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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

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Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:
Antony, A., Steets, S., & Pfadenhauer, M. (2022). Politics of Crisis: Threatening and Defending Journalistic Expertise - A Processual Account. *Symbolic Interaction*, *45*(4), 541-569. https://doi.org/10.1002/symb.598

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Symbolic Interaction

Politics of Crisis: Threatening and Defending Journalistic Expertise — A Processual Account

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In this article, we argue for making the frequently invoked notion of "crises of journalism" itself the proper subject of sociological analysis. Based on a case study of a public controversy over an adversarial TV interview with a well-known politician on Austria's public service broadcaster ORF, we provide an analysis of the practical use of crisis claims in metajournalistic discourse. Drawing on ethnomethodology, interactionism, and situational analysis and suggesting the discursive trajectory *as an analytic tool, we show that crisis accounts serve as an instrument of politicizing journalistic expertise, i.e., as a discursive strategy of mobilizing heterogeneous actors to impose interpretations of how journalism ought to be.*

Keywords: journalism, crisis claims, journalistic expertise, discursive trajectory, situational analysis

INTRODUCTION: "CRISIS OF JOURNALISM"

In recent years, there has been much talk of the "crises of journalism," both in various journalistic formats and in social science debates (Alexander et al. 2016; Zelizer 2015). Beyond economically induced uncertainties, journalism faces certain

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Symbolic Interaction, Vol. 45, Issue 4, pp. 541–569, ISSN: 0195-6086 print/1533-8665 online.
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central challenges, such as the digital transformation of the public sphere (Habermas 1989, 2021; Tong 2018), a related loss of authority and quality in reporting (Butler Breese 2016; Luengo 2016), and increasing criticism and "attacks" from the political realm (Carlson et al. 2021; Koliska et al. 2020; Van Dalen 2021). In short, the legitimacy of journalistic expertise, its "cultural authority" (Anderson 2008:258), appears to be threatened in many respects (Carlson 2016a; Skovsgaard and Bro 2011; Tong 2018).

As sociologists and journalism scholars we can deal with the purported crises in two ways: First, we can join in the discourse by either adopting the corresponding diagnoses or actively claiming a crisis ourselves. Or, second, we may turn the production of crises itself into a subject of sociological investigation by addressing it as a form of metajournalistic discourse (Carlson 2016a). From this second perspective, "crises of journalism" are *not* treated as more or less self-evident phenomena that can either be characterized as objective or propagated on the basis of normative stances (i.e., on how journalism ought to be) (Zelizer 2015). Rather, it is their *practical enactment*, based on "cultural codes and narrative structures of crisis and decline" (Butler Breese 2016:33), that comes into view; the social process itself.

Building on such a constructivist approach to crisis production (Boin and 't Hart 2009:53; Voss and Lorenz 2016:48), we provide a case study focusing on the relationship between the public invocation of "crises of journalism" and journalistic expertise. Drawing on ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 2004/1967), interactionism (Strauss [1993] 2008), and situational analysis (Clarke 2005), we examine a media controversy that originated in an adversarial TV interview with a well-known Austrian politician on Austrian public TV broadcaster ORF (Österreichischer Rundfunk). After the interview had aired, the interviewer Armin Wolf, prominent anchorman of the ORF's late news program, received much praise in the media, but also massive criticism from the interviewed politician himself and, subsequently, from an ORF media manager. This, in turn, motivated a collective of "critical journalists" to take a public stand on what had transpired, and a controversy unfolded around the relationship between public service media and politics.

However, this public dispute illustrates more than just the fragile and potentially problematic relationship between journalism/public media organizations and politics, even in liberal democracies (e.g., Larsen 2016), which appears to be openly conflictual especially in times of political polarization (Van Dalen 2021). A closer look reveals that the two opposing parties — particularly the interviewed politician on the one hand and the "critical journalists" and their advocates on the other — tried to define the situation in a specific way (Altheide 2013:126; 2020) by putting forward a "dramatic framing of social reality" (Benford 2013:139). In other words, both used *crisis accounts* in the course of the controversy. Conceiving of crises as discursively "produced phenomena" (Garfinkel 1991:10), we ask: How and why are crises of journalism enacted and thus made recognizable to media recipients? How do such processes of crisis construction relate to threats to journalistic expertise, and its stabilization or re-establishment?

Our empirical case provides more than an opportunity to analyze processes of crisis construction as based on practices of claims-making (Best 1987) and interpretive framings (Snow and Benford 1988). Above all, it turns out that taking into account the temporality of the controversy — both its step-by-step development and the direction it took — is essential to a sociological understanding of the enactment of crises (and probably also for the construction of social problems in general; see Best 2003 for an overview). While ethnomethodology sensitizes us to the controversy's real-time production by bringing into focus its sequential unfolding, our use of Anselm Strauss's concept of trajectory as well as the mapping strategies elaborated in Clarke's situational analysis results in a reconstruction of the controversy as what we call a *discursive trajectory*: How do multiple discursive positions contribute to the development of the controversy? Who reacts to the positions initially voiced, and by means of which forms are these reactions articulated? In short: How exactly does the discursive process unfold?

Our processual account makes clear that the enactment of crises does not necessarily stand at the very beginning of a public controversy. Rather, claiming crises seems to be a practical coping strategy and thus a *response* to circumstances deemed problematic. What is more, depending on how different actors *in turn* respond to crisis accounts, and especially *who* responds to them (at what time), crisis constructions may be more or less consequential. The enactment of crises animates others to respond, to either reinforce the critical claims or reject them and counter them with an alternative one. As the following analysis shows, crisis accounts serve as discursive instruments of *political work*, i.e., of attempts to prescribe and stabilize an interpretation of reality — in our case: what "good" journalism ought to be.

TOPICALIZING AND PROCESSUALIZING THE "CRISES OF JOURNALISM"

Crisis Accounts as Normative Constructions of Journalism

In adopting an ethnomethodological perspective, we aim to make crisis accounts and their inherent everyday logics the subject of sociological inquiry (Zimmerman and Pollner 1970) by addressing the claimed "crises of journalism" as participants' "practical accomplishment[s]" (Garfinkel 2004/1967:4). Just as the sociology of social problems does not take problems as given, but asks how they are created (Blumer 1971; Spector and Kituse 1977), we are not merely interested in reactions *to* crisis claims, but in the very *production* of crises itself (see also Luengo 2014, 2016) as well as their mobilizing effects: Crises are enacted at specific times, in specific sites, by specific actors, and on the basis of specific communicative practices in order to make them "accountable" to an audience (Garfinkel 2004/1967:33f.; Meyer 2019:289). Put differently, it is participants' "methodical procedures" (Garfinkel 1991:13) that come into view.

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Although we adopt a constructivist perspective on the crises of journalism, the question nevertheless arises how to define "crisis" sociologically to begin with. Even if one takes the communicative practices of crisis claiming as the object of investigation, it is still the sociological observers in their analyses who have to decide whether a specific form of addressing journalism amounts to a crisis account or not. At first glance, it might seem reasonable to focus on participants' explicit use of the term "crisis." However, this would exclude many cases in which a danger or threat to journalistic knowledge production is in fact claimed. Therefore, we propose to understand crisis constructions as a "dramatic framing" of reality (Benford 2013:139; see also Butler Breese 2016; Zelizer 2015) based on three basic interrelated interpretive claims (Best 1987; Monahan and Maratea 2021; Snow and Benford 1988):

(a) *Claiming instability*: asserting a state of danger regarding the stability of established social orders (in certain social worlds, states, "societies" or "the world") or identifying an instability that has already occurred, based on the "identification of a problem" (Snow and Benford 1988:200; Best 1987:104ff.) and possibly an attribution of blame (or even causality),
(b) *Claiming severity*: framing the identified instability as highly problematic, insofar as it renders impossible, or threatens to do so, the "normal" processing of social orders as practiced so far; i.e., crises are framed as "big" problems (and not as relatively easily manageable interruptions of routine actions), and
(c) *Claiming a need for action*: asserting an acute need to intervene against this threat or a destabilization of social orders that has already occurred.

