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The attitude of the local press to marginal groups: between solidarity and alienation

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\textbf{ABSTRACT}

This article examines the 2001–2003 coverage by the local press in the Haifa region of the struggle of the fishermen who claimed to have contracted cancer as a result of coming into contact with the polluted water of the Kishon River. It shows that the local press chose to deliver to its readers an ‘interpretive package’ that portrays the fishermen as ‘The River’s Heroes’, a group fighting for justice and morality for the benefit of all. However, alongside the favourable framing were also some of the writers’ stereotypical elitist perceptions, at times explicit and at others implicit, of the fishermen. In the case of the Kishon fishermen, whereas the local press played an important role in covering their struggle, it only partially presented the solidarity dimension wherein the differences between people and groups constitutes the basis for moral relations between them.

\textbf{KEYWORDS} Local press; solidarity; fishermen; interpretive package; framing; Kishon Affair

\textbf{Introduction: the local press}

Unlike national newspapers that are distributed countrywide, local newspapers have specific geographical target audiences and are generally published weekly. The local press aims to provide its readers with information on local events, and activities in the local public domain, alongside business/advertising pages. Local newspapers define a regional area as their relevant territory, and provide their readers with tools to help them in everyday life. Despite the numerous deficiencies of the local press, within a relatively short time its readers have developed a sense that the information provided by local newspapers constitutes a localized and familiar source of information.\textsuperscript{1} Toward the end of the twentieth century, the sociological perception of loose social bonds in the urban-industrial system was replaced by an examination of social-community
arenas in these spaces, and acknowledgement that the local press constitutes an instrument for community integration. Numerous studies have described the social need of people living in urban communities to create social arenas of belonging, and a sense of local identification. Stamm posits that the existence of numerous local newspapers in a particular area indicates strong community ties and community solidarity. People living in the same residential area share various social systems that shape their lives, and the quality of the ties between the individuals depends on mediating agents – and the local press is one of these agents. The new approaches engaging in community also emphasize the renewed linkage between the individual and group mind, which possesses collective and human values of reciprocity and solidarity. Social solidarity mandates care and concern for the close other, and this closeness can stem from social identity, but also from community of place, region, or shared geographic space. Researchers still view shared geographic space as the primary basis for the development of a community. The most important characteristic shared by all local newspapers is a strengthening of the writer’s sense of belonging to the local community. This sense of belonging is a component of an individual’s identity as a resident of a particular area, as a member of the community, and as someone close to their surroundings. Local newspapers are typified by episodic stories based on the tradition of descriptive drama that creates an effect of realism, and favours close examination over presentation of a general, distant perspective. Some local topics, such as politics and public administration that occupy most of the investigational space in the local press, are commissioned and supported by local politicians, who also provide advertising space. Local journalists seek out human interest stories on local public figures and ordinary people, whose life dramas evoke altruistic or inquisitive interest, people who are waging a struggle against public authorities and the establishment, or who inspire sympathy and identification.

The local press in Israel began gaining a foothold in the early 1980s. Its target audience is a population residing in a defined geographic area, and constitutes a consumer target for the businesses operating in that area, and which support the local newspaper’s publication. Standing behind some local newspapers that started out as advertising fliers are private entrepreneurs, and the structure of the editorial board is typified by a low level of institutionalization.

The power of the press lies in its ability to set the agenda by focusing public attention on a particular issue, and determining what is important at a given moment, which in turn sparks public debate that can also drive political change. The journalists writing for local newspapers are usually not bound by the rules of ethics of the national press, in terms of investigative requirements and reliability or of the declared need for representation of different opinions, and they are free to choose to cover the struggles of local social groups and provide a solidarity platform.
The test case presented in the present study seeks to examine whether the local press indeed gave sympathetic expression to a marginal group in Israeli society, and brought its struggle to the attention of the wider public offering support and sympathy, or whether in its coverage it perpetuated the inferior status of this group. Did the local press function as a morally and socially committed representative of the public, or did it continue to represent a discrete elite group?

When examining the activities of the local press in general, and with regard to social issues in particular, it should be borne in mind that a local newspaper is not an organized ideological body, and in some local newspapers no editorial meetings are held in which value-based discussions are conducted on the subject matter of the stories or the nature of their coverage, or even on its interpretive package. At times there is no collaboration between journalists working for the same local newspaper, and the editor or editorial coordinator receives the stories only a short time before their publication. Consequently, the attempt to gain an understanding of the role played by the local press in accompanying the struggle of the Kishon River fishermen was carried out from a retrospective overview, and the findings are a retrospective identification of trends, positions, and actions, even when they were not apparent and visible to those engaged in the journalistic writing at the time.

