receive. At the same time, Channel 4’s choice to broadcast their version of the images rather than Reuters’ suggests that some images can be made accessible to the audience, even under Ofcom regulations. Beyond Ofcom rules, then, an element of decision making in the selection of the images broadcast on television channels is possible.

Comparing unedited images regularly shown on Arabic-speaking networks or Al-Jazeera in English with those broadcast on Western news, viewers in both the Arabic-speaking and English-speaking world may understandably conclude that Western media fails to report events as they happen on the ground. This often raises the issue of deliberate bias and leads to more marked polarisation of public opinion, especially in the Arab world and within British Muslim families who have access to satellite channels, as reported by Jon Snow. British Muslims interviewed on Snow’s programme argued that the conflict is under-represented at best. For those with access to Arab channels in particular, the discrepancy between Western reporting of events in the Middle-East and the conflict as portrayed in the Arab world is such that accusations of deliberate manipulation on the
part of Western news providers now have considerable currency. Lawrence Pintak, the publisher and co-editor of the online-only journal *Arab Media & Society* and director of the Kamal Adham Center for Journalism Training and Research at The American University in Cairo, seems to corroborate the view that Arab and Western viewers are watching dramatically different wars unfolding before them, as a result of this kind of divergent reporting: referring to the Israeli military intervention in the Gaza Strip, Pintak (2009) writes that ‘American and Arab viewers are seeing two vastly different conflicts play out on their television screens’ and that ‘the world’s television news organisations were all taking the same feed from the Palestinian video agency Ramattan TV; the difference came in how they edited the tape’.

Impartiality, media control and bias are interdependent concepts that make the work of the mainstream journalist reporting on the conflict very difficult to carry out, especially in such an emotionally charged conflict where all events – main and peripheral – are constantly scrutinised and dissected by either or both parties. Commenting on the December 2008 / January 2009 attacks on Gaza, Peter Horrocks, Head of Television News at the BBC explained the difficulty in terms of access to information: ‘there is a danger, because of not being able to get in, that the story becomes a series of contested claims where it is hard for any news organisation to be able to establish an objective and an impartial truth, and that is definitely an obstacle in this story telling’ (in Snow 2009). Access to information, as we will see, is not cited by those who have researched media
coverage of the conflict as the reason for perceived bias, be they insiders accounts, published reports or research-based publications.

Individual insiders’ accounts like journalist Stephanie Gutmann’s\textsuperscript{5} \textit{The Other War, Israelis, Palestinians and the Struggle for Media Supremacy} - published in 2005 - attempt to demonstrate the bias Israel falls victim of through personal encounters, conversations and anecdotal evidence; for Gutmann, ‘given the distorting effects of journalism in general, any country that finds itself as continually in the spotlight and under the microscope as Israel does will find itself distorted’ (Gutmann 2005: 5). In Gutmann’s view, mainstream media’s over-simplified, egregious reporting of the conflict is unreservedly pro-Palestinian and routinely scapegoats Israel as an automatic response, without taking the time to delve deeper into the causes and origins of the conflict. She illustrates her point by meticulously deconstructing photos and video clips representing symbolic incidents\textsuperscript{6}: she insists that Israel is being accused of crimes it did not commit by mainstream media’s deliberate and systematic omissions (through pro-Palestinian bias) and over-reliance on photos provided by pro-Palestinians without checks or verifications.

\textsuperscript{5} Stephanie Gutmann was a freelance and staff journalist and now keeps a blog in \textit{The Telegraph.co.uk} (last entry to date on 16 April 2009)

\textsuperscript{6} The widely reported 2002 massacre in Jenin, for instance, or the death of 12-year old Palestinian boy Mohammad Al Dura, who killing and subsequent death the arms of his father made front page news in most mainstream media at the time. Both incidents sparked controversy as the Israeli Government denied involvement in the death of the Palestinian boy and disputed claims that their army’s intervention in the 15,000-populated Jenin refugee camp was a massacre.
Gutmann claims that the two main reasons for such consistent misrepresentations in mainstream media in favour of the Palestinian perspective are the intimidation tactics used by the Palestinian Authorities over the foreign journalists on the ground (which she substantiates with second-hand anecdotes) and Israel’s poorly media-trained, Hebrew-only speaking spokespeople at the time of writing (she acknowledges that much effort has been made by Israeli official to better deal with media operations, especially in times of crises).

In the USA, Marda Dunsky’s 2008 study *Pens and Swords: How the American Mainstream Media Report the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* concludes that the American mainstream media ‘rarely goes much beyond superficial details of failed diplomatic initiatives and intercommunal violence in the field’ and that ‘the media bypass important contextual aspects of organic issues’ (Dunsky 2008: 3). Dunsky examines the period from 2000 to 2004, drawing on some 350 media reports and transcripts (supplemented by reports from the Israeli press) from close to 30 major American print and broadcast news outlets, as well as on interviews with numerous journalists who speak candidly about the particular challenges of reporting on a conflict that generates powerful emotional responses from readers. Dunsky also examines the role and influence of some media-watch organisations such as CAMERA and HonestReporting (which will be the subject of a

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7 Marda Dunsky is a former Arab affairs reporter for *The Jerusalem Post* and editor of *The Chicago Tribune*. 
more in-depth analysis in this thesis) and the pressure they exert on U.S. media outlets. The North American media outlets are specifically targeted by these two organisations, as they are consistently subjected to accusations of anti-Israel bias and have to deal with orchestrated actions such as mass mailings, phone calls and e-mails on a daily basis. In an interview with Columbia University Press Online, Dunsky reports that ‘the imbalance of the policy and role of the United States in the conflict [a reported $100 billion have been granted in aid as well as diplomatic and political backing to Israel, compared to an estimated $2.1 billion to the Palestinians] are rarely acknowledged in American mainstream media reporting of it’. Another contextual grounding that is absent from the American mainstream media, still according to Dunsky, is ‘that the reporting rarely acknowledges or explains international law and consensus on two key aspects of the conflict: Israel’s policies of annexation and colonisation of Arab lands and the Palestinian refugees’ right of return’ (ibid.). As a result, American audiences do not have enough contextual background to fully appreciate the complexity of the situation on the ground. The fact that the USA is so heavily involved in Israeli politics also makes its position as an objective peace broker difficult to sustain. For Dunsky, the North American mainstream media does not show any particular bias for or against either party, but the lack of contextualised depth makes the reporting of the conflict incomplete and, on, occasion over-simplified. Although very detailed, Dunsky’s study does not however rely on a consistent quantitative analysis of outlets; as a result, it can more readily be defined as a critique of the journalistic practices of the American mainstream media in general rather
than a scholarly study of the coverage of the conflict.

Insiders’ reports by experienced, active journalists who have been reporting from the battleground tend to confirm the claims of bias, misrepresentation and lack of contextual and historical background levied upon them, whether it be with a perceived pro-Palestinian or a perceived pro-Israeli bias. The next section will examine whether scholarly research on the issue follow this trend.

2.1.2 Scholarly Research on the BBC and the New York Times

In Great Britain, a two-year study was published in 2004 by Mike Berry and Greg Philo of the Glasgow University Media Group. This involved an audience sample of 800 people, including students from the UK, the USA and Germany, academics, journalists and people from various walks of life taking part in focus groups. Philo & Berry studied over 200 television programmes starting from 2000 in four samples - September to October 2000 (BBC and ITV early and late evening news), October to December 2001 (BBC News 24 and ITV News), March 2002 (BBC and ITV late news) and April 2002 (BBC1 and ITV News early and late evening news). For their investigation of media content, they used quantitative analysis by transcribing lines of verbal texts from news programmes and calculating the
amount of coverage given to different subject areas,\(^8\) including counting the lines of texts dedicated to each of them. They then compared the selected reports from their data with other media outlets (*The Independent*, *The Guardian* and Channel 4 are amongst the most commonly cited) and sometimes added additional samples to confirm or further analyse their findings. Whilst highly transparent about their use of data and offering very detailed findings, as seen previously Philo & Berry use different subject areas (see footnote 9 for examples) in each sample: this technique does provide the reader with a large amount of information as many issues are covered, although the inconsistency in the use of the categories chosen for analysis makes it difficult to draw parallels between the samples studied and the overload of information also makes it difficult for the reader to easily determine which are the most relevant and salient points of the study.

The study drew similar conclusions to the independent report commissioned by the *BBC* (CRC 2006) and concluded that although not deliberately biased, the *BBC* and *ITV* journalists give little historical background to their stories, resulting in confusion amongst the audience: ‘many in our audience samples did not even understand that there was a military occupation and that it was widely seen as illegal. There was very little of the conditions of the occupation or its effects on the Palestinian economy’ (Ibid. 2004: 258).

\(^8\) These include disputes over the history and origins of the conflict, the motives of those involved, who is portrayed as initiating violence, the reporting of casualties and peace negotiations (Philo & Berry 2004: 96-98) but vary according to the samples analysed.
The study suggests that most media outlets present the conflict in the Middle East as a series of independent events, and the audiences fail to see how all the incidences reported in the media are connected. It is therefore possible to describe the selection of television news reports by the media outlets reported in the present reports as following the episodic framing described by Iyengar, a central theme in the scholarly research reviewed here. For independent journalist Scott London (1999), ‘a frame is the central organising idea for making sense of relevant events and suggesting what is at issue. News and information [have] no intrinsic value unless embedded in a meaningful context which organises and lends it coherence’.

According to Shanto Iyengar, a Professor of Political Science at Stanford University, ‘[t]he episodic news frame takes the form of a case-study or an event-oriented report and depicts public issues in terms of concrete instances’ (Iyengar 1991: 14) whilst thematic framing ‘presents collective or general evidence’ (ibid). Following experiments carried out on audience samples, Iyengar suggests that there are differences in the way audiences perceive a given item of news depending on how it is framed - essentially episodic framing, that is the framing of specific events without a context, tends to lead to the audience holding individuals responsible whilst thematic framing, that is the framing of an event with a contextual backdrop, tends to lead to the audience holding broader economic or social factors responsible.

Again for Iyengar, the fact that media outlets rely primarily on episodic framing
reduces ‘complex issues to the level of anecdotal evidence’ (Iyengar 1991: 136) and helps present ‘only a passing parade of specific events, a “context of no context”’ (Iyengar 1991: 140). In the Middle-East conflict for example, episodic news framing would only report punctual events such as a suicide attack or a rocket being fired in Israel (possibly leading to Palestinian individuals being held responsible for the event, and by extension for the whole conflict) whilst thematic news framing might look into the difficult social and economic situation affecting Palestinians under Israeli occupation.

Conversely, the Economic and Social Research Council-funded research found in their first sample that ‘news headlines highlight Israeli statements, actions or perspectives’ (Philo & Berry 2004: 144) and that ‘the Israeli perspective is highlighted in terms of causes, motives and preferred outcomes’ (Ibid. 2004: 166). The Palestinian views, when they are represented, ‘tend to be buried deep in the text of news bulletins. There is no obvious reason why they would not be included in headlines and it is hard to avoid the conclusion that one view of the conflict is being prioritised.’ (Ibid. 2004: 144).

In sample two of the Philo & Berry study, the analysis shows that ‘the news framework and presentational structure, which was most frequently used in reporting events, tended to favour the Israeli perspective’ in the way the news outputs were portraying Israeli action (ibid.160) and that there was ‘significantly more coverage of Israeli casualties than Palestinians’ (ibid. 2004: 182) and largely more emotive language
used when describing Israeli casualties as opposed to the non-specific way of describing Palestinian casualties.

In the third sample, the study shows ‘a continued emphasis on Israeli deaths and injuries, both in terms of the amount of coverage which they receive and the consistently detailed accounts which are given of them’ (Ibid. 2004: 184) and the continuation of patterns already analysed in previous samples, namely that Israel ‘retaliates’ rather than ‘attacks’ and that Palestinians are generally portrayed as being the instigators of attacks (ibid. 187).

Sample four deals with the offensive launched by Israel on the Palestinian area of Jenin and the media restrictions imposed by Israel on the international press. Philo & Berry analyse the reports from the BBC, Channel 4 and ITV and conclude that whilst the BBC and ITV were reporting claims from either side without pursuing stories – a consequence of the restrictions imposed on media – Channel 4 raised issues that the other channels did not, such as the legality of Israel’s actions and allegations of looting by Israeli troops.

Philo & Berry also carried out an audience study based on questionnaires and focus group discussions. The 14 focus groups consisted of seven to ten people each, selected on the basis of various criteria (professional, social and economic for example)
and with one moderator in each group. Philo and Berry enlisted the help of media professionals (journalists or broadcasters), and some of those took part in the focus groups. The questionnaires and questions asked in the focus groups are all included as appendices to the study. Philo & Berry found that for the majority of the people who took part in the focus groups, there is a link between the understanding people have of the conflict and their level of interest in it; this suggests ‘the need for change in the current structure and content of news programmes to address the problem that so many people apparently not well informed by the news services which they see as their primary source of information’ (Philo & Berry 2004: 243). One critique of this audience study could be that only televised news outputs have been analysed, yet it is very likely that some audiences do not use television as their only source of information even if they use it as their main source of information. These findings could thus be complemented by an analysis of the coverage of the conflict by the written press.

Another scholarly study, which this time offers a detailed examination of the New York Times’ editorial practices in its coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, is Israel-Palestine on Record: How the ‘New York Times’ Misreports Conflict in the Middle East. This study was conducted by Howard Friel, a researcher and president of an information-services company, and former Professor of International Law at Princeton University Richard Falk (who the United Nations Human Rights Council appointed to a six-year term as a United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian...
Occupied Territories). The study focuses solely on the American newspaper New York Times, arguably one of the most influential and prestigious US media outlets - often referred to in the North American press as the ‘paper of record’ or the ‘agenda setting newspaper’ - which is the reason why Friel & Falk deliberately chose to analyse it. The methodology is grounded in international law - a neutral standard that cannot arguably be seen as favouring either party - and in reports of major human rights organisations (including Human Rights Watch, B’Tselem and Amnesty International). The main issues as defined by Friel & Falk are the Palestinians’ right to self-determination, territorial rights (the illegality of colonies, for example), the rights of refugees to return to their homes, and the question of Jerusalem.

The study analyses all of the New York Times’ editorial and news pages’ coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict from 29 September 2000 to 30 November 2006 (including the start of the Second Intifada in 2000, the 2006 war on Lebanon and military assault on the Gaza Strip as well as the Palestinian elections also held in 2006). It concludes that The New York Times framed events, essentially ignored international law in its coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict and did not recognise Palestinian rights or cover the conflict impartially; it also chose not to cover reports published annually on the conflict by Amnesty International, HRW and others.
On the subject of international law, which according to Friel & Falk ‘should guide responsible journalism in a democratic society whenever foreign policy or international conflict are present’ (Friel & Falk 2007: 10), the study found that whilst Israeli colonies were mentioned 2,350 times in various articles and editorials in the 6-year period of the analysis, the newspaper referred to the Fourth Geneva Convention - relating to the protection of civilians during times of war under any military occupation - on one single occasion. For Friel and Falk, the New York Times ‘refuses even to acknowledge the relevance of international law unless it reinforces the paper’s pro-Israel bias (...) This selectivity in the treatment of international law establishes the bias of the Times beyond any reasonable doubt’ and also shows the newspaper’s ‘unwillingness to acknowledge the degree to which the central Palestinian claims in the conflict are solidly supported in international law’ (Friel & Falk 2007: 9).

In the case of recognising Palestinian rights, Friel & Falk found that Israel’s right to exist was cited 13 times as often as the Palestinian right to self-determination in articles and editorials produced by the newspapers’ staff (as opposed to readers). The study contrasted these findings with the letters written by readers to the editor (where Israel’s right to exist was cited 4 times as often as the Palestinian right to self-determination), indicating that the New York Times readers were less biased than the newspaper itself. They also found that the newspaper did not report incidences of Israeli violence against Palestinians in the same way as they reported Palestinian violence against Israelis; 75
articles on Palestinian terrorism were given prominent space whilst very few articles on Israeli violence towards Palestinians could be found on the front-page of the newspaper, this despite the fact that over 4,000 Palestinians were killed by Israelis and over 1,000 Israelis were killed by Palestinians. According to Friel & Falk, ‘from 29 September 2000 to 31 December 2005 the [New York Times] published about fifty front page articles on Palestinian suicide bombings and other terrorist acts, in addition to twenty-five articles on Palestinian terrorism reported elsewhere in the front section. In contrast, there was much less emphasis in the Times on the far more numerous Israeli killings of Palestinians in the occupied territories during this same period’ (Friel & Falk 2007: 25-26). Testimonies of victims of human rights abuses that were not reported by the newspaper were also included in the study.

A lack of historical and contextual background, sometimes systematic and selective (especially in the case of the New York Times) and a tendency to frame the events through the Israeli perspective (more empathetic, emotionally charged wording and more coverage when dealing with Israeli casualties, for instance) seem to be the recurring shortfalls of the New York Times and the main UK-based broadcasters, as identified by the two scholarly studies highlighted in the section. This trend is supported by other smaller-scale research projects, which also indicate a marked pro-Israeli bias: freelance writer Matt Viser (2003), for instance, found that the New York Times’ pro-Israeli gradually built up through the years from the first Intifada to the terrorist attacks held on the World Trade
Center on 11 September 2001. In her study of the New Your Times’ editorial coverage of the conflict in the months following the World Trade Center attacks, Ross (2003) also found that the New York Times tends to dehumanise Palestinian casualties (which go largely unreported, according to her) and present Israel as the victim of Palestinian terror. Elmasry’s 2009 study of the New York Times and the Chicago Tribune surrounding the first Intifada draws similar conclusions. In contrast, little to no sustained research projects have been published which support claims of anti-Israeli bias in mainstream media at the time of writing. If methodical, empirical, research-based studies on the subject of media bias in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflicts are scarce, a number of reports have emerged, either commissioned by independent organisations or initiated by interested individuals. The following section will look at a small selection of those reports, specifically those that have affected the BBC in the last decade, one of the most influential and recognizable mainstream broadcasting agency in the UK, and arguably more broadly one of the symbolic points of reference in terms of professionalism and efficiency in the journalistic field.

2.1.3 Published reports by organisations or individuals: The Case of the BBC

In the UK, the BBC’s coverage of the Middle-East especially (but not exclusively) has been the subject of several close analyses by both academic and independent or private studies, and has also been criticised by individual media practitioners. Tim Llewellyn (2004), for
example, the BBC’s former Middle-East correspondent, argues that the BBC systematically favours the Israeli point of view: ‘In my judgement as a journalist and Middle East specialist, the broadcasters’ language favours the occupying soldiers over the occupied Arabs, depicting the latter, essentially, as alien tribes threatening the survival of Israel, rather than vice versa’. Llewellyn speaks from experience and does not claim to have conducted a rigorous analysis of data, but there have been other charges of bias based on analyses of the BBC’s outputs, even though those analyses are not necessarily methodologically sound.

For instance, Trevor Asserson, a British solicitor and member of the Israeli Bar as well as the Jerusalem Center of Public Affairs now living in Israel, produced a series of privately funded reports on the BBC’s coverage of the Middle-East conflict between 2002 and 2005, all accusing the BBC of anti-Israeli bias. In the first 24-page report, published in March 2002 and produced by Asserson and Israeli lawyer Elisheva Mironi, a number of BBC news reports (released on television, radio and the Internet) were recorded during a seven-week period and contrasted with news outputs from other sources. Whilst others have also chosen to compare the BBC’s news outputs with other sources (Philo & Berry 2007 for example), comparisons are generally made with similar publications (which

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9 Excluding a 17-page appendix not included in the downloadable version of the document but available on the BBC Watch website.
either appeal to similar audiences or which are bound by the same rules as set by their regulatory body – Ofcom in the UK for example). In this case, Asserson and Mironi chose to compare the BBC’s outputs with outputs of publications such as the New York Times, Ha’aretz, Sky News, The Economist and CNN. Although reputable news broadcasters, these do not abide by the same rules nor address the same audience as the BBC.

Sixteen ‘independent principles’\textsuperscript{10} were identified in the report and the selected news outputs - the bulk\textsuperscript{11} of the news outputs from the BBC dealing with the Middle-East in a period selected at random and in advance - tested against them. These principles seem arbitrary and vague, as no discussion is offered as to why they were chosen specifically. Nevertheless, based on these principles, the following issues were addressed in the study (Asserson & Mironi 2002: 2): choice of language (specifically ‘terrorism’, ‘Occupied Palestinian land’, “‘Presidential’ Arafat’ and ‘settlements’), unbalanced

\textsuperscript{10}The 16 independent principles as cited in the 2002 Asserson & Mironi document are as follows: ‘1. fairness, 2. respect for truth, 3. due accuracy, 4. attachment to fundamental democratic principles, 5. not broadcasting on opinions on current affairs or matters of public policy, 6. ensure the opposing views are not misrepresented, 7. news programmes should be dispassionate, wide-ranging and well-informed, 8. must take account of events as well as arguments, 9. should offer viewers and listening an informed account of issues, enabling them to form their own views, 10. audience should not be able to gauge reporter’s personal views, 11. research must be thorough, wherever possible – information should be gathered first hand by being there or by talking to those who were, 12. reluctant to rely only on one source, 13. if controversial issue – relevant opinions as well as facts may need to be considered, 14. if legally contentious issue – its accuracy must be capable of withstanding scrutiny in a court of law, 15. use language fairly, 16. not to use language inadvertently so as to suggest value judgements, commitment or lack of objectivity’ (Asserson & Mironi 2002: 5/6)

\textsuperscript{11}This suggests that no quantitative analysis was carried out, as not all the outputs from the selected period were analysed.
reporting (mainly on Ariel Sharon and Yasser Arafat), inappropriate selection of material, context (7 examples of omission of contextual background - also called decontextualisation - are given), distortion and omission of facts (namely Human Rights abuse, Palestinian reactions to suicide bombings, Israel’s attitude towards Yasser Arafat, Apportioning blame, Portrayal of Hamas and the Jewish Lobby in the USA), Palestinian and Arab Press, Democracy Media and Law, Time allocation and Choice of interviewees. Asserson and Mironi conclude in their executive summary: ‘we have found the BBC to fall consistently short of its aim of impartial and accurate reporting. (...) All of the many breaches of guidelines which we have highlighted in this report appear to us to indicate a marked and consistent pro-Palestinian bias within the BBC’ (Asserson & Mironi 2002: 3). On all the issues analysed – except for the time allocated by the BBC to each source and the selection of interviewees from either party, thanks to which the BBC ‘preserves a superficial impartiality’ (ibid.) – the report found that the BBC breached their own Guidelines, specifically on the principle of fairness (cited in relation to almost all the issues studied).

The second report, also published in 2002 and again privately funded, included the BBC’s response to the first report as well as a new analysis aimed at ‘continu[ing] the work of the First Report’ (Asserson 2002: 3). The report covered a nine-week period with no reference to any quantitative analysis, similarly to the First Report. Asserson points out that because the BBC produces a large quantity of outputs, he did not consider it ‘feasible’
to monitor all the outputs dealing with the Middle-East conflict in the time-scale chosen and instead monitored ‘a representative sample of the most significant news programmes’ (Asserson 2002: 9), but no methodology was outlined with regards to how and why the material was selected. Another issue is the fact that whilst generally the same outputs were analysed on a weekly basis, some ‘rare’ exceptions were added to the selection, and again the reason for the selection of these additional outputs is not given. The analysis of the news reports covered the following issues: reporting one side of the debate, suppression of news stories, background information, use of pictures (as an illustration of the story), journalistic comments (or personal remarks made by BBC correspondents when reporting on a given story), miscellaneous, impartiality of reporters and changes in the BBC – all of which are judged to be mishandled by the BBC, very similarly to the findings of the First report. The document concludes that ‘by failing to break out of its own cycle of inaccuracy and impartiality (..) the BBC is abusing its power, behaving irresponsibly and is in breach of its legal obligations’ (Asserson 2002: 27).

Such were the accusations of bias that in 2004, the BBC’s then director of news, Richard Sambrook, commissioned an internal report to examine the organisation’s output on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The report, called the Balen report after the journalist who wrote it, has yet to be released as the BBC has refused its publication on the basis that it was an internal report and that ‘under the Freedom of Information Act the corporation is exempt from disclosing information for purposes of “journalism, art or
literature” (in Luft & Holmwood 2009). London-based commercial lawyer Steven Sugar has been campaigning since 2005 for the BBC to publish the report under the Freedom of Information Act; he initially reported it to the Information Commissioner (who ruled in favour of the BBC) and to the Information Tribunal (who upheld Sugar’s request and ruled that the report did not fall within the ‘purposes of journalism’ exception). The High Court rejected Sugar’s challenge of the BBC’s appeal against the decision of the Information Tribunal but the lawyer has recently won his appeal to the House of Lords (the highest court in the UK), which was allowed on 11 February 2009. The BBC has appealed to the High Court against the Law Lords’ decision on a second ground of appeal. Critics of the BBC await the publication of the Balen report as, according to Sugar (cited in Sebag-Montefiore 2009), ‘the significance [...] is that it might reveal a BBC anti-Israel bias.’

A year after requesting the Balen report, the BBC’s Board of Governors felt compelled to commission a report on its coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict from an independent body - the Independent Panel. The Communications Research Centre at Loughborough University ‘integrated the qualitative analysis of items with the presentation of quantitative findings’ (CRC 2006: 7) over a 6-month period in 2005. In their published output analysis of the report in 2006, the CRC revealed a number of disparities on the part of the BBC in favour of Israel. Analysing the frequency of coverage, the actors, the speaking time of actors, the themes, the actors and themes reporting the historical context, reporting fatalities, keywords used in conflict coverage, current affairs
in news programmes as well as *BBC News Online*, the reports concluded that there was a disparity in favour of Israel in the amount of both talk-time and appearance given to non-party political Israelis and Palestinians as well as to Israelis and Palestinians in general, and that the *BBC* gave greater coverage of Israeli fatalities and sometimes overlooked important themes. The report also stated that there was a lack of historical context in the reporting of the conflict, and that ‘third party positions either from the Middle-East or from the rest of the world were marginalised in comparison to the UK and US perspectives’. No disparities in favour of the Palestinians were reported, although there was a broad parity in the amount of talk-time and appearance given to Israeli and Palestinian political representatives.

More recently, after a complaint lodged by a member of the *Zionist Federation of Great Britain and Ireland* (ZF) and by *CAMERA*, one of the media watchdogs examined in the present thesis, the *BBC* Trust’s Editorial Standards Committee (ESC) handed in a report in which it judged that the *BBC*’s Middle East editor, Jeremy Bowen, breached the organisation’s regulations by not giving a clear source to an assertion he made on a radio programme, by giving an inaccurate account of a historical event and by using imprecise language in some parts of an online report (see Holmwood & Lerman 2009). According to Lerman (2009), the 118-page report only referred to these three items even though another 21 were in dispute, thus exaggerating the claim that Bowen – and more broadly the *BBC* – is biased against Israel. This purported bias is claimed by ZF co-vice chair
Jonathan Hoffman, for whom Bowen’s position is rendered ‘untenable’ by the report findings (in Liphshiz 2009).

In recent years, a number of accounts of distortion in the reporting of events taking place in the Middle East have been published, mainly online and by actors who are openly aligned to one or the other party. For example, media watchdog If Americans Knew published seven reports (dating from 2000 to 2004) offering detailed analyses of the media coverage of Israel/Palestine in American mainstream media (all concluding that the US media is biased towards Israel). Seth Ackerman of FAIR analysed the portrayal of political group Hamas, also in mainstream American news outlets (Ackerman 2006). Alison Weir of If Americans Knew posted a detailed analysis of the coverage of both Palestinian and Israeli fatalities in a Youtube video in 2005 (Weir 2005), whilst Patrick O’Connor of Palestine Media Watch analysed the coverage of the conflict by the New York Times’ Jerusalem bureau chief Steven Erlanger (O’Connor 2006). Media watchdog HonestReporting undertook a 6-month analysis of the BBC’s coverage of the Middle-East conflict (HonestReporting 2007), and concluded that ‘a number of subtle biases combine to create a false impression of the Israel-Palestinian conflict’ and that ‘by presenting coverage that builds empathy for the Palestinians at the expense of Israelis, the BBC is manipulating public opinion (...)’.

The issue of bias, then, is central to the perception of the conflict, with many
anecdotal reports, personal accounts, independent reviews and newspaper articles devoted to the subject in traditional mainstream media. Yet, only two studies using transparent data as well as quantitative and qualitative methods to back up their analyses can be found. The claims of bias in the mainstream press seem to be substantiated by the research done to date, which indicates that mainstream media has a tendency to favour the Israeli perspective. Claims of anti-Israeli bias in the media are prevalent in newspapers and consistently surface on various blogs, fora, insiders’ accounts and some independent reports, but very little academic research has been conducted on the specific issue of anti-Israel bias, or has shown any such bias in mainstream media. It can therefore be argued that while there is a case for the presence of alternative sources of information proposing to redress the prevalent pro-Israeli bias by pro-Palestinian alternative media outlets, there arguably also is reason to question the pro-Israeli groups’ motives in redressing a bias that does not seem to affect them negatively.

The rapid growth of new media is also playing a central role in addressing the issue of bias in the reporting of the Middle-East conflict, not least because the use of new technologies helps keep the conflict visible in the public arena. New media – understood as all media supported either digitally or electronically via a network or a computer - ‘radically break the connection between physical place and social place, making physical location much less significant for our social relationships’ (Croteau and Hoynes 2003: 311) and have certainly had a major impact on news dissemination, including the relaying of
news relating to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

2.2 New Media, an Overview

In addition to mainstream media outlets using new communication technologies to reach larger audiences, there has been an explosion of alternative means of communication since the start of the 21st century. Government institutions, charities and grass-root Internet-based outlets used for political purposes, be they watchdogs, advocacy groups or other media outlets (political pressure groups for example), have mastered the many forms new media circulation allows - a blog, a discussion forum or a video on the Internet, campaigns started on mobile phones, daily news of activist actions on well sourced and consistently updated websites - with all the potential pitfalls of unreliability, time constraints, the constant and not always verifiable / verified flux of information these communication systems might bring. The decline in newspaper readerships that accompanied the rise in Internet news consumption as well as increased access to the Internet worldwide has helped the proliferation of those organisations, and so has the use of the English language as transnational vehicle to reach audiences worldwide. This section will therefore look into examples of new media being used by various organisations to get their political points across in the Middle-East conflict.

