Konstruiranje stvarnosti putem fotografija: analiza fotografija izraelsko-palestinskog sukoba 2014. godine objavljenih na Twitteru i analiza njihove recepcije kod korisnika

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Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2025-03-14**

Repository / Repozitorij:

Sveučilište u Zagrebu

Fakultet političkih znanosti

Diplomski studij novinarstva

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CONSTRUCTING THE REALITY VIA PHOTOGRAPHS: ANALYSIS OF PHOTOGRAPHS
OF THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT IN 2014 PUBLISHED ON TWITTER, AND
ANALYSIS OF USER RECEPTION OF THESE PHOTOGRAPHS

DIPLOMSKI RAD

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DIPLOMSKI RAD

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Zagreb

rujan, 2016.

Izjavljujem da sam diplomski rad *Constructing the reality via photographs: Analysis of photographs of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in 2014 published on Twitter, and analysis of user reception of these photographs*, koji sam predao na ocjenu mentorici doc. dr. sc. Viktoriji Car, napisao samostalno i da je u potpunosti riječ o mom autorskom radu. Također, izjavljujem da dotični rad nije objavljen ni korišten u svrhe ispunjavanja nastavnih obveza na ovom ili nekom drugom učilistu, te da temeljem njega nisam stekao ECTS bodove.

Nadalje, izjavljujem da sam u radu poštivao etička pravila znanstvenog i akademskog rada, a posebno članke 16-19. Etičkog kodeksa Sveučilišta u Zagrebu.

Emil Čančar

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For my late grandmother.

1 Introduction

The shaping of this thesis did not occur over night. Upon retrospect, it has followed the logic of David Walsh's *funnel structure* in ethnographic research and data gathering, a flexible process that can be meandering and adjusted along the way (2006). It also resonated with Ina Bertrand and Peter Hughes' (2005) idea that every researcher shapes his/her's intellectual framework and research according to personal preferences and traits, along with institutional training. In the summer of 2014 conflict between Israel and Gaza erupted. Newscast and the Internet were abundant with coverage. The conflict was also prominent on social media, especially Twitter. Instead of traditional news media reporting, Twitter was a place where users posted content in real time, some as they lived it, some spreading the message. While Susan Sontag (2003: 18) found wars to be present as "living room sights and sounds", that assumption is taken even further, as nowadays technology delivers them to the palm of our hand, to our omnipresent smartphones. It was of a peculiar personal interest to investigate how people perceive conflict related photography. It could have been any conflict chosen as a case study: the instabilities in Ukraine, the ethnic conflicts in Africa or the civil war in Syria. However, the Israeli-Palestinian question is a theme that has been present for many decades in the mainstream media. I found myself wondering how others perceive the images of terror, suffering and a global movement for peace. Having had an in-depth formal education on the issues, while noticing the content on Twitter, I had decided to investigate the problem. Considering the long and complicated historical relation that led to the shaping of the conflict, it was found to be an adequate study.

Combining war photography on contemporary platform such as Twitter and trying to discover how people construct their own 'realities' when it comes to that particular topic deemed a fitting research project, especially when taken into account that in 2016 Twitter celebrated its 10 year anniversary. Although it has been almost two years since the latest military clash between Israel and the Gaza Strip, and the world's attention has shifted to other current affairs, the messages stemming from the conflict have not stopped. Content is posted every day on Twitter. It is launched into a vast online expanse of imagery, textual messages, videos and online interactions.

All those reasons have shaped the final work of the thesis *Constructing the reality via photographs: Analysis of photographs of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in 2014 published on*

Twitter, and analysis of user reception of these photographs. Having understood that Twitter information, although it began as primary textual (Marwick and boyd, 2010), are becoming more visual and audio-visual contents, they are not consumed in a vacuum of online reality, but in a living setting. Human lives are rich with context, a very complex and nuanced context that comprises everything that a particular user has ever seen or heard about the matter, every idea and construct found *on* and *off line*. It would seem that the particular visual content would also have an impact on their perception of the Middle East.

This thesis firstly explains the historical, political and regional happenings in the Middle East, as it takes into central account that deep contextual knowledge is of paramount importance in order to understand the photographic message disseminated instantaneously. It then follows with a review of theoretical work on photography and audiences/users, as well as Twitter as social media. It describes the research methodology utilized to investigate the problem: narrative analysis of photographs collected from Twitter, the means by which they were acquired, and a survey that tested users' perceptions of said photographs. In the end, the interpretation of the results is given in order to try to better understand how people create a mediated reality of an event in an over-saturated mediascape.

2   Theoretical overview: Palestine and Israel – the history, the peoples, the context

As Boris Havel (2013: 29) wrote, no other place in the world is as defined by conflict as is Palestine and both Jews and Muslim find the political and theological arguments in their historical interpretations to claim the Holy Land (2013: 108). The Holy Land, it is important to note, was a term rooted in the consciousness of Europeans (but not its actual inhabitants at the time), so writes Alexander Scholch (cf. Kasapović, 2010: 102); and the territory roughly encompassing it stretches the shores of the Mediterranean Sea and river Jordan. The Biblical victory of Israelis over the Egyptians, when Moses parted the Red Sea is considered the first Jewish military prevail and its circumstances will be found important as the basis for religion-founded wars (Havel, 2013: 119). War became, and remained up to this point, the state-making tool of Israel (Kasapović, 2010: 61). Having formed an alliance with God, the Promised Land (Palestine) is forever in political ownership of the Jewish people and they claim they right upon it as long as they maintain the alliance (Havel, 2013: 120). The agreement with God, in other

words, is the basis of the right to rule the land and this theological postulate is the driving force behind every effort ever taken to settle forever in Palestine.

When it comes to defining the term *Middle East*, Mirjana Kasapović wrote (foreword in Havel, 2013: 15) that there is no universal understanding of what that region would encapsulate. Instead, numerous studies always name the same eight countries: Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey. The eight countries, along with the Palestinian Territories, are found to be the *core region* of the Middle East. Conflict is also a variable used to determine what Middle East is, as Kasapović refers to Volker Perthes (in Havel, 2013: 16) stating that the conflict between countries of the Middle East determine it as geopolitical region in which the conflict between the Arab nations and Israel takes center stage. The following is the brief elaboration of the context that is needed to understand everything that led to the 2014 conflict.

The Jewish people were persecuted throughout history. From the Egyptian pharaoh times through the medieval period when three large exoduses happened (Wandycz, 2004: 25-6; in Kasapović, 2010: 17) until the two World Wars that culminated in the Holocaust.

Palestine was home for Jews, Muslims and Christians for centuries but was populated mostly by Sunni Muslims (Kasapović, 2010: 103). Jews began to settle in Palestine while it was still part of the Ottoman Empire (1519-1918) (Kasapović, 2010: 62). Five *aliyjahs*, big immigration waves to *Eretz Israel*, occurred between years 1882 and 1948, beginning with persecutions (*pogroms*) in Eastern Europe and Russia and culminating with the onset of World War II and the creation of the State of Israel (Kasapović, 2010; Havel, 2013). Jews mostly inhabited Palestine spontaneously and out of religious reasons. It was considered that the return from *galut* (persecution) was in the hands of God. With the rise of secular thought, amongst the first who believed that Jews themselves could form a state was Theodor Herzl, the father of political Zionism (Havel, 2013: 385). Zionism was the movement to colonies Palestine politically, a Jewish nationalism. It was articulated as a movement of people without a homeland (Kasapović, 2010: 32). As such, it was a radical departure from religious Zionism that had faith that God will grant Jews their state. Various locations were proposed as a place where the Jewish people could found their homeland. Herzl himself was fond of Argentina, countries such as Canada, Colombia, Ecuador, Australia, Sudan, Iraq and Ukraine were considered. The "Uganda plan", which was initiated by the British government and that had planned for the Jews settling

in that country fell through (Kasapović, 2010: 33-4). The only true homeland for the Jews was Palestine.

In the years after the First World War, Palestine, along with Iraq, was divided between the British and the French through the secret Sykes-Picot agreement and during the British Mandate that lasted from 1922 until 1948, Winston Churchill created the state of Transjordan – splitting Palestine into two parts and inflicting long term effects for the entire Middle East (Kasapović, 2010: 62-64). Both the Jews and the Arabs opposed creation of Transjordan and saw it as a violation of their right over Palestine. The British, acting out the well-known role of a colonial force, put their state interests first.

However, several events led to further division of Palestine. The Balfour Declaration, issued in 1917 is a 117 words long personal letter by Lord Arthur James Balfour, British foreign minister to his acquaintance, Lionel Rotschild, who happened to be a Jew. The letter contained optimism in establishing "a national home in Palestine" of the Jewish people (Kasapović, 2010: 65-66). Carefully worded, this personal letter is regarded as the first official British backing to the Zionist idea of founding a Jewish State.

In 1937, the Brits ventured into researching the cause and the solution of the enduring conflicts between the Arab and Jewish populations of Palestine. The document known as the Peel report shocked both the British government and the international community, as the commission led by Lord Robert Peel proposed to divide the Palestine into two separate states (Kasapović, 2010; 69-71). The main argument was that the two communities are far too different and cannot coexist in a single state and the report contained the two primal Zionistic goals: the creation of Jewish state in the Palestinian territory (even though of a reduced size) and the complete transfer of Arab population off its territory (Kasapović, 2010: 71; referring to Masalha, 1992: 61). The report started the Arab riots against the Jews and the British and inflicted the civil war that lasted until 1948 (Kasapović, 2010: 72).

Two years after the Peel report, the British Government issued the MacDonald's White Paper in 1939. Named after the minister for colonies, the Paper had three parts and proposed an alternative policy: it rescinded the Balfour Declaration, limited the immigration of Jews to Palestine to the maximum of 75 000 people in the coming five years and no more after that and forbade the acquirement of land to the Jews in all of Palestine (three zones were differently

regulated) (Kasapović, 2010: 72-3). By putting the ban on immigration in the most crucial time of the Jewish history – the coming of Holocaust, the Jews turned away from the British to seek a new ally – the United States of America (Kasapović, 2010: 74).

The Biltmore Resolution of 1942 saw the American Jews taking the lead in the world Zionist movement. It was agreed that the White Paper is unacceptable, the new world order should not be established without finally resolving the troubles of Jews in Palestine and worldwide and the Jewish State is to be formed on all the territory of Palestine, without ever considering or including the Arab people as an actor (Kasapović, 2010: 74). After the Second World War, the British ended their Mandate over Palestine and in 1947 let the United Nations to settle the problem. The Resolution 181 of the UN's General Assembly voted in favor of the report that was made by a majority of a special commission comprising of Canada, Czechoslovakia, Guatemala, the Netherlands, Peru, Sweden and Uruguay that proposed Palestine to be divided into an Arab and a Jewish state, Jerusalem to be a *corpus separantum* and the states to be in an economic union under the British supervision for the first two years (Kasapović, 2010: 74). India, Iran and Yugoslavia, members of the commission, delivered a different report, calling for a federation of Arabs and Jews under the patronage of the UN for the first 3 years. The report was declined (Kasapović, 2010: 75). Many historians, according to Kasapović (2010: 76), saw the Holocaust as causing the international community to bear the responsibility for the Jewish tragedy and as a sort of redemption and a guarantee towards the Jewish people that such an incident will not occur again.

The day after the State of Israel was declared, May 15th 1948 the War for Independence was launched. A coalition of Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Transjordan set out to destroy Israel and end the "Zionist occupation" only to be totally defeated. Hence, the Arab peoples refer to the war as *al-naqba* or disaster (Kasapović, 2010: 80). The war was perceived as a total one – a complete ideological, political and emotional mobilization of Jews that took the war as a matter of their own national survival (Naor, 2008: 242-3; in Kasapović, 2010: 81). Israel ultimately conquered 1/5 of the territory that was reserved for the Arab state in the Resolution 181 and made national defense, security and military a flagship public policy (Kasapović, 2010).

The 1956 Suez War between Israel and Arab countries is also referred to as the Sinai War (Kasapović, 2010: 81). Israel had doubled its population since the Independence War and

invaded the Sinai Mountain, causing an international crisis. Under the watch eye of the US and USSR, Israel retreated and was granted free passage of ships through the channel (Kasapović, 2010: 82).