**Background: the Kishon Affair as reflected in the press – prominence and exclusion of social groups**

The beginnings of the incident commonly referred to in Israel as ‘The Kishon Affair’ can be traced back to a comprehensive investigative report that was published in May 2000 in *Yedioth Ahronoth*, the most widely distributed newspaper in Israel at the time. The report revealed that many of the naval commandos who had trained in the Kishon River, whose waters were being polluted by the petrochemical plants in the Haifa Bay area, had contracted cancer and subsequently died. Following the exposé and the commandos’ demand that the state acknowledge its responsibility for the afflicted soldiers, a special commission of inquiry was appointed, headed by former Supreme Court Justice Meir Shamgar. After three years of Shamgar Commission hearings, the state accepted responsibility for treating the naval commandos who had contracted cancer, and for providing assistance to the families of those who had subsequently died. The naval commandos’ struggle received extensive coverage in the national Israeli press for three years, from the publication of the exposé to the state accepting responsibility.

An examination of the attitude of the daily national press to the naval commandos’ lawsuit revealed that in *Yedioth Ahronoth*, a newspaper associated with the popular press, the subject was covered in 123 articles and stories, in all of which the journalists displayed personal involvement and concern, and adopted an explicit or implicit stance regarding the affair’s moral and ethical aspects.
The newspaper’s coverage was accompanied by a regular logo composed of the words *Sartan Bashayetet* (lit. cancer in the naval commando unit) and the unit’s insignia, and highlighted the importance of the subject. In the broadsheets, the daily *Ha’aretz* primarily covered the commission of inquiry proceedings, adopted a more neutral stance toward the commandos’ struggle, and placed emphasis on environmental aspects and ecological hazards.

The Kishon River fishermen worked in the very same place where the commandos trained, they too suffered from serious illnesses, and many of them died of cancer. The fishermen filed a suit in the district court against the petrochemical plants and demanded recognition of their right to compensation for the damage caused to them. Despite the similarity of the fishermen’s and the naval commandos’ struggles, the fishermen’s 13-year struggle did not receive similar media or public attention. In this situation, whereby the fishermen’s struggle was hidden from the general public’s view, the local press filled the void and created an alternative platform. The present article endeavours to shed light on the nature of the local press and its distinctiveness in accompanying the fishermen’s struggle.

**Solidarity vs. alienation**

In the past, solidarity typified people who lived together and were similar to one another, and possessed characteristics of shared destiny, loyalty, and reciprocity. As society developed and traditional social systems disintegrated, solidarity changed its character and began giving expression to the division of functions between people, and their interdependence on the practical interest level, as well as to values, mutual responsibility, and shared social responsibility, as a kind of ‘collective conscience’. As a social act, solidarity can exist between two individuals or two groups, when one side is usually stronger and helps the weaker and more vulnerable one. The role of the media is to serve as a ‘watchdog’ and expose public failures or conduct that deviates from accepted norms. The ‘contract’ between the daily press and the reader is therefore not one of mollification, containment, and empathy toward the figures featured on the pages of the newspaper, but the reverse: the press is expected to be ‘biting’ and shed light on the ugly aspects of reality. Consequently, the press has to maintain independent and nonaligned autonomy. Postmodern ethics, which rejects the existence of a general truth, and instead postulates a contextual truth that contains responsibility for and ethical commitment to the other, proposes a local model that assumes pluralism of thought and philosophy wherein respect for people exists despite their differences. Acknowledgement of the other therefore mandates the rejection of any attempt to distance them or cause their exclusion from the political and media discourse.

The philosophy of Karl Marx regarded the absence of solidarity as the most profound ‘sore evil’ of living in a capitalist society, and since then the concept
of solidarity has become part of the ideological worldview of numerous left-wing organizations and labour unions around the world. An example is Solidarność (Solidarity), the Polish trade union federation founded in 1980 by Lech Wałęsa with the aim of protecting workers’ rights and breaking the monopoly of the Communist Party as the only political organization in Eastern Europe.

The diametric opposite of solidarity is alienation, which is typified by a sense of foreignness, lack of belonging, distance, and isolation. The concept of alienation has a long history. For our purposes, alienation can be manifested in different social contexts, one of the most striking of which is the disparity in social status between different groups. In democratic countries that raise the banner of the right to freedom of expression and equality between citizens, the media is considerably influenced by the character of the social and political system in which it operates. Thus, minority groups, either in numerical terms or low social status groups from the geographic periphery, are often shunted to the margins and do not gain equal representation.14

The individual reader is not personally known to the national media, and consequently does not expect it to express solidarity. By contrast, the local or regional press is much closer to its readers and their hardships, big and small alike. The place of the local press compared with the national press is of considerable importance when examining its distinctiveness in terms of its ability to express independent views, and especially to provide a platform for identifying with struggles in which the national press displays little or no interest. Groups and individuals gain expression in the local media, namely the local press, radio, and television, and the most important common characteristic is a strengthening of the sense of belonging to the local community. Thus, the basic conditions exist, at least ostensibly, for solidarity to develop.

