Israeli Journalism during the State’s Formative Era
Between Ideological Affiliation and Professional Consciousness

This article explores the process by which Israeli journalists in the 1950s and the 1960s forged a communal identity by thinking and writing about issues such as the importance of the journalistic profession, sources of their professional authority, reporting conventions, and their assessments of good and bad journalism and the appropriate ways to distinguish between them. It also explores how fundamental tensions between ideological and professional affiliations were concretized via various journalistic “areas of contention.” Thus, it indicates how debates over specific issues, such as preferred journalistic writing styles or the optimal relations between the Israeli media and military censors, could be better understood within the larger context of this process of journalistic self-definition.

The first yearbook of the Association of Tel Aviv Journalists, Sefer ha-shanassah ha-iteha'um, was published in 1942. It had 347 pages and included a geographic description of Israel and detailed reviews of the agricultural production of various Jewish settlements and the activities of the Jewish Agency. Only ten pages, located in the last third of the yearbook, were dedicated to journalists and their work, with a list of the newspapers and weeklies appearing in British-ruled Mandatory Palestine. It was not until 1956 that the discussion of journalistic work and journalistic values moved to the opening pages of the yearbook, and it took several more years until the foremost publication of Israeli journalists focused on journalism.

This illustrated some of the fundamental characteristics of the mainstream Israeli journalistic community during the formative years of the country. Primarily, it showed the community’s firm identification with the Zionist endeavor, and the gradual process by which Israeli journalists formed a professional identity and gained recognition as a community in their own right. Thus, this article concerns the ways in which the journalistic community was shaped in Israel through the 1960s: the structure of Israeli media ownership and control; the identity of the members of the journalistic community; the internal divisions within the community; and the ways in which membership in this professional community was defined.

This study follows James Carey’s proposed research agenda for the field of journalism history. “When we study the history of journalism,” he wrote in Journalism History in 1974, “we are principally studying a way in which men in the past have grasped reality. We are searching out the intersection of journalistic style and vocabulary, created systems of meaning, and standards of reality shared by writer and audience. We are trying to root out a portion of the history of consciousness.” Therefore, this article aspires to track down the ways in which Israeli journalists of the 1950s and 1960s comprehended and constructed social realities within the broader political and cultural contexts of their work. Through a multi-faceted search of primary and secondary data it offers the first exploration of the process by which Israeli journalists forged a commu-
nal identity in the country’s early years. It examines the ways in which they thought and wrote about issues such as the importance of the journalistic profession; the sources of their own professional authority; reporting conventions; and their assessments of good and bad journalism and the proper ways to distinguish between them.

By doing so, this study portrays and analyzes the interplay between the stories that Israeli journalists of that era told as professionals and the stories they told about their profession. At the same time, the article also considers the stories that mainstream Israeli journalists agreed not to tell, as a way of illuminating their perception of what it meant to be a commendable journalist. Finally, the article offers an exploration of how the fundamental tensions between ideological and professional affiliations were concretized via various journalistic “areas of contention.” It indicates how debates over specific issues, such as preferred journalistic writing styles or the optimal relations between Israeli media and military censors, can be better comprehended within the larger context of this process of communal journalistic self-definition.

Tracing the development of the Israeli journalistic discourse during Israel’s first two decades was facilitated by the examination of multiple sources. The primary venue for the discussion of issues such as journalistic values and practices during that era was the yearbook of the Association of Tel Aviv Journalists, which was searched for all relevant references between 1947 and 1967. Other references to those issues were located in the journalistic coverage of debates over issues such as leaks or the activities of military censor. Similarly, data was gathered from the Archives of the Tel Aviv Journalists Association, the archives of the Israeli army (the Israel Defense Forces, otherwise known as the IDF), autobiographies of prominent journalists and officials, and academic studies of Israeli journalism.

The decision to focus this study on the period between the establishment of Israel and the mid-1960s resulted from the wish to portray the origins of current Israeli journalism, as they were shaped during Israel’s first two decades of existence. Towards the end of the 1960s and to a greater extent during the 1970s the Israeli journalistic community began to adopt a more professional ethos, due to political changes, such as a gradual decline in the hegemonic role of the Israeli labor movement, as well as the ongoing influence of some of the processes described in this article.

When considering the Israeli journalistic community during the country’s formative era, it is important to address the pivotal role of journalism in the Zionist movement. Theodor Herzl, the movement’s founder, was a well-known journalist in Vienna before he became a political leader. In fact, his coverage of the Dreyfus trial in 1894 and the French army’s blunt anti-Semitism was a major influence on his decision to advocate a Jewish national movement. Perhaps, the outstanding example of this personal bond between the Zionist movement and “its” journalists could be found in Nahum Sokolov (1860-1936), who was considered “the father of Hebrew journalism.” His paternal status was formalized when it was decided to name the building that houses the Tel Aviv Journalists’ Association after him as well as a major journalism prize (awarded by the city of Tel Aviv). At the beginning of his journalistic career, he was skeptical regarding Zionism, but later he became an avid supporter. Like many of his Jewish journalistic peers he had a clear sense of his journalistic mission: he aspired to mobilize support for the Zionist idea, contribute to the revival of the Hebrew language, and combat the opponents of Zionism. Moreover, he never perceived himself only as a reporter, or even as an essayist, serving as a delegate to several Zionist congresses and as the president of the World Zionist Federation. Hence, it is hard to differentiate between his political activities and his journalistic writings.

