

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Communicating Critique: Toward a Conceptualization of Journalistic Criticism

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*This study explores the concept of “journalistic criticism” from theoretical and empirical perspectives. To achieve this goal the study analyzes the ways in which journalists shape representations of criticism through their coverage of events in general and especially in times of war and conflict: specifically, Israeli news media during the Second Lebanon War (July–August 2006). We present 2 models that deconstruct critical journalistic texts: The first tracks the various possible sources, contents, and objects of journalistic criticism; the second explores the different possible levels of journalistic criticism. The discussion explores the use of “reaffirming criticism” as a tool enabling journalists that cover their own national conflict to express fierce criticism as professionals, without challenging the establishment’s basic assumptions.*

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## Introduction: Criticism as a journalistic norm

Among the many titles associated with modern journalism, such as the “watchdogs of democracy” and “the fourth estate” (Cook, 1998), the concept of “criticism” and the journalistic practice of “criticism” have remained central. Researchers, educators, and journalists argue that criticism represents the soul of a free press, and that educating toward critical thinking must be a central component in journalists’ training (Maras, 2007; Reese & Cohen, 2000; Zelizer, 2008). Without criticism, journalism would be a tool in service of the political establishment or corporate wealth. For this reason, much research has examined the degree to which the news media are critical of those in power and the effects of such criticism. Is criticism by the news media successful in destabilizing the establishment? Does it trigger political processes? Or are its effects negligible? (Ettema & Glasser, 1998; Gitlin, 1980; Herman, 2000). Likewise, the question whether criticism by the news media reinforces public trust in the political

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system, or instead creates a “spiral of cynicism” leading to distrust and skepticism, has also been examined (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997).

Although much research has explored the degree to which journalists are critical of those in power and the political implications of such criticism, most existing scholarship does not devote attention to the fundamental question of what “journalistic criticism” is and tends to treat this phenomenon as self-evident. As Zelizer (2008) argued, “In effect, the mention of critique as a relevant prism for thinking about journalistic practice reminds us that its long-heralded role in providing a critical reading of events taking shape in the public sphere has been somewhat overlooked, though its practice continues unabated” (p. 89).

This study sets out to repair this neglect through an exploration of the interconnections of journalism and criticism; it investigates and problematizes the concept of “journalistic criticism” to conceptualize it better, both theoretically and empirically. To achieve this goal, the study analyzes the ways journalists shape *representations of criticism* through their coverage of events in general, and especially in times of war and conflict. The latter is emphasized because in times of national crisis professional dilemmas are exposed and often amplified in ways not usually noticeable in everyday reporting (Hallin, 1984, 1986; Neiger & Zandberg, 2004; Zandberg & Neiger, 2005). Specifically, this study probes representations of criticism that appeared in the Israeli news media through its coverage of the Second Lebanon War (July–August 2006).

To address such queries, we suggest two models that serve as research tools for a critical exploration of journalistic criticism. As mentioned, most existing discourse concerning journalistic criticism revolves around the degree to which journalists stand against government or stand by government. Conversely, this study looks “inward,” into the field of journalistic work, and investigates the practices through which journalists develop a rhetoric of criticism and constitute a critical discourse. It examines criticism as a professional tool utilized by journalists to deal with dilemmas inherent to journalistic practice. In other words, this study expands current communication scholarship through a comprehensive conceptualization of the term “journalistic criticism.”

A salient example of the complexity of this “rhetoric of criticism” is to be found in the public and inner-professional discourse in Israel following the end of the war in Lebanon, when the Israeli Press Council commissioned a committee to devise special ethical regulations that would apply in times of war. This act was the result of fierce criticism voiced across the political spectrum regarding the conduct of the Israeli news media during the war (Israel Press Council, 2007). On the one hand, many of those testifying before the committee claimed that the Israeli news media had acted irresponsibly, even treacherously, and thus harmed Israel’s war efforts. Although this perception was mostly advanced by politicians and members of the general public—who sent protest letters to ombudsmen of various news outlets and circulated internet chain letters (Benziman, 2007; Weimann, 2007)—it was also shared by several journalists: For example, in an article titled “Serving the Hezbollah” (Levy, 2006; Schiff, 2007), journalist Yossi Levy claimed that “from the point of view of

the combat soldier who is also a journalist, broadcasters acted irresponsibly and with reckless abandon.” At the same time, however, countering the claims that the Israeli news media had collaborated with the enemy and were generally overcritical, other voices—such as that of the left-wing media watch organization “Keshev”—argued that the media had operated in service of the establishment and “national morale.” According to this perception, “apart from a few isolated, exceptional cases. . . all main outlets of the Israeli media covered the war in an almost wholly conscripted fashion” (Keshev, 2007, p. 7).

The existence of two such contradictory opinions about the role played by the Israeli news media during the war—too much criticism that encouraged the enemy, or no substantial criticism while supporting hegemony—illuminates the complexity of the concepts discussed and elaborated in this article.

In the first section of this tripartite article, we explore the ways in which the notion of “criticism” was previously conceptualized by scholars of communication, especially in journalism studies. Next we present and discuss two models that conceptualize the fundamental aspects of journalistic criticism. The concluding section of the article puts these models into the context of journalistic practice and explains the central role of the rhetoric of criticism in journalistic work.

### Theorizing criticism

As a theoretical concept, “criticism” has multiple philosophical sources. Our own is found in Kant’s work, in which the concept of “critique” plays a fundamental role. Kant revolutionized philosophical thought on epistemological and ontological questions, especially that concerning the nature and limits of human knowledge. According to this stream of thought, “critique” means observing a concept from a skeptical standpoint, achieved through independent engagement with theses presented previously. Scholars of the Frankfurt School, whose work connected Kant’s thought to Marx’s political economy critique, were the first to be referred to as critical theorists, as a result of Horkheimer’s (1937) essay *Traditional and Critical Theory*, which differentiated the Frankfurt School from other, less political and subversive schools of thought. Thereafter, the concept “critical theory” functioned commonly as a synonym for neo-Marxist theories and later, in a broader sense, for social critical thinking.