The Kishon River fishermen’s struggle is the individual case of a marginal minority group in Israeli society. It is a weak group in terms of its power to reach the national media, and hardly gained any expression in the national press, and the only possibility for their struggle to reach the printed media was by means of the local press. How did the local press in the Haifa region, where the Kishon River fishermen live, report on the fishermen’s struggle, how did it cover the struggle, and how did it build an interpretive package for their suffering and distress? Did it function as representing a commercial position in which public responsibility does not play a part, or as a public representative with moral social responsibility? These questions lay at the basis of the analysis of the newspaper stories on the Kishon River fishermen, and will be examined with reference to prominent theories in the field of communication.

**Material collection and analysis**

Although hundreds of local newspapers are published in Israel every week, there is no single archive that houses all the reports, articles, and stories...
published in them. Most local editorial boards do not maintain an organized archive, especially the small local newspapers that are struggling to survive, whose owners seem to have no interest in investing resources in documenting the information published in them. Consequently, local newspaper researchers face a problem, especially when they seek to methodically analyse material that has not been collected and documented in real time.

The newspaper stories analysed in the present study were published between 2001 and 2003, and were collected (randomly and without any apparent methodology) by the fishermen themselves. A few of them are undated, and we assume that like all the others they were collected during the period the fishermen conducted an active public struggle. The material was lent to us for a limited period at the end of October 2008, some six or seven years after it was published, as a gesture of goodwill and in response to our request. Acknowledging the absence of methodology in collecting the stories mandated treating all 28 of them as qualitative material, and making no claims pertaining to a sample. The qualitative analysis was conducted in accordance with media measurements such as content, headlines, main players, narrative building, and metaphors.

The stories were collected from five local newspapers, and were written by 15 journalists (for a breakdown of the stories and their authors, see the Bibliography section). Only one journalist covered the affair over an extended period of time, and published seven stories on the subject, two other journalists published three stories, and the remaining 11 journalists published one or two stories on the fishermen's struggle for acknowledgement of the Kishon River's pollution. Thus it seems that although the topic was 'in the air' for a long time, only one local newspaper undertook to give it long-term news coverage. The other local newspapers left it as a 'hot' topic, and responded to specific events associated with it. We shall examine the fishermen's struggle against the Kishon River's pollution, and the coverage they received in the local press by means of an analysis of the stories.

As in field studies that at times collect random material, the main methodological limitation in the present study was the absence of information concerning the degree to which the stories that were analysed represent all the stories that were published on the subject. The missing details pertaining to the location of the stories and their context within all the events at the time made it difficult to validate the findings. Even the presumption that the majority of the stories were collected at the time leaves room for the possibility that the fishermen 'missed' some, and they were consequently not included in the analysis. Nevertheless, it is evident that no internal classification was carried out on the collected material according to the spirit of the stories or the degree of their sympathy for the struggle.
The fishermen’s struggle as reflected in the local media

Framing and interpretive packaging as an expression of solidarity

Framing is a kind of schema that offers individuals an organizing tool to enable them to interpret, process, and store information. Every journalistic story is comprised of a sequence of events, some of which are interconnected, while others clash, and every story has a point of view in accordance with the position of the ‘actor’ or ‘player’ on the ‘stage’ and their role in the story. The journalist’s role is to provide the public with tools that enable it to understand new information and formulate its views on the subject by employing familiar causal analogies. The writing incorporates information, at times partial and unsubstantiated, voices from the ground, and personal interpretation. The way a journalist chooses to describe an event – which details and voices to present – shapes the framing and point of observation that will be constructed in the reader. Framing is intended to define the essence of the problem and shape the way of thinking about it and ways of resolving it. The assumption that the media reflects reality is naive, since the framing accorded to an issue profoundly affects the way in which it is constructed and evaluated.

The term ‘interpretive package’ was coined by Gamson and Modigliani, and describes the way a journalist constructs a story with the aim of bringing the reader to a particular understanding of a complex issue according to the way s/he seeks to present it. They specified four factors which in their view influence the way this package is formulated: (1) cultural components that are consistent with the target audience’s reality; (2) business or other connection with bodies (such as sponsors, social organizations, and so forth); (3) professional practices of presenting diverse opinions; and (4) adapted linkage to previous events. Consequently, an interpretive media package includes a central organizing idea (the frame), and a number of symbols or artistic, linguistic, or visual means.

In the case of the Kishon Affair, the national press presented the naval commandos who trained in the Kishon River as heroes, and the fishermen as people who ‘catch stinking fish’. It reinforced the stereotype whereby the fishermen are impoverished, and their inarticulacy and appearance are likely to arouse revulsion. The fishermen themselves accepted this stereotype and did not attempt to challenge it:

Usually, when someone from the television comes to ask something, he finds a fisherman on the beach who doesn’t speak Hebrew, or speaks Hebrew of a certain kind. The naval commandos are not only more patriotic, they’re also more photogenic.

