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Ultra-orthodox representations in Israeli radio satire

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ABSTRACT

The growing power of the media to define social values and perceptions is a conspicuous feature of contemporary life. Radio is one such shaper of social reality perceptions. While much of the media research focuses on secular organisations operating in a Western, liberal context, not much attention has been paid to this tension between religion and modernity within media outlets. This article examines representations of Israel's Jewish ultra-orthodox minority in Israel's daily radio satire shows, a popular and intuitive medium. It shows that content is usually based on the broadcasters' spontaneous feelings contrary to other media. The findings in the article depict an isolated community out of touch with public consensus and mainstream society.

While much of the media research focuses on secular organisations operating in a Western, liberal context, not much attention has been paid to this tension between religion and modernity within media outlets.[1] Indeed, the media play a powerful, ever-growing role in structuring social identity. This process is linked to the creation of entrenched stereotypes and persistent prejudice, factors that build social differentiation.[2] Such stereotypes appear in all media platforms, not only as social products but also as social mechanisms, and enable content creators to use of a reduced set of labels and definitions to characterise entire complex phenomena in concise form.[3] While efficient, this reduction comes at a cost of undermining fair, nuanced representations of many minority groups, impacting the public space in which these voices are barely heard or not heard at all. In Israel, the ultra-orthodox are seen as a minority group despite their swelling numbers in the general population, partly because they are self-segregated.[4] Segregation and lack of knowledge naturally combine to create a broad set of stereotypes. The overall media effect is one of symbolic denial and clear exclusion of ultra-orthodox individuals. In the small percentage of mainstream media content that features ultra-orthodox Jews, their media image is inherently negative.

This hostile media attitude can be expected to further polarise social perceptions and increase the empathy gap between secular and religious communities to the point where mediation can no longer repair the rift. In fact, as the social split grows, knowledge of the ultra-orthodox community seems to diminish.

This article investigates media coverage and representations of Israel's ultra-orthodox community in popular daily radio comedy programmes. This research is thus unique in focusing on ultra-orthodox representations in radio, a media platform that is still vastly influential in Israeli society, even as Israelis embrace new mobile technologies.[5] Editing in radio is unique in its intuitive, real-time nature, which reveals broadcasters' authentic feelings. In fact, radio represents a very accessible public space on the social and economic spectrum. As leading daily morning programmes are often based on entertainment, humour, and satire, it is not surprising that they inform common representations of the ultra-orthodox community.

Generally, the content of daily morning radio programmes is based on the news in the morning papers. Therefore, editing of comic sketches and conversations between broadcasters tends to be brief and intuitive, and is typically performed only shortly before programme airtime. As such, this analysis opens up a fascinating window on the authentic feelings, perceptions, and reactions of the media industry. Importantly, these programmesare broadcast at prime time and boast very high listening rates. Their influence on listeners and power to reinforce stereotypes should not be underestimated.

Radio is a medium that continues to reach almost every household in the world. For example, in the United States, with a listening rate of 90% and more, radio reaches more Americans than any other platform.[6] This fact illustrates the power of radio as an instrument that shapes public agenda and public opinion, and underlines the importance of this research. Moreover, as far as we know, no studies have analysed the representations of minorities on the radio. This research may serve as a case study on media coverage and minority group representations, especially religious groups in predominantly secular western democracies.

Literature review

The media reality and its features

One of the roles of media is to supply daily information (and commentary) on current events to listeners. However, informational messaging often contains deeper layers of meaning that shape social perceptions of group differentiation. This process is not entirely understood and is even mysterious to non-scholar consumers, if they detect it at all. Nevertheless, media

messages leave an indelible imprint on society. For example, research on the phenomenon of modern mass media as an agent of social control can be traced to the 1950s, if not earlier.[7] Early research claimed that the media can be increasingly used to express and transmit the opinions of the ruling class, convincing the masses that the existing system is, in fact, operating in their benefit. According to this approach, the mass media system is a tool to stabilise the power relations between ruler and ruled and to discourage protest by opposing forces that might otherwise gain recognition and public support.

While studies have demonstrated the growing power of the media to affect citizens' perceptions and the dangers of abuse of this power,[8] an emerging research tradition stresses consumers' ability to decipher, interpret and understand media messages otherwise than the originally intended by the producers of these messages. These studies focus on recipients' traits, values, culture, and ideologies, based on the understanding that the communication process does not end with the transmission of the message but rather with its deciphering by the recipient. Social and cultural contexts, family and interpersonal structures, and time and place, for example, dictate and affect media consumers' meaning making. Thus, different people will receive and interpret the meanings of media messages differently. Reception research studies how media texts are received by consumers and stresses consumers' role in deciphering and assigning meaning to media texts. Studies have confirmed these conjectures and found that socio-economic status, various social and cultural factors, and the types of discourses available to consumers are associated with the way consumers interpret media messages.[9]

Importantly, the communicative reality of consumers may appear to reflect social reality as it is, but, practically speaking, media's influence compels consumers to adopt the media's definitions of reality through a process that is designed to appear appropriate, natural, and in no way unusual. While the media system functions as a preserver of the social and political status,[10] the media are capable of operating as levers of social change, which has political consequences.[11]

Habermas referred to the public sphere as a space where citizens meet to exchange opinions and ideas. In this free market of opinions, people engage in rational discussion on topics of political and social importance. The maintenance of the public sphere is critical to the development of public opinion. For Habermas, the media are useful for producing the foundation of the public sphere.[12] The growth of commercial mass communication has, however, diminished the media's function as a tool of public debate and increased its role as a consumer product. As a result, media messaging no longer undergoes a potentially challenging process of deliberative discussion, and its messages are conveyed as matters of fact. In addition, although the

public sphere should ideally function as a space for fair, egalitarian participation of all political and minority groups, it is becoming increasingly doubtful that such openness and inclusiveness can persist in a consumer-driven media ecosystem.[13]

Group representations in the media

Media messaging is often engaged in drawing distinctions between social groups. An enormous amount of media content is devoted to class tensions between rich and poor and government tensions between bureaucracy and citizens. In Israel, the media addresses additional sources of tension such as Arabs versus Jews, Ashkenazi versus Sephardi Jews, and religious versus secular Jews, to name only a few. The media use their control over the means of transmission to introduce dominant social values, ideas, dogmas, opinions, and norms of behaviours.[14] In this continuous and totalising process, the media operate as a force for structuring identities and creating stereotypes and prejudice that help to build social differentiation.[15] In fact, as First and Vremer-Bial note, stereotypes are the 'revealed code in the communicational text'.[16]

Stereotypes constitute not only the product of media messaging, but add to the messaging toolkit itself. Of course, the reductionist nature of such codes may prove detrimental to the representations of many social groups, who already are at a disadvantage in the public sphere, with voices hardly heard or not heard at all.