On the one hand, this abstract understanding of crises is broad enough to allow for an empirical reconstruction of the various types and ways of claiming crises in their specificity: How are crises practically "done" (Sacks 1984)? On the other hand, it offers sufficient analytical orientation to prevent that every claimed problem, change, or transformation regarding journalistic work is understood as a crisis.

Crisis accounts, of course, are not limited to a certain communicative *form*, they always imply specific *contents* as well — in the case of journalism; ideals of what "journalism" ought to be and what its expertise (Eyal 2013; Stehr and Grundmann 2011) comprises, i.e., the "cultural authority" (Anderson 2008:258) that journalists claim for themselves and which is externally ascribed or denied (Grundmann 2017): How does journalism differ from other forms of knowledge production? What are its epistemic and moral claims? What values is journalistic work based on? Which specific competencies and technological and organizational infrastructures does journalistic work require to be recognized as such? These questions already indicate that crisis accounts do not constitute innocent forms of addressing journalism. Rather, they should be understood as a "*normative construction* of journalism" (Deuze and Witschge 2018:168; emphasis added).

Cultural sociological and discourse analytic journalism research have suggested that the invocation of crises must be regarded as a perspective- and interest-bound practice. Crisis accounts, Zelizer (2015:892) argues, help "turn murky and troublesome challenges into a controllable phenomenon that can be identified, articulated, managed, and ultimately gotten rid of." As a problematizing form of articulation, crisis accounts are always selective and thus contingent: They could turn out quite differently. Moreover, they are based on specific cultural codes (e.g., community needs-driven journalism vs. market-driven journalism), expressing desirable and undesirable ways of producing journalistic knowledge (Luengo 2014, 2016). This further implies that the enactment of crises is not limited to drawing attention to facts and developments deemed problematic. Crisis accounts are also a way of publicly affirming (or questioning) journalistic ideals and values, and thus, potentially, of generating commitment within the journalistic community (or among its critics) (Butler Breese 2016; Carlson 2016b).

The Unfolding of Crises as Discursive Trajectory

In order to apply a processual account to crises, we draw on ethnomethodology's notion of *sequentiality* (Rawls 2005; vom Lehn 2019). In addition, we adopt Strauss' ([1993] 2008) concept of *trajectory* to analyze the social configuration arising from multiple and interconnected contributions of the actors involved, resulting in what we call an analytically detectable *discursive trajectory*.

From an ethnomethodological point of view, sequentiality, in abstract terms, refers to the "relationships between the parts of interaction that make coherent orders of meaning possible" (Rawls 2005:177). In such an understanding, crisis accounts are not only based on previous events or developments regarded as problematic. Their meaning as well as their practical significance is primarily constituted retrospectively, in *reactions to* the crises claims: Do crisis accounts become the object of attention at all? And if so, who refers to them (e.g., journalists, politicians, social scientists) and in which ways (e.g., by duplicating them, agreeing with them, or rejecting them; see Leudar and Nekvapil 2004; Nekvapil and Leudar 2006)?

However, in the case of the public controversy at hand, and in media reporting in general, sequentiality is not limited to local situations of embodied co-presence, the classical domain of ethnomethodology (vom Lehn 2019). Rather, sequentiality is constituted through interrelated situations mediated by, and spatio-temporally connected through, mass media infrastructures (e.g., when a TV event becomes the subject of a newspaper interview, which is subsequently taken up again in different media formats). Journalists in particular play an essential role in the co-production of such interactive media networks. It is the journalists who are actively involved in making certain contributions relevant by amplifying them, linking the statements of various actors with each other, or generating new contributions (e.g., by posing questions to politicians at press conferences) and feeding them into public discourse

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(see especially Kaderka et al. 2018; Leudar and Nekvapil 2004; Nekvapil and Leudar 2006).

Following Strauss, we conceptualize this "flow of media discourse extended in time" (Leudar and Nekvapil 2004:250) as a *discursive trajectory*. Strauss (Strauss [1993] 2008:52ff.) understands trajectory as a sensitizing concept (Blumer 1969:140ff.) that (1) focuses on the emergence of social phenomena (not necessarily limited to local situations) over time, (2) takes into account the contributions of multiple actors, and (3) calls attention to the fact that the conditions for later contributions are continuously created in and through social processes (see also Hall 1997). By adopting this analytical perspective, we aim to address the mediated, distributed, and interactive process of meaning-making in its course and dynamics (see also Scheffer's 2013 concept of micro-history).

As we will see in our case study, crisis accounts indeed emerge from a process, a discursive trajectory. Insofar as discursive trajectories are taken up by participants (journalists, politicians, etc.), they are conducive to determining the way in which the trajectory unfolds (Grenz 2020; Scheffer 2007). It is thus a matter of finding out what the enactment of crises responds to, under which concrete conditions crises are claimed, and how others — subsequently — refer to them, thereby in turn contributing to the overall development of the trajectory and providing crisis constructions with a wider public dissemination.

DATA AND METHOD OF ANALYSIS: PROCESSUAL MAPPING AND PARTICIPANTS' DISCURSIVE POSITIONINGS

Methodologically, our approach builds on Clarke's (2005) situational analysis, which she based on different mapping strategies. This allows us to focus on the dynamic unfolding of media discourses, which implies two central interrelated analytical perspectives: For one thing, we focus on the establishment of connections between those media contributions that add to the controversy's development and depict them by means of a processual map. For another, we account for participants' communicative "methods and schemata of interpretation" (Smith 2005/1990:91) as expressed in the discursive positionings of politicians, media managers, journalists, etc. who make an appearance in the course of the controversy.

We compiled the data corpus through a database search of media coverage about a TV interview by Armin Wolf, anchorman of the ORF's late news program, with Erwin Pröll, a well-known Austrian politician, which aired on March 27, 2017. It is important to emphasize that our central focus in this paper is not on the interview itself (although, of course, we give it the analytical attention necessary to understand the case as a whole), but primarily on its subsequent journalistic processing. Our data focuses on German-language print and online newspaper and magazine articles — mainly from Austria, but also from Germany and Switzerland. We only took into account social media (e.g., Twitter posts) or broadcasting contributions if — due to a journalistic attribution of relevance (Leudar

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and Nekvapil 2004:249) — they were taken up in the newspaper and magazine coverage and thus "imported" into the latter. An initial review showed that the period up to May 10, 2017, was relevant, because during this time the TV interview and related events (e.g., a subsequent statement by Pröll himself) or topics (e.g., the relationship between public broadcasting and politics) were the subject of journalistic reporting. On this basis, we included 115 media contributions in our corpus.

The next crucial step for the analysis of the discursive trajectory was to identify those contributions that comprised key positions. By *positions* we generally mean "major discursive issues," i.e., "topics of focus, concern, and often […] contestation" (Clarke 2005:126), that are made publicly available as statements by participants. We, therefore, focus, in particular, on contributions that actively engage in the discursive struggle of defining the situation (Altheide 2013:126; Bourdieu 1989:20). As *key* positions we consider those communicated standpoints that prove to be significant for the way the trajectory develops. Whether a discursive contribution can be identified as a key position or not is determined by whether it is taken up in subsequent media contributions (e.g., in the form of a quotation or paraphrase), processed (e.g., evaluated and rejected), and thus made relevant to media recipients in one way or the other.