In 1967 Israel attacked Egypt, Syria and Jordan and in only six days completely defeated them, undermined the regimes and destabilized the countries (Kasapović, 2010: 83). It had tripled its territory, occupying the West Bank, Gaza Strip, the Sinai, Golan Heights and Eastern Jerusalem. After the Six Day War had finished, Israel annexed the Eastern Jerusalem and issued a legislation that calls it its „eternal and undividable capital"(Kasapović, 2010: 83). Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were driven from their homes, some 400 000 people, adding to those that have been persecuted in 1948 (Kasapović, 2010: 83). The lives of remaining Palestinians on the occupied areas are referred to as living in apartheid or a ghetto (Glaser, Ron, 2003; in Kasapović, 2010: 85). The UN issued Resolution 242 due to severe violations of international law. It calls for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from occupied areas, end of war and recognition of sovereignty of all the countries in the Middle East (Kasapović, 2010: 85). The Six Day War marks a turning point in Israeli state history. According to Kasapović (2010: 85; referring to Penslar, 2007: 110-11), Israel was rapidly turning into a colonial force and an imperial state. From a state that offered shelter to refugees and persecuted Jews, „David has turned into Goliath"(Avnery, 2002: 2; cf. Kasapović, 2010: 86). It also marks the definite end of the Pan-Arabian movement between Palestinians (Khalidi, 2010: 192-201; in Kasapović, 2010: 105) and it is important to note that many critics imply that the Arab nations were disorganized and without a proper nation-building strategy. They are blamed for declining all the British and UN proposals regarding the division of Palestine, only to be left with nothing after Israel prevailed (Gelber, 2000: 43; Sandler, 1997: 681-3; in Kasapović, 2010: 97). Additionally, the Yishuv (Jewish settlements in Palestine) of 1947 had many similarities with a modern nation-state and numerous and complex reasons added to the demise of Palestinian Arabs: weak social and military organization, economic capacity, political standing include some of the vectors that added to the exodus (Kasapović, 2010: 111). The making of Israel unmade Palestine, wrote Kasapović, adding that one nation came from the diaspora and another embarked into in (2010: 114).

The fourth, Yom-Kippur War found Israelis unprepared in 1973. Egypt and Syria attacked Israel on the Yom-Kippur holiday and after initial shock, the Israelis managed to fight back and push out the enemy armies back to the status quo of before (Kasapović, 2010: 86). Having understood that war cannot end the conflict, Israel and Egypt signed a peace accord in 1979 with Secretary of State Henry Kissinger as a mediator (Kasapović, 2010). Egypt was the first Arab state that recognized Israel (Kasapović, 2010: 89) and its Camp David accord is the first instance of the „land for peace" practice.

The fifth and final grand war happened when Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982. Planned to be only a two-day offensive, the war became the longest Israeli war and found protestors at home demanding that Israel retreats due to violence towards Palestinian and Lebanese civilians. In September of the same year, some 400 000 people in Tel Aviv alone called for the end of invasion (Kasapović, 2010: 87-8).

2.1 Shaping of the contemporary Israeli society

Ever since it's founding, the State of Israel never determined its borders. Kasapović explains that the founding fathers never accepted the UN's plan fully and were 'flexible' and eager to conquer all of Palestine they believed belonged to them (2010: 123). Israel is defined as a democratic Jewish state (Kasapović, 2010: 130). Israeli political scientists such as Don Peretz and Gideon Doron, Sammy Smooha note that it is the only state where 'Arabian' is a nationality (1997: 60; 1993: 325; in Kasapović, 2010: 131). Israeli nationality does not exist: only the Arab and Jewish distinction does. Palestinians are the largest minority within Israel and have basic civil and human rights. Palestinian women were the first Arab women that were given the right to vote. However, even though the law recognizes their rights, non-Jews are not considered equal with Jews in the political and social life (Kasapović, 2010: 131). Palestinians are not regarded as an ethnic or a national minority, they are just entitled to special cultural, religious and lingual rights. They are discriminated against in the favor of the Jewish population (Shahak, 2006: 25; in Kasapović, 2010: 131) and are exempt from military service, segregated in everyday life by the Jewish majority and the Jewish media perpetuate negative images and add to the segregation (Avraham, 2003; in Kasapović, 2010: 131).

As it has been illustrated so far, the Arab-Israeli differences are deeply rooted and unmatchable. But it's the divisions don't end on that level – within the Jewish society there exist grave differences that split the community into several layers.

In the formative stages of the Yishuv, nearly all the inhabitants came from European societies and therefore shared the same cultural background, shared the same vision of what their future state would be and what their identity was (Kasapović, 2010: 136). During the 50s and the 60s of the last century, Jewish government began to populate certain parts of Israel with Oriental Jews from Asian and African countries in order to populate the desolate areas, weaken the Arab-Jewish population ratio in the Western Bank and Gaza and, perhaps unintentionally, start the rift between the European (Ashkenazi) and Afro-Asian (Sephardic) Jews (Kasapović, 2010: 136). Israel was becoming a mosaic society (Kasapović, 2010: 137).

Adding that into the equation, Kasapović has identified five major polarizations within Israel. The primal and the most visible one is the ethnic rift between Jews and the Palestinians, which is the topic of this thesis and it should be perceived as an internal dimension of a wider regional rift between Jews and Arabs in the Middle East (Kasapović, 2010: 139). Furthermore, the above mentioned differences between the Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews within the Jewish society accounts for the second polarization. Those two communities differ when it comes to cultural, social and political distinctions: Ashkenazi Jews are of European descent, pioneers of Yishuv and founders of Israel. For decades they were the political, social and cultural elite, belonging to middle and upper layers of society, educated, urbanized, secular, liberal and were the basis for left parties of Israel (Kasapović, 2010: 141). Sephardic Jews, on the other hand, came to Palestine late from African and Islamic countries, they missed out on the Zionist revolution, and they are characterized as less educated, religious, conservative and counter-West oriented with their voting preferences leaning towards right (Kasapović, 2010: 141). Important to note that this rift is generational: it is being passed on from parents to their children.

The third, and to most scientists, the most important rift is the one between the state and the synagogue, between the State of Israel and *Eretz Israel* (Kasapović, 2010: 142). The religious right claims that the state should be exclusively Jewish, while the secular left believes in Israeli identity that would encapsulate the Arabian citizens as well (Kasapović, 2010). From the religious rift the left-right division further stems and consumes the whole society, making it the

fourth rift. The last one was debatable for a long time but the existence of socio-economic polarization was proven in 1993 (Kasapović, 2010: 143). Social status and indicators such as standard and unemployment rate were never a part of party programs, as the worst jobs were always being done by Arab workers. The last two rifts were formed later in the state, while the first three (with the dominance of Israeli-Palestinian conflict) were imported to Israel from the Yishuv (Kasapović, 2010: 145-6).

Israel, as a state, is a proclaimed democracy. However, in reality, Israel is situated somewhere between an ethnic, consensus and consociational democracy. The term ethnic democracy falls into the category of "democracies with adjectives", a concept developed by David Collier and Steven Levitsky (1997; in Kasapović, 2010: 259) by which democracies that do not fully meet the normative theory of democracy are explained. An ethnic democracy, as some scholars believe originated in Israel, is risen from a nationalistic movement that strives to form a state ruled by law and based exclusively on an ethnic community, its language, culture, history and heritage. All others are considered *the Other* and therefore cannot be a fully inclusive member (Kasapović, 2010: 260). Simply put, the Palestinians in Israel are considered citizens of lower ranking, and are removed from the political life, institutions and decision-making in the areas of the most important policies (Kasapović, 2010: 264). In order to become a fully democratic state, Israel is to shift towards consociational democracy where the main segments of the society would become Jews and the Israeli Palestinians, instead of today's division to Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews as pillars of Israeli society (Kasapović, 2010: 264). All other textbook examples of multiethnic societies (Yiftachel, 1992: 130, 133 mentions Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka and Cyprus, in Kasapović, 2010: 264) show that a constantly deprived minority in a society can result in increase of multiethnic violence that can, in turn, throw the entire political system into chaos. Another distinction is the presence of elements that make up what is consociational democracy. From the beginnings of Yishuv, it can be seen that it was evolving as a split society, with some elements of consociational democracy (Kasapović, 2010: 265). Despite their differences, these segments of society remained together as the political elites understood the importance of compromise and collaboration in order to keep what was to become Israel a unified state. The hostile environment in their wake helped bolster that collaboration and put aside internal hostilities and a compromise to found a joint state and political system was dis-entwined (Kasapović, 2010: 165-6).

Compromise setting was the method that was applied to all the key issues of Israeli state and society (Kasapović, 2010: 166). Neither side (religious or secular) can willingly change the *status quo* that is, however, the Arabian segment of society was cut out of the compromise to begin with. A vital part of the society that was alienated from the consensus on the basis of political system and institutions of consociational democracy is what makes Israel a typical ethnic democracy (Kasapović, 2010: 167).

2.2 The Intifadas and their consequences

As it is clearly read from this text so far, since the founding of Israel in 1948 on the territory that makes up the Israeli state the Arab/Palestinian population is considered second class citizens. Constant discrimination, social, political, economic and cultural subordination has led to two *intifadas* (rebellions, uprisings). The first intifada occurred in 1987 when an Israeli transport truck crashed into several Arab cars in Gaza, killing four and injuring many and demonstrations that followed were a spontaneous eruption of hatred and frustration but it represented years of anger (Smith, 2007: 412). A new generation of Arabs was growing up on the territories who questioned their parents' submission to daily humiliations; the poor and the young were the primal driving force behind intifada (Smith, 2007: 414, 419). Demonstrations were restricted to stone-throwing alone, as the directors of protests understood that images of civilians throwing stones on well-armed Israeli army would resonate with the world (Smith, 2007: 419). The authorities responded to the riots with various inhumane forms of punishment such as demolition of suspects' homes and holding Palestinians locked up without a trial for up to six months (Smith, 2007: 416). One Israeli journalist has stated (quoted in Smith, 2007: 422) that "Arabs who are arrested are beaten and tortured. (...) Israelis see it as a normal practice." Such racial segregation led to the involvement of the middle class and women. Palestinians regardless of their status joined the fight, boycotting Israeli goods and refusing to pay taxes. The mere fact they were Palestinian was reason alone to be subjected to Israeli harassment and that was their main motive to participate in the intifada (Smith, 2007: 422). A direct result of the intifada, it must be mentioned, was the formation of Hamas – the Islamic Resistance Movement in 1988 (Smith, 2007: 423). The intifada as a whole had a huge impact on international politics and the perceptions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In the Gaza Strip, conditions were extremely harsh: more populated than Bangladesh, 70 per cent of inhabitants were refugees from years 1948 and 1967 (the same year Israelis expropriated almost half of Arab land, squeezing a tighter noose on the territory) (Smith, 2007: 416-7). In 2010, to illustrate, Gaza with its 360 square kilometers was home to more than 1.5 million people (data in Picula, 2010: 42). Gaza had a long history of opposing Israeli rule and the significance of Islam was much more politicized than it was in the West Bank (Smith, 2007: 417). The culmination of the uprising can be pinpointed in March 1993 when Israelis closed the Gaza border, cutting tens of thousands out of access to Israel, their work and livelihood (Smith, 2007: 437).

A long and extremely complex period of peace and truce negotiations ensured and resulted with the Oslo Accords of 1993, which constituted the Palestinian Territories and served as a political start of state forming (Kasapović, 2016: 275), only to be stricken down by the second uprising. Lit in 2000 by the candidate for Prime Minister of Israel, Ariel Sharon's visit to Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif in the company of nearly a thousand security forces and media personnel enraged the Palestinians (Smith, 2007: 512). Stone-throwing and tire-burning quickly grew into an armed conflict due to Israeli's use of massive fire power on rioters (Smith, 2007: 512). In 2001, the intifada saw Israeli side use politically ordered assassinations and the Palestinians began to use suicide bombing as a new tactics, random acts of revenge on Palestinians who were routinely beaten and harassed. One year later, women started to self-bomb as well (Smith, 2007: 515-16). Up to 2003, 50 000 Palestinians were killed opposed to mere 7000 Israeli casualties. The living standards of the Palestinians plummeted; children were malnourished, more than 80 per cent of the population existed below the poverty line (Smith, 2007: 518). Things worsened even further after the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza in 2005; in June of 2006, Gaza was compared to the impoverished areas of West Africa, being on „verge of disaster"(Smith, 2007:531).