In literary studies, the concept of criticism rested on the notion of literary work as an object for evaluation and analysis. Over the past few decades, however, the merging of various philosophical, sociological, linguistic, and literary strands of thought has charged the concept of “criticism” with additional meanings. The reason is mainly that after the 1960s—the decade of the “New Criticism” in literary studies, which focused on the text per se, rejecting “external” (i.e., autobiographical, sociological, political) readings—new schools appeared in literary theory that inserted social questions into literary research. Similarly, linguistic studies moved toward examining the text within the context in which it is embedded, alongside its relations with political power structures. Thus, inspired by the Frankfurt School and the Birmingham School,

the fields of Critical Linguistics (Fowler & Kress, 1979) and afterwards Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) use the term “critical” to emphasize that signs and their meanings are studied in a broad social context, with examination of the concept of “power” in its social sense (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; van Dijk, 1993, 1998). These issues are expressed, for example, in examinations of the linguistic description of minorities, or the role of language in the construction of the social world in times of crisis and war. One research avenue of this merging of philosophical, sociological, linguistic, and literary disciplines is cultural studies, to which the term “critical” is often appended. Following this line of thought, the contextualization of the term “criticism” in communication research usually involves an analysis of the reciprocal relations between the media and closely related fields, particularly politics. For instance, critical scholars tend to analyze the operation of the news media as an agent of the state, serving the interests of the establishment and its various institutions. According to this analysis, criticism might appear in the news media, but nevertheless these media continue to function in their essence as tools for the dissemination of dominant ideology (Herman & Chomsky, 1988).

Correspondingly, when looking into the dynamics of journalistic work, the terms “journalistic criticism” or “oppositional journalism” are often used in communication research to describe news media that stand against the establishment, point out injustices, and in some cases offer solutions or alternative ways of thinking (Hamilton, 2000; Harcup, 2005). The journalistic endeavor of providing critical coverage has been explored within larger cultural and political contexts concerning the timing of such criticism (conflicts and war versus routine) and the legitimacy of its aiming at political institutions (Hallin, 1984, 1986). Thus arises the term “sphere of legitimate controversy,” in which discourse about controversial issues, recognized as such among the legitimate institutional participants in the political process, takes place; the discourse rejected by the political mainstream of society belongs to the “sphere of deviance.” Following Hallin, Bennett (1990) posited his indexing hypothesis: The media provide an index of the range of opinion among the social elites as represented by legitimate political sources. Journalistic criticism thus represents only a narrow range of opinion, and oppositional voices perceived as “extreme” have little chance of being heard in the media (Althaus, Edy, Entman, & Phalen, 1996).

Much analytical attention has been paid to the role of journalism in times of war and crisis. Such studies have regarded coverage of war or crisis as the acid test of government–media relations (Peri, 2006), and as an extreme test case of journalism’s role in society (Allan & Zelizer, 2004; Liebes & Frosh, 2006) and of the work conventions of the journalistic community more specifically (Neiger & Zandberg, 2004; Zelizer, 1992). Several scholars argue that in times of war or crisis journalism tends to lean toward the consensus and the conscripted model, based on what is perceived as “the good of the state”—that is, adopting the dominant/hegemonic view of the establishment, avoiding criticism of the state and its representatives (both military and civil), emphasizing social solidarity by focusing on positive action and the shared goals of the in-group, and portraying the enemy stereotypically while

amplifying its threatening nature. As Waisbord (2002) wrote in reference to the media's reaction to the 9/11 attacks, "Sheer patriotism fully emerges in situations in which the 'national community' is considered to be at risk" (p. 206).

This pattern of journalistic operation is especially common in countries such as Israel, which are constantly engaged in violent conflicts and where the majority of practicing journalists are highly committed to the country's founding ideology (Liebes, 1997). Hence, this study aims not to analyze the relations between Israeli media and the establishment but to explore the varied nuances of the concept of journalistic criticism and to understand the central role of the rhetoric of criticism in journalistic practice in times of crisis.

### Models for analyzing the journalistic criticism

One may argue that any journalistic text, particularly any journalistic text with salient narrative characteristics, is critical. Emphasizing one narrative in the story at the expense of another, selecting certain terminologies rather than others, or choosing a specific viewpoint, photograph, or layout will always represent certain aspects of the story while weakening or silencing others. Any type of coverage is in certain ways, explicitly or implicitly, a criticism of other viewpoints that are not represented. A headline such as "Olmert [the Israeli PM]: Israel is not in a hurry to reach a ceasefire" (*Haaretz*, July 31, 2006) is to some extent implicit criticism of those within and outside Israel who call on the country to stop the war. Moreover, in the context of criticism against the war, the headline could also be read as critical of Olmert, who is not working to end the war.

Alongside questions regarding the *critical content* (can reinforcement of military morale be considered criticism?) and the identity of the *source of criticism* (can the Prime Minister be the source of criticism?), questions are raised regarding the *objects of criticism*. That is, who is this criticism directed at? Are journalistic attacks against those opposed to war "critical?" Should criticism of civilian "cowardliness" be considered criticism (or just a rebuke)? Is criticism by the Israeli media of the foreign media to be considered criticism? Does criticism by Israeli journalism of its own work during the crisis turn the news media into a reflexive watchdog? Finally, can criticism of the enemy be considered journalistic criticism, or is it simply the reproduction of official propaganda? Thus, pragmatically, we can suggest that "journalistic criticism" is a mediated expression of a social institute or an individual pointing at a failure or a flaw in another social institute or individual. This definition seems extremely broad, as it covers a wide spectrum of expressions, from direct and explicit to subtle and implicit, in different discursive environments (e.g., a front-page news item, an analysis, or print and broadcast interviews), through a variety of roles, elementary practices, speech acts, rhetorical instruments, and tactics, e.g., "challenge/support" (Blum-Kulka, 1983; Labov & Fanshel, 1977), "Face Threatening Act" (FTA) (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 2006/1967), or "adversarial" stance (Clayman & Heritage, 2002).