There are three major dimensions of the invisible code of stereotypes: (1) mystification, or the description of groups based on racial perception, ego, and social economic status; (2) elimination, or exclusion from the general social conversation; and (3) marking, or attributing external characteristics to a given group. This process of stereotype fixation is carried out by broadly separating the normal and accepted from the exceptional and different.[17] Typically, when the public conversation turns to groups such as religious minorities or immigrants, references are rarely objective and instead tend to be negative, highlighting aspects of crime and violence, public rioting, social unrest, and distress.[18] Cultivating negative stereotypes of a minority group encourages their exclusion from the public sphere and undermines their basic right to participate as equal members of society. Without the ability to affect public decision making or to influence their own lives, their marginalisation is perpetuated.[19]

Similarly to Hall who defined the media as a major current social and cultural force,[20] Kellner claimed that the media is the source of much of our identity, selfhood, consciousness of social status, and group belonging. The media use a set of conventional images to enrich individuals' worldviews. The media are at the centre of interactions between different social players

and influence the power relations between them: Invidious representations of minority groups are symbolic expressions of power relations that reflect dominant ideologies.[21] Consumers build their worldviews out of these power relations by distributing, reproducing, and incorporating meanings and values into their lives. In a linear sense, this process starts with a concrete reality as perceived by human sense perception. Then, the media instruments broadcast their messages that are structured on that perceived reality. Consumers thus absorb and re-enact reality through the filter of the media. Finally, society is shaped by the totalising effect of this media reality. The media filter, therefore, changes reality and propels their consumers to conform to the ideas and values of one of the power groups dominating the media.

Representation is a structuring of the other; that is, the media, through their content, structure the belongingness of a certain group by distinguishing between the dominant 'us' and minority 'them'.[22] Such structuring, which is performed through media professionals' selections of topics and the extent to which they are explored, affect general public perceptions.[23] These tools are referred to as media frames, instruments often used for structuring narratives, stereotypes, and cultural myths common to society.[24] Media representations also influence the self-concept of minority group members, who adopt and internalise these stereotyped representations and society's expectations of conformity to them.[25]

Screen presence transmits significance to the viewer-consumer, and lack of screen time implies that a group has little social significance and exists on the margins of society.[26] Research has shown, for example, that elderly people, children, women, immigrants and the disabled are underrepresented in US media relative to their proportion in the population, while white males are media staples.[27] In Canada, for example, research has found that minorities are not represented in the media in correlation with their proportion in the population. As a result, minorities are not represented in the public agenda, which triggers a sense of rejection and non-belonging, causing minorities to feel alienated and to distance themselves from society.[28] In other countries, research found that minority groups are presented in the media in association with negative events and are absent in other positive connotations. For example, Saeed showed how the British press links Muslims to terrorism and represents all Muslims, both immigrants and native citizens as foreigners who pose a threat to Britain.[29]

In Israel, the media similarly fail to accord equal, fair representation to the country's minority groups. Various reports prepared by the Second Authority for Television and Radio[30] found that the dominant group on television has the following characteristics: male, Jewish, secular, Ashkenazic, and non-immigrant, while other groups including Arabs, immigrants, and

ultra-orthodox Jews are clearly underrepresented. Various framing practices are used to insert minority groups into media spaces as stereotyped, flat characters, viewed specifically from the dominant male Ashkenazic perspective.[31]

The ultra-orthodox ("Haredi ") community in israel

The constant tension between many groups in Israel, including between secular and ultra-orthodox Jews, is reflected in local media representations. The ultra-orthodox Jewish community in Israel comprises over 10% of the total adult Jewish population.[32] Though there are varying degrees of religiosity among Jews, ultra-orthodox (or Haredi) Jews consider themselves the true guardians of the divine commandments and Jewish faith. The term *Haredi* is derived from the Bible (the term implies an awe-inspired fear to perform God's will), and Haredi Jews (or Haredim) self-identify as strict adherents of Torah laws.[33]

The ultra-orthodox have a distinctive cultural ideology that rejects the values and lifestyle of the wider secular Israeli society.[34] Haredim maintain an extremely conservative lifestyle, with most rejecting contact with secular and modern living. Moreover, modern life is perceived as a community threat and is often denigrated.[35] As a result, the ultra-orthodox isolate themselves from the modern Israeli social environment – including employment, education, and media – and maintain separate community institutions.[36] Religious studies are valued as the highest pursuit and as a result, many ultra-orthodox males do not work, as working outside 'Olama shel Torah' (the world of the Torah or religious studies) is considered an inferior pastime. Over the years, the Israeli government has made efforts to encourage the community's integration into the labour market, education, and military service, yet these attempts have usually failed, and isolation has increased.[37] The ultra-orthodox media has traditionally taken on the role of preserving ultra-orthodox community ideals by voicing rabbinical imperatives and reinforcing their hegemony.[38] Since ultra-orthodox society rejects television and the Internet,[39] print media and radio have gained primacy as the media used by the community's rabbinical hegemony.[40]

Media representations of religious and ultra-orthodox Jews

The ultra-orthodox are systematically excluded from mainstream Israeli media.[41] Rarely featured or mentioned, Haredim appear more frequently in current events programmesthan in dramas or reality shows, but even when they appear, it is in contexts related to the religious-secular split.[42]