12 There is an online version of most leading newspapers, some in more than the languages normally used on the printed versions.
Reports of the use of new media in the ‘war of words’ raging between Israeli and Palestinian officials are many and, it seems, to Israel’s advantage. In December 2008, CNN World online reported the launching of the Israel Defence Force’s official YouTube channel to offer exclusive broadcasts of the Army’s military actions against ‘Hamas targets’ (CNN Online 31 December 2008), with a promise from the IDF to ‘continue to update [the] site with documentation of the IDF’s humane action and operational success in ‘Operation Cast Lead’’. According to journalist Samira Simone (2008), ‘The YouTube posts started [...] with black-and-white aerial military video of Israeli aircraft striking ‘rockets in transit’ and ‘terrorist smuggling tunnels’. Another video in colour showed what are identified as Israeli trucks transporting aid into Gaza’ (ibid.).

In January 2009, at the height of the Israeli offensive on Gaza, Hamas launched a new social video-sharing network mirroring YouTube to disseminate news of the al-Qassam Brigades’ successful military attacks and clashes with the Israeli army. The channel – called Palutube – broadcasts mainly in Arabic, although some videos are subtitled in other languages (generally in English), and presents an alternative picture of the 22-day war on Gaza. Some of the clips on the network portray guerrilla attacks on Israeli soldiers. Another video-sharing service called AqsaTube had been taken offline a few months previous to the launch of Palutube by the French company which hosted it after a report by the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Centre, published in Israel,
claimed it was linked to Hamas, although Crispin Thorold of BBC News reported in 2008 that the Palestinian movement denied the claim.

The Consulate General of Israel in New York, which has a Consul for Media and Public Affairs, recently hosted a press conference on Twitter (a new social networking website online). According to David Russell from The Jewish Chronicle (2008), ‘these innovative web efforts are at the forefront of the consulate’s current hasbara (public information) campaign — whose aim is no less than to change Israel’s image’. Other organisations such as the Israeli Foreign Affairs Office have also held press conferences on Twitter, according to Gwen Ackerman of Bloomberg.

Online groups created by bloggers are multiplying. One of them - called HelpUsWin— is founded by Pro-Israeli bloggers: it aims to rally up support for Israel across the world in order to win ‘the hearts and minds for Israel’ in the international media and urges people to post online comments on media sites, including CNN, the BBC and Sky News amongst others, to use an “I (heart) Israel” icon as a profile picture on their personal Facebook pages.

The National Information Directorate - a body that ‘acts across ministries and decides key messages on a daily basis’ (in Shabi 2009), was set up in 2008 ‘to deal with hasbara - meaning, in Hebrew, “explanation”, and referring variously to information, spin,
and propaganda’ (ibid.). This is a concerted and very well organised effort to co-ordinate all messages from all agencies involved in the conflict, but also to liaise with other bodies using online networks. It has been emulated by other bodies such as the Israeli Citizens Information Council, endorsed by Natan Sharansky – who has held various posts in the Israeli Government – and describing itself as an ‘Israeli-based grassroots initiative [whose purpose] is to assist efforts to explain Israeli life from the vantage point of the average Israeli citizen’ (ICIC Hasbara website). This involves enlisting ‘Israelis from all walks of life to participate in its various projects’, including ‘providing assistance and guidance for individual and groups involved in hasbara and advocacy campaigns, encouraging participation in media “watch” groups, providing a resource to the foreign media outlets for Israeli grass-root opinion and experience, supporting the activities of student groups advocating pro-democracy, human rights and anti-terror messages and forming liaisons with individuals, communities and public officials overseas through e-mail and personal contact’ (ibid.). Another initiative called Hasbara Fellowships, started in 2001 by Jewish Orthodox organisation Aich HaTorah in conjunction with Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is a programme aimed at training (mainly North American) students in Jerusalem in order to give them ‘the information and tools to return to their campuses as leaders in the fight for Israel’s image’ (Hasbara Fellowship website). Students, who will be ‘educated on Israeli and Middle East history and politics with a specific focus on issues related to the

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13 It is interesting to note that the concept of media watchdogs has been recognised and embraced by official Israeli Public Relations organisations.
Palestinian conflict, [...] trained to be effective campus activists by creating and implementing pro-active, pro-Israel campaigns’ and encouraged to ‘build their Jewish identity and knowledge in order to be effective Jewish leaders [...] have the opportunity to meet with many important members of Israeli society including journalists, politicians, prominent Israel activists, historians, and other experts [...] including Benjamin Netanyahu, Shimon Peres, Dore Gold, and Natan Sharansky’ (ibid).

The proliferation of blogs, discussion fora or network communities on the Internet has also, perhaps inexorably, led to various acts of hacking by either party: Flora Graham (2009) of BBC News Online reports a group using a logo pertaining to the Jewish Internet Defence Force taking control of pro-Palestinian Facebook discussion groups, closing them or altering the content, and of pro-Palestinian hackers calling themselves ‘Agd_Scorp/Peace Crew’ ‘defacing several high-profile websites, including a US Army website, and the Nato Parliamentary Assembly’s website and replacing pages with white space and a well-known photograph of a boy throwing stones at an Israeli tank in Gaza, and the Israeli, American and British flags with a red strike through them’. According to cybercrime expert Professor Peter Sommer, of the London School of Economics, ‘security professionals have come to expect such hacktivism attacks’ (cited in Graham 2009).

The most recent military actions led by Israel in Gaza have seen developed a new trend toward using mobile phones as a form of psychological warfare: Jim Michaels of
USA Today and Balousha & O’Loughlin in the Guardian point to the use of text messages and phone calls by the IDF and Hamas as intimidation tools. Whilst the Israelis sent daily phone calls and text messages - perceived by those who received them as ‘threatening’ (Balousha & O’Loughlin 2009) - warning Palestinians against supporting Hamas and asking for information about the whereabouts of its members, Hamas had been sending ‘crude’ text messages ‘that said rocket attacks on all of Israel’s cities were imminent’ (Michaels 2009).

As has been shown in this section, new media in its various forms, and all the new technological tools it has to offer are being exploited by non-official, non-professional concerned activists, or citizen journalists, to raise awareness of perceived unjust or controversial situations; for instance, Channel 4’s Syria’s Torture Machine, an investigation into Syrian President Assad’s use of torture techniques on prisoners and civilians, used 30,000 clips which have been uploaded on various social media platforms by Syrian citizens on the ground. A new productive new field of research has emerged from the development of new media, which has addressed the rise of citizen media and its influence over various issues or events. The University of Manchester’s Mona Baker and Luis Pérez-Gonzàles (2016) specifically have brought to the front important scholarship on translation and citizen media, with a focus on the role and significance of citizen journalists in the context of the 2011 Egyptian revolution: from webcomics to graffiti and street art to activist film-makers using raw material from citizen journalists, new media
has helped present a different, perhaps more authentic side to the Egyptian revolution, away from the often sanitised reports to be found in mainstream media. Dr Courtney C. Radsch also examined in her thesis the Arab media’s influence on foreign policy, focusing especially on citizen journalism in the form of blogs, and Twitter reporting the context of the Egyptian military action in July 2013 is currently the subject of a doctoral thesis at the University of Manchester¹⁴. New media, most notably the Internet, has become the main platform of choice for alternative media participants to bring the conflict outside the battlefields and into the public arena, but it is also important to note that among the various types of web presences covering the Palestinian-Israeli conflict are also the less publicised yet equally relevant peace-building charities such as Children for Peace, a non-partisan peace-building organisation aiming to build ‘trust, friendship and reconciliation’ between Israeli and Palestinian children by involving them together in education, artistic and cultural activities. The charity has the active support of Prime Minister Teresa May, former French President François Hollande, Pope Francis and former US Vice-President Joe Biden, among other high-profile figures, and has been active for over 12 years. Other organisations like this one exist and have a presence online, yet this presence seems to be consistently over-shadowed and undermined by conflict-reinforcing agents, thus mirroring the situation on the ground.

¹⁴ Analysing Fragmented Narratives: Twitter Reporting of the 3 July 2013 Events in Egypt by Neil Sadler, doctoral candidate at the University of Manchester (ongoing at the time of writing).
As media bias is still the single most reported issue in the Palestinian-Israeli crisis, the Internet has been host to the most important proliferation of alternative media outlets (or advocacy journalism groups) proposing to restore fairness and accuracy in the reporting of the conflict, in conjunction with citizen journalism. Little to no academic comparative research has been brought to bear on new media and its influence over the Palestinian-Israeli conflict: the present thesis proposes to bridge the gap, by addressing specifically the role and position of advocacy journalism in the context of the Middle-East conflict. The next chapter will present the theoretical framework which will be applied in order to help identify the position of these alternative media outlets in the journalistic field: in the current context, the chapter will attempt to demonstrate why Bourdieu’s field theory, specifically the concepts of field, capital exchange, doxa and habitus, is the most appropriate framework for a comparative study of multiple alternative media carrying the same aim whilst heralding opposite views.
CHAPTER 3. A FRAMEWORK FOR APPLYING BOURDIEUSIAN CONCEPTS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE MIDDLE-EAST CONFLICT

Such a complex situation as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict evokes passionate, entrenched allegiances, points of view and debates reflecting the diversity of the agents involved both professionally and personally. A tangled issue on the ground, its reporting in the media is just as complicated, with many perspectives. At its core, constant disputes over the accuracy, objectivity and transparency of this reporting principally between the established mainstream media and their critics, among which the four web-based alternative media outlets under present study and ultimately, a struggle for influence and legitimacy in their professional sphere, that is the sphere of media. This study therefore calls for a dynamic, flexible theoretical framework that needs to allow for analysis across several spheres (financial, political, journalistic) using data from various new media supports. Pierre Bourdieu’s conceptual tools seem ideal in dealing with such a multi-layered set of data.

The present chapter will therefore propose to situate Bourdieu’s Theory of Practice in its socio-cultural context, will offer a definition of the various Bourdieusian concepts as they are intended to be applied in the present thesis as well as a critical assessment of the Theory. The second section will situate Bourdieu’s ideas in Media Studies, with a specific emphasis on Journalistic Studies. The third section attempt to map the field(s) in which the different agents involved strive for capital gain. Finally, a brief test of these concepts
against other theories dealing with purported bias in the media, namely Herman & Chomsky’s Propaganda Model and Gramsci’s Theory of Hegemony, will be offered in order confirm the validity of Bourdieu’s Field Theory in the context of the present study.

3.1 Situating Bourdieu and Assessing his Theory of Practice

If it is true that ‘Bourdieu can never be read casually’ (Swartz 1997: 13), it is difficult to deny the increased popularity and influence his theory has had on many researchers willing to bypass the philosophical digressions and occasional obtuseness, perhaps attracted by the theory's empirical value and its practical applicability. As he points out himself, ‘theory without empirical research is empty, empirical research without theory is blind’ (Bourdieu 1988: 774). Bourdieu’s canonical work has had immense influence in sociology and anthropology, and is widely used not only in the social sciences but also more recently in Translation Studies (see Vorderobermeier 2013 and Hanna 2016), in Cultural Studies (see Parker & Philpotts 2009, Philpotts 2010), in Politics (see Davis 2010) and Media Studies (see Benson 2004/2006, Hesmondhalgh 2006, Couldry 2003/2007 and Driessens 2013); his work has asserted its relevance in various fields as more scholars have

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15 On the subject, Swartz attempts to justify Bourdieu’s writing style as follow: for him, ‘Bourdieu consciously employs rhetorical techniques for gaining distance from the taken-for-granted world, [...] his style is a calculated challenge to the stylistic conventions of orthodox academic discourse in France’ and ‘undoubtedly represents an intellectual strategy to demarcate his distinctive product on the French intellectual market just as Barthes, Foucault, and Lacan have invented their respective writing styles’ (1997: 13).
chosen to adopt, develop or refine Bourdieusian concepts in their respective research areas in the past decade.

A working-class boy ‘done good’, Pierre Bourdieu was the son of a postman from deep rural France; he rose from being a philosophy student to taking the Chair of Sociology at one of the most prestigious and renown research universities, the Collège de France, through merit and against most odds. His own personal trajectory likely played a part in his seminal work on social, cultural and economic class reproduction. Informed by the observations he made in Algeria\textsuperscript{16} as young man during its war of independence against France in 1962, Bourdieu introduced then developed across over 40 years a theory based on the fact that those agents who hold cultural and symbolic capital acquired through financial means or military might – by perpetuating long standing cultural and family tradition, having the right accent, a privileged schooling, an awareness and respect for social conventions or etiquette, a specific artistic taste, food preferences, the time, opportunity, professional networking or family connections, the vernacular, the fashion sense, the political or religious convictions, gender or sexual orientation depending on the context - and know how to transmit them (through education or inheritance), also hold class privilege and therefore power; as he states, ‘dominance, even based on naked

\textsuperscript{16} ‘the colonial system can function properly only if the dominated society is willing to assume the very negative nature, or ‘essence’ (the Arab cannot be educated, is improvident, etc.) that the dominant society holds up for it as its destiny’ says Bourdieu on the relationship between France as the colonising power, and Algeria as its colony (Bourdieu in Loyal 2017: 18).
forced, that is by force or money, always has a symbolic dimension’ (Bourdieu 1992b: 172). Pierre Bourdieu explains the concept of *symbolic violence*\(^\text{17}\) as ‘a power which presupposes recognition, that is, misrecognition of the violence that is exercised through it’ (Bourdieu 1991: 209). This process allows for the institutionalisation of *symbolic power*\(^\text{18}\) by an unrecognised albeit legitimate agent, that is any state-owned, state-accredited or endorsed institution or any mainstream organisation which has all or some monopoly (and a concentration of economic and / or political influence) over a given field (news outlets, television channels, mainstream cinema) and are embedded in the collective consciousness both objectively (the structures themselves) and subjectively (through perception and thought) in such a way as to make their acts seem natural (Bourdieu 1998: 40). In other words, symbolic violence entices the dominated agents to comply at least tacitly, through force of habit, with those agents that dominate the field: because symbolic power is recognised as legitimate, there is no imposed coercion, but rather an acceptance of the rules of the game, the *doxa*, as they should be played. For Bourdieu (1994: 16), ‘doxa is a particular point of view, the point of view of the dominant, when it presents and imposes itself [through struggles against opposing visions] as a universal point of view’. Each social sphere has its own doxa, or set of taken-for-granted rules, and all agents in their particular social sphere are expected to follow these rules.

\(^{17}\) symbolic violence is not to be understood as being imposed by an individual agent on another agent, but as a structural domination based on the capital accumulated by an institution.

\(^{18}\) based on forms of capital that are difficult to quantify, such as reputation, strong networks, large audiences, credibility.
All agents evolve within a particular social context: the social spheres in which agents position themselves are defined by Bourdieu as fields. A field, according to Bourdieu (1993:164), is ‘a veritable social universe where, in accordance with its particular laws, there accumulates a particular form of capital and where relations of force of a particular type are exerted’. In other words, a field is identified as a relatively autonomous social sphere that obeys its own rules and adapts to the agents evolving within this sphere at any given time and space. For example, it is difficult to compare the structure of the field of education between different countries or times (contemporary and early 20th century France for instance). Existing agents and new additions who strive to make their marks occupy positions in relation to different forms of capital: economic (financial assets), social (personal or professional connections), cultural (academic qualifications, cultural and artistic knowledge and appreciation, or the way agents express themselves – manners, accent, elocution) and symbolic; symbolic capital here ‘refers to a degree of accumulated prestige, celebrity, consecration or honour’ (Johnson in Bourdieu 1993:7).

The acquisition and / or accumulation of a certain capital can be converted into another type of capital as a trade-off for a better position in a particular field: for instance, by investing in fee-paying private education (therefore giving up some economic capital),

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19 See Bourdieu’s 1983 ‘Forms of Capital’ for further detail.
parents are expecting a return on their investment in symbolic capital (the promise of a better quality of education yielding better prospects, as an example), which in turn can exchanged back into economic capital in the form of better employment opportunities for their children.

Bourdieu’s definition of symbolic capital is, in essence, any type of capital that legitimises the agent’s presence in a specific field and therefore, it is difficult to recognise. For Bourdieu (1993: 76), ‘the only legitimate accumulation consists in making a name for one-self, a known, recognised, a capital of consecration’:

In the economic field, symbolic capital can be represented for instance by any company managing to earn profits during a recession, irrespective of the amount of capital it holds.

In the cultural field, symbolic capital can be bestowed upon the artist who has managed some success despite either their lack or their rejection of other forms of capital, mainly economic, and is therefore recognised through talent alone.

In the political field, a high symbolic capital holder can be represented by a dominant agent: for instance, Germany is presently considered to be the most influential agent in the field of Western European politics because in a difficult economic context in which many other European countries are facing high level of unemployment, large amounts of public debts, a rejection of the European project as seen by the rise in nationalistic aspirations, amongst other factors, Germany’s healthy budget position and
relatively low unemployment rate gives the country symbolic capital, and allows its political representatives to have more influence than less successful countries over political and economic decisions within the European Union. It can also be represented by a successful challenger: Argentinian medical student Ernesto Guevara for instance, earned symbolic capital in the political field by successfully challenging the dominant political agent in Cuba, President Batista, through his involvement and influence over events on the ground during the Cuban Revolution in early 1959.

For Johnson (in Bourdieu 1993:6) a field is ‘a dynamic concept in that a change in agents’ positions necessarily entails a change in the field’s structure’: a change in the agents’ positioning (or a change in the nature of the agents themselves) in this specialised sphere of action (in arts, politics or education for instance) can lead to, or are the product of, struggles over the different forms of capital mentioned above. These struggles are either a result of natural social and economic evolution, or an act of rebellion or resistance against consecrated, institutionalised agents in order to gain material and social status (Inghilleri 2005: 136). The relationship between the agents’ habitus and field therefore works both ways: the field can only exist if agents have the necessary dispositions to constitute that field and give it meaning. At the same time, agents evolving in the field bring the expertise that will allow them to constitute the field.

How does any given society shape the actions of the individuals within it?
Bourdieu’s concept of **habitus** is fundamental in understanding how any given agent acts in the social sphere they evolve in. Instead of seeing the agent as a simple subject following social rules, Bourdieu posits that each agent’s personal and cultural trajectories\(^{20}\) can be used to explain how their views and actions are shaped in relation to their position in a particular social sphere. Bourdieu explains that ‘being the product of history, [habitus] is an *open system of dispositions* that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 133, italics in original): it is therefore crucial here to add that in no way is the concept of habitus to be taken as an immutable end product made of hereditary legacies and pre-conceived judgements, with an agent incapable of adapting or evolving. Habitus evolves with its agent, from the first and deeply rooted experiences of childhood and the personal circumstances early years bring to the influences of education, society and thought processes. It is precisely the fact that the agent’s habitus, in its intimate relation with its position in the field, is not only defined by the agent’s past, but also has the scope to change and adapt according to future developments, that makes it attractive and relevant to the present study.

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\(^{20}\) the experience they have accumulated through the years both professionally and in their personal lives from childhood, including their degree of education, geographical location, personal background and political views.
As Bourdieu explains (2000: 138)

‘one of the major functions of the notion of habitus is to dispel two complementary fallacies each of which originates from the scholastic vision: on the one hand, mechanism, which holds that action is the mechanical effect of the constraint of external causes; and, on the other, finalism, which, with rational action theory, holds that the agent acts freely, consciously, and as some of the utilitarians say, ‘with full understanding’, the action being the product of a calculation of chances and profits.’

Habitus therefore encompasses both the involuntary and the deliberate, and opens the way for choice and transformation; agents have some say in how their life unfolds. As Bourdieu himself accomplished in his personal life, one can beat the odds of their predicted path (which is informed by their upbringing, social and cultural origin and status) to break the mould and forge their own path by making themselves aware and reflect on their place in the world, so as to enable potential changes in the future. This reflexive element in Bourdieu’s Theory is the crucial link which allows to bridge the gap between objectivism and subjectivism, amongst other arguably artificial, restrictive binary propositions, and sets it apart from other sociological schools of thought and ‘escape from false dualities and imposed categories’ (Calhoun 2002).

Reflexivity is all the more important for the heretic agents who want to break free from the doxa of the fields they are situated in and challenge the symbolic power the dominant agents are imposing on them. Each individual agent - the ‘embodiment of a complex historical strategy’ (Benson 2006: 194) - has a unique cultural, religious and educational background and their own habitus; but Johnson also identifies the concept of
'class habitus' as 'the similarity in the habitus of agents from the same social class', using as an example how Bourdieu shows analogies amongst working-class agents across a range of cultural practices (in Bourdieu 1993: 5). Given the diverse backgrounds of the agents dealing with the Middle-East conflict, even within the same group, Johnson's concept of 'class habitus' can be adapted to the present thesis in order to examine whether an 'professional habitus', or an 'ideological habitus' similarity in the habitus of the agents involved in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, could be identified amongst a group of people sharing the same values.

As is often the case within the field of published social analysts, Bourdieu’s theories have met with scepticism. Outside of any given context, Bourdieu’s work has been criticised by many scholars; staunch critics include French researcher Jeannine Verdès-Leroux, who claims Bourdieu is guilty of putting in place ‘an ideological discourse clothed in intimidating rhetoric and a whole panoply of scientific pageantry’ (Verdès-Leroux 2001: 75): this seemingly contradicts Bourdieu’s stated intention, which it to ‘translate highly abstract problems into thoroughly practical scientific solutions’ (Bourdieu 1992: 221). There is no denying that Bourdieu’s Field Theory is complex; it spans over 40 years of thoroughly documented studies, and its broad scope addresses cultural and symbolic reproduction in diverse milieus, its intricate theory meticulously applied.

21 For example, there are Christian and Muslim Palestinians; those who live in Israeli-controlled parts, those who live inside Israel and those who live abroad.
empirically using a wide range of data from questionnaires to art pieces and dealing with the relationship between agency and structure at individual and class (or group) level. Yet its incredible popularity and success both in various fields of academia and in popular culture (especially in his native France, where his political engagements and active participation in debates in the media have made him a house-hold name) tends to be a good test to Bourdieu’s accessibility, and seems to indicate that his ‘intimidating rhetoric’ has found a very large audience.

In a rigorous and well documented study of Bourdieu’s epistemology and methodology, social anthropologist Richard Jenkins sees ‘contradictions and weaknesses in Bourdieu’s work’, which he attributes to a ‘deterministic model of social reality and the practice of social agents’ (Jenkins 1982: 278): in other words, Jenkins (amongst other critics) refutes Bourdieu’s ambitious intentions to transcend structuralist and fundamentalist frameworks of objectivism and subjectivism and accuses him of determinism by arguing that Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of social practice is reproductive rather than transformative, with agents constrained by their habitus, unable to break free from their almost inflexible social trajectory as it is imposed to them by the law of the field. This criticism seems to be particularly unfounded, especially given the reflexive nature of Bourdieu’s Field Theory. It is true that Bourdieu appears to be pessimistic and overly dismissive of the tendency for dominated groups to passively accept the symbolic violence imposed on them by the dominant agents in their respective
field. Yet his own political activism (most notably against neo-capitalism in 1990s France) was the perfect illustration of the transformative ideals he held for the dominated classes: he was indeed an active proponent for the dominated classes to form a coherent class habitus and join force in revolting against the legal and economic constraints which formed the doxic submission imposed by the ultimate power-holder, the field of fields, that is the State.

Bourdieu’s writing process has also come under scrutiny: whilst Matthew Philpotts (2010: 108 – 109) uses Bourdieu’s key ideas as a theoretical framework, in order to conceptualise cultural impact in the context of post-1990 Germany, he also recognises in Bourdieu’s work ‘an often tortuous prose style, apt to obscure rather than illuminate’ and an ‘endless process of self-reflection’ yielding ‘new texts which tread a fine line between repetition, refinement, and wilful misdirection in their treatment of cognate terms and ideas’ in a rich and prolific body of work. Going even further in his acerbic - if a little prosaic - criticism of Bourdieu’s writing style, Washington Post staff writer Hal Hinson (1998) describes it in his review of Bourdieu’s On Television as ‘a prose style so eye-stinging and impenetrable that you’re obliged to reread each sentence a minimum of three times, you begin to realize that Bourdieu is the literary equivalent of anthrax -- a little goes a very long way’. This criticism is impossible to refute: often contradictions or convoluted sentences present themselves to the reader; whether his prose alone is enough of a deterrent to accessing his fundamental theory is highly debatable, however.
Perhaps the toughest challenge Bourdieu’s Field Theory presents to the researcher is also what makes its strength, that is its richness: in order to do Bourdieu’s Theory of Practice justice, the researcher needs to familiarise him/herself with an impressive body of work which reflects Bourdieu’s redefining of concepts as his empirical research develops. As has already been established, fields have constantly shifting boundaries which reflect the struggles for field domination by agents whose actions and choices are driven by their habitus: arguably, it is therefore when the boundary of any given field is about to shift, when the doxa of the field is being successfully challenged by credible heretical agents that Bourdieu’s Field Theory in action works at its best. It offers the empirical researcher looking to apply Bourdieu’s conceptual toolkit to their study the flexibility to determine for themselves the boundaries of the field under their scope at a specific point in time, with specific agents exchanging a specific set of capital. The next section of the chapter will explore in more detail how Bourdieu’s Theory has been applied to media studies, more specifically in relation to journalistic studies.

3.2 Bourdieu in Media Studies

For Couldry (2003: 657), ‘there are good reasons to be sceptical about how fundamentally new media, especially the Internet, are changing patterns of media consumption, let alone people’s orientation to media as sources of social legitimacy’. When considering the potential audience the heretical agents are targeting in the context of the Palestinian-
Israeli situation, it is true that this potential audience will be limited to those who do have access to the Internet\textsuperscript{22} and further narrowed to Anglophones, as most of these heretical agents tend to use English as their primary language. One may also assume that most of the potential readership is made of educated, technologically and politically-minded users who already have an opinion on the conflict and either wish to have it confirmed or want to further their knowledge on the subject.

Nevertheless, the interest raised by the Middle-East conflict in the political field, the international field of news media and all national news fields is unique. Speeches from senior politicians world-wide dealing with any and all issue relating to the Middle-East are being scrutinised with utmost detail by both Israeli and Arab media outlets as well as the Western media; new academic studies, non-fiction books and personal reflections on the nature of the conflict and its coverage on the media are regularly being published (in the past two decades especially); all the main news outlets have a permanent Middle-East correspondent on the ground. It is also very difficult to deny that despite a limited (but ever growing) audience, new media has transformed the media landscape: discussion forums dedicated to the subject of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, sometimes on unrelated websites (for example, the ‘Opinion’ forum on the online version of the \textit{Times Educational Supplement} in the UK often features heated debates on the topic), the multiplication of

\textsuperscript{22} This essentially rules out many of the people directly affected by the Middle-East conflict, given the sporadic access to electricity those living in the Occupied Palestinian Territories have, for instance.
blogs (or citizen journalism as it is sometimes referred to) giving individuals the opportunity to voice their personal views, the ever increasing use of mobile phone cameras which allow for privately filmed footage being almost immediately widely broadcast on video-sharing websites – all these factors contribute to, and perhaps to a certain degree influence, public awareness of the conflict.

Yet very little has been said (at the time of writing) on the new media and their influence as a force of resistance against the symbolic power that is held by institutionalised, mainstream media by applying Bourdieu’s framework, especially in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli situation. Given the intense coverage of the issue by all media outlets (be they dominant or heretical), the role of web-based media outlets in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict should therefore be acknowledged, and a close study of these alternative media outlets within a Bourdieusian framework can prove helpful in better understanding the role and influence of the media as a wider field in the Middle-East conflict.

In his work on capital acquisition in the journalistic field, Nick Couldry recognises what he sees as the ‘limitations’ of Bourdieu’s field theory, and proposes a bridge ‘between Bourdieu’s mature field theory and the institutionalisation of mediatisation analysis (...) that some of media’s consequences must be understood in a more generalised way than standard field theory seems to allow’ (2014: 59): in other words, in
the absence of a clearly defined ‘media capital’ by Bourdieu, is it possible, within field
theory, to apply an analytic tool that would allow to determine the presence of a specific
capital within the field of media, which would be transferable to other fields and
potentially influence them? Drawing on Patrick Champagne’s introduction of a ‘media
capital’ as a measure of agents’ potential influence over media events, Couldry argues
that, although ‘media capital’ is not at this stage to be considered as a basic capital in the
same way as the economic or social capital are - arguably because media capital would
not be applicable or transferable into other forms of capital in all fields -, there is a place
for a ‘media meta-capital’. Couldry proposes that, because media as an institution has a
direct effect on the accumulation or loss of other forms of capital, this ‘media meta-
capital’ could ‘take the particular form, initially, of influence over what counts as ‘symbolic
capital’ in each particular field’ (2014: 60).

Given the increasing role of social capital, or the ‘possession of a durable network
of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition’
(Bourdieu 2006), in a digital age where significant networks of connections are clear
markers of one’s success, especially online, the present study argues that social capital
specifically should be given a permanent part in this ‘media meta-capital’: high social
capital – either or both in its number and its value - is an essential commodity in the media
sphere, and can also be exchanged for symbolic capital in any given field; it is difficult to
envisage an agent’s influence over media events of any significance, and specifically on
such large scale as intended in the present context, without high social capital. This is why media meta capital will be defined as the combination of symbolic capital earned in all the fields the outlets have positioned themselves in and social capital collected online for the purpose of this study. Media meta-capital holders could be represented by French bank Crédit Mutuel for instance, which has had a major influence in the journalistic field as the owner of the group L’Est Républicain, a daily French regional newspaper representing a quarter of France’s regional press. Similarly, between 2006 and 2014, French-Israeli private investment banker Edouard de Rothschild was the main shareholder in French national mainstream newspaper Libération; Mathieu Pigasse, CEO of Lazard Bank France, a French-American investment bank, and former chief of staff to then French Minister for Economic Affairs Laurent Fabius (currently Minister for Foreign Affairs), is one of the three most important shareholders of internationally recognised French Newspaper Le Monde. In a difficult political and economic context in which high profile banks with established high social capital hold both political and economic capital and therefore have the potential to influence political decisions at national and international level, despite a poor reputation in the eyes of the general public, the presence of bankers at the heart of the journalistic field would allow them to be in a prime

23 Lazard Bank, for instance, acts a financial advisor to governments and treasuries at national level as part of the bank’s Sovereign Advisory business (The U.S. Department of Treasury, the New Zealand government, UK Financial Investments and the Hellenic Financial Stability Fund, amongst other clients), LAZARD LTD REPORTS FULL-YEAR AND FOURTH-QUARTER 2013 RESULTS http://files.shareholder.com/downloads/LAZARD/3514070814x0x723314/a9aab5a7-c4f1-4f35-b806-3cdf2d6a5c8a/LAZ_News_2014_2_5_Earnings.pdf [last accessed 30 September 2014].
position to help shape and / or disseminate opinions which would best suit their interests not only in the political and the economic field, but also in the journalistic field: at the very least, decisions made in terms of staffing and budgets have a direct impact on how the newspapers have to operate. The concept of media meta-capital would be particularly helpful in identifying and making coherent the outlets’ impact on the representation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict within the social sphere as a whole, and in multiple fields (the journalistic, economic and political field) at once. This concept will be tested in the context of the present study, in which high ‘media meta-capital’ would be attributed to the outlet(s) able to hold the highest cumulated amount of social and symbolic capital relevant to the field(s) they want to influence.