An examination of the subjects covered in the local press revealed that they are divided into two main areas:
(1) Damage caused to the fishermen due to contact with the Kishon River’s polluted water: property damage (33%) and bodily damage (29%).

(2) Ecological damage: quality of the environment (26%) and public health (12%).

On reading the content of the stories, and given the substantial space allocated to the subject, it is evident that the local press generally adopted a position of sympathetic solidarity toward the fishermen’s struggle, and presented them as an active group fighting for the benefit of all. Moreover, in their struggle the local press chose to frame the fishermen as fighters, as a group fighting the just war of all the residents of the Haifa Bay region whose quality of life, as well as the natural and ecological environment, could be adversely affected by the Kishon River’s polluted water. Due to their daily proximity to the Kishon’s water, the fishermen were the first to suffer, but the danger is much more widespread. According to the stories, the fishermen acted similarly to a military unit defending the home front, and their leader was even nicknamed ‘Commander of the Nahal’ (in Hebrew: nahal = river, and also the name of an Israel Defence Force (IDF) infantry brigade).

Many of the stories in the local press presented the fishermen as acting for the principle of justice, and not only for financial compensation. In stories about public health and environmental quality, the local press described the fishermen as the ‘vanguard’ in the war of the public as a whole against the large-scale ecological hazard. The local press presented the fishermen as those who were warning against failures in public administration, and presented their demand to participate in the activities and decisions of the environmental pollution agencies. Thus, unlike the national press, which primarily engaged in the state’s responsibility toward the naval commandos, the local press preferred to engage in the local implications of the river’s pollution, and thus created a basis of mutual interest for the fishermen and all the residents of the region. To strengthen this impression, they chose to quote the fishermen describing themselves as soldiers standing guard: ‘We fishermen will be the real soldiers who ensure that the River Authority does its job’. These expressions allude to a possible comparison with the naval commandos, who managed to create equivalence between the national narrative of heroes who were sent on a military mission by the state, and the justness of their struggle to gain the state’s acknowledgment of its responsibility toward them.

Underlying solidarity is the perception of reciprocity even in the absence of symmetry between the players. A photograph of the presiding judge in the fishermen’s suit against the petrochemical plants sitting in a boat with the fishermen during a tour of the Kishon illustrates more than anything else how in a one-time but symbolic event the fishermen and the judge are ‘on the same level’. Moreover, the local press presented quotes by the fishermen from which it is evident that their lack of formal education is being leveraged into an advantage
in terms of familiarity with the area: ‘We’re not professors, but the solutions for the Kishon can be found with us and not in the courts, we know the river better than anyone else.’ It is evident that the ideological position of the press can take on a diverse range of direct or indirect linguistic and formal expressions.

An examination of the headlines of the stories on the Kishon River published in the local press reveals that about two-thirds were devoted to the fishermen, and one-third engaged in the affair’s ecological aspects and the struggle for the public’s health. The headlines equally emphasize two main players: the fishermen and the polluting plants, which are primarily identified with Haifa Chemicals Ltd. The court and its representatives who are charged with justice and preserving public order appear in the headlines as only supporting actors.

The headlines can be divided into four groups:

1. Factual headlines that provide information from a neutral non-involved perspective. For example: ‘Thousands of fish found dead in the Kishon fishing harbor’; ‘The Kishon Fishermen’s Association demands a commission of inquiry’; ‘Fishing boat owners on the Kishon demand NIS 7.2 million in compensation for destruction of their property’.

2. Quotation headlines that present direct quotes. For example: ‘The Kishon fishermen: They want us to be like monkeys and die quietly’; ‘The Kishon restoration plans are meaningless” said Minister of Agriculture Shalom Simhon during a tour of the Kishon fishing harbor’.

3. Interpretive headlines that explain an event. For example: ‘The fishermen defeated Haifa Chemicals [the petrochemical plant].’

4. Headlines incorporating idioms and metaphors designed to trigger the reader’s senses and associations. For example: ‘Floating court on the Kishon’, ‘Kishon Qassam rocket’, ‘The grass is green, but what about the smell?’

The headlines associated with the Kishon River in the local press differ in style from those in the national press: in the national press most of the headlines were factual, pertinent, and interpretive, whereas in the local press only half of them are factual, almost one-third employ metaphors and idioms, and the number of headlines presenting quotes and interpretations is relatively low. In a few stories the headlines and photographs occupy most of the page, and thus the text becomes a secondary component of the story.