This blur between political leadership and journalistic practice characterized many other prominent figures in the Zionist movement, such as Zeev Jabotinsky, Berl Katzenelson, and Moshe Sharett. All were active journalists who perceived their journalistic work as a means of promoting their political agendas. According to journalism scholar Dina Goren, this phenomenon contributed to the slow development of an independent professional sense of journalistic consciousness among Zionist and Israeli journalists:

Throughout the years in which the Jewish People had no sovereignty, its sons could not attain to real political positions, at least not as Jews. Those who wanted to manifest themselves in the political arena had to make do with the substitute of covering politics, rather than actually being involved in it. Journalism provided that substitute.”

Beyond the immediate involvement of Zionist parties and leaders in journalism, a deeper connection existed between the Zionist movement and the Hebrew language. Hebrew newspapers were the vehicle through which the ancient language was revived and disseminated; for instance, Fleezer Ben-Yehuda, the father of modern Hebrew, published and edited several consecutive Jerusalem newspapers around the turn of the twentieth century. All of his publications promoted his Hebrew revival agenda and attacked the traditional Jewish ultra-orthodox, anti-Zionist establishment. Adhering to the same line, the Zionist establishment in Mandatory Palestine fought the non-Hebrew newspapers, which it perceived as representatives of Diaspora tendencies. A second factor to be considered when discussing Israeli journalism in the first years of the state is that the establishment of

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Israel in 1948 did not create a totally new reality in the life of the Jewish community in Palestine. The fledgling state inherited many of the characteristics of the preceding voluntary Yishuv. On a personal level, the political leaders of the Yishuv became the ministers and high-ranking officials of the new state that was led by Mapai (Israel’s major labor party, Milquet Pohei Erez Israel, which means Land of Israel Worker’s Party), that was established in 1930 and was the dominant political party in both the pre-state and the early post-state years.

The same was true for journalism’s elite, consisting long after 1948 of journalists, editors, and publishers who had entered the profession in the years of the British Mandate (1918-1948). A close resemblance between the political and journalistic elites in the first years of Israel also could be found in their members’ personal traits: the great majority of those in the two groups were middle-aged men who migrated to Palestine from Europe out of ideological (mainly Zionist) motivations. Furthermore, the link between the journalistic and political elites was underscored before and after 1948 through the many politicians who were actively involved in journalism.

Another feature of continuity between the pre-state and the post-state eras was the ongoing politicization of most realms of social life. Although Israel’s founding father, David Ben-Gurion, managed to neutralize challenges against the monopoly of the IDF in the use of legitimate force, in other spheres of life functional compromises were chosen over a more statist approach. For instance, in 1953, after prolonged debates, the state recognized the political legitimacy of two religious educational systems (one autonomous and the other semi-autonomous) operating alongside the state’s general schooling system. All through the first decades of Israel’s existence political parties maintained an influence that extended far beyond pure politics and into issues such as employment, housing, healthcare, and more.

The same type of direct political influence existed in the realm of journalism, in which the party-affiliated newspapers played an essential role in informing and mobilizing the supporters of each party. Most of the newspapers appearing in Israel’s first decade were affiliated with political parties, and in 1948 about two thirds of Israeli journalists were employed by party newspapers. Furthermore, the belief that Israeli newspaper consumption was driven by political beliefs was sustained through various means. For example, the IDF determined which daily newspapers should be purchased for its soldiers on the basis of both circulation among the general public and the number of Knesset (the Israeli Parliament) seats that each party newspaper “represented.” This calculation, of course, discriminated against private newspapers that did not represent political parties.

In brief, these two factors—affiliation with the Zionist enterprise and continuation of pre-state patterns—contextualize the examination of the work of Israeli journalists in the first years of the state. Journalistic practitioners did not have to invent Israeli journalism in 1948. Instead, they accommodated existing ideological and structural constraints to the new circumstances.

In 1950, seventeen dailies were published in the newly born state of Israel: eleven Hebrew dailies, two German dailies, and one daily each in English, French, Arabic, and Hungarian. Fourteen of the newspapers appeared in the morning, two in the evening, and one in the afternoon, and ten of the newspapers were affiliated with political parties, labor organizations, or the government. There also were thirty-eight weeklies and biweeklies published in Israel, catering mostly to specific audiences, such as soldiers, children, sports fans, and youth movement members.

Since Israeli television did not begin broadcasting until the late 1960s, the only available electronic medium in Israel during the 1950s and early 1960s was the radio. After the state was established, Kol Yisrael replaced the official Mandatory Kol Yerushalim and the radio stations of the Jewish undergrounds. During the 1950s Kol Yisrael was directly supervised by the prime minister’s office, and it dedicated large portions of its programming to the development of a new Israeli culture and to its dissemination among the large population of new immigrants.