As mentioned, we analyzed the discursive trajectory by building on mapping strategies as proposed by Clarke (2005). This resulted in a *processual map* on which discursive positions can be visually located and the development of the discourse trajectory can be traced.[1] (See Figure 1. The following letters in square brackets refer to the corresponding elements in the map.) The concrete procedure consisted in determining published *media contributions* [A] along the parameters of, first, *time of publication* [B], second, *references to other media contributions* [C], and, third, *thematic positioning* [D].

Finally, the key positionings were (selectively) coded (Strauss 1987:27ff.) in more detail, i.e., we identified and conceptualized practical textual strategies that enabled the respective discursive positionings — both in terms of communicative form (e.g., crisis claims, boundary work) and content (e.g., public service journalism/politics nexus, journalistic competence). However, our perspective is not limited to linguistic/textual aspects. The concept of discursive trajectory and the methodological tool of processual mapping aim at the *interactive dramaturgy of the discursive process*. Similar to Goffman's interaction order, we view the discursive trajectory as a "substantive [analytical] domain in its own right" characterized by a mutual "engrossment and involvement of the participants" (Goffman 1983:2). In this way, not only the *hows* (e.g., the rhetorical strategies of individual participants) but also the *whys* of crisis claims come into view (for a similar argument see Holstein and Gubrium 2011), i.e., the conditions produced in the process that make a certain subsequent positioning possible in the first place and thus explain the emergence of the discursive trajectory's network-like character (see Figure 1 as well as Leudar and Nekvapil's (2004) concept of dialogical networks).

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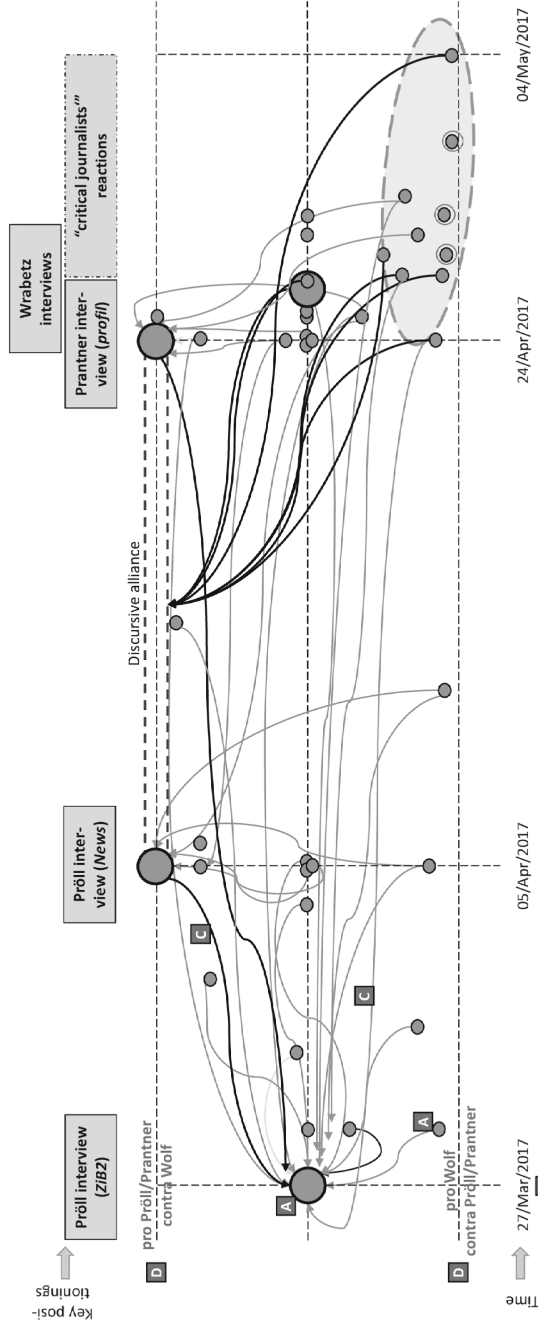

FIGURE 1. Processual Map (Extract)

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FROM A TV NEWS INTERVIEW TO THE THREATENED INDEPENDENCE OF AUSTRIAN PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING — A MEDIA CONTROVERSY

Contextualization: Austria's Public Broadcasting and Politics

Before we look at our case in detail, we should start with some notes on the Austrian public media system and its relationship to politics. This is necessary to be able to appreciate the important role of public service broadcasting in Austria and to develop an understanding of why it has become an object of contestation in the controversy we discuss.

In their comparative study Hallin and Mancini (2004) assigned Austria, together with countries like Denmark, Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, Norway, or Switzerland, to the Democratic Corporatist Model (see Karmasin et al. 2018; Plasser and Pallaver 2017 for criticism of this classification and further discussion). On the one hand, this model is characterized by a strong liberal tradition of press freedom, a high level of newspaper circulation, as well as a relative autonomy of the journalistic culture from politics. Yet, on the other hand, in such systems, media "are seen to a significant extent as social institutions for which the state has responsibility, and press freedom coexists with relatively strong state support for and regulation of media" (Hallin and Mancini 2004:74). The latter point has significant consequences regarding the close relationship between public service media and politics, which distinguishes Austria, for example, from countries such as the United States, whose media system is more commercial and market-based.

The Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF), the country's largest media company, is a foundation under public law with a public service mandate. It is financed to a large extent — around 61% — by compulsory broadcasting fees paid by viewers and listeners (which is supposed to guarantee a certain independence from the economy and journalistic independence in general).[2] In fact, however, governing parties cannot only intervene in a legislative sense but also impact the composition of the ORF's foundation council, which in turn exerts a significant influence on internal decisions, e.g., high management positions in the company (Plasser and Pallaver 2017). Accordingly, the political scientists Plasser and Pallaver (2017:322) diagnose a "problematic dependence" (our translation) of the ORF management on party politics.[3] The relationship between the ORF and politics is also a recurring issue in the media and in election campaigns.

The Starting Point: A (Failed) Farewell Interview (March 27, 2017)

In March 2017, the anchorman of the ORF late-night news program *Zeit im Bild 2* (*ZiB 2*), Armin Wolf — renowned, acclaimed, and criticized for his rigorous and tenacious style of questioning and repeatedly the target of public criticism from political parties — interviewed a well-known politician of the conservative Austrian People's Party (ÖVP), Erwin Pröll, then-governor of Lower Austria, one of Austria's nine

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states.[4] It was Pröll's last appearance in this format before his retirement. The fact that he was then considered one of Austria's most influential politicians is evident in media reactions to the announcement of his departure from politics; according to the national daily *Kurier* (January 17, 2017), Pröll had been "undisputedly dominating" politics "for two decades," not only in Lower Austria, but in particular as the main "kingmaker" within his party. *Die Presse*, another national daily, characterized him as the last remaining "provincial ruler" (January 18, 2017) and one of the ÖVP's "most powerful politicians" (January 17, 2017).

The live interview (see Ekström and Fitzgerald 2014:85) initially focused on Pröll's great influence in the ÖVP, his assessment of the current political situation, and his performance as governor of Lower Austria. Wolf, the interviewer, also addressed controversial topics. For example, he confronted Pröll with a characterization in *Der Standard* stating that Pröll was a "despotic, authoritarian, vindictive, and power-hungry politician" who deems himself "above the law." However, the interview did not take on an obviously conflictual character until another topic came up: accusations of a lack of transparency with regard to the private foundation established by Pröll. Wolf did not let up in demanding answers to the question of why the use of subventions for the foundation had not been officially disclosed: "But the critical question was, Mr. Governor, why these subventions — over eight years, 1.3 million from the state budget — why were they kept secret?"