Having established the theoretical framework for the present study, and highlighted the relevance of focusing on web-based alternative media outlets, it is necessary to attempt to map all the overlapping and interlocking field(s) in which the various agents under study in the present thesis evolve in order to better comprehend the complex relations that exist between all the agents and assert their positions (consecrated / heretic agents) in the field(s).
3.3 Mapping the field

The journalistic field is rooted in competition across fields and within its own bounds, as media outlets compete to secure readership, gain profits (as most of the major news outlets are also commercial enterprises), maintain and consolidate their reputation.

Within Bourdieu’s framework, these agents are ‘challengers who break the silence of the doxa and call into question the unproblematic, taken-for-granted world of the dominant group’ (Bourdieu 1993: 83) and can therefore be described as holding heretical positions. One of the most efficient heretical strategy they use to this effect is the ‘return to the source’, a ‘strategy of beating the dominant groups at their own games by demanding that they respect the fundamental law of the field’ – transparency and newsworthiness in the context of the present study, which are generally regarded as a fundamental principle of journalistic professionalism. They also want to reclaim the symbolic capital held hostage by mainstream media and look to secure this symbolic capital for themselves using various other strategies such as labelling or name-dropping, so that they can convert it into political influence in the conflict.

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24 defaming the characters and / or ideas of those whose views they oppose, or as Jenkins describes it, ‘subtle, or not so subtle, academic abuse’ (Jenkins 1992: 104)

25 clearly stating for example how many supporters they have, what famous political / academic figures or institutions endorse them.
These heretical agents often denounce established, dominant outlets such as the *Washington Post* or the *New York Times* as conservative outlets that align themselves too readily with the agendas of the ruling elite. This makes for complex relationships between ‘the established figures and the young challengers’ (Bourdieu 1993: 60), as many of the agents that participate in alternative media outlets are either credited, published journalists themselves or have experience in political activism: in other words, they too have cultural capital and the necessary economic capital to fund and maintain their organisations. Although their aim is to resist the strong cultural and symbolic capital the dominant agents have in mainstream society, they are also mindful of the fact that they need to gain visibility within these media institutions in order to bolster their own standing. In that sense, whereas mainstream, institutionalised media outlets such as the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* convert symbolic capital into economic capital, in turn reinvested into maintaining the political influence they have accumulated, many of the alternative media outlets involved in the Middle-East conflict want to acquire symbolic capital that they can convert into political and cultural capital. So how do these heretical agents challenge the mainstream media they have alienated themselves from on the issue of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and to what extent are the strategies they use different to – or in fact mirror – the ones used by mainstream media? Specifically, how do the various strategies these groups engage in reflect their choices of the kind of audience they wish to appeal to (the political elite, the general public, or other agents that are part of
the wider field)? These questions will be dealt with at a later stage in the study, when a closer examination of all the agents involved, their habitus and the fields they evolve in will be carried out.

Using Bourdieu’s field theory and his concept of symbolic violence to determine the positioning of the Internet-based media outlets studied in the present thesis, the journalistic field which, as described by Rodney Benson (2006: 195), ‘tends to engage with first and foremost those agents who possess high volumes of capital’, will be narrowed down to the international field of news media. This field will include those consecrated dominant, institutionalised media outlets that broadcast internationally and hold significantly high economic capital (they are financially rich and have high consumer levels) and high cultural capital (they enjoy a strong reputation and employ influential agents with strong cultural capital). As Benson & Neveu posit (2004: 5), ‘organizations or individuals who dominate a field are generally those who successfully convert one form [of capital] into the other, and in so doing, amass both “social capital” of friendship and colleague networks, and “symbolic capital” through which their dominance is legitimated’. The accumulation of capital therefore gives them very strong symbolic power and influence (for example the BBC or The New York Times).

Web-based news media will, in this context, be considered as a sub-field of the wider field of international news media. If it is true that some web-based only media can
be influential and have gained sufficient economic and cultural capital to hold some
degree of symbolic power, their status is not as dominant as the mainstream outlets from
the print media who are also present on the Internet. This raises the following questions,
which the present thesis will attempt to answer further in the study: to what extent is the
web sub-field structured in the same way as the wider field? Do agents occupy the same
kinds of position in both fields? Is it possible to identify homologies – or ‘similarit[ies] in
organisation’, as described by William F. Hanks²⁶?

Media bias has been denounced by individuals, pressure groups of various
orientations and motives, as well as academics or journalists who believe that the
standards of objectivity or fairness usually expected from mainstream media are not being
adhered to. Arguably the more successful and recognised theoretical models dealing with
media bias – Gramsci’s theory of Hegemony and Herman & Chomsky’s ‘Propaganda
Model’ – both posit (with differences) that pressure is exerted on the public via the media
by an elite or dominant group to project their ideologies under authoritarian (Gramsci)
and/or democratic (Herman and Chomsky) regimes. These two theories will briefly be
tested against the Bourdiesian concepts of field, capital, habitus and doxa in order to
justify the latter as the better theoretical framework to draw on in the context of the
present thesis.

²⁶ of the Anthropology Faculty at Berkeley, in his critical examination of Bourdieu’s legacy from the
perspective of linguistic anthropology (Hanks 2005: 74).
3.4 Bourdieusian concepts tested against Gramsci’s Hegemony and Herman Chomsky’s ‘Propaganda Model’

A brief outline of Gramsci’s Hegemony and Herman & Chomsky’s ‘Propaganda Model’ will be proposed, before testing them against Bourdieu’s concepts.

**Gramsci’s theory of Hegemony:**

Although the concept of hegemony has been applied in various ways and contexts from Aristotle to Marx and Lenin, the social and political theory of Antonio Gramsci\(^27\) has been the most popular and influential to date, certainly at least for the past two decades, as the hegemonic model he developed in the early part of the 20\(^{th}\) century has been applied to many contexts dealing with international relations as well as social and political studies\(^28\). For Fontana (2006: 28), ‘Gramsci emphasises that politics and political activity are fundamentally centred on the attaining and maintaining of power. And power, according to Gramsci, is constituted by a dual or dyadic opposition: force and consent, violence and persuasion’: the theory of cultural hegemony therefore identifies and explains domination and the maintenance of power and how the elite class entices the subordinated social classes to accept and adopt the values of the dominating bourgeois

\(^{27}\) An Italian political scientist, a revolutionary and founding member of the Communist Party of Italy. A Marxist thinker, Gramsci wrote the majority of his essays (*The Prison Notebooks*) when imprisoned by Mussolini’s regime.

\(^{28}\) see Birchfield and Freyburg-Inan 2004 or James Martin’s 2001 4-volume set, more specifically Volume IV on the contemporary applications of Gramsci’s theory, from political to cultural and international studies.
hegemony. For Gramsci, the ruling class maintains its domination by the consent of the mass of the people – here similarities can be drawn with Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic violence - and only uses its coercive apparatuses, the forces of law and order, as a last resort. Gramscian hegemony encompasses not only political and economic control, but also the ability of the dominant class to project its own way of seeing the world so that those who are subordinated by it accept it as ‘common sense’ and ‘natural’, and therefore implies a degree of willingness and consent.

Subordination of the populace is ensured by the agents of cultural hegemony, like mass communications media, schools, organised religion, and commercial popular arts (cinema, music, literature, etc.). Gramsci’s theory also has a dynamic dimension, a ‘constant process of power’ as he emphasises the importance of struggle: this is acknowledged by Fiske, according to whom the consent given to the ruling elite by the subordinated classes ‘must be consistently won and rewon…In hegemonic theory, ideology is constantly up against forces of resistance. Consequently, it is engaged in a constant struggle not just to extend its power but to hold on to the territory it has already colonised’ (Fiske 1992: 219).

Gramsci also emphasises the need for a counter-balance to hegemonic power that could challenge the consensus and overthrow ‘common sense’. Whilst ‘traditional intellectuals’ such as doctors, teachers, journalists or clergymen contribute to the
validation of the dominant power by circulating and / or reproducing the official stance, ‘organic intellectuals’ originating from within (or at least having strong ties with) the ruled classes can create subversion and give the subordinate classes the tools to break free from the dominating elite. This counter-hegemony has social, political and cultural revolution as its ultimate goal, with the working class at the helm of a socialist model.

Herman & Chomsky’s ‘Propaganda Model’:

First introduced in 1988, Herman and Chomsky’s propaganda model deals with media performance and ‘focuses on [the] inequality of wealth and power and its multilevel effects on mass-media interests and choices. It traces the route by which money and power are able to filter out the news fit to print, marginalise dissent, and allow the government and dominant private interests to get their messages across to the public’ (Herman & Chomsky 2008: 1): essentially, this model alleges systematic media distortions by the mass media, always favouring corporate interests. The ‘Propaganda Model’ argues that there are 5 classes of ‘filters’ in society which determine what is newsworthy; these 5 filters are described as (a) corporate media ownership which, being profit-making orientated and very concentrated, is bound to influence the treatment of the news, (b)
the influence of advertising, (c) the issue of sourcing\textsuperscript{29}, (d) what the authors call ‘flak’\textsuperscript{30} and (e) the arguably outdated anti-communist ideology\textsuperscript{31}.

Here similarities can be drawn with Bourdieu’s criticism of the journalistic field. More specifically, one can draw parallels between the propaganda model and Bourdieu’s view of television as subjected to censorship or constraints by the economic and political fields, which in turn affects other fields (when over-sensationalising an event for example)\textsuperscript{32}. Both models seem to agree that media ownership plays an important part in the way the news is being reported, even though Bourdieu recognises that the journalistic field is in fact capable of some autonomy, mainly due to the relational interactions between the journalists’ personal trajectories, their habitus and position in the field they occupy. Herman & Chomsky’s model does not however seem to acknowledge that the media have any form of autonomy: the total control (and even censorship) to which media owners subject the media prevents it. Whilst acknowledging that generally media news people being subjected to the 5 filters described above act in good faith, Herman &

\textsuperscript{29} ‘the reliance of the media on information provided by the government, business and “experts” funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power’ (Herman & Chomsky 2008: 2).

\textsuperscript{30} ‘negative responses to a media statement or program’ (Herman & Chomsky 2008: 24) and can take many forms such as letters, phone calls, petitions, lawsuits or speeches before the Congress amongst others, and may be instigated by individuals or organisations at national or local level.

\textsuperscript{31} In the 2002 Preface of their study, Herman & Chomsky replace anti-communist ideology with ‘the triumph of capitalism’ and privatisation (2008: XVII).

Chomsky argue that these news people lure themselves into thinking they act professionally, ethically and objectively; in reality, the constraints posed by the 5 filters make it near impossible for them to have any scope for autonomy (Herman & Chomsky 2008: 2). The ‘Propaganda Model’ has suffered many critiques, which often describe it as being inconsistent and overly deterministic\(^3\). 

In the complex context of the reporting of events related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which involves dealing with particularly well-documented, sometimes controversial and always sensitive material, it is necessary to be able to draw on a theoretical framework that allows for adaptability, flexibility, and helps deal with multi-layered relations (from individuals to group pressures, institutions to outside pressure). The fact that the Middle-East conflict is a live conflict involving daily, sometimes contradictory events means that the theoretical framework used to analyse the data has to adapt to a volatile political and social context. This conflict is broadcast not only in the mainstream press and on television networks but also in the new media (specifically the Internet). Herman and Chomsky’s propaganda model is undoubtedly useful in analysing behavioural patterns developed by mainstream media – that, according to the authors,\(^3\)

\(^3\) See Lehrer’s 2004 ‘Chomsky and the Media: A Kept Press and a Manipulated People’ and Schlesinger’s 1989 ‘From production to propaganda?’ (see bibliography for full reference). Herman addressed most of the critiques in his 1996 ‘The Propaganda Model Revisited’.
subserviently serve the agenda of the political elite following the five filters as described above. However, it seems more difficult to apply to new media as the five filters identified by Herman and Chomsky do not all necessarily translate into the world of new technologies (specifically the issue of media ownership since setting up a website, for instance, requires very little financial investment) or apply to alternative media. In contrast, the Bourdieusian concept of capital in its different forms allows for a close analysis of the dynamic relationship between different types of media outlets in terms of relational struggles. As Couldry argues (2007: 210), ‘Bourdieu’s insistence, which the concept of field implements, that social space does not exist in the abstract, but must always be understood in terms of the relations between each space and other spaces, and the relational struggles over capital and position among agents in each space, powerfully challenges the abstractions of social theory’: in other words, the ways in which the various agents involved (regardless of the type of media they evolve in) convert any form of capital they have into symbolic capital with the ultimate goal of acquiring political influence is what makes the framework useful in this particular context.

Events relating to the Middle-East conflict are analysed at all levels by representatives (be they independent or part of a political group) of two parties holding opposing views on an issue that is already extensively relayed in institutionalised mainstream media. This is a unique situation that is far from the usual binary system involving one obviously dominant, elite group (the State for instance, mainstream media
in general or one mainstream news outlet in particular) and another dominated group (the citizens of the State, alternative media as a whole or one specific media outlet struggling against the power of a bigger mainstream outlet) for which Gramsci’s Hegemony seems perfectly suited. In his analysis of Inuit videography groups and the way they choose to produce videos representing the Inuit people through indigenous eyes (as opposed to simply reproducing the Canadian coloniser’s predominant viewpoint), Michael Robert Evans illustrates how these groups deal with hegemonic pressures either by producing videos funded by the Canadian government (in Evans’ study, the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation) or by creating independently made documentaries - represented by a group called Isuma, who ‘see themselves as a resistance cell, fighting against the powerful hegemony of Colonial Canada’ that they recognise as the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation’ (Evans 2003: 315). So whilst Gramscian Hegemony identifies forms of hegemonic power as well as forms of counter-hegemonic power, and therefore acknowledges the struggle facing a dominated group that is not simply accepting of the hold the elite cast imposes on them, it seems less applicable to contexts where multiple rather than dual positions are taken on the same issue. Bourdieu’s field theory and the concepts of symbolic violence and capital seem more appropriate in this regard. As pointed out by Benson & Neveu (2005: 12), Bourdieu’s field theory calls for ‘the simultaneous analysis of social structures and cultural forms, as well as the complex interplay between the two’: in the context of the present thesis, because it allows dealing with multiple position-takings, Bourdieu’s field theory will not only help determine each
web-based outlet’s position in the field they occupy, but also examine their evolution in the field and their struggle for resistance against mainstream media.

The political pressure exerted on the media by pressure groups, activists or individuals holding strong views on this issue has become such that as much as governmental or institutional pressure, outside pressure plays an important part in the representation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Whilst Gramsci and Herman & Chomsky are perfectly adapted to macro-level (Fascist Italy in the case of Gramsci, the ‘Establishment’ as studied by Herman & Chomsky) or medium-level (large corporations for example, or punctual political events such as the Indochina Wars) relations, Bourdieu’s framework appears to be the only model which allows to be applied at micro-level. As Omar Lizardo from the Department of Sociology at the University of Arizona points out, the concept of habitus ‘allows Bourdieu to analyse the social agent as a physical, embodied actor, subject to developmental, cognitive and emotive constraints and affected by the very real physical and institutional configurations of the field’ (Lizardo 2009). The make-up of the individual agents involved as well as their beliefs and positions (and potential shifts in positions) on some contentious issues such as the right for Palestinian refugees to return or the one-state solution, are determining factors in better understanding the aims and ultimate objectives of the web-based outlets denouncing bias on the part of mainstream media, and Bourdieu’s concept of habitus specifically will therefore reveal particularly useful in dealing with these individual agents.
Having determined that using Bourdieu’s rich, flexible and adaptable model is more helpful than other theoretical frameworks in dealing with new media and their positioning in the reporting of a live political event, the next chapter will offer a brief sample data analysis. The applicability of Bourdieu’s model will be tested on two alternative media outlets (one pro-Palestinian and one pro-Israeli) which have not been chosen as the core data of the study.
CHAPTER 4. SAMPLE DATA ANALYSIS: A STUDY OF MEDIA WATCH INTERNATIONAL AND PALESTINE MEDIA WATCH WITHIN A BOURDIEUSIAN FRAMEWORK

Web-based media can have a very short life-span and can disappear without warning; it is sometimes difficult to find secure, lasting and reliable online sources. This is especially true of alternative media outlets dealing with high-profile issues, such as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, as they need to have enough economic capital to keep audiences informed regularly, often on a daily basis. With this context in mind, the practical and critical applicability of Bourdieusian concepts to alternative media as a site of resistance will be assessed on one pro-Israeli outlet, Media Watch International (MWI), and one pro-Palestinian outlet, Palestine Media Watch (PMW). MWI and PMW both refer to themselves as non-profit, independent organisations based in the USA, and were both set up as the Second Intifada started in late 2000, at a time when media coverage was particularly intense due to a cascade of political decisions and military incursions, giving rise to an intensification of the violence.

Many similarities can be found in the strategies used by the two web-based media outlets to denounce the dominant agents by appealing to the core values of the wider journalistic field: balance, accuracy, fairness and authenticity (some of the most relevant journalistic values as identified by the American Society of News Editors and their Journalism Values Institute in 1997). The first obvious similarity can be found in the name
these alternative media outlets have given themselves: both claim to ‘watch’ the media. The claim that mainstream media need to be ‘watched’ conveys an important point: by ‘watching’ how mainstream media cover the conflict, they are distancing themselves from the dominant agents of the field they are evolving in, and are posing themselves as outsiders in the journalistic field - a strategy arguably used to help them gain symbolic capital as they are inferring that mainstream media should not be entirely relied upon. In effect, by implying that mainstream media do not adhere to the journalistic code of ethics and that there is a need to monitor them in order to ensure reliable coverage of the conflict, both MWI and PMW are reclaiming the core journalistic values for themselves in their quest for legitimacy.

According to their respective mission statement, their aims are also similar, but offer opposing perspectives: MWI is ‘dedicated to advancing Israel’s image by promoting accurate, impartial media coverage of, and providing timely, factual information about, Israel and the Middle East’ (Media Watch International website, About Us page), whilst PMW describes itself as wanting to ‘promote fair and accurate coverage of the Israeli occupation of Palestine in the US mainstream media’ (Palestine Media Watch website – archived, About Us page). The claim of ‘promoting accurate media coverage’ is combined with the emphasis on decrying the ‘media failures’ (as described by PMW) of the American mainstream media. This claim, made by both MWI and PMW, is validated by publishing reports presenting a certain consecrated, institutionalised media outlet as
responsible for accuracy, omissions or biased position-takings. On occasion, the dominant agent charged is the same: for example, *MWI*’s 2002 ‘Revisiting CNN’ study finds fault in, amongst other aspects, *CNN*’s ‘obsequious interview’ with Yasser Arafat in one particular occasion, whilst *PMW*’s 2006 ‘CNN Presents Slanted Propaganda’ article argues that *CNN* does not report on world-wide anti-Israeli rallies against the Israeli invasion of Southern Lebanon taking place in the same year. Again, discrediting and denouncing the dominant agents help support the claim that both *MWI* and *PMW* can be described as heretical agents of the field.

Another common strategy, which reinforces this idea, is the practice of name-dropping and listing all endorsements to the dominated agents in order to strengthen their symbolic capital, therefore validating their claim as legitimate agents with credible claims: *PMW* lists Prof. Noam Chomsky, Prof. Norman Finkelstein and Prof. Edward Herman, three high-profile academic figures, as endorsing their actions; *MWI* quotes former Israeli Prime Minister Ehut Olmert, Israeli President Shimon Peres and former senior advisor to Ariel Sharon Ra’anana Gissin. Similarly, both web-based agents emphasise the fact that they have been mentioned in the mainstream media they are denouncing. *PMW* offers an extensive list of all the major mainstream media outlets they have appeared in, whilst *MWI* describes its founder, Sharon Tzur, as ‘the icon for national media outlets like Fox News and CNN, who seek her counsel in securing articulate Israeli voices – she herself has appeared on these networks and has been featured in articles in the US
and *Israel Fox News Channel* and *CNN*. Although the nature of the involvement of *PMW* and *MWI* respectively with the institutionalised media is not made clear (there is no evidence that the appearances are either positive or negative), maintaining visibility in outlets in possession of high cultural, economic and symbolic capital again allows them to accumulate symbolic capital. This implies that their presence in mainstream media acts as an acknowledgement by the dominant agents of the validity of their heretical rivals’ claims.

Aside from the obvious opposition in their viewpoints - and consequently their opposing doxa in the political field - other differences can be found between the two heretical agents: whilst both encourage pro-active initiatives, the nature of their activism differs. *PMW* offers tools and tips for efficient media watch and gives sample letters and contacts to address letters of complaint: this strategy seems aimed at gaining immediate political and symbolic capital by extending its influence. *MWI*’s involvement in ‘presenting a positive image of Israel’ appears geared towards gaining long-term political influence: the two initiatives endorsed by *MWI*, *Caravan for Democracy* (launched in 2002) and the *Faculty Fellowship Summer Institute in Israel* (which took place in 2008), are both educationally-based projects, the first one bringing high profile speakers (including Shimon Peres and Natan Sharansky) to American campuses for talks on the Middle-East conflict and other political and /or historical subjects, the second one an academic fellowship opened to academics of all levels and aimed at helping the exchange of ideas
between college faculty members on an educational two week program to Israel. According to MWI's website, the Faculty Fellowship Summer Institute in Israel was initiated as a response to the academic boycott of Israel by British academics. Another difference is that whilst MWI's ‘About Us’ page includes comprehensive information about its main members, it is more difficult to glean information on the set-up and staffing of PMW.\(^{34}\)

The diverging strategies may indicate a difference in the audience each agent is aiming at: the fact that no journalists or members are being mentioned might mean that the organisation is trying to convey the image of a grassroots, collective group rather than an individual initiative. This in turn could be interpreted as PMW wanting to attract as many members as possible by drawing attention to the importance of their mission rather than to personalities. This strategy would certainly confirm its status as a heretical agent, as opposed to MWI's more conventional strategies: in contrast, much detail is given about Sharon Tzur, the founder and Executive Director of MWI.\(^{35}\) One potential explanation

\(^{34}\) Dr Ahmed Bouzid is the founder and President of PMW. He is also the Head of the Philadelphia Chapter of the National Arab American Journalists Association and Honorary Editorial Board Member of independent online newspaper The Palestine Chronicle. He is also the author of the 2003 book Framing the Struggle: Essays on the Middle-East and the US Media.

\(^{35}\) Sharon Tzur was raised in Israel. She has been listed 44th in Jewsweek's ‘50 Most Influential Jews in the USA’ (dating 22 July 2002 and available online at http://usuarios.lycos.es/santo29/The%2050%20Most%20Influential%20Jews%20in%20America.pdf [last accessed 26 July 2009]. She is also the founder of another alternative media outlet dealing with purported bias in the Middle-East conflict (HonestReporting) which will be studied in detail further into this thesis.
might be that, as a recognised figure both in the political and the media world, and given
the powerful endorsements her organisation enjoys, Tzur’s aim is to maximise her
symbolic capital and convert it into political influence by providing a platform for the
Israeli political elite.

Much remains to be studied in what has been intended as a sample data analysis
to show the practical applicability of Bourdieusian concepts in the media coverage of the
Middle-East crisis by heretical agents, but the sample data already alludes to the
importance and helpfulness of the concepts of capital and habitus in order for a
challenging agent to exert any influence on the dominant agent. This confirms Husu’s
assertion that (2012), ‘to be able to make visible and change identity-related social
problems and to take advantage of the possibilities that exist in fields, agents need not
only to be qualified and able to carry out certain types of position-taking, but also to have
legitimacy based on the possession of capital and habitus that indicates their class
position in the society’ or, in that context, in their field.

A more comprehensive examination of similar data (2 pro-Israeli groups and 2 pro-
Palestinian groups) will be carried out more extensively in chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 of the
thesis, where the concepts of field and capital especially will be deployed in more detail.
Chapter 5 proposes to test the concept of habitus as a key analytical tool for exploring,
describing and understanding the agency of these media outlets.
CHAPTER 5. THE HABITUS(ES) OF ALTERNATIVE MEDIA

The present chapter proposes to reflect on the habitus of the alternative web-based media, and particularly those four agents constituting the core data of the thesis. The first section will discuss the dispositions and practices of alternative web-based media outlets as a professional habitus, while the second section will focus specifically on the ideological habitus and the political activism habitus of the four agents under study. The third section will analyse strategies employed by the alternative web-based media outlets under study in questioning the habitus of mainstream media.

5.1 Establishing the Professional Habitus of Alternative Web-Based Media

Alternative media has been defined as ‘media production that challenges, at least implicitly, actual concentrations of media power, whatever form those concentrations may take in different locations’ (Couldry & Curran 2003: 6). It has been steadily growing since the late 20th and beginning of 21st century, although precursors of current alternative media can be traced back to the mid-18th century (for a well-documented history of alternative media, see Hamilton 2000). Alternative media can take many forms: one popular form is advocacy journalism or ‘the use of journalism techniques to promote a specific political or social cause’ (Jensen 2008). Well known examples of advocacy journalism in the press include newspapers that use satire and humour to relay political
scandals or miscarriages of justice and have their own style and journalistic jargon: examples include weekly French newspaper *Le Canard Enchaîné* and fortnightly British magazine *Private Eye*.

Advocacy journalism in the new media also take the form of alternative media outlets, generally grass-roots not-for-profit organisations, which mostly present themselves as the ultimate guardians of accuracy and fairness in mainstream media. Media watchdogs, as they refer to themselves, have distinctive features, for instance in terms of the choice of language used to broadcast their claims, and their geographical location (outside the country they are focusing on, to evade censorship or dissuasive measures imposed on local journalists for example). Most of these organisations exist only virtually, on the Internet. Many are based in the USA, some of the most active and widely recognised being *Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting*, a media watchdog group advocating independence in journalism, and *Tyndall report*, which monitors the American television networks’ weekday nightly newscasts.

For those media watchdogs situated outside of the USA, English seems to be the main language of use. A study carried out by Professor John Paolillo for UNESCO in 2005, ‘Measuring Linguistic Diversity on the Internet’, concluded that ‘the principal effects of bias are to favor large languages with well-established technical standards. Notably, English is perhaps foremost among these languages, being not coincidentally, the
language of the founders of the Internet and its precursor research projects’ (Paolillo 2005: 79). Internet World Stats, an International website featuring up-to-date statistics and Internet market research data for over 233 individual countries and world regions, shows an Internet users growth of 336.1% between 2000 and 2008. These two factors indicate that the use of English on the Internet is likely to increase the size of a potential audience, and may explain why many media outlets – be they mainstream, governmental or alternative - tend to use English as the main vehicle to circulate their ideas and use new media (namely the Internet, but not exclusively) as their platform. Romaine (2009) points out that ‘as much as 80 percent of the information stored in the world’s computers is in English and 90 percent of the world’s computers connected to the Internet are located in English-speaking countries’ (at the time of writing).

It is, however, important to bear in mind that the use of the Internet is spreading more rapidly in non-English speaking communities (in Latin America and China, for example); subsequently, English could lose its edge in the field to the benefit of minority languages. Although it is true that some media watchdogs use languages other than English (sometimes Arabic or Hebrew and other European languages), the fact that the audiences that ‘matter’, those who can have an influence on foreign affairs politics, are generally Western audiences who are mostly proficient in English tends to suggest that the trend to use English as the main language will not be affected by anything less than a major shift in the current political paradigm.
This is a factor that influences media watchdogs dealing with international conflicts such as the Tibet-China conflict, the India-Pakistan contention in the Jammu and Kashmir province and the difficult situation faced by journalists in Burma or Zimbabwe. But while all of the watchdogs involved in these conflicts use English as their main language, their profiles are very different from those dealing with the Middle East conflict.

Generally defined as not-for-profit, independent grass-root organisations aiming at balancing mainstream news coverage of various issues, media watch activities have a very different role in countries where mainstream journalists do not have the opportunity to work independently, and where freedom of the press is not a priority. In the case of Burma, the Burma Media Watch organisation – part of Burma Media Association, an organisation ‘established in January 2001 by overseas Burmese journalists, reporters and writers who practice and advocate freedom of expression in Burma’ (website)– is dedicated to reporting all cases of journalists arrested and detained by the Burmese authorities, and newspapers suspended as well as general issues on press freedom in Burma. Because foreign media are rarely allowed on Burmese soil, media coverage is scarce and potentially hazardous for local journalists reporting on the Burmese dictatorship and its hold over the Burmese population. There is a very similar situation in Zimbabwe: The Association of Zimbabwean Journalists in the UK, launched in 2005 ‘to bring together exiled journalists and other media practitioners living outside the country’, describes its mission as balancing the lack for press freedom in Zimbabwe by ‘offer[ing]
an independent outlet for news for and by the people of Zimbabwe’ and ‘provid[ing] a source of balanced, authoritative, accurate and in-depth information about Zimbabwe’ (see website).