Following this general definition, we strive to classify the different manifestations of the rhetoric of criticism by deconstructing it and by sorting out the various actors that can serve as the sources and/or objects of criticism and the shades of critical content manifested in the news media. The model attempts to focus more closely on journalistic representations of criticism, while examining in detail the identity of those expressing criticism within journalistic texts, the different types of criticism, and the wider implications of selecting different types of critical frames (Ryan, 1991; Wolfsfeld, 1997). The model is derived from an examination of the news coverage of the Second Lebanon War, from the beginning of the war until a ceasefire was announced (July 13–August 14, 2006), in two of Israel's prominent daily newspapers: the popular *Yedioth Ahronoth*, which has the widest readership in Israel, and the highbrow and influential *Haaretz*, which is the most popular newspaper among Israel's elites (a total of 56 issues—28 of each newspaper—as in Israel there are no Saturday issues). The compiling of items containing *journalistic criticism* was conducted in order to illuminate the main sources and targets of criticism and to distinguish between various levels of criticism. Following the logic of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1997), this was done so that the proposed theoretical model would be derived from findings in the field.

The process of locating journalistic criticism and classifying it was executed in several consecutive phases: First, we compiled all of the items regarding the war that appeared in the news sections of the two newspapers, a total of 1,484 items. Then we tracked items in which either headlines, subheadlines, opening paragraphs, or highlighted portions of the text included markers of criticism: all inflections of the words “criticism,” “protest,” “failure,” “flaw,” “dispute,” “disappointment,” and “complaint”; additionally, we tracked the use of strong reporting verbs (e.g., argue, claim, emphasize, demand) or the phrasing of questions with no answers (e.g., “who gave the orders?” *Haaretz*, August, 1, 2006, p. 2), which seem to be one of the salient rhetorical devices for the expression of journalistic criticism.

Next, out of this initial corpus of data we tracked items in which “journalistic criticism” (according to the abovementioned definition: a mediated expression sourced by a social institute or an individual pointing at a failure or flaw in another social institute or individual) was a core theme rather than a lateral issue (such as the case of a report on Israel's air strikes that ended with a brief note that Lebanon plans to complain to the UN). Following this vetting process, we located a total of 172 items, an average of 3 critical items per newspaper issue per day. This means that less than 12% of the news items published throughout the war manifested salient expressions of journalistic criticism. In the last phase of our case-study classification process, we aimed to classify the 172 items featured according to main variable that will be fully explained later, that is, whether the criticism challenges the establishment basic assumptions or reaffirms them. This coding process was conducted by three coders; 15% of the 172 news reports were coded for reliability by all three coders, and the nominal Krippendorff's Alpha for this item (challenging/reaffirming criticism) was 0.85.

Within a given social and cultural context and a specific media frame:

Source of Criticism (S)	Content of Criticism (C)	Object of Criticism (O)
Journalistic Arena (S1)	Criticism of the decision to act/not to act (C1) (Why? Why now?)	Journalistic Arena (O1)
Political Arena (S2)	Criticism of the magnitude of the action and targets (C2) (How much?)	Political Arena (O2)
Military Arena (S3)	Criticism of the method of action (C3) (How? What tactic?)	Military Arena (O3)
Civil Arenan (S4)		Civil Arena (O4)
International Arena (S5)		International Arena (O5)

**Figure 1** The Different Manifestations of Journalistic Criticism

The model presented in Figure 1 demonstrates the difficulty of dealing with the concept of “journalistic criticism” in generalized and unequivocal ways, and highlights the complexity of this concept when it is translated into actual journalistic products. Because we argue that criticisms that appeared in the journalistic texts could have evolved from five major sources (S), were targeted at five major objects (O), and focused on three fields of content (C), the model offers 75 different variants of criticism ( $5 \times 3 \times 5$ ), which may appear in different permutations in any given journalistic text. Thus, journalistic criticism must be viewed as a dynamic, contextual, and interpretive field of study. We will now illustrate the model and elaborate on its different components:

#### Source of criticism (S)

Criticism may stem from five different arenas. The fundamental distinction is between criticism arising from the journalistic arena and criticism that the text presents as arising outside it. This distinction illuminates journalism’s apparent double role, as a public arena for different actors and as a legitimate actor itself within this arena. Criticism from within the journalistic arena generally stems from journalists and analysts expressing their reservations about the war. The other arenas that serve as sources of criticism are the political (e.g., parliamentary opposition, coalition members, and nonparliamentary sources), the military (e.g., soldiers and officers

in compulsory or reserve service), the civil (e.g., organizations or citizens), and the international (e.g., leaders of foreign countries, international organizations such as the UN, and international media).

As in any model, borderline cases, namely sources that “belong” to more than one arena, may be found here as well. Examples are criticism leveled by members of parliament who are retired high-ranking officers, or even active reserve duty soldiers (political or military arena), and the like. This complexity is evident even in only one of the potential sources of criticism: On July 26, *Haaretz*'s military correspondent Amos Harel wrote a column titled “Did the IDF [Israel Defense Forces] fail?” On August 2, Harel cowrote a column with his colleague Avi Issacharoff in which they noted “growing criticism within the military of the management of the operation.” Thus, similar criticism was expressed twice, once by the newspaper's military correspondent and once by military sources. Moreover, Harel probably formulated his own earlier criticism after consulting his sources, or rather selected suitable sources to support the opinion expressed in the first article. Because the presentation of the source of criticism in a journalistic text is complex, it highlights the fact that journalists can never simply “reflect” or “mediate” reality.