In the following, we address two analytical aspects of this TV encounter: (a) the interaction itself and (b) its implications for claimed (and contested) journalistic expertise.

(a) *Disturbed interaction*: The interaction format "interview" — which in its ideal-typical and, from the journalistic perspective, normatively desirable form is based on the following rhythm: question/interviewer, answer/interviewee, question/interviewer, answer/interviewee, and so on — collapsed. Wolf's inquiry as to why the subsidies were not made public remained *unanswered* by Pröll. The refusal to answer provoked repeated follow-up questions from Wolf (see also Ekström and Fitzgerald 2014). The conversation thus became *repetitive and lengthy*. Moreover, Pröll tried to undermine Wolf's interview authority by *setting a topic himself* and accusing the ORF of a lack of transparency, which Wolf in turn communicatively framed as an evasion ("I understand that you prefer not to talk about your foundation"). The encounter was also increasingly shaped by *mutual interruptions*, and Pröll's style of interaction became more and more *emotional*. *Der Standard* (April 07, 2017) would later even speak of a "temper tantrum" on Pröll's part.

(b) *Undermining journalistic expertise*: Pröll aimed in various ways to undermine Wolf's claimed journalistic expertise. He did so, first, by rudely rebutting the accusation of non-transparency and accusing Wolf of talking "utter

FIGURE 2. Armin Wolf Interviewing Erwin Pröll (Screenshot). Source: https://tvthek.orf.at/history/Innenpolitik/8002278/Proell-verteidigt-Privatstiftung-in-ZIB-2-Interview/13926903 (accessed September 2, 2021)

nonsense.” Thus, Pröll rhetorically attacked Wolf’s claim in *epistemic terms*. This in turn led Wolf to reject Pröll’s counterclaim as wrong (“No, it’s not nonsense, Mr. Pröll”), so as to underline the verifiability of his own claim (“I can show you all of these press releases [in which Pröll’s foundation had not been mentioned]”), and to actively inquire from Pröll why keeps calling his claim “nonsense.” In short, a downright battle takes place over what is true and what is not (and why). Second, Pröll disputed Wolf’s journalistic jurisdiction (Abbott 1988) in terms of its *legitimacy* when he stated, “We’ll see what your boss thinks about this.” In other words, Pröll threatened to complain about the interview to Wolf’s superior, the director general of the ORF. Third, he thus at the same time called into question Wolf’s journalistic *autonomy*. The prospect of a complaint implies a (potential) rebuke of the journalist Wolf by his highest superior, who is not a journalist but a media manager (Figure 2).

Without offering a detailed interaction analysis of the interview (see Clayman and Heritage 2004) in this paper, the account above should make clear that this “non-routine” interview was well suited to become the subject of a further journalistic treatment (Ekström and Fitzgerald 2014:91) — due to its decidedly adversarial character and in particular Pröll’s attempts to cast doubt on and communicatively undermine Wolf’s claimed journalistic expertise with regard to its claim to truth, its legitimacy, and its autonomy. We will now discuss — with a focus on the key positions — how, by whom, and under which conditions the interview

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was covered in the media. In doing so, we focus primarily on two questions. First, how is the threat to and defense of journalistic expertise accomplished as a social process in the media? And second, which role do crisis accounts play in this process?

Pröll's Public Retrospection: "Directed Journalism" (April 7, 2017)

Initially, the interview triggered reactions in the form of journalistic commentaries and columns, most of which referred positively to Wolf's interview style. For example, he was named "Hero of the Week" in the — left-leaning — *Falter* (March 29, 2017), and his journalistic competence was praised. In several newspapers, moreover, the interview was described primarily as conflictual, for instance, as a "clash" (*Die Presse* April 07, 2017). The media coverage became more controversial when another interview with Pröll was published in the weekly magazine *News* (April 07, 2017) 11 days after the broadcast:

> [Interviewer:] You recently faced off on television with *ZiB 2* anchor Armin Wolf. Were you surprised by the stir that interview caused — apropos of "nonsense" and your private foundation?
>
> [Pröll:] I was surprised that the public displayed much better power of judgment when it comes to objectively assessing a certain kind of journalism than many journalists themselves.
>
> [Interviewer:] That's quite harsh criticism.
>
> [Pröll:] Which brings us to the next issue. Journalism is an important, an essential factor in a functioning democracy. Critical journalism in particular. But occasionally I have the impression that some journalists are not even aware of the responsibility they have in a democracy. In directed journalism this can take on extreme forms.
>
> [Interviewer:] What exactly do you mean by that?
>
> [Pröll:] When a few people join forces and agree upon who to beat up next, how to scandalize in a democracy: that's a major threat. {And especially at the ORF there are such tendencies. To be frank, I do not understand the director general. Apparently he is incapable of forestalling such structures. And that's why I believe, if this continues to be the case, that we should use further democratic procedures to check what is going on at the ORF.}[5]

Pröll here engages in boundary work (Carlson and Lewis 2015; Gieryn 1983): He discursively constructs a group — vaguely characterized as "a certain kind of journalism" — to which he implies "some journalists," not mentioned by name, belong. In Pröll's view, these journalists *fail* to meet a *normative ideal* of journalistic practice in two respects. First, he denies them the competence to correctly judge their own journalistic practice and its appropriateness. In doing so, Pröll invokes

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the abstract, not further specified, journalistic key value or norm of "objectivity" (Schudson and Anderson 2009:39f.) and demarcates those he considers deviant when he ascribes "power of judgment" to another group, i.e., the "population" — a majority, it is implied, that he himself belongs to. By contrast, the journalists who are unable to judge their own work "objectively" form a minority of deviants.

Second, Pröll concedes that journalism — in particular what he calls "critical journalism" — has an important function in democratic societies: "Journalism is an important, an essential factor in a functioning democracy. Critical journalism in particular;" a seemingly uncontestable, but rather abstract statement that prepares the ground (Best 1987:104) for Pröll's problem definition. For he subsequently uses this normative positioning as a contrasting foil to attribute to the deviants an incapacity to recognize their own "responsibility." In other words, they once more fail to meet Pröll's (still rather vague) ideal of journalism. This failure can "take on extreme forms," he holds, in what he calls "directed journalism" — a highly effective catchphrase that would be taken up repeatedly in subsequent reporting. In response to a question from the interviewer, Pröll specifies the misconduct attributed to the deviants. There are two plausible interpretations of his criticism: They are not primarily concerned with distributing information but with engaging in politics themselves; and/or they pursue self-interested goals at the expense of others, especially politicians ("who to beat up next, how to scandalize"). As Pröll sees it, both these matters constitute a problematic transgression of journalistic jurisdiction (*claiming instability*), a "major threat" (*claiming severity*) which requires a response by the ORF's director general (*claiming a need for action*). If necessary, he threatens, measures of political intervention will have to be taken — the exact character of which he does not specify.

To sum up, in communicative terms, Pröll's statements constitute a crisis account (in the sense defined above). And he attributes that claimed crisis primarily to the state of public broadcasting: He cautions — with the public supposedly behind him — that a small, irresponsible, partisan grouping that illegitimately exceeds its "proper" sphere of journalistic jurisdiction represents a "threat" to an abstractly named state of order — "democracy" — that has to be maintained.[6]

Support from the ORF Management: The TV Studio as "Criminal Court" (April 24, 2017)

The media coverage that followed Pröll's *News* interview focused, above all, on his controversially-interpreted talk of "directed journalism." Three types of journalistic reporting can be distinguished in this case: First, media coverage was *observational*, e.g., by quoting individual passages from the interview, making them accessible in other media, and thus disseminating them further. Second, different *reactions* to Pröll's positioning were fed into the public discourse. For example, a press release from the ORF Editors' Council (a group of elected ORF journalists) was discussed in which Pröll's statements are rejected as a "conspiracy theory" (*Österreich* April

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07, 2017). Third, some explicitly-normative journalistic *opinion pieces* appeared that for the most part were critical of Pröll's position or outright rejected it.