In the case of the 50-year-old Tibetan struggle for autonomy from China, there is a very limited number of grassroots, independent organisations that monitor news coverage of the events in Tibet. The Tibet Information Centre, which was the main information provider of news regarding Tibet, had to close down in 2005 due to a lack of funds. The only other easily accessible news provider, TibetInfoNet, aims to monitor international media and academic journals, especially from the People’s Republic of China (PRC), and openly targets international audiences – it is translated in eight different languages – as well as Tibetans and Chinese. The organisation makes it clear that although ‘concern for the situation in Tibet is the reason for the existence of TibetInfoNet, the organisation has no ‘political agenda’ other than doing ‘its best to depict the situation in Tibet in the fairest and accurate way possible’. Protecting the identity of their sources in Tibet also seems to be a priority for this not-for-profit organisation that solely depends on donations. In contrast with the highly publicised Middle East conflict, the situation in Tibet is sporadically covered by the Western media. In that context, it is not the bias and distorted news bulletins broadcast by mainstream media so much as the lack of media coverage from Tibet that is being addressed. TibetInfoNet provides a similar service to that provided by some Palestinian / Israeli watchdogs (media monitoring, dissemination of
information ‘through internet-based reports, electronic mailings and occasional publications’, provision of ‘confidential briefing and expertise service to governments, international organisations, NGOs, corporations and individuals dealing with contemporary Tibet’). It also openly aims to enrol volunteers to ‘further disseminate [its] output, translate it into other languages and by inviting other interested people to subscribe to [its] mailing list [as well as] provide practical help’. It is difficult to label TibetInfoNet a ‘media watchdog’ due to the scarcity of news coverage of the conflict and of the organisations involved in covering the issue outside of mainstream media. Access to information from sources outside the official Chinese media channels is also possibly another explanation, due to the heavy influence of the Chinese state-controlled press.

Interestingly, there is also an official, state-controlled news provider based in China, the China Tibet Information Center (www.tibet.cn) – available in English, Chinese and Tibetan – which is also ‘committed to publishing news and information about Tibet accurately’, in what can be seen as a deliberate attempt to discredit media watchdogs such as TibetInfoNet. The front page of this news outlet bears articles on ‘fifty years of democratic reform in Tibet’, and on huge investments made by China to protect the Tibetan culture. Other articles offer a profile of the Dalai Lama, with titles such as ‘Dalai Lama lies again, says newspaper’ (unsourced and unclaimed), ‘China publishes evidences

36 Although ongoing, the Tibet situation is not one of military conflict between two armed parties.
of Dalai clique’s masterminding of riots’ or ‘Dalai Lama a politician, not a simple monk’.

Other pages include testimonies of foreign tourists and journalists depicting the ‘real Tibet’ and giving a ‘true picture of contemporary Tibet’, with no reference to the civil unrest in the Tibet Autonomous Region that TibetInfoNet reports on in its articles.

The Kashmir region – divided among India, Pakistan and China because of territorial dispute – has been the object of several wars and many recent military threats (including the use of nuclear weapons) in the last 60 years. Whilst many view the civil unrest in India-controlled Kashmir as a ‘genuine national uprising against Indian misrule’ (Margolis 2008), India tends to describe the situation as ‘cross-border terrorism’ (ibid.). Although coverage of the conflict on Western mainstream media is at best patchy, it is widely reported in Indian and Pakistani English-speaking mainstream media: online Pakistani newspaper A Pakistan News reports on its front page in its Kashmir section ‘Indian Troops Martyr 42 Kashmiris in March’ on 8 April 2009, whilst The Times of India’s first title on the same day is ‘Alarm at LoC but its jihadis, not Taliban’, referring to the ‘jihadi’s determination for a new terror attack in [Indian controlled] Jammu and Kashmir’.

There is also an online news agency based in Kashmir, Kashmir Media Service, offering daily updates on the situation in ‘occupied Kashmir’. Kashmir Watch is an independent organisation also based in Kashmir; it aims to monitor ‘leading Indian and Pakistani newspapers, including those being printed in both sides of Kashmir’ and ‘is sincerely committed to enlighten the world regarding the real nature and picture of the Kashmir
conflict through its unbiased and impartial reporting’. Its main page hosts articles
denouncing India’s intentions ‘to malign [Kashmir’s] genuine freedom struggle by
associating it with that of likes of Taliban and Al Qaeda’ and defining the Kashmir struggle
as ‘a resistance movement’ against ‘human rights violations’ perpetrated by Indian
security forces on the ground, according to Shah (2009). Again, in the context of Kashmir
it can be noted that there are very few accessible media watchdogs dealing with this
highly contested issue – one reason could be the lack of interest shown by Western media
(alternative or mainstream) to cover the situation at length.

As has been established, the alternative web-based media outlets have a very
distinctive professional habitus within the journalistic field, particularly those outlets
dealing with international conflicts. The media watchdogs that focus specifically on ‘fair
and accurate’ reporting of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict are numerous, diverse in their
geographical location (many are based in North America, some in Europe, a handful in
Israel and a couple in the Occupied Palestinian Territories). At the same time, they are
unanimous in blaming mainstream media for recreating misconceptions and (sometimes
deliberately) misleading their audiences by giving false or erroneous information. The
following section offers to present the four agents forming the core data of the present
thesis, and will also include a study of the habitus(es) (professional, ideological, political)
of the agents involved in the alternative web-based media outlets in the context of the
Palestinian-Israeli conflict.
5.2 Core Data - The Habitus(es) of the Web-based media outlets in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict

The four agents under study – CAMERA, HonestReporting, If Americans Knew and Electronic Intifada - all declare themselves to be part of the professional habitus of alternative web-based media outlets: CAMERA describes itself as ‘a media-monitoring, research and membership organisation devoted to promoting accurate and balanced coverage of Israel and the Middle East’ which ‘fosters rigorous reporting, while educating news consumers about Middle East issues and the role of the media’ (see website). CAMERA further describes itself as a ‘non-partisan organisation’ which ‘takes no position with regard to American or Israeli political issues or with regard to ultimate solutions to the Arab-Israeli conflict’ (ibid.). CAMERA also insists that it ‘systematically monitors, documents, reviews and archives Middle East coverage’ and that its work is a ‘combination of rigorous monitoring, research, fact-checking, careful analysis, and grassroots efforts’. HonestReporting ‘monitors the media, exposes cases of bias, promotes balance, and effects change through education and action’; Electronic Intifada ‘addresses the prevailing pro-Israeli slant in US media coverage by offering information from a Palestinian perspective’ with a ‘reporting built on a solid foundation of documented evidence and careful fact-checking’, and describes itself as ‘a pioneering online resource for media analysis, criticism, and activism’; finally If Americans Knew see it as their mission ‘to provide information that is to a large degree missing from American press coverage of this critical region’ so that the information on which Americans base
their actions is complete, accurate, and ‘undistorted by conscious or unconscious bias, by lies of either commission or omission, or by pressures exerted by powerful special interest groups’. It is also clear that by using English they are addressing Western readers rather than local constituencies in the Middle East.

If they all partake in the same professional habitus, the four agents have diametrically opposed ideas with regards the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The two alternative web-based watchdogs identifying with a pro-Israeli ideological habitus are CAMERA and HonestReporting. CAMERA describes itself as a ‘media-monitoring, research and membership organization devoted to promoting accurate and balanced coverage of Israel and the Middle East’ and justify this because, according to them, ‘inaccurate and distorted accounts of events in Israel and the Middle East are to be found everywhere’ and ‘frequently inaccurate and skewed characterizations of Israel and of events in the Middle East may fuel anti-Israel and anti-Jewish prejudice’. CAMERA was founded in 1982 - the year of the invasion of the Lebanon by Israel - by Winifred Meiselman, an American teacher and social worker, to respond to alleged anti-Israel bias in The Washington Post. On the Executive Board at the time were prominent Jewish political activist Saul Stern, Senators Rudy Boschwitz and Charles Grassley, Congressman Tom Lantos, journalist M. Stanton Evans, Ambassador Charles Lichenstein, Pastor Roy Stewart, and Rabbi David Yellin. Members also included Charles Jacobs, who served as co-founder and Deputy Director of the Boston section. He also co-founded the American Anti-Slavery Group in
1993, and The David Project Centre for Jewish Leadership\textsuperscript{37} in 2002, which he led until July 2008 when he co-founded Americans for Peace and Tolerance, which ‘works to expose and challenge Radical Islamic organizations and to support moderate Muslims in America’ (from his personal blog). In 2009, this organisation spearheaded a campaign to stop the building of Roxbury Mosque in Boston arguing that the leaders of the mosque are ‘extremists’. Jacobs received his doctoral degree in social policy from Harvard University.

Current Executive Director Andrea Levin, also the editor of Bearing False Witness: Jimmy Carter’s Palestine Peace Not Apartheid (2007), a former English teacher who also served as associate editor of the Journal of Policy Analysis and Management at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government and now writes and lectures widely on media coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. She also contributes to the Middle East Forum, founded by Daniel Pipes, a reputed American writer – who is incidentally opposed to a Palestinian state and advocates military intervention in Iran - who mainly concerns himself with criticism of ‘radical Islam’.

\textsuperscript{37}‘which promotes a fair and honest discussion of the Middle East conflict, and which evolved into a Center for Jewish Leadership. The David Project currently educates thousands of pro-Israel students each year, preparing them for the rhetorical battles on the nation’s campuses.’, Charles Jacobs’ blog, ‘Paradigm Shift’, http://charlesjacobs.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=2&Itemid=3 [last accessed 7 March 2011].
CAMERA

Founded in 1982, the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America is a media-monitoring, research and membership organization devoted to promoting accurate and balanced coverage of Israel and the Middle East. CAMERA fosters rigorous reporting, while educating news consumers about Middle East issues and the role of the media. Because public opinion ultimately shapes public policy, distorted news coverage that misleads the public can be detrimental to sound policymaking. A non-partisan organization, CAMERA takes no position with regard to American or Israeli political issues or with regard to ultimate solutions to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The scope of the problem

Inaccurate and distorted accounts of events in Israel and the Middle East are to be found everywhere from college radio stations to network television, from community newspapers to national magazines, and, of course, on the Internet. In recent years misinformation about the Middle East has also surfaced in fashion magazines, architectural publications, encyclopedias, professional reference works, geography textbooks, travel guides, and even dictionaries. Frequently inaccurate and skewed characterizations of Israel and of events in the Middle East may fuel anti-Israel and anti-Jewish prejudice.

Figure 1: CAMERA, ‘About Us’ page

_HonestReporting_ was launched in 2001 by British University students a few months after the start of the Second Palestinian Intifada. On HR Canada’s archives can be retrieved an article retracing the launch of HR, originally run by _Media Watch International_ founder Sharon Tzur thanks to substantial financial contributions from Jerusalem-based Jewish Orthodox outreach organisation _Aich HaTorah_, which aim is to bring unaffiliated Jews to Orthodox Judaism thanks to specifically tailored educational programmes, seminars and
social events in its branches around the world. *HR*, now based in Israel, was founded as an independent, non-profit organisation headquartered in Toronto, Canada in 2003 with a view to ‘monitor[ing] the media, expos[ing] cases of bias, promot[ing] balance, and effect[ing] change to ensure Israel is represented fairly and accurately’. *HR* also provides ‘educational tools and resources to anyone wishing to advocate for Israel’ (*HR* website). It has affiliates in the UK, Brazil, Spain, Israel and the USA (also with a status of Charitable independent organisation) and has recently opened an office in Montreal in April 2008, giving them official national and bilingual status. Former *HR* President Rabbi Ephraim Shore is now *Aish HaTorah*’s Israel Director. *HR* CEO Joe Hyams, is a former advertising executive with Saatchi & Saatchi Tel Aviv. UK *HonestReporting* Managing Editor Simon Plosker (based in Israel) holds a Masters from the London School of Economics specialising in the Israel / Palestine conflict, was former public affairs officer for the Board of Deputies of British Jews and British Aliyah Movement co-ordinator as well as working at the Jewish and Governmental Organizations Desk at IDF Spokesperson’s Unit, where he still performs reserve duty. Senior Editor Yarden Frankl worked as a senior aide to New York Congresswoman Nita Lowey for ten years and as the Strategic Affairs Lobbyist for the *American Israel Public Affairs Committee* (*AIPAC*), also in New York, before settling in Israel. Mike Fegelman, a graduate of Carleton University’s journalism programme whose specialist area is in broadcasting and international reporting is the executive director of *HonestReporting* Canada and a speaker for the Hasbara Fellowships (also organised and financed by *Aish HaTorah* in association with Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs), a
programme aimed at ‘educating and training university students to be effective pro-Israel activists on their campuses’ (see website).

The two alternative web-based media watchdogs identifying with a pro-Palestinian ideological habitus are Electronic Intifada and If Americans Knew. Electronic Intifada (EI) is a not-for-profit, independent online resource launched in February 2001 which focuses on ‘the question of Palestine, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the economic, political, legal, and human dimensions of Israel's 40-year occupation of
Palestinian territories.’ Specifically, *EI* seeks to provide an alternative to ‘the prevailing pro-Israeli slant in U.S. media coverage by offering information from a Palestinian perspective [whose] views on the conflict are based firmly on universal principles of international law and human rights conventions’, and ‘[whose] reporting is built on a solid foundation of documented evidence and careful fact-checking’ (‘About us’ website). *EI* has 4 co-founders: Palestinian-American writer Ali Abunimah, who often contributes to mainstream newspapers and lectures across Europe, North America and Australia on his involvement with *Electronic Intifada*. He is also the author of the book *One Country: A Bold Proposal to End the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, which proposes to revive the idea of one state shared by two peoples.

Another *EI* co-founder is Arjan El Fassed, a human rights policy advisor of an international development organisation based in the Netherlands, and co-founder of the Palestine Right of Return Coalition. He has published articles in *The Washington Post* and *Ha’aretz* amongst other newspapers.

Dr. Laurie King-Irani, former coordinator of the International Campaign for Justice for the Victims of Sabra and Shatila, and former editor (from 1998-2000) of *Middle East Report Magazine*, is another co-founder. Dr. King-Irani is an Adjunct Professor at the Centre for Contemporary Arab Studies of Georgetown University, Washington DC and author of forthcoming book *Universal Jurisdiction for Humanitarian Crimes*. She is an
anthropologist and focuses on ‘the political identity and participation of Palestinian citizens of Israel.’

The fourth co-founder is Nigel Parry, author of one of the first blogs worldwide entitled ‘A Personal Diary of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict’, a first-hand account of the conflict in the West Bank from 1994 to 1998. He also created the original website for Birzeit University (launched in 1996), developing content and documenting the Israeli army's redeployment from Ramallah.

Notable contributors include Ilan Pappe, Omar Ahmad, Tanya Reinhart, and Joseph Massad.

Figure 3: Electronic Intifada, ‘About Us’ page

If Americans Knew is an ‘independent research and information-dissemination institute, with particular focus on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, U.S. foreign policy
regarding the Middle East, and media coverage of this issue [whose] objective is to provide information that is to a large degree missing from American press coverage of this critical region’ (IAK website). *If Americans Knew* was founded in 2001 by freelance American journalist Alison Weir. Weir has compiled research on North American mainstream media and their treatment of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in a 2005 video entitled ‘Off The Charts’ and accessible on YouTube. She also gives presentations of her findings in lectures across the USA. Other board members include former United States Representative Paul Findley, author of the 1985 book *They Dare to Speak Out: People and Institutions Confront Israel’s Lobby*, and Andrew I. Killgore, a former ambassador of the United States to Qatar and one of the original founders of the magazine *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*.

Figure 4: *If Americans Knew*, ‘About Us’ page

Choosing a perspective on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a personal choice as much as it is dictated by outside influence. Some external force (like peer, professional or family pressure on the degree of involvement in the conflict, given the extreme sensitivity
of the subject) can exert agents to be so. Position-taking is not solely based on instinct, but one’s personal, professional or social trajectory predisposes them to be either (through their place of birth or residency, genealogy, social circles, degree of education and / or experiences). If these acquired dispositions are ‘durable’, there is scope for any given agent’s habitus to shift, evolve and adapt within its field, be it on a specific issue (a two-state solution as opposed to a one-state solution for example) or on a broader one (the nature of the compromises – if any – to be made by either party to achieve a satisfactory outcome).

Putting aside calculated choices directed by political considerations as opposed to personal inclination, there is no immediate intrinsic value or personal aggrandisement to be gained by simply taking position in the conflict, even though there is symbolic gain in persuading others to take sides. Whilst many in the world are aware of the conflict, not everyone finds it either relevant or interesting. This tends to fit in with the notion that the agents’ position-taking in this context is not a result of premeditated, thought-out actions and reactions but that their habitus is ‘the universalising mediation which causes an individual agent’s practices, without either explicit reason or signifying intent, to be none the less “sensible” and “reasonable”’ (Bourdieu 1995: 79). This personal process is what forms the common ideological habitus of the agents involved in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It is important to note that within each ideological habitus (broadly speaking, the agents have adopted one or the other perspective), each agent may have their personal
ideological habitus: for instance, *Electronic Intifada’s* Ali Abunimah is a proponent of the ‘One-State solution’, which is not shared by any other outlets. In another instance, highly respected expatriate Israeli historian and *Electronic Intifada* contributor Ilan Pappé, often described by extremist Zionists as a ‘self-hating Jew’ for his vocal stance against Israel’s military rule against the Palestinians, is also in a minority of agents originating from Israelis who openly voice their sympathies and support for the Palestinian people. There are other instances of agents’ individual habituses may not obviously match the unconscious assumptions, but for the purpose of the present study, only common habitus(es) will be considered. These examples however illustrate how the concept of habitus is both objective and subjective.

Sometimes journalists, sometimes activists, sometimes academics, sometimes lecturers, sometimes all of the above, whilst they have very different personal trajectories, the agents involved with these websites have many traits in common, be they pro-Palestinian or pro-Israeli. Whilst only some founders or contributors of the alternative media outlets under study have a journalistic background, all have strong academic credentials. It is clear that, whilst not all agents involved in reporting the Palestinian-Israeli conflict through web-based alternative media outlets have formal journalistic training, their solid academic backgrounds make it a safe assumption that they have not stumbled upon the subject by accident, but that their own personal individual habitus (given the nature of their degree, their geographical location and / or other professional
experiences) have helped shape, if not their view, at least their interest in the crisis and its representation in the media. Another assumption would be to presuppose that these agents’ personal trajectory would help them shape their position (pro-Palestinian or pro-Israeli) in the conflict, and therefore also reveal potential vested interest in its portrayal across media outlets. The various agents involved have different nationalities and may or may not have strong and open religious allegiances; some of them are not native English speakers; some have radically differing political views (outside of the conflict); some live on the ground but are not native of either Palestine or Israel, some originate from either Palestine or Israel but live and work elsewhere; some have an interest in the subject who have no direct, obvious link to either Palestine or Israel; for some even, they are critical of the groups they would naturally be supportive of, yet all these agents have a common trait: while the agents involved in the conflict support opposing perspectives, what brings them together is an active interest in Middle-Eastern politics, as well as a sound knowledge of the background and historical context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It is therefore possible to contend that these agents are forming part of the same habitus – that of politically minded agents willing to take on the dominant agents with a sense of duty and fairness, regardless of the perspective they are defending: the habitus of political activism. Using modern technology to pursue their mission in educating the general public and bringing awareness to what they perceive and truly believe to be an injustice, these agents’ political activism habitus makes them the perfect candidates to rise to the challenge against the dominant agents, as they all present themselves as
convincing, credible, knowledgeable agents who are fully invested in their mission.

5.3 Questioning the Habitus of Mainstream Media

The habitus of the dominant agent dictates the doxa of the field in which the agents evolve. In the highly contested struggle against the symbolic power imposed by the dominant agent (mainstream media), the main strategy of the dominated agents (the four web-based media outlets under study) is to question the habitus of the dominant agents. A recurring strategy used by the agents is to query the dominant agents’ objectivity. For instance, *Electronic Intifada* and *If Americans Knew* often refer to the ‘conflict of interest’ some agents in the mainstream media may have, which would prevent them from giving a balanced report of the conflict: in its ‘Media analysis’ section, *If Americans Knew* evokes the fact that various high-profile journalists assigned to the conflict, including former Jerusalem Bureau Chiefs for the *New York Times*, have close family ties to Israel and its army, the IDF. Alison Weir of *If Americans Knew* regrets that ‘the Times’ espoused commitment to the “impartiality and neutrality of the company’s newsrooms”\(^{38}\) would seem to require it to have a balancing editor equally sophisticated about Palestine and its adversary’ is not being addressed. *Electronic Intifada* uses the same strategy: for instance, in an article entitled ‘*Washington Post*’s new Jerusalem correspondent married to pro-

\(^{38}\) http://ifamericaknew.org/media/bronner2.html [last accessed 7th August 2017].
Israel propagandist\textsuperscript{39}, Ali Abunimah suggests that Jerusalem correspondent for the Washington Post Rush Eglash is heavily biased in favour of a pro-Israeli stance by proxy, given ‘her husband’s political and business ties to the Israeli government and its overseas propaganda apparatus’. This presupposes that each of these individual agents’ personal habitus may lend them to have a natural affinity for the Israeli perspective. This may seem like an unfair assessment on the surface as this strategy implicitly cast doubts on the objectivity of proven professionals, which seems incompatible with their responsibilities as non-engaged observers, especially as the dominated agents themselves advertise their chosen perspective. The assumption in these cases is the lack of transparency from the mainstream media agents, who have failed to declare their personal links to Israel and in turn lose credibility as part of the habitus of professional journalists.

While the tendency for both If Americans Knew and Electronic Intifada is to imply a pro-Israeli bias on the part of the agents of the mainstream media, HonestReporting and CAMERA choose to infer systematic anti-Israel / anti-Jewish bias on the part of the dominant agents. As an illustration, HonestReporting’s feature ‘bias by numbers’ in which they ‘crunch the numbers behind the media coverage of Israel, taking a snapshot of individual media outlets as well as offering a comparison between some of the major press organizations’, includes a graph illustrating the position (Positive-Israel, Negative-

Israel, Neutral) of various mainstream media outlets in the way they report news relating to Israel, using their own criteria. The graph displays a very heavy bias against Israel from most mainstream media outlets, and implies that the anti-Israeli bias in mainstream media is both endemic and systematic. The graph analysis invokes a particularly strong anti-Israel slant in the Independent (where senior Middle-East correspondent Robert Fisk, a regular subject of critiques from HonestReporting, contributes). Similarly, the media watchdog offers regular ‘in-depth analyses’ of the reporting of mainstream media, which invariably show the ‘subtle anti-Israel bias’\(^{40}\), singling out The New York Times especially. One recent analysis concludes that ‘in all [HonestReporting’s] studies going back over many years, [The New Times] has shown a consistent bias, reporting negatively on Israel and Israeli actions. Negative stories far overwhelm positive ones, important context is lacking, misleading terminology is used, and quotations showing subjective bias influence readers to have a poor impression of Israel.’ The criteria, data and methodology for these analyses are self-defined

\(^{40}\) http://honestreporting.com/in-depth-analysis-the-new-york-times-washington-post-la-times/ [last accessed August 1\(^{st}\) 2017]
Figure 5: *HonestReporting*, ‘Bias By Numbers’ Graph.\(^{41}\)

*CAMERA* also picks up on the New York Times’ alleged Israeli bias: in its article ‘At NYT, Seeing Israel with a Jaundiced Eye’\(^{42}\), *CAMERA* states that ‘the indictment of Israeli leaders and Israeli society as bigoted is a recurring theme both on the news and editorial pages of *The Times*. In another article, *CAMERA* claims ‘More Anti-Israel Bias from The New York Times’ Jodi Rudoren’\(^{43}\) and reports ‘Tweeting Trips Another Journalist, This Time from The Washington Post’. It is clear from the language (more anti-Israeli-bias, Tweeting trips another journalist, a recurring theme) used that *CAMERA* is attempting to portray


\(^{42}\) [http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=2&x_outlet=35&x_article=3590](http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=2&x_outlet=35&x_article=3590) [last accessed July 31\(^{st}\) 2017]

\(^{43}\) [http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=2&x_outlet=35&x_article=2775](http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=2&x_outlet=35&x_article=2775) [last accessed July 31\(^{st}\) 2017]
anti-Israel bias in the main media outlets as a routine, a pattern of practice ingrained in the way mainstream media report the conflict. Interestingly, research shows that no media outlets denounce either a pro-Palestinian or an anti-Palestinian bias.

The present chapter offered a presentation of the various habituses of the web-based media watchdogs under study, shedding light on their mode of agency: their agents’ individual trajectories, affected by external factors as well as their own personal deliberate choices have determined they be part of the professional habitus of web-based media watchdogs; they also each belong to an ideological habitus, having settled on a primary perspective with which to engage in the conflict; finally, all four belong to the political activism habitus, convinced in their belief that the habitus (and by extension, the integrity) of the dominating agents needs challenges. The four agents have put in place strategies to challenge the habitus of the dominant agent by claiming mainstream media lacks transparency and carries out systemic anti-Israel bias. In order for their challenges to be considered, and for their ambitions of changing the doxa of the journalistic field, the agents involved need to possess or acquire enough capital so they can pursue their aim—capital exchange and the various agents’ positions within a certain field will help assess their level of success: Chapter 6 will be dealing with the various strategies the agents have put in place to accumulate the right amount of the right capital in order for their voices to be heard whilst still positioned at the margins of the field.
Within the field of power, or as Bourdieu describes it, ‘the system of powers occupied by the holders of diverse forms of capital which circulate in the relatively autonomous fields which make up an advanced society’ (Wacquant 93: 20), each agent gains and / or maintains capital depending on the position they have in a particular field. In this chapter, the practical and critical applicability of the Bourdieusian concept of capital will be illustrated with reference to the two pro-Israeli outlets, Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America (CAMERA) and HonestReporting (HR), and the two pro-Palestinian outlets, Electronic Intifada (EI) and If Americans Knew (IAK).

If the four outlets want to be recognised as credible challengers in the journalistic field, it is important that the claims the organisations make are successful in helping them accumulate symbolic capital of any form. Bourdieu describes symbolic capital as ‘the acquisition of a reputation for competence and an image of respectability and honourability’ (Bourdieu 1984a: 291): in a complex context in which different fields constantly overlap and in which symbolic capital can be earned in many different ways depending on the agent under study and the field the agent is positioned in, the applicability of the Bourdieusian concept of capital is clearly put to the test. It is undoubtedly useful to examine the type of capital the outlets possess or lack, and can
trade for the highest commodity in their quest for credibility, longevity and recognition that symbolic capital represents. They strive to earn symbolic capital in return for the economic capital they all need in order to survive, as well as for greater exposure and more efficient dissemination of their own coverage of the conflict in order to suit their particular agendas.

The four outlets under study have chosen to be present on the Internet solely, presumably to gain maximum exposure and impact at the lowest possible cost and at the quickest possible time. This is to be expected from challenging newcomers who do not have the financial resources, staff or infrastructures to use the more traditional methods of communication, such as television (be it digital or terrestrial) or printed press the dominant agents of the journalistic field can afford. Additionally, the process of publishing information online is far freer, less constrained with less regulations, control or potential risks of censorship.

A consistent focus of attention in a media-saturated world, thirsty for instant analyses of even the most complex of issues and avid of quick ready-made answers, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is already being extensively documented world-wide on a daily basis by mainstream media: strategies therefore need to be developed for the four organisations to have a viable chance at fulfilling their stated objective in an already saturated market. In the context of the present study, all four agents have a common
declared objective: they are challenging the reporting of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in mainstream media, which they all see as being inadequate at best and purposefully misleading at worst. The four groups, therefore, position themselves as challengers to the established agents of the journalistic field: as Bourdieu states, they as challengers ‘break the silence of the doxa and call into question the unproblematic, taken-for-granted world of the dominant agent’ (Bourdieu 1993: 83). For Bourdieu, ‘the dominated users (…) have to resort to subversive strategies which will eventually bring them the disavowed profits only if they succeed in overturning the hierarchy of the field without disturbing the principles on which the field is based’ (1993: 83). The four outlets’ first common strategy, therefore, is to obtain symbolic capital in the journalistic field by attempting to devalue, and ultimately delegitimize the intentions and professionalism of both the mainstream media institutions at the top of the hierarchy - which are regarded as references in the journalistic field - and the individual reporters assigned to covering the conflict, who are not deemed to adhere to the journalistic code of ethics. The four organisations are aiming to justify their presence in the journalistic field by reclaiming for themselves the core principles of balance, authenticity, financial and political independence, accuracy and fairness normally associated with mainstream press (as identified in a previous chapter) and posing as the only reliable sources of information on the conflict. Economic capital would be earned in the process; this would enable them to pursue their declared objective. For Bourdieu, the whole of the journalistic field ‘is losing more and more of its autonomy’ as a direct impact of the increasing influence of its most heteronomous sub-
field, television, and its reliance on commercial revenues (such as advertising) and audience ratings’ (Bourdieu 2004: 42). Yet depending on their position within the boundaries of the economic or the political field, some agents are less heteronomous (or more autonomous) than others; in other words, they are less dependent on external demands, rules, conventions or pressures, mainly because they own less (specifically economic) capital - be it by deliberate choice or dictated by circumstances. The heteronomous sectors of the journalistic field, which dominate the field in all (or most) forms of capital, namely economic and ‘media meta-capital’, have clear ambitions to further the capital already acquired through profits but are also restricted by the constraints associated with having high amounts of capital. The potential loss in symbolic capital these restrictions may bring to the established agents contrasts with the disinterestedness shown in economic considerations by the newcomers: as Bourdieu points out, ‘new producers whose only capital is their conviction can establish themselves in the market by appealing to the values whereby the dominant figures accumulated their symbolic capital’ (1993: 76). The first part of this chapter will be dedicated to looking at how the outlets strive to attract economic capital by offering a close study of how they portray themselves, and of the tactics they use to discredit mainstream media and ascertain their positions as challenging newcomers to the journalistic field in order to convince potential donors to make financial contributions. This might help paint a subtler picture where the extent of their independence (in the journalistic field, the political field and the economic field) is relative and subject to shifts with changes in their environment.
It is difficult to overlook the central part the USA play in all political and economic decisions relating to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict: a clear common strategy used by all four outlets is to appeal directly to the North American public. Both Committee for Accuracy in the Middle-East Reporting in America and If Americans Knew make it obvious in their name choice, with If Americans Knew making clear in its mission statement that its goal is ‘to supply the information essential to those responsible for the actions of the strongest nation on earth – the American people’. Electronic Intifada also makes it explicit by stating its aim ‘of presenting an accessible, credible, and responsible Palestinian narrative of developments on the ground to the American public and international community’. In the case of HonestReporting, whilst the target audience is not openly specified and whilst HonestReporting has affiliates in other areas and languages, the fact that HonestReporting Canada appears to be the most active branch, with the most complete website seems to point to a similar choice in the target audience: HonestReporting Canada also clearly points out that ‘the Canadian news media often fail to provide an accurate representation of Israel and the Middle East’ and refers to Canada’s ‘moral authority at the United Nations’ to justify its work on Canadian media. The second section of this chapter will look into the reasons behind this strategic choice, and will analyse its success.