In 2011, 95% of Israeli media content (news, documentary, lifestyle, drama, reality, entertainment, and quiz shows) was identified as secular, with only 5% religious or ultra-orthodox. These figures represent a 4% decline in the frequency of representations since 2006.[43] Interestingly, the religious and ultra-orthodox sectors represent approximately 12% and 8% of the total population of Israel, respectively. That is, 20% of the population is misrepresented in the media,[44] primarily because key positions in the media are dominated by members of the country's (secular) social elite. The bias in the system is thereby reinforced by the fact that the professional class of interviewers, experts, commentators, and so on also come from this dominant group.[45] Consequently, the limited visibility, representation, and coverage of the ultra-orthodox community is not surprising.[46] In fact, a study by the Israel Broadcasting Authority in 2013 found that the number of broadcasters who self-identified as 'national religious Jews' was almost zero. At the time, virtually no ultra-orthodox, much less religious figure functions in the media landscape as an important authority, commentator, or public persona.[47]

The ultra-orthodox are considered a minority despite their swelling numbers, primarily due to their self-segregation. Naturally, this social distancing only exacerbates unfamiliarity and feeds a wide set of stereotypes. In mainstream media, distance is maintained, for example, in any important event dealing with an ultra-orthodox figure, by introducing first the religious nature of the event.[48] Zilbershlag defines the 'virtual ultra-orthodox' media image: They are portrayed as individuals who despise secular and state symbols, dodge military service, engage in occasional public violence, and as parasitic leeches who benefit from an disproportionate share of the state budget due to the political power of the political parties that represent them.[49] Helinger and Rashi state that mainstream society's attitudes to this group create a social rift that is difficult to bridge.[50] The divide between the secular majority and ultra-orthodox minority reflects the deep sense of alienation and concern: Antagonism towards the ultra-orthodox is accompanied by a fear of them taking over neighbourhoods and even society. As such, the ultra-orthodox are perceived as a social threat. These feelings are a direct result of the collision of values between ultra-orthodox and secular society.[51]

Many ultra-orthodox Jews perceive the media in uniformly negative terms[52] and have consequently created alternative media systems including local and nationwide newspapers, radio stations, and audio recordings of Torah lessons. This distinct and separate media system, however, adds another obstacle to bridging the gap between ultra-orthodox and general public. Although a few professionals in the general media identify as ultra-orthodox (such as Sivan Rahav Meir on

Channel 2 and Michael Shemesh on IDF Radio), this tiny representation cannot correct the negative role of the media in fomenting the secular-religious divide.

Humour and satire

As humour can be interpreted and received in many forms, its nature is inherently polysemic.[53] Humour can unite a group around a common language and can also damage relationships. By using humour, society can bring up for discussion taboo social topics and criticise powerful individuals in society.[54] Humour is also a type of coping mechanism for difficult circumstances, a tool for protesting against social injustice, and even an effective means for challenging and subverting the existing social order.

Analysis of radio satire shows is complicated by the polysemic nature of this genre.[55] Satire shows are based on, but do not copy, reality. In fact, they diverge from it by using distortion and exaggeration. Research has shown that satire shows can reproduce social stigmas through the use of conventional mental and physical characteristics associated with different groups, and in doing so, the satire becomes integrated into the accepted social structuring.[56] Satire can criticise accepted reality, protest strongly against social injustice, and undermine existing social orders, yet can often reproduces hegemonic perceptions and reinforces existing negative social stereotypes, and thus serves as a reactionary element for existing social orders.[57] Nonetheless, exaggerated and ridiculous stereotypes in satire shows may contribute to their own deconstruction: "Every humour uses stereotypes, but sometimes it strengthens them and sometimes it undermines them.[58]

Radio in Israel

A survey conducted by Israel's Second Authority of Radio and Television found that 74% of the population listens to the radio almost every day, and therefore the importance of this study.[59] In Israel, as elsewhere, two main models of radio evolved: the commercial model and the public model which includes the Voice of Israel and the Israel Defence Forces [IDF] radio stations. The IDF radio is a unique type of public broadcast and operates two popular stations. The musical line in Israel is mostly dictated by the IDF stations.[60] The public broadcasting model considers its responsibility to provide information that benefits society Public radio is directed to and for citizens and does not aim to generate a profit.[61] In contrast, commercial radio operates under a profit-oriented model,[62] based on the sale of air time to advertisers, where the emphasis is on entertainment, and ratings (such as who listens and how much) are commercial radio stations' highest priority.[63] The map of radio broadcasting changed significantly in the 1990s, when

newly established regional commercial radio stations dramatically expanded the variety and volume of radio broadcasts in Israel. At the same time the Voice of Israel established educational radio stations for educational purposes in educational institutions in order to educate and empower students, pupils and people who live in the periphery and train the next generation of media people.[64] Today, radio stations in Israel disseminate their content not only through traditional FM broadcasts, but also through their websites, visual radio, apps, podcasts, and social media (e.g. Facebook pages).[65] As a result, the radio consuming habits have changed and a considerable number of new private stations broadcast exclusively the Internet.[66]

Questions and research hypotheses

The above literature review describes the negative media coverage of a specific minority group using stereotypes associated with social disruption and disorder. As noted, satire shows can reproduce hegemonic perceptions and reinforce stereotypes. Therefore, our research assumptions are as follows:

- The representations of the ultra-orthodox in radio satire programmes in Israel will be mostly in a negative tone or use negative associations.
- The representations of the ultra-orthodox will be accompanied by stereotypes and generalisations.
- The ultra-orthodox minority will be presented as a group on the margins of society, outside the general public consensus.

Methodology

This article uses an interpretative, thematic, textual content analysis to examine the representations of ultra-orthodox Jews in a selection of Israeli satire and comedy radio shows intended for a secular audience. The context analysis was conducted over six months (January-June 2015) based on three daily morning eponymous shows dealing with humour and satire, broadcasted between 07:00–09:00: 'Shay & Dror' (Radio Lelo Hafsaka), 'Tal & Aviad' (Eco 99FM) and 'Slutzky & Domingez' (Radio Tel Aviv). All three shows are broadcast during prime time and boast a high listening rate of captive commuters. For example, Shay & Dror won the prize for the best show in 2014, while Tal & Aviad is the most listened to show on the ICAST site. In addition, these shows are broadcasted in syndication and can be heard almost everywhere in the country.