During the 1950s, Israeli national newspapers did not readily reveal their circulation figures, but a 1952 article published in the Journalists’ Yearbook by Ezriel Carlebach, the first editor of the daily Ma’ariv, provided some insights. He noted that a 1950 UNESCO survey reported that the most popular Hebrew daily in the country was Ma’ariv, an independent with an average circulation of 33,000. It was followed by Davar, which was published by the General Federation of Labor and was affiliated with Mapai, a 25,000-circulation daily; Ha’aretz, an independent with 23,500 circulation; Yedioth Aharonoth, a 21,000 independent; Al Hamishmar, which was published by the leftist Mapam party and had 17,500 subscribers; and six Hebrew dailies. The most widely circulated non-Hebrew daily was The Jerusalem Post, which was owned by the Histadrut and had a circulation of 24,000.

According to Carlebach the data was partly inaccurate, and in the article he provided different figures (although it was non-specific for each paper) based on Israeli governmental information. This followed an internal Ma’ariv memorandum on 1951 in which he had reported the following daily average circulation numbers, which were probably based on the governmental data: Ma’ariv, 44,500; Davar, 29,100; Ha’aretz, 27,200; Yedioth Aharonoth, 25,300; and The Jerusalem Post, 14,400. Whichever figures were correct, in general, the circulation tendencies persisted throughout the entire decade and into the 1960s: Ma’ariv was clearly the most popular newspaper in Israel, followed by the two more upscale leading morning dailies, Davar and Ha’aretz, and the second major popular evening newspaper, Yedioth Aharonoth.

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When the new state was born Israeli journalists had to redefine their mission within the new circumstances. Throughout the 1950s, the Israeli journalistic community was engaged in a constant discussion over its shared path. Two major conflicting impulses characterized this internal discourse: the desire to maintain the press' status as an integral component of the Zionist endeavor versus the wish to develop an authoritative professional identity.

On April 4, 1951, Prime Minister Ben-Gurion addressed the Israeli Parliament and replied to criticism from Menahem Begin, the leader of the right-wing opposition Herut party, about a bill to regulate the transition from the first to the second Knesset. He dismissed one of Begin's arguments by claiming it was based on an article in Ha'aretz: "But what is a newspaper?" Ben-Gurion asked. "Whoever has money opens a business, hires laborers and writes whatever he wishes. I worked in a newspaper, and I know what a newspaper is." This famous phrase enraged the Israeli journalistic community. Two days later Carlebach, the first editor of the (independent) daily Ma'ariv and arguably the most influential Israeli journalist of the 1950s, countered with an article that highlighted the ideological component in the self-perception of Israeli journalists of the 1950s. After he rejected Ben-Gurion's accusations that Israeli journalists could be bought, he addressed their motivations by talking about their readers:

Our journalism, as a unit, as a part of our social life, is far better than the journalism of many other peoples, perhaps no other nation in the world has finer journalism. And the journalists are not the ones to be thanked for this. We are certainly not any better than our fellow practitioners elsewhere. But our audience is better than in any other nation. . . . A Jewish audience does not share its Prussian master's view on "what is a newspaper." This audience sees the newspaper as more than just a business. . . . [Through the newspaper] the audience can follow the most important of all issues: Zionism, and what we have done, and are going to do as a nation, as a state, as a movement. And a newspaper that is solely based on money and its goal is money, a newspaper of hired thinkers and writers, a newspaper without an ideal at heart, just won't make it.36

Most Israeli journalists of the 1950s, especially those who entered the profession before 1948, were unable to position themselves as critical observers of the young state. This held for journalists writing for the party-affiliated newspapers, who openly promoted ideological goals, as well as for journalists such as Carlebach, who wrote for privately owned newspapers.37 The mainstream Israeli journalistic community of the 1950s was not only supportive of the Zionist ideal but also viewed itself as an integral part of the fulfillment of this vision. In some instances, as demonstrated in Carlebach's statement, it was hard for them to distinguish between the achievements and challenges of the journalistic community and those of the entire Zionism.

Or as the late Hanah Zemer, Davar's editor from 1970 to 1990, explained in 2002:

We are talking about a period in which all the leadership of the [journalistic] profession was composed of people who were active in the field before the establishment of the state. They stood by the state's cradle and felt that they were among those who established it. For them, the interests of the state were more important than the interests of their newspapers. . . . For instance, if someone applied for a journalistic job, they [the employer] would first check to see whether the General Security Service had a file on him. 38

The tendency to frame and value journalistic work through ideological criteria was evident in several ways. First, it was reflected in instances where journalists defined their professional mission. In 1948 the Israeli delegates to the International Jewish Journalists' conference defined Hebrew journalism in the following manner: "[I]t provides a trustworthy representation of the struggles that accompany the revival of the Jewish people in its homeland. It [Israel journalism] is statistic in its nature, and it is the ability to lead whenever required."39 Similarly, in 1955, seven years after the establishment of the state, one of Davar's senior writers stressed the pivotal role of Israeli journalism in the effort to build a new Israeli nation, pointing out that it was involved in a constant struggle against non-Hebrew journalism and foreign cultural influences.40