In the context of a long-standing, violent conflict, constant claims of imbalance and unfairness in its coverage by both pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian sympathisers reflect the extent to which the agents involved in the conflict are emotionally invested in the
issue; yet while many in the world are aware of the conflict, not everyone finds it either relevant or interesting. By positioning themselves on the fringes of the journalistic field, the four groups all recognise that there is symbolic capital to be gained in accumulating social capital by persuading others to take sides in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The accumulation of social capital is not only an essential commodity in gauging success in the journalistic field, it is also at the heart of any success in the political field: if gaining influence in the political field in order to either help reach a non-violent resolution to the conflict – by promoting the application of economic sanctions such as the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement campaign to encourage world-wide boycott of Israeli goods for the pro-Palestinian groups - or to help justify military actions as they take place on the ground – by promoting the Israeli government’s economic and military besiegement of the Gaza Strip, or Dahiya doctrine, for the pro-Israeli groups - is the ultimate aim of the four organisations, they need to attract attention, convince and ultimately change perceptions of the largest number of people in order for capital exchange to take place.
6.1 Strategy 1: Challenging the Dominant Agent for Symbolic Capital in the Journalistic Field

As seen in previous chapters, all four groups describe themselves as capable of overcoming the shortcomings of a professional body whose agents have failed to engage with the issue objectively and without bias. According to them, mainstream reporting is unsatisfactory, incomplete, distorted or simply missing. In Bourdieusian terms, the four outlets are using ‘the strategy of beating the dominant groups at their own game by demanding that they respect the fundamental law of the field’ or in other words, the ‘return to the sources’ (Bourdieu 1993: 84), using ‘assertive, attention-seeking strategies’ as opposed to the ‘defensive strategies’ of the dominant agents, ‘drawn to silence, discretion and secrecy’ in order to ‘perpetuate the status quo’ (Bourdieu 1993: 83). In order to earn their position as credible challengers in the journalistic field, in return for the economic capital that would allow them to maintain their position, they therefore need to build a professional image in their own field. The ways the four groups attempt to challenge the dominant agents’ position in the journalistic field, and turn it to their advantage, by presenting themselves as relevant and trustworthy sources of news. Advertising endorsements in a bid to confirm the challengers as legitimate, credible and recognised sources able to garner support from individuals or institutions, with a preference for respectable high-profile figures, is another strategy used by all four websites to amass capital: this will be analysed in the second section. The last part of the
The main role of the media, be it mainstream or alternative, is to provide news to the general public on events and issues that may affect them. All agents are therefore de facto part of the journalistic field. The more comprehensive this role of education is seen to be carried out by the agents, the more media meta capital will be accrued: a reputation for professional integrity would help ensure the target audience’s trust and loyalty, which would in turn attract a larger audience and help establish the agents as credible sources of news. As the four alternative outlets under study openly recognise the fact that public opinion bears a heavy weight in shaping political views, one role they have ascribed to themselves in order to legitimise their presence is to set out to educate the public with facts they feel are at best not easily being made available to them, and sometimes ignored entirely.

Starting with the two pro-Palestinian outlets, Electronic Intifada claims it is ‘committed to comprehensive public education on the question of Palestine, the Israeli-
Palestinian conflict, and the economic, political, legal, and human dimensions of Israel's 40-year occupation of Palestinian territories’. The fact that Electronic Intifada seems very active and seems to cover news from Palestine and Israel tends to justify its claims as news provider. In order to be able to relay news from the Middle-East as comprehensively as Electronic Intifada proposes to do, reports should be made based on information received from Palestine or Israel directly. The majority of the dominant agents’ outlets have a presence on the ground, normally in the form of a dedicated correspondent generally posted in the region: Robert Fisk, for instance, is the Middle-East correspondent for the Independent and is based in the Lebanon, Martin Chulov is the Guardian’s correspondent and is also based in the region. Contributors to Electronic Intifada seem to be present in all the Middle-East: Jillian Kestler-D’Amours is a Canadian freelance journalist based in Jerusalem, both Nora Barrows-Friedman and Patrick O Strickland are American freelance journalists based in the West Bank, Rami Almeghari is a Palestinian journalist based in the Gaza Strip whose ‘Diaries: Live from Palestine’ are updated almost daily. Articles are submitted on a regular basis, and posted under various columns in the ‘News and Analysis’ section (Opinion / Editorial, Human Rights, Development, Business & Economy, etc.). The presence of a correspondent on the ground does not itself guarantee that the news will be reported accurately and free of bias, but it helps the outlet gain symbolic capital in the journalistic field, as a credible provider of previously unreported news, as set out in its own mission statement.
*If Americans Knew* describes itself as a ‘research and information-dissemination institute’ and wants to ‘inform and educate the American public’: its front page seems to corroborate this statement, as the outlet seems to focus on regularly updated comparative statistics between Israel and Palestine (the death toll on both sides since the first Palestinian uprising in 2000 for instance, the unemployment rates or the numbers of Palestinian and Israeli houses demolished since 1967). The North American public is also the obvious target audience, with a clear emphasis on events taking place in Bethlehem, a mostly Christian part of Palestine - arguably in a bid to detract from the common misleading negative association often found in the North American press between the Palestinian struggle and Muslim extremist activities. *If Americans Knew* also attempts to solicit the attention of the American taxpayers by investigating the financial ties between the USA and Israel with an article highlighting the US Congress’ Israel budget (‘Congress Triples Budget to Israel’ by Alison Weir, dated December 13th 2013). This is also a strong emphasis by *If Americans Knew* to focus on its educational initiatives (such as Alison Weir’s public speeches and other materials such as DVDs, cards, booklets and fact files ready to order) rather than its media-monitoring activities, and therefore to claim for itself the fundamental law of the journalistic field, that is a role of education.

The two agents’ emphasis on education and the dissemination of what they perceive as accurate news is a clear attempt at showing themselves to the public as providers of news. The symbolic capital acquired by the established agents in the
journalistic field is transferred to the two pro-Palestinian outlets, which are seen to provide or present news generally not previously reported by mainstream media, and therefore ascertain their position at credible challengers of the dominant agents.

Moving on to the pro-Israeli organisations, CAMERA claims that it ‘fosters rigorous reporting, while educating news consumers about Middle East issues and the role of the media’, and its front page shows how the outlet and its sister groups have ‘prompted corrections’ on articles from mainstream outlets such as the New York Times, Ha’aretz or the Washington Post. It also features opinion pieces (‘Expect the Usual Falsehoods on Ariel Sharon’ by Dr Alex Safian, dated 6 January 2014) and a book review, although there seems to be very few articles reporting events or issues happening in Palestine or Israel. This is also the case for HonestReporting. Its mission statement broadcasts that ‘to ensure Israel is represented fairly and accurately [HonestReporting] effects change through education and action’. Its ‘Press Box’ section mainly contains articles originating from Israeli mainstream agents such as JerusalemOnline, Israel Today and Times of Israel as well as opinion pieces from HonestReporting’s main contributors as published in other outlets (‘More Pallywood: How Palestinians turn their stone throwers into victims’, Simon Plosker, in Times of Israel, December 4 2013). Similarly, to CAMERA, other articles generally refer to mistakes claimed to have been made in mainstream media. Both

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outlets heavily showcase the successes they have had on their websites as a direct result of lobbying big name media outlets such as the *Washington Post* or the *New York Times* into correcting errors as seen by the two outlets. Symbolic capital in the journalistic field is achieved by *CAMERA* and *HonestReporting* as their focus on attempting to correct news already reported by mainstream media, as opposed to original pieces of news originating from Palestine or Israel, is an implicit challenge to the dominant agents’ claims of thorough research. Symbolic capital here is transferred from the established agent - with those established agents who hold the most media meta capital (*The New Times* or *The Washington Post*, for instance), and therefore have the most influence over the conflict in the journalistic field, being most specifically targeted - to the successful challenger, which helps question the professionalism of mainstream media. On this issue, *CAMERA* dedicates a section of its website entitled ‘Errors and Corrections’, citing the mistakes it claims to have been made by (mainly) mainstream outlets and the lists of those that corrected the mistakes, those that chose not to act on *CAMERA*’s recommendations and those who gave a ‘dismal correction’, or are deemed as inadequate by *CAMERA*. In these cases, it offers better versions of the corrections made by the original newspapers. Symbolic capital is gained using this strategy, as the organisation shows itself as a credible challenger bringing results whilst engaging for more sustained action against those dominant agents ignoring *CAMERA*’s calls for corrections, therefore confirming its claim that the events reported in mainstream media are purposefully biased.
HonestReporting’s ‘In the Press’ section offers an exhaustive list of all print, radio and television news pieces from mostly mainstream media, where reference is made to them, although it is difficult to ascertain without reading, watching or listening to them all whether all the references were positive or negative. The fact that the majority of the sources cited are from Israeli and/or Jewish media outlets (such as the Jerusalem Post, Israel’s English radio station Rusty Mike Radio or Israel’s Channel 1 IBN News in English) however tends to undermine HonestReporting’s quest for legitimacy in that it shows that HonestReporting has limited influence on high profile, undisputed dominant agents worldwide. HonestReporting’s Managing Editor Simon Plosker (in charge of the UK-dedicated HonestReporting website, which he operates from Israel) seems to be the main public figure representing HonestReporting in the media. Plosker is an International Relations graduate with no journalistic credentials, which may explain the lack of exposure on worldwide mainstream media and HonestReporting UK’s choice to focus on daily reporting of the news.

Another major pre-requisite for any credible media outlet is to show that they are respectful of the journalistic code of practise, which includes thorough investigation, balance, non-bias, authenticity and fairness. All four agents position themselves in the journalistic field by claiming the code of practise for themselves, therefore challenging the professional habitus of mainstream media. All four groups are clearly manifesting a ‘disavowal of self-interest’ (Bourdieu 1993: 82), which allows them to assert their role as
newcomers in the journalistic field, with no other intention than to respect its law, if only because ‘the strategy of beating the dominant groups at their own game (...) can only work if it manifests exemplary sincerity in its own denial’ (Bourdieu 1993: 84): ‘Whilst they claim to adhere to the fundamental principles of the journalistic code of practise, therefore positioning themselves within the journalistic field, the four alternative outlets also attempt to gather the symbolic capital that comes with placing themselves at the autonomous pole of the field, impartial to external political and / or economic influences. The main declared aim of the four groups under study, then, is to help promote a fairer representation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and events related to it to compensate for what they perceived as an unbalanced reporting by mainstream media. From this perspective, it would be reasonable to expect the agents involved in these projects to have some journalistic background, especially as they claim to adhere to the journalistic code of ethics. Symbolic capital in the journalistic field would be gained by the fact that journalists are more equipped to recognise errors, misinterpretations or omissions from their peers. This would validate the agents’ claims of independence towards the journalistic field and would place journalists who have chosen to distance themselves from the dominant agents at the autonomous pole of the field.

This is the case for the pro-Palestinian organisations: both *If Americans Knew* and *Electronic Intifada* make a direct reference to their original founders as being journalists who were individually inspired to take action through personal experience, background
or motivation and who were able to garner significant support in order to expand and get recognised. The fact that *Electronic Intifada* (despite listing other contributors) and *If Americans Knew*’s main activities appear to evolve around one specific person helps entertain the idea that both Ali Abunimah and Alison Weir feel compelled to selflessly take action. *Electronic Intifada*’s front man Ali Abunimah describes himself as a journalist, and is presented as such by mainstream outlets such as *Al Jazeera*, for which he contributes regularly. Abunimah showcases his journalistic achievements in the form of a comprehensive list of high profile and high exposure media outlets like *CNN*, *FOX*, the *BBC*, the *New York Times* or *Ha'aretz* that have published his work or invited him to speak: capital transfer from the dominant agent to the challenger is taking place, with *Electronic Intifada*’s existence as a successful newcomer being validated by the established agents, all high media meta capital holders. *Electronic Intifada*’s ‘In the Press’ section consists in 21 web pages dedicated to Abunimah’s appearances or references made to *Electronic Intifada* on various national and international media platforms such as Australia’s *ABC* radio station, the *Boston Globe*, Canada’s *CBC* radio, *Al Jazeera*, *the Irish Times* and *BBC World* amongst many others. This tends to indicate that Abunimah has earned symbolic capital in the journalistic field in his own rights, which he uses to help raise *Electronic Intifada*’s profile and ultimately its influence on matters of interest over the conflict.

*If Americans Knew* also appears to have only one main contributor, who seems to be the only consistent representative of the organisation. She appears to have authored
most articles, and she also seems to be the only key speaker at all public events involving *If American Knew*. Weir also broadcasts her credentials as a freelance journalist – with a journalism degree from the University of Michigan - and public speaker, lecturing at renowned, high symbolic capital holding institutions like Stanford, Yale and Harvard Law School and publishing articles in other (non-mainstream) media outlets such as *CounterPunch*. Associating with such high-profile names helps Weir earn symbolic capital by transfer, as prestigious academic institutions recognise her place in the journalistic field by inviting her to lecture, therefore implicitly giving her their ‘seal of approval’: this is consecration for the newcomer.

*Electronic Intifada* and *If American Knew*’s journalistic credentials and endeavours to provide information from the ground confirm their place within the journalistic field and help them acquire symbolic capital in this field. In contrast, the agents involved in the pro-Israeli groups have more varied backgrounds: Andrea Levin, current President at *CAMERA*, has had experience in teaching English in inner-city Philadelphia and *CAMERA*’s original founder Winifred Meiselman was also a teacher; Dr Alex Safian, Associate Editor of *CAMERA*, is a physicist by training and Gilead Ini, Senior Research Analyst for *CAMERA*, has a degree in Environmental Science. In the case of *HonestReporting*, Managing Editor Simon Plosker has a BSc in International Studies and Political Science from the University of Birmingham and an MSc in History of International Relations from the London School of Economics, with a main focus on the Middle East Arab-Israel conflict, whilst CEO Joe
Hyams is a cameraman. Yarden Frankl, who is Special Projects Producer, has a Bachelor Degree in African Studies and a Masters in National Security Studies, and Senior Media Researcher and Analyst Pesach Benson has a B.A. in Political Science. *HonestReporting* USA Executive Director Gary Kenzer has a first degree in Social Work and USA President David Barish owns a furniture company. Whilst Mike Fegelman, Executive Director of *HonestReporting* Canada, has a degree in Journalism and Public Affairs, former Assistant Director Paul Agoston holds a Bachelor degree of Commerce, Marketing and Entrepreneurship.

The overwhelming majority of the agents representing the two pro-Israeli groups, then, have no background in journalism. Yet the fact that very few agents of these two outlets are journalists does not question the validity of the groups’ claim to discredit mainstream media as credible sources of news. On the contrary, this strategy is particularly successful in garnering symbolic capital in the journalistic field: *CAMERA* and *HonestReporting*’s apparent lack of professional credentials in the journalistic field shows them to be a group of strongly motivated activists with no other motive than to present a better, more independent alternative than the established agents, as challenging newcomers to the field.

The four groups’ position in the political field is a clear indicator of the potential impact they have in promoting their agendas on such a highly political issue as the
Palestinian-Israeli conflict. All four organisations claim impartiality towards mainstream agents in general, and towards policy makers in particular, seen by all as unjustly supporting either Israel or Palestine depending on their allegiances; it would therefore be reasonable to expect all groups to be positioned at the fringes of the political field, and therefore have very limited to no political influence. A close examination of the four groups’ main agents’ links to political figures, through various forms of endorsements (such as official statements or personal affiliations), may however reveal a more complex relationship between the groups and the political field.

**6.1.2 Validation through recognition by endorsements**

Whilst publishing endorsements from high profile figures that have direct or indirect, professional or personal vested interest in the conflict, from web experts or from members of the general public, all four websites are aiming for the same target: accumulating as much symbolic capital as possible in order to justify their claims and consolidate their position as viable challengers in the journalistic field with the aim to attract as much social capital as possible. As Bourdieu states, ‘the newcomers (...) have and want no other audience than their competitors – established producers whom their practice tends to discredit by imposing new products – or other newcomers with whom they vie for novelty’ (1993: 83): legitimacy and validation of the newcomers’ existence are bound by the recognition they need from the established agents as well as other
challengers to justify their raison d’être. This strategy seems to benefit the two pro-Palestinian groups, whose endorsers are mainly outsiders to the journalistic, the political or the economic field. Both pro-Palestinian groups have very little to no ties with mainstream political agents, and in fact seem to actively want to distance themselves from the political field. This helps them claim some symbolic capital in the journalistic field as credible independent organisations with the aim to attract as many grassroots activists to help their cause. It is proving less successful for the two pro-Israeli groups in terms of their position as challenging newcomers in the journalistic field however, and is hinting that these two outlets have traded symbolic capital in the journalistic field for symbolic capital in the economic and political fields, where ultimately decisions are made which directly and concretely affect the situation on the ground. Both CAMERA and HonestReporting boast having the support of high profile political names and influential corporate businessmen, and appear to have far reaching connections in the political field. Their connection to AIPAC specifically, as well as their links with other important mainstream political figures, cast serious doubts as to the organisations’ claims to be independent of all political motivations, especially as AIPAC is reputed to be an extremely influential pro-Israeli lobby group with strong ties to the US Congress. Not only does this place them firmly as active agents in the political field, it also reflects their intentions to act as potential influencers in political decisions made in relation to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. This somewhat challenges their claims to want to educate and help change perceptions the general public may have on the subject, and shows them as lobbyists with
a clear political agenda and the intention to justify Israel’s official political strategy on the
ground.

Starting with the two pro-Palestinian groups, both *If Americans Knew* and
*Electronic Intifada* are unambiguous in their critiques not only of how mainstream media
are portraying the conflict, but also of the successive foreign policies mainly led by the
USA on the subject. For main *Electronic Intifada* contributor Ali Abunimah (2008), ‘the
price of admission to the political mainstream is to abandon any foreign policy goals that
diverge from those of the pro-Israel, anti-Palestinian lobby’: whilst citing in his article that
he had met Barack Obama a few times prior to him being elected President of the USA,
he is also distancing himself from Candidate (and consequently President) Obama, whose
presidential ambitions, according to Abunimah, had forced him to take a pro-Israeli stance
in order to secure funding and high profile support for his campaign. Abunimah therefore
positions himself unambiguously at the margins of the American political spectrum and
asserts his place outside of the political field. This is reflected in *Electronic Intifada’s* list
of endorsements: its carefully chosen endorsers convey the idea that quality,
independence (specifically from mainstream media, but also from the political and
economic field) and integrity are at the core of *Electronic Intifada’s* work, and fully reflect
its definition of itself: it is, therefore, a successful challenger able to respect the
‘fundamental law of the field’. The endorsers include Alexander Cockburn, a highly
regarded American radical political journalist, co-editor of *CounterPunch*, a ‘bi-weekly
muckraking newsletter’ who has also contributed to primary mainstream newspapers such as *The New Statesman* or *The Wall Street Journal*. Cockburn is known for his stance against major mainstream media corporations in general, and against Israel’s treatment of the Palestinian people in particular. This endorsement helps *Electronic Intifada* gain symbolic capital in the journalistic field as a genuinely independent organisation free from any obvious political affiliation, as it is capable of denying for itself the political connections it denounces in the established agents, and of gaining consecration from other challenging newcomers.

The other two endorsements cited were given by web effectiveness research and consultancy group senior consultant (and former industrial journalist) David Bowden on one of his twice-monthly columns for the *Financial Times*, and of now defunct weekly television ‘The Web Review’ programme on British channel ITV, dedicated to reviewing various websites of diverse interests. Both of these commented on the content of the website but seemed to also recognise *Electronic Intifada*’s qualities as a web-based outlet. This ‘seal of approval’ given by web specialists bolsters *Electronic Intifada*’s claims as a quality website (in terms of design), and again as a truly independent professional outlet capable of gaining endorsements from professional individuals who have no direct, obvious links with the conflict: consecration from agents who have earned symbolic capital outside of the journalistic field confirms EI’s status as a successful newcomer, and
confers the outlet with media meta capital as an agent capable of building new social capital.

In the case of *If Americans Knew*, the two mainstream politicians Weir is associated with are former Ambassador Andrew Killgore, 93, and former Congressman Paul Findley, 91, who are no longer actively part of the mainstream political field and could not be considered as having any direct political influence over the conflict at national level: this tends to validate the organisation’s position outside the political field as no clear external political impositions or pressures seem to be exerted on Weir to carry out her activities. *If Americans Knew*’s list of endorsements also appears to be bare: of the only two endorsements cited, one is an excerpt of an article published in the *New York Times*, by established reporter Peter Applebome. The quote taken from the article reflects on how the audience reacted to one of Alison Weir’s speeches without it being a specific, personalised backing from the newspaper or the journalist who wrote it. This is arguably an attempt by *If Americans Knew* at showing that the impact of the speech on public opinion was important enough to be noted by one of the most prominent agents in the journalistic field, therefore conferring on the organisation media meta capital (or influence over media events), therefore consecration, as a result of being recognised by a dominant agent as a credible challenger.
The other endorsement, by former Congressman (and present Dean of California’s Chapman University School of Law) Tom Campbell sparked controversy when Campbell entered the 2010 race for United States Senate: Republican front-runner at the start of the campaign, Campbell had to address criticisms against him on his voting record on Israel in Congress as Member of the House of Representatives (that many have qualified as being anti-Israel), his connections with Palestinian Muslim activist Sami Al-Arian and his endorsement of Alison Weir, all of which have been cited as reasons for Campbell’s subsequent loss of the campaign. That *If Americans Knew* has chosen to keep the endorsement despite the controversy could be seen as confirmation of its claims that the prevalent pro-Israeli stance in mainstream media is being pushed by influential pressure groups and journalists who have conflicts of interest, and comforts its position as a challenger in the journalistic field and an outsider in the political field.

*HonestReporting*’s list of endorsements, which only appears in the Canadian section of the website (no endorsement in the UK, USA or Spanish-language versions), also cites many locally recognisable figures in their respective fields, typically important individuals who play an active part in their local Jewish community. This may arguably be done in a bid to confirm *HonestReporting*’s claim that it is a legitimate grass-roots organisation with a strong power of persuasion, and therefore able to acquire symbolic capital through work on the ground. The endorsements of other members of the Canadian Jewish community such as Canadian religious figure Michael Whitman, Senior
Rabbi for Modern Orthodox Adath Israel Poale Zedek Anshei Ozeroffal synagogue in Montréal, Judy Schwartz, Director of McMaster University’s Jewish Students’ Association or former Maths teacher at Toronto-based secondary Jewish day school Tanenbaum Community Hebrew Academy of Toronto Steve Baker for instance tend to confirm HonestReporting’s objective to promote its grass-roots credentials. Similarly, whilst at first glance, Maple Downs Golf and Country Club General Manager David Greaves’ praise for HonestReporting’s work might seem incongruous, mainly due to his lack of symbolic capital on the question of the conflict (he has no known views, is no media, political, religious or civic authority nor is he a technical web expert, though he might be a recognised figure in his own field), Greaves’ positive appraisal of HonestReporting’s advocacy work is also aimed at confirming HonestReporting’s ability to convince the general public with credible, trustworthy arguments.

One big name on HonestReporting’s list of endorsers is former (now bankrupt) major media company CanWest Global Communications Corporation CEO Leonard Asper. Asper had acknowledged that he had strong personal ties with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, and that he used his media outlets to advertise strong pro-Israeli support: given that at its peak the company owned Canada’s second largest English

\[45\] The Asper family were reported to be ‘enthusiastic Zionists’ Asper’s father and founder of the company, Israel Asper, was given the title of Honorary Doctor of Philosophy from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Horesh, Hadar ‘It was a mistake to do business with Eli Azur, http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/features/it-was-a-mistake-to-do-business-with-eli-azur-1.152323 Ha’aretz 07 March 2005 [last accessed 20 April 2011].
language daily newspaper *(The National Post)* and Canada’s primary broadcast television network Global Television Network, it would be difficult to describe CanWest as anything but a dominant agent in the Canadian journalistic field. This endorsement by a major mainstream agent with connections to powerful political figures in Israeli politics arguably undermines *HonestReporting*’s stance that mainstream media is misreporting the Middle-Eastern conflict. Ted Sokolsky, President and CEO of the *United Jewish Appeal Federation of Greater Toronto* in Canada, part of the North American Jewish Federations, also one of the investigators in conjunction with the *Jewish Council for Public Affairs* of a ‘delegitimization movement’ aimed at fighting ‘anti-Israel boycott, divestment and sanctions campaigns’ called ‘The Israel Action Network’. The list is also extended to Paul Hertz, former Director of Jewish College fraternity Alpha Epsilon Pi based in York University, Canada with affiliates in the United-States and Israel. The fraternity is a member of the *Israel on Campus Coalition* programme, which also counts *CAMERA* as its member. One of ICC’s main aims is to ‘foster support for Israel, an appreciation for Zionism’ in order to ‘effect a positive and pro-active Israel agenda on campus through advocacy’ (see website). Top Israeli political figures such as Yoram Elron, Consul General of Israel for Quebec and the Atlantic Provinces, and Alan Baker, Former Israeli Ambassador to Canada also appear on the list, adding to the impression that *HonestReporting* is not just a successful activist organisation and a marginalised media-monitoring outlet, but that it is part of a wider, well-organised movement with open
political ambitions and that it holds high economic, political and social capital in its own right.

In contrast to both pro-Palestinian organisations, no individual or group of people is directly named as HonestReporting’s founder on any of the presentation pages. The organisation’s archives have however helped retrieve an article from 15 June 2001 describing the details of HonestReporting’s set-up, and indicating that ‘the Jerusalem Fund of Aish HaTorah, an Orthodox group focused on outreach to secular Jews, provided close to $150,000 in seed money to create Media Watch International for a dual purpose: to absorb HonestReporting and continue with its activism and media watchdog work, and to educate the media with position papers’ (HR website). Further investigation has shown that founder of the Jerusalem Fund of Aich HaTorah Irwin Katsof was involved in setting up HonestReporting and the organisation whilst still serving as the Executive Director of the Jerusalem Fund of Aich HaTorah. Current HonestReporting contributors include UK Senior Editor Simon Plosker (now living in Israel) who has been a public affairs officer for the Board of Deputies of British Jews whose current President, Vivian Wineman, is also part of the European Jewish Council, an elected body representing Jewish communities across Europe which ‘works with national governments, European Union institutions and the Council of Europe’; Mike Fegelman is the executive director of HonestReporting.

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Canada and a ‘recommended speaker’, along with other contributors in the political field (like Ambassador for Israel Yoram Ettinger) or mainstream journalists (like Yaakov Katz or Gil Hoffman of The Jerusalem Post), for the Hasbara Fellowships (website), a programme aimed at ‘educating and training university students to be effective pro-Israel activists on their campuses’. Gary Kenzer, CEO of HonestReporting USA, is not a trained journalist but an Administration, Public Policy and Community Organization graduate from the University of Illinois with an 18-year career as a political action staff liaison officer for the National Association of Social Workers in Illinois. David Barish, President of HonestReporting USA branch, a furniture magnate by trade, is a board member for the Jewish Agency for Israel (amongst other organisations) and serves on American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC)’s National Council. AIPAC president Michael Kassen, was listed with his wife Shelly as a member of the Tribute Committee to CAMERA’s 2012 Annual Dinner honouring CAMERA President and Executive Manager Andrea Levin, during which the keynote speaker was former mayor of New York and major political mainstream figure Rudolph Giuliani. CAMERA’s 2011 Annual Dinner, honouring The Friends of Israel Initiative had Jose Maria Aznar, former President of Spain, Fiamma

47 https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:6r9z8ev_xV8J:cyjp.org/images/event/76_Camera_Gala_Special_YL_Invitation.pdf+&hl=en&gl=uk&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEESg7N8NHaw3efnGhoaZ4TrU7EwGOue32JGtrQ9WChnsvOEZik0352ztLUSTL9_s-N512uCQd9yeYfLCLClOMaBQB80c745suKSO6vDnlORbeYOzOlh4zgShVYy1eeUR6IK-BT&sig=AHIEtbS0D2SnW0FxmezG0RdpjmqGW08isXg [last accessed 10 January 2013].

48 The Friends of Israel Initiative, created and led by former Spanish Prime Minister José Mara Alfredo Aznar in 2010, is an international organization with a key aim to ‘counter the growing efforts to delegitimize the State of Israel and its right to live in peace within safe and defensible borders’. http://www.friendsofisraelinitiative.org/about-wellcome.php
Nirenstein, Italian Parliamentarian, and John Bolton, former US Ambassador to the UN as key note speakers, whilst in 2009, the Annual Dinner honoured Michael Oren, Israeli Ambassador to the USA. CAMERA also sits with AIPAC as a partner organisation of the Israel Campus Roundtable, a programme set up to help Boston students finance Pro-Israel campaign projects in Israel or on their own campuses in Boston. CAMERA’s list of endorsers is rich in very high-profile names in the world of North-American politics and include such personalities as former Congressman Tom Lantos, former New York Mayor Ed Koch and Harvard Law professor Alan Dershowitz, all three openly staunch supporters of Israel and its Foreign Affairs policies, as well as former Israeli Minister for Jerusalem Affairs Natan Sharansky. With these endorsements, CAMERA makes it clear that by having friends in high places, in other words established social capital, the organisation has tangible political influence of its own as well as significant political clout by association (the figures cited have had direct and successful influence over the USA’s Middle-East policies). Other endorsements include Charles A Radin, a former contributor to the Boston Globe. Using the name of a journalist working in the local mainstream press may be an attempt at drawing symbolic capital by conveying the idea that CAMERA is recognised by mainstream press. The fact that Radin now writes for The Jewish Advocate, a

49 Its publisher, Grand Rabbi Y. A. Korff was one of the signatories in October 2007 to an Open Letter to Reverend Taylor of the Old South Church in Boston asking for the church not to host a conference organised by Sabeel - an organisation based in Jerusalem, describing itself as ‘an ecumenical grassroots liberation theology movement among Palestinian Christians’ doing ‘work in advocacy, education, and nonviolent resistance to the Israeli occupation’ - on the basis that the conference was ‘based on inaccuracy and bias’ and ‘clearly intend[ed] to demonize Israel’ http://ucctruths.blogspot.com/2007/10/david-project-hate-fest-at-boston-old.html [last accessed 20 April 2011].