The headlines of newspaper stories are simultaneously an indication of the story’s content and an autonomous text, since some readers ‘leaf’ through the newspaper and are satisfied with reading only the headlines. Headlines perform a dual role: they provide an indication of what the story is about, and stimulate the reader to read it. Consequently, the choice of headline has a substantial influence on the level of prominence a subject is accorded in the newspaper.
The main headlines and subheads not only express the position of the author/journalist, but also and primarily the position of the editor who chooses to publish them.36

While the national press created the impression that the heroes of the affair were the naval commandos, whereas the fishermen ‘jumped on the bandwagon’ of their struggle, the local press undertook to frame the fishermen’s struggle differently. Gamson describes how the press can advance social change by presenting an injustice, marking those responsible for it, and creating familiarity with the people who have suffered from it.37 For this purpose, according to Gamson, the stories have to appeal to the emotional aspect of the injustice while preserving the frame of beliefs shared by the public as a whole. In this instance it seems that the local press indeed enlisted to highlight the injustice caused by the petrochemical plants dumping effluent into the Kishon River. It had no difficulty pointing a finger at those to blame for the injustice, and proposed an alternative framing to that offered by the national press, central to which was the issue of environmental quality and the health of all residents in the area, including the fishermen as a group that suffered the greatest harm.

With reference to the model proposed by Gamson and Modigliani,38 it seems that the interpretive package includes the target audience’s perception of reality, in this case the residents of Haifa and its environs. We ascribe an attitude of solidarity to the interpretive package precisely because the stories are free of any business connection with the fishermen. It is evident in the stories examined that the local press maintained professional practices of presenting diverse opinions, but in all the stories the reactions of the organizations or their representatives are presented in the margins of the story, whereas what the fishermen and their representatives have to say appears in the headlines and is emphasized in the body of the story. The newspapers also provide accounts of previous environmental pollution events, although they frequently do so without an in-depth investigation. There are also no historical descriptions from which lessons can be learned, but it may be assumed that the reason for the absence of such information is that most of the journalists did not cover the affair over a long period of time, and consequently did not investigate the history and background of the events.

Narratives and personal stories are a means to achieve identification and empathy, and are typified by subjectivity with no attempt to adhere to neutral facts. The local press preferred living, human stories. Thus, for example, one journalist provided a glimpse into the fishermen’s life:

Early morning, the stench of death and toxic chemicals fills the area of the Kishon Port fishing harbor. In a warehouse to one side, the auction of the night’s small catch begins. The fish merchants sit tensely on wooden benches, counting banknotes in anticipation of the violent struggle over the few creatures still remaining in the poisoned sea. After years of pollution from the plant, it’s a miracle that
anything still lives there. Facing them are the fishermen, tired and grimy from the night’s hard work.39

The local press as a whole is typified by primarily publishing hard news and emphasizing disorder, and the journalists thus stimulate public interest. 40 It seems that in the case of the fishermen’s struggle, the local press expanded its role from its primary function as an advertising noticeboard accompanied by piquant stories, to presenting a current local public discourse of the local community residents that invites responses of identification with the fishermen and criticism or anger against public institutions and the petrochemical plants. At times the struggle attained a potency resembling that of an actual war. In an opinion column one local journalist presented an analogy between the local pollution and the security threat against Israel, and used the metaphor of a Qassam rocket to describe the extent to which the pollution of the Kishon River’s water poses a threat for the residents of Haifa and its environs:

In a week during which Qassam rockets manufactured in Gaza were a constant threat, and could be launched at central Israel, I had an opportunity to encounter a Qassam rocket that is manufactured in the Haifa Bay laboratories and launched every morning straight into the stomachs, lungs, and living rooms of each and every one of us. The name of this Qassam rocket is the Kishon River.41

Expanding the perspective of viewing the fishermen’s struggle through metaphors associated with a national security situation is a way of creating an emotional experience and cognitive understanding that the fishermen’s struggle is part of a wider context, and not only a local matter.

Artistic means in framing and creating an interpretive package

Davis defines five common framing devices routinely used by journalists when reporting the news: (1) metaphors; (2) historical examples from which lessons are drawn; (3) catchphrases and direct quotes; (4) depictions; and (5) visual images.42 In the local press stories we found four of the five categories, for, as stated earlier, the second category – historical examples – was absent. The remaining framing devices defined by Davis were found in the stories alongside two additional devices: rhetorical questions, and emphasizing an argument by contrasting it with another argument.