On the international scene, many countries, members of the UN, acknowledged the sovereignty of Palestine, and the unusual support came in the span of two years (2007-2009) when eight South American countries formally recognized Palestine's sovereignty (Picula, 2011: 11). It's also recognized throughout Africa, Asia, and is backed by Russia, China and India as well as it's still not recognized by the United States and, naturally, Israel (Picula, 2011: 12).

Palestine indeed is a phenomenon in the international community: it's given the status of an observer in the UN, UNESCO and WHO, while it's a full-pledged member of organizations such as FIFA and the Arab League (Picula, 2011: 14). Palestinian films are eligible for Oscar nominations and athletes can represent Palestine under their nation's flag at the Olympic Games, having done so for the first time in Atlanta in 1996 (Picula, 2011: 15).

2.3   A glance into Israeli society today

A key notion of the Israeli society is the abundance of rifts that exist within. Hili Perlson and A. J. Samuels argue in their feature article (2015: 86) that the cultural production of Israel too has become politicized. Artists and academics refuse to visit the country without ever stating the reason and there is a wider political, economic and cultural boycott of the country. The reason lies in the occupation of the Palestinian Territories. The authors (Perlson and Samuels, 2015: 88-91) quote editor-in-chief of newspaper *Haaretz* and a Centre for Contemporary Art's curator in their descriptions of the events that followed the 2014 conflict, explaining that it was extremely hard to raise a critical voice within the country, as newspaper subscriptions were cancelled by unsatisfied readers when they pointed out civilians were killed as collateral damage, artists were attacked and threatened for sympathizing with the Gazans, and clashes occurred when Israelis protesting the war at its height were attacked by right-wing supporters of occupation. A single interviewed Palestinian cultural producer warned that the sole inclusion of him, a Palestinian gay rights activist, portrays the whole situation as "normal" to outsiders. "This is not Berlin. (...) A country that puts so much effort into reducing the amount of Palestinians and does its best to study demographics for how to do so should be boycotted" −claims Muhammad Jabali (in Perlson and Samuels, 2015: 94).

2.4   The 2014 Israel-Gaza war: Operation Protective Edge

The Gaza Strip has been a volatile geopolitical hotspot up to this point. After Hamas, a terrorist organization, took power in 2007, Israel launched four major operations against it (Siapera et al., 2015: 1297). The most recent clash between Israel and Gaza was Operation Protective Edge, a 50-day long military campaign launched by the Israeli Defense Forces officially on 8th July 2014 after months of rocket attacks on Israel (ict.org.il, IDF, 2014). The three-phased endeavor found the IDF using air strikes and ground operations in order to destroy Hamas' terror tunnels into Israel, undermine their operations and restore the security in Israel,

due to an increase in intensity of shelling Israeli territory from the Gaza strip by terrorists (IDF, 2014). The IDF officials stressed that civilian casualties were brought down to a minimum by using several techniques, such as dropping leaflets from airplanes, making telephone calls and sending text messages to civilians warning them that their area is to be bombed and to evacuate (IDF, 2014). In the same time, Hamas is accused of using human shields and civilian establishments as a cover for their terroristic actions.

In numbers, IDF struck down 4,762 terror sites in Gaza and those actions resulted with 2,100 civilian casualties and 1000 Hamas were killed, along with 32 destroyed tunnels (ict.org.il, 2014). The Operation officially ended on 26th August 2041, when a ceasefire brokered by Egypt was implemented (ict.org.il, 2014). According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR, 2014), over 100 000 Palestinians were left homeless after the military operation, citing massive destruction and long-term psychosocial consequences for the Palestinians, as well as suspicion on violation of international law on both conflicted sides.

Operation Protected Edge took place in a new mediascape: the hybrid media system which included vast usage of social platforms (Siapera et al., 2015), conveyed content instantaneously to a global audience. For the first time, individuals sharing their experiences as they live them were present in the mediascape simultaneously along with mainstream media and activists (Siapera et al., 2015: 1314).

3   Elements that constitute a media created reality

3.1   Reality: constructed

The notion that social reality is constructed predates the media and is in fact an integral part of Western philosophy (Hromadžić, 2014: 13). While positivist epistemology relied on objective observing towards a passive study object, constructivism is based upon, Gergen postulated (1985, in Hromadžić, 2014: 15-6), that the social construction of reality derives from individual *experience* of reality. Four linked arguments support it: the personal *experience* of living, lingual classification for phenomena that spurs from human interaction, the dominant communication patterns and cultural interaction within a group or a community. When it comes to media involvement, the matter of reality construction becomes quite sensitive issue if taken into account the media's perpetuation of certain narratives that are so frequently repeated that they are taken for granted and without questioning, while in fact are laced with stereotypes and

prejudice (Hromadžić, 2014: 17). It does somewhat resonate with the media imagined as an ideological "battlefield" for various groups in order for them to define what reality is (Gurevitch and Levy, 1985, in Hromadžić, 2014: 21).

Toynbee (2008, noted in Hromadžić, 2014: 18) points out the importance of two institutional practices when it comes to reality construction in the media studies sphere: production and reception. It follows the same logic that media are in fact an integral part of social reality, a force that co-shapes it, rather than just reflecting it as a trustworthy mirror (Bennett, 1982, in Hromadžić, 2014: 19). The term *media construction of social reality* is situated in the middle of two scholar traditions: the mirror theory, which believes that the media merely reflect reality, and semiotics, which is based upon the system of signs that actively co-construct social reality (Hromadžić, 2014: 24). To use Fiske's term (1990, in Hromadžić, 2014: 24), meaning is constituted through media communication. Media studies, contained in a single sentence, are interested in the relationship between media text and its context, cultural setting without restrictions (Hromadžić, 2014: 25). Construction of social reality is the fundamental problem that occupies media studies, spurring from the post-modern theoretical framework. The key notion here is the fact that representations are not reality, even though audiences often perceive them to be (Croteau and Haynes, 2003, in Hromadžić, 2014: 27).

3.2 Our ways of seeing

Humans are first and foremost visual beings. Sight is the most important sense. One doesn't need to go far to understand how the sense has become rooted as a cultural practice. Jenks (2002: 15) channels attention to the fact that *seeing* is also taken as *knowing*; common language figures such as "Can't you see that's better?" or "You see I was right about that." communicate clearly how our eyes serve our perception. In the French language, the close connection is astonishing: verb 'to see' (*voir*) is almost the same as 'to know' (*savoir*). Seeing had been installed as an indicator of reality and as a direct consequence, vision and seeing are found to be the final arbitrary for beauty, truth and everything that's right (Jenks, 2002: 26). Observation, especially of a scientist, Nicod described as a visual distance that is all by itself functional enough to serve as science (1930: 72, in Jenks, 2002: 15). Sontag (1977: 3-6) found that since the invention of photographic technique in 1839, photographs served as evidence of existence or a testament.

Art historian Bryson laudated *seeing* as pure perception (1983, in Jenks, 2002: 16) and Bourdieu concluded that each perception includes conscious and uncurious decoding (1993: 215, in Jenks, 2002: 16). Seeing is believing, the three-worded peak of Compte's positivism sums up the scientific method and how can that not be true? After all, sight paved way to discovery, from the molecular level with the usage of microscope to inter-galactic observations made through a telescope. Not to mention everything in between.

3.3   Still images of conflict

The most influential branch of photography in relation to society is documentary photography. Sandra Vitaljić (2013: 9) explains that the essence of all photographic practices was to document something and its credibility does not depend solely on photographic practices, but also on various discursive, social and cultural practices. It is almost impossible to avoid photographs today. Be it on the street in form of ads, at home while browsing the web and print media, the 1839 invention was praised to be the 'pencil of nature' by its discoverer Henry Fox Talbot (Vitaljić, 2012: 108) and was, at the time, attributed the objective depiction of the physical world. Technology has since allowed for the practice of photographing (literal translation of the Greek-coined phrase is "light drawing") to be widespread. Everyone can do it as mobile phones are equipped with cameras and Internet access. Participants of events such as Occupy Wall Street, the Arab Spring and the 2009 unrests in Iran can and do easily share content online. Their imperfect snapshots seem more authentic when it comes to portraying reality, especially conflict (Sontag, 2003: 26-7). Professional photographers have as well turned more to their iPhones and share their images with virtual communities of Hipstamatic, Instagram and Twitter (Vitaljić, 2013: 169-70). The contradiction between documentary photography, which strives to faithfully depict the reality as it is (was), and the relationship between the photographer and the subject and photographic practices that deliver the end result is central in the debate on war and conflict photography (Vitaljić, 2013: 109).

The aesthetization of conflict photography by professional photographers is often accused to diminish their documentaristic value. Vitaljić argues (2013: 167) that such content must fight to get attention from viewers due to the multiplicity of visual contents. For everyday people, war images are not real and do not differ much from violent images from commercial films. In turn, shocking and graphic content of real conflict distinguishes itself from industrial fiction and

communicates its authenticity (Vitaljić, 2013: 168). It is not important if the images are true or false, writes philosopher Jean Baudrillard in his essay *War Porn*, but "their impact counts in the way in which they are immersed in war." (Baudrillard, 2006: 87). In essence, to be truly objective, images of war would have to be distinct from the war itself. Rather, their virtual omnipresence has made them war pornography, concludes Baudrillard, drawing from the pictures of tortured Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib, as their photographs have been taken by their torturers, American soldiers. The digital age has turned war into a reality show, expanded on its essence: the excess of power channeled to torturous image pornography (Baudrillard, 2006: 87).

We are living in a visual village today, writes James Estrin (2013: 105) and wonders if the proliferation of photographs on the Internet could lead to development of a unique, maybe even universal visual language. He understands that fundamental decisions make the act of photographing a personal one (where to stand, which lens to use, what to include in the frame and what to leave out of it) but he gives people who post their photographs on social media around the world the benefit of the doubt, hinting that perhaps the democratization of photography can be beneficial for democracy itself (Estrin, 2013: 104). It would also seem, as an undertone, that contemporary users who share their photographs live in a scopic social reality that is mixed with elements of exhibitionism and voyeurism (Hromadžić and Popović, 2010: 105). As Susan Carruthers (2008: 73) would put it: "If obsessive self-documentation is a reflex of the digital age, so too is asking to see other people's pictures." Carruthers (2008) titled her article on war audiences "No one's looking" and paired noun "audiences" with the adjective "disappearing". She writes of "collective aversion to inspecting the war and its consequences" (Carruthers, 2008: 70) at the same time the scopic regime comes to its peak.

In his short essay for National Geographic's 125th anniversary, Robert Draper argues quite poetically (2013: 22-3) that photography has a goal, to document, to bring awareness and change, even in the modern world of global cacophony of photographs. Estrin writes of Nick Ut's and Eddie Adams' photographs that "probably changed the course of history" when made available to the general public (Estrin, 2013: 104). Michael Griffin (2010) disagrees with such poetic optimism. He claims that war photographs are not authentic captured pieces of history but "results of a continuing practice of cultural production that is also a tool of government management, media business and political persuasion" (Griffin, 2010: 36).

Such a defined pessimist stance is corroborated by a claim that war produced photographs should be analyzed when it comes to the conditions under which they were taken and the institutional practices by which they were distributed (Griffin, 2010: 8). Pointing out to another practice, Griffin (2010: 17) illustrated how during the Vietnam War the news agencies carefully vetted photographs in order not to alienate the mainstream audiences. In other words, the 'living room war', the authentic and real representations of what was going on in Vietnam, never happened. News imagery rarely reveals something new or unseen; rather, images that are perpetuated enough become symbolic rather than descriptive, abstract icons (Griffin, 2010: 36). Simply put, published war photography has no effect of change because it is devised under control and molded in a way not to entice a change in status quo.

Susan Carruthers' work on war imagery revolves around "reluctance to see", the civilians' (audiences') preference to look away from still and moving images of war, documentary films included (2008: 70-2). Carruthers refers to Daniel Hallin (1997) (2008: 74) and blames the scholar focus on production rather than reception, concluding that scientists neglected qualitative research that uncovers the construction of meaning. She also underlined the need to locate "visible micro publics that increasingly constitute themselves online" (Carruthers, 2008: 74), indirectly countering Griffin's groomy findings as they focus solely on traditional mass media.