Generally, two major sources of criticism were prominent during the war: journalists and analysts, and IDF personnel. The newspapers thus served as a stage for criticism from within the IDF (voiced by soldiers, officers, and reserve officers), but mostly produced criticism stemming from the newspapers' journalists and analysts. In this context, the marginal representation of criticism leveled by politicians was noticeable. As expected, taking into consideration the indexing hypothesis (Bennett, 1990), during the war there was almost no critical discussion in the press in which ministers or Knesset members took an active part. On August 10, following the 29th day of the war, *Haaretz*'s headline announced that “the pro-war consensus is over: *Meretz* (a leftist opposition party) is joining the protests,” and so the media started to reflect criticism among the social elites as represented by legitimate political sources. Journalists commented on the absence of politicians from the protest sphere: On August 13, a month after the outbreak of the war, two of *Haaretz*'s correspondents wrote, “The political arena woke up over the weekend, after a month in which the opposition backed the government and the IDF.” On the same day, *Yedioth Ahronoth* carried the headline: “The Right [i.e., the opposition]: the restraint is over.” So during the first month of war, members of the political arena seem to have rarely criticized the government's or the military's actions—or, more accurately, such criticism did not find its way into the press. Only when the fighting was almost over and its outcomes, as well as public opinion about it, were clearly evident did the politicians once again allow themselves to publicly criticize the authorities through the press, or rather, this criticism was once again mentioned in the press.

### **Object of criticism (O)**

State institutions and elected political players who are authorized to make policy decisions are the most obvious candidates for journalistic criticism. At the same



time, the spectrum of such criticism may span across a multitude of individuals and entities such as specific sectors or institutions in the local public sphere, international organizations or countries that oppose the policies implemented by local officials, or even the national media themselves, whose criticism can be conceived as either too cooperative or not cooperative enough with the initiatives of the political leadership. This last type of criticism can also be understood as “second-order criticism,” a critique of the disapproval of the war from various actors (see also Thompson, 2000).

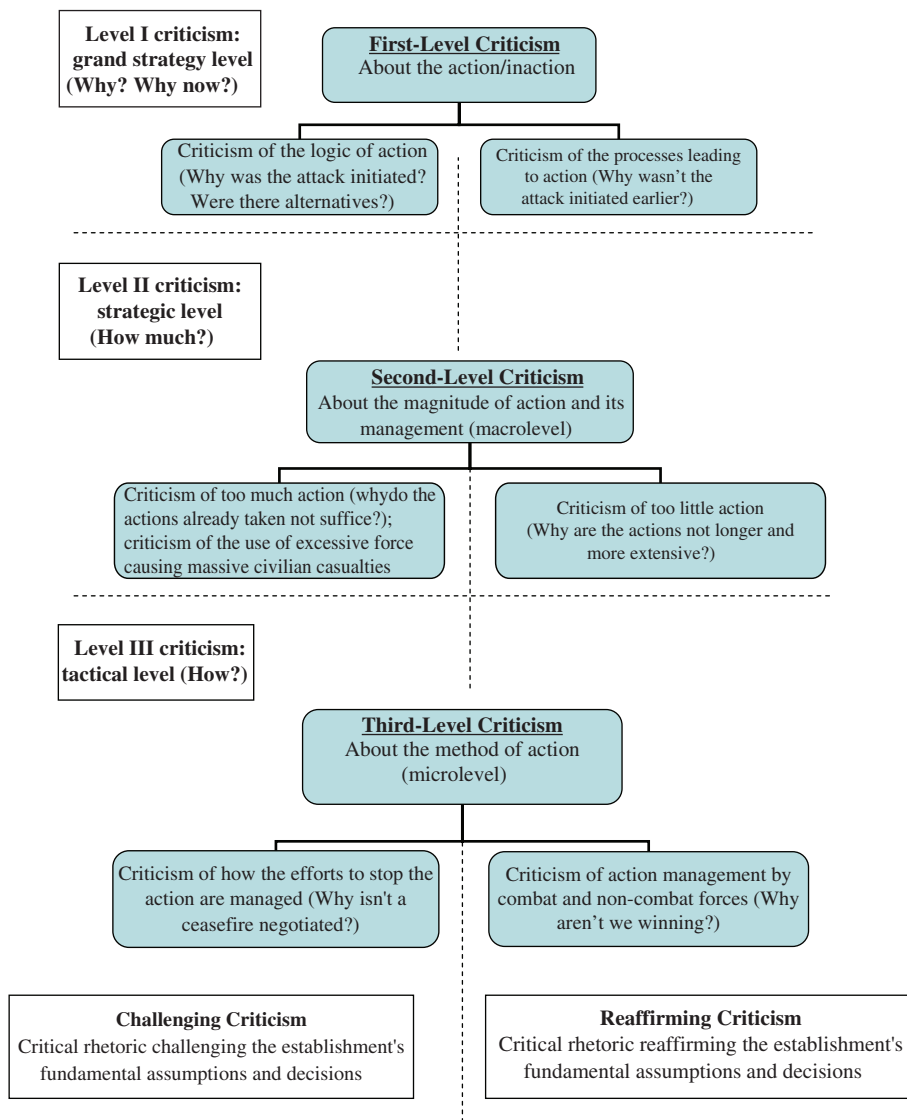
During the 2006 Lebanon War, prominent targets of journalistic criticism were the Israeli government (the Prime Minister, other ministers, and government policy in general), civilian authorities (such as local municipalities and emergency services), and the state’s military authorities (senior officers, security decision makers, combat forces, the military spokesperson, etc.). A typical example of such journalistic criticism appeared in a *Yedioth Ahronoth* article on August 11 under the headline “The soldiers are furious: the government is deliberating and we’re dying.” Through this headline the newspaper presented piercing criticism of the government. But in the article much of the criticism was actually targeted at the military itself. A third target of criticism mentioned in the item was the state’s civil authorities: local municipalities, welfare organizations, and so on.