Metaphors

The local press stories on the fishermen’s struggle against the Kishon River’s pollution employ an abundance of metaphors. Lakoff and Johnson assert that metaphors play an important role in the way we experience and understand the world, for they provide meaning for abstract concepts.43 Metaphors serve as a kind of bridge between concrete and abstract, and enable the use of symbolic representation and imagination to express an idea, for in addition to their explicit meaning they also possess implicit meaning. In the local press the
Kishon River is described by means of a ‘poisoned womb’ metaphor: ‘Those who have poisoned the womb of the sea, the Kishon, have to answer for it’. Use of double meaning strengthens the power of metaphors, such as: ‘The cancer [in Hebrew: sartan = cancer, and also crab] nesting in the river’. Many metaphors draw on the animal kingdom: ‘They want us to be like monkeys. If at first they tried to shut our mouths, now they want to block our ears and eyes, they just want us to die quietly’; ‘The fishermen are watchdogs’; ‘The court let the cat guard the cream’ (equivalent to: the fox guarding the henhouse). Virtually anything is possible in the world of metaphors, including intentional amplification of threat and anxiety: ‘What you see here is Death himself, and he doesn’t threaten us, he just seeps into our veins quietly and inconspicuously’; ‘Does anyone imagine that a fisherman will pitch in his nutshell in the wake of a 250-million ton tanker?’

**Rhetorical questions**

A rhetorical question is a figure of speech in the form of a question that is asked for the purpose of making a point, highlighting a problem or dilemma, and in order to leave an impression on the listener: ‘And what is the fishermen’s life? What’s more important, polluting plants or conserving nature?’; ‘It’s worthwhile checking closely what’s more dangerous for us: the virtual Qassam rocket of the Kishon, or the one in the hands of the Palestinian Authority?’

**Contrasting**

Contrasting is another way of emphasizing a position: ‘The Kishon fishermen’s misfortune has become the authorities’ fortune’; ‘You and I drink cancer from the tap, the rich drink [bottled] Eden Spring Water’. A photograph repeatedly accompanying the stories shows protesting fishermen holding a banner inscribed with: ‘You’re making money, we’re undergoing radiation and chemotherapy’.

**Visual images**

Many of the stories in the local press are accompanied by photographs, and frequently the size of the image is equal to the space occupied by the text. Images that appear in a newspaper fulfil several functions: they present the reader with a fragment of the reality s/he is reading about, they provide atmosphere and feelings that words cannot convey, they take the reader to the site of the event, and complement the information provided by the newspaper in words. The photographs published in the stories on the fishermen’s struggle feature the famous ‘Caution Danger’ sign located on the bank of the Kishon River. Other photographs show dead fish, and in others the fishermen are seen holding a banner stating ‘I’m being polluted / I identify’ (in Hebrew: mizdahem = polluted; mizdahe = identify). There are numerous photographs of the fishermen’s leader, and of public figures, such as the presiding judge in the fishermen’s
suit, and others who visited the site. In summary, it can be stated that in the coverage of the Kishon Affair, the local newspapers made extensive use of visual means to construct and frame reality, and thus positioned themselves as active participants in the struggle.

**The hidden dimension: alienation and superiority**

In contrast with solidarity, which indicates identification, alienation refers to a removed stance that includes social, cultural, or racial superiority. Studies engaging in the interrelationship between marginal groups and the media show that marginal groups usually suffer from coverage replete with negative stereotypes, since their aims and values are far removed from those of the political, cultural, social, and media elites. This situation creates a perpetual cycle of reinforcing the negative image and stereotypical perceptions of weak groups.

It seems that the local press simultaneously faced two converse options: viewing the fishermen’s struggle through the solidarity dimension, or choosing to remain in a position that emphasizes the advantage of the journalists’ education and status. As a rule, journalists who present ethnic groups that differ from the majority in terms of ‘us’ and ‘them’ in effect define who is in the collective and who is outside it. In this section we will see that coupled with the numerous displays of solidarity, as described in the previous section, the language, descriptions, and metaphors also contain expressions of superiority, disdain, and elitism, especially in personal descriptions of the fishermen’s leader.

Instances of lower register language can often be found in the local press. Crude or vulgar language is not directly expressed, since the journalist usually avoids ‘stooping’ to writing in crude language – but appears in the form of direct quotes. The choice to present a crude and vulgar discourse can be associated with the group’s stereotypes and its social and cultural image. Thus a newspaper quoted Yehiel Abergil (the fishermen’s leader): ‘Soon all the shit and poisons will float to the top, and then it’ll be like Saddam Hussein’s rockets; ‘This whole park is just one big ass-covering.’