Another way in which Zionist ideology framed the work conventions of Israeli journalists was through news selection and representation. Although Israeli political leaders were critical of the press' reliance on leaks,41 in most cases publication policies were restrained and attentive to the authorities' requests. Finally, the adoption of an ideological frame had a fundamental influence on the way Israeli journalists of the 1950s distinguished between good and bad journalism. Defining the essence of worthy journalistic work, they referred to issues such as balanced reporting and a non-sectarianist tone; clarity in writing and objectivity; educated analysis of current events; and rejection of improper political or monetary pressures.42 But, in parallel to those professional criteria, Israeli journalists also tended to assess the quality of their work according to its contribution to the Zionist endeavor. Of course, different journalists had different ideas regarding what was good for the country, but it is important to note that in that era the ideological justification was an essential element in the journalistic debate on professional excellence.

While the Israeli journalistic community of the 1950s manifested a strong ideological commitment, it also was engaged in an initial effort to define its independent professional identity. The journalists' yearbooks of that era revealed a growing tendency to discuss and debate issues that were more purely journalistic in their nature than political. While the earlier yearbooks mainly addressed

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different aspects and achievements of the Zionist project, towards the end of the 1950s discussion of journalistic issues became more prevalent and moved to the opening sections of the yearbooks. The discussion in those later years involved increasing diversity of journalists and experts and became geared to professional aspects, such as work ethics (the first ethical code of the Tel Aviv Journalists' Association was approved in 1958), the premises of a high quality interview, and the boundaries of freedom of speech.31

Another example of the growing professional consciousness among Israeli journalists during the 1950s was the debate over journalists' training. In the early days of the state, there were no institutions, academic or otherwise, that trained new journalists entering the profession. They trained on the job, and in some party newspapers new journalists were hired on the grounds of their political loyalty and the employment demands of the affiliated Kibbutz movement.32 These methods of recruitment and training were criticized by some journalists, who argued that methodological training was necessary to improve the status of the profession and to attract the best possible candidates. As a result, two attempts were made to establish an Israeli journalism school in that era. In 1955 a short-lived, two-year journalism studies program was inaugurated at the Tel Aviv School of Law and Economics.33 Then in 1965, after the Tel Aviv School of Law and Economics was absorbed by Tel Aviv University, a second journalism program opened, but it closed in 1970.34

The salience of the two fundamental conflicting impulses mentioned above, and the impact of the tensions between them, can be traced through several areas of contention. Disputes between journalists and political authorities, as well as negotiations over the establishment of journalistic codes of ethics, were derivatives of these two competing impulses. Moreover, the dynamics that surrounded such areas of contention demonstrated how such conflicts were handled and resolved.

Defining the boundaries and hierarchy of the journalistic community. In the early years of the state, Israeli journalists discussed ways of determining membership in their community and the criteria by which hierarchies were established in it. A starting point to the exploration of this topic could be found in the way in which Israeli journalists depicted the general state of their community during the 1950s. In summing up Israeli journalism, they usually projected a positive self-image that was embedded in what could be defined as a "discourse of uniqueness." Such self-evaluations were bounded between the unique conditions facing the young state and the unique traits of Israeli journalism. In view of these unique circumstances, Israeli journalism—at least according to Israeli journalists—operated differently from the accepted practices of foreign journalism in several ways. These included: Israeli journalists supported military censorship but made certain it was not manipulated for political needs;35 Israeli journalists took an active part in national tasks such as the absorption of the new immigrants;36 Israeli journalists understood the gravity of the challenges before the country so they focused their coverage on serious issues, such as politics and security, thus making even the lighter components of Israeli journalism, such as the lifestyle and entertainment sections, less sensationalist and "yellow" than their counterparts in other countries;37 and Israeli journalism incorporated both private and politically affiliated newspapers, so it managed to avoid the defects inherent in journalism in both capitalist and communist societies.38

A typical assessment of Israeli journalism, by a mainstream Israeli journalist in 1955, concluded:

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Abaronoth. These newspapers were either affiliated with political parties or privately owned, and their status was not necessarily based on circulation figures; for example, in 1950 at least one German-language newspaper had a larger circulation than the well-regarded Al Hamishmar and Hadoke.39

Beyond this group of newspapers were several types of news organizations that were marginalized for various reasons. Foreign-language newspapers were perceived during the 1950s as a necessary evil, and their journalists were not viewed as an integral part of journalism's elite. Before 1948, the Zionist establishment opposed the publication of all foreign language newspapers except The Palestine Post, which informed English-reading populations within the country and abroad. After the establishment of Israel and the mass immigration waves of the 1950s, the publication of foreign-language newspapers was viewed as part of the effort to absorb the immigrants, but veteran Hebrew journalists were suspicious of their foreign-language colleagues. For instance, in 1959 during a general assembly of the Association of Tel Aviv Journalists, several veteran journalists suggested that new applicants for membership in the journalists' associations be required to demonstrate basic Hebrew skills and knowledge of Israel's history, polit-
tistics, and geography. Eventually, this suggestion was rejected.\textsuperscript{41}