In other cases, identifying the object of criticism was not easy. For instance, an article in *Yedioth Ahronoth* stated that the State Comptroller had started investigating the Ministry of Housing’s functioning in evacuating the home front. The headline stated: “In the middle of the war: the Comptroller is already examining the failures in evacuation.” This text can be seen as criticism of the Ministry of Housing and of the establishment’s treatment of the home front, but it can also be viewed as criticism of the Comptroller, who began investigating failures even before the war had ended.

Finally, while the Israeli government and the military establishment were the two main objects of criticism, and certain journalistic criticisms were leveled at international organizations and governments and at the Israeli press itself, we found no journalistic criticism of Israeli citizens. Nevertheless, we added the “civic arena” to the possible targets of criticism because we took into consideration documented examples from the first Gulf War, when Israeli citizens leaving areas struck by Iraqi missiles were termed “defectors” (Liebes & Kampf, 2007). The existence of such “empty cells” in the empirical examination of our proposed model in this specific case study—although it is not empty in other cases—is logical given the general and theoretically driven character of models.

### **Content of criticism (C)**

We point to three major types of criticism content: the action’s guiding logic (Why? Why now?); the magnitude of the action and targets (How much?); and the method of action (How to act?). These questions illuminate the inherent contradictions embedded in the use of the generalized term “criticism”; moreover, such nuanced distinctions might help explain the simultaneous claims that during the war Israeli journalists were too critical and that they were not critical enough.



**Figure 2** Levels and Content of Reaffirming and Challenging Criticism

To clarify the coexistence of seemingly opposing types of journalistic criticism, we analyzed the potential content of criticism through a second model (see Figure 2), which presents three levels of the content of criticism and suggests that at each level it may be presented in one of two ways: as challenging the establishment's viewpoint or as reaffirming its values and actions.

First-level criticism focuses on the fundamental level of grand strategy, and thus highlights questions about the allocation of resources to achieve national goals. At

this level, questions about the overall necessity of the action are raised. Such criticism doubts the logic of going to war, questions the motivations for war, and asks why political alternatives were not sought. In addition, a different type of criticism, likewise focused on the grand strategic level, may condemn the government for not dealing with this security threat earlier. While this kind of criticism also targets the political establishment, it in fact reaffirms its current actions: The criticism focuses on previous lack of action, and thus supports the logic and necessity of military action now.

An example of challenging criticism that confronts the logic of the war could be found in the words of the first war refusenik, as cited by *Haaretz* on July 17: “Only resistance of the type I have chosen will bring an end to the insanity and shatter the false impression that the home front is united in support of an unnecessary war.” Similarly, *Haaretz* covered a demonstration against the war, with the headline “Stop the stupid war’ demanded 2,500 demonstrators in Tel Aviv” (July 23). Some of the challenging criticism on the first-level (grand strategy) was heard when voiced by Israeli-Arab citizens. An example of this practice was found in a *Haaretz* July 19th article in which “Hassan from the Lower City [of Haifa]” was quoted as saying: “what Israel is doing is a crime. They should negotiate and release the hostages in Lebanon. Not everyone is Nasrallah. Children were killed there, women. I’m not saying that Israel shouldn’t fight, but it should fight the right people. . . I identify with the country in which I live. . . but it disturbs me that I don’t see any left wing party raising its voice about what is going on.” Thus, using a quote by an Arab citizen, the newspaper presented a radical critique of official policy: against the military response to the kidnapping, against the extent of military action, against the method of action, and against the lack of reaction by left wing parties. However, for Hebrew readers such criticism was easier to digest, or even understandable when it came from an Arab.

An example of first-level reaffirming criticism may be found in the words of Major-General (Res.) Yossi Peled in *Yedioth Ahronoth* on the first day of fighting (July 13): “In a report I wrote six years ago. . . I noted various failings. . . It was emphasized that Hezbollah must not be allowed to be arrayed along the fence. What has been done with that since then? Nothing.” Likewise, two *Haaretz* reporters commented (July 16): “The change along the border is important and should have come before the kidnapping [which triggered the war] had the government heeded the warnings of the military.” In these cases the criticism centered on the earlier lack of action, so it was supportive of the war, reinforcing and reaffirming its logic.

Second-level criticism focuses on the strategic level and addresses the magnitude of military operation. This type of criticism is based on either an agreement with the logic of the necessity of action or an acknowledgment that the war is actually being fought. After the war was launched, its opponents could no longer advance their cause by concentrating only on their original claim that war was unjustified. The war was a fact, so at that stage effective challenging criticism focused on ways to limit it, or to end it altogether. Those who opposed the war to begin with were now joined by

supporters of the war in principle who were nonetheless critical of its extent. Such challenging criticism, directed against Israel's excessive use of force, was heard within Israel and on the international scene. It asked why the war could not be stopped after a few days; whether the number of Lebanese civilian casualties was not excessive; and so on. The opposite type of second-level criticism, reaffirming criticism, could be traced in the argument that Israel was not using its military capabilities to the fullest magnitude; that it was delaying the deployment of ground forces; or that it could have opted for heavier air strikes and more massive artillery fire.

An example of second-level challenging criticism appeared in a July 14 *Yedioth Ahronoth* article, two days after the outbreak of war, under the headline "The world: Israel's reaction is excessive." We must stress that most of the challenging criticism on this level, as of challenging criticism on other levels, appeared in the newspapers in the form of criticisms voiced by international sources such as the international press, foreign diplomats, and foreign citizens demonstrating against Israeli policies. One of the most prominent sources for this type of criticism was UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, whose claim that the killing of four UN soldiers by Israeli fire appeared to be intentional was quoted in *Haaretz* (July 27th) and in *Yedioth Ahronoth* (on July 31st, under the logo "All the world is against us"). This was complemented by reports about criticism of Israel abroad. Thus, for example, on July 17th, *Haaretz* published some of the criticism by European media of Israel's excessive use of force.

