

Between Ultra-Orthodox and Secular Jewish Society: Cultural Conflicts and Stigma Contest in the Mass Media

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Abstract

Cultural conflicts between different cultural worlds in the same society often lead to groups defining one another as 'immoral' and even dangerous or criminal. In this paper, we aim to address two apparently different processes: the way the ultra-Orthodox mass media treats the issue of ultra-Orthodox women's leaving the supervised, protected religious sphere for the dangerous, promiscuous secular sphere for work; and the threat attributed to the general ultra-Orthodox society *via* secular mass media. Analyzing over 80 articles published during 2001-2011 in the main daily newspaper from the ultra-Orthodox and secular societies, it seems that the main, repetitive themes in ultra-Orthodox newspaper articles reflect the sense of threat and fear which accompany the trend of ultra-Orthodox women stepping out of the acceptable internal societal frameworks. On the other hand, the secular newspapers use the same techniques of heightening the perceived threat of deviation and criminal acts carried out by individuals and generalizing them to the entire ultra-Orthodox population. In both cases, the media use techniques of "moral panic" to emphasize the differences between cultural or gender groups and enhance and intensify the threat level attributed to the opposite group.

Keywords: Cultural conflict, Ultra-Orthodox, Stigma contest, Mass media.

1. Introduction

The cultural conflict between the secular population and ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel has co-opted an array of various phenomena, such as the exclusion of women, domestic violence, homosexuality, abortions, and infringement on civil rights, in order to demonstrate and establish a moral and cultural hierarchy to bridge the different conceptions that coexist at a given moment.

This conflict is primarily based on an attempt to redefine the "Other" and his cultural and normative standards as dangerous, threatening or corrupting. Schur (1980) [1] explains that the struggle to label the 'Other' group as deviant (Stigma Contest) influences and defines the internal and external boundaries of the group. In many cases, as seen in this study, the deviation and deviants are not perceived as the root of the problem but rather as symptoms for

a much greater malady, or as Persons (1983) [2] put it: “crime and violence draw attention mostly as means to point a blaming finger at the wider social standards to which we object”. The persistent struggle between different moral universes enables the participant’s symbolic world to be strengthened and maintained. Defining alternative symbolic worlds as ‘deviant’ or ‘dangerous’ preserves and normalizes the value systems through which the stronger group maintains and defines the boundaries of its world (Shoham, 2012) [3]. Cultural conflicts between different cultural worlds in the same society often lead to groups defining one another as ‘immoral’ and even dangerous or criminal. This occurs as part of the conflict between these communities and, and perhaps to an even greater extent, within the communities themselves.

In order to demonstrate these claims, this study investigates cultural conflicts within the ultra-Orthodox group and between the ultra-Orthodox and the secular society surrounding it. To do so, we examined the different techniques the ultra-Orthodox media uses to deal with what is defined as a deviation from its central moral standards, especially among women, and aims to protect them from moral deterioration. In the second part of the study, we examined the different techniques used by the secular mass media to present the ultra-Orthodox public sphere as ‘deviant’ or even dangerous.

2. Who are the Ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel?

Ultra-Orthodox society is perceived as a minority in Israeli society, Israeli Jewish society and among the Diaspora community. Its ideology and way of life usually situate this group as a contrasting culture to that which surrounds it. This is expressed through its conduct, institutes and facilities, educational systems, perceptions and unique clothing that mark out its members. Naturally, this group raises curiosity, wonder and misunderstanding among the general population and engenders ambivalent references of closeness and distance, love and hate, appreciation and contempt (Doron, 2013 [4]; Sagi, 2006 [5]; Kaplan, 2003 [6]).

According to various statistics and population censuses, Israel currently has a population of approximately 700,000 ultra-Orthodox Jews. The average number of children in an ultra-Orthodox family is 5.5. On April 21, 2011, Israel’s Central Bureau of Statistics published a lengthy document debating the question of how to estimate the number of ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel. A comparison of various statistics using data from the education system with studies based on self-definition gives a 40% gap between different surveys (approximately 700,000 compared with 444,000 ultra-Orthodox). This gap in estimates is not just a matter of statistical choice but represents, first and foremost, an issue of political and cultural identity construction and a struggle between various identities.

The ultra-Orthodox community operates within defined social patterns with an internal social hierarchy and different statuses, based – among other things – on a division of gender roles, in which a woman’s role is completely different in her religious, familial and social status from that of a man. Torah study and the practice of religious precepts are the foundation of male behavior while female roles mainly focus on economic and debt management within the home and raising and educating children within the family.

The demand for complete segregation between men and women in the public sphere means that each gender is contained within its own specially designated space: “men at the front and women go inside” is just one expression that depicts the struggle to maintain these social norms. The media’s preoccupation – through ultra-Orthodox newspapers, local magazines, pasquinades and of course the ultra-Orthodox formal education system – with these issues is designed to preserve the hegemonic moral world of ultra-Orthodox society and the distinction between it and its social surrounding environment.

2.1 Ultra-Orthodox Women in the Secular Sphere

The entrance of ultra-Orthodox women into the public sphere in the first decade of the 21st Century is not metaphorical, but rather real and tangible in the ultra-Orthodox community.

Ultra-Orthodox women are found within a myriad of public institutions and perform vital tasks required by men as well, and sometimes even work side by side with men (as mediators, architects, educational consultants, speech-language pathologists and other allied health professionals, executive assistants and software programmers).