Radio was selected as a research platform as it remains one of the most accessible media channels to all social and economic groups in the population. Daily morning shows are often based on news items from the morning

papers; therefore, editing of the sketches and conversation between broadcasters tends to be quick, spontaneous, and improvisational. In this way, these shows are quite intuitive and based on the broadcasters' personal knowledge and attitudes towards the subject matter – in our case, the ultra-orthodox public. Hence, these shows are an interesting window into the authentic feelings, emotions, and raw perceptions of key media personas who convey representations of this group.

A total of 360 programmes of these shows were reviewed, and all the segments linked to the ultra-orthodox world were identified and extracted for analysis. In this process, we collected and transcribed all segments dealing with ultra-orthodox (male and female) individuals, including mentions of typical ultra-orthodox names. The content analysis was conducted using a thematic analysis, which is a qualitative analysis that attempts to offer meaning, interpretations, and generalisations of the phenomenon under study.[67] A thematic analysis allows comparison of different segments and identification of themes that link all the texts in the analysis.

Findings

Three main themes emerged in the analysis of ultra-Orthodox representations in the various sketches broadcast in the three daily entertainment and satire programmesselected for this study: (a) stoners (i.e. drug users); (b) unethical businessmen; and (c) unenlightened individuals. In addition, specific Haredi leaders were also mentioned in the shows as embodying all these features.

Stoners

The Tal & Aviad show (2) offered the following comment on the Breslov faction, the ultra-orthodox followers of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov:

> Maybe the "Breslov" [a Hassidic movement] party could unite with "Green Leaf" [a party that advocates legalization of marijuana] to get a mandate; it sounds to me as the same spectrum of "getting high." Those dance on their cars and so do the others. It is really the same. Just change the outfit slightly, and they look the same. By the way, large sections of the Breslovers have a history of one too many tokes; let's admit it.

Here, Tal and Aviad are implying that ultra-orthodox individuals are perpetually high, acting like drug abusers who have lost their minds from too much drug use. This comment was essentially disparaging of the Breslovers,

and was used to emphasise their distinction from ordinary society, in the same manner as drug abusers are not considered part of the normal social fabric.

Tal and Aviad continued to satirise the Breslovers by mocking their famous mantra, *na – nach – nachman – nachman meuman*, which is considered a sacred invocation: 'It has a kind of a sequence, a kind of line – you can be a stoner, stoner, stoner, stoner . . . Breslov!' For Breslovers, mocking this invocation is a desecration. However, the linkage of Breslov with people high on drugs is not random. The stereotype of Breslovers is one of 'joyful Hassidism', therefore satirising them as hedonistic drug users in search of a 'happiness fix' makes sense from a satirical perspective.

On their radio show, Shay and Dror also used the 'stoners' trope in relation to the ultra-orthodox community and its strict adherence to religious laws of agricultural activity in seven-year cycles known as the laws of s*hmita*:

> Are people allowed to smoke cannabis in the year of *shmita*? There are people who have a medical certificate of approval [to use cannabis], but prefer to grow grass for personal use in their garden. As one knows, this year is a *shmita* year, and marijuana users want to know if they can use the flowers from the plants [in their gardens], or should they look for another solution . . .

Shay then performs an imitation of a rabbi who responds to the question: 'People can smoke cannabis during the *shmita* year if they drop the seventh joint in every smoke. That way they conform with *shmita* requirements'.

The comedy lies in the ultra-orthodox person who smokes cannabis (which is not permitted in their community) in a way that is respectful of the laws of *shmita*. Nevertheless, the payoff of the humour is in the unrealistic representation of ultra-orthodox persons as stoners who grow cannabis in their homes.

This sketch illustrates a widespread, though unrealistic, view held by the secular sector, that ultra-orthodox persons appear delusional and out of touch with reality, with a single-minded focus on religious practices, similarly to drug addicts' constant search for a 'high' or 'fix'.

Flexible ethics

These shows often depict ultra-orthodox persons as 'shady' businessmen. The following excerpt is from the Tal & Aviad show:

Tal: "I always wonder what the shady deal is, when you get those telephone calls . . . and when you answer, you hear a blessing from a rabbi, or [an invitation] to 'celebrate with us in the Mechpala cave'.

Aviad: And one day, I'll probably hear 'now, matchmaking, now!' [in a take on the well-known ultra-orthodox refrain 'Now, the Messiah [will come] now']

The stereotype expressed here is that ultra-orthodox persons are unscrupulous individuals who exploit their own religion for profit (by selling blessings or holding commercial events in sacred sites, such as the burial cave of the Patriarchs), and whose outreach efforts intrude upon private lives in an unacceptable manner, threatening private space.

The next dialogue from Shay & Dror relates to disreputable business practices that involve bending the Halacha (Jewish law) and religion for opportunistic ends:

Uri Gotlib: If I become religious one minute before I die, it is accepted, right?

Dror: 'Shma Israel our God is one' is the mantra that will lead you straight to heaven.

This is not only a crude misrepresentation of the doctrine of repentance (*teshuva*) in which personal salvation may be achieved instantaneously through a change of heart: This banter evokes the stereotype of ultra-orthodox persons shamelessly 'buying' a ticket to heaven with empty words. Religion is portrayed sarcastically as a petty practice, obsessed with minute details, missing the essential point of life. This type of secular criticism is often heard, typically without any attempt to understand the religious perspective.

In the next dialogue, Tal and Aviad are critical of the wave of repentance that is sweeping many celebrities (6):

Aviad: Let's talk about everyone's new BFF: God . . .

Tal: [reading] 'Yuval Hamevulbal [popular children television show character] maintains religious affiliation . . . soon Yuval Hamevulbal will not be performing on Saturdays. He says 'I always had a connection to religion and in the past year my belief in God is growing stronger. I am doing it slowly because I believe that if a man [does something too intensely] he will give it up at the end. I decided that, from September, with the help of God, I will stop working on Saturdays'.