Examples of second-level reaffirming criticism were extremely common throughout the entire war. For instance, *Yedioth Ahronoth* (July 11) quoted soldiers who claimed: "We're like sitting ducks. . . Why aren't all these villages being bombed? In any event we won't win the Nobel Peace Prize." Another soldier was quoted as saying: "Hezbollah must understand that if you get yourself involved with the IDF, you pay a heavy price. These villages should be demolished from the air, and soldiers should not be sent to die there. . . You can't fight with your hands tied behind your back." One of the most demonstrative examples of the use of this kind of rhetoric appeared in *Yedioth Ahronoth* on July 18, when a public opinion poll was presented under the headline: "71% of the public: More force should be used." In the same issue, this newspaper's Editor-in-Chief, Rafi Ginat, wrote a personal column in which he attacked those demanding the use of less force in Lebanon. In this case Ginat's text clearly falls under the category of "journalistic criticism," though it was criticism aimed at those critical of the government's actions rather than at the government's actions themselves.

Second-level criticisms addressing the magnitude of the use of force were very different based on the identity of the sources cited. Criticism from abroad that appeared in Israeli newspapers systematically argued that excessive force was being used; the dominant voice from within Israel was that too little force was being used. Within this context, much of the criticism that the newspapers chose to emphasize was voiced by low-ranking soldiers, who called into question their commanders' judgment. This type of criticism appeared throughout the war, and reached its climax when *Yedioth Ahronoth* reported on August 11 about a group of reserve soldiers

whose comrades were killed during the war. These soldiers commissioned a public opinion poll that determined that most of the public (91%) supported destroying villages by air raids, whereas only a minority of the population (8%) called for the deployment of ground forces. This type of criticism, targeted at the military's senior ranks, simultaneously highlighted several points: criticism by low-ranking soldiers of high-ranking officers; the opposition of public opinion to the military's methods and magnitude of action; and the fact that low-ranking soldiers had appealed to civic public opinion to support their criticism of their military commanders. The ways in which newspapers voiced (as more passive players, reflecting authorities) and shaped (as active agents, by choosing sources, headlines, editing, etc.) the rhetoric of criticism in this context emphasized civilians' desire for greater involvement in supervising the military, as well as the rejection of the military's authority.

Third-level criticism focuses on the tactical level and thus addresses the ways in which particular war-related actions are carried out. This type of criticism is based on agreement with the war's logic and magnitude or on acknowledgment of its actual existence, which has to be dealt with. Challenging criticisms on this level discussed, therefore, the tactics of advancing a ceasefire. For instance, challenging voices asked why Israel's Foreign Ministry was not more proactive in brokering a political agreement between the fighting sides; why various international agencies were not taking part in the negotiations; and so on. This type of criticism could frequently be traced in direct quotes from international leaders urging Israel to negotiate; it was far less common in direct references made by Israeli journalists and commentators. This type of criticism appeared, for example, in *Haaretz's* July 31 headline: "Europe condemns the bombing; Blair: the situation cannot go on."

Third-level reaffirming criticism endorses the war's logic and magnitude, but it questions the outcomes of the war. Accordingly, such criticism focused on questions regarding the ways in which various military operations were conducted, the logistical aspects of the fighting (why were the fighting forces supplied with insufficient equipment, ammunition, and food?), and the management of the home front. Another type of reaffirming criticism at this level targeted state diplomacy, claiming that, while the logic, magnitude, and methods of military action were justified, Israel had not successfully explained and justified its actions to the world. This specific type of criticism does not attend to "real" aspects of war management but to the ways in which war is represented in the (mostly foreign) media.

Examples of reaffirming "operational" criticism were found throughout the war. For example, on July 30, journalist Yossi Yehoshua wrote in *Yedioth Ahronoth* that "after 18 days of fighting, it has become clear that the IDF suffered a series of operational failures, wrong decisions, and accidents that have led to many casualties." Similar tactical-level criticism could be found in the July 24 issue of *Haaretz*, in which a reporter warned that factories in Israel's northern region were required to hire private companies to connect them to siren systems warning that missiles had been fired; the newspaper's welfare reporter, Ruth Sinai, wrote that the Ministry

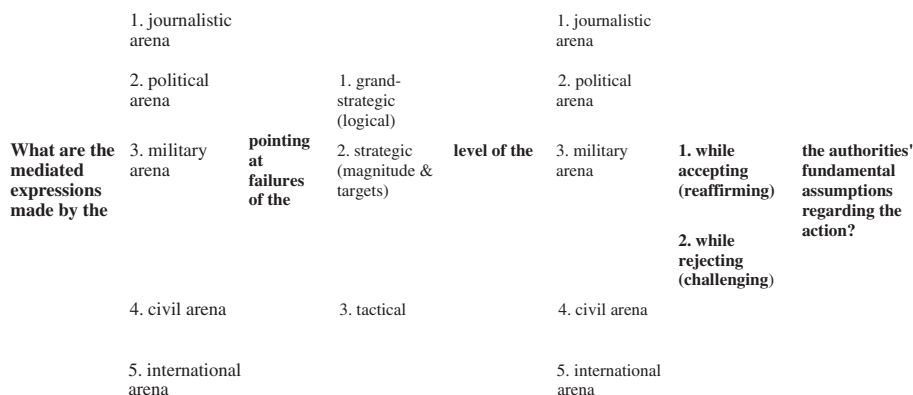
of Finance wanted to postpone decisions about compensation for casualties of the war.

A July 30 *Haaretz* headline leveled criticism at the failures of Israel's public diplomacy efforts: "Images of destruction from Lebanon are changing European public opinion." Likewise, in a July 27 column in *Haaretz*, former MK Yossi Sarid focused his criticism on public diplomacy and was particularly critical of the parade of generals frequently appearing on television: "TV, apparently, is not the military leaders' strongsuit, and we should hope that they have much stronger assets."