But, if the discourse trajectory subsequently gained increasing momentum, this was primarily due to a second key positioning. Seventeen days after Pröll's *News* interview, an interview with the ORF's head of online and new media, Thomas Prantner, was published in the weekly magazine *profil*. Prantner was initially asked how he positions himself regarding the statement of another ORF manager, Roland Brunhofer, who had criticized *ZiB 2* anchor Wolf:

> *profil*: Brunhofer said that the ORF subjects politicians to "late-night inquisitions." Wolf and the *ZiB 2* team had to feel that he was talking about them. Should not a former regional director of the network [Brunhofer] know the difference between a critical interview and an inquisition?
>
> Prantner: We have the ORF Act and the editorial agreement. But the commitment to a critical and investigative journalism does not mean that anyone can do what they want. As I see it, this applies to interviews as well. A tough way of conducting interviews is not irreconcilable with fairness, correctness, and respect towards the interviewee. It is unacceptable for a public service broadcaster if the TV studio appears like an interrogation room or a criminal court. Politicians must put up with critical questions, but everything depends on the tone and style of the questioning. I guess that is what Brunhofer meant to say.
>
> *profil*: So you liken an ORF studio to a criminal court?
>
> Prantner: There were individual cases in which the interviewee and the public must have gained that impression. (*profil* April 24, 2017)

Similar to Pröll (whose name is not mentioned in the interview), Prantner initially legitimizes "critical journalism" *in principle* on an abstract level, and he mobilizes for his argumentation both the ORF Act, in which the public service mandate of the broadcaster is laid down, and the ORF's editorial agreement, in which the tasks, rights, and duties of all of its employees are defined. Thus, Prantner too invokes a — in this case, formally legitimized and codified — normative ideal of journalistic practice within whose framework "critical" and "investigative journalism" certainly have their place. Subsequently, he returns to the question of the assessment of Wolf's interview style: Although politicians have to tolerate "tough […] interviews" and "critical questions," what matters is "fairness, correctness, and respect towards the interviewee" and the "tone and style of the questioning."

Clearly, the issue here is what "correct" journalistic *practice* should look like; more specifically, how public broadcast journalism should be (individually) *enacted* in an appropriate manner. Important for an understanding of Prantner's position is the following point: The *opposite* of the virtuous consideration he champions is given when "the TV studio appears like an interrogation room or a criminal court," and this was, to his mind, indeed the case in the Pröll interview ("*must* have gained that impression;" emphasis added). According to Prantner, the central problem consists in the

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fact that Wolf moved illegitimately ("unacceptable") outside the normative framework of public broadcasting journalism as he understands (and communicates) it.

Enter the Boss: The Art of Non-Positioning (April 26/27, 2017)

Four weeks after Pröll's TV interview and two days after the publication of the Prantner interview, ORF director general Alexander Wrabetz (already mentioned — and criticized — in Pröll's *News* interview) spoke out for the first time, "after weeks of silence," as the daily *Salzburger Nachrichten* (April 26, 2017) put it. In short, his positioning with regard to Wolf's interview style and Prantner's criticism consisted in *not* communicating a position at all. While Wrabetz, in principle, backed his employee ("Armin Wolf has nothing to fear. […] Armin Wolf is one of the best interviewers"), he added that "not all of his interviews, as he says himself, are successful" and that Wolf "is his own harshest critic" (*Standard* April 26, 2017), thus at least voicing a subtle criticism. Wrabetz made similarly ambiguous comments in a second interview (*Kleine Zeitung* April 27, 2017). When asked what "critical journalism" should look like today, he replied, "Critical distance is the essence of an interview. Challenging and following up is also part of it, and there are no limits to it." At the same time, however, he stressed that "what we don't want to do is indicate our opinion of possible responses while asking our questions." And while "the conversation should not be too sterile," a good journalist knows better than to "signal either sympathy or antipathy towards the interviewee" (*Kleine Zeitung* April 27, 2017). As to Wolf's journalistic independence, Wrabetz defended it but also pointed out to the *ZiB 2* anchor his place in the internal organization of the ORF; "An anchor conducts the interviews, as per the program's profile. And the management's job is to decide on personnel and structures. Giving each other tips is fine. But in the end interviews are the interviewer's responsibility, and structural decisions the management's." The message: Wrabetz himself is in charge of internal organizational matters.

Wrabetz used the same diplomatic approach when commenting on Prantner's statements. On the one hand, he signaled agreement ("I thought many of the things he said about his own area of work were right and important"); on the other, he emphasized that Prantner is merely expressing an opinion (not speaking for the ORF as a whole) and subtly criticized his choice of terms; "He says, without providing names, that during individual discussions certain impressions are conveyed. That is his opinion. I would not phrase it like that" (*Standard* April 26, 2017).

Wrabetz's (non-)positioning left some room for interpretation. Some journalists read his remarks as support for Wolf whereas others reported that he put Wolf "in his place" (*Die Presse* April 28, 2017). The *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten* (April 26, 2017) spoke of "Wrabetz's lukewarm testimony" and concluded that he had "not clearly" sided with Wolf, thus calling attention to Wrabetz's communication strategy itself. Rumors were even reported that Prantner had "acted at the behest of Wrabetz" (*TV Media* April 26, 2017). Regardless of the possible journalistic interpretations,

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two things are certain. Unlike those journalists and commentators who spoke out in favor of Wolf and "critical journalism," Wrabetz did not explicitly make the relationship between media and politics an issue, nor did he problematize Prölls' statements in the *ZiB 2* or *News* interviews.

"Critical Journalism's" Collective Response and a Statement from the Chancellor (April 25 to May 10, 2017)

The discursive trajectory took a decisive turn after the Prantner interview, and later contributions would reference the Wrabetz interviews as well. This turn concerned two aspects. For one, there was a thematic shift. While the contributors initially concentrated on Wolf's interviewing style and the confrontational interview situation, now the *relationship between politics and media*, especially public broadcasting, began to play a much bigger role. Of particular importance in this context is the fact that the criticism by the representatives and defenders of "critical journalism" and some other observers (i.e., those who sided with Wolf) was not triggered exclusively by Prantner's positioning in terms of content (his negative view of Wolf) or his rhetoric (the TV studio as "criminal court"). Rather, various journalists criticized Prantner for entering into an *alliance*, a "coalition of values" (*Oberösterreichische Nachrichten* April 26, 2017) with Pröll. In other words, the argumentation of these commentators focused on the fact that a representative of *politics* (Pröll) and an (important) representative of the *management of the public broadcaster* (Prantner) were on the same page.[7] That this constituted a or *the* central problem becomes evident in a commentary by a journalist in the *Salzburger Nachrichten* (April 26, 2017; emphasis added):

> Some politicians, represented here by Erwin Pröll but not just him, want nothing to do with critical journalism as it is cherished by certain ORF journalists. That alone would not constitute a problem: a strong ORF leadership could easily fend off such attempts at political intervention. *The problem is that a part of the ORF leadership*, represented here by Brunhofer and Prantner, *willingly supports the politicians who criticize ORF*.

The above commentary's title — "Is the ORF being gagged?" — and the fact that the very first sentence of the article expressed a concern that the ORF's "journalistic independence" may be "threatened" already indicates the second aspect; the communicative thrust in the period between April 25 and May 10. The contributions and comments by representatives and defenders of "critical journalism" increasingly entailed crisis accounts. On the one hand, the rhetoric now often included a vocabulary of physical confrontation and war, a way of *claiming severity* and conveying the message communicatively on an emotional level. On the other hand, a variety of *instability claims* were made; a threat of undesirable change was articulated, and a warning against destabilizing the relationship between politics and the ORF was sounded (see "critical journalists' reactions" in Figure 1).