Aviad: That's what's beautiful about the Jewish religion, that its interpretations are so elastic: 'My belief in God is getting so strong that I decided to stop working on Saturdays after September. I consulted the rabbis and they said that "It is a commandment that every Jew should make a lot of money over summer vacation so that he can start September as a pure, holy, religious Jew"'.

Tal: 'As long as my bank account profits, that's fine: I have no problem with working on Saturdays or you driving your car to my shows [during summer vacation] . . . but in September, when the market is weak, my faith will be stronger, I'll ratchet up the level of my spirituality . . .'

This segment directs abundant sarcasm to the newly religious Yuval Hamevulbal ('the confused Yuval').[68] The rabbis are mocked for supposedly permitting Yuval Hamevulbal to work on the Sabbath during summer vacation, bending the Jewish laws to allow the performer to earn money, as if they are saying 'money overrides the laws of the Sabbath', which is take on the principle in Jewish law that the preservation of human life overrides all other religious considerations. Their banter also ridicules a person's right to choose his own actions if these actions are incompatible with a secular way of life.

A similar expression of derision is manifested in the way these radio show hosts address religious listeners. For example, Tal and Aviad distributed tickets to a show of the band One Republic to one of the listeners who happened to be a religious girl. In referring to her degree of religiosity, they wondered aloud, 'How religious can she be if she wants to go to the One Republic show?' They added, 'She can remove her head covering and use it to wave to One Republic'. Here, again, they are mocking the 'elasticity' of religious practices. The ultra-orthodox are depicted as wanting to have it both ways, while secular individuals view religiosity as a life that is subject to strict rules and limitations that can never be modified under any condition. They, therefore, are sceptical about the girl's religious sincerity.

In their show, Shay and Dror (8) created a fabricated interview with a religious girl named Pua, played by Shay. Dror is interviewing her on the religious custom of refraining from physical contact between the sexes before marriage:

Dror: What do you do before your wedding that previous generations haven't done?

Pua (Shay): Our ancestors were not permitted to touch each other; they kept a distance until the wedding.

Dror: In what way is this different today?

Pua (Shay): Today, we start to get slutty at the age of 13–14 . . .

Dror: You occasionally let yourselves hug each other?

Pua (Shay): We hug, kiss a little, sometimes he can grab a breast . . . it's not the same as it used to be . . . .

Dror: What makes you believe that you are totally released from the severe prohibitions of the past?

Pua (Shay): Nothing is like it used to be: Our mothers were virgins until the wedding. Look at me: . . . I hardly remember when I was a virgin . . .

The mock interview expresses the view of growing sexual promiscuity of the ultra-orthodox sector, whose members are gradually adopting secular modes of behaviour, stretching the boundaries of religious prohibitions in order to become increasingly progressive and modern. The claim embedded in the sketch is that the ultra-orthodox are becoming less strict in their adherence to their interpretations of the law, and are bending Jewish law as it suits their interests.

In sum, broadcasters tend to mock the elastic, fluid nature of religious laws and rules. Representations of the ultra-orthodox as disreputable businessmen are also informed by century-old stereotypes revolving Jews and money.

The unenlightened

As noted, these shows are fond of representing members of the ultra-orthodox community using stereotypes that compress a great deal of cultural information into messaging for easy and quick listener comprehension. Our findings show that ultra-orthodox individuals are also portrayed by broadcasters as essentially unenlightened and primitive. This characterisation is expressed all the more forcefully in the shows' representations of ultra-orthodox women. For example, from Tal and Aviad:

> There are different societies that see things differently, and a part of the structure on which the ultra-orthodox society is built is that the woman supports the family, cleans, and works, and brings the money home. The man sits and studies Torah all day, which is the supreme mission.

This comment reinforces the stereotype of ultra-orthodox society in which men do not work, and women are family providers, and the view that ultra-orthodox males exploit their wives. This condescending attitude, however, reflects capitalist and secular values that consider work and productivity as the supreme human value. In this view, the study of the Torah does not count as productive or even appropriate. This approach essentially conceals a patronising, ethnocentric view that the ultra-orthodox lifestyle through secular glasses. For these broadcasters, the ultra-orthodox perspective is simply inferior to their own 'correct' worldview.

Tal and Aviad's discussions of ultra-orthodox women also reflect similarly biased representations:

Aviad: At the end of a convention where the Yachad [political] party addresses its potential women voters, people received a blue box of chocolates, with the following message: 'Yachad under Eli Yeshay's leadership' and 'Divide the Passover tasks into twenty easy-to-do tasks. Complete one each day, and give yourself one bar of chocolate as a reward. You won't

believe that you finished all of it and achieved your target in twenty days'. The target is a clean house – after all, what other target could there by for a woman in this world? How else will she earn her chocolate if she doesn't complete the Passover mission of cleaning [the house] in only twenty days?

Aviad's cynical description of the ultra-orthodox woman's role as a housewife is exaggerated to produce an emotional effect in his audience. The role of housewife implies that the ultra-orthodox woman is as a slave to her husband, with no independence. She is compared to a dog tied to his master and compensated for good behaviour. These allusions extend the stereotype that ultra-orthodox individuals subscribe to the view that man is superior to woman: Man is the ruler of the home, who studies the Torah all day long, while woman works, cleans, and takes care of the family.

Tal and Aviad summarise the discussion as follows:

> You have to remember that those people, the ultra-orthodox, they see the world through completely different eyes. When we think about something [about their lives], we are shocked . . . because in our roots there is a kind of set of values, which is liberal, enlightened, maybe secular, but there are people who see the world completely differently. That means, the longing for equality or liberation is not in their DNA at all, and it's not something they aspire to.

Berman is expressing a multicultural perspective that is accepting of diverse cultures. He criticises the secular view that religious individuals can be 'saved' and forced to accept a secular worldview and modern way of life. At the same time, he still uses the common ultra-orthodox stereotypes, and determines that ultra-orthodox individuals are reactionary, have no understanding of the world, and are slaves to their religious beliefs. This condescending piece, which implies cultural arrogance, poses secular and ultra-orthodox Jews as opposites, reflecting an 'us vs. them' attitude.