Many advertisements published in ultra-Orthodox local magazines, written and funded by individuals; reflect the difficulty experienced by ultra-Orthodox society in dealing with this strengthening and empowerment of women and their prominent presence in the public sphere. The tension between the need to make a living (especially in the last few decades, during which social benefits were significantly decreased) and the need to preserve the spiritual existence of the community and family is resolved via the rhetoric of *halacha* (Jewish law), which refers to men in terms of 'holiness' and the spiritual world, and women in terms of "materialism" and "worldliness". For this reason, women are able to act as mediators to the world outside of holiness and community, which makes them responsible for the secular areas of life – *i.e.* the physical existence of the family and, through it, the entire community, as they make the step to the outside world and bear the burden of making a living.

Although ultra-Orthodox women's permission to work occurs, according to Ben-Yehuda (2010) [7], mostly on the margins of ultra-Orthodox society where the Rabbis' control is weaker, or in places of great economic stress, ultra-Orthodox women's entry to the labor market necessitates a renewed definition of the role of women in ultra-Orthodox society. These definitions actual threat to destabilize the comprehensive legitimacy of male religious authorities and therefore forces those authorities to strictly redefine women's characteristics and roles via a modern 'witch hunt' technique, which attributes properties of deviation, threat and danger to women who work in the public sphere.

An interesting example of this struggle for women's physical and metaphorical presence in the ultra-Orthodox sector can be seen in Israeli public transportation routes, or the "*Mehadrin* buses". Most women in the ultra-Orthodox sector do not drive and so use public transportation to travel to work; buses, therefore, have become a space for significant interaction within the ultra-Orthodox community, in which the level of supervision has decreased and the risk of damage and temptation faced by working ultra-Orthodox women has increased.

There seems to be a link between the ideological conflict around the place of the "new ultra-Orthodox woman" and struggle for her physical place in the *Mehadrin* buses, where women are required to enter through the back door and sit at the back in order to not "fail and falter", *i.e.* mingle with, men. There is a reason why the section reserved for women on the bus is the inside, back section, and why the over-meticulousness of the *Mehadrin* buses occurs in parallel to the rise of women's social and occupational status.

The undermining of women's status is well known in Western society and is a phenomenon that is seen every time women make any progress in their social status. This phenomenon, known as "backlash" (an opposition movement or trend), was presented as response to the radicalism of the Sixties in the United States. The backlash describes a trend that attempted to push back women's social progress and tried to deliberately block it through a series of events that seem individual and separate, caused by different social forces, each with a different level of severity.

Each event in itself does not seem to be a severe insult to women's rights but the result of the totality of these events is devastating – a multitude of minor insults to women's progress and damage to specific rights accumulate into a force that pushes women back from the progress they made into to their subordinate place and traditional roles.

The backlash response against ultra-Orthodox women's strengthening status is not a result of women gaining full equality but rather the outcome of male anxiety toward women obtaining such equality; in other words, this is a process whose sole purpose is to prevent any option of significant female progress that could undermine the structure of society (Shoham, 2012) [3].

The emphasis of this dichotomy between “good” and “bad” women enables the change in the instrumental aspects of ultra-Orthodox women’s roles to be contained, while at the same time strengthening the extent of control over women and subjugating them even in the face of such changes.

2.2 The Ultra-Orthodox Media

The role of media in ultra-Orthodox society is to influence reality in the preferred ideological direction and not necessarily to report said reality. The main role of any ideological media is to reinforce an existing moral system, to prevent the establishment of alternative perspectives and to thwart attempts of change. Gans (1979) [8] discerns between “order news” and “disorder news”. Order news is ‘positive’ news and usually concerns improvements, creation, social stability, flourishing, etc. In contrast, disorder news is usually negative news focusing on crime and violence, subversion, disorganization and immorality, social instability, and separations.

Ultra-Orthodox journalism in Israel mainly revolves around order news. The ultra-Orthodox newspaper aims to reflect and reinforce a cultural world of symbols pertaining to Jewish law. To do so it must find various, different ways through which everyday lives can be adjusted to the aspired ideal reality. Ultra-Orthodox media emphasizes the public’s right *not to know* (Ben-Yehuda, 2010) [7].

One of the main techniques through which social order is created and maintained is by selections and denial, which results in the exclusion of entire subjects and their labeling as taboo, so that they will not be mentioned in writing or reported. At the same time, this technique emphasizes issues that encourage recruitment to a joint cause.

Levi (1989) [9] explains that every reference to the secular world in a particular ultra-Orthodox newspaper reflects the formal attitude of the ultra-Orthodox group’s rabbis towards secular society. The main role of the ultra-Orthodox newspaper as a monitoring agent, alongside other powerful supervision mechanisms such as gossip, leads it to attribute maximum attention to opinion columns and less to the reports on burning issues. The newspaper does not only provide a filtered description of facts, it acts in prescription of behavior. Each ultra-Orthodox newspaper allocates a unique section for publicity articles containing analyses and interpretations of the world according to ultra-Orthodox doctrine, and in accordance with the customary rules that allow framing and reinforcing the dominant social conventions of the ultra-Orthodox world.

Through these sections, the newspaper clarifies and reinforces the moral boundaries of the group and those applied within the group. In other words, the ultra-Orthodox media maintains the role of control and supervision (Mann & Lev-On, 2012) [10] by ignoring certain topics or by referring to them within a much wider tapestry, which gives them a completely different meaning. Another means to deny events that do not fit with the normative world is *via* obscure, unclear and vague language (Ben-Yehuda, 2010) [7].

The exclusion and silencing of Jewish women in Israel is most prominent in ultra-Orthodox journalism, and even more so in the visual aspect of publications; an ultra-Orthodox newspaper will rarely show photographs of women or girls, as editors censor ads (for example by adding yarmulkes and shirts to female children in advertisements for diapers) or by erasing images of women from images of newsworthy events.