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subscription-only Boston-based newspaper, confirms the organisation’s obvious pro-Israeli stance, and alludes to its close working links with mainstream media as an equal partner sharing similar goals rather than a challenger opposing the dominant agents’ stance. Although making CAMERA’s allegiance to Israel unequivocal and advertising such influential figures may be a good show of symbolic capital in the political field and proof that their activist strand is effective, its choice of endorsers may in the process cast some doubts on the organisation’s claims to non-partisanship. This may be the reason why, as a bid to counter-balance the possible impressions given by the big names, there is also listed as endorsing CAMERA freelance journalist and recognised blogger Craig Silverman, describing himself on his personal blog as a ‘press accuracy expert’ and author of a book publicising anecdotes on mistakes, inaccuracies and fallacies by media outlets online and in print: this endorsement implies CAMERA has the backing of what the organisation may want to describe as a colleague with no publicised association with the conflict but who has acquired symbolic capital in the journalistic field, as an expert in his domain. Consecration by another newcomer in the journalistic field implies that CAMERA is able to build a network of connections within the field they are positioned in, and gain media meta-capital as an influencer in the journalistic field.

Whether in the journalistic field, the political field or the economic field, all four outlets have been successful in acquiring symbolic capital. A look at the four outlets’ financial profiles will provide some clues in establishing whether the organisations’
strategy of gaining symbolic capital in any of the fields they position themselves in has allowed the groups to exchange any symbolic capital earned for economic capital, without which their presence would be threatened, and ultimately, unjustified.

6.1.3 Gauging Success: A Look at the Outlets’ Financial Profiles

The four outlets describe themselves as being free from the political pressures exerted by external powers which render fairness and accuracy near impossible to achieve. All groups are set up as charitable organisations with an aim to educate the public on the issue of the Palestinian-Israel conflict. This charity status implies both financial and political independence: CAMERA describes itself as a ‘non-partisan organization [which] takes no position with regard to American or Israeli political issues or with regard to ultimate solutions to the Arab-Israeli conflict’, If Americans Knew sees itself as an ‘independent research and information-dissemination institute’, EI is an ‘independent publication’ and HonestReporting refers to their ‘independent charitable organisation status’.

Most mainstream media outlets are ‘for-profit’ organisations mainly dependent on high sales figures and wide access: The New York Times for example, which has been published continuously for 170 years, has accumulated 106 Pulitzer price wins and has news bureaux based in the USA and other countries (such as France, Israel, Italy, Egypt,
Lebanon, Turkey, Germany, Iraq or South Africa amongst others), is part of a publicly owned company, *The New York Times Company*, along with other broadsheets such as *The Boston Globe, The International Herald Tribune* and other commercial ventures; its owners are shareholders, its value fluctuates according to stock exchange variations and its net income for 2011 is $5.4 million. In contrast, *CAMERA, HonestReporting, Electronic Intifada* and *if Americans Knew* all describe themselves as 501(c)(3) ‘not-for profit’ charitable organisations which, according to the USA’s tax collection agency (Inland Revenue Services), ‘are subject to limits or absolute prohibitions on engaging in political activities’. A ‘not for profit organisation’ ‘may not be an action organization, i.e., it may not attempt to influence legislation as a substantial part of its activities and it may not participate in any campaign activity for or against political candidates’. In order to maintain this tax-exempt status, the organisations are permitted to ‘conduct educational meetings, prepare and distribute educational materials, or otherwise consider public policy issues in an educational manner’ as long as no attempt to influence legislation (i.e.

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50\*CAMERA is 501(c)(3) non-profit and contributions are tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law’, http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=24 [last accessed 20 September 2011].

‘If Americans Knew is a 501(c)3 tax-exempt, independent research and information-dissemination institute’, http://www.ifamericansknew.org/about_us/whoweare.html last accessed 20 September 2013].

‘The Electronic Intifada is a program service of the Middle East Cultural and Charitable Society, Inc. a 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization’, http://electronicintifada.net/content/donate-support-work-electronic-intifada/4 last accessed 20 September 2013].

‘In 2001, the project became a major organization in its own right as a US non-profit organization (501c3) with an Independent Board of Directors. In February of 2006, HonestReporting was granted independent Charitable Organization status in Israel to complement its US status’ http://honestreporting.com/about last accessed 20 September 2013].


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lobbying) and no active support for any candidate for an elective public office are made. This status assumes that the organisations are financially independent of political involvement and heavily dependent on donations, which would put them at the autonomous pole of the economic field.

The main data of interest included in the analysis represent the total revenues of each organisation, and their revenues less expenses. Data was collected for tax years 2010 to 2013 (data for previous years was not accessible online at the time of the study) and was collated in table 1. Table 2 shows the latest available data for the number of staff the organisation has on roll, and the salaries of their executive teams.

For Alison Weir, President of *If Americans Knew*, ‘one of the most difficult aspects is raising enough money to sustain the organization. The good news is that we have been able to keep going for almost ten years. The unfortunate reality is that there’s never been enough money to go beyond a paid staff of about 2-3 people’.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Committee for Accuracy in The Middle East Reporting in America</th>
<th>HonestReporting</th>
<th>Electronic Intifada</th>
<th>If Americans Knew</th>
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<td>N/A</td>
<td>-$274,123</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>+$132,426</td>
<td>-$216,827</td>
<td>+$86,329</td>
<td>+$1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>-$61,435</td>
<td>+$5,615</td>
<td>-$30,545</td>
<td>-$16,646</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>+$478,450</td>
<td>+$105,769</td>
<td>-$13,065</td>
<td>+$35,993</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A look at her organisation’s revenue seems to confirm this, as *IAK*’ has to contend with a relatively small budget compared to the objectives the organisation has set for itself, and also compared to the other three organisations. The second lowest annual revenue holder is *Electronic Intifada*: although its budget is more than double *If American Knew*’s budget, it is still relatively modest compared to both pro-Israeli outlets. Both the pro-Palestinian organisations would be defined as very small companies with budgets under $500,000, and both have a limited number of staff on roll - 6 for *IAK* although only its President is in receipt of a regular salary, and 3 for *Electronic Intifada*, again with one staff in receipt of a paid salary, as opposed to a compensation.
In stark contrast to both *EI* and *IAK*, *CAMERA’s* healthy financial report shows a total revenue of over $3,000,000; its excess alone - of $132,426 - is in the same range as *IAK*’s total income: it appears that *CAMERA* has budget that is closer to a for-profit business company, with 35 staff on roll and 2 staff members in receipt of a healthy salary.

Despite a huge disparity in their respective budgets, all three outlets register a profit for the fiscal year ending December 2012: this tends to show that these organisations have achieved decent successes in terms of their appeal campaigns: *EI*’s excess represents 24% of their 2012 total income, *IAK*’s excess represents 22.7% of 2012 their income and *CAMERA* reports a more modest excess of 3.7% compared to their big 2012 annual budget.

While many not-for-profit companies have had to face hardships in a particularly difficult global economic climate, not only have these three outlets managed to make gains, they have also been able to compensate their executive directors with healthy salaries compared to their annual income, and all executive members of staff benefited from an increase in their salaries from the previous fiscal year: *CAMERA’s* combined salaries for the two highest paid staff members represent 10.4% of the company’s annual income – the accepted standard number for most charitable companies – with each receiving an increase, of 6.5% for President Andrea Levin and 2.8% for Associate Director Alex Safian. Similarly, *EI* President Ali Abunimah’s salary is 11.4% of the company’s annual
2012 budget, with a salary increase of 11% from the previous year. Alison Weir of IAK received a salary representing 15.9% of the company’s annual income, with a major increase of 18.9% from her previous salary.

One outlet that seems to have suffered from the economic downturn is medium-size company HonestReporting: it has seen its annual income decrease by over a third (37.7%) from the previous year with its highest paid staff member, President Gary Kenzer, in receipt of a salary representing 4.7% of its 2013 annual budget. No salary was reported for any staff members in 2012. It registered 11 staff on roll with only one staff in receipt of a salary. If HonestReporting appears to be struggling, its decent-sized budget and higher than average number of staff compared to the pro-Palestinian outlets still make it difficult to mark it as an unsuccessful agent. In the case of CAMERA especially, its big annual income, many staff on roll (35) and generous pay packages for the two main executive staff make it a healthy not-for-profit organisation.

A look at how the four organisations direct their donation appeals may give an insight into the expectations each group has in terms of collecting economic capital through their main source of income: the donation appeals. The four outlets rely heavily on public donations, their primary source of income, in order to finance their activities. While all four organisations have a dedicated section on the ways and means to donate, and all use online technology to accept immediate donations (through businesses such as
PayPal for instance), there are differences in the way the organisations present their options, which may help explain the four groups’ disparity in their budgets, as shown by their financial profile.

Starting with the pro-Palestinian groups, Electronic Intifada lists four methods of payment as supported by the organisation’s website without offering any specific amount as a starting point, or the option to make regular contributions; potential donors also have to contact the organisation prior to setting up bank transfers, which does not allow for spontaneous donations. Electronic Intifada’s seemingly sober approach may indicate a conscious decision to adhere to the strict rules imposed on all charitable organisations in an attempt to prove its credibility and integrity, and also to avoid potential negative connotations of commercialisation and profiteering, making it a relatively independent agent dependent only on its public. The fact that no fixed amount is being suggested, and that no particular incentive is offered in return for the donations also gives the sense that Electronic Intifada is looking to attract the broadest possible number of contributors by making it accessible to all as opposed to a select wealthy few, confirming its credentials as a charity and an activist group for which every contribution matters, whatever its size. Similarly, whilst If American Knew’s appeal for donations allows for the immediate set-up of monthly contributions, the fairly modest amounts proposed (ranging from $10 to $125) as well as the other means of contributions (a donation in a will or the purchase of a music
CD which entire proceeds go to the organisation) also seem to suggest that the outlet wishes to abide by its charitable status.

Moving on to the pro-Israeli groups, in contrast to both Electronic Intifada and If Americans Knew, HonestReporting’s donations appeals appear more complex: ten different ways of making a gift covering three specifically targeted countries (the USA, Israel and the UK) are being offered, with a strong emphasis on immediate contributions. These contributions range from a minimum of $50 to a maximum of $10,000 of either one-off or regular payments, each amount associated with a title. Other options include gift aid donations, but also the donation of stocks and shares. While it is not as comprehensive as HonestReporting’s page, CAMERA’s donation appeal page also promotes immediate and direct contributions, although a regular donation cannot be set up. Similarly, to HonestReporting, fixed amounts are proposed, also ranging from $50 to $10,000 with concessions made to students and seniors, each amount also associated with a title. With a contribution of $50 comes membership to the organisation, along with access to publications from CAMERA: this suggests that, although high contributions are expected (and therefore high economic capital can be assumed), the organisation wants to emphasize its activist credentials and ensure their charitable status as educational outlets are respected.
The fact that both pro-Israeli outlets offer a symbolic title in exchange for a financial contribution can also be viewed as an active effort to build a network of connections in which all parties have a gain in the transaction: this could be interpreted as the premise of working towards building and consolidating social capital to be translated into another form of capital (economic or political) at a later stage.

There seems to be a discrepancy between the pro-Palestinian and the pro-Israeli outlets in terms of their financial means, the former appearing as small, understaffed, independent yet relatively successful newcomers with high professional credentials, little economic capital and no obvious mainstream political allegiances, and the latter well-staffed, well-resourced and well-connected companies with a clear political agenda and the means to put it in place. This is partly explained by the outlets’ donations appeal campaign, as both EI and IAK seem to anticipate acts of solidarity from their potential donors, for whom no recognition or reward is being offered while both CAMERA and HR appear to target and expect high economic capital holders and offer special access to their in-house literature, concessions for certain groups or symbolic titles in return for a donation, which may be read in similar terms as an economic contract with the expectations inherent to any transaction when there is a trade, in a concerted effort to build social capital. As already discussed in the present section, the pro-Israeli agents’ efforts to undermine mainstream media are, however, hindered by their high-profile connections within the political field. It also questions the two outlets’ very position in
the journalistic field as their profiles and activities seem more suited to be newcomers to the political field as lobbyists rather than educators, as all capital accrued would be traded as symbolic capital in the political field in order to apply pressure on decision-makers. *EI* and *If Americans Knew*, on the other hand, confirm their status as challenging newcomers in the journalistic field, with low economic capital and no obvious links to the political field. Yet the four groups’ financial profiles tend to indicate that all four agents have managed to achieve relative success in realising their first strategy: they all seem to have acquired sufficient economic capital which they are able to trade for symbolic capital in the journalistic field for *EI* and *IAK*, and in the economic and political field for *CAMERA* and *HR*.

The challenging agents appeal to a specifically targeted audience: the North American readership. The next section will look at the level of success achieved by the four outlets in attracting their target public by analysing the type of audience each organisation draws on their own websites, and the field in which they hope to earn symbolic capital.

### 6.2 Strategy 2: Targeting the North American Readership

Besides showing strategic knowledge of the fact that the US audience specifically is more responsive to online-based sources of news, targeting the North American readership is
an acknowledgement by all four outlets that North America in general, and the USA in particular are heavily invested in events unfolding in the Middle-East. A number of online webpage analysis trackers were used to determine the traffic on each website in order to ascertain whether the four outlets were successful in their endeavours. Given that the results are estimated (only the owners of the websites have access to accurate, up-to-date and comprehensive data), three webpage traffic analysis trackers were chosen to give the closest overall estimate on the basis of their popularity, ease of use and the fact all three were comparable in terms of the type of data they are able to offer. All data were compiled over a 90-day period. The results are shown in Table 3. Figures 6 to 9 represent the charts for the three countries generating the most visits for each outlet.

Table 3 Website popularity and visitors’ geographical location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>HonestReporting</th>
<th>Committee for Accuracy in The Middle East Reporting in America</th>
<th>Electronic Intifada</th>
<th>If Americans Knew</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affiliation</td>
<td>Pro-Israeli</td>
<td>Pro-Israeli</td>
<td>Pro-Palestinian</td>
<td>Pro-Palestinian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address</td>
<td>Skokie, IL, USA</td>
<td>Boston, MA, USA</td>
<td>Chicago, IL, USA</td>
<td>Vancouver, WA, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US rank</td>
<td>75,025</td>
<td>137,318</td>
<td>29,293</td>
<td>147,485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SimilarWeb.com</td>
<td>75,025</td>
<td>137,318</td>
<td>29,293</td>
<td>147,485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexa.com</td>
<td>92,729</td>
<td>67,881</td>
<td>40,141</td>
<td>197,360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urlmetrics.com</td>
<td>117,264</td>
<td>262,448</td>
<td>60,298</td>
<td>228,190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worldwide rank (Table 3 continued)</td>
<td>SimilarWeb.com</td>
<td>Alexa.com</td>
<td>Urlmetrics.com</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>180,980</td>
<td>214,180</td>
<td>389,685</td>
<td>66,742</td>
<td>369,533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>214,180</td>
<td>254,759</td>
<td>94,407</td>
<td>510,699</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>378,763</td>
<td>594,830</td>
<td>166,900</td>
<td>580,309</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of monthly visits (August 2014)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SimilarWeb.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexa.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urlmetrics.com</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top 3 Leading countries for visits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SimilarWeb.com</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 6 HonestReporting

Figure 7 CAMERA
The results for each website vary widely in numbers depending on the tracker, although the overall picture for all four organisations is fairly consistent: all four websites seem successful in their endeavours to mainly attract a North American audience as all three trackers identify the USA and Canada as the main geographical locations of the websites’ visitors. Another observation from the data collected in Table 3 is that while
the USA is *Electronic Intifada’s* largest audience, it seems to draw audiences from a wider range of countries. This may be explained by the fact that *EI’s* strategy is to spread its message as widely as possible across the world; more prosaically, this may also be explained by the negative connotation generally associated with the term ‘intifada’ in the North American press, which could alienate potential audiences as the organisation’s affiliation is made clear and unambiguous.

It seems that high economic capital does not necessarily translate into high numbers of monthly views. For all trackers, second lowest economic capital holder *Electronic Intifada* has the most successful website both in the USA and worldwide, and seems to attract the most amount of monthly views: the total amount of views for this site alone is more than double that of the three others combined for *SimilarWeb*, and about a third more for *urlmetrics*. The lowest financial capital holder *If Americans Knew* also looks like it fairs better than its high budget counterpart, *CAMERA*, which both trackers have identified as the least successful website in terms of attracting visits. In this context, it is clear that low economic and political influence have been traded up for high symbolic capital by the two pro-Palestinian outlets, which do appear to be successful newcomers in the journalistic field, with success in reaching their target audience and well as widening it. *CAMERA* by contrast, seems to have lost symbolic capital in the journalistic field despite already accumulated symbolic capital in the political and the economic fields, given that it has attracted the least amount of interest on its website. It
can be noted that if \textit{CAMERA} is the most popular in terms of attracting its target audience, its second highest country for visits is Israel: if the declared objective of the organisation is to educate the general public deemed largely misinformed about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, it seems interesting that visitors to the website come from one of the parties directly involved in the conflict; one would assume that these particular visitors are therefore already well-informed as to events unfolding in their own country. This tends to contradict \textit{CAMERA}'s main objective as an educator and media watchdog, and emphasises the idea that \textit{CAMERA}'s main aim is strategy online is to retain and consolidate already established connections in the political and the economic field, and is looking for media meta-capital primarily in these fields as opposed to the journalistic field. In the case of \textit{HonestReporting}, it seems that its relatively high symbolic capital in the economic and political field has not hindered its success in attracting a relatively high response rate on its website (the outlet has the second highest number of monthly visits on its website, as shown on table 3, p. 46), and has also been fairly successful at reaching the North American audience.

For the outlets, reaching to the largest possible number of people in North America has the potential to engross symbolic capital in the political field to allow the challengers to weigh in on any political decision made at national, and ultimately, at international level. If the four outlets are to follow the sequence of capital acquisition and exchange as established earlier in the discussion, targeting the USA may have an impact
on the symbolic capital they would accumulate both in the economic field – promoting the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign for the pro-Palestinian outlets and encouraging continuous financial participation from the USA to Israel for the pro-Israeli outlets – and in the political field – a non-violent resolution of the situation as a result of economic sanctions (in the image of Ghandi in India) in the form of the foundation of a Palestinian State or the One-State Solution (as advocated by EI founder Ali Abunimah) for the pro-Palestinian groups, and continuous support for any military action carried out by Israel on the grounds for their pro-Israeli counterparts.

Such high political and economic ambitions cannot be met with symbolic capital alone, whether from the political, the economic or the journalistic field. In order for the four outlets to build media meta-capital, and therefore have influence over the journalistic field in the first instance, appealing directly to the ‘democratic process’, where civil participation of the general public is real and powerful in the USA especially, is crucial. The impact of civic pressure on governmental policies is a reality in North American politics, where media pressures associated with public participation have yielded results

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52 According to Jeremy Sharp of the US Congressional Research Service, the US government ‘provides the President’s full $3.1 billion request for Israel. In addition, it provides another $504 million in funding for research, development, and production of Israel’s Iron Dome anti-rocket system ($235 million) and of the joint U.S.-Israel missile defence systems David’s Sling ($149.7 million), the Arrow improvement program (or Arrow II, $44.3 million), and Arrow III ($74.7 million)’, Sharp Jeremy (11 April 2014) US Foreign Aid to Israel, http://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33222.pdf [last accessed 09 September 2014]. In addition, tax-deductible donations are made privately to Israel, the only government for which the American taxpayer is allowed to make such donations.
before. A case in point is the Vietnam War of 1955-1975 during which the influence of public opinion and the ‘new media’ of the time (television) had a direct effect on the American government’s ultimate decision to withdraw from Vietnam. In more recent times, the arrival of new technologies has also seen the emergence of untrained, politically-motivated groups of people using the Internet, and more specifically social media, to circulate news generally not available in mainstream media in order to raise collective awareness for a specific purpose, and referred to as participatory media. Such instances of acts of participatory media are, amongst others, the civil unrest, riots and protests following the fatal shooting of a young African American male by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri in August 2014: claims of arrests of mainstream journalists, of unreported elements surrounding the shooting itself and subsequent reporting of the protests have led the local population to post personal accounts or videos of the incidents on social media, ask for popular support in lobbying local political representatives into introducing new legislation at national level to prevent such incidents, and ultimately bring the African-American community together. In this instance, building an active network of connections, in other words social capital, has been instrumental in achieving media meta-capital (acts of participatory journalism have helped keep the events current in mainstream media). Similarly, in the case of the disappearance of 3-year old British girl Madeleine McCann from a holiday resort in Portugal, her parents’ active social capital building (constant television and radio appearances, press interviews, a book launch and various appeals) has allowed them to earn sufficient media meta-capital to influence the
field of media – in keeping this particular missing person case alive for 7 years, and in obtaining regular case reviews by both the British Home Office and the Portuguese Police. Social capital, it is argued here, is therefore a fundamental pre-requisite for any agent from any field who aspire to have influence over media events, or in other words, media meta-capital. The next chapter will look at the various ways the organisations propose to acquire and maintain social capital (partly gained thanks to their donation appeal campaigns) through their third common strategy - their presence online - to see how, if at all, their presence is impacting on the audiences they are seeking in order to justify their activities, fulfil their missions and make exchanges with other forms of capital possible. A strong presence online is necessary to help these organisations reach the largest audience and ascertain their presence in the journalistic field: this strategy used by all four outlets is therefore to use the Internet, and more specifically social media, as a means to build social capital in the view to accumulate media meta-capital. The third part of the chapter will look into analysing the ways the four outlets use to put this strategy into place: the outlets’ presence online, either on their own website or on social media (namely Facebook and Twitter), will be brought into focus to help determine the type of visits they attract on their websites, and the type of interactions they have with their social media audiences; looking into the groups’ activities online would therefore help gauge whether each outlet’s message has reached its targeted audience, and whether the objectives set are being met.
CHAPTER 7. DATA ANALYSIS 2: BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL

Obtaining and maintaining social capital is essential if the outlets want to achieve success in asserting their position as newcomers in the journalistic field in the first instance, especially if the aim of the four outlets is to garner as much media-meta capital in view of influencing events in the journalistic field; it is also instrumental in allowing them to pursue their aim in influencing other fields (mainly the political and economic field) in the second instance. For Bourdieu, ‘the reproduction of social capital presupposes an unceasing effort of sociability, a continuous series of exchanges in which recognition is endlessly affirmed and reaffirmed’ (Bourdieu 1986): this holds especially true for Electronic Intifada and If Americans Knew as they are both outsiders to the economic and political fields and have relatively low if healthy economic capital, as has been established in previous discussions. They need to rely on symbolic capital earned almost exclusively in the journalistic field, and therefore have to be particularly pro-active in using strategies to build new capital. Their pro-Israeli counterparts have already established symbolic capital in all three fields, and can therefore rely on an already established social capital which they need to maintain and consolidate.

In any agent’s efforts to build social capital in any given field, the Internet has become an increasingly popular way of developing and maintain a network of connections; its low running cost, instant impact, free access to the general public and
ease of use make it an extremely attractive proposition, especially for newcomers who want to make their mark against the established agents as it allows for low exchange of economic capital for a potentially high return in social capital. The use of social platform has also increased exponentially in the last few years, with a special mention to Twitter and Facebook, arguably the two most popular, widely accessible and successful social platforms online at the time of the study: Twitter has 255 million monthly average active users, and over 1.25 billion monthly active users are on Facebook. The second part of this section will focus on each organisation’s own activities and interactions with their Twitter followers and Facebook fans for trends in the ways the outlets use social media to attract social capital, and the type of social capital they are targeting.

The next section will look at confirming whether, and how, the four outlets apply the strategies identified – namely relying on established social capital and building new social capital – on the most widely used social media platforms, Facebook and Twitter. Twitter is a social networking and microblogging platform which allows its users to receive real-time, on-the-moment information related to their own interests in a very short format (no more than 140 characters), while Facebook, the biggest networking website in the world, allows users to connect to each other, share videos, messages, links or photos. Only very recently have academic researchers started to consider social media as sufficiently reliable tools for data collection in social sciences, and scholarship on methods in analysing social media is developing accordingly: Axel Burns, Associate Professor at ARC
Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation, Queensland University of Technology in Australia, offers tools and methods for using Twitter data specifically (Burns 2012), and Fehmi Ben Abdesslem, Iain Parris, and Tristan Henderson also propose a new methodology for reliable online social network data collection (2012). For the purpose of the current study, interactions between the groups and their twitter followers and Facebook fans are another way of testing the groups’ reputation and credentials in the social world: this will help identify the amount of social capital each group has within their own network, and help establish which agent holds media-meta capital. This study will look at the outlets’ Twitter follower profiles (Facebook’s various privacy settings do not allow for a reliable collection of data for the organisations’ fan profiles), with an emphasis on the Twitter followers who have a verified account. The four groups’ interactions on Twitter and Facebook will also be looked at: the groups’ engagement rate, their most popular tweets and Facebook comments will be also analysed, in an attempt to understand the type of information each outlet attracts, and whether the information shared matches the outlets’ claims.

53 Twitter defines users of a verified account as ‘highly sought users in music, acting, fashion, government, politics, religion, journalism, media, sports, business, and other key interest areas,’ twitter website https://support.twitter.com/articles/119135-faqs-about-verified-accounts# [last accessed 11 August 2014].
7.1 Presence On Social Media: the four groups’ activities on Twitter and Facebook

Previous discussions suggest that media-meta capital, which is defined as the combination of symbolic capital earned in all the fields the outlets have positioned themselves in and social capital collected online, is key in order for the outlets to have any influence on the political field. The Twitter feed and Facebook activities for the two pro-Israeli and the two pro-Palestinian organisations were used to analyse whether there were differences in how these organisations used the technology to disseminate their message. The tweets and Facebook posts for the four organisations were scraped for information on the time and date of postings. The names and basic Twitter and Facebook data for the organisations are collated in Table 4. The data were analysed within MS Excel to determine if there was any pattern to the periodicity of their social media activities within a thirty-day framework. The data were analysed using the data-analysis tool-pack in MS Excel to generate histograms. The bin ranges for these histograms were based on day of the week, for the analysis of day of the week; and by hour in a 24-hour period for analysis of when posts were made during the day. These data were analysed to determine what day of the week (Figure 10) and what hour of the day (Figure 11) the tweets were made, and what day of the week (Figure 12) and what hour of the day (Figure 13) Facebook posts were made.
Table 4 *Twitter* and *Facebook* posts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisations</th>
<th>HonestReporting</th>
<th>CAMERA</th>
<th>Electronic Intifada</th>
<th>If Americans Knew</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Affiliation</strong></td>
<td>Pro-Israeli</td>
<td>Pro-Israeli</td>
<td>Pro-Palestinian</td>
<td>Pro-Palestinian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Followers on Twitter</strong></td>
<td>7,722</td>
<td>6,931</td>
<td>48,665</td>
<td>948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Following on Twitter</strong></td>
<td>2,811</td>
<td>476</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of tweets in a 30-day period</strong></td>
<td>103</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>1,775</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fans on Facebook</strong></td>
<td>15,751</td>
<td>9,357</td>
<td>46,733</td>
<td>20,756</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Posts on Facebook in a 30-day period</strong></td>
<td>35</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 10 Tweets by days of the week a) CAMERA, b) HR, c) Electronic Intifada, d) If Americans Knew

Figure 11 Tweets by hour of the day: a) CAMERA, b) HR, c) Electronic Intifada, d) If Americans Knew
Figure 12 Posts by days of the week a) CAMERA b) HR c) Electronic Intifada d) If Americans Knew

Figure 13 Posts by time of day a) CAMERA b) HR c) Electronic Intifada d) If Americans Knew
Starting with the pro-Palestinian outlets, the data from EI (10c) show a different pattern from all the other parties in the survey. Table 4 shows that the volume of tweets is more than all the other parties combined, and figures 10c and 11c show that tweets are spread across all seven days of the week and across a constant 24-hour period. This would assume that either the organisation has dedicated staff that work outside of normal office hours, possibly on a 24-hour rota, or that tweets are automatically scheduled to be released at specific times during a 24-hour period. Social media tracking, analytic and measuring toolkit Twitonomy reveals that the bulk of Electronic Intifada’s tweets originate from SocialFlow. SocialFlow is a fee-paying software company used by many major companies such as The Financial Times or L’Oreal to boost their social media profile on all major social platforms. On Twitter, SocialFlow uses specific algorithms to release tweets on schedule to maximize impact and ensure constant flow of information: for Electronic Intifada, this means that Twitter users from all time-zones have access to the same real-time information at the time they access their accounts. This explains the extremely high volume of tweets per month (1775, or approximately 60 tweets per day) and also shows astute use of this particular social network by Electronic Intifada, which clearly chooses to utilise Twitter not as a networking platform (it only follows one other user) but as a tool to deliver as much information as possible to as many as possible for maximum impact. Given that EI has treble the number of followers than the other three organisations combined (as seen on Table 4, p. 189), this strategy seems to be paying off. As is the case for Twitter, Electronic Intifada seems to be the most successful of the four
outlets on Facebook, with the same amount of Facebook fans as all the other outlets combined. It has a similar amount of Facebook fans as it has Twitter followers: this confirms EI’s position as the most successful organisation. Posts are still spread across a seven-day week (Figure 12c) but they are made during the day (between 7am and 19pm with a more continuous stream between 12pm and 17pm). Its engagement on Facebook is less voluminous in quantity (85 posts in a month, which is less than 3 posts a day) which implies that these posts are not released automatically. Information overflow seems to be EI’s strategy in terms of delivering information on social media, which fits with the description it gives itself as ‘Palestine’s weapon of mass instruction’. This also fits with previous findings showing that the outlet aims at building social capital based on quantity primarily.

In contrast to EI, the data from IAK (10d) shows sparse activity on Twitter. One would assume that the very limited financial resources and manpower identified in the previous sections would explain such a low participation rate on this particular social platform (18 tweets in 30 days on average, or approximately one tweet made every other day, as seen on Table 4). This is being confirmed by the data collected for its Facebook activities. IAK has a marginally higher engagement rate on Facebook (31 posts per month on average), with posts made over a 5-day week, from 13pm to 20pm, which may explain the reasons for the fact that IAK has over twice as much Facebook fans as it has Twitter followers. Careful and timely information dissemination may also be a strategic decision
on the part of IAK: the outlet has already been established as holding high media-meta capital, with symbolic capital principally accumulated in the journalistic field. The organisation’s position as an outsider to the political field and as a challenger to the journalistic field comforts its role as an alternative independent news provider, and confirms its aim as an educator. It is therefore possible to assume that IAK’s strategy is to build new social capital of informed agents who would be more likely to fully participate and invest as activists in the conflict – a slower but potentially more rewarding process in building media-meta capital that could ultimately be exchanged for symbolic capital in the political field.