A rather vague, but nevertheless fierce, object-targeted criticism could be found in *Yedioth Ahronoth* (e.g., July 13, p. 4; July 16, p. 4; July 23, p. 4), separate boxes were used with a headline or logo proclaiming "The Difficult Questions." In these boxes, a battery of questions cast doubt over the judgment of the senior command (why had no one paid attention to the warnings about kidnappings?) or the commanding officers (why had the unit entered the village in daylight?). By presenting these questions, journalists challenged the existing state of affairs and thus, implicitly, the establishment. In the absence of a clear object of criticism, however, the critical dimension was somewhat blurry, and the fact that no response by the (implied) objects of criticism was included prevented the development of any productive discourse.

All of these examples represent the wide variety of third-level reaffirming criticism, ranging from the management of active combat operations to the more defensive (home-front) and rhetorical (public diplomacy) aspects of war management. At the heart of all of these criticisms stands the wish to understand why Israel was not winning on all the different fronts in which the war was being waged. Here again, both categories—challenging and reaffirming criticism—seem to dispute official lines of action, the one pointing at failures in peace/ceasefire management and the other criticizing various operational aspects of war management. What makes "challenging criticism" challenging on this level is that, once more, it suggests an overall change of direction: from an emphasis on actions conducted within the military arena (i.e., fighting) to a focus on the arena of political negotiation.

Our distinction between challenging and reaffirming criticisms helps clarify the logic that guided the rise of two parallel yet contrasting arguments regarding the extent to which Israeli journalism was critical during the war. As mentioned, we coded the different types of criticism and found that less than 27% of the representations of criticism can be classified as "challenging criticism" (46 items out of 172). Thus, those who claimed that journalistic coverage was too critical seem to have referred mainly to the volume—that is, the sheer *quantity*—of criticism and its aggressive tone, even if much of this criticism actually reaffirmed the use of force, endorsed official policies, and focused on tactical themes or Israel's public diplomacy failures. In contrast, those who claimed that journalistic coverage was not "really" critical or that it was not critical enough apparently referred mainly to its *quality*—as challenging criticism constituted slightly more than a quarter of all critical coverage, whereas many news items contained the mirror image of criticism, which are behind the scoop of this



**Figure 3** The Integrated Question for Mapping Journalistic Criticism

article: Reporting that was supportive of the war efforts, sometimes even encouraging belligerent actions.

The first model deconstructs the concept of journalistic criticism and highlights the complexity of the journalistic critical texts. The second model suggests three levels of criticism, in each of which one can find two kinds of criticism, “challenging” and “reaffirming.” The integration of the models could be conceptualized as a mapping question (see Figure 3), which might serve as a tool for researchers focusing on journalistic criticism within the context of war coverage; with small modifications, it may also be used as a basic tool for the study of journalistic criticism in other contexts (i.e., replacing the “military arena” with the “industrial/economic arena” in case of an economic crisis).

### Conclusion: Journalistic criticism between nation and profession

This article explored the idea of journalistic criticism as a multilayered concept and analyzed the different types of the rhetoric of criticism through an analysis of the coverage of the 2006 Lebanon War in the Israeli press. We presented two models that offer a theoretical deconstruction of critical journalistic texts and suggested that scholarly investigation of these texts be rethought. The use of the two models in analyzing journalistic criticism in the coverage of the Second Lebanon War helps to better understand journalistic practice, especially at times of conflict and crisis.

The first model deconstructs the concept of journalistic criticism and highlights the various compositions that might be used to produce such criticism. As documented in this study, journalists made use of critical rhetoric throughout the war; but at different stages, they made use of different “blends” of criticism. The wide variety of the possible rhetoric of criticism enabled journalists to match their criticism to the different contexts that framed their coverage of the war: the changing realities of the war, political movements, shifting public opinion, and more. During the early stages of the war, Israeli journalists focused their criticism on the government and the

military for not having done enough to prevent the kidnapping of the two soldiers that had triggered the war, and for allowing the Hezbollah to strengthen its military might. Later in the war, most critical rhetoric focused on tactical issues having to do with the deployment of combat forces. Toward the end of the war, we traced critical rhetoric that opposed the war in general, as well as its strategic management.

The second model focuses on the contents of journalistic criticism; it suggests that at each level of criticism (grand strategy, strategy, and tactics) one can find criticism that either challenges or embraces the overall logic of official policies. We claim that the second, reaffirming type of criticism can be also understood as a professional device during violent conflict, when the journalist is a member of both the professional community and the national community.

In previous studies (Author A & Author B, 2004; Author B & Author A, 2005), we suggested that journalists covering their own nation should be conceptualized as professionals trapped between nation and profession. On the one hand, the values of the professional community call on journalists to tell a story that is factual or appears to be factual and objective. Although it is acknowledged that this goal cannot be fully accomplished, these are still the values that lie at the heart of the journalistic profession (Schudson, 2001). On the other hand, the national-cultural community calls on journalists to take part in the conflict, to be a weapon in the battleground of images, and thus to tell a story that is neither balanced nor objective, but rather leans toward the community to which they belong. Drawing on Rorty's (1991) well-known dichotomy, we can say that in such cases journalists are torn between two contradictory aspirations: the professional aspiration to objectivity and the national aspiration for solidarity. The use of "reaffirming criticism" as a professional tool enables journalists to remain loyal both to their profession (in which criticism is a central value) and to their nation (because this kind of criticism does not challenge the establishment). Therefore, journalistic texts may communicate a rhetoric of criticism, but they do not necessarily subvert the fundamental notion of national unity.

