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Filmed 'Not During the Sabbath':

The Israeli Haredi Minority through the Camera's lens

Abstract

The Haredi (Jewish Ultra Orthodox) minority in Israel has an increased visibility in Israeli media in recent years. Many of its representations are negative and stereotypical. This article is an analysis of a documentary series about this minority group that the author co-directed also in an attempt to challenge these stereotypes. The article analyses the process of production of the series and the many decisions that had to be taken during it. It explores the difficulties in challenging the key stereotypes, especially in the context of Israeli commercial television.

In the last ten years, images of Haredim (Ultra Orthodox Jews) have come to occupy a prime position in Israeli media.

The demographic growth and political power of the Haredi minority, as well as the fact that many of its members are moving outside of the boundaries of the segregated Haredi space, and are entering the Israeli public space, are some of the causes for this increased interest. For quite some time now, Haredi spokesmen have become regular guests on talk shows, while Haredi journalists host radio and television shows. Cinema as well as theater and literature have also recently 'discovered' this minority. However, very little has been written so far about the representations of the Haredi minority, even less about the changes in these representations.

This article is an attempt to start filling these gaps; I will be looking at the stages in the production of a documentary series on the Haredi minority in Israel ("Filmed on a Weekday"), which I directed, together with Ron Ofer¹. In this article, I will try to describe the decision-making process during the work on the series and the different forces that were involved in the process. I will show how the compromises between the affinities, considerations, needs and skills of the creators, the participants, and the representatives of the funding bodies shaped the final product. I will start with a short review of the relevant literature.

¹ Ron Ofer is an independent screenwriter and director. Many of the cinematographic projects he has been involved in deal with the Haredi minority, including the documentary film *Mithazkim* (2001). Recently, he produced the film *Pursued* which follows a person who has left religion and is trying to contact the man who raped him while he was in a Hassidic boarding school.

Religions and their representation in the media

Since the events of September 11, 2001 in New York and of July 7, 2005 in London, there has been a sharp rise in the media's interest across the world and in the West in particular, in topics related to religion and religious people. Most of this media attention has been directed towards Islam, which is perceived as a serious threat to Western way of life.

Following this growing public and media attention, there has also been a sharp rise in the number of studies that look at the various ways religion and religious people are represented in the press. There are a number of journals that specialize in the interface between media and religion, including the *Journal of Media and Religion* and *The Journal of Religion and Film*. Since 1994, there has also been a bi-annual conference on the issue – The International Conferences on Media, Religion and Culture.

Particularly relevant for this article are studies that examine the representations of Muslims in popular media, the press and cinema (Abdel-Hafiz, 2002; Moore, Mason and Lewish, 2008; Poole, 2002; Ramji, 2003, 2007). These studies have helped uncover the stereotypes that are often found in these representations, and the overall tendency to present Islam and Muslims in limited and negative connotations. In an attempt to interpret these tendencies, various writers, such as Poole (2002), analyzed the global processes, including the collapse of the Communist Block, which reinforced the need to portray Islam as the new enemy of the West.

The creation of negative images in relation to Islam in the media - as a tool in the hands of the hegemony - justified subjugating large populations (Muslims living in the West but also in many other places), thereby maintaining the hegemony of the West. These images portrayed Muslims as a homogeneous group which is mentally backward, irrational, unchanging, fundamentalist, misogynist and manipulative in its use of religion and faith towards gathering political power. This is how, for example, the aggressive stance of the West and the conquest of Iraq and Afghanistan, were justified. Within the framework of this cultural essentialism, the reason for the range of negative features is not biology, but the specific culture, which is portrayed as permanent and unchanging (Barker, 2002; Donald and Rattansi, 1992; Grillo, 2003).

Following Poole's study (2002), additional studies were conducted in various Western countries, in relation to the representation of Islam and Muslims; some of them attempted to describe the attitude of the media in a specific country, avoiding describing Western media as a single and identical entity. Writers such as Baderoon (2003) focused on news coverage in relation to Islam and Muslims and showed how the news is perceived as being committed to a description of objective reality. However, in order for an event to be worth reporting on, it must be turned into a story and translated into journalistic language. The decision as to which story is worthy of being translated and how best to do this is, of course, tainted with ideology and values. She also adds (p. 5):

"By disseminating such storied truths in a complex and powerful circuit of production and readership, the media creates communities out of audiences. Because of this, theorists argue that the media is crucial to generating a sense of national belonging. Hartley (1996) concludes that citizenship and communal identity are not possible these days without journalism. The media provide a 'national, political fantasy' in which a sense of community is generated."