The journalists at the Kol Yisrael radio station also were not highly regarded by their colleagues because they were government employees rather than "real journalists." Hence, they were not admitted to the Jerusalem and Tel Aviv journalists' associations until 1965, when the radio station was no longer controlled by the prime minister's office.\textsuperscript{45} The case of Bamahaneh, the IDF weekly, reflected the important impact of the political and military establishments on the self-perceptions and work conventions of the journalistic community. It was not perceived as an independent source of information since it was a military publication. But during the mid-1950s, the IDF granted Bamahaneh's writers and photographers exclusive authorization to join its combat actions.\textsuperscript{46} Military correspondents of all other newspapers had to base their coverage on its reports, which meant waiting for the weekly to appear.\textsuperscript{47}

Finally, some newspapers and journalists were marginalized for political and stylistic reasons. Kol Ha'am, a Hebrew daily, was established in 1947 (although it replaced an earlier publication, which began in 1937) and dealt mainly with "appropriate" topics, such as politics and national security. Even though it was affiliated with a political party, as previously mentioned it was not prevented from joining Israeli journalism's mainstream. What marginalized Kol Ha'am, however, was its affiliation with the non-Zionist Communist Party. During the mid-1950s Ben-Gurion and Moshe Dayan, then the IDF chief of staff, would not meet with the Editors' Committee and reveal state secrets if the editor of Kol Ha'am was present. The editors protested this decision but accepted it after it was made clear that the presence of Kol Ha'am's editor would end the joint meetings.\textsuperscript{48} Similarly, the IDF refused to purchase Kol Ha'am for its soldiers and refused to accredit Kol Ha'am's military correspondent.\textsuperscript{49}

Other marginalized members of the journalistic community were newspapers and weeklies that dealt with lighter (and thus non-political) or controversial materials. The principal example of this type of publication was the weekly Haadlam Hargh. Most of its staffers were not members of the journalists' associations, and many Israeli journalists on various occasions referred to it as a substandard newspaper.\textsuperscript{50}

Competing institutionalization options. The tension between ideological commitments and professional consciousness was evident in the institutions that guided the work of Israeli journalists and reflected their dual loyalties. The most systematic means whereby Israeli journalists adhered without coercion to the wishes of officials was the Editors' Committee. It was formed in 1942 to coordinate a uniform journalistic response to the policies of the British Mandate. After the establishment of the state in 1948, the committee decided it would continue its activities, changing from a "war council against the foreign rule into a committee that collaborates with the Hebrew government and assists in its establishment.\textsuperscript{51}

The original members of the committee were the editors of Israeli dailies, both Hebrew and foreign-language, and later, the editors of the electronic media were added. This structure prevented editors of weeklies, such as the radical, sensational weekly HaMoam Hargh, from joining the committee.\textsuperscript{52} The editors usually met at the request of high-ranking officials, such as the prime minister or the minister of defense, who revealed secret matters to the editors and asked that the information not be published. At this point, it is crucial to note the Editors' Committee was a voluntary body, and the editors were not obliged to adhere to the requests. If its members did not unanimously agree to the officials' requests they were turned down, but this rarely occurred.\textsuperscript{53}

Through the late 1970s and after the status of the committee greatly diminished, and it became far less relevant on the Israeli journalistic scene. But during the 1950s and 1960s, it played a major role in shaping relations between journalists and government authorities, as reflected in a 1956 letter from Davar's Dan Pines, the committee's chairman, to Ben-Gurion. "On behalf of the daily's editors it is my duty and privilege to convey our great appreciation to you for the trust in which you hold Israeli editors, and to promise you that when in respect of vital security and propaganda matters we will not fail you," he wrote.\textsuperscript{54} Echong the same sentiment, Ben-Gurion stated in 1957 that while he hesitated to share state secrets with high-ranking officials and party members, "there is one body with whom I can speak openly and freely and know that what I say will not be leaked. This body is the Editors' Committee, they have never failed me."\textsuperscript{55}

The committee's commitment to professional standards remained intact, and its members continued to promote journalistic norms. The editors' agreement to conceal such information thus underscored the commitment of Israeli journalists to ideological perceptions and its manifestation in their work conventions.

The other institutionalization processes reflected the first stages of development of professional awareness. In 1958, the Tel Aviv Journalists' Association approved an ethical code drawn up by a committee of four veteran journalists. This constituted Israeli journalists' first attempt to discuss and define the boundaries of their professional community. The code stated that their mission was to "serve the public by providing it credible and verified news, to comment and interpret [the news] in the spirit of educating the public in good citizenship and respect for others."\textsuperscript{56} The code, which was updated in 1959, required journalists to conduct their investigations in a legal and fair way; to reject bribes; to
refrain from signing paid advertising articles appearing in their newspapers; to respect off-the-record agreements; and not to work as public relations representatives unless they received the approval of the journalists' association.