These conclusions are supported by the findings of previous research. In the Israeli context, Zandberg & Neiger (2005) found that, during the first few days of the Palestinian-Israeli citizens' demonstrations in October 2000, Jewish-Israeli journalists embraced the worldview of politicians and the security establishment, asked few critical questions, and therefore excluded the Arab citizens and identified them with the Palestinians in the occupied territories. Only after several days had passed, and only after politicians had changed their views, did a process of "paradigm repair" (Berkowitz, 2000) take place, and coverage became more challenging of authorities. Internationally, one can point to Schudson's (2002) relief at seeing the September 28, 2001, edition of *The New York Times*, which for him marked the beginning of the demise of the wall-to-wall consensus that characterized American journalism after the 9/11 attacks. The return of American journalism to standard reporting conventions was expressed in its willingness to criticize the government and to cover events using the somewhat distant tone that is characteristic of news media



in democratic societies. These studies suggest a dynamic, interpretive perception of the journalistic profession. At times of national crisis, journalists' default mode of operation is identification with commonly perceived "national interests"; later, alongside developments and processes led by the political arena (Wolfsfeld, 2004), journalists adopt a more critical stance and challenging tone.

In his essay "The End of Journalism? Notes on Watching the War," relating to the Gulf War's coverage, Elihu Katz wrote: "The combination of information management, instant news, empty analysis and the best of intentions threaten the future of critical journalism" (Katz, 1992, p. 12). Almost 2 decades later, in a new media age of bombardment of users with nonstop information, we can notice that mainstream journalism has not abandoned the ideal of criticism, but, nevertheless, at times of conflict, journalists usually prefer to take the safer path, which does not challenge authorities and which reaffirms their basic assumptions, leaving the road less traveled by—the challenging criticism—to alternative media.

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## **传播批评：将新闻批评概念化**

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### **【摘要：】**

本研究从理论和实证的角度探讨了“新闻批评”的概念。为实现这一目标，本研究分析了记者如何通过报道本身，特别是在报道战争和冲突年代的事件中形成对批评的观点：具体则指第二次黎巴嫩战争（2006年7月至2006年8月）的以色列新闻报道。我们提出了构成新闻批评文本的两个模型：第一个模型追踪了新闻批评各种可能的来源、内容和对象；第二个模型探讨了新闻批评的不同层次。本文探讨了记者使用“重申批评”这一个工具在报道自己国家冲突中允许他们表达作为专业人士的激烈批评，同时又不挑战当局的基本立场。

## Communiquer la critique : pour une conceptualisation de la critique journalistique

Motti Neiger, Eyal Zandberg & Oren Meyers

Cette étude explore le concept de « critique journalistique » d'un point de vue théorique et empirique. Afin d'atteindre ce but, l'étude analyse les manières par lesquelles les journalistes cadrent les représentations de la critique dans leur couverture d'événements en général, et particulièrement en temps de guerre et de conflit. L'article se concentre particulièrement sur les médias d'information israéliens lors de la deuxième guerre du Liban (juillet-août 2006). Nous présentons deux modèles qui déconstruisent les textes journalistiques critiques. Le premier suit les divers sources, contenus et objets possibles de la critique journalistique. Le second explore les différents niveaux de critique journalistique possibles. La discussion explore l'usage de la « critique confirmative » comme outil qui permet aux journalistes couvrant leur propre conflit national d'exprimer une féroce critique à titre de professionnels, sans pour autant contester les aprioris de l'ordre établi.

# Communicating Critique: Toward a Conceptualization of Journalistic Criticism

## 대화적 비판: 언론적 비판의 개념화

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### 요약

비판의 개념과 비판의 언론적실행은 자유언론의 가장 중요한 기능들 중 하나로 간주되고 있다. 따라서, 많은 연구들이 저널리스트들이 이들을 비판하는 정도를 연구하였다. 그럼에도 불구하고 현존하는 학문적 성향은 언론적 비판주의가 무엇인가에 대한 근본적인 질문을 던지지 않고 있다. 따라서, 본 연구는 이론적 그리고 실증적인 측면에서 언론적 비판주의의 개념을 연구하였다. 이러한 목표를 성취하기 위해 본 연구는 어떻게 저널리스트들이 비판의 전형을 형성하는가를 일반적인 사건들의 보도와, 특히 전쟁과 갈등상황에서의 보도를 통해 다루었다. 본 연구는, 특히 2006년 7월과 8월사이에 발생한 두번째 레바논 전쟁기간동안 이스라엘 뉴스 미디어내에서 나타난 비판의 전형을 연구하였다. 우리는 비판적인 언론적 텍스트를 분석하기 위해 두가지 모델을 사용하였다. 첫번째 모델은 여러 가능한 정보들, 내용들, 그리고 언론적 비판주의의 목표들을 추적하였으며, 두번째는 언론적 비판주의의 여러 다른 수준을 연구한 것이다. 본 논의는 저널리스트들이 전문가로서,그들 자신의 국가적 갈등들을 강도높게 비판하기위해 사용하는 도구로서 재확인 비판주의를 사용하였다.

Comunicando la Crítica: Hacia una Conceptualización de la Crítica Periodística  
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### Resumen

Este estudio explora el concepto de la “crítica periodística” desde las perspectivas teóricas y empíricas. Para alcanzar su objetivo este estudio analiza las formas en las que los periodistas dan forma a las representaciones de la crítica a través de la cobertura de eventos en general y especialmente en tiempos de guerra y conflicto; más específicamente, las noticias de los medios Israelíes durante la Segunda Guerra con el Líbano (Julio–Agosto del 2006). Presentamos dos modelos que deconstruyen los textos periodísticos críticos: El primero rastrea varias fuentes posibles, los contenidos, y los objetivos de la crítica periodística; el segundo, explora los niveles de crítica periodística diferentes posibles. La discusión explora el uso de la “crítica re-afirmante” como una herramienta que permite, a los periodistas que cubren sus conflictos nacionales propios, expresar críticas furiosas como profesionales, sin desafiar el establecimiento de las asunciones básicas.