When portraying conflict, media show the suffering of distant others every day, without our ability to act on their situation (Boltanski, 1999, in Mortensen, 2011: 11). The social media, with users' compulsive picture taking and sharing, and citizen photojournalism on the social platforms, "hold a strong appeal for identification with the author, even if we do not know with whom we are supposed to identify with" (Mortensen, 2011: 11). Likewise, amateur content production is often "mobilized in a propagandistic image-war where the contenting parties fight through the media about which truth the picture substantiate" (Mortensen, 2011: 11). A message is not fixed in the piece of citizen photojournalism, it is rather prone to situational interpretations for legitimizing different political standpoints and as a starter for activism (Mortensen, 2011). The 'Twitter revolution' and web 2.0, Mette Mortensen has concluded (2011: 14) opened new avenues for portraying ongoing war and conflict on social media. However, she warns, the

traditional news media still cling to conventional framings of war and conflict (Mortensen, 2011: 14).

3.4   Audiences evolved to users

As semiotics has it for its core, "every producer also reads, and every reader also produces (meanings)" (Bertrand and Hughes, 2005: 7). This branch of communication theory, devoted to study of textual meaning by interaction of signs and their readers and producers, in the present time probably means more than ever. The traditional sender − message − receiver model is antiquated in the contemporary user-oriented mediascape. Communication theory has had a linear start. Literally, the 'hypodermic needle' model found effects on media consumers to be direct and immediate ('injected') and has since been rethought through user and gratification theory that questions how individuals use media to cultural studies that are interested in social contexts of behavior and practices (Bertrand and Hughes, 2005: 38-9). The cultural studies, emerging in Birmingham, England, were the revolutionary moment that reinvented audiences, naming them in plural and changing their definitions from helpless media victims to active participants. It was the start of transdisciplinarity (Hromadžić and Popović, 2010: 101). The term media audience(s) itself is a complex one that tries to grasp relations between institutions, technologies, texts and user receptions (Hromadžić and Popović, 2010: 98). Audiences have evolved parallel with the media revolution, from newspaper readers, to radio listeners, consumers of television to the multi-screening and content selection practices of modern living. As such, they cannot be studies completely separated from media.

The contemporary audiences are prone to everyday theoretical and practical changes, so state Hajrudin Hromadžić and Helena Popović (2010: 104). The main stress today is on those audiences that co-create content in a manner that they are now referred to as users or *produsers* (stemming from *produsage*) (Bratich, 2005, in Hromadžić and Popović, 2010: 105, Bruns, 2008, in Siapera, 2013: 542; *emphasis added*, Mortensen, 2011: 7). The rise of citizen photojournalism, a form of user generated content, has created a landslide of visual information on current world affairs, facilitated by technological developments and social media in recent years (Mortensen, 2011: 13). The new media has blurred the boundaries of those documenting and those participating in events and has made a shift from ideal photojournalist as an objective observer to an active participant (Mortensen, 2011: 10). It is often unclear whether the visuals produced are

made by political activist or just by-standers that happened to be at the right place at the right time. Additionally, further ethical issues stem from the citizen journalism: the visual content tends to be more graphic than professional news and the question of reliability of the source asserts itself (Mortensen, 2011: 10). Nowadays, the notion of usage understands that people take the media content, be it their own production or someone else's and share it further to their own audience in a complex web of online interactions.

3.5   Twitter: micro-blogging social media

Twitter is a microblogging site originally devised for mobile phones in 2006, using which individuals can post 140-character short updated to a network of others (Marwick and boyd, 2010: 116). The usage of 'hashtags' (#) and 'mentions' (@) allows categorizing of topics and directing the communication towards specific accounts on Twitter, respectively. Twitter can provide a "dynamic, interactive identity presentation to unknown audiences" (Marwick and boyd, 2010: 116). But why is that presence offered to unknown audiences? The authors explain that tweets that are posted are directed towards imagined audiences — they are sent out in the cyberspace, but the authors don't know which people read them. With the practice of retweeting (user reposting of original tweets onto their accounts), a single tweet can reach users beyond the scope of the producer's own followers' list (Marwick and boyd, 2010: 117).

While it was written about plurality of audiences above, Twitter is responsible for a phenomenon called 'context collapse', which means it flattens multiple audiences into one. It is impossible to differ self-presentation strategies, write Marwick and boyd, as the social media requires a singular identity (2010: 122). Users negotiate those (their) audiences by concealing information, targeting special audiences with tweets whilst trying to balance in presenting an authentic and interesting personality (Marwick and boyd, 2010: 122). Twitter is used in multiple ways, as a broadcasting medium, news source, personal diary, marketing channel (Marwick and boyd, 2010: 122). In a way, its users are really living a media life, to borrow Deuze's (2011) term. It has given the final blur over the boundaries of producers and consumers and has achieved, like Deuze wrote, to put reality (and indeed, identity) under constant construction (2011: 138, 146).

As tweeting identity is constructed in conversation with others, tweets are formulated up to a point from the social context derived from the tweets of people one follows. This can lead to

self-censorship and reluctance to tweet on a topic as controversy may deflect followers. It all makes Twitter carefully watched public space (Marwick and boyd, 2010: 124-5).

Twitter was already considered as a potential candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize following the events of digital activism in Iran in 2009, when it became an integral part of uprisings due to suspected electoral fraud in that country (Pfeile, 2009 in Mortensen, 2011: 8). After the first decade of the 21st century had passed, social media platforms were diffused more widely and were used more systematically in war times (Berenger, 2013, in Siapera et al., 2015: 1297). In a new, hybrid media ecosystem that has information flowing across diverse platforms, Twitter is centered as both a news medium and a system of social awareness (Chadwick, 2013, Kwak et al, 2010 and Hermida, 2010, all referred to in Siapera et al., 2015: 1297). Claire Diaz-Ortiz, head of Corporate Social Innovation and Philanthropy at Twitter claims that by democratizing activism, Twitter can lead to changes in the world, stressing its power lies in open, global real-time information sharing (2011: 1, 192). The social media is used on all levels: individual, organizational, transactional, and governmental. Its reach spreads to the developing world as well, using SMS (Short Message Service) and mobile penetration to deliver information in developing world and as well as a mean of crisis mapping in disastrous situations (Rinne, Commons in Diaz-Ortiz, 2011: 65, 106). Diaz-Ortiz's book, even though devised as a how-to manual for NGOs and for-profit businesses, stresses the accessibility of Twitter and its widespread use on all levels, with constant devotion to change and progress with the usage of the platform.

4   Hypothesis and research questions

The goal of this Master's thesis was to discover how Twitter users perceive photographs of the 2014 Israeli-Palestinian conflict−Operation Protective Edge. In order to do so, its tasks were to extract the photographs which portray the 2014 clash between Israel and the Gaza Strip (Palestinians) that were published on Twitter, group them according to a view that they depict (Palestinian, Israeli or international − humanitarian view) and analyze them using narrative analysis. The main hypothesis is that the photographs of the 2014 Israeli-Palestinian war influence the perception of reality of Twitter users regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. To test that assumption, basic research questions were asked: Do users possess any prior information

on the topic? What construction and meaning do the photographs convey? Can photographs and mere visual information alone dictate the perception of reality regarding the conflict?

This research could prove to be beneficial to communication scientists in the field of media studies, as it investigates social media users' reception of visual content. It can also be of valuable use to theorists and practitioners of political communication, as the communicated content is heavily politicized and has gained substantial world attention. Lastly, it can be of significant interest to the researchers of the Middle East, as it would serve to deepen their understanding of an ever-growing media component to the long-lasting conflict.

5   Methodological debate and research methodology

As this research will try to uncover how Twitter users perceive images from that social media and which tale they have constructed from them, it begins to assert all by itself that it is not a laboratory effort. Studying a social phenomenon differs much from studying subatomic particles in a carefully controlled lab. As it stands clear from the very title of this thesis, the term "construction" stands in the focal point.

For a long time in media research, positivism, a paradigm (intellectual framework), was most influential in guiding scientists. As such, it is based on the assumption that the world is to be explored using scientific method: impartially collecting measurable and verifiable knowledge (Bertrand and Hughes, 2005: 9). It has since loosen its grip on social sciences and other paradigms have been let into the fold. The thought frameworks that are dominating the qualitative research domain are post-positivism (a revised, modern version of positivism), critical theory, constructivism and participatory action research (Bertrand and Hughes, 2005: 9). As Bertrand and Hughes have noted, it is almost impossible to establish an experimental situation, isolate any variable accurately enough or attribute any difference to said variable in period that spans before and after implementing the test when engaging in audience research (2005: 47). This research is a qualitative analysis and Nelson has described a qualitative research (1992, quoted in Halmi, 2005: 15) as "interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and on occasion counter-disciplinary field of research". A vital distinction of qualitative research is that it always studies subject in their socio-historical context (Halmi, 2005: 14).

David Marsh and Paul Furlong (2005: 25) explain that constructivism has for its basic fact that the world is socially constructed. Social scientists who follow that paradigm study interpretations and rely to Geertz's "thick description", a thorough and rich context elaboration which helps to understand the phenomena (Marsh and Furlong, 2005: 29). Qualitative research takes into account that social reality is dynamic and prone to evolve (Devine, 2005: 195). Fiona Devine acknowledges the criticism coming from positivist side than reject the research mode as invalid as it cannot be repeated or generalization cannot be distilled but she stresses that qualitative researchers adhere to their professional standards as much as their qualitative colleagues (2005: 198-99).

The paradigm to govern this research is constructivism. As Aleksandar Halmi (2005: 60-61) has explained the philosophy behind it, the paradigm understands social reality as multiple, intertwined constructions created by society that can succumb to change. Its epistemology finds the researcher and the subject connected and the discovery a result between those interactions.

5.1 Narrative analysis

"Narrative is the theoretical and technical term that that analysts used to refer to what, in lay terms, we usually call stories," explains Marie Gillespie (2006: 81). A narrative begins and it ends, it is a chain of events in cause and effect relationship, occurring in certain time-space setting (Bordwell and Thompson, 1990, in Gillespie, 2006: 81). The term narrative has Latin roots and as with the French verbs *voir* and *savior* (*seeing* and *knowing*, respectively), it derives from and has close ties to terms *knowing* and *wisdom*. Narrative analysis helps understand how knowledge and meaning are reproduced and circulated in societies, how socio-political constructs are passed on, how continuities and change are reflected (Gillespie, 2006: 82-3). Last, but not least, studying narratives is linked with the consumption of stories on various intellectual and emotional levels.

While audio-visual narratives can be broken down to a different but parallel dimensions (plot that is presented and the story that is inferred), which contain the variables of space, time and causality, Bulgarian theoretician Tzvetan Todorov (Gillespie, 2006: 89-96; 97) proposed a universal model of narrative development. He proposed a core pattern in all narratives: a shift from a stable situation caused by a disruption (force, external influence) resulting in a new situation (Gillespie, 2006: 97). Another narratologist, Vladimir Propp (in Gillespie, 2006: 99)

proposed seven roles that were being carried out in all narratives: the villain, the hero, the donor, the helper, sought-for person, the dispatcher, the false hero.

> Various viewing activities add to constructing meaningful story from the narrative as "viewing involves us in a series of goal-oriented, problem-solving activities aimed at the construction of a meaningful whole story. Our prior knowledge and experience of narratives, of genre conventions and of the social world create certain expectations and assumptions that we bring to interpreting a text." (Gillespie, 2006: 102)

Another important part of narrative analysis is the range and depth of information. It is the *mise-en-scene* that encompasses everything within the frame, the positioning, lighting, color, spatial organization of objects (Gibbs, 2002; in Gillespie, 2006: 107) all at once. It is the way a viewer is encouraged to see and like the narration process, it can give as well as withhold information from a viewer (Gillespie, 2006: 107).

5.2   Decoding a photograph: identifying elements that construct a narrative

Photographs are made when light is passed through the lens, reaching the medium (photographic film or digital sensor), upon which the light inscribes what was in front of the lens (Burian and Caputo, 2003: 8). A photograph, classified in Charles Saunders Pierce's semiotics is an *index*, an indirect reference to what it stands for (Vitaljić 2013: 9).

Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins have identified several ways (gazes) by which individuals read a photograph (in Vitaljić, 2013: 145). Those significant for this research include the gaze of a photographer, means by which he or she chooses a subject, frames it, photographs it, the gaze of the institution, actors who select and manipulate the photographs, the gaze of the audiences who consumes it and the gaze of academia, who analyzes it. Each gaze is a certain point of view. The photographer on the battle field, the consumer in their private setting, the academic undertaking the analysis in the laboratory. Each of those engaging with a photograph devote different amounts of time and different types of knowledge in reading, decoding, constructing meaning from the given visual media text.