The discussion of an ethics code was accompanied by a debate over whether to establish an Israeli Press Council. The two discussions were fueled by similar motivations: the wish to professionalize the journalistic occupation; the notion that younger members of the Israeli journalistic community (both individuals and newspapers) were breaching the accepted conventions of journalistic behavior; and the fear that if journalists did not regulate themselves, external legislation would be forced upon them. After lengthy debates, the Israeli Press Council was established in 1963 as a voluntary body made up of representatives of the National Federation of Israeli Journalists, the newspaper owners, the Editors' Committee, and the public. The council's main goals were, and still are, to guard the freedom of the Israeli press; to promote the quality of journalistic work; and to enforce the council's code of ethics, which was based on the code of the journalists' association code and was approved in 1963. The council operates ethics courts, which can sanction and condemn news organizations and journalists although it has no legal jurisdiction.

The later process, during which the Editors' Committee lost its clout while the Journalism Council became a relatively influential factor within Israeli journalism, symbolized and demonstrated the vast changes in the status and professional self-perceptions of Israeli journalists through the years. The Editors' Committee agreement and operation reflected a sense of cooperation between the press and official authorities while ignoring the duty of journalists and officials to publicly account for their decisions. In contrast, the operating principles of the Press Council were embedded within the concept of public accountability: the press is the public's tool in its quest for establishing the accountability of various authorities, and the council is the public's tool for establishing the accountability of the press.

Establishing a sphere of a legitimate adversary. In parallel to the effort to define the boundaries of the journalistic community, the Israeli press was defining the boundaries of legitimate reporting. In the days of the British Mandate, the Yishuv's press asked for the guidance of the Zionist establishment, but after 1948 Israeli newspapers were faced with a new situation in which they were required to redefine their professional identity outside, or even against, state authorities. Hence, through the 1950s and 1960s Israeli journalists were engaged in an ongoing effort to define a sphere of critical reporting and analysis. Of course, opinions on those issues varied among journalists and newspapers—according to their ideological beliefs or even temporary political constellations—but on some key issues the majority of Israeli journalists were in agreement.

The first widespread agreement among journalists regarded the separation between news and views. While it was agreed that reporting on some issues should be censored, most journalists protested any attempt to restrict publishing. This view received crucial judicial support in the famous Kol Ha'um u. The Minister of Interior ruling in 1953 in which the Israeli Supreme Court overturned a decision by the minister of interior to suspend publication of Kol Ha'um, the Communist Party's daily that had denounced the government's alleged pro-American policies. This did not mean that Israeli journalism was open to dissenting voices. Rather, the marginalization of dissenting opinions, such as anti-Zionism, was achieved through the subtle means of political and professional exclusion and the overwhelming preference given to pro-Zionist voices in the mainstream media.

The second agreement concerned the need to protect Israel's national security. In 1948, when the state was established, newspaper editors supported the activation of a censorship mechanism that could prevent the publication of secret military information. To this day, Israel is the only democracy in the world in which a military censor has the legal authority to disqualify material, whether it is produced by local or foreign journalists, prior to its publication.

The relations between military censors and Israeli journalists over the years, especially during the 1950s, have illustrated the characteristics and boundaries of the above mentioned sphere of legitimate adversary in three fundamental ways:

First, the formal boundaries of this sphere were determined through an agreement that bypassed the harsh Mandatory Law. In the first months of the state military censors did not hesitate to activate their authority, following the precedents set by the British Mandate. For instance, on July 27, 1948, a censor closed Al Hamishmar for one day after it published a photograph of Yigal Alon, the commander of the Palmach elite military unit. The censor claimed that the paper had failed to observe the prohibition against identifying army officers. The Israeli press was furious, especially since the decision was perceived as motivated by political considerations: both Al Hamishmar and the Palmach were identified with the left-wing opposition to Mapai's political prominence. Following several similar closures, the Editors' Committee proposed a new law limiting a censor's powers. Finally, at the end of 1949 an agreement was signed between the Editors' Committee and the IDF. This agreement was somewhat changed over the years, but its essence was that all censorial disputes between news organizations represented on the Editors' Committee and the military should be resolved "internally." Thus,
a censor would not enforce the Mandatory law while the journalists would not appeal to the courts.

Second, the censorship agreement—and by extension, the entire sphere of legitimate adversary—took place without the real threat of punishment. In fact, the agreement formalized the distinction between two categories of Israeli media: the daily newspapers represented in the Editors’ Committee and all other media, namely dailies that were not members of the committee, weeklies, journals, books, and foreign media. This meant that while the first group of news organizations was somewhat shielded by the agreement, the latter group was exposed, at least in principle, to the existing law. Moreover, the agreement reflected the closeness between officials and journalists who were members of the privileged group through its informal characteristics: censorship “trials” were conducted at the journalists’ Association premises, and the cases were discussed over a four-course meal shared by all sides.