In addition, editors will not print the first names of women writing for the newspaper but only give their first initial. Ultra-Orthodox radio stations prohibit any broadcast of women singing and some even prohibit listening to women’s voices over the radio.

During the 1990s, ultra-Orthodox rabbis started a campaign against the use of the internet due to the fear that communities could be exposed to inappropriate material. While some rabbis allow the internet to be used for business or studies as long as a content filter device is

employed, the threat this technology poses to the “purity of the Jewish home” remains a leitmotif in the discourse between ultra-Orthodox groups. In May 2012, approximately 80,000 people rallied against the internet in City Fields, New-York. The main motif of this demonstration was that it was the mother’s role to enforce the prohibition on the Internet in the ultra-Orthodox home (Mann & Lev-On, 2012) [10].

3. Gender Roles and Stigma Contest in Ultra-Orthodox Media

As mentioned above, the use of stigma struggles in mass media not only define a group’s external boundaries but, perhaps even more so, aims to define its internal limits as well. One of the most prominent issues over which these battles are fought in local ultra-Orthodox media is the gender issue. The ability to monitor the behavior and humility of ultra-Orthodox women is becoming more complicated in today’s internet and cellular media age.

The unmitigated availability and access to a variety of worlds outside the ultra-Orthodox home, the lack of physical need to leave the house or to give any sign that a woman has used the internet to access other spheres, have led to a long list of limitations and prohibitions. These include bans on connecting to the internet or owning a cellular phone, rulings forbidding the use of Smartphone's to surf the web, the designation of certain cellular phones as ‘kosher’, the setting of parameters for ‘safe’ web surfing and the harsh censorship to block and limit internet use (ibid).

While the present era brings the threat of a silent, invisible undermining of societal norms which are problematic to supervise, at the same time technology is used as an opportunity to spread religious messages through the very channels that threaten the existing social order. Against this background, it is interesting to examine the processes through which the ‘ideal’ image of women has been maintained and reinforced over the past two decades, and to review the techniques used to create moral panic around the threat that the actual or virtual journey by ultra-Orthodox women to the secular world poses to the ultra-Orthodox world. Therefore, we have chosen to analyze several anecdotes published in three prominent ultra-Orthodox newspapers: *Mishpacha*, a mainstream weekly newspaper aimed at ultra-Orthodox women of all sects; *BaKehila*, which much like *Mishpacha* is not aligned to a particular sect but deals with issues relevant to ultra-Orthodox society as a whole and is managed and edited by ‘modern’ Hasidic Jews; the weekly *Marva La’tsame*, an alternative magazine for those who object to *Mishpacha*, which they consider as too promiscuous, and *Yated Ne’eman*, the magazine of the highly observant Misnagdim group.

The following are a number of anecdotes that may imply a general trend which the ultra-Orthodox journalism chooses to emphasize, which illustrates the level of danger attributed to the interaction between women and the outside world, and – derived from that – the general threat of the ultra-Orthodox community’s inability to supervise women.

3.1 Baby, It’s Corrupt Outside

The articles analyzed show a recurring story pattern that appears in most issues in different variations. The protagonist in this story is a young woman who wants to master a profession so that she can help the family business. At first, the young woman first enjoys success, but as time passes she discovers how much corruption there is “out there”, and how her studies have distanced her from “eternal life”.

The only characteristics that vary in these stories, which are published on a weekly basis, are the era, the background and the characters. The narrative of corruption and threat remains constant and has a very clear moral. The article “Badge of Shame” (*Mishpacha*, 22.10.09), which revolved around the so-called right choice to learn a profession and which surveys professional training institutes, talks about “*the myriad of paths and versatile employment options have also led to severe spiritual difficulties...*”

Rabbis, education professionals and *Posekim* (teachers who make rulings on Jewish law) warn that:

*“...due to the reality created in the past few years, when many ultra-Orthodox women work in secular workplaces, often managed by secular men who lack the minimum sense of modesty and humility, but even when there is complete segregation, the association with secular women or even with those who are not ultra-Orthodox may bring **an actual disaster** [bold text by author]. These colleagues may seem very polite, interested and caring, but they may also induce spiritual weakness and looseness in women who are not strong enough and may give rise to wrong and completely distorted perspectives.”*

This danger is twice as great since it is hidden and lurks to tempt women who cannot recognize it, drawing them to itself – by which time it is too late to back out. Interaction with men and women outside the ultra-Orthodox sphere is corrupting and distorting. This interaction is considered twice as dangerous because these are seemingly polite and kind people and so the women who meet them are unaware of the dangers underpinning their interactions with them.

3.2 Good Deeds Do Not Go Unpunished

“The very act of going about with uncovered hair is promiscuity like no other and is practiced by humanity’s most inferior! Even when wearing a wig! This means that it is not a matter of exhibiting the hair; it is how the hair that is presented in a way that destroys humility. How foolish are those who aspire to relief on this matter through a false head covering”.

Different ultra-Orthodox local magazines belonging to the newspapers we examined show many advertisements which urge women to pay attention to modesty, such as the above advertisement taken from the local paper *Emtza HaShavua*, published in Beitar Illit (an ultra-Orthodox city):

“One should wear long, non-formfitting skirts and not wear transparent stockings, especially not flesh-colored stockings. This will guarantee a great reward in Heaven”.