As part of examining the role of the media in creating a national identity, the findings of Khatib (2006) are particularly interesting. Khatib examines the ways in which Islamic fundamentalism is portrayed in Egyptian cinema. She shows how the representations of this fundamentalism serve to strengthen the Egyptian national identity, and how it is presented as an artificial product, while Egyptian nationalism is constructed as a natural essence. According to Khatib, the representation of fundamentalism in Egyptian cinema recreates the classic point of view about the other, a point of view which teaches us more about "us" than about "them".

The role of Haredim in Israeli cinema and media seems to be similar. To a large extent, they are the "other", the "irrational", in relation to which Israeliness constructs itself as modern, advanced, rational and enlightened.

Representation of religion, religious people and Haredim in Israeli media

A comprehensive review of the changes in the representations the Haredi minority in the media since the establishment of the State of Israel has yet to be conducted, although various authors have related to the issue (Chyutin, 2003; Vinig, 2011).

Israeli cinema, for example, reflects the processes undergone by Israeli society along the years; the attempts to do away with the burden of Diaspora and with tradition seem to be the main explanation for the fact that Israeli cinema in its early days avoided religious topics.² Parček (1998) discusses in this context the tensions in the early days of the State due to the Orthodox monopoly on religion. As a result, secular Israelis distanced themselves from religion and its related issues. On the other hand, Parček reminds us the complex relations of Judaism with art, and with the creation of representations. The identification of cinema with Western culture further pushed religious people away from film-making. Since film-makers were secular, their topics were mostly secular too. When religious or Haredi characters did appear on screen, the attitude towards them is negative and hostile. As part of the Zionist-ideological cinema, between the 1930s and the 1960s, the tackling of religious issues is very limited, and religious figures are presented in a negative light (Zimmerman, 2003). This cinema was often funded by ideological groups with clear political motives, which the directors and scriptwriters adapted to. The Zionist pioneer and the Israeli Sabra³ were the main heroes of the story in those days.

Towards the end of the 1960s, a number of films appeared, which Kurzfeld (2003) calls "small town movies", the most famous one being "Kunilemel". Their innovation lies in the fact that they focus on religious figures and themes from the East European Shtetl, but they are based on old stereotypes. The *Burekas* genre, which blossomed during the years 1965-1980, stretches the treatment of religious topics by looking at Mizrahi⁴ characters. In these films, in addition to the stereotypical representations of religion and religious people, Mizrahi characters are orientalised. The European Zionist pioneer strived to do away with his diasporic past, but not with his European past. He was secular and European in his behaviour and education and perceived and represented the oriental Jew as the opposite: traditional, uneducated and irrational (Almog, 2000).

New representations of religion and religiousness started appearing with the weakening of the Zionist-ideological cinema, and with the appearance of the personal cinema which was breaking away from ideological commitments. This personal cinema originated

2 According to Schnitzer (1994), out of the 410 feature films that were produced in the years 1960-1995, only 20 of them touched in any way on religious issues and feelings.

4 Sabra is an informal slang term that refers to Israeli Jews born in Israel.

5 The term Mizrahi is most commonly used in Israel to refer to Jews who trace their roots back to Muslim-majority countries.

already in the 1960s, but blossomed only in the 1970s and 80s (Shohat, 1991).⁵ In these films, there is a strong criticism of the Sabra and Zionist ideology, as well as of the other main cultural institutions which characterized it, such as the kibbutz and the army. As argued by Shohat:

"While the national-heroic films elevated and praised the 'new Zionist man', personal films mourn its downfall and disappearance. None of the genres imagines a broader historical approach to Judaism as it is lived in Israel, be it from a dialectic point of view, or even deeper from an 'anthropological' point of view. Film makers take Zionism's rejection of exile for granted, without suggesting a deeper analysis of the Israeli Jew as a multi-layered deposit of thousands of years of a syncretic, complex and rich history, spanning across a dozen countries. Israeli cinema is surprising in its cultural superficiality, in its not dealing with issues that have bothered Jews for hundreds of years." (Shohat, 1991: 269).