Third, relations between the press and a censor, just like the notion of what was “legitimate” reporting and criticism, were dynamic and reflected various external influences. During the 1950s, Israeli journalists accepted without protest rules that would never be followed by their successors today. For instance, Israeli journalists in the 1950s accepted without complaint a policy that prevented them from reporting illegal immigration practices and severe punishments that were inflicted on IDF soldiers. Yet several issues, such as politically motivated restrictions or the prohibition on publishing information that had already appeared in foreign newspapers, were constantly debated and challenged by the journalists, leading to more lenient censorial policies.

The boundaries of the journalistic discourse were not only highlighted in the realm of national security. Although the journalistic community fundamentally supported the existence of military censorship, detailed instructions were forced upon it. Boundaries were most clearly defined in cases where journalists agreed, without coercion, not to report on specific issues. The majority of such issues were deemed to be related to the Zionist cause, so Israeli journalists, for instance, refrained from reporting on Jewish immigration from countries that had no diplomatic relations with Israel. An illuminating reference to such non-coerced boundaries was made in 1961 by Gabriel Zifroni, editor of Haboker (which was affiliated with the centrist-liberal General Zionists’ party), who talked about the coverage of kibbutznim in the Israeli press: “You are only allowed to write good things about them. . . . In the village, just as in the city, there are human problems, hardships, and wrongdoing. But such things are not known to the public, and there is no way to find out about them.”

Reporting vs. Publicist Writing. Since the inception of the Zionist movement, the Hebrew press was where ideological convictions and disagreements were negotiated. Hence, for many years most Hebrew-written journalism was focused on opinion making rather than news reporting.

The knowledge of journalistic reporting developed, naturally in the country where journalism was widespread and free. American journalists never suffered from an inferiority complex in comparison to novelists. Young Americans who wanted to learn how to write started working in newspapers, and it is a not a coincidence that so many American novelists initiated their career as reporters. . . . During the 19th century American journalists came to understand that their primary responsibility was to report the news.

A first-of-its-kind survey of Israeli journalists in 1964 seemed to enhance this self-perception of Israeli journalists as would-be (or would rather be) “serious authors.” Shmuel Schnitzer, a prominent Ma’a‘ot publicist and editor who conducted the survey, defined three criteria for assessing the journalists’ “intellectual level”: their academic training, their knowledge of foreign languages, and whether they had published novels, plays, or poetry volumes.

The gradual shift from opinion-oriented journalism to a hard news orientation was not always well received. One of the main topics discussed at a 1961 journalists’ symposium was the “ongoing decline of publicist writing in Israeli journalism.” Most of the participants agreed that Israeli journalism was becoming more focused on reporting, while it provided less in-depth analysis. But the explanations offered for this phenomenon exposed some of the disagreements between journalists of party-affiliated and private newspapers. The former argued that revenue-seeking journalism led inevitably to shallowness and the inability to provide in-depth analysis of events, and the latter responded that it was the rigidity and predictability of party journalism that made its publicist writing so boring.

Thus, this article has explored Israel’s formative-era journalism by focusing on the process by which tensions between ideological affiliations and professional consciousness were manifested, discussed, and in some cases resolved.

The expanding internal professional discussion among Israeli journalists during the late 1950s and the 1960s resulted in a shift in the journalistic community. The earlier journalistic discourse was focused on the common political (Zionist) cause, so agreements as well as disagreements between journalists were based on, and channeled towards, political argumentation. Later, the inner-journalistic discourse gradually centered on professional issues. This, in turn, changed the ways in which Israeli journalists positioned their agree-
ments and disagreements. As a result, the rationale for the existence of a Hebrew press shifted from national validations (Hebrew journalism as part of the Zionist revolution) to professional ones (the Israeli public's right to know); similarly, the internal divisions within the journalistic community were now argued and justified through professional rather than political parameters.

The approach that stands at the core of this study also could guide the study of later developments in Israeli journalism. Hence, for instance, it provides a way to look at how the Israeli journalistic community conceptualized routine internal debates as well as fundamental paradigmatic crises, such as its inadequate coverage of the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Journalistic achievements, such as the coverage of the 1982 Lebanon war, also could be understood better through this proposed perspective. Similarly, the type of tracking of changes within the journalistic discourse conducted in this study also could be applied to a comparative context. Thus, the interplay between the two prevailing dual impulses of Japanese journalism—the "servant" vs. the "watchdog" traditions—could be explored through a similar integrative look at patterns of institutionalization; definitions of the professional community's boundaries and inner-hierarchies; and the changing conceptions regarding legitimate reporting topics and styles.75

NOTES

1 Following the end of the World War I and the establishment of the League of Nations, Great Britain was entrusted with a mandate to rule the territory now controlled by Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority.


4 On Oct. 15, 1894, Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish captain in the French army was detained on charges of spying for Germany and was wrongly convicted on all counts. In 1899, the president of France pardoned him, and in 1906 he was exonerated of all charges, after which he was restored to his former military rank.