The local magazine *Meida Beitar* (8.3.10, right before Passover) published the following advertisement, aimed to help the soul of his relative ascend to Heaven:

“The Holiday of Freedom is upon us and we are still in exile, for what is exile? It is a state in which the soul is under the domination of the evil inclination... your true freedom, dear daughter of Israel, is your ability to detach yourself from the horrible influence of fashion and from the attire that is sold today... to be like the Holy Mothers and be wary every time you step outside to the street, that your presence will not be felt in the street at all... if there is not enough holiness, the Divine Spirit will leave and the People of Israel might, G-d forbid, be delivered to the Other Side, as it was during the Holocaust, Heaven forefend, You are the Daughter of a King, it is so simple to wear your royal garb which includes a wide skirt, thick stockings, a high-necked blouse, a head-covering, a simple kerchief and not wigs, bandanas or prominent hats, and quiet shoes. Have a happy, Kosher Passover”.

Women’s entry into the secular, public sphere stipulated their becoming invisible by blurring and covering every sign of their femininity or uniqueness. Those in charge of supervising women in the ultra-Orthodox public sphere feel an increasing lack of control, and this leads them to be more meticulous and strict about everything that could be perceived as a possible sign of the world of beauty, aesthetics, femininity or – Heaven forbid – seduction.

The creation of a moral panic in the ultra-Orthodox public sphere over the phenomenon of ultra-Orthodox women going to work is accompanied by an early sense of imminent loss. This stage of feeling that something bad, or that some disaster might befall us means that immediate action must be taken, otherwise the consequences will be far worse. Debates over social problems are usually done through rhetoric, is the art of persuasion, which enables the

speaker to move people and create a change in their behavior and new positions to strengthen existing standpoints. Rhetoric is not just a means but also a prophecy of those of use it (Tsur, 2004) [11].

Among the types of rhetoric used as a political tool to create a 'social problem', is the textual rhetoric conducted *via* literature, poetry and prose, as well as articles, magazines etc. (ibid.). The newspaper *Marva La'tsame* hardly touches on the issue of women going out to work; on the contrary, most women mentioned in the newspaper's stories and articles are housewives who rarely leave their homes unnecessarily in order to preserve their modesty. Reference to working women can only be found in educating stories, in which the working woman always discovers that her going to work has damaged those who live with her. For example: "*The child suffers from developmental problem since he was not held on the arms enough as a babe, while his mother was busy*" (*Marva La'tsame*, 30.4.2010).

Articles for women are all about how to maintain a home efficiently and about providing tips for childcare. Even though most papers chose not to address the fact that women work and study at all, the advertisement sections of these papers do contain many "wanted" ads seeking to hire women with a Bachelor's degree from within the community (as social workers, speech-language pathologists, etc.).

Dealing with the dangers created by women's going out for work outside of the ultra-Orthodox sector brings ultra-Orthodox journalism to use an array of intentional techniques, starting from creating a moral panic around the underlying danger of going outside, equating women's going out to the secular sphere with the shocking meaning of the Holocaust and ending with the loss of their souls, G-d forbid. The various techniques for exclusion, which erases the very existence of women who work outside the territorial and symbolic boundaries of the sector from the public agenda, are meant to prevent other good, ultra-Orthodox women from following in their footsteps.

3.3 Who are the Good Women?

Another method of exacerbating the level of danger underlying ultra-Orthodox women's traversal into the public sphere is *via* confirmation and reinforcing the definition of the Good Woman Prototype.

This technique uses important female characters, who are referred to throughout the newspaper and whose positive qualities – like modesty, obedience, educating their children (or educating children in general) allow them to live according to the Correct Way. The strong influence of women's entrance to the public sphere is prominent in these references, especially in local magazines in which individual publishers can post advertisements that are not edited or polished by anyone: "*to be like the Holy Mothers and be wary of every time you step outside to the street, that your presence will not be felt in the street at all...*".

The newspaper *Yated Ne'eman* (19.4.10) published a eulogy for the wife of one of the famous rabbis of a large *Yeshiva*. The article describes how:

"the woman was making her living through educating the Daughters of Israel and teaching them the Torah and piety and afterward, when her Gaon husband was appointed to teach the Torah in Tel-Aviv she left her job so she could stand by his side and allow him to fully devote himself to the benefit of the students... the entire burden of the house was laid upon her shoulders, and until her last day she did not boast about her greatness and in her humility she hid her actions... she has left behind her a generation of honest and blessed people...".

The magazine *Mishpacha* (in the newspaper's women's supplement) (25.03.10) published a long interview with a *Rabbanit*, the daughter of a renowned Rabbi, especially for Passover. In the interview, the *Rabbanit* encourages women of our generation to follow the lead of Hebrew women in Egypt, since "*it is due to righteous women we were saved and thanks to them the People of Israel will be saved once more*". The *Rabbanit* compares women today with

Hebrew women in Egypt and encourages women to perform their roles as mothers and wives out of a sense of mission.

The phenomenon of women leaving the home to work has caused ripples of change that spread far wider than the need to make a living. This has resulted in a great sense of fear and terror of loss of control over women in particular and over the existing social order in general. Women have brought many changes from the outside world into the ultra-Orthodox world, and these have been adapted to the community's norms and needs. More and more female characters are influencing the agenda; there is now a full range of female cultural products, including late-night theater shows and ultra-Orthodox movies created by women for women. Women's entry to the professional world has resulted in the creation of a completely new leisure-time culture designated for women, which has forced the ultra-Orthodox institution and the men who lead it to devise ways to supervise this new cultural sphere. The cultural agenda created by ultra-Orthodox women requires that the men in charge find relevant, drastic and speedy solutions before they lose the power to mold the cultural, political and social-order agenda.

As claimed above, the interaction with outside moral and cultural universes did not increase pluralism but rather brought a contradictory response in which societal norms were toughened and intolerance towards those people and behaviors that the community was able to contain in the past increased.