A transformation in the representation of religious and Haredi Jews on the big screen occurred in the 1990s, as part of the weakening of the major ideologies – Zionism and Socialism. The void that appeared created a need for a renewed definition of Israeli identity, and Jewish religion and tradition slowly became a topic in itself. At the same time, in most of these films, the representations of religion include many negative stereotypes. The establishment of Ma'ale Film School⁶ had a positive impact. It enabled the training and development of a new generation of filmmakers who are more connected to Jewish religion and tradition, as reflected in their work (Friedman & Hakak, 2015).

These processes are gradually changing Israeli television as well. In their study from 2006, Laor, Alpent-Leffler, and Inbar-Lankri found that there was a certain improvement in the representation of minority groups, and in the air-time they received in commercial TV channels. Moreover, a qualitative analysis of soap operas, such as "The Court" ("*Hahatzer*"), which dealt with the Haredi minority, also points to the appearance of more positive representations of this minority which, among others, challenge the stereotypes concerning the marginalised and voiceless Haredi woman (Ben Shohat, 2006).

A number of recent studies reveal the problems that still characterise contemporary representations of different minority groups within Israeli society, including the Haredi

5 Utin (2008), who wrote some 10 years after Parcek, describes the continuation of the trend in which Israeli film makers focus more and more on the characters' personal story, while the political context moves from the front to the background of the story, as a kind of a hint or as the 'tip of the iceberg' of the political experience.

6 The Ma'ale Film, Television and Arts School in Jerusalem was founded in 1989, in order to cater to the growing need within the national-religious minority for professional training and academic qualifications in this area.

minority. Studies that examined the way minority groups are represented in news reports in Israeli commercial media – Channel 2 & Channel 10 (Laor, Alpent-Leffler, and Inbar-Lankri, 2006; Avraham, First and Alpent-Leffler, 2004) – and on Channel 1 (Bar-Lev, 2007), found that the number of news items related to these groups was very limited compared to their share in the population, and that their representation is flawed. These groups are mainly mentioned in connection with crime, violence, tragedies, social deprivation and unrest. As with other minority groups, Haredi figures make their way into these channels mainly 'through the back door', and are often connected to violent, provocative or particularly emotional conduct. Studies conducted by Cohen (2005) and Evans (2011) found that the media coverage of religious issues focuses on the Haredi minority, generates stereotypes, and contributes to the strengthening of intra-religious tensions. Totally absent from the representations of the Haredi minority on the big and the small screen is its dynamic nature and the sharp changes it has been undergoing, particularly in the last decade.

Gender representations and religion

Among the researchers who looked at the way religious groups were represented in the media, some also related more specifically to the issue of gender. Baderoon (2003:5), for example, writes as follows:

"By disseminating such storied truths in a complex and powerful circuit of production and readership, the media creates communities out of audiences. Because of this, theorists argue that the media is crucial to generating a sense of national belonging. Hartley concludes that 'citizenship and communal identity are not possible these days without journalism'. The media provide a 'national, political fantasy' in which a sense of community is generated."

Until recently, Haredi men, when appearing in Israeli cinema, were for the most part anti-heroes, and were represented with an emphasis on their femininity and their unsuitability to the requirements of the ideal Western model of muscular and assertive masculinity. Zabel (2001) also related to the issue of gender. He analysed the representations of Iranian and Muslim women in the Western press, where they are often pictured wearing black dresses and walking in throngs as part of various processions. In his view, these women represent for Western viewers a threatening combination of a fatal belief in the divine and unchanging order of things, religious fanaticism, and a total passiveness regarding changing their own situation. These women are not represented as individuals but as soldiers in the Islamic revolutionary army.

In this context, it is important to point out the contribution made by Saba Mahmood (2005), who uncovered the liberal-individualist assumptions that underlie the feminist project. Mahmood indicates that in Western consciousness, social, religious and other commitments are perceived as binding, and only when the individual manages to oppose himself to them is he able to achieve genuine freedom and express his "true self". Contrary to this, in the religious consciousness, as Mahmood (2005) describes, social demands are perceived as a kind of scaffolding, which are the only thing that enables the true self to appear. In other words, we are looking at two cultural approaches that understand and interpret the social demands placed upon individuals, their place and importance, in quasi-opposite terms. In this context, several studies are devoted to the work of Shirin Neshat, an Iranian artist living in New York who often relates to Muslim women in her art. The critics and commentators of Neshat's work disagreed as to her position with regards to the status of women in Islam; however, Rounthwaite (2008) shows that most of them are entrapped within the feminist perception, which expects women to come out against the social order, and that they fail to take into consideration the possibility that for Muslim women, fulfilling social requirements is what enables them to fulfill their true self.