Anderson and Trudgill assert that employing crude language in the press is an indication of low social status and lack of education, and indeed the direct quotes from Abergil emphasize his socioeconomic status more than they contribute to clarifying his position. However, it is reasonable to assume that when speaking about severe ecological pollution it is difficult to report it in ‘clean language’, and consequently descriptions such as ‘The Kishon River has turned into a sewage ditch’ or ‘The Kishon refuse dump’ can be considered acceptable and relevant language. However, Abergil’s language, which the journalists frequently quote, stoops to much lower places: ‘Where have you seen people shitting poison?’ It is reasonable to assume that these quotes were intended to present to the readers the authentic language that is more reminiscent of the marketplace than of representatives of the establishment.
Abergil is the undisputed hero of the local press. He is specifically mentioned in almost half the stories, and there is a profile report devoted to him as well.\textsuperscript{62} The ambivalent attitude toward him is expressed in the fact that the journalists present him as a charismatic local hero, but at the same time attribute inferior social behaviour to him:

Abergil, a tall and charismatic man, whose opponents claim that he operates armies of junkies and does not shy away from any means including intimidation … Abergil's charisma is clearly evident in those early morning auctions, and he notices every slight movement and with amazing swiftness announces the prices being offered while singing and moving, mimicking accents, and shouting the names of the winners as though he were announcing the winner of the world boxing title.\textsuperscript{63}

A graphic description later in the same story reinforces this image:

Aggressively, with determination, without blinking, he came in blaring, threw out the previous chairman, established an uncontested position for himself, and now he's declaring war. Anything goes. And anyone who's got a problem with him had better shut up.\textsuperscript{64}

An example of strengthening the impression gained from the presentation of Abergil and his people as acting in accordance with the norms of non-democratic groups, founded on aggression, emerges from the following description:

‘This is a happy day, a good decision that will save something for us’ says 75-year-old fisherman Amram Assor who started working as a fisherman when he was 13, the only sentence he managed to say before committee member Fuad Popo interrupted our conversation and said to him: ‘You're not allowed to talk, you don't understand anything’.\textsuperscript{65}

Disdain and condescension are expressed in different ways with reference to the fishermen themselves as well. Thus, in a description of the fishermen's reaction to one of the interim decisions made by the court hearing their suit, one journalist wrote: ‘After the verdict was read, the fishermen who thronged the court erupted into cries of joy. Some shouted: “We've shut down the plant”, and others yelled: “It's not us who shut it down, justice shut it down”’.\textsuperscript{66} And the journalist adds with condescending cynicism and irony: ‘The people shouting apparently did not understand the court's decision.’ The journalist positioned himself as the ‘knowing’ and ‘understanding’ side, and the joyous fishermen after the verdict was read as people who do not fully understand the court's intention. Nevertheless, a degree of caution is evident and is expressed in the journalist's use of the qualifier ‘apparently’.

In summary it can be said that evident in the journalists' position are expressions of superiority and alienation, but in most cases they are not blatant and are presented in a toned-down version that possibly indicates that the journalist himself did not have a consistent and clearly formed position in his attitude toward the fishermen.
Discussion

Is it possible for the local media's voice to also be heard on the national media's public platform and potentially influence the decision makers? The traditional media (such as the national press and television) adopt protest stories inter alia on the condition that they have appeared in the social media, such as online social networks and news websites. The local media can be a part of these social media and allow topics it raises to reach the traditional media's broader public platform (as mentioned earlier, in the case of the fishermen there was hardly any expression of their struggle in the national media), but in order to do so they have to present a clear, consistent, and non-ambivalent voice.

Gross examined the place of the journalist by means of a typology defining who creates the media message, who is the target audience, and what is the outcome. According to Gross's first category, the minority representative is supposed to appeal to the minority by means of such groups’ alternative sectoral media. It seems that in the Kishon fishermen's case this category was absent, and the local journalist was the addressor whose words were directed toward the local newspaper's entire readership (in our analysis of the stories we found no instances of the minority representative appealing to the public; although the journalists frequently quoted the fishermen, especially their leader, not a single story was written by a fisherman). However, in contrast to the prediction presented in Gross’s model, stereotypical coverage was not the only outcome; the stories also included sympathetic and softened metaphors, and even positive representations of the minority group. On the subject of the Kishon fishermen's struggle presented in this article, the local press managed to bring their struggle to the fore on the local stage by framing and according it a sympathetic interpretive package, while at the same time it also contributed to fixing the stereotypically inferior perception of this group, and thus sabotaged its power as a leader of social solidarity.

When the media fail to give coverage to minority groups in non-negative contexts, the low-status minority groups that have scant resources need protest and even violence in order to gain coverage and convey messages of discrimination and deprivation. Wolfsfeld defines this as entering the media through the 'back door', whereas the 'front door' is reserved for groups possessing resources and a high media status. Entering through the 'back door' requires 'payment', which is manifested in destruction of the self-image of minority and marginal groups, and their presentation as violent, strange, or as an oddity.

Elements of solidarity are manifested in the position of the local press in the image it presented of the Kishon fishermen's struggle as possessing moral and just value. Analysis of the stories clearly reveals that the fishermen's struggle gained extensive sympathetic representation in them, and some journalists stood behind it and supported it, gave it an extensive platform, and presented the minority group that conducted it in a positive light. However, for the media
to influence the perception of the protest as just, they have to accept its leaders, respect them, and express solidarity with the aims of the protest they are leading. The media’s disrespect of the fishermen’s leader, and their condescension toward him, accentuated the journalists’ status as a local elite, and distanced identification with the marginal group. Thus two, at times inconsistent, messages were given expression: sympathy toward the fishermen's struggle on the one hand, and explicit or implicit expressions of condescension on the other.