The fear of the power that ultra-Orthodox women began to accumulate has dragged different movements in various directions, all aimed to protect the ultra-Orthodox woman figure. Today, there are voices urging women to not wear an artificial wig (an act which is permitted and which is even a characteristic of Orthodox and conservative women), to cover their bodies with a shawl, and so on. The most prominent conflict is over *Mehadrin* bus lines, which started out with the requirement that women sit at the back of the bus but which has quickly spread to other public areas, e.g. separate cashiers for women at supermarkets and various places stipulating different days and hours of service for ultra-Orthodox men and women. In some places the conflict even spread to the streets where women were asked (especially during Jewish holidays) to walk on separate sidewalks so they will not tempt men. In an interview from 26.12.11, the ultra-Orthodox Community Head of Holiness and Education explained that:

"Women go to sit at the back of the bus out of free will and with a good feeling... every simple ultra-Orthodox woman enjoys sitting at the back, in the company of other women and talking of women's matters. She is more comfortable at the back..."

Women who do not comply with these new regulations are penalized, starting with verbal comments and even escalating to offensive remarks and raised voices. Sometimes the children of such women have faced expulsion from community education facilities and, rarely, physical force is used. Each of the aforementioned demands is not significantly powerful and they are backed up by religious reasoning which, allegedly, puts women's minds at ease. These anecdotal demands stem from different sources and are part of a much wider conflict process aimed to push ultra-Orthodox women away from their new positions and back to their traditional place in society, thus protecting the existing social order and its patriarchal hegemony.

It seems that the main, repetitive themes in ultra-Orthodox newspaper articles reflect the sense of threat and fear which accompany the trend of ultra-Orthodox women stepping out of the acceptable internal societal frameworks. These themes involve an attempt to preserve the boundaries between the private sphere, where a woman's place is defined and secured, and the public working sphere, with its new professions such as law practice, accounting, computing or academic studies and which poses various threats to the traditional ideal of the ultra-Orthodox women's character.

4. Social Deviance and Cultural Conflict between the Ultra-Orthodox and Secular Sectors

Cromer (1996) [14] argues that when examining references to secular society in ultra-Orthodox journalism, the leading agenda is a militant one, characterized by a sense of recoiling combined with a hatred and criticism of secular society.

The main narrative of secular individuals is one of a complete negation of any possibility of moral superiority, while the fact that the Israeli State is secular and not God-fearing one is given as the reason for all its misfortunes and horrible deviations.

This conception is not uniform and appears at various levels in different ultra-Orthodox groups. Some oppose all secular symbols while others try to influence the order of things from within (Doron, 2013) [4]. References to secular society are characterized by a radicalization and exaggeration of an underlying evil and threat accompanying the slippery slope (in Hebrew, there is a link between the words modern (*moderna*) and slope (*midron*)) of secular life, with all the different deviations that accompany it. Secular society is presented by a total denial of any alternative moral compass that could block this implemented descent. Ben-Yehuda (2010) [7] claims that ultra-Orthodox, traditional media describe secular culture in terms of panic and hatred. Ultra-Orthodox and secular media usually refer to each other in descriptive language overflowing with militant descriptions like “the Battle for the Graves”, “Religious Commando Strikes Again”, “Another Secular Assault against the Rabbi’s Home”, etc.

Ultra-Orthodox journalism is frequently preoccupied with the secular public’s social ills and deviations and the complete absence of such problems in the ultra-Orthodox sector. This preoccupation is expressed via in cultural environments which attribute crime and violence to the secular lifestyle, which is characterized as the root of all evil. In some ultra-Orthodox circles, journalism is characterized by a hostile attitude towards the secular State and its institutions. Each malfunction of the State is used as a reason to attack the whole Zionist idea and each event is examined not just as an isolated occurrence but also in the wider context of Zionism and the State (*ibid.*).

This conception is validated still further by attempts to impose mandatory military service on ultra-Orthodox men. The conclusions of the Knesset's Committee, which recommend that a very small number of ultra-Orthodox men be exempt from military service and obligating the rest to be recruited at a relatively young age, caused thousands of ultra-Orthodox to take to the streets. In the protests that followed, demonstrators led hundreds of children tied with ropes through the streets, with placards that read “Save us from the disaster of military conscription” (*Hadashot*, 25.6.12).

This is the “antithesis” of the secular, Zionist ethos, common in many sectors of Israeli society. The attitude to work and military recruitment are added to the negative interpretation that ultra-Orthodox society has of the secular world, whose everyday components - mainly earning a living and military conscription - are translated as threats to a person’s holiness. As described by Cromer (1998) [15] and his studies, incidents of deviation in the secular public sphere are considered by ultra-Orthodox newspapers as an expression and symbol of the “moral vacuum” or “deprivation of values” which characterize the secular world, and which almost inevitably lead to moral deterioration and even to drastic outcomes such as murder or adultery. Cases such as the murder of taxi driver Derek Rott by two secular teenagers from good families, or the treason against the State by a member of a left-wing kibbutz (*HaShomer Hatzair*), which Cromer (*ibid.*) discusses, go beyond the personal and local components of these deviations and allow ultra-Orthodox journalism to make far more general comments on the secular world and its cultural symbols from whence all murderer and traitors come.

4.1 The Counter-Approach: Defense Rhetoric in Secular Journalism

The use of deviation etiology to attack the symbolism of alternative universes is not exclusive to ultra-Orthodox journalism. Secular newspapers use the same techniques of heightening the perceived threat of deviation and criminal acts carried out by individuals and generalizing them to the entire ultra-Orthodox population.