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We include here some examples. In a column in the *Kurier* (April 27, 2017), there was talk of a "very worrying development," of an "attempt to intimidate Wolf and all other journalists." The *Standard* (April 26, 2017) opined that it was not so much about Wolf, who admittedly likes to play "power games," but that the "real issue" was the "powers in the background" which target "the very substance of the democratic public." The German *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (April 28, 2017) spoke of a "remarkable controversy playing out," and according to the Vienna correspondent of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (April 25, 2017), Pröll's *News* interview should be seen as a "clear challenge" to the ORF leadership's authority. The Swiss *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (April 30, 2017) reported that "since in Austria the sphere of influence of politicians reaches well into the public service broadcasting, Wolf is currently being attacked on his own turf." Finally, in a speech printed in the *Standard* (May 04, 2017), a well-known Austrian journalist deplored "encroachments" of the ORF's "freedom," which he, based on his own experiences, thought had been "threatened" in recent years.

In some cases, the various media reports contain explicit *need-for-action claims* (e.g., the proposal to strengthen the independence of the ORF through political initiatives, such as a petition for a referendum). More importantly, however, two other aspects seem to us to contribute to highlighting or magnifying the relevance of the topic in particular. On the one hand, the fact that there was a *collective reaction* to the previous events (the interventions by "critical journalists" created a widely disseminated, shared crisis claim that made it difficult to ignore the issue); on the other hand, the fact that now also *non-Austrian*, i.e., German and Swiss, *media* (considered to be "quality newspapers") reported extensively on the Austrian case. This, in turn, was interpreted by participating Austrian journalistic actors as evidence of the relevance of the topic. For example, an article in *profil* (April 28, 2017; emphasis added) states the following: "Last week's *profil* interview with online director Thomas Prantner caused an upheaval in the ORF's headquarters, *which even German quality media like the Süddeutsche Zeitung dedicated articles to*."

The topical relevance generated in this way eventually provoked statements by leading politicians (whose positions were then taken up by the media): After some politicians — such as the then Media Minister (via Twitter) — had already positioned themselves in the discourse, Austria's then Chancellor, Christian Kern, commented on the matter on the ORF radio station Ö1. This interview was picked up by various media, and it was unanimously interpreted as supporting and defending Armin Wolf:

> Sure, his interviews are tough. [But a]s a viewer I have to say: He is always very well prepared, at least on par with the people he talks to, and against that background we should accept and appreciate it. I think this [the news program *ZiB 2*] is one of the truly important political programs we have in Austria. […] Personally I would say — and on behalf of the SPÖ [Social Democratic Party of Austria] as well — that there are no interventions […].[8]

In the case of Kern's (journalistically mediated and duplicated) positioning, as in the case of the others, not only is *what* he says about Wolf's journalistic work, interview

style, and "critical journalism" relevant, but above all *who* is taking a position, namely the country's leading politician, a person with a great deal of political capital (Bourdieu 1991:192ff.).

As for the further development of the case, it must suffice to say here that before and after, but also during the controversy itself, there were ongoing media coverage of and discussions about the need to structurally reform the ORF (see e.g., *Die Presse* May 24, 2017). One point debated was the creation of politically sensitive management positions, which, according to journalistic observers, secured more influence on news reporting for ORF Director Alexander Wrabetz. These plans were criticized by some ORF journalists, especially by a group around *ZiB 2* anchor Armin Wolf, but their implementation was nonetheless announced in May 2018.

THE KEY POSITIONS: CRISIS ACCOUNTS, JOURNALISTIC COMPETENCE, AND MEDIA MANAGEMENT

Before we determine the relationship between crisis accounts and journalistic expertise and generalize it theoretically in the next section, we uncover the logics of the key positions we identified within the discourse trajectory. For it turns out that, as different as the two key positions are (Pröll and Prantner on the one hand, the "critical journalists" on the other), they nevertheless show three remarkable similarities: Both (a) claim a crisis of journalism, (b) emphasize journalism's importance for democracy, and (c) interpret public broadcasting as a significant boundary object. It is these commonalities that make the differences between them even more apparent.

Inner Crisis—External Crisis

First, in both cases the enactment of crises appears to be a dominant discourse strategy. However, one position claims a crisis within, the other one a crisis outside the social world of journalism. Pröll, in epistemic terms ("nonsense") as well as in terms of legitimacy and autonomy, already in the *ZiB 2* interview contested the journalistic expertise communicatively displayed by the interviewer, Wolf. Later, in the *News* interview, he cautioned that some journalists could become dominant within the organizational structures of the ORF. Thus, he is communicating an *inner crisis*, warning of democracy-threatening developments within public broadcasting and its organization. According to Pröll, Wolf (and his supporters) illegitimately transgressed their jurisdiction. In this way, Pröll and *News* not only co-produced a topic that was subsequently reported on, they also produced the possibility of either publicly rejecting Pröll's position or actively supporting it and thus forming an alliance against the group of journalists Pröll claims need to be controlled.

The latter scenario occurred in the case of Prantner, ORF head of online, whose public criticism of Wolf prepared the ground for a second collective crisis construction, which now addressed the relationship between media and politics in more

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abstract terms. For the representatives of "critical journalism," the public alliance (as it was called by some commentators) between Pröll and Prantner made plain the underlying problem, i.e., that the ORF's independence is threatened. The "critical journalists" constructed an *external crisis* by expressing their concern that political decision-makers — a group that from their perspective stands outside the social world of journalism — exert influence on ORF journalists *through* the network's management.

The "Right" Enactment of Journalistic Competence

Second, both groups appealed to similar journalistic key values to legitimize their claims, and both attributed to journalism an important function for democratic societies (see also Koliska et al. 2020). On an abstract level, these commonalities form an unproblematized "protected territory" (Callon 1980:200) that is recognized and seems to be taken for granted by both sides (at least in their public statements). The importance of journalism "for democracy" is seen as indisputable *in principle*. However, the two groups differ in their view of *how* public service journalism should be enacted, i.e., how democratic ideals should be realized in journalistic practice (e.g., through different ways of interviewing politicians). What appears to one side (Pröll, Prantner) as a presumptuous and unacceptable journalistic interrogation, intended to make politicians look like fools, appears to the other side (the "critical journalists") as the tenacity necessary when facing politicians who evade certain questions or outright refuse to answer them. An essential difference between the two positions thus consists in how abstract journalistic ideal images and key values are discursively specified and, depending on one's interests and on the occasion, *translated* respectively (Gieryn 1983). Journalistic expertise — in particular, the way it should be practically performed — is therefore discursively constructed in different ways. Put differently, the two opposing groups publicly share the same abstract basic values but nonetheless espouse divergent understandings of journalistic competence. Consequently, their understanding of the ORF's functions also diverges.

Public Broadcasting as a Boundary Object

Third, the crisis accounts of both parties are situated between the respective "social worlds" of politics and journalism (Strauss 2008/1993:209–243; Clarke and Star 2008; see also Becker 2008/1982). In both cases, *the* central discursive intersection, or "boundary object" (Star and Griesemer 1989), is the public media company ORF. To be sure, both groups harbor different expectations towards the ORF and its management, but this would — in principle — not prevent cooperation between journalists and politicians as they can be seen as "mutually dependent actors, who interact on the basis of mutually respected role relations, within a shared political communication culture" (Van Dalen 2021:2712). In the controversy

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at hand, however, the diverging, if not contradictory, interests became manifest. While the critics of "critical journalism" aim at *limiting and controlling* journalistic work through the ORF management, the "critical journalists" themselves (and their defenders) argue for *protection* from such interventions by politicians via media managers — which is tantamount to the desire to be in charge of oneself (in Freidson's 2001:2] terms, to be able to establish professionalism, an "occupational control of work"). From the perspective of "critical journalism," then, an effective border management is needed.