In their show, lack of enlightenment of the ultra-orthodox community is emphasised: 'The only ones that still maintain that stupid separation between men and women are the ultra-orthodox public. The ultra-orthodox press does not publish photos of women, and that is shocking. It is terrible, it is very sick'. These comments reflect a judgemental, patronising attitude without the least attempt to genuinely understand different cultural practices.

In Slutzky & Domingez, the ultra-orthodox are also presented as unenlightened, violent, mindless, and unprogressive. The following sketch is a fabricated interview with the mayor of Beit Shemesh, a city with a dominant ultra-orthodox population, played by one of the broadcasters:

> Haim, do me a favor, spit on the girl over there . . . Do you see how she hangs around the city with gummy bears in her hands, wearing earrings?

> I will make sure to eliminate everything that disrupts the lives of all the secular people in Beit Shemesh . . . no shops will open on Saturday, no streets will be open for traffic on Saturday, no building permits for new construction, no barbecues.

In sum, entertainment and satire shows present the ultra-orthodox as a chauvinistic and backward community in which women are subordinated and inferior to their husbands. Gender inequality reflects the primitive world of the ultra-orthodox, who failed to adopt more progressive views and remained enclosed in their self-made ghettos.

'Assume for yourself a master' (Ethics of the fathers 1:6)

The satirical sketches that focus on the ultra-orthodox community also include sketches on specific community leaders (rabbis), who are portrayed as epitomes of the norms that were noted earlier (stoners, unenlightened and ethically compromised individuals). In the Shay & Dror show, Shay and Dror present a fake interview with Razi Barkai, a popular Galei Zahal radio broadcaster, to discuss a recent scandal involving a rabbi who installed cameras in a ritual bath in Mea'a Shearim in Jerusalem:

Dror: A storm is rocking the ultra-orthodox world! It turns out that hidden cameras were installed in the ritual baths of Mea'a Shearim, at the order of rabbis, under the pretence of protecting bathers' safety. All the ultra-orthodox are raging because there is nudity and that is a huge story.

Razi: Hear now, no porn this morning . . . because this morning, we want to talk with Rabbi Yaakov Gutta, director of the ritual baths in Mea'a Shearim, who will discuss this matter with us.

Rabbi Gutta (interrupting): I don't like it that someone is peeking [on us].

Dror: But you are the one who is doing the peeking. Explain what is going on.

Rabbi Gutta: I don't want to explain this to a non-religious person like you. It is written in the Scriptures, 'God's ways are mysterious'.

Dror: I don't understand. Does this seem normal to you?

Rabbi Gutta: To be honest, it's not normal. I didn't believe what was going on here until I saw it with my own eyes. There are short films here that will blow your phylacteries away. Do you know that we discovered women who are cheating? They are not following the Halakhah.

Dror: In short, your control station is completely organised: You sit there and watch porn.

Rabbi Gutta: It's more than that. Amnon Yitzhak's studio [Amnon Yitzhak is a rabbi who was involved in various scandals and is a popular character in Israeli satire shows] is nothing compared to what we have here. Next month we are starting to sell memberships . . . as it has been said, 'And you have been peeking here at night?'

Dror: That sounds perverted.

Rabbi Gutta: Me, a pervert? I'm a trailblazer!

This satirical interview highlights a serious case investigated by the police involving unlawful video surveillance. The sketch alleges that ultra-orthodox leaders used Jewish law to justify this serious offence.

In Slutzky & Domingez, poet Yehonatan Gefen joins the presenters to comment on the case of Rabbi Pinto case [Rabbi Pinto was convicted of trying to bribe the head of the Israel National Police's National Fraud Squad]:

> I wrote about the Pinto case, because the Rabbi and the police commander are all over the news right now.

> After months of exile, Rabbi Pinto is landing in Israel. Yes, he is here. God forbid, don't worry, he will cover his ass. A deal will send him to prison for no more than a year, as a state witness. The police are on high alert and Pinto is going to be the 'Shula Zaken' [defendant turned state's witness in a bribery scale involving former prime minister Ehud Olmert] of the Rabbinate. On the desk are bribes from the honorable Rabbi . . . Somebody is going to pay in cash and it will be a lot.

Here the notorious Pinto case (14) is framed as an example of corruption involving government, the rabbinate, and criminal elements, with the expectation that the offender will escape justice using bribery.

As noted, the fake interview with the mayor of Beit Shemesh, aired on Slutzky & Domingez (15), also portrayed the ultra-orthodox population as ignorant and corrupt.

> Fake Mayor Abutbul: Go do something useful, look for a woman soldier and spit on her . . . Surely you can see that Beit Shemesh is like Paris. Why? Because just like in Paris, you can't hang around the streets without getting into trouble with criminals: That makes us twin cities.

Responding to an accusation of election fraud, cheating in the elections, Fake Mayor Abutbul said, 'There was no cheating in the elections, everything was valid. I swear to you that I would let you talk with the majority of our voters, but they suddenly passed away after voting'.

In these representations, the ultra-orthodox leaders and public figures are associated with crime and violence. They are depicted as corrupt and greedy members of a mafia-like organisation, for whom Jewish law is merely a means for opportunistic bending.

Discussion

This article offers a case study of minority representation in the media, focusing on negative depictions of Israel's ultra-orthodox minority in secular entertainment and satire programmes on Israeli morning radio programmes. The nature of daily morning shows translates into intuitive and spontaneous broadcasting, which is useful for highlighting authentic media perceptions of this minority.