Arguments about social problems usually employ rhetoric. Cromer (1996) [14] describes three possible types of “defensive strategies”: self-defense (*they are threatening, taking over and dangerous*); self-criticism (*we are not understanding enough, we need to see why they respond as they do*); and self-encouragement (*we are meticulous in our practice of gender equality, freedom of speech, values of democracy*). Counter-arguments delivered through hostile counter-rhetoric aim to deny the problems of violence and degradation which ultra-Orthodox media attributes to the secular population, while directing the very same claims against ultra-Orthodox society.

To test how secular newspapers describe the etiology of the deviation stories in ultra-Orthodox society, we reviewed eighty articles published between 2000-2011 in Israel’s most popular daily newspapers: *Yediot Aharonot*, *Haaretz* and *Maariv*, which are all identified as “secular”. These articles mostly discuss two main issues: first, the level at which the “ultra-Orthodox” form an integral part of society, an issue that in the past few years was usually discussed under the political theme of “equality of burden”; and second whether this sector is, by definition, aggressive and violent and therefore should be treated with caution by the rest of society.

The following paragraphs describe several events concerning the ultra-Orthodox sector that were prominent in the reviewed articles and which reflect the counter-rhetoric used by secular journalism when discussing the ultra-Orthodox public sphere.

4.1.1 Rhetoric of “Pre-Disaster”

The city of Beit Shemesh is in the geographical center of Israel. This city, built in the Fifties and considered as a development town for many years, used to comprise mostly traditional and secular communities. In the past two decades, as a result of overcrowding in ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods in Jerusalem and Bnei Brak, ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods were built in Beit Shemesh and attracted many families.

The creation of new ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods in Beit Shemesh was accompanied by a series of public conflicts over the city’s character and nature. *Maariv* (11.12.03) published an article headlined “The battle between ultra-Orthodox and secular communities in Beit Shemesh is heating up”.

This moral panic was not created solely by highlighting the events in popular consciousness and defining them as a dangerous deviation, but also by bringing experts, professionals and politicians to explain and offer ways to solve them. Indeed, under a secondary headline, one of the politicians interviewed explains that “*this is indeed a war... thing are happening here that should not be dismissed*”. Later in the article there is a paragraph entitled “Combat heritage: stones, threats, demonstrations”, a description which further strengthens the impression that the ultra-Orthodox are a violent and dangerous group that does not eschew the use of violence.

The cultural conflict over the character of Beit Shemesh’s population hit the headlines once more in 2011, in the form of the story of a young girl, Na’ama Margolis, who studied at a religious state school for girls, named Orot. For several months, ultra-Orthodox men from a

radical sect, the Sicarii, held civilian demonstrations outside Orot, where they yelled and cursed at and even prevented passage of, the religious girls who attended the school.

Orot served pro-Zionist religious neighborhoods, mostly immigrants from English-speaking countries. It was the fact that these Jews were both ultra-Orthodox and supporters of the Zionist State that made them seem particularly dangerous to those ultra-Orthodox sects who consider the establishment of the Zionist State as a great disaster for Judaism.

The climax of this story was when Na'ama's mother, an American immigrant in Beit Shemesh, told the media the story of her eight year old daughter who was afraid to go to school. Na'ama's mother described how ultra-Orthodox men outside Orot would spit, curse and even threaten her daughter. The image of a young child afraid to walk to school enraged almost everyone interviewed for the story, religious and secular alike.

Na'ama's story gained considerable traction in online media, particularly in December 2011. The Beit Shemesh City Council, which convened after the incident was exposed, decided to place a network of cameras on the streets for increased public safety. Meanwhile, counter-demonstrations were arranged in Beit Shemesh and other cities, in which protesters carried signs that read "We Are All Na'ama Margolis", while ministers, and even the Prime Minister, were interviewed about the issue. The stationing of video cameras in ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods and police requests that citizens photograph any incidents led to attacks against photographers and civilians by ultra-Orthodox men who tried to rid their communities of "invaders". Na'ama Margolis's face and name was featured in talk shows about the "Conflict in Beit Shemesh".

The story of Na'ama Margolis revealed two different types of preoccupation in the media. The first is a near-disaster rhetoric, which described this act of violence a warning sign for the future of Israeli society in general and for women in particular. This rhetoric aims to divert the discussion from this specific incident and direct it to a general context, which threatens the unique character of Israeli society. The second rhetoric is a discerning one, which aims to minimize the role of the ultra-Orthodox in the story and to attribute it to a specific radical group that cannot be controlled.

The media that displayed the first type of preoccupation used a "self-encouragement" rhetoric, praising the democratic values of Israeli society as a free and liberal community which considers the exclusion of women (and girls) from the public sphere as something that should not be ignored.

These articles focus on the modestly dressed image of the innocent eight-year-old girl Na'ama and some even focus on her mother – an attractive, religious woman who reminded some of the writers of actress Carrie Bradshaw. In article from *Haaretz* (25.12.2011), the Prime Minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, was quoted as saying that Israel is a democratic, Western and liberal country, and for that reason the public sphere is open and safe for everybody. The leader of Israel's then-opposition party Kadima, said two days later in comments made during a Beit Shemesh demonstration and broadcast on the evening news programs of all channels, that:

"We came here to protect the face of Judaism and Zionism. My Judaism is the kind that lives side-by-side with democracy and not against it... in my Judaism women can do anything – select the way they should live, their occupation and their home".

Cohen (1972) [16] explains that to induce moral panic, public attention must be directed to the imminent danger, and the mentality of an approaching disaster must be created. The leader of Kadima party uses disaster rhetoric by explaining that:

"We are only a minute away from the division of Israeli society into different tribes with no common language, who spit on each other, thus bringing an end to the dream of the State of Israel..."