Any discussion on an individual case raises the question of its generalizability to different situations in other places around the world. We contend that the case we chose for the present study could have taken place in different places around the world, where a weak minority group that has suffered serious damage at the hands of capital-intensive industry faces it like David facing Goliath. The weak minority group is uneducated, and has no access to the power sources of government, capital, and national public media. This group often suffers from lack of internal organization, absence of a leadership that has the power to hold complex negotiations, lacks ability in the sphere of law, and funds to hire lawyers and obtain professional opinions that can serve as admissible documents in court. Facing the huge forces acting against it, it is virtually powerless. Additionally, many of the group members are old and sick, or belong to families whose primary breadwinner has died of cancer, leaving them in dire financial straits and without any institutional support. In this situation the local media, albeit small but consistent and objective-centred, can serve as the small stone David launched at Goliath’s forehead.71

Consequently, a discussion on the role of the local press in this kind of struggle is greater than just a single case study and can be instructive on the power of the local press to exploit the journalists’ writing skills, and diverse visual and verbal means at its disposal to convey a message, as well as the professional connection it maintains with the national press, and thus present the struggle as diverging from a marginal local matter. The local press can serve as the mouthpiece of the weak and resource-poor, and it can find a way to present their struggle as possessing socially moral meaning, and as an injustice that needs to be rectified. We believe that the contribution of the present study lies in a deeper understanding of the ability of the local press to enlist the residents of a particular area to struggles that directly influence them, when it accompanies a disadvantaged group and provides it with a public platform possessing characteristics of identification, empathy, and support. However, the potential for large-scale influence on the public as a whole, and for bringing the voice of a marginal minority group to the fore, is also conditional upon relinquishment of perceptions of superiority and alienation toward these groups, and adopting a position of solidarity with all the elements of ethics, justice, and morality it entails. The voice of solidarity has to be lucid and clean, and free of alienation and condescension.
Notes

2. Karp, Stone, and Yoels, Being Urban.
3. Stamm, Newspaper Use.
5. Caspi, Media Decentralization.
8. Tal-Shir and Yechezkeli, “Malignant Dive”.
14. Yeshuvi, Exclusion and Negative Image, 4–40; Shils, Center and Periphery; Caspi and Elias, “Don’t Patronize Me”; Avraham and First, “Media, Power and Space.”
16. Lakoff, Don’t Think of an Elephant!
18. Entman, “Framing”; Fairclough, Media Discourse.
21. Ibid.
22. Wasserman, “Commander of the Nahal.”
23. Lerman, “Haifa Chemicals.”
25. El-Hay, “Floating Court.”
27. Lerman, “Thousands of Fish.”
29. Shoshani, “Fishing Boat Owners.”
30. Lerman, “The Kishon Fishermen.”
32. Zuaretz and Milman, “Fishermen Defeat Haifa Chemicals.”
33. El-Hay, “Floating Court.”
34. Kay-Zilberman, “Kishon Qassam Rocket.”
35. Nudel, “The Grass is Green.”
37. Gamson, Talking Politics.
38. Gamson and Modigliani, “Media Discourse.”
39. Wasserman, “Commander of the Nahal.”
40. Tuchman, Making News.
41. Kay-Zilberman, “Kishon Qassam Rocket.”
42. Davis, “How the Media Frames.”
43. Lakoff and Johnson, Metaphors We Live By.
44. Nudel, “The Grass is Green.”
45. Lerman, “The Kishon Fishermen.”
46. Lerman, “Haifa Chemicals.”
47. Kay-Zilberman, “Kishon Qassam Rocket.”
48. “City Council Member.”
49. Kay-Zilberman, “Kishon Qassam Rocket.”
51. Nudel, “The Grass is Green.”
52. Ibid.
53. Avraham, “Media Inequality.”
54. Wolfsfeld, Media and Political Conflict.
55. Lundby, “Community Television.”
56. Ben-Shahar, “Representing Speech.”
57. Wasserman, “Commander of the Nahal.”
58. Nudel, “The Grass is Green.”
59. Andersson and Trudgill, Bad Language.
60. Shoshani, “Fishing Boat Owners.”
61. “City Council Member.”
62. Wasserman, “Commander of the Nahal.”
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid.
65. Zuaretz and Milman, “Fishermen Defeat Haifa Chemicals.”
66. Ibid.
68. Gross, “Minorities, Majorities.”
69. Avraham, The Hidden Israel.
70. Wolfsfeld, “Media, Protest and Political Violence”; Wolfsfeld, Media and Political Conflict.
71. 1 Sm 17:37–52.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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