Within the Haredi minority, both the female and the male body are under strict supervision; men more than women, however, are forced to wear certain clothes, somewhat similar to a uniform. Those exposed to the Israeli media are familiar with pictures taken at demonstrations or funerals showing thousands of Haredi men wearing the black and white "uniform". This image is both frightening and fascinating, for the exact same reasons: for the average secular person, the mass of Haredi men taking part in large demonstrations or funerals are faithful soldiers in the army of God and of the rabbis, and are devoid of any ability to think for themselves. They are captive of an extreme ideology, which they can't criticise or undermine.

However, focusing on individual members of this minority can also be problematic as its purpose is often to stress the exotic or the different. As an example, I will look at three relatively recent photography exhibitions that focused on the Haredi minority. The first two are by Israeli photographers Menachem Cahana (2009)⁷ and Gill Cohen-Magen (2010)⁸, and the third one is by the British photographer Andrew Aitchinson (2009)⁹ and focuses on the

7 To hear Cahana talking about his photos: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4b6Dqt70m60>

8 Some of Cohen-Magen's photos can be seen here: <http://www.gilmagen.com/gallery.aspx?id=4>

9 To see Aitchinson's photos, go to: <http://www.andrewaitchinson.com/gallery-list>

Haredi minority living in Stamford Hill, London. Surprisingly, the three photographers focused on very similar images, which recur in other pictures often found in the media. All three photographers were particularly interested in religious ceremonies. In addition to the pictures where Haredi men appear en masse, there are also pictures where they do not appear in a large group; in most of these pictures, Haredi men appear in two situations: when they are actively involved in a religious ceremony, in which they are caught engaged in a religious practice whose meaning remains unknown to the viewer; or when they lose control and concentration. Thus, the exotic is what is emphasised: the Haredi men we see in the pictures are nearly always people doing "strange" things, using exotic tools, and wearing unusual clothes.¹⁰ When they lose control a little – this is particularly the case in Cahana's pictures – the pictures present them as slightly ridiculous or as eliciting a smile from the viewers: here is a Haredi man dressed up for Purim as an IDF soldier; here is a Haredi man who got drunk at Purim; and here is a Haredi man who got undressed to dip into the purifying bath. These pictures exert a certain degree of reproach: "Here you go, we got you. You're not such tzadikim/modest/opposed to military service as you pretend to be." Both Cahana and Aitchinson's exhibitions are devoid of any pictures representing daily life, or of Haredi people acting outside the ceremonial framework, while Cohen's exhibition contains a few pictures dealing with daily life. Indeed, Haredi people also speak on the phone, go to work and to the grocery shop, carry their children, feed them, blow their noses, go travelling, and have dinner (other than on Seder night, for example).

In all three exhibitions, Haredi women are represented in a quasi-opposite way. They sit, their head covered with a veil, waiting for the groom, or stand in the women's section at synagogue, looking at the rabbi through the slits. They play no active part in the religious ceremony they are looking at - they wait. These images also serve first and foremost the needs of secular viewers and readers and help construct their own identity in relation to that of the Haredi people they are looking at. In these pictures as in many other cases¹¹, Haredi women are presented as the passive victims of a patriarchal and oppressive society. They agree to bear the burden of raising children and earning a living because they have been instilled a "false consciousness" and they have been deprived of the ability to stand up against it; they have neither voice nor agency. It may well be that since women are not obliged to

10 These have been discussed in Ron Ofer's film *Haredim betaarucha* ("Haredim Exhibited"), which was screened at the opening of the exhibition at Beit Avi Chai, in 2009.

11 The motif of the Haredi woman as repressed by the patriarchal male establishment is also found in Amos Gitai's film *Kadosh* from 1998, as well as in the series of films on Haredi and religious women, directed by Anat Zuria, particularly in *Purity* (2002) and *Rebellious Woman* (2009).

wear clothes of a single colour – and in many cases, their clothes are quite similar to those of non-Haredi women – they are also less appealing to photographers. This may be why they are rarely filmed as they go about their daily life.