While a relatively small sample was used, the three shows under analysis are very popular and highly influential. Our findings highlight that ultra-orthodox individuals are typically represented in negative terms, using variations on the same general themes: shady businessmen, drug abusers out of touch with reality, and hypocrites who follow their religion only when it is self-serving and convenient. These portrayals convey the view that ultra-orthodox individuals choose to be religious for all the wrong reasons, they lack 'true' religious values and embrace religion as a means to "the good life. This is perfectly illustrated by Tal and Aviad's suspicions that religious repentance comes from economic motives. Such cynicism, however, will only increase the divide between the ultra-orthodox and secular sectors. As Rashi and Helinger showed,[69] the media has exacerbated the religious-secular gap to a dangerous point almost beyond repair. Media antagonism to and fear of the ultra-orthodox has labelled this sector as a social threat. The findings in this article raise questions such as how coverage affects this social gap and knowledge and acquaintance with the ultra-orthodox public diminishes.

The religious person is thus represented as being beyond mainstream public consensus, unenlightened and lacking any connection to the modern liberal progressive world, the world of the secular individual. In contrast, ultra-orthodox society is primitive and 'stuck' in an outmoded time, characterised by blatant gender inequality, with women responsible for all household tasks, livelihood, and raising children while husbands dedicate their lives to Torah learning. According to their media stereotype, these individuals are crazy madmen from a forgotten age, with no understanding of the modern world.

The process of media representation is one of constant identity structuring, with the power to produce stereotypes and heighten prejudice, which in turn, can exaggerate social differences.[70] This article found that the ultra-orthodox community members are represented by negative stereotypes and generalisations. As a whole, their society is shown to be 'shady' and dishonest: They take shortcuts, don't work hard, and live off the work of others. Furthermore, the ultra-orthodox are often represented as 'stoners' – which is code for a disconnect from reality. The social view that these representations reflect is that conduct that deviates from mainstream behaviour and values is akin to irrationality and even insobriety.

Members of the ultra-orthodox community are portrayed as individuals whose adherence to religious laws is flexible, and religious values can be bent for a variety of reasons including profit. Religion is represented as elastic – changeable and conditioned by circumstance. For broadcasters, society is marked by a constant intractable conflict between religious and secular lifestyles, values, and beliefs. As a result, they believe that any ultra-orthodox individual who enters the modern world and accepts social progress necessarily forgoes some of his or her religious values.

Importantly, religious leaders are commonly represented in a negative light and tone. They are portrayed as all too ready to bend rules for personal needs, their friends, and their believers. This sort of negative representation is generalised to the entire community: If rabbis, the community leaders, are shown as criminals, greedy, obsessed with petty ridiculous rules, the same associations can be extended to the community in its entirety.

Daily shows based on sketches and conversations often relate to current affairs and trending news events, focusing on minority issues as well as unrest, crime and violence[71] Studies have shown that coverage of the ultra-orthodox community often centres on social disorder, such as incidents of rabbis who commit crimes. As such, the media make negative generalisations based on structured stereotypes, engaging in patronising and critical attacks on the religious 'others' outside popular consensus.[72]

In conclusion, the article shows for the first time how a minority group is covered on the radio morning programmes in Israel – a popular and intuitive medium. These programmes introduce spontaneous intuitive editing into broadcasting, which contrasts with other media that enforce strict editing standards before its content reaches the consumer. As a result, these programmes reflect an undeniable level of authenticity of feelings, perceptions, and responses in their representations of Israel's ultra-orthodox community. These broadcasters are from the secular world and do not necessarily have intimate knowledge of the ultra-orthodox community.

In these programmes, ultra-orthodox individuals are rarely featured. When they are included, their representations are stereotyped and based on negative assumptions. These research findings illustrate that secular media select specific representations and negative stereotypes of the ultra-orthodox public, depicting it as a group that is outside the consensus and different from general society. In fact, these representations reproduce rather than challenge existing hegemonic perceptions. This reproduction is reinforced by the popularity and large listening audiences of these prime-time programmes, which have the power to influence and shape listener perceptions and entrench prevailing stereotypes.

The findings in this article also reinforce previous studies on the systematic exclusion of the ultra-orthodox in Israeli media,[73] specifically and the sparse coverage of ultra-orthodox society in mainstream media.[74] Such limited media coverage of the ultra-orthodox community potentially exacerbates the social divide between secular majority and the ultra-orthodox minority, leaving the ultra-orthodox minority firmly outside public consensus. The article illustrates how western secular-democratic media may systematically exclude minority groups that threaten social consensus through differences in language, dress, behaviour, customs, or lifestyle.

Future research should examine the representations of religion in sectorial satire and comedy shows in the ultra-orthodox community. Such research can focus on the presence of internal criticism and the dynamics of its expression, and identify how inwardly directed criticism differs from its presentation in the mainstream secular media. In addition, this type of research may shed light on how closed communities challenge their own customs, leaders, and practices.

Notes

1. Mishol-Shauli and Golan, "Ultra-Orthodoxy on Public Social-Media," 438.
2. First and Enbar-Lankri, *The Absent and the Present 2013*.
3. Kama and First, *On Exclusion*, 52–53.
4. Russo-Netzer and Bergman, "Patterns among Ultra-Orthodox," 233–248.
5. See note 1 above.
6. Nielsen, "Audio Today 2019," 10.
7. McQuail, *Mass Communication Theory*, 3–5.
8. Mariotti, "Adorno on the Radio," 434–5.
9. Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," 393–4.
10. Luther, Lepre and Clark, *Diversity in US Mass Media*, 32–33.
11. Kama and First, *On Exclusion*, 59–60.
12. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 171.
13. Curran, "Media as a Public Sphere," 50–52.
14. McQuail, *Mass Communication Theory*, 17–19.
15. Pickering, *Stereotyping the Politics of Representation*, 1–9.
16. First and Vermer-Bial, *Elderly Representations in the Satire Program*, 29–30.
17. First and Abraham, "Diversity in Commercial Television," 135–137; and Luther, Lepre and Clark, *Diversity in US Mass Media*, 62.
18. First and Abraham, "Diversity in Commercial Television," 137; First and Enbar-Lankri, *The Absent and the Present 2013*, 12–13; Luther, Lepre and Clark, *Diversity in US Mass Media*, 12; and Saeed, *Media, Racism and Islamophobia*, 460.
19. First, *Arabs in the News*, 27–31; First and Enbar-Lankri, *The Absent and the Present 2013*, 63; and Saeed, "Media, Racism and Islamophobia," 443–462.
20. See note 8 above.
21. Kellner, "Cultural Studies," 13–15.
22. Saeed, "Media, Racism and Islamophobia," 444.