Moving on to the pro-Israeli outlets, CAMERA work a five-day week, as would be expected for professional lobbyists (10a and 11b). CAMERA seems to tweet a reasonable amount of tweets (8 tweets per day on average) during normal office hours, between 7am and 14pm with a peek at around 11am to 12pm, which corresponds to a lunch-break for most office workers, who would have instant access to the real-time information should they choose to check their Twitter timeline during lunch. This is consistent with the activities of a paid office staff as part of their job specifications. The data collected for Facebook posts by time of day show that CAMERA posts between 12pm and 17pm. This may indicate that one staff shares their workday equally between Twitter activities in the morning and Facebook activities in the afternoon, during a normal 5 working-day week and during normal office hours. Facebook seems to be CAMERA’s favoured social platform.
as data reveal a very high engagement rate: 208 posts on average per month, which equates to 7 posts a day. One may assume that this is could simply be a practical strategy to make better use of the more widely-used networking tool of the two. Interestingly, despite high economic capital, CAMERA’s strategy on social media does not seem to translate into high social capital in quantitative terms, as shown by a relatively low number of both Twitter followers and Facebook fans: one could conclude that presence on social media is not CAMERA’s priority. This fits with the overall impression emerging from all data collected for this organisation, which suggests that the strategy used by CAMERA is not for the purpose of building social capital; it is to maintain the symbolic capital already established in the political and economic fields.

*HR* also works a 5-day week, although it works a week that has a weekend Friday to Saturday (10b): it would therefore seem that the staff posting on Twitter respect religious Jewish resting, or Shabbath. Times in which tweets are made are grouped early in the morning (11b): this presupposes that either the posters are located outside of the USA, or that the posters tweet before their own working hours. The average of tweets per month (103, or just over 3 tweets a day) is also fairly low. As has been previously noted, *HR* has 11 staff on roll, only one of which being in receipt of a regular salary: the fact that tweets are made outside of normal working hours may mean that these are the efforts of dedicated volunteer activists who tweet in their own time. Similar to its Twitter activities, *HonestReporting*’s engagement on Facebook is fairly low (35 posts on average,
or 1 post per day), posts are made across the week (aside from Friday) and only from 14pm to 21pm: this is not consistent with a normal 5-day week, and the patterns for postings again suggest that HR uses activists who work outside of their own working hours.

Based on the data collected, it is difficult to determine HonestReporting’s intended strategy on social media: very low activity on Twitter and Facebook added to high symbolic capital from the journalistic, economic and political fields seems to indicate that, like CAMERA, HR’s strategy is to rely and possibly expand on an established symbolic capital in the political and economic fields.

It emerges from all data collected on the four groups’ presence online through their own website or on social media that both pro-Palestinian outlets have chosen to attract new social capital (in quantity for EI, mostly in quality for IAK): this is consistent with the fact that both outlets have positioned themselves as outsiders to the political and the economic fields, and have acquired media-meta capital through symbolic capital earned in the journalistic field, and as such cannot rely on pre-existing social capital. CAMERA and HR in contrast, seems mainly interested in retaining and / or expanding on already established symbolic capital earned through symbolic capital gained in the political and the economic field. A look at how the outlets interact with their Twitter fans and Facebook followers may help confirm these trends.
7.2 Interactions with Followers and Fans on Social Media

Given that each group refers to themselves as a charitable organisation whose main role is to raise awareness of the events unfolding in the Middle-East without bias or distortion, it would be reasonable to assume that the main body of their Twitter followers is made of either grassroots organisations or individuals who have special interest in the conflict. One way of assessing the four groups’ success in reaching their main objective of educating the general public on current news items they feel are either distorted or missing as reported by the dominant agents, is to look at the engagement rate their activities on Twitter and Facebook trigger with the users who have shown interest. The data used to measure the degree of interaction of the four outlets was collected in Table 5 for Facebook, and in Table 6 for Twitter.


Table 5: Interaction Rate on Facebook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CAMERA</th>
<th>Electronic Intifada</th>
<th>HonestReporting</th>
<th>If Americans Knew</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engagement Rate:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of people</td>
<td>26.8%</td>
<td>69.3%</td>
<td>50.1%</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>engaging with</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a post (like /</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comment /share)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at least once</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>out of the total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of Fans</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average of Likes</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2465</td>
<td>940</td>
<td>3015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ Comments /</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shares per post</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over a month</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Interaction Rate on Twitter (over the last 3200 tweets)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CAMERA</th>
<th>Electronic Intifada</th>
<th>HonestReporting</th>
<th>If Americans Knew</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% Retweeted</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>99.75</td>
<td>61.9</td>
<td>54.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tweets (own)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Favourite</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>99.06</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>25.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tweets (own)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Replies to</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Retweets of</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>others’ Tweets</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Starting with the pro-Palestinian outlets, although individual Twitter users - such as students, groups of students or academics make the majority of Electronic Intifada’s Twitter followers, a close analysis of the outlet’s twitter follower profiles also reveals that journalists constitute over 10% of all users, and are located in countries such as South
Africa, Egypt, Australia, Norway, Italy, Germany, France, Lebanon, Saoudi Arabia, Belgium, Canada, the USA, Denmark and Romania to name a few.

Journalists also account for 60% of its 145 verified users: amongst those are mainstream journalists working for high profile dominant agents in the journalistic field, such as Paul Abowd of Al Jazeera, Mustapha Khalili, multimedia News Editor for the Guardian, the official Twitter account for news channel ABC Current Affairs in Australia, or Elias Jahsham, Editor of Australia’s Star Observer. Others are independent investigative journalists, some recognised worldwide for their work as critiques of mainstream media. Amongst those journalists following EI are Belgian independent journalist Michel Collon, an activist journalist who is particularly vocal about his stance on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Award-winning Australian independent journalist John Pilger, author of documentary Palestine is Still The Issue and respected in the journalist field for his work on seldom documented issues such as the plight of Australian Aborigines or child slavery in Thailand, is also one of the verified users following EI. 6 of EI’s followers have over 1 million followers themselves, including renowned US DJ King Assassin, international network of activists Anonymous and social media management system Hootsuite (who have over 6 million followers). Rapper Lil B, R&B singer Maher Zain and Hollywood actor Alex Winter, who all have over 500 000 followers themselves, are also amongst EI’s followers.
Twitter encourages network building between various followers by suggesting to follow Twitter accounts already followed by any given account: if it is difficult to establish the level of interaction between these followers and El, and to gauge how many followers are gained in this way, the outlet’s potential for exposure and visibility is still enhanced exponentially thanks to this network of well-connected individuals and entities outside of the political and the journalistic field, which helps the outlet accumulate the social capital it needs in order to survive and expand online. The data collected in Tables 5 and 6 confirm Electronic Intifada’s success in reaching its audience: over 2/3rd of the total number of Facebook fans (which is also the highest number of fans out of all four organisations) have engaged at least once with one of El’s posts, and these posts also attract a very healthy average of reactions.

Electronic Intifada’s impact on Twitter is significant: almost every analysed tweet was retweeted or favourited by other users and the outlet is also the one attracting the most number of followers out of the four outlets, this is despite being the one engaging the least with its potential followers - it has chosen to follow no other Twitter account than less used its sister account, El live, dedicated to tweet during specific live events only as they unfold on the ground. By electing not to follow any other accounts, El potentially takes the risk of reducing its social capital by limiting its potential for connections. Given El’s extremely successful engagement rate however, by applying the same strategy as the one adopted by the dominant agents in the field on digital media
such as BBC News and CNN, significant media-meta capital is being earned almost exclusively based on symbolic capital deriving from the journalistic field. This helps EI present itself as a credible alternative news provider: more than a successful newcomer to the established agents in the journalistic field, EI shows signs of becoming a dominant agent in its own right, in the sub-field of alternative media, if not in the journalistic field itself.

It is to be noted that CAMERA is also one of Electronic Intifada’s followers: irrespective of the reasons behind CAMERA’s choice to follow Electronic Intifada, symbolic capital in the journalistic field is earned by the pro-Palestinian outlet for being recognised as an influencing force in the context of the Middle-East conflict.

In the case of If Americans Knew, it seems that earlier findings on the outlet’s strategic choice in terms of acquiring qualitative social capital is confirmed. The outlet’s main followers are, in their vast majority, individuals located across the world; aside from a number of grassroots organisations such as Boycott Israeli Salt, the UNHCR or the PLO Delegation to the USA for instance, the organisation’s 1334 followers are mostly low-

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54 These numbers have had to be updated in the course of the study in order to reflect the changes to the number of Twitter followers and Facebook fans all four outlets, following their coverage of the most recent (and ongoing at the time of study) conflict engaging Israel and Palestine, also called ‘Operation Protective Edge’ by the Israeli Government, started on July 8th 2014 IAK had 948 Twitter followers and 20,748 Facebook fans on July 4th 2014; it had 1348 Twitter followers and 80,556 Facebook fans by August 16th 2014 – this represents an increase of just over 142% in Twitter Followers, and a 388% increase in Facebook fans. In the same period, EI experienced a 135% increase on Twitter and a 224% increase on
profile, with a very limited influence on the social platform as they have few followers themselves, which means that any interactions with If Americans Knew would likely have a limited impact: over 86% of all If Americans Knew followers have 1000 followers or less themselves, with the biggest follower counting under 500,000 followers. Of all their followers, only one is a Twitter verified user – Phil Radford’s account, former CEO of Greenpeace. The users If Americans Knew follows on Twitter (221) are also mainly individual or groups of peace activists, human rights activists or Boycott Divestment and Sanctions movement supporters, with the exception of independent journalist Jonathan Cook (who, incidentally, is a contributor to Electronic Intifada): this confirms initial conclusions drawn earlier in the chapter, which is that If Americans Knew tends to target these as their main audience in order to raise awareness of the issues they consider to be either under-reported or missing from mainstream headlines. This strategy, which may not allow for high social capital in terms of quantity, especially accumulated with symbolic capital earned in the journalistic field, has the potential to translate into symbolic capital in the long term if successful, as a small number of active users is, in time, more influential than a high number of passive users. This is especially true as If Americans Knew seems to deliberately choose to follow activists with a high number of followers themselves: over 44% of all accounts the organisations follow have over 1000 followers. Engagement rate data reveal that although If Americans Knew have a relatively low engagement rate compared to the others (most of their Facebook fans appear to be

Facebook; CAMERA had a 124% increase on Twitter and a 144% increase on Facebook; HonestReporting had a 135% increase in Twitter followers, and a 175% increase in Facebook fans.
passive), its posts are the ones which by far attract the most reactions on average: regular activity from a small but consistent number of users – in other words, established social capital - is likely to have a positive impact in helping IAK spread its message, and therefore conferring it a significant amount of symbolic capital in the field all the outlets are ultimately vying for attention, that is the political field. This may partly explain the reasons for the 388% increase in the number of its fans in the space of a month. On Twitter, the outlet has the lowest number of followers and is the least active on the social platform, which may explain why it also has the lowest engagement rate out of the four outlets. It has however managed to increase its followers by 142% with its coverage of the most recent developments in the Middle-East crisis.

A close look at the users most replied to by IAK’s shows a list of 1-reply conversations with a variety of users, the majority of which are either individuals or groups of pro-Palestinian activists: this could be interpreted by others as willingness to interact with its followers, in the view to building a reliable network of connections, and may be a significant factor in IAK’s increase in followers. IAK’s retweeted tweets are mostly of high profile, popular, successful and current celebrities across the cultural field appealing to a very wide audience in age, taste and geographical location – namely Hollywood actors Mia Farrow, John Cusack, Rob Schneider, Wilson Bethel and Mark Ruffalo, signer Kerry Washington, comedian Russell Brand and footballer Mario Balotelli - voicing their concerns over the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in a bid to earn followers by
association. Finally, *Electronic Intifada* and its lead contributor, Ali Abunimah, are amongst the most mentioned users by *IAK*, and *IAK* has recently taken to promote links to *El*’s articles on both Twitter and Facebook on a regular basis: associating with *El* and its success not only helps validate *Electronic Intifada*’s status as a convincing news provider, it also allows *IAK* to make a meaningful connection in the journalistic field.

A look at both pro-Israeli outlets’ follower profiles indicates that the trend observed in previous chapters also seems to be confirmed, in that both outlets have chosen to prioritise consolidating established symbolic capital previously earned in the political and the economic field. Out of the 60 verified accounts following *HonestReporting* (from a total of 2817 at the time of writing), 28% are official accounts of Israeli Embassies in the world (Israeli Embassies in Ireland, the UK, Germany, Turkey, New Zealand, Greece, Canada, Uzbekistan, in the European Union, in Toronto, New York or Philadelphia, and the Israeli Mission in the United Nations the for instance). 33% of those verified Twitter accounts for high-profile representatives of the Israeli government can be found on *HonestReporting*’s follower list: amongst those are Danny Ayalon, Deputy Foreign Minister of the State of Israel, the State of Israel’s official Twitter Channel, the account of the Israeli Prime Minister’s spokesperson for the Arab Media Ofir Gendelman, the official Israel Defence Force account, the account of Sasha Dratwa, Head of the New Media Desk for the IDF, the account of the Head of European Parliament Liaison Department – Mission of Israel to the European Union David Saranga, the account of IDF
spokesman for International Media and Commander of the IDF Social Media activities Lieutenant Peter Lerner, the account of Gal Rudich, spokesman for the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the accounts of the Israeli Prime Minister in Hebrew and in Arabic as well as current and former Israeli Consuls and Ambassadors. Other potentially influential followers include Hollywood actors Jesse Spencer and Roseanne Barr, which adds significant potential for social capital although no real symbolic capital is gained from their presence on the list given that no interaction can be reported between the outlets and these celebrities.

*CAMERA’s* follower profile is very similar to that of *HonestReporting*, in that of the 59 verified accounts following the organisation, 22% are made of Israeli Embassies or Missions across the world and 28% are made of high profile official political figures in Israel – largely the ones already being reported as following *HonestReporting*, like Danny Ayalon, Lieutenant Peter Lerner, the Prime Minister of Israel’s accounts in Hebrew and Arabic, but also Israeli Justice Minister Tzipi Livni, amongst others. Interestingly, 17% of the verified accounts following *CAMERA* are recognised mainstream agents in the journalistic field, including David Gregory, an American news journalist with 1 665 759 followers himself (*CAMERA’s* more influential follower), political journalist Mike Allen, *Fox News* Boston section and *ABC* correspondent Alexander Marquardt. The rest of the verified account holders include Roseanne Barr, historian and staunch pro-Israeli activist
Daniel Pipes, and civil liberties lawyer Professor Alan Dershowitz, also a strong and vocal pro-Israeli supporter.

Accounts that are followed by the outlets do not always match those that follow them: in the case of CAMERA and HonestReporting however, in addition to both organisations following each other, they both also have a number of accounts they follow (and are followed) in common. These include a number of pro-Israeli advocacy groups such as CifWatch (Comment Is Free Watch describes itself as a watchdog dedicated to ‘monitoring and combating anti-Semitism, and the assaults on Israel’s legitimacy’ on the ‘comments is free’ sections of UK-based newspapers The Guardian and The Observer), CifWatch sister organisation and CAMERA-affiliated BBCWatch, an organisation whose aim is to monitor the reporting of the Arab-Israeli conflict on the BBC only, The Gatestone Institute, chaired by former United States Permanent Representative to the United Nations John Bolton, an international policy and think tank aiming at ‘educating the public about what mainstream media fails to report’, the influential American Israel Public Affairs Committee, many of the Israeli Embassies and Missions across the world as well as most of the Israeli officials already reported as following both outlets. This cohesive network of connections is illustrated in Diagrams 1 and 2: Diagram 1 is a Yifan Hu modular

55 See website
56 See website
57 www.gatestoneinstitute.org [last accessed August 23 2014].
graph representing the connections between all the Twitter accounts following the four outlets, and Diagram 2 is Yifan Hu modular graph representing the accounts the outlets follow. While some connections can be seen between the two pro-Palestinian outlets (which is to be expected given EI's very high amount of followers) and sparse connections can be found between the 4 outlets (they have 5 twitter accounts in common, mainly of individual pro-Palestinian activists), the number of connections between the two pro-Israeli outlets is significant. This translates into valuable social capital for both pro-Israeli outlets, especially as the majority of their connections is made up of dominant agents - or at least major influencers - in the field they are both targeting: the political field.

Diagram 1: Gephy graph – Connections between Twitter Followers of all four outlets
Diagram 2: Gephy graph – Connections between Twitter accounts the four outlets follow

The main difference between the two pro-Israeli organisations can be found in the profile of those accounts the two pro-Israeli outlets are following: if HonestReporting tends to follow a variety of accounts including low profile individuals or groups of activists as well as influential political figures (like former Natan Sharansky, former White House Press Secretary Ari Fleisher, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu or Israeli President Shimon Perez), mainstream journalists or outlets (Anderson Cooper, Christine Amanpour, CNN, BBCNews or NYTimes for instance) or mainstream organisations (AIPAC, the American Jewish Committee), CAMERA seems to be making the deliberate choice to target a comparatively small number of followers (467) comprising of mainly high influencers (43% of the accounts they follow have
10,000 followers or over themselves, 16.3% have 100,000 followers or more). Of those accounts CAMERA follows, 53% are either mainstream journalists or public figures, including Alan Dershowitz and Daniel Pipes. As already suggested by previous findings, individual activists do not seem to be CAMERA’s primary target: the organisation’s clear aim is to build a network of influential figures who possess enough symbolic capital in the political field to make a direct impact on the general public and/or on the events on the ground.

If over 50% of all of HonestReporting’s Facebook fans have at least contributed once to the organisation’s status updates, the average of likes, comments and shares is comparatively fairly low: social capital, in this case, cannot entirely be converted into symbolic capital as HR’s fans are not as actively engaged as those of both pro-Palestinian outlets. In the case of CAMERA, despite its high level of activity on Facebook (as covered in the first part of the chapter), it seems that the majority of its fans (almost 75%) have not engaged at all in any of the outlet’s updates, and even amongst those who have, a very limited amount of activity can be reported on average. CAMERA also has the least amount of Facebook fans of the four outlets: this tends to confirm that CAMERA’s strategy, on Facebook at least, is relatively unsuccessful, which does not help the organisation in its quest for education the public on the issue of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The interaction rate on Twitter seems to be more successful for CAMERA, as shown by data collated on Table 6: with the lowest number of followers, CAMERA
manages to attract the second highest rate of interaction with over two-third of all analysed tweets retweeted, and over one third favourited.

A more detailed analysis of both HonestReporting and CAMERA’s most mentioned and most retweeted followers shows that, in majority, those are the users the two outlets rely upon the most as their main sources of news - the Times of Israel, BBCWatch, CiFWatch, the Gatestone Institute and the official account for the Israeli Defence Forces - as well as the Twitter accounts for their own main contributors, (Gilead Ini and Tamar Sternthal for CAMERA, Simon Plosker for HonestReporting). Mentions and retweets of individual users are unusual, although on occasions some users receive replies – in the case of CAMERA, only 1% of all analysed tweets were replies to other users, which tends to illustrate that CAMERA does not use Twitter to interact with others. In the case of HonestReporting, the majority of the replies given to other users are ‘unofficial’ retweets, which are tweets retweeted in the form or a conversation as opposed to using the ‘retweet’ function offered by Twitter; the other replies are regular conversations (ranging between 13 and 57 replies) held with the same very small number of individual users, all vocal and very active pro-Israeli advocates: HR’s high percentage of replies to others does not therefore truly reflect HR’s level of engagement on the social platform. The overall impression given by both CAMERA and HonestReporting’s engagement rate on Twitter is rather of social capital at work: in other words, there is no real attempt at engaging with users outside of the strong network of connections already established by
the outlets, mostly consisting of Israeli advocacy groups or official Israeli channels. Dissemination and justification of the State of Israel’s official political and military decisions to the general public, and more specifically to the North American audience as well as maintaining links with high profile, mainstream political and economic figures in North America and Israel seem to be HR’s CAMERA’s priority as opposed to their proclaimed aim of educating the general public on the conflict.

The analysis of the four outlets’ Twitter account profiles of both those who are following the outlets and those who are followed by them as well as their engagement on Twitter and Facebook has mostly confirmed the initial general trend already observed in the previous sections on the type of social capital each organisation possesses and / or strives for, and how media-meta capital is being accumulated. If Electronic Intifada emerges as the highest media-meta capital holder comparatively, all four outlets seem to have applied their respective social capital building strategies with success.

For Electronic Intifada, media-meta capital means a popular online presence, recognition by its peers in the journalistic field – be they independent or mainstream agents – or by other outlets promoting the same goal (like If Americans Knew and CAMERA for instance), no clear political ties, a healthy if average economic capital, high engagement rates on the two most highly used social platforms and appeal to a demographically diverse and active audience, giving it potential for significant social capital both in quantity and in quality. Media meta-capital would in turn
be traded as symbolic capital in the political field, specifically in influencing political decisions on the ground through economic sanctions such as the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement.

For *If Americans Knew*, media-meta capital means independence from the political and economic field, very low economic capital justifying its status as a challenging newcomer, relative success in engaging its target audience of mostly grassroots groups or individual activists, a very significant increase in both Twitter followers and *Facebook* fans as a result of its consistent coverage of current events unfolding at the time of the study, a consistent effort in slowly building a network of active and committed users, and accordance between the claims made and the image projected to the general public. Media meta-capital gain would in turn be traded for symbolic capital in the political field, specifically in influencing national policies decisions in terms of reducing economic subsidies given to Israel from the USA.

For *CAMERA*, media-meta capital means independence from the journalistic field, high economic capital allowing for more staff and therefore a more pro-active approach to challenging mainstream agents, high political influence allowing for a concrete chance at impacting the Palestinian-Israeli conflict at executive level, and very high social capital considering its tight links with other pro-Israeli advocacy groups and high profile Israeli officials, whilst low media-meta capital is determined by a low engagement rate on social media, a relatively subdued presence online, and an a relatively high amount of political and economic capital jeopardising the outlet’s original
claims of independence. Media meta-capital gain would in turn be traded for symbolic capital in the political and economic field by maintaining and consolidating existing strong ties between the USA and Israel, and allowing Israel to pursue current policies.

Finally for HonestReporting, media-meta capital signifies a respectable presence online, success in attracting grassroots individuals and organisations as well as high profile political figures, relative independence from the journalistic field, connections with influential political agents, a higher than average engagement response on social media, legitimate success in obtaining corrections from mainstream agents and continuous activity despite a decrease in economic capital, showing dedication and collaborative spirit. By the same token, some media-meta capital is lost by the same decrease in economic capital, indicating potential struggle in providing a cost-effective service. Media meta-capital is also lost by the outlet’s accumulation of high social capital in the political field, which threatens the organisation’s claim as a media watchdog acting as a challenger in the journalistic field, but rather introduces it a challenger in the political field. Media meta-capital gain would in turn be traded for symbolic capital in the political and economic field by maintaining and consolidating existing strong ties between the USA and Israel, by allowing Israel to pursue current policies, and by justifying Israel’s military and political actions to the general public.

In the context of the present study, it seems that the application of media-meta capital as a measure of influence over media events has proved a useful concept in
analysis the four outlets’ behaviour online, and has helped in homogenising and simplifying the process of labelling capital acquisition, retention and exchange when agents position themselves differently. The importance of social capital in any agent’s attempt at influencing media events has also been discussed, and findings suggest that its central role in defining media meta-capital is justified.

The four outlets’ quest for capital specifically applied to the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and the potential influences and consequences of this quest for capital can be summarised in Diagram 3, p. 215.
Diagram 3: Capital acquisition and exchanges in the context of the Middle-Eastern conflict

- **Media meta-capital** (symbolic capital from social capital + symbolic capital from any other field)
  - Influence over media events

- **Social capital** (presence online, Facebook, Twitter interactions)
- **Symbolic capital from the economic field** (healthy financial profile, success in donations appeals, connections)
- **Symbolic capital from the journalistic field** (challenger to the establishment)
- **Symbolic capital from the political field capital** (outsider position / connections)

- **Political Change through**
  - **Economic strategy** (BDS, Dahia doctrine)
  - **Political strategy** (United Nations sanctions / decisions, peace talks, elections)
Even if not always in the spotlight, and with no political resolution in sight, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is still ongoing. The previous chapter has helped establish the role of the four agents under study as credible and influential challengers to the dominant agents of the journalistic field in terms of possessing, accumulating and maintaining media meta capital as has been defined in this study, that is the accumulation of symbolic capital from social capital as its essential core and all other forms of symbolic capital acquired through other means (be they political or economic capital). Through media meta capital, the aim of the game for the four challengers is ultimately to denounce the symbolic violence imposed by the dominant agents in the journalistic field, and acquire for themselves symbolic power in the view to influence public opinion and affect the political field. This game has a set of rules, a doxa, or what is taken for granted and undisputed, and regulates each field. In Bourdieusian terms, the four outlets are using ‘the strategy of beating the dominant groups at their own game by demanding that they respect the fundamental law of the field’ or in other words, the ‘return to the sources’ (Bourdieu 1993: 84), using ‘assertive, attention-seeking strategies’ as opposed to the ‘defensive strategies’ of the dominant agents, ‘drawn to silence, discretion and secrecy’ in order to ‘perpetuate the status quo’ (Bourdieu 1993: 83).
One of the consequences of the advent and increased influence of social media and, more widely, of citizen journalism, within the journalistic field has been a noticeable recent shift in the journalistic field from the traditionally held values of neutrality and objectivity to the more social media-friendly fundamental doxic value of transparency, allowing for a clear position to be taken while retaining the core journalistic values of balance, accountability and professionalism. As an illustration, many dominant agents in the journalistic field openly took sides for either one or the other candidate during the 2016 Presidential elections; many high-profile mainstream news outlets also declared to either leave or remain in the EU during the UK’s Brexit campaign.

Contiguously, in the current climate of open distrust for the dominant agents in the journalistic field, claims made that mainstream media present fake or alternative news even by political figures at the highest position of power are constant - US President Donald Trump, himself a producer of ‘fake news’, regularly describes news broadcasters such as CNN, the Washington Post or the New York Times as ‘fake news’ and his chief strategist Steve Bannon (January 2017) referred to mainstream media as ‘the opposition party’ to the current administration. These claims, along with growing legitimate concerns over the propagation of unverified news online, have prompted news service provider BBC to address these issues by putting in place a permanent fact-checking team in January 2017, Reality Check, to debunk deliberately misleading items of news, thus arguably
justifying claims that some dominant agents have been neglecting the fundamental doxic value of transparency.

This context gives credence to the four agents’ bid to present themselves as the true orthodoxic agents of the journalistic field, and provides them with a viable case to earn symbolic power against the dominant agents by challenging the fundamental doxic value of transparency.

The present chapter proposes to look at the relationship the four challenging agents have with the doxa of the journalistic field, that is the field they are active participants in. In the first instance, it is important to note that some exogenous factors are playing a determining role in the struggle for symbolic power between the dominant agents and the challengers of the journalistic field, in the context of the reporting of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; these exogenous factors will be presented in the first part of the chapter. The second part of the chapter will be discussing how the four agents’ claims compare with the behaviour of the dominant agents in the field; that section will be looking into whether the dominant agents do in fact follow the undisputed, tacitly accepted rules of the game as they apply to all agents in the journalistic field by observing the coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict from the four most cited dominants agents by the challengers, that is the BBC, The Guardian, The Washington Post and The New York Times for a period of a month, from December 11 2016 to January 10 2017.
8.1 Exogenous Factors Allowing The Dominated Agents to Claim Orthodoxy in the Journalistic Field

In the first instance, it is important to be reminded that the four agents are single-focus challengers, whose only aim is to report news on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; in contrast, the conflict is only one of many issues addressed by the dominant agents in the field, and its coverage is highly dependent on national and other international news at any given time, as well as on editorial choices.

With that context in mind, it has been widely acknowledged and reported that the trend is for major media corporations to close their foreign affairs bureaux and / or limit their staffing on the ground. For Otto & O Meyer (2012), the financial crisis, combined with a refocus on internal affairs, are the main reasons for this situation. A consequence of the closure of foreign news bureaux and the decrease in the number of journalists permanently stationed abroad, as explained by Otto & O Meyer (2012), is an over-reliance on citizen journalists, be they amateur or professional freelancers, to capture stories as they happen on the ground in an instant via social media or mobile phone technology. In an era when time is of the essence and global news consumers are looking for speed of delivery in an easily accessible and quickly digestible format, whatever the nature of the news (be it the infotainment type or the serious type), mainstream news outlets increasingly turn to social media for crowdsourcing for obvious expediency and cost
efficiency benefits, and to minimise the threat posed by these alternative sources of news to mainstream media’s commercial and distribution constraints. This reliance on social media seems to be especially true in events relating to major news events such as terrorist attacks like the London Bombings of the 7th of July 2005 (Allan 2015), political insurgencies or revolts like the Arab Spring (Eltantawy & Wiest 2011) and the war in Syria (Baraniuk 2016), high profile national events like the 2016 US Presidential elections (upcoming special issue of online journal Flow 2017) or natural disasters (Person Finder was developed after the Japanese earthquakes of 2011, and the University of Hawai’i offers a course in ‘Social Media for Natural Disaster Response and Recovery’).

In effect, without the benefit of the contextual knowledge and detailed, in-depth analysis offered by the dominant mainstream news providers, who are gradually losing some control over news production, the modern news consumer is left to interpret and make sense of a constant mass stream of often raw, unfiltered, direct information.