That this is not easy to realize is evident from the statements of *the* ORF representative, director general Wrabetz. Obviously, Wrabetz must take into account different perspectives and interests; those of his employees (journalists, media managers, etc.), those of politicians (since he is appointed by the board of trustees, which is mainly politically staffed), and probably also those of the audience. His positioning is thus a complicated matter, and it is perhaps unsurprising that he tries to avoid joining either of the two key positions, or joining both — depending on how one looks at it. Wrabetz is relatively clear only with regard to *one* aspect. He is the "strong man" who makes the decisions, which is probably intended to suggest to politicians that he has everything under control.

THE ENACTMENT OF CRISES AS A DISCURSIVE POLITICIZATION OF JOURNALISTIC EXPERTISE

While at the beginning we presented the interpretive claims (instability, severity, need for action) that make crisis accounts crisis accounts in the first place and showed how these manifest empirically in the context of the controversy, our final task is to theoretically determine the *practical functions and possible effects* of crisis claims. The central question is: How do the enactment of crises and the articulation of journalistic expertise practically relate to each other?

To begin with, a highly conflictual situation occurs in the investigated case, located in the public arena (Strauss 2008/1993:225ff.). Of the social worlds of media and politics, not only do two groups with different views of journalism confront each other, but both are concerned with articulating and enforcing different interpretations of reality. If one defines political action with Pierre Bourdieu (1989:20) as practical attempts "to produce and to impose the legitimate vision of the world," which manifests in "symbolic struggles" about the "correct" interpretation of reality (see also Bourdieu 1991), it can be concluded that the invocation of crises represents an instrument of the *politicization* of metajournalistic discourse in general and journalistic expertise in particular. Against the background of this concept of politics, both the interpretative work of professionalized politics and the journalistic production of reality can be understood as political *in a broad sense*.[9] At this point, however, a central question arises: What makes crisis constructions political in *a narrower sense*? Three interdependent steps of a politicization of journalistic expertise can be identified: (a) the (de)legitimization of journalistic expertise, (b) the production of public

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relevance, and (c) the creation of mobilization effects. Basically, then, it is about how crisis claims are translated into mobilizations (Callon 1980, 1986).

Crisis Accounts as Instruments of (De)legitimizing Journalistic Expertise

Unsurprisingly, the different positionings reveal that crisis accounts indeed represent a form of metajournalistic discourse (Carlson 2016a). The question, however, is; in what concrete form? As we already argued above, crisis accounts are not innocent or objective descriptions of the state of journalism. Rather, they problematize journalism, and every problematization *ex negativo* implies a normative construction of journalism. This is more or less explicitly realized by means of projection and/or preservation. In the case of *projection*, it is the articulation of an ideal future state (e.g., a truly independent public service journalism on the one side or a managerially controlled journalism on the other).[10] In the case of *preservation*, it is an attempt to maintain an endangered here-and-now (e.g., that of "critical reporting"). Thus, problematizing projections and preservations serve a positive normative determination of journalistic expertise since they manifest here in divergent expectations of the media organization ORF (while both parties claim the "right" idea of journalism and its democratic relevance for themselves).

This can be further illustrated by means of the positionings of "critical journalists:" Journalism in crisis mode does not just represent a "practice capable of supplying valid knowledge of events in the world" (Carlson 2016a:350). The "critical journalists" do not simply report more or less disinterestedly on issues deemed relevant. Nor do they merely report on a (comparatively) unusual topic; themselves. Rather, the collective instability claims (along the lines of "The ORF is in danger!") function as the foundation of an act of normative self-assertion. What the "critical journalists" are concerned with is articulating a certain form of journalism as *desirable and/or worth preserving*. In other words, they engage in agenda setting on their own behalf. These crisis constructions are thus political in a narrower sense insofar as they are communicative instruments to *(de)legitimize certain (un)desired notions of journalistic expertise* (see also Carlson 2016a:360f.; Koliska et al. 2020; Monahan and Maratea 2021:715ff.; Skovsgaard and Bro 2011). One could say that crises are negative justifications of what is supposed to be.

Crisis Accounts as Instruments of Producing Public Relevance

Against this background, the practical challenge is to make oneself heard. In other words, it is not only a matter of defining the situation in a specific way and setting topics, but also of seeking appropriate ways and means to enforce one's own normative interpretation of reality. One prerequisite for this is the generation of a certain (affective) resonance on the part of the media recipients. The strategy of claiming a "crisis of journalism" first and foremost consists in convincing readers "that there *is* an issue" (Strauss 2008/1993:226) which deserves serious attention. In the "critical

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journalists"' modified rhetoric and in their collective enactment of crisis claims, we have identified discursive strategies that not only allow for naming a specific problem but also for making it sufficiently recognizable. In order to be heard, and thus successful, "critical journalists" leave the "normal" mode of journalistic reporting. They become louder in the sense of using more alarming terminology and involving a growing number of voices: A broad (international) movement is forming that is committed to a common issue — fighting threats to journalistic independence. Crisis constructions are thus political in a narrower sense insofar as they represent *dramatizing strategies of relevance production in an intensified interpretive struggle*.

Crisis Accounts as Instruments of Mobilization

Our analysis of the Wolf controversy as a discursive trajectory has made evident that crisis accounts are not only about articulating different interpretations of reality, making them recognizable and relevant, but in fact about striving for their imposition. Crisis accounts are potentially mobilizing (Blumer 1971; Bourdieu 1991; Callon 1980, 1986; Snow and Benford 1988) since they create both *opportunities* and *necessities of positioning* for actors participating in the journalistic arrangement of expertise (Eyal 2013). One could say that crisis claims invite actors to form (discursive) alliances or call for their own counter positionings (Benford 2013): Prantner can join Pröll in trying to change the arrangement of expertise of public service journalism in their favor (for the benefit of all who share their position) — for example, by jointly putting public pressure on ORF director general Wrabetz. At the same time, however, Prantner mobilizes the "critical journalists" who, for their part, make his intervention a topic qua crisis construction, and thereby invite others to join in and produce resonance and further attention. Eventually, they thus contribute to turbulence in the media, which in turn prompts politicians to state their position, or at least encourages other journalists to question them on the subject. Therefore, crisis claim-makers become representatives of a certain interpretation of reality, which may be consequential if other relevant actors publicly *share* their interpretation of reality.

From the perspective of the "critical journalists," these acts of mobilization are political in the narrower sense because they go beyond addressing media consumers. They represent a practical way of transcending the boundaries of the social world of journalism and *intervening* in other social worlds — such as that of politics or that of public service media management — by recruiting actors from these social worlds (or bringing opponents onto the scene). Ideally, relevant actors with much political/symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1991:192ff.) can be induced to (publicly) react.

CONCLUSION

In the natural attitude of daily life (Schütz 1962), we take social phenomena for granted. With regard to the frequently claimed "crises of journalism," sociologists, too — particularly those who see themselves as "critical" — are inclined to conceive

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the problems and challenges journalism faces as developments endangering the democratic public sphere. And some of them actively contribute to the crisis discourse themselves (see, most recently, Habermas 2021:487ff.). From a constructivist perspective, however, this does not exempt us from asking how and why "crises of journalism" are practically enacted as social phenomena. This has an important implication: It means to understand crisis accounts not just as communicative products based on practices of claims-making and framing processes, but to inquire about the *practical functions of crisis claims*. In light of our case study, we suggest that these serve as forms of a *(discursive) politicization of journalistic expertise*.