5 Ralf Mann, "Herzl and the Press: From 'Sword of Steel' to Cable Newspaper" (in Hebrew), Keshet 8 (1990): 20-36.

6 Shoshana Shiffsted, "Nahum Sokolov as a Journalist and an Editor" (in Hebrew), Keshet 8 (1990): 55-63.


8 Dina Goren, Jidokaru, haolehut ne-gethash bi-hita'am (Secret, Security and Freedom of the Press) (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1970). 12. The close tie between political activism and journalism is not unique to the Zionism case. Many twentieth-century political leaders, such as Stalin and Mussolini, were active journalists before they rose to power. In general, it seems that Goren's assertion can be attributed to leaders of fringe political movements: journalistic work was a substitute for the use of "real" political power.


10 Shmuel Gilewitz, "This Year in Our Press" (in Hebrew), Ha-asha"nath shel ha-hita'am (1945): 155-56; and Getzel Kessel, Tikkun ha-asha"nath bi-Erez Yisrael (The History of the Hebrew Press in the Land of Israel) (Jerusalem: Zionist Library), 189. 19. Yabes, which means the settlement, is a Hebrew term used to define the pre-1948 Jewish population of Mandatory Palestine.


15 Memorandum on the Circulation of Israeli Dailies in the IDF (in Hebrew), 1956, shipment 776, file 33, Israel Defense Forces Archive, Tel Hashomer military base, Kiryat Ono, Israel.


17 Yehiel Limor, The Cruel Fate of Israeli Dailies" (in Hebrew), Keshet 25 (1999): 44.

18 M. Goldstein, "Newspapers and Periodicals in Israel" (in Hebrew), Sefer ha-shanah shel ha-hita'am (1950): 242-53.


20 Mordekhay Naor, "Israel's Army Media" (in Hebrew), Keshet 25 (1999): 59.

21 There were no significant Israeli local media until the 1970s.


24 Knesset Proceedings, April 4, 1951 (in Hebrew), 1588.


28 Yitzhak Zengberg, "The Jewish Journalists' Conference in Basel" (in Hebrew), Sefer ha-shanah shel ha-hita'am (1948): 211.

29 Yehuda Gottelf, "Light and Shadow in Journalism" (in Hebrew), Sefer ha-shanah shel ha-hita'am (1955): 164.


34 Arze Kinneret, "Changes in Israeli Journalism" (in Hebrew), Sefer ha-shanah shel ha-hita'am (1958): 197.

35 Interview, Jay Bushansky, May 9, 2005.

36 Carlebach, "Permitted to Write—Forbidden to Read," 9.

37 Moshe Keren, "A Portrait of Israeli Journalism" (in Hebrew), Sefer ha-shanah shel ha-hita'am (1955): 168.


"The Editors’ Committee Annual Report, 1955-1956, file 52b, Archives of the Tel Aviv Journalists Association, Tel Aviv.

Correspondence between Ma’an’s Editor and the IDF Chief-of-Staff, 1956, shipment 770, file 34, IDF Archive, Kfar Yona, Israel.

A. Avner Bar-On, Ha-sipurim she-lo supura: Yomano shel ha-tsorer ha-raiti (The Untold Stories: The Diary of the Chief Censor) (Jerusalem: Etzanim, 1991), 76

See David Ben-Gurion’s Reply to MK Va’er’s Parliamentary Question, 1953, shipment 540, file 63; and Correspondence between IDF Spokesman and Kol Ha’am, shipment 68, file 45. Both are in the IDF Archive.


Bar-On, Ha-sipurim she-lo supura: Yomano shel ha-tsorer ha-raiti, 77.


Correspondence between the Editors’ Committee and David Ben-Gurion (in Hebrew). July 31, 1956, file 52, Archives of the Tel Aviv Journalists Association.

Quoted in Bar-On, Ha-sipurim she-lo supura: Yomano shel ha-tsorer ha-raiti, 65.


Bar-On, Ha-sipurim she-lo supura: Yomano shel ha-tsorer ha-raiti, 18.


Goren, Saléyat, bi’laham mi-khefesh ha-itnai, 194.

Nusseck and Limor, “Military Censorship in Israel: An Ongoing Compromise between Clashing Values,” 371. As mentioned, Israeli radio of the 1950s and 1960s was directly controlled by the government and the IDF, so it did not challenge those institutions on censorial issues.


Ibid., 33.


Carlesbach, “Permitted to Write—Forbidden to Read,” 9:17.

The kibbutz, which is the Hebrew word for “communal settlement,” is a socioeconomic system based on the principle of joint ownership of property, equality and cooperation of production, consumption, and education.

“Symposium: Journalism as a Public Service” (in Hebrew), Sifer ha-shanah shel ha’itnai’im (1961): 237.


In the 1980s, Schnitzer became Ma’an’s editor.


“Symposium: Journalism as a Public Service,” 238-42.


One illuminating resemblance between the Israeli and the Japanese case studies can be found in the operation of similar mechanisms—the Israeli Editors’ Committee and the Japanese “reporters’ clubs”—that regulate the relations between reporters and sources, define incest-hierarchies among journalists and news organizations, and even enforce self-censorship upon reporters. See Maggie Faley, “Japan’s Press and the Politics of Scandal,” in Pharr and Krauss, Media and Politics in Japan, 135-38.