All the elements that form a photograph: framing, lighting, depth, spatial organization, color etc. can be deconstructed using narrative analysis. Composition is a primary factor in photography (Burian and Caputo, 2003: 24) and elements such as leading lines and rule of thirds all add up to the visual message. The Western culture reads images in a similar fashion to

reading texts: from left to right (Burian and Caputo, 2003: 27) and it is desirable that the primary subject is situated on the left third of the photographic frame. Encountered with a still image, consumers decode it 'instantaneously' and 'naturally' (Burgin, 1982: 147, in Parry, 2010: 69). In other words, all the choices that led to a photograph (lens, angle, composition, distance and focus) are taken for granted and photograph is perceived as authentic reality, rather than a signifying system. A paramount feature of a photograph is the confinement of the frame. A photographic frame captures, but it also excludes (Sontag, 2003: 46). It shows, but hides as well, as the seen-unseen dynamic always remains. Various compositional techniques (repetitive elements that create rhythm, dynamic diagonal, contrasting color) help make a photograph more appealing (Burian and Caputo, 2003: 32), rather than an unfocused 'hot mess' amateur photographs of war and conflict.

When consuming a photograph, one finds that its meaning is often not fixed. Images are in most cases (news photography, advertising, artwork, Instagram and Twitter posts etc.) paired with verbal language (Gripsrud, 2006: 32). Roland Barthes has identified two functions of verbal language in relation to images: relay and anchorage. Relay refers to text added to the image that states something new, not evident upon visual decoding of the narrative, a new information. Anchorage is a more important function, as Jostein Gripsrud (2006: 32) explains that it states which interpretation is the correct one. It literally anchors one's perception so a misreading of an image would not occur. A reverse process is also possible - an image can anchor text as well

The saying "A picture is worth a thousand words" underlines the basic avenue by which photography communicates a message: through evoking emotions. Often it is said that pictures evoke a certain "feeling" or "mood". Emotions, when to be explained in a nutshell, are complex reactions to stimuli that consist of three elements: bodily reactions such as blushing of the cheeks, expressions such as laughter or crying and the subjective feeling a person experiences (sadness or joy) (Bratko, 2005: 88). Emotions can be divided into primary and complex ones. Primary emotions are experiences by people worldwide, they come spontaneously, are expressed universally, unconsciously and last briefly. They are joy, surprise, sadness, fear, anger and revulsion (Bratko, 2005: 88). Complex emotions are love, guilt, pride, shame and many others, and their experience is learnt (Bratko, 2005: 94). Emotions are the driving force behind humankind, and each individual experiences emotions differently.

When tasked to define what power is, Kira Petersen (2011: 192) consulted the Oxford English Dictionary and found 18 meanings with further divisions. In the context of her research, political science, she has isolated several core meanings (Petersen, 2011: 198): power as strength, power as control over outcomes, power as control over others (domination), power as a resource (or control over resources), power as an ability to act or affect something and power as authority. It is clear that there is not a unique or exact definition, as power can be branched onto soft power, military, economic and so on (Petersen, 2011: 192). The core concepts listed here, however, can be of use when analyzing photography and the theme of conflict.

Photography operates based on codes, similar to language (Gripsrud, 2006: 14). Humans routinely decipher visual content based on shared conventions, rules of living in a certain culture. For example, everyone recognizes a photograph of a canine animal to be representing *a dog*, regardless of its breed. If there ever existed a society where dogs are an unknown phenomenon, its populace could not decipher the photograph, as *dog* would be an unknown phenomenon (Gripsrud, 2006: 14). Similarly, many visual codes that are used in real life are utilized by photography (Lister and Wells, 2000: 77). Individual conventions, like dress conventions, operate together to form a photographic code (Lister and Wells, 2000: 76). Content of photographs is therefore recognized based on all of previous knowledge obtained by living in a culture.

Photography is also abundant with symbols, as it is with conventions. Symbols are listed as "something that stands for, represents or denotes something else" (OED, 2016). They can stand for something abstract or immaterial, they can be signs that conventionally imply to some process. Upon closer look, one sees that what appears to be an ordinary, normal photograph is often laced with symbols such as flags of nations, gestures that imply to some concept, signs that symbol an idea and many more.

5.3 Mining Twitter (Big) data

There isn't a consensus within the scientific community on what Big Data are nor is an exact definition (Meyer et al., 2013, Schroeder, 2014). It is used to refer to digitally born data, huge in volume, being created in real time, structured or unstructured, flexible and expandable rapidly (Kitchin, 2014: 1-2). It is "research that represents a step change in the scale and scope of

knowledge about a given phenomenon", wrote Ralph Schroder (2014: 6) and a novelty for social scientists as it opens access to various sources for them to study human behavior. It is a 'disruptive innovation', as Rob Kitchin (2014: 10) has described it, giving access to massive quantities of data for social scientists. Big Data studies are also somewhat limited for social scientists as they lack the expert knowledge in computing and statistics. Additionally, several challenges such as access to data and lingual barriers appear: while Wikipedia remains open, Twitter charges researchers for access to its data (Meyer et al., 2013).

Lev Manovich wrote of three groups of people related to Big Data (2011, in boyd and Crawford, 2012: 675): those who produce data, those who collect it and those who analyses it, the latter being the smallest crowd. A group of scientist that conducted the first Big Data quantitative Twitter study concluded that Twitter is far more used as a source of information than a social networking site. That conclusion was derived from studying over 41 million user profiles and their 'social relations' in 2012 (Kwak et al., 2010, in Meyer et al., 2013).

Population that uses Twitter cannot be considered representative of the global population. Dominant English-speaking platforms do not entirely encapsulate the world of social media as Chinese and Russian versions exist. To go even further, danah boyd and Kate Crawford (2012: 669) point out that user and account ratio is not proportional: some users have several accounts, while some accounts are managed by several users. The authors cite information released by Twitter Inc. themselves, stating that 40 per cent of its users log in to observe only.

Twitter data is not accessible to anyone: Twitter makes only a fraction of its data available to the general public through APIs (application programming interface), while a 'firehose' gives access to 100 per cent of unprotected (public) tweets to a paying costumer (boyd and Crawford, 2012: 669). Twitter's advanced search option offers to display content previously published but it is limited in scope. An online analytic tool Topsy, used to mine Twitter data, was acquired and shut down by Apple in late 2015. Additionally, large data sets originating from online sources are prone to outages and losses, Twitter may decide to remove problematic content or tweets (boyd and Crawford, 2012: 669) and this was exactly the case Eugenia Siapera et al. (2015) have encountered. All this has further narrowed the avenues by which researchers and public could access the historical (and real-time) data. These notions stress that the data gathered cannot be seen as truly representational of the entire Twitter population.

Siapera et al. (2015) ventured to analyze the role of Twitter in the 2014 Gaza war. Their work was important for this thesis as it analyzed millions of tweets and spurred several interesting findings. Firstly, they discovered that the majority of sampled tweets were retweets. While collecting data in the aftermath of the conflict, it became evident that some multimedia content was removed, links embedded were invalid and accounts were suspended. The authors concluded that Twitter interventions in accounts and content made it an actor (communicator) in the war (Siapera et al., 2015: 1302). Secondly, software robots (bots) that aggregate content and can be used to spread propaganda or unverified information were discovered as accounts in the sample, thus potentially compromising Twitter as a completely reliable information dissemination platform (Siapera et al., 2015: 1305). Thirdly, data has shown that the conversation on 2014 war was global and ideologically fractured: users from over 50 countries participated in pro-Israel, pro-Palestine or humanitarian divide, mostly from United States, UK, Israel, Indonesia and Venezuela (Siapera et al., 2015: 1315). The Palestinians, even though under Israeli-imposed internet restrictions, managed to participate in, what Tawil-Souri and Aouragh have called 'Intifada 3.0' (2014, in Siapera et al., 2015: 1300), a cyber rebellion and construction and narration of stories from war-stricken and occupied Palestine. Besides mainstream actors such as media, activists and politicians, a new category of an influential actor has risen from Twitter − an individual caught in the conflict, witnessing their experiences on social media. In terms of volume, both activists and individual users have had a significant impact in communicating the pro-Palestinian agenda (Siapera et al., 2015: 1314). The Israeli Defense Forces, in spite their sophisticated strategic communication and placement of visual content on Twitter (a feature desirable for further dissemination of tweets) were mostly perceived as an aggressor in the global conversation on Twitter (Siapera et al, 2015: 1308, 1314). The IDF, an important communicator in the Operation Protected Edge has not utilized hashtags to promote its content.

The authors concluded, even though in 2014 global attention was given to Palestine in the middle of a crisis, the ad hoc Twitter communications have lost momentum in the present and Palestine, presently in ceasefire, seems to be forgotten (Siapera et al., 2015: 1316).

5.4 Social Media Tracking and Analysis System

SMTAS − the Social Media Tracking and Analysis System is result of work by scientists from the Innovative Data Laboratory of the Social Science Research Center in Starkville, Mississippi. The software is organized in modules with capacity to research the social media: features such as phrases, locations, time, volume of data and other traits can be used to research social media (IDL, 2013). The software was tested with the 2012 Superstorm Sandy. It is based on cloud servers and it uses Google Maps for tweet mapping (IDL, 2013). The interface provides researcher with setting a study and parameters for collecting data. SMTAS is currently Twitter-oriented and provides access to 500 million tweets on a daily basis as well as all public tweets as far back as 2006 (those are considered historic data) (IDL, 2013).

5.5 Survey

"A survey is a system for collecting information from or about people to describe, compare or explain their knowledge, attitudes and behavior," explains Arlene Fink (2003: 1). Conducting a survey is an endeavor that comprises of several phases, beginning from setting an objective for a study, designing it, constructing a reliable and valid instrument, administering it, analyzing the data and reporting on the results. Surveys can be conducted directly or indirectly, or by observation. The most often case of conducting a survey is through self-administered questionnaires on paper or via Internet, in person or through telephone (Fink, 2003: 1-2).

Questions are integral part of a survey and it is important they are purposeful (the respondent can easily see the connection between the question and the goal of the survey), concrete, precise and phrased in complete sentences (Fink, 2003: 15). Two types of questions appear in surveys: those in which respondents answer questions in their own words are called open questions and another type is a closed question, where a respondent chooses between selected options (Fink, 2003: 17). Open questions are welcome when it is desired for the respondents to "describe the world as they see it" (Fink, 2003: 17) and can present a challenge for the researcher to interpret. Closed questions are harder to write as they must take into account all possible answers. Still, some respondents prefer them as they are unwilling to express themselves in written words and the results are easily analyzed and interpreted (Fink, 2003: 17-18). Closed questions are answered by categorical (nominal) responses where respondents categorize themselves or others, ordinal responses where they rate or list items and numerical

responses where they provide measurements of age, income or something else (Fink, 2003: 18-19).

Surveys are often administered to samples (mini versions) of a general population. The aim is for the sample to represent the characteristics of the population (a representative sample). Sampling methods can be probability sampling where each unit has an equal chance of making it into the sample or nonprobability sampling where there isn't an equal statistical chance for all units to be included in the sample (Fink, 2003: 33-39). Nonprobability sampling is preferred for hard-to-identify groups and the most common methods are convenience sampling of available individuals and snowball sampling where individuals identify other desirable respondents (Fink, 2003: 40-41).

Qualitative surveys are used for investigation of meanings and people's expressions. They are useful for discovering feelings and opinions, as well when the access is limited to very small samples. They differ from statistical surveys which measure and count phenomenon (Fink, 2003: 61-62). Qualitative surveys don't lean towards generalizable results or average response scores, they rather seek deep and unique responses to the questions under investigation (Fink, 2003: 68). In analyzing qualitative date, an inductive approach where the researcher reviews the data and finds common themes or unifying ideas is useful (Fink, 2003: 72).

5.6 Research design

In order to test the visual construction of reality from data originated from Twitter, this research design grouped prominent images that were posted onto that social network in July and August 2014 and were marked with hashtags. An exploratory study with the Twitter interface was conducted and the work of Siapera et al. (2015) provided insight into the popularity of hashtags, overall visual content and influential actors. The hashtags #GazaUnderAttack, #IsraelUnderFire and #JewsAndArabsRefuseToBeEnemies each nothwistanding supports one side of the coin − one portrayal of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: the Palestinian, the Israeli and the humanitarian stance, respectively. In the aftermath of the conflict, the now defunct tool Topsy had shown that the hashtag #GazaUnderAttack had been used over 7 million times, while the #IsraelUnderFire was utilized just over 400 000 times. Israel had lost the online war, according to numbers (Daileda, 2014; Urlić, 2015). Siapera et al. (2015: 1307) have also identified said hashtags as prominently used, with the Palestinian hashtags dominating in

volume. The assumption is that the dominant "Twitter reality" would be the one of invasion on Gaza.