In parallel to this, some people tried to explain the incident by claiming that those responsible were not the entire ultra-Orthodox sector but only a “small group of people” from the Sicrii sect. These people mainly discussed the characteristics and history of the radical Sicrii sect and the attempt to set it apart from the rest of the ultra-Orthodox community.

In an interview with the Knesset Channel (the official television channel of Israel’s parliament) Rabbi Dov Lipman, the leader of the *Am Eched* (“One People”) movement, said that those responsible were only a “handful of bullies” who do not represent the rest of ultra-Orthodox society. Lipman was presented as an “ultra-Orthodox, English-speaking Rabbi, a truly sane person” whose character represents the exact opposition of the “thuggish ultra-Orthodox men” who run amok in the streets. In his words, the Rabbi implies that attributing sexual attributes to an eight-year-old girl may be linked to some kind of pedophilia. In the article, the interviewer continues to ask whether the Sicrii perpetrators are “really just a handful of people” and why they choose to hurt such an innocent girl who, by secular standards, is dressed very modestly. The end of the article gives analysis from an “expert”, who says that most of the secular public objects to the ultra-Orthodox *Mehadrin* buses which serve ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods.

Many secular articles employ deviation stories to introduce the secular reader within the ultra-Orthodox sector. In strengthening and deepening the moral panic and its presentation, secular newspapers both eliminate and deny the differences and nuances that exist in that sector.

The secular articles frequently use expressions such as “*ultra-Orthodox mass rampages*” (even when events involve no more than a handful of teenagers), “*ultra-Orthodox violence*”, “*violent demonstration in an ultra-Orthodox street*” or “*the ultra-Orthodox terror that is brought to each neighborhood in which they settle*”.

4.1.2 Cultural Conflict over Moral Superiority

Deviation stories in secular newspapers clearly employ counter-rhetoric techniques, which object to ultra-Orthodox society’s attempt to present itself as occupying the moral high ground. These articles use deviation stories to undermine this high moral image and to explain to the secular public that even if the ultra-Orthodox community pretends to perceive itself as morally superior to the secular population, in practice this public suffers from the same levels of violence as any other society, and even more so. An example of this claim can be seen in a lengthy article in *Maariv* (7.8.02) with the headline “The second murder in a year in the *Or Hateshuva* yeshiva in Jerusalem. Suspected: a yeshiva student thought his friend stole from him and yesterday he beat him to death”.

This article aimed to locate these deviant actions at the very center of the ultra-Orthodox community’s symbolic moral sphere – the yeshiva, and to present them as common occurrences. The reader is given to understand that the ultra-Orthodox public’s reaction, even to petty theft, is the uncompromising act of murder -a testament to the sector’s violent and hardline nature. Later in the article, the reporter incidentally mentions that “*police officers came to the yeshiva which, among other things, works to rehabilitate criminals*” and notes that the murderer had a “*criminal record full of drug and property crimes*” and that he stayed at the yeshiva for rehabilitation.

Another example of a headline that is used to create a deviant and criminal image is in an article titled “The Rebbe from Playboy” (*Maariv*, 15.7.02). This headline gives the secular reader the understanding that, despite the great modesty which the ultra-Orthodox society attributes to itself, even the allegedly most respectful community leaders perform immoral and prohibited acts and in fact their ultra-Orthodox behavior is but a mask to disguise their true nature as perverts.

4.1.3 Sex Offenders in Disguise

Stories about sex crimes play an important role in the stigma struggle against the ultra-Orthodox public. Offences like sexual harassment or other sex crimes permit the undermining of the moral superiority that the ultra-Orthodox sector appropriates as its own. These deviation stories allow secular journalism to expose the ultra-Orthodox society's naked truth: the additional title "Rabbi" or "Avrach" (yeshiva student) attributed to every ultra-Orthodox individual caught performing forbidden acts in general and forbidden sexual behavior in particular helps extend these traits to the wider ultra-Orthodox student population. For instance, an article published in *Maariv* (30.3.02) discusses an alleged gang-rape of an ultra-Orthodox girl by teenagers from ultra-Orthodox families. Although from the description of the attackers, it seems these teenagers do not follow an ultra-Orthodox lifestyle, the reporter describes the attackers' families as "ultra-Orthodox" ("*the ultra-Orthodox families of the accused*"). The article gives the reader to understand that this is a common behavior which characterizes ultra-Orthodox families, who deny all responsibility of the rape from the boys and put the blame to the girl, who brought everything that happened to her on herself through her own behavior.

Four months later, *Maariv* published another story, headlined "Hell at the yeshiva" (*Maariv*, 19.7.02). The decision to locate deviation stories in yeshivas is not coincidental. The yeshiva and its students represent the heart of the ultra-Orthodox world and therefore allow the deviation to be explained not as an anecdotal event involving a particular individual, but as the moral-ethical expression of the intrinsic nature of the ultra-Orthodox public, which not only endangers its own members but also Israeli society as a whole.

Although the article addressed a specific incidence of rape and sexual abuse of one yeshiva student by another, the fact that the reporter chose to write this story and its headline reinforces the message that "the ultra-Orthodox are not really as decent and modest as they seem, they are as corrupted and degenerate as us and perhaps even more so".

The preoccupation with the yeshiva rape story was used as an attempt to expose the misleading facade disguising the real deviant nature of ultra-Orthodox society. This story used a myriad of names and metaphors for one purpose – to present the ultra-Orthodox public as corrupt and immoral. Expressions used in the story include "*the religious conspiracy of silencing*", "*the sexual harassment affliction*" that is "*always in the air*", "*sexual harassments continue to happen in institutes*" and "*great embarrassment in the yeshiva network*", "*the exposure of this incident caused grave damage to the yeshiva world and may reveal a Pandora's box of other events that are yet to be exposed*", "*...the event befell the yeshiva world, whose dirty laundry is no longer the responsibility of the authoritative yeshiva manager...*", "*these events are the latest in a series of cases...*", "*these things happen in the best families*".