23. Georgiou, "Diaspora in the Digital Era," 94–97.
24. Gamson, "News as Framing," 158–9.
25. Mahtani, "Canadian Media and Minority Identities," 79–85.
26. Ibid.
27. Hargreaves and Hardin, "Competing against Media Stereotypes;" Luther, Lepre and Clark, *Diversity in US Mass Media*, 334; and Saeed, "Media, Racism and Islamophobia," 443–462.
28. Mahtani, "Canadian Media and Minority Identities," 30.
29. First and Enbar-Lankri, *The Absent and the Present 2013*, 12–13; Lemish, "Images of Female Immigrants," 347; Mahtani, "Canadian Media and Minority Identities," 3; Mendelson-Maoz and Shteier-Livni, "The First Arab-Israeli Sitcom," 34–39; and Saeed, "Media, Racism and Islamophobia," 443–62.
30. For example: *The Absent and the Present in Prime Time* – The Reports from 2004–2013.
31. For example: *The Absent and the Present in Prime Time* – The Reports from 2004–2013; First and Enbar-Lankri, *The Absent and the Present 2013*, 62; Lemish, "Images of Female Immigrants," 344–47; and Mendelson-Maoz and Shteier-Livni, "The First Arab-Israeli Sitcom," 34–7.
32. Kahaner, Malah and Hoshen, *Haredi Society in Israel*, 7.
33. Bergman et al., "Discrimination among the Ultra-Orthodox," 32.
34. Neriya-Ben Shahar, "The Medium is the Danger," 28; and Wasserman and Gabel, "Israeli Ultra-Orthodox Media," 13–14.
35. Wasserman and Gabel, "Israeli Ultra-Orthodox Media," 5.
36. Cohen, "Media Information and Jewish Clergy," 7; and Wasserman and Gabel, "Israeli Ultra-Orthodox Media," 5.
37. Wasserman and Gabel, "Israeli Ultra-Orthodox Media," 13–14.
38. Ibid.
39. Neriya-Ben Shahar, "The Medium is the Danger," 28–29.
40. Wasserman and Gabel, "Israeli Ultra-Orthodox Media," 4–5.
41. Abraham, Elephant-Leffler and First, *The Absent and Present 2004*, 12–13; and First and Enbar-Lankri, *The Absent and the Present 2013*, 12.
42. First and Enbar-Lankri, *The Absent and the Present 2013*, 12–61.
43. Laor, Elephant-Leffler and First. *The Absent and Presents 2006*, 16–52.
44. First and Enbar-Lankri, *The Absent and the Present 2013*, 12–13.
45. Ibid., 19–20.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
48. Mishol-Shauli, Nakhi and Golan, "Ultra-Orthodoxy on Public Social-Media," 438; and Zilbershlag, "Virtual Ultra-Orthodox," 42–43.
49. Zilbershlag, "Virtual Ultra-Orthodox," 42–43.
50. Hellinger and Rashi, "The Ultra-Orthodox Minority," 120–1.
51. Struch and Schwartz, *Perceptions of Conflict with Haredim*, 20–24.
52. Hellinger and Rashi, "The Ultra-Orthodox Minority," 122.
53. Zeidman, *Humor*, 15.
54. Zeidman, *Humor*, 133–136; and Koestler, *The Act of Creation*, 393.
55. Abraham, Elephant-Leffler and First, *The Absent and Presents 2004*, 76.
56. First and Vermer-Bial, "Elderly Representations in the Satire Program," 29–30.
57. Steier-Livni, "Hegemonic Memory on Eretz Nehederet," 14–15.
58. See note 55 above.

59. Shwiki, "Listening Habits Survey." 3; Laor, Lissitsa and Galily, "Online Digital Radio Apps," 22; and Lissitsa and Laor, "Generational Differences in On-Demand Radio Use," 6–7.
60. Laor and Galily, "Communal Musical Taste Mix in Israel," 928–959.
61. Bonet and Fernndez-Quijada, "Public Service," 5–7.
62. Irvine, "Commercial Radio: Serving UK Communities," 38–39.
63. Rothenbuhler, "Commercial Radio and Popular Music," 125–7.
64. Laor, "Educational Radio in Israel," 890–907; Laor, "Added Value of College Radio;" Laor, "The Development of Educational Radio," 716–738; and Laor, "Music Programming in College Radio," 1–25.
65. Laor, "Radio Programs and Popular Posts," 80–87; Laor, "Visual Radio in Israel," 1050–1052; Laor and Steinfeld, "Radio Stations on Facebook," 279–281; Laor, Tamir and Galili, "Radio Presence in Online Platforms," 963–964; Samuel-Azran, Laor and Tal, "Who Listens to Podcasts," 490–491; and Steinfeld and Laor, "Public and Commercial Radio Stations," 194–209.
66. Laor, "Radio Consuming Habits in Israel;" Moshe, Laor and Friedkin, "Radio Listening and Digital Divide," 361–84; Laor, "Internet Radio in Israel," 830–47.
67. Dushnik, "Qualitative Analyses," 137–139.
68. Yuval Hamevulbal is the stage name of a popular actor and star of children's performances, Yuval Shem-Tov.
69. Hellinger and Rashi, "The Ultra-Orthodox Minority," 138.
70. See note 52 above.
71. First and Abraham, "Diversity in Commercial Television," 140–142; and First and Enbar-Lankri, *The Absent and the Present 2013*, 12–13.
72. First and Abraham, "Diversity in Commercial Television in Israel," 1–60.
73. Zilbershlag, "Virtual Ultra-Orthodox," 42–43; Hellinger and Rashi, "The Ultra-Orthodox Minority," 138.
74. First and Enbar-Lankri, *The Absent and The present 2013*, 3–4; Hellinger and Rashi, "The Ultra-Orthodox Minority," 138; and Laor, Elephant-Leffler and First, *The Absent and Present 2006*, 16–52.

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