For Newman (2011), mainstream media still sets the agenda in terms of shaping public opinions when it comes to important, relevant news despite the rise in social media, although arguably, this may not always prove to the dominant agents’ benefit. For instance, for veteran freelance journalist John Pilger (2016), “one of the most revealing things about the [US Presidential] campaign has been the exposure of journalism as the
extension of the same established power. They are not independent, they are echo chambers...'. Pilger’s open distrust of the dominant media seems to be shared by the general public in recent times, at least in the USA, as has been polled, analysed and commented upon at length in the months and weeks preceding the US Presidential elections (Pew, Gallup 2016). The perception that mainstream media is unreliable at best is regularly tested by outside agencies such as Julian Assange’s major online whistle-blowing outlet WikiLeaks, for instance, publishing secret government or official documentation while tweeting that ‘US mainstream media are completely out of sync with their audience’ (14 October 2016, Twitter Archive). While it is difficult to ascertain the credibility of the claims of bias on the part of the dominant agents, the rise in social media and the lack of trust in the dominant agents offer an ideal breeding ground for responses guided by perceptions based on emotion and confirmation bias, especially when dealing with particularly polarising political or societal issues. They also create a perfect environment for challengers to the dominant agents in the field to position themselves in the field, and build media meta capital that will help gain symbolic power in order to reclaim the doxa of the field.

In the context of foreign affairs news reporting from the Middle-East by the dominant agents in the journalistic field, most Middle-East permanent news bureaux have in fact bucked the trend and are still in operation, but while the Palestinian-Israeli
conflict has always been a steady source of news and a staple in the ‘Middle East’ section of the written press (be it printed press or online), other practical and logistical factors have allowed for social media as well as alternative sources of news reporting like the four agents under study to gain prominence in broadcasting the Palestinian-Israeli conflict specifically.

- Official peace talks have been ground to a halt between the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority since the last direct peace negotiations in 2014, with Palestinians refusing to engage in talks directly with the Israeli government over the issue of the unaddressed illegal proliferation of Israeli colonies on Palestinian soil, and with Israeli officials refusing to attend peace talks organised by third parties (Paris summit 2017). In pragmatic terms in terms of news reporting, the stalling of the ‘peace process’ has meant a natural decrease in mainstream media outlets’ interest for lack of fresh news to report – in other words, the conflict has lost some of its newsworthiness value.

- There have been many incidences of journalists risking their lives on the field: at least 7 journalists and media workers were killed in the 50 day Gaza war in 2014, as has been reported by the Committee to Protect Journalists, some journalists were captured (like Alan Johnson, by Hamas in 2007, and later released), multiple statements in 2016 alone were raised by the Foreign Press Organisation expressing
concerns over the treatment of some of their members by both Hamas and the Israeli government, 25 Palestinian journalists are currently being held without charge in Israeli prisons, many journalists and photojournalists cite exhaustion and stress at covering the conflict (photojournalist Tyler Hicks and Vice’s Danny Gold in Malsin 2014), working conditions for journalists are difficult (90-day permits to the Occupied Palestinian Territories are given by the Israeli authorities at their discretion, and can be refused at any time), the Israeli PM himself, Benyamin Netanyahu, has expressed distrust over the foreign press being controlled and silenced from ‘telling the truth’ by Hamas (2014).

In the last couple of years, the Syrian ‘civil war’ (with direct involvement from foreign military forces) and the ‘Arab Spring’ have stolen the limelight from the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in mainstream media, and the Syrian war especially has taken precedence in news reporting from the Middle-East.

These three factors have naturally contributed to a steady drop in the coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in mainstream media, and have helped the four agents claim their legitimacy in the journalistic field as they are still reporting or covering news from the region, therefore justifying their existence in the field.
Several exogenous, circumstantial factors have clearly allowed for and contributed to the challengers justifying their presence in positioning themselves not as dominated agents submitting to the rules of the games, the doxa as it is imposed by the dominant agents of the field, but as the real orthodoxic agents in the journalistic field, especially since the Arab Spring started in 2011. Building on this favourable momentum, the challengers have established strategies to help their claim on the journalistic doxa, more specifically the values of newsworthiness and transparency.

8.2 Doxa and Positions Within the Journalistic Field and the Field of International Legal-Political Decision-Making

As has already been discussed in the present thesis, the four agents have successfully positioned themselves as challengers to the journalistic field by presenting themselves as relevant, professional and relatively successful news providers. Some like Electronic Intifada and If Americans Knew, by aiming to explicitly discredit mainstream media by focusing on covering news that has been mostly ignored, by the same token claiming for themselves the value of newsworthiness; others, like CAMERA and HonestReporting by choosing to implicitly question the accuracy and rigour of the dominant agents and focusing on cataloguing and attempting to correct all potential errors, mistakes or omissions present in mainstream media, therefore challenging the value of transparency.
They are justifying their presence as relevant challengers to the field by reclaiming for themselves the fundamental values of the field. The present section proposes to look at how the dominant agents apply these doxic values themselves, by analysing how four main dominant agents in the field, the *BBC, The Guardian, The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*, have covered news pertaining to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict for a period of a month, which was specifically selected as it includes the build-up and follow-up to a major event (a United Nations vote on the issue of the expansion of Israeli colonies on Occupied Palestinian Territories on December 23 2016) and other incidents taking place on both Israeli soil and in the Palestinian Territories, and because it provides the most current information at the time of writing the thesis.

When the four agents make it a point to broadcast news on their website or on social media on a near daily basis (several times in the day in the case of *Electronic Intifada*), the data shows that, although they do not cover news of the conflict every day, the four dominant agents do relay the most major incidents.
Table 7: Items of News Published by the Dominant Agents between December 11\textsuperscript{th} 2016 and January 10\textsuperscript{th} 2017.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items of news published in Middle-East Section (including news from issues other than the Palestinian-Israeli conflict)</th>
<th>The New York Times (online)</th>
<th>The Washington Post (online)</th>
<th>The BBC (online)</th>
<th>The Guardian (online)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>98</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Middle-East section news articles relating to Palestine-Israel relationship and peace process (reference to colonies, deaths on either side, UN resolutions)</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From the Israeli viewpoint, or relating to events on Israeli soil</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From the Palestinian viewpoint, or relating to events on Palestinian soil</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From American/UK viewpoint (specifically referring to US/UK role or position with regards to the UN Vote Condemning Israel’s Expansionist Policy)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Items of news relating to issues in Israeli society, unrelated to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Items of news relating to issues in Palestinian society, unrelated to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict | 12 | 2 | 6 | 3 |

| Items of news relating to issues in Palestinian society, unrelated to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
On close inspection, the dominant agents tend to relate news of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which somewhat tie in with their own national interest, especially in the USA – for instance, the coverage of Palestinian-Israeli related issues increased exponentially in the two US newspapers, during and after United Nations Resolution 2334 vote of December 23 2016, given the role the USA had in allowing the sanction against Israel’s illegal expansion of colonies on Palestinian Territories by abstaining, as opposed to the USA’s traditional position of vetoing any perceived anti-Israeli resolution. The *Washington Post* reported 50 items of news from the Middle-East, just over 20% of which in connection with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict: in their overwhelming majority (that is in 7 out of the 9 news items), the pieces closely link to the USA, be it in reference to President Donald Trump’s past involvement in financing Israeli colonies or Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu’s hostile reaction to John Kerry’s decision, or John Kerry’s justifications for abstaining the vote. Similarly, a clear increase in The *New York Times*’ coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict can be noted on the dates surrounding the UN resolution vote: again, Israeli Prime Minister’s angered declarations after the vote, the potential consequences on the usually strong US-Israel bond, the history of an apparently fraught relationship between President Obama and Prime Minister Netanyahu, the reaction of the Jewish American community, the reception of John Kerry’s speech in the Arab world and Donald Trump’s role in any future peace talks between the two parties were overwhelmingly the focus of the reports. Only two non-UN resolution related incidents on the ground were relayed by the *Washington Post* and six by the *New York
Times, all either covering news originating in Israeli grounds or reporting them through an Israeli perspective. Other news, relating to domestic Israeli issues, such as Prime Minister Netanyahu facing potential corruption charges, the dress code at the Israeli Knesset or a reflection on the place of the military service within Israeli society, were also covered. This tendency to relate Israel-centric news is shared by the two UK-based news providers, although if similarities can be drawn between all four dominant agents in the way the information is relayed to the general public, some instances of news reported from the perspective of the Palestinian Authority can also be found in the UK outlets: for example, The Guardian also reported two items of news reflecting Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas’ thoughts on the subject of UN Resolution 2334 and its impact on the Palestinian-Israeli peace process.

This analysis seems to corroborate the claims by the challengers that the dominant agents are in fact heterodox when it comes to respecting the fundamental doxic rule of newsworthiness as, with the exception of The Guardian, a declared politically engaged news provider with a progressive bend, no items of news have been reported from the Palestinian viewpoint or pertaining to news originating on Palestinian soil. In contrast, and arguably as expected, while neither CAMERA nor HonestReporting, published any articles, opinion pieces or corrections based on events unfolding on the ground from the perspective of the Palestinians in the period covering the present data
analysis, *If Americans Knew* published 22 articles strictly relating to the conflict from the Palestinian point of view and/or on events taking place on Palestinian soil, and *Electronic Intifada* published a monthly roundup of news originating from the various parts of the Palestinian Territories. The pieces of news reported incidents involving Israeli occupation to some degree (reports of arrests, conflicts in the Israeli colonies, stories of poverty due to lack of access to natural resources or energy commodities such as electricity or gas), but also news related to joint peace initiatives between Israeli and Palestinians (such as arts projects or joint protest marches organised by various peace groups or organisations) and more general news on Palestinian life, culture and politics.

While the data shows news reported by the dominant agents in connection with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict to be Israel-centric and clearly favouring Israeli point of view, a more detailed analysis of the articles published on the subject shows that, despite an apparent bias, the content of the articles is, in their overwhelming majority, at best neutral, and often, critical of the Israeli government in general, and of its Prime Minister in particular: for instance, the *New York Times*, which seems to find Israeli news especially newsworthy (arguably to cater for its local readership, with New York having the second largest Jewish population world-wide after Tel Aviv), published an opinion column entitled on December 29th 2016 entitled ‘Bibi Netanyahu makes Trump his chump’, arguing that new US President Donald Trump would be an clear and partisan ally to Israel;
on December 24th, another article on Netanyahu’s reaction to the unanimous UN sanction vote condemning Israel’s expansion policy was title ‘Netanyahu Promises Retributions for ‘Biased’ U.N. Resolution’. While The Washington Post is less prolific in its interest in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and issues related to it, the discourse used by the newspaper (Netanyahu ‘blasts’ The U.N. and Obama over the Resolution, he ‘summons’ the US Envoy over the same issue) gives the impression of a belligerent, uncompromising Prime Minister taking a hard line and therefore positioning himself as a heterodoxic agent in the field of international legal-political decision-making and the fundamental laws of this field, which are legal and political decisions made by the various legal and political branches of the international community (the is the EU, the UN, the USA, the International Court of Justice among the most high profile agents in the field), represented by the U.N, President Obama and the US Envoy to Israel in the articles cited. This is a recurring theme for both British-based news outlets BBC (‘Netanyahu Orders UN ties Review’) and The Guardian (‘Netanyahu told New Zealand backing UN vote would be declaration of war’), who also show a slight anti-Israel bend in their discourse. In terms of respecting the fundamental doxa of transparency, while all four dominant agents refrain from openly taking sides with regards to the conflict and while very few articles presented the Palestinian viewpoint, it would be possible for pro-Israeli supporters advocating for an Israeli perspective to perceive these discursive methods as a lack of impartiality in the same way as it would be possible for pro-Palestinian advocates to perceive the absence of Palestinian-related articles as a lack of balance: this therefore gives credence to all
challenging agents’ attempts at discrediting the dominant agents as being the holders of the fundamental doxic values of the journalistic field.

As a researcher, my position with regards to the collection and analysis of the data has been to attempt to remain impartial regardless of my own personal convictions as an active supporter of a peaceful resolution of the conflict, which would satisfy both parties equally. With regards to the challenging agents’ claims that the dominant agents do not subscribe to the fundamental doxic values of the journalistic field, despite the Palestinian perspective being overwhelmingly missing, I have found those claims to be sustainable enough to justify the presence of all four challenging agents, but I have not found those claims to be entirely convincing. The dominant agents seem to be reflecting the situation on the ground as well dealing with the constraints of having to adapt to a shift in the journalistic field and other exogenous factors, as discussed in the first section of the present chapter; these sets of circumstances at least partially explain the lack of news reports from Palestinian soil, and appears more circumstantial than ideological or deliberate.

I have however found that while both pro-Israeli challengers are respecting the doxa of the journalistic field in its new definition, especially the doxic value of transparency (by clearly stating their allegiances), it seems that the doxic value of newsworthiness has not
been met with the same success: very little to no room is given to peace initiatives\(^{58}\) or any attempts at presenting news from the Palestinian perspective. They seem to be mirroring the position of the dominant agents in the Israeli political field by holding a heterodoxic position within the field of international legal-political decision-making. This is evident in the discursive and semiotic methods employed on their websites: for instance, both [CAMERA](http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=7&x_issue=18&x_article=3520) and [HonestReporting](http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=7&x_issue=18&x_article=3526) make it clear in the way the U.N. sanction vote against Israel (Resolution 2334) was reported. For CAMERA, ‘Resolution 2334 is likely to be just as counterproductive [as the previous resolutions]’, ‘the resolution could embolden efforts to delegitimize Israel; falsely blaming the Jewish state for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the lack of peace. Yet, it has been Palestinian leaders who have rejected statehood and embraced terror’\(^{59}\). It also suggests that former U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, who played an instrumental role in the decision of the USA to abstain from voting to veto the Resolution, based the decision on erroneous facts: for CAMERA, ‘what does it say about the case Mr. Kerry is trying to make that he and his many researchers at the State Department couldn’t come up with better "facts"— like, for example, ones that are actually true?’\(^{60}\). HonestReporting does not provide their own analysis on the issue, instead choosing to relay Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin

\(^{58}\) HonestReporting’s website does provide a section about ‘Resources on Israel’s Peace Efforts’; unfortunately at the time of writing, most of the links suggested were broken and the page was last updated in 2011.

\(^{59}\) http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=7&x_issue=18&x_article=3520 [last accessed August 6 2017]

\(^{60}\) http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=7&x_issue=18&x_article=3526 [last accessed August 6 2017]
Netanyahu’s\textsuperscript{61} statements through links to various Israeli mainstream outlets such as \textit{The Jerusalem Post} and \textit{YNet}, further confirming their role as an echo chamber for the Israeli government.

On the issue of the disputed status of Jerusalem - which was granted special legal and political status by the UN since both parties are claiming it as their capital, despite its illegal annexation by Israel in 1980), \textit{HonestReporting} unequivocally and unambiguously refers to the whole of the City of Jerusalem as the country’s capital; it also defines the illegal annexation of the Palestinian part of the city, Jerusalem East, as the ‘reunification of Israel’s capital city’ and states that the ‘Palestinian residents of eastern Jerusalem […] refuse to recognize Israeli sovereignty over the city’ while enjoying ‘generous health provisions, national insurance and other services that all Israelis enjoy’\textsuperscript{62}. \textit{CAMERA} concedes that the status of Jerusalem is contended, yet offers justifications for the annexation of Jerusalem by giving a historical background of the Jewish population of the city, rooting Israel’s right to sovereignty on all of Jerusalem\textsuperscript{63}.

\textsuperscript{61} http://honestreporting.com/idns-12292016-kerry-aftermath/ [last accessed August 6 2017]
\textsuperscript{62} http://honestreporting.com/celebrating-jerusalem-hrs-biggest-ever-mission-wraps-up/ [last accessed August 6\textsuperscript{th} 2017]
\textsuperscript{63} http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=7&x_issue=4&x_article=2577 [last accessed August 5\textsuperscript{th} 2017]
With regards the issue of Palestinian refugees\textsuperscript{64}, which \textit{Electronic Intifada} considers to be a ‘non-negotiable right’ and a ‘cornerstone of Palestinian struggle’\textsuperscript{65}, \textit{CAMERA} considers that ‘there is no Arab right to destroy the Jewish state by immigration’\textsuperscript{66} and usually refers to it as the ‘so called’ or ‘alleged’ right of return, therefore mirroring the position of the State of Israel on the subject. \textit{HonestReporting} follows a similar pattern, describing the right for Palestinian refugees to return as the ‘Fright of Return’ or the ‘Rot of Return’ and explains that ‘first of all, contrary to the conventional wisdom, there’s no legal basis for the so-called “right” of return. Secondly, any responsible article about the “right” of return has to explain its consequences for Israel […]. If the more than one million registered Palestinian refugees flooded what is today the state of Israel, it would mean the end of Israel as a Jewish state.’\textsuperscript{67}.

The position of the two pro-Israeli alternative media outlets seems to tend towards maintaining the status quo as opposed to offering a genuinely equitable peaceful solution to the conflict. In contrast, pro-Palestinian alternative outlet \textit{If Americans Knew} seems to present itself as an orthodoxic agent in the journalistic field by privileging facts over

\textsuperscript{64} Who fled the 1948 war and creation of Israel to neighbouring countries or found exile in the newly created state of Israel. International Law recognises that the Palestinian refugees of 1948 and 1967 have a right to return to a sovereign State of Palestine (UN resolutions 194 and 237)

\textsuperscript{65} https://electronicintifada.net/content/right-return-heart-palestines-struggle/17856 [last accessed August 6\textsuperscript{th} 2017].

\textsuperscript{66} http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=7\&x_issue=7\&x_article=719 [last accessed August 5\textsuperscript{th} 2017]

\textsuperscript{67} http://honestreporting.com/the-rot-of-return/ [last accessed August 7\textsuperscript{th} 2017]
emotionally charged language, as is made evident by its main page. It also presents itself as an implicitly orthodoxic agent in the field of international legal-political decision-making by explicitly promoting a peaceful solution within the clear guidelines already set out by International Law in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. For *If Americans Knew*

> The Fourth Geneva Convention applies to the West Bank, to the Gaza Strip, and to the entire City of Jerusalem, in order to protect the Palestinians living there. The Palestinian People living in this Palestinian Land are “protected persons” within the meaning of the Fourth Geneva Convention. All of their rights are sacred under international law. There are 149 substantive articles of the Fourth Geneva Convention that protect the rights of every one of these Palestinians living in occupied Palestine. The Israeli Government is currently violating, and has since 1967 been violating, almost each and every one of these sacred rights of the Palestinian People recognized by the Fourth Geneva Convention. Indeed, violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention are war crimes.\(^\text{68}\)

*If Americans Knew* is also the only outlet to regularly promote peace organisations and projects in a dedicated section of its website.\(^\text{69}\)

Similarly, I have found *Electronic Intifada* to be adopting both the doxic values of transparency and newsworthiness by offering various perspectives on the conflict, from pro-Palestinian Israeli projects or academics voicing their concerns to reporting some

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\(^{68}\) http://ifamericaknew.org/cur_sit/int_law.html [last accessed August 11th 2017]

\(^{69}\) http://ifamericaknew.org/cur_sit/groups.html [last accessed August 11th 2017]
news from the Israeli perspective. Within the field of international legal-political decision-making, I have found *Electronic Intifada* to be positioned as a heterodoxic agent – an active supporter of both the Boycott, Divestment & Sanctions (BDS) movement since its inception in 2006, and a vocal advocate of the One State Solution since 2007, *Electronic Intifada* seems to be the only agent in the habitus of political activism that is attempting to engage in finding concrete solutions to the conflict by advocating action as well as educating the general public.
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Although certainly not the only international conflict, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict seems to be the most polarised and mediatised both in mainstream and alternative media online, compared to other conflicts. No other international crisis generates as much ink or websites than this conflict, and the considerable number of media watchdogs dedicated to the issue is only rivalled by those dedicated to social issues such as abortion, for which claims of media bias on either side also proliferate. The study of various insiders’ reports, scholarly research and independent reviews tend to prove that mainstream media do not always report news from the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in a fair, objective and well-balanced way, as shown in the present thesis: cases of under-representation of the Palestinian perspective, over reliance on sources originating from Israel, lack of contextual and historical background, systematic (and sometimes purposefully selective) omissions of certain events, valorising and empathizing more readily with one party (often, the Israeli perspective) to the detriment of the other seem to indicate that there is in fact a case for the presence of alternative news providers in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli context, and that the general trend point to a bias that favours the Israeli perspective. Data analysis of the dominant agents’ discourse has however mitigated these findings within the dominant agents’ discourse in Chapter 8 – if the dominant agents are mostly Israel-centric, this does not translate into pro-Israeli support.
The emergence of new media in all its technological developments have considerably helped the rise of alternative news providers, be they individual, non-affiliated, non-professional active and technology-savvy citizens who happen to be there at the right place at the right time, more organised citizen journalist campaigners targeting a particular social or political crisis, or advocacy journalists on the margins of the mainstream media who voice their dissent against bias perceive to be latent among the dominant news providers. The combination of verified bias on the part of mainstream on an extremely polarized and already constantly mediatised conflict and of new, inexpensive and potentially far-reaching new technologies is, perhaps unsurprisingly, fertile ground for the rise and proliferation of alternative media outlets appointing themselves as fair, objective and professional providers of news that have been omitted or misrepresented by mainstream media. This is all the more valid for those media outlets who favour a pro-Palestinian perspective since it is the one shown to be at a disadvantage in the reporting of events by mainstream media. The fact that there is very little substantiated, academically researched evidence to suggest that mainstream media shows bias against the Israeli perspective already calls into question the legitimacy of the pro-Israeli alternative media outlets as challengers to the journalistic field, and allows to anticipate that the pro-Israeli outlets may have a different agenda in mind.

The aim of the present thesis is to provide an up-to-date analysis of the events affecting the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as they unfold in real time at the time of writing.
To that end, the latest data available at the time of writing, ready to be collected and analysed have been used whenever possible. Given the sensitivity of the issue, and perhaps paradoxically, particular care has been given to applying as much impartiality and neutrality at all levels of the production of the present study, from the selection of the core data and the choice of data to be analysed to the conclusions and findings to be drawn from the data analysis: as in interested and curious citizen on a constant quest to understand my place in the world, and with a natural inclination to take a political stand when the occasion arises, attempting to remain impartial at all costs has helped me temper my personal stance on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict for the sake of presenting a credible study, but it also has helped appreciate a new, perhaps more realistic, less idealistic approach to understanding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in its current state, with a renewed respect for any genuine attempt at proposing a non-violent yet achievable way to bring the two parties together peacefully.

If my own personal trajectory can explain a strong interest in events unfolding in the Middle-East as well as an appeal for Bourdieu’s work due to both my cultural and educational heritage, I have no close personal attachment to either Palestine or Israel directly, other than a genuine desire to understand why the reasons for a political resolution to a human tragedy that has affected so many for so long is so difficult to find, and can appear simple and impossible in equal measure. As a researcher, I am very aware of how contentious and volatile the subject of the thesis is, which is partly why I chose to
study it – at its core, the fundamental question I was asking myself as I was embarking on the project was whether it was possible to engage with a controversial subject with an open mind, accepting to confront my own admitted personal beliefs and pre-conceptions, and preparing myself to have these pre-conceptions potentially be challenged as the study was unfolding.

As a very Spartan social media user myself, both wary and sceptical of the effect of fast-moving news circulation, I was also interested in looking into what potential role or an impact web-based alternative media platforms may have in concretely changing the course of action in terms of actively participating in finding a just resolution to the conflict, or whether they were in fact simply mirroring either mainstream media or the situation on the ground; this aspect of my research has become of increasing interest given the extent to which social media has taken over most other means of communication and news circulation in recent years, especially in an era of distrust for mainstream media and anything perceived to be representing ‘the Establishment’ or the dominant agents in the field of power.

Analysing an ongoing, live political event which was constantly evolving even at the time of writing was always going to be a challenge, especially when dealing with a subject as mediatised and divisive as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The challenge was all the tougher as the four alternative media outlets used as core data were also adapting at
the same pace as the events affecting the conflict on the ground, and at the same time
discovering, evolving and diversifying themselves on the ever more popular social media
platforms available to them. The data collection methods specific to web media research
were themselves improving and getting more reliable and precise as the study went on.
New developments, perspectives, critiques and uptakes on Bourdieu’s theory as well as
on citizen journalism and the role of social media in big scale political or societal events
were always emerging as the time of writing. Finally, the biggest stumbling block in the
process of conducting the current study were personal circumstances surrounding the
writing of the project, which have affected choices in data selection and collection, and
the continuity of the project. Most of the potential issues had been anticipated, some of
these limitations were been addressed by having to make sacrifices in terms of data
selection, by choosing a shorter than anticipated time-span; in hindsight however, other
less anticipated new developments directly affecting the current study (the US President
Trump’s election and subsequent declarations on the conflict, for instance) would have
been better avoided by keeping to a strict timeline regardless of how the events were
developing on the ground, and therefore reported in either mainstream media or the four
alternative outlets chosen as core data.

In his study of the position of critical British-Jewish critical-groups, David Landy
(2015: 256) discusses ‘how Bourdieu's field theory can explain the internal dynamics of
social movements and their process of position-taking’: for Landy, through field
interactions, be they inner struggles inside a field or a rapprochement between agents
acting within different fields, a change inside a field, if rare, is possible. In the current context, the alternative media outlets striving to challenge the dominant agents are faced with inner struggles inside their own field (the journalistic field) as they need to ascertain their position as credible alternative news providers by challenging the dominant agents, but they also need to interact wisely with the political and the economic fields, and make good use of any gain in economic and political influence. The present study has shown that all agents’ habitus allow them the means to carry out their stated objectives: the agents are all politically aware and knowledgeable, highly educated, sometimes journalistically trained (or carrying positions of responsibility in other fields), and are therefore perfectly well positioned to offer a credible alternative to the dominant agents, and to investigate the most efficient strategies for capital acquisition and capital exchange.

This has revealed true by the three data analyses relating to the quest for various forms of capital in all the fields the challenging agents participate in, which have both shown that all four agents have met with some success in the implementation of their strategies for capital gain and profit. Bourdieu’s field theory has provided a very helpful framework of analysis, and the concepts of capital, field and doxa have proven to be precious tools in assessing the four agents’ position in the journalistic, political and economic fields and the tread-offs they were able or forced to make in terms of capital gains and losses. Exploring and expanding on Couldry’s media-meta capital – as defined
in this thesis as symbolic capital earned from social capital and symbolic capital earned from any other capital - has allowed for a simpler, more concise and more comprehensive way in which to summarize each outlet’s capital gains and capital losses specific to the journalistic field. If we accept that all four agents’ end-game is to ultimately influence the events on the ground, either through political means or through economic means, they need high level of media-meta capital acquisition in order to reach their aim.

The present study has shown that both pro-Palestinian outlets earn media-meta capital through symbolic capital earned in all fields, therefore confirming their position as successful agents of change in the journalistic field so as to raise awareness within public opinion in order to put political pressure on the USA through sanctions and economic pressure on Israel through the BDS movement. Their pro-Israeli counterparts however tend to earn high volume of media meta capital mainly through the political field and the economic field. The two pro-Israeli outlets therefore appear to be more active challengers to the political field, which would explain the strong ties with high profile political figures in both North America and Israel. Their presence as purported outsiders to the journalistic field is therefore used as a means to directly counteract the pro-Palestinian perspective (and the BDS movement more specifically, at the time of writing) and to reinforce Israel’s official policies and military interventions on the ground, as opposed to truly challenging the dominant agents. As the present thesis has concluded to the efficiency and usefulness of media meta capital in gauging the position of the alternative agents within the
journalistic field, and given the increasing influence and mass use of social media and web-based news providers be they dominant or challengers, during what could be describe as an existential crisis in the journalistic field, there is a case for upgrading media meta capital to media capital in its own right. Media capital as a universal capital could be acquired in the field of media, then traded in exchange for symbolic power in other fields of power such as the political field, for instance: it would therefore be interesting to explore this concept of media capital further by testing its efficiency and adaptability to other fields.

Another possible extension to this study would be to look into the Facebook and Twitter interactions of the four groups in much more detail, either for a longer period of time or during a specific political event, and perhaps delve into the backgrounds of some of the outlets’ followers on both platforms to potentially establish their habitus. Finally, as a new and already prolific area of research is emerging, yet another possible area of further study would be to examine the role of citizen journalism and cyber-activities in the context of Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and their potential influence on the general public.

Finally, as recent events within the field of international legal-political decision-making (that is, the field of power) has shown, the fundamental laws of the field with regards to the Palestinian-Israeli, are about to shift: by envisaging an alternative solution
to the peace process with a One State Solution for both Palestine and Israel to join as one country, US President (and a dominant agent in the field) Donald Trump breaks away from the fundamental doxic value represented by the Two-State solution and all its derivative values (the rights of the Palestinian refugees to return to what would be an independent country along the borders as defined by the UN in 1967 with Jerusalem as a joint capital and an infinite stop to Israel’s current policy of annexations of parts of Palestinian Territories). As the doxa of the field of legal-political field shifts, this could lead to the positions of the four challenging agents changing too. Previous to President Trump’s shifting position with regards to the doxa of the field, both CAMERA and HonestReporting were actively denouncing the One State solution as the ‘destruction of Israel’, given that the religious character of Israel would have to adapt to the changes in accommodating and assimilating a majority of non-Jewish new residents to the new country. For If Americans Knew, both semiotic and discursive analyses seem to indicate that the outlet respects the doxic values of the field, and therefore aligns itself with the dominant, orthodoxic agents in the field. In contrast, Electronic Intifada’s founder and main contributor Ali Abunimah has been one of the very first vocal advocates of the One State Solution since its inception in 2007. It would therefore be worth analysing whether Abunimah in particular and Electronic Intifada in general had a decisive role to play in this shift. It would also be interesting to analyse how this shift is being presented by the dominant agents in the journalistic field, who tend to follow the doxa of the international legal-political decision-making field.


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Hasbara Fellowship  http://www.israelactivism.com/factsheet/18/

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If Americans Knew (IAK)  www.ifamericansknew.org

Israel on Campus Coalition Programme  http://www.israelcc.org/about/mission.htm

Kashmir Media Service  http://kmsnews.org

Media Watch International (MWA)  www.mwio.org

Palestine Media Watch (PMW)  www.pmw.org

Quintly  www.quintly.com (quintly is a web-based tool to help track, benchmark and optimize the social media performance of any given public identity on multiple social platforms)

SimilarWeb  www.similarweb.com (SimilarWeb is a website traffic tracker and analytical tool).

TibetInfoNet  www.tibetinfonet.net/static/about
**Twitonomy** twitonomy.com (Twitonomy is a Twitter analytical tool tracking interactions for any Twitter account).

**Urlmetrics** urlm.co.uk (urlmetrics is a website traffic tracker and analytical tool).