The data mining encompassed a 50-day time span from July 8th until August 26th 2014. The official Israeli communicator − Israel Defense Forces − @IDFSpokesperson account was mined for data in that time span, considering Siapera et al. (2015) have identified it as an important pro-Israeli actor. The endeavor resulted with a massive sample of over 400 000 individual tweets, of that, a random sample of 45 896 tweets and retweets by 33 775 users was loaded into SMTAS. The hashtags were used globally as the sample identified users from Japan, United States, Australia, Pakistan, Venezuela, Brazil, Malaysia, Indonesia, Nigeria, South Africa, and Saudi Arabia and throughout Europe. The users that were detected there allowed for their tweets to contain a geo-location. This feature can be switched off on mobile devices.

Trend analysis pointed out to most frequent dates on which the conversation with the predominant hashtag took place: 13th, 17th and 20th of July were the most active dates for tweets. As Siapera et al. (2015) have encountered in their research, a lot of the content was removed when following the embedded URLs within tweets. Also, majority of the sample contained retweets.

Since STMAS does not extract visual content from tweets, the trend analysis of keywords offered a starting point by identifying prominent dates. From there, the advanced search option Twitter provided was used to mine images. The overwhelming abundance of images posed a challenge: a pattern of recurring ones was identified by setting search parameters of hashtag, date and photo filtering and scrolling down the newsfeed of historic tweets. The hashtag dominant in volume was #GazaUnderAttack. To identify repeating images, a historic search found 5 frequent ones for the #GazaUnderAttack in week from July 13th to 20th, 5 most frequent ones for #JewsAndArabsRefuseToBeEnemies on July 26th. Both of time frames were identified by trend analysis. An interesting finding was made for the third viewpoint, #IsraelUnderFire. The hashtag was diffused in the abundance of the imagery containing targeted Gaza area. Further along, users paired the same hashtag with the pro-Palestinian one to point towards the bombing is coming from Israel. In order to compensate, tweets from the official Israel Defense Forces Twitter account were mined for photographs. As an official communicator, it has a vast following and high retweets of content, in average, 800 RTs per photograph. As Kwak et al. have discovered

(2010, referred to in Murthy, 2012: 1069), a single retweet of a tweet has the potential to reach another 1000 users. From the time frame, 5 IDF photographs with minimal infographic content and high retweet number were selected. With that sampling of visual content, three viewpoints containing most repetitive photographs on the 2014 Israel-Gaza conflict were grouped.

6   Analysis of variables
6.1   Study 1: deconstruction of photographs collected from Twitter
6.1.1   #GazaUnderAttack

Figure 1 #GazaUnderAttack1 Source: Twitter image search for #GazaUnderAttack

*Figure 2#GazaUnderAttack2 Source: Twitter image search for
#GazaUnderAttack*

Figure 3 #GazaUnderAttack3 Source: Twitter image search for #GazaUnderAttack

Figure 4 #GazaUnderAttack4 Source: Twitter image search for
#GazaUnderAttack

Figure 5 #GazaUnderAttack5 Source: Twitter image search for #GazaUnderAttack

All the photographs depicting Palestinians share a motif of death and destruction. The people depicted are in pain, shock, grieving or distress. The photographs #GazaUnderAttack 2, 3 and 4 clearly show the faces of the subject distorted by emotion, in a state of shock. The collection of photographs instantly implies that the situation is not normal: they communicate chaos, panic, apprehension, indetermination. Perhaps the most shocking one is photograph 2 with a child on a hospital bed, heavily wounded and dead, with its father by it. It is outside of the frame we see arms reaching to the father, in an attempt to comfort him and pull him away from the corpse. Not everyday situations are depicted and the photographs are unsettling, not easy to look at. The playful child with the balloon in photograph #GazaUnderAttack1 acts as a counterpoint to the debris behind him. The balloon, the child's only toy, symbolizes the frail nature of childhood in a war zone, as the balloon hovers over metal spikes, the possibility of it impaling on them remain, rendering the child lost of its only pastime. All the content depicted narrates the aftermath of something, a disruptor that caused havoc. It is unclear from the information they provide what was the cause, but the effects are clearly seen. Pain, loss and instability dominate the photographs.

The common denominator of the group of photographs is the destruction of civilian lives. From the technical side, all the images feature the subjects in the center of the frame, except the last one. The main subject is situated on the left side, looking outside the frame, creating tension. Slightly on the right, but still in the center, a lifeless corpse of a child in an unnatural position draws attention. It is apostrophized by the fact that the scene takes place on a beach, which most people, if not all, associate with relaxation, leisure time and fun. In this case, it is a scene of death and atrocity. All the photographs depict men, their skin darker, not Caucasian. Children are depicted in all of the photographs as dead, suffering or simply stuck in the middle of a war zone. The content infers that the events take place in a conflict region, some place distant. Sartorially, all the subjects are dressed normally, in everyday clothes. The simple fact as clothing hints that they were caught going about their ordinary activities, only to be found in the midst of chaos and captured on photographs. To encapsulate the content of the photographs analyzed, a single emotion covers them all: heartbreak.

The hashtag #GazaUnderAttack with its content is massive in volume and dominates all the others during the research period. Although a lot of photographs in the online environment

featured women, the ones recurring most depicted men. Meads (2014) has found in a #BBCtrending analysis that not all the photographs paired with the #GazaUnderAttack hashtag were originally produced during the 2014 Operation Protective Edge. Some of the photographs posted on Twitter were of older origin or illustrated Syrian and Iraqi conflicts. Nevertheless, they were uploaded by users and paired with the particular hashtag. Therefore, they have been framed as photographs of Palestinians. The last photo of the series, #GazaUnderAttack5, is put into context as an Israeli air strike targeting Hamas killed four boys on a beach. The event was witnessed by a hotel full of international journalists and stories broke on The New York Times, The Washington Post and, first and foremost, Twitter (Taylor, 2014). This research included an original image, however, on Twitter, it was often cropped or shared in a various fashion.

6.1.2   #IsraelUnderFire

Figure 6 #IsraelUnderFire1 Source: @IDFSpokesperson Twitter

Figure 7#IsraelUnderFire2 Source: @IDFSpokesperson Twitter

Figure 8 #IsraelUnderFire3 Source: @IDFSpokesperson Twitter

Figure 9 #IsraelUnderFire4 Source: @IDFSpokesperson Twitter

Figure 10 #IsraelUnderFire5 Source: @IDFSpokesperson Twitter

The photographs disseminated by the IDF tackle threat and response to threat. The first, #IsraelUnderFire1 photograph is a computer manipulation over the Eiffel tower photograph, the symbol of Paris. The city is seen under attack, as explosions are artificially generated in a computer program, as are the three rockets en route to the Eiffel tower. The large message "What would you do?" is covering the center of the frame. In a similar manner, verbal language anchors the message of photograph #IsraelUnderFire2, which shows a large explosion in an urban setting, counting up to 1,000 rocket attacks on Israeli soil in a mere week, consequentially labeling those attacks as murder attempts. The message stemming from photographs entices fear, justification for the actions of bombardment and eventually, compassion and patriotism for people enduring the constant threat of terrorism. The photographs hint that other nations, if they were in the same situation as Israelis, would choose the same course of action.

The background image #IsraelUnderFire3 comprises of a photograph of an Israeli soldier in military gear, his face clearly visible, on the left and a military vehicle with insignia on the right of the frame. Behind the soldier, a wired fence is seen. The color tones are soothing, almost unnatural, as Kohn (2015: 3) has found that images altered through Instagram filters act as "instant emotional buttons", and has identified the IDF practice of using those. The image is a 6x6 imitation of the old photographic camera, a unique Instagram feature that implies traditional and old-fashioned traits (Kohn, 2015: 4). The infographic features information on movements of supplies to the Gaza Strip facilitated by Israel, despite rocket attacks by Hamas on Israeli soil. Therefore, we are familiarized with the soldier, leveled with his kind face, as the text augments the fact that even during conflict, Israel keeps the flow of essentials into Gazan territory, acting as a noble force.

The remaining images depict soldiers in full gear, taking into action. Photograph #IsraelUnderFire4 portrays five soldiers photographed from their left profile running in full military gear with rifles pointed forward are positioned in the center of the photograph, slightly towards the right side of the frame. They run on sandy terrain, with grass-covered area parallel with them and a patch of blue sky with clouds behind them. Their legs are blurred due to their speed. The area of the photograph encapsulating the soldiers, an elliptical shape is lighter than the corners of the photograph, emphasizing them. Equally, the final photograph singles out a soldier in full-gear, pacing forward, with his platoon following behind. The soldiers are depicted

as dominant to the observer, portrayed as valiant protectors always on the move. The perspective levels them in both photographs with the viewer but they are dominant in their appearance. Their supremacy is pointed out both by light around them and the text that counts all the success of the IDF: elimination of terrorists, destroyed tunnels, protected citizens. The message of photographs resonates with the notion that Israeli society is heavily militarized, due to its history, and show that threat is acted upon.

The photographs taken from the Israeli Defense Forces' Spokesperson Twitter account involve content that justifies military action in the Gaza Strip, laurates the military and soldiers and emphasizes the caution and humanitarian side of the aggressor. They repeatedly stress that the Operation Protective Edge is a retaliation for Hamas' rocketing of Israel and by using many infographics and visually appealing techniques (e.g. emphasis by manipulation of light, artificial filters) their messages are clear, they have a widespread reach and evoke feelings of pride and admiration, dominance and power as well. The main message of the photographs is a concentration of power: power to act, power to control, the power of the military. This narration resonates with the State of Israel's foundations, which is the military.

6.1.3 #JewsAndArabsRefuseToBeEnemies

Figure 11 #JewsAndArabs1 Source: Twitter #JewsAndArabsRefuseToBeEnemies image search

Figure 12 #JewsAndArabs2 Source: Twitter #JewsAndArabsRefuseToBeEnemies image

search

Figure 13 #JewsAndArabs3 Source: Twitter #JewsAndArabsRefuseToBeEnemies image search

Figure 14 #JewsAndArabs4 Source: Twitter #JewsAndArabsRefuseToBeEnemies image search

Figure 15 #JewsAndArabs5 Source: Twitter #JewsAndArabsRefuseToBeEnemies image search

Perhaps the most viral group of photographs, the humanitarian visual content mainly posted by users and heavily retweeted (and featured on multiple websites) call for the end of hostilities and peaceful co-existing. All images compose of both Jewish and Arab protagonists, unlike the first two groups which portrayed exclusively one side. On one hand, people wrote messages of peace and photographed themselves or had their photographs taken. On other instances, photographs were artistically constructed, like the photograph #JewsAndArabs5 of a couple overcoming the wall. The last one, along with the two boys on a pro-Palestinian rally call heavily on social conventions of clothing, symbolism of flags, walls, group distinction. Human beings recognize photographic convention on a subconscious level (Lister and Wells, 2001: 75-77). All the subjects of the photographs are seen coming together, in close and intimate physical contact. Photographs #JewsAndArabs 1 and 5 have a young couple, a man and a woman kissing. While it cannot be interpreted what is their ethnicity by observing their clothing or skin tone, it is obvious on the first photograph that the subjects are Jewish and Arab by the written message they hold. The other photograph does not have a verbal anchor. Instead, it relies on clothing conventions (the woman wearing a scarf over her head, the man seen with the lock of hair typical

for orthodox Jews) and symbols, flags of Palestine and Israel. Another strong symbol is the overcoming of a wall that divides Palestinian Gaza from Jewish Israel. The man is reaching down while the woman is climbing up the wall, hinting at their unequal ethnic positions. Nevertheless, they are joined together in a kiss, uniting and surpassing obvious cultural differences.

