

Executive Summary

The current research presents some data concerning the representation of human rights issues in Arab weekly newspapers. It examines which types of issues are presented in the media discourse and their connection to the social and political environments. The focus on human rights stems from the subject's general importance, especially in cases of ethnic minorities, like the Arab-Palestinian population in Israel, which endures the violation of their rights in various aspects of life.

Our purpose is to examine, analyze and understand the representation of human rights issues in a sampling from the most popular newspapers published among the Arab population. We would offer an opportunity to understand the nature of human rights discourse by asking which issues get more attention, what is their level of prominence, how are they presented and to what extent are they connected to human rights terminology. We will also compare the representation of Arab minority's social rights facing the state, with the representation of human rights within society itself, and ask what could be the reason for the differences between the two. The comparison between them may help us gain a better understanding of the media discourse and its level of concern for group and individual rights within the society, especially of those deprived of their rights, not just by the state, but also by groups or individuals from within the society. In other words, this study examines the Arab media's commitment to human rights issues, not just by counting the number of human rights related articles but also by probing their content. Thus we explore the willingness of the media to acknowledge the difficult situation in which the Arab community in general and certain disadvantaged groups within it find themselves, and emphasize the violations of human rights in order to enable the consolidation of the human rights paradigm in society.

While findings in most samples of news reports suggest that the general

atmosphere is in favor of human rights, we found no special emphasis on the subject or active calls by the media to turn this general atmosphere into a human rights ethical stance. Likewise, there was no attempt to educate the readers about human rights by tying the articles to international norms, standards, treaties and organizations dedicated to them. The media reports merely monitored incidents of group's or individual's rights violations. The articles were mostly descriptive; their content may have been related to human rights issues but there was no mention of the direct link between the incident reported and its specific human rights components, nor an expressed support of the right that had been violated. This is the most common kind of coverage, even in cases of gross violations of the Arab minority's rights by the government or its agencies. The subject of violence is prominent in the media agenda according to the findings, a reflection of the growing violence within society, which result in rights violations of specific groups, particularly women. We found that although specific groups within Arab society, such as women, domestic violence victims or house demolition victims have their rights being violated, most news reports related to human rights discuss the larger communitarian impacts rather than focusing on how these violations specifically impact women.

This kind of coverage shows that the collective social framework of the Arab minority in Israel is the dominant one, having created a collective self-image of this social group. But it results in generalizing the human rights issue and excluding gender-sensitive analysis, thus neglecting the question of how gender, race and even class interlock and creating a sense of acceptance of such forms of violations. The findings show us that media reports relating to human rights lack historical references to human rights issues, which could enhance the reports by reminding the readers of events or people related to the subject of human rights. The avoidance of historical references to policies and behaviors that violate human rights, indirectly undermines the idea of human rights as the ethical framework for the incident reported in the article.

After measuring the quantity of the reports and examining their characteristics, we may conclude that there is no special emphasis on human right issues. There is no declared policy concerning this matter and human rights issues

The Marginality of Human Rights Discourse in Local Arabic Newspapers

are reported like any other issue on the media agenda. We found that the most prominent rights on the media agenda are the local and regional rights of the Arab minority; the right for personal safety and the right for security and wellbeing are the most prominent in articles discussing violence in Arab society, while freedom of speech, the right to equality and the right to adequate housing are the most prominent when discussing Israel's policies, which points clearly to the intentional and systematic violations of Arab minority's basic rights. There is a difference between the focus on collective rights, set by the relations between the state and the Arab minority, and individual rights, shaped between individuals, at the level of the community, and impacted by the state. While there is a common, though not systematic, practice of focusing on civil, political and to some degree socio-economic rights of the Arab-Palestinian minority, there is no sufficient emphasis in the media on violations of human rights performed by actors from within the community itself.

To sum up, we can say that while there is definitely a general atmosphere in favor of human rights and against violating them, especially when it comes to the Arab minority's rights in Israel, there is no direct emphasis expressed, nor is there use of human rights terminology. The informative and educational aspects of reporting on rights violations are also noticeably absent.