The structure of equal differentiation (Hall, 1978) [17] which provides possible scenarios for a specific event based on the assumption that it is similar to other, past events, allows a redefinition of the moral hierarchy of relations between ultra-Orthodox and secular Israelis.

The articles use trivialization techniques to lead the secular reader to understand that the issue they are reading about is just the tip of an iceberg characterizing a community that presents itself as decent while in reality it is not like that at all. The reader must understand that just because she does not read about these incidents on a regular basis does not mean that they do not occur but that this is a society that is proficient at hiding and disguising its deviant acts. The presentation of sexual harassment as a common incident and attributing it to all community members is assisted by a sequence of articles emphasizing the "high and mighty" status of the deviant ultra-Orthodox individual: the harasser is presented as a "Rabbi", a "synagogue leader and cantor", "the head of an ultra-Orthodox yeshiva" or at the very least a "resident of Bnei Brak" who performed these acts at the "*Mikveh*" (ritual bath), "the synagogue" or "the yeshiva", all of which gives the deviations a specific location within the ultra-Orthodox world's most sacred places (*Maariv*, 24.7.03, 30.4.02 and 16.12.98; *Haaretz*, 7.1.01; 11.1.01 and 12.1.00; *Yediot Acharono*, 7.1.01, 12.1.00, 13.1.00).

5. Hitting the Soft Underbelly of Ultra-Orthodox Sector

Another main subject that the secular media has frequently addressed over the last decade is the issue of the ultra-Orthodox mother.

In Summer 2008, secular newspapers were full of articles about an incident dubbed the “Starving Mother Affair”, which concerned an ultra-Orthodox woman from Jerusalem who, according to an indictment filed against her, abused and starved her baby. The story of the mother’s arrest (*Haaretz, Yediot Aharonot*, 4.8.08) led thousands of ultra-Orthodox people to demonstrate claiming they are being persecuted by the establishment.

A year later, during the second half of 2009, print and electronic secular media once again flooded with stories of an ultra-Orthodox mother from Beit Shemesh, nicknamed “Mother Taliban” as a result of her habit of covering her whole body in several layers of black garments. Quotes from an indictment (3.11.09) published in all secular newspapers described how this mother abused her many children for a number of years and accuses her of alleged aggravated assault.

Israeli secular media’s preoccupation with cases of abusive ultra-Orthodox mothers, who are given nicknames such as “Mother Taliban” and “the Starving Mother”, “the mother who sexually abused her children” and more, has allowed printed and electronic media to harm the ultra-Orthodox society’s “soft underbelly”, *i.e.* the image of the devoted, decent ultra-Orthodox mother. The emphasized interest in those women who deviated from their role allows the secular media to depict a different image of the ultra-Orthodox society – one that is violent and dark and which fails to fulfill even its most basic role according to its own definitions – that of safeguarding and nurturing the important next generation, *i.e.* its children. Against the background of the extreme moral significance that the ultra-Orthodox community attributes to the nuclear family and children’s education, especially by mothers, the secular media’s focus on “starving”, “neglecting” and “abusive” mothers undermines the moral and ethical supremacy of these publics within the cultural conflict of the nature and identity of Israeli society.

Confronted with the ideal prototype of the ultra-Orthodox mother who lives only for her family, home and children, the secular media creates a different image in the minds of its readers, via descriptions of abnormal mothers. This creates a completely different prototype, which poses harsh questions about the role of ultra-Orthodox mothers and, by extrapolation, the entire ultra-Orthodox public.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we aim to address two apparently different processes: the way the ultra-Orthodox media deals with the issue of ultra-Orthodox women’s leaving the supervised, protected religious sphere for the dangerous, promiscuous secular sphere for work; and the threat attributed to ultra-Orthodox society *via* secular mass media.

Each of these processes reflects a conflict over cultural hegemony, whether within the ultra-Orthodox world or between the ultra-Orthodox world and secular society. However, in both processes, the media’s use of techniques like “moral panic” to emphasize the differences between cultural groups and to enhance and intensify the threat level attributed to the opposite group can clearly be seen.

According to Hecht (2007) [18], a “moral panic” is a drastic reaction by the media, the public and supervisory agents to events perceived and defined as threats and risks to society. It is based on the art of expression and rhetoric, uses the visual power of the media, and even uses information that is inaccurate or does not fit the relevant findings and facts.

That the media chooses to report a certain topic in its headline or breaking news is sufficient to create concern, anxiety, recoil or panic. It is when such feelings are combined with the idea that certain values should be protected that the process of creating a social problem begins. Such non-proportional responses include the media's exaggerations of data and manipulations of facts by "manufacturing" news, the diversion of statistical data about current information or the level of interest that has apparently arisen in this context (Best, 2001) [19].

The mass media aids in creating a moral panic, as it floods the public consciousness with a particular issue at dramatic levels, and as newspaper editors, religious authorial figures, politicians and philosophers construct "moral barricades".

The public sense of impending doom that this panic creates later results in a re-inspection of the system of social conventions system the threat and the danger it poses, and leads to the creation of a regimented intervention, whether through new legislation or the rigorousness enforcement of existing laws.

The use by both ultra-Orthodox and secular media of processes of generalization and exaggeration in describing deviation at the heart of ultra-Orthodox society allows for a "politics of concern". This helps redefine the level of cultural threat both between different cultural groups within ultra-Orthodox society and between that society and the secular community. This allows a re-definition of the boundaries between the colliding moral universes, and between that which is normative and that which is deviant.

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