While the controversy examined here is country-specific and temporally limited, it nonetheless allows us to draw some (preliminary) theoretical conclusions. First, crisis accounts function as *instruments of (de)legitimizing journalistic expertise*, making journalism itself an issue from a normative point of view (what journalism ought to be like). Second, crisis accounts are *instruments of generating public relevance*; they potentially produce resonance on the part of recipients of journalistically mediated content. Third, crises function as *instruments of mobilization*, which are a prerequisite for generating approved world views or even initiating (sometimes unintended) concrete practical measures. However, it is important to point out that not only concrete policy actions in the narrower sense (e.g., government decisions or even legislative amendments) constitute practical effects, but already the public reactions by heterogeneous actors, which contribute to the discursive trajectory. This symbolic "signifying work" (Snow and Benford 1988:198) is a central aspect of political and journalistic practice (Bourdieu 2005).

Our hope is that we were able to make clear that a central key to identifying and reconstructing the functions and (potential) effects of crisis claims is to take seriously the processuality and interactivity of discursive struggles over the "correct" interpretation of reality — for that is what crisis accounts are. In the concept of *discursive trajectory* and the approach of *processual mapping*, we have proposed theoretical and methodological instruments for a processual analysis of crisis constructions. Overall, such an approach emphasizes the practical-political implications of crisis claims. Crisis accounts articulated in the mass media or elsewhere (e.g., in social science literature) and the journalistic key values corresponding to them are not merely abstract ideas. Rather, they are practical stakes which are always tied to specific perspectives and interests and, depending on the occasion, geared towards establishing an interpretation of reality considered legitimate — i.e., at producing "symbolic power" (Bourdieu 1991:163ff.). Crisis accounts, then, are not only a specific way of cognitively interpreting reality; they aim at evoking practical consequences and *moving* actors.

Whether the theoretical generalizations presented above also apply to other forms of claiming "crises of journalism" or if they require case-specific modifications and refinements can ultimately only be shown in comparative case studies (Snow et al. 2003). In our view, there are two issues in particular that warrant further research, which we would like to briefly address here in conclusion.

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First, we consider comparisons between countries whose media systems are structured differently to be particularly fruitful, for we assume that journalistic practice as a whole still is strongly nationally bound (Flew and Waisbord 2015), and the same applies to crisis accounts and their thematic orientation (Zelizer 2015:900f.). The crisis accounts discussed here primarily revolve around normative notions of *public service* broadcasting; an institution that European "critical journalists" see as a "sacred institution" (Larsen 2016:54) they must defend. However, crisis accounts can of course also take on completely different thematic forms. María Luengo (2014), for instance, has shown for the United States (and comparatively for Spain) how techno-economic transformations were used as "grounds" (Best 1987:104) for crisis accounts, namely, as damaging "in-depth, accurate, and critical journalism" (Luengo 2014:584). From the perspective we propose, one can see Former US President Donald Trump, to give another example, as an influential claims-maker of a "crisis of journalism." Specifically, he triggered a crisis of the mainstream media which, according to Trump's de-legitimization strategy, fail to meet standards of truth, competence, and independence, and thus pollute political and public discourse (Carlson et al. 2021; Koliska et al. 2020; Monahan and Maratea 2021). In light of such examples, we suggest a kind of national crisis mapping; a systematic assessment of which "crises of journalism" can be observed in which countries. On such a basis, comparative case studies may be conducted, which allow for a more precise determination of the influence of the respective media systems' structural conditions on crisis accounts (and the discursive trajectories that can be found in each case).

Trump is also relevant for the second issue. His use of social media, especially Twitter, not only revealed their possible influence on political communication (Altheide 2020; Carlson et al. 2021; Monahan and Maratea 2021), but also their close connections to other, more traditional media. Trump's Tweets were "boosted, amplified, and legitimated by established conventional broadcast media, like Fox TV" (Altheide 2020:528), disseminating them further than Twitter alone would have been able to (Carlson et al. 2021:742; Monahan and Maratea 2021:718). By contrast, in the Austrian media controversy studied here, social media barely played a role in conventional media contributions. This raises the question of the specific, multiple, and intricate media logics of discursive trajectories (Altheide 2020:515ff.). The case of Trump shows that the connections—but also possible decouplings—of different types of media can prove to be highly relevant for the dramaturgy of discursive processes. The study of discursive trajectories could thus certainly benefit from addressing the constitution of journalistic reporting and political communication as distributed across different media types. One can imagine media-specific discursive trajectories (e.g., on Twitter and in the press) that principally operate in parallel but also show many points of contact. The question would then be under which conditions im- and exports between these trajectories take place and which logics underlie them.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to thank Kai Ginkel, Sarah Miriam Pritz, and the participants of the Social and Cultural Theory colloquium at the Institute of Sociology, Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, as well as the anonymous reviewers, all of whom made critiques and suggestions that contributed significantly to improving the present article. Furthermore, we would like to thank Björn Bosserhoff for his careful editing of the text and Lisa-Jo K. van den Scott for her great support and her helpful suggestions. Open Access funding enabled and organized by Projekt DEAL.

NOTES

1. Thus, we are adding to Clarke's (2005:83ff.) three types of maps (situational, social worlds/arenas and positional maps) a fourth one. It is important to point out that maps are not to be understood as instruments for presenting results, but rather, primarily, as tools for analysis.
2. The 61% represents the average relative share of broadcasting fees in the ORF's total revenue during the years 2013 to 2020. The remainder comes from advertising (22%) and "other revenues" (17%). The average total annual revenue during this period amounted to around EUR 1 billion (=USD 1.13 billion) (see https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/880790/umfrage/umsatzerloese-des-oesterreichischen-rundfunks-nach-ertragsstruktur/; https://der.orf.at/unternehmen/der-orf100.html; shares based on own calculations). In Austria every household that owns a broadcast receiver and can in principle receive ORF programs is — with some exceptions — obliged to pay broadcasting fees (https://www.gis.at/fremdsprachen/english; all websites last accessed on February 3, 2022).
3. Such a statement by social scientists should be understood, from our interpretive perspective, as part of the normative construction of journalistic expertise (see also Deuze and Witschge 2018:167ff.).
4. In the live broadcast a 9-minute excerpt of the recorded interview was aired. The full 22-minute interview is available in the ORF's video-on-demand library: https://tvthek.orf.at/history/Innenpolitik/8002278/Proell-verteidigt-Privatstiftung-in-ZIB-2-Interview/13926903 (accessed September 2, 2021). It is primarily this online version that has become the subject of media coverage.
5. Although not included in the print version, but only in a video of the interview published on *News'* website (https://www.news.at/a/erwin-proell-interview-8065458; accessed September 2, 2021), the statement added in curved brackets was picked up by the media in various articles.
6. Following Herman and Chomsky (1988), this intervention could also be called an instance of "flak." In their theory of manufacturing consent, flak refers to one of several filtering mechanisms that control the production of news — specifically, negative reactions to a media statement or program (e.g., in the form of threats to journalists) intended to create a chilling effect, thereby standardizing journalistic coverage.
7. See the black thick arrows in the period between April 24 and May 4 in Figure 1, which illustrate that this alliance became a topic in the media contributions presented in the map.
8. Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuOdWXjrvdg (accessed September 2, 2021)
9. Örnebring et al. 2018 (following Bourdieu) have convincingly argued that there is no such thing as journalism proper, but that the "journalistic space" is a heterogeneous field with a number of different participants.
10. A special case of projection would be the *restoration* of a no longer apposite past state.

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