In a similar fashion, photographs #JewsAndArabs 3 and 4 communicate the message. While photograph #3 features two men modernly dressed, on a busy New York street (the yellow cab and the insignia on the ambulance vehicle reveal it), it is only the piece of cardboard with a message that identifies them as a "Jew" and as a "Muslim". Above the message, a peace sign is inscribed. Photograph #4, on the other hand, immediately calls for the social and sartorial convention of a woman wearing a hijab that recognizes her as Muslim, while her counterpart has a typical Western clothes and appearance. Both of them are signaling the peace sign with their hands, with the Toronto skyline in the background. Here, the written text anchors the message further, calling for a global end of hate and hostilities. Picture #2, the two boys, is decoded instantaneously, and upon closer look it reveals the social conventions that construct it. The boy on the left has darker skin tone, curly hair and a Palestinian flag resting around his neck, as well as a painted version on his right cheek. On the other side of the face, the words "Free Palestine" are painted. He is joined with another boy, with a curly lock of hair descending from his sideburns and a traditional Jewish cap. He is instantly recognized as Jewish − the symbolism of the cap and lock of hair offer no other avenue of deciphering the meaning. However, they come together in unity, hugging. Their facial expressions are calm, serene. The Palestinian boy is slightly smiling and looking away from the frame, while the Jewish boy observes him. They are situated in what seems to be a rally, with a fence behind them. All the photographs convey the message of compassion and togetherness. The overall message that consolidates them is ordinary people reacting to events in the Gaza strip, calling for the end of hostilities and peaceful coexistence.

Overall, the basic communications stemming from the groups of photos are death and destruction for the Palestinian group, military supremacy and legitimacy of the Gaza invasion for the Israeli side and the call for truce and peaceful coexistence for the last, humanitarian group. Grouped individually, they hold a piece of the puzzle, offer some information on the 2014

conflict. When taken into account that they all refer to the same event, a broader narrative is presented. The first group communicates suffering and destruction. The Israeli photographs explain that the invasion of Gaza is caused by constant bombardment from terrorists from that area. Photographs that depict dominance and determination, power overall, are often paired with verbal language that anchors their message by a great deal. It is clear they underline the ability to act on the threat, military discipline and patriotism, pride, determination and swift reaction. In this instance, verbal language embedded in the photograph evokes fairness and care towards the civilians, even though the first grouping strongly presents us with the evidence of mass suffering and death. Finally, the third group of photographs highlights a global humanitarian approach, call for truce and activism. This grouping of photographs also contained numerous symbols. Peace sign, both written and gestured appears in the photographs, as do the flags of Palestine and Israel. Image #JewsAndArabs5 contains the symbol of a wall, a real divider between Gaza and Israel, and in the photograph, the couple is overcoming the wall, thus, symbolically overcoming their ethnic differences.

When presented with the three groupings of images, a narrative can be inferred. It is the terror bombing on Israel that has caused a military invasion on the Gaza strip. The invader is a powerful force, acting in retaliation and responding to a threat. The civilians are caught in between, powerless, collateral casualties. That has, in turn, caused a global campaign of images calling for the end of the conflict. The disruption in this narrative is the invasion on Gaza, bombardment, and a new global situation diffused from it: the world's attention again on the Middle East and its protracted conflict that has escalated once more.

6.2   Study 2: user reception of the photographs

In order to test user reception of the analyzed photographs, a survey created through SurveyMonkey online tool was administered through social media via links, hashtags and retweets. The goal of the survey was for users to describe the photographs and their knowledge of the conflict. The first part sought information on prior knowledge of the conflict and social media use. The second part consisted of attributing descriptions to groups of photographs. Each photograph within a group was described by users and an overall judgement of a group was given. After describing the three separate groups of photographs (Palestinian, Israeli and

humanitarian), respondents were required to provide information on the impact of all the photographs, taken as whole. Finally, they provided basic demographic information.

A total of 93 respondents started out the survey. However, number of responses dropped with the progression of questions. In analyzing individual responses, the majority of respondents who declared had no knowledge of the conflict aborted the survey before looking at the photographs. On other instances, respondents discontinued the questionnaire after witnessing the graphic imagery from the first group. The survey was completed fully by 48 respondents. Malicious respondents who posted nonsense answers were eliminated from the analysis. The sample's majority was female (68%, versus 32% male). The majority (71%) of respondents were 18-24 years old, 25% of respondents between years 25-34 and 4% in year span 35 to 44. Only 2 respondents (4%) cited high school education as their highest achieved level, while the rest (96%) had college education. 84% of the respondents originated from Croatia, while individuals from Italy, Morocco, Pakistan, Spain, United Kingdom and United States of America have completed the survey.

Regarding social media usage, 30% stated they are an active Twitter user, 59% did not identify themselves as active on Twitter, and 11% opted for the answer of not having a Twitter account, but browsing Twitter content occasionally. The majority of the sample did not notice visual content regarding the conflict on Twitter (64%), while in a separate question, the majority of respondents cited mainstream media as a mean of noticing content related to the 2014 Israeli-Gaza war.

The open ended question that sought information on the previous knowledge of the conflict found recurring themes within respondents' answers. They either stated they knew nothing regarding the conflict, that they were aware of the long term hostilities but could not give further clarification and the third recurring theme were users who provided comprehensive historical overview and in-depth knowledge of the protracted conflict. Some respondents answered the question by referring to the most recent clash, the 2014 war. The more comprehensive responses all stipulate the occupation of Palestinian land by Israel and refer to it as the core of the conflict. Others just state that they are aware of the instability within the region. The answers were aggregated by groups of photographs to seek for patterns and recurring ideas.

When confronted with the first group of photographs, #GazaUnderAttack, most respondents identified emotions the pictures convey. Sadness, despair, fear, loss, shock and agony were the most common emotions. Some respondents gave only objective, factual descriptions of the photographs presented. For example, the image #GazaUnderAttack3 was simply attributed as: *"Kids crying."* or *"Children crying by an SUV."* Other respondents gave more complex answers, attributing emotions that resonated from the same picture, such as sadness. At the same time, they tried inferring what happened to the children: the loss of parents, molestation by soldiers. As one respondent (#81) put it: *"Three boys, physically unharmed, cry next to a car. It's impossible to know what affects them. It communicates desperation.*" The image #GazaUnderAttack2, the extremely graphic image of a father with heavily wounded child caused some users to share personal disgust, as they were unable to describe the photograph. Comments such as *"I don't have the words to describe this…"*, *"Too sickening, I can't."* or *"immoral to publish."* were given. Some respondents attributed only emotions as descriptors. For example, terms such as pain or sadness were attributed, while the context was not described.

The exception from other photographs was the image #GazaUnderAttack1, a child playing with a balloon. For respondents, that image communicated hope and innocence in the midst of a war. Child's play was identified as a beacon of hope among ruins, and most people explained that the child was unaware of its surroundings of war. Some attributed general concepts to the story of the child playing, referring to overall horror of war, such as respondent #35: *"There is war, and kids can't be kids and play because everything is destroyed?"* Another respondent (#34) stated that the picture communicates *"children whose childhood is interrupt with war."*

Final two images, which have a recurring theme of men carrying wounded children from rubbles of a bombing, found respondents relating themselves to the content of photographs. While they described the images and what they depict, they were shocked at the fact that such events take place. *"I can't even imagine being there and seeing all this, this is horrible."* and *"Can't believe this is happening while I am writing this, or that this is happening nowadays"* are examples of commentary that found respondents troubled with the imagery. A specifically strong statement was made by a user (#29) who found that the images are all too clear and it is the emotions that they emit are important: *"I won't describe the photographs because the obvious is*

obvious. But the message is something different, for me it is pain, despair, courage, fear, tragedy." Another one pondered what the actual number of children as casualties in the war torn area was.

After commenting on individual photographs, the respondents were asked to summarize their message and the information they provided. In general, the theme of civilian suffering and destruction prevailed. Respondents pondered the futility of war, in which predominantly children are affected and lives of everyday people are destroyed. As one responded (#48) put it: *"it communicates reality, a brutal reality that we pretend not to see, just because it seems too far away from our reality, it seems the reality of somebody's else who, for not being related to us, we can pretend not to see. The message is shocking, is eyes-opening."*

Most of the images from the #IsraelUnderFire group were labeled by users as propagandistic and one-sided content. The image of Paris under rockets, #IsraelUnderFire1 was decoded by 2 respondents to be associated with the Paris attack on November 15th 2015. They also believed that that image was to illustrate that terrorism is a global threat, not confined only to the Middle East. One respondent (#19) poignantly explained the image: *"The photograph asks us what we would if there was a war in Europe, if our own homeland was attacked, and not some distant, third-world country."* Multiple respondents also identified the effort of the image to empathize with Israel's military actions as a PR tactic. The images were seen mostly as a justification for war actions in the Gaza strip: photographs #IsraelUnderFire 2, 3 and 5, which had their written messages tackling terrorist threat and facts on success of eliminating the threat were decoded as such, especially image 3, which was found to be propagandistic, in a manner of a "righteous conqueror". An interesting question was posted by respondent #66 regarding the last photo in the series, #IsraelUnderFire5: *"The photo shows statistics, Israel's perspective. It says 750 terrorists were killed. Number of civilian and child victims is missing. It makes me wonder how did they identify the terrorists?"*

Respondents described the images of soldiers as IDF content that emphasizes the excellence of its forces. One respondent attributed the image of soldiers on the move as "cool" and attempting to resemble an action movie. Short descriptors were often attached to photograph of soldiers on the move, #IsraelUnderFire4: war, power, fear.

The overall reception of the photographs found that users consider them to be predominantly one-sided point of view. Many surveyors branded the photographs as "advertisement". Some did, however, recognize the photographs to explain that the IDF is dealing with a threat of terrorism and defending its territory.

The third and final set of photographs depicting the humanitarian side found users attribute them very positive and hopeful descriptions. Love was the predominant theme attached to the set, as were the notions of peace and tolerance among ordinary people. The people depicted on photographs were often described as "ordinary" and "real", implying that the respondents found images to be trustworthy. In the same manner, people were recognized to originate from different ethnic backgrounds by respondents. The photograph #JewsAndArabs1 and 3 found users recognize the couple's ethnicity via the written messages they were holding. The commentary was positive, as respondent #48 wrote: *"This photo communicates hope for a better future where finally Israeli People and Palestinian will leave in Peace. The kiss, the symbol of the strongest and most positive feeling of the world, gives the image a stronger impact."*, another, respondent #21 stated that *"The peoples themselves don't have so much hate for each other."*

Whereas people on images #JewsAndArabs2, 4 and 5 were decoded as being Jew or Arab based on clothing practices or cultural conventions (hair style of Orthodox Jews or symbolism of flags), they were predominantly described by users as interfaith friendship, interfaith couple, religious tolerance and peace. They found evidence that ordinary people do not wish for war and that coexistence is possible. Commentary such as *"The photo shows two men who come from different ethnical and cultural background, but they're protesting for peace between their countries, Palestina and Israel."* by respondent #69 referring to image #JewsAndArabs3 and others identifying social conventions on image #JewsAndArabs4 followed. *"A man in western clothes and a woman in a hijab hold a pacifist sign in Canada. It suggests that the wish for peace is international."*, *"Another duo of people who hold a paper that says that they refuse to be enemies, even if they are not from the same ethnicity or religion."* and *"A mixed couple in the diaspora are appealing for peace."* by respondents #81, #76 and #75, followed.

Some respondents, however, were skeptical regarding the final photo in the series. They found it to be artificially produced, staged. As respondent #75 described it: *"Very staged photo*

of an Orthodox Jewish man and a hijabi Palestinian kissing across a wall., another offered their own interpretation: *"I don't know why are they holding the flags, it seem insincere like this...Staged, I mean. But, the same as the first photo: It can be peace, the photo communicates the will of the youth to cease the disputes."*(respondent #29). One respondent (#21) even criticized the artistically inaccurate portrayal of Israeli flag, questioning the effects: *"An orthodox Jew is kissing a Muslim woman but they are separated by the wall. They are holding flags but Israeli flag is inaccurate so it looks like a setup. The one who took this photo doesn't understand the cultures he's trying to protect and this could have the opposite effect."* The user clearly referred to the color of the flag, light blue, whereas the color tone of the official flag of Israel is a much darker shade of blue. Overall, the positive commentary prevailed, recognizing differences of people portrayed on the analyzed photographs, as did the intent to entice peace and acts of activism and raising awareness by ordinary people.

When asked what they think of the final set of the photographs, the respondents provided universal responses. They wrote of peace and tolerance, stressing that young, ordinary people (Jews and Arabs, i.e.) do not to live in conflict and accept each other. Love is found in this set of answers to be the connector across cultural differences.

The final part of the survey questionnaire sought information from respondents on the overall situation (the Israeli-Palestinian conflict) they obtained through all presented photographs. It included a diverse set of opinions. Generally they have concluded that the sets are one-sided, and when taken into account together they portray the overall situation completely. Answers that state that the photographic sets illustrate the "whole picture" were identified, as were the statements that the movement of ordinary people would cease the war.

Responses resonated with individual descriptions of photographs. Photographs of IDF soldiers were labeled as extremely one-sided and propagandistic, the Gazan perspective as innocent suffering. The third set was described as somewhat idealistic by some, however, the majority of respondents did decide for the set to contain hope. "*The overall situation is complicated, but, based on the photos, it all comes to the same thing in every war: the little man is suffering because of the decisions made by the ones on top*"– respondent #90 concluded, while another (#84) finished with the thought that "*From what I noticed, the first set goes to show damages on the Palestinian side. The second set is there to legitimize the actions of the Israeli*

state on the Palestinian side in addition to demonizing Palestinians to a certain degree. The third set is there to show that the people of both sides can cooperate, it is up to the states to stop acting in the way they are." Generally, respondents agreed that each set shows a certain perspective, and as one (#54) has poignantly pointed out − "*They are all leading towards one possible truth.*"

Only one respondent, #69, questioned what wasn't shown: '*(...) We didn't see the victims on the Israeli side, neither have we seen the propaganda of the Palestinian side, and the must be one, especially in the modern time of new media and social networks. The photo sets send a good message regarding the fact that children are the true war victims and should end, and that cultural, national and religious differences shouldn't divide us. But in these conflicts is more than just these differences, so it's still a subjective message, and we don't know the political, economic and social characteristic of the area.*"

The overall responses of each group of photographs spanned from mere factual descriptions (describing the literal content of photographs) to describing them in abstract concepts, such as "praying for peace" or inferring the actions of the people depicted and the situations they were depicted in.

7   Conclusion

This research served as an attempt to investigate how users (audiences) perceive the imagery of conflict. While the ratio of photographs utilized was intentionally identical (5:5:5), the narrative inferred from them was disproportionate. All but one respondents offered interpretation regarding the situation based on the content of photographs. The photographs themselves served as a frame for the final account on the conflict. The only exception was a respondent acknowledging that different perspectives exist, although they were not shown, such as Palestinian propaganda and Israeli casualties.

In describing photographs a common theme for respondents was listing factual descriptions that summarize the situation the photographs presented. The next category related to respondents inferring what the photographic message was: threat of terrorism, loss and destruction, war propaganda and demonstration of power or regular people advocating for peace

in conflict. When contrasting the introductory question that sought the knowledge on the conflict with the final interpretation of photographs, a variety of descriptions was provided. It was evident that photographs gave a certain amount of information regarding the 2014 war. The last question was phrased in a way for respondents to give their opinion on the overall situation. Most respondents that gave modest introductory background knowledge pointed out in the last question that the elites incite the war, referring to the fact that there was an international movement of "ordinary people" who did not hate nor wish to fight. They themselves stated that the war must stop. Respondents with more knowledge were more prone to summarize the sets of photographs to be "subjective" and an adequate portrayal of the overall situation. This research has discovered that, as Griffin argued (2010), the images generally did not show the respondents anything they didn't already know: the catastrophe of war and its dynamics. It is interesting that a large number of respondents who could not offer any knowledge on the conflict ended the survey after the first set of photographs. They are all resonating with Carruthers' (2008) idea of "reluctance to see".

This research has found that social media Twitter users have a variety of interpretations of the photographs that are conflict related. While the convenient sample is consisted of almost entirely high educated individuals, they have all followed the same path of decoding them. They have discovered an abundance of negative emotions, attempts to justify the military invasion and casualties and a global movement for peace according to the elements that comprise the narrative. The respondents have, as Sontag (2003: 13) theorized, called for peace to oppose the photographs of atrocities in their own interpretations. The key notion here is they relied on photographs heavily to deliver their responses, never questioning what isn't seen.

Respondents in this research found images from first and third to be shocking and emotionally moving, while the second group was labeled propagandistic. In the overall assessment of the situation, they have drawn parallels implying the complexity of the situation. They have identified the victim (Palestinians), the attacker (Israeli; IDF) and the ordinary people of both ethnicities calling for peace. The situation was described as pointless loss of civilian lives and atrocities of war. Mostly they have constructed their answers upon information the photographs presented, following the logic of relations of power. The crucial notion here is that the photographs, constructs themselves, shaped and constructed the opinions of respondents in

this research. They were confined to interpretations of the visual content presented, almost universally never seeking or questioning a different reality or perspective.

The goal of this research was not to quantify or strictly count the responses. Instead, it takes comfort in allowing a multiplicity of interpretations. Moreover, it has shown that some respondents are reluctant to comment on content they have no vast knowledge of. Likewise, it has shown that images originating from sources such as ordinary people are considered trustworthy, while the ones produced by the institutions are rejected as one-sided. Following that notion, it became clear that photographs served as a source of knowledge, as points of reference in shaping the interpretations regarding the problem at hand. In this case, the images of Palestinians' plight spoke for themselves, them being the central focus of this reality construction.

While those exact images of war have become antiquated, the problem still remains. It will be interesting to witness how the protracted conflict will be portrayed in future on primarily visual platforms of wide use, such as Instagram and Snapchat. In August 2016, exactly two years after "Operation Protective Edge", a new hashtag #PalestineIsHere erupted on Twitter after accusations that Google Maps have erased Palestine's Gaza and the West Bank from its mapping portion (McGoogan, 2016). Also, the solution for the protracted conflict was an omnipresent question for the candidates for the position of United Nations' next Secretary-General, asked frequently in interviews, informal hearings in front of UN's General Assembly and in televised debates. The answer was almost always universal: "two states for two peoples", a concept found in the Peel Report, in Resolution 181, amongst many political scientists and the international community, who believe that the proposed avenue is the only one that will end hostilities (Kasapović, 2016: 297)

The topic of this research was a hard one. It is never easy to look at images of conflict and suffering. Nevertheless, they remain present in the torrents of Twitter feed. Flowing in abundance of other imagery and video content, they remain a reminder of someone else's reality.

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9   Summary

During the 2014 Israeli-Palestinian conflict dubbed 'Operation Protective Edge', the photographs stemming from the conflict in the media, primarily the social media, shifted the world's attention once more towards the protracted conflict between the State of Israel and the Gaza Strip. The war was led in an online environment, where visual contents, photographs and videos depicted Palestinian suffering or the Israeli side of the story, and some called for a peaceful coexistence. Bearing in mind that the photographs, depending on who sent them, depicted different points of view, different realities, the primary goal of this Master's thesis was to discover how Twitter users perceive the photographs of conflict, since they construct different tales. This research sought to find out how Twitter users read the photographs, how critical are they towards them and do they rely merely on the presented visual material or seek additional information.

The task was to extract the photographs published on Twitter between July 8th and August 26th 2014 uploaded with the following hashtags: #GazaUnderAttack − photographs depicting the Palestinian side, #IsraelUnderFire− photographs of the Israeli Defense Forces and #JewsAndArabsRefuseToBeEnemies − the photographs of a humanitarian movement. To gather the groups of the photographs the SMTAS (*Social Media Tracking and Analysis System*) software for Big data analysis was utilized. After the photographs had been grouped in a ratio 5:5:5, according to the themes they depicted (Palestinian, Israeli and humanitarian), they were analyzed with two methods: qualitative content analysis and narrative analysis. They were then distributed to Twitter users as a part of a online survey questionnaire. The survey was answered by 93 users. By testing their previous knowledge regarding the conflict and the reception of photographs, parallels were drawn that point out that the photographs did create their own perception of reality regarding the conflict. The analysis discovered vast interpretations of the photographs, with emphasis that almost all respondents relied solely on the information presented within the photographs, never seeking additional information outside the confinement of the photographic frame.

Keywords: Twitter, photography, media construction of reality, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Israel, Gaza

10 Sažetak

Za vrijeme izraelsko-palestinskog sukoba iz 2014. godine, sukob medijski poznat kao "Operacija Zaštitni rub", fotografije tog sukoba koje su putem medija, a ponajviše putem društvenih mreža obišle svijet, još su jednom skrenuli svjetsku pozornost na dugotrajni konflikt između Države Izrael i Pojasa Gaze. Rat se tako, na neki način, odvijao i u *online* okruženju gdje su vizualni sadržaji, fotografije i video snimke, prikazivale patnje Palestinaca ili izraelsku stranu priče, a neke od njih pozivale su na miran suživot. Imajući na umu da su fotografije, ovisno o različitim pošiljateljima, prikazivale različita gledišta tj. različite stvarnosti, primarni cilj ovog diplomskog rada bio je otkriti kako korisnici društvene mreže Twitter percipiraju fotografije sukoba, budući da one konstruiraju različite priče. Istraživanjem se pokušalo doznati kako korisnici Twittera čitaju fotografije, koliko su kritični spram njih te pouzdaju li se isključivo u prezentirani vizualni materijal ili traže i izlažu dodatne informacije.

Zadaća je bila izdvojiti fotografije objavljene na Twitteru u razdoblju od 8. srpnja do 26. kolovoza 2014. godine uz sljedeće oznake (#*hashtags*): #GazaUnderAttack – fotografije koje su prikazivale palestinsku stranu sukoba, #IsraelUnderFire – fotografije Izraelskih Obrambenih Snaga te #JewsAndArabsRefuseToBeEnemies – fotografije humanitarnog pokreta. Kako bi se prikupile grupe navedenih fotografija korišten je SMTAS (*Social Media Tracking and Analyis System*) softver za analizu velikih količina podataka. Nakon što su grupirane tematski u omjeru 5:5:5 sukladno svakom gledištu (palestinskom, izraelskom i humanitarnom) analizirane su koristeći dvije istraživačke metode: kvalitativnu analizu sadržaja te analizu narativa. Potom su kao sastavni dio upitnika distribirane korisnicima Twittera putem *online* ankete. Anketi je pristupilo 93 ispitanika. Testirajući njihovo prethodno znanje o sukobu i recepciju fotografija, povučene su paralele koje ukazuju na to kako su fotografije konstruirale njihovu percepciju stvarnosti o sukobu. Analiza je otkrila mnoštvo interpretacija fotografija, s naglaskom na činjenicu da su gotovo svi ispitanici analizirali skučene informacije koje su prenijele fotografije, bez da su tražili informacije izvan fotografskog kadra.

Ključne riječi:

Twitter, fotografija, medijska konstrukcija stvarnosti, izraelsko-palestinski sukob, Izrael, Gaza

11 Appendix

Links to tweets that contain images used in the study

#GazaUnderAttack:

1. https://twitter.com/plutocrata/status/490282215314440192 accessed on 21.3.2016.

2. https://twitter.com/ShahidMursaleen/status/487748010445914113 accessed on 21.3.2016.

3. https://twitter.com/LubnaK/status/489556094696837121 accessed on 21.3.2016.

4. https://twitter.com/DichosdeChavez/status/504051976456638465 accessed on 21.3.2016.

5. https://twitter.com/misilak/status/490281682336231424 accessed on 21.3.2016.

#IsraelUnderFire - IDF Spokesperson

1. https://twitter.com/IDFSpokesperson/status/489152175575015424 accessed on 27.3.2016.

2. https://twitter.com/IDFSpokesperson/status/490785110799564800 accessed on 27.3.2016.

3. https://twitter.com/IDFSpokesperson/status/491194272016654337 accessed on 27.3.2016.

4. https://twitter.com/IDFSpokesperson/status/498893729353064448 accessed on 27.3.2016.

5. https://twitter.com/IDFSpokesperson/status/496917432687001600 accessed on 27.3.2016.

#JewsAndArabsRefuseToBeEnemies

1. https://twitter.com/Concitoyen/status/493132163110670336 accessed on 23.3.2016.

2. https://twitter.com/paulo_terroso/status/493123208334573568 accessed on 23.3.2016.

3. https://twitter.com/safeworld4women/status/493927039255076866 accessed on 23.3.2016.

4. https://twitter.com/abgutman/status/492522239405735937 accessed on 23.3.2016.

5. https://twitter.com/Ansosi/status/493085276005466112 accessed on 23.3.2016.