Among the studies that examined the representation of Haredi people within the Israeli context, no attention has been given to the process of developing or producing these representations, which is where this article intends to make its contribution. I will be analysing the process of making the series, in order to examine the decisions that were made throughout the process, as well as the range of economic, political, artistic and other forces at play, which shaped the final product, and of which the viewers are mostly unaware. These decisions, forces and factors can give us an insight into the politics of the creation of a documentary film.

From anthropology to documentary cinema

As a journalist who focused on covering the Haredi minority, but particularly once I started studying it academically, I became more and more interested in the way this minority is represented in the media and in the arts. These representations are particularly important in light of contemporary wider processes in Israeli society. As part of these processes, many young Haredi men are stepping out of the Haredi sphere and are trying to get a job and join other areas of activity (Hakak, 2003, 2004, 2006). I am interested in the role played by these representations within Israeli society, as well as their effects on the Haredi minority itself. Indeed, the attitude towards the Haredim, and the latter's ability to be successfully integrated outside the Haredi enclave, depends also on the openness and tolerance they will encounter. This openness and tolerance, in turn, is heavily influenced by the representations of this minority in the media, and the public discourse they create.

In this case, however, I wanted to do more than simply point out the stereotypes found in the representations of the Haredi minority. I wanted to take a more active part in the creation of alternative representations that would challenge existing ones, and examine the actual process through which such representations are created. Quite early on I discovered visual anthropology and started collaborating with documentary film makers.

Many anthropologists tend to document the participants in their studies with the help of a camera, and visual anthropology is an established sub-discipline. The nature of the anthropological research, which exposes the researcher to the world and lives of the

participants in his research, in their natural habitat, brings him/her closer to documentary film making, which relies on the same kind of materials and access. The reasons that have led many anthropologists to document society visually are that this allows them to present and illustrate more successfully certain aspects of the societies they are studying; a desire to also convey sensory qualities such as colors, images, movement and also tastes and smells, which are part of the societies under study; a desire to communicate the findings to a wider audience, and to do so in a way that will also impact on the viewers' emotional and sensual world, rather than only intellectually. Similar motives also underlie my attraction to the field. It enabled me to acquire new work tools but required continued adjustment to a new way of working and thinking.

Since the beginning of the work with Ron Ofer on this series, we shared the various tasks and both of us took on part of the research, screenplay and directing, each one according to his affinities and talents. The partnership was successful, however in September 2007, when we were still deep into filming I left for the UK with my family, on a post-doctorate program. Ron continued driving the project forward and we were in close phone and email contact. Out of the six participants in the series, I was involved in most of the filming with four of them. I was also involved in the discussions that arose in relation to the two other participants. During editing, I saw different versions at various stages, which I commented on. I will only be relating here to those events which I am deeply familiar with.

In analysing the process, I chose to focus on the characteristics that in my view are unique to cinema that deals with the Haredi minority and religion more broadly, and to minimise the discussion on the characteristic and more general features of documentary film making. Thus, for example, I hardly dealt with the pressures we faced to turn the film into a more accessible and commercial film, which forced us to carry out a few essential changes, such as strengthening the dramatic conflict between the characters. Although these interventions did shape our series, they are commonly found in many other films unrelated to religion in any way.

Between a commitment to the Haredi viewpoint and commercial considerations: the context in which the series was created

The project I will describe and analyse here was made possible due to a set of special circumstances. In 2005, the concessionaires of Israel's Channel 2 stood before a tender that was to determine which one of them would be granted broadcasting rights in the upcoming

concession period. The Second Television and Radio Authority, as a government regulator, was responsible for choosing the best proposal. Each concessionaire tried to recruit to its ranks the best stars and to prepare a pool of quality television projects, which it would fund and broadcast - projects which involved a commitment to society and which did not necessarily turn to the broadest and lowest common denominator. The concessionaires were graded based on how they related to peripheral sectors and Jewish contents. This was our opportunity. Since we had already worked together on a number of projects, we quickly came up with a proposal for a documentary series entitled "The Haredi Pillar of Fire", playing on the title of the series "Pillar of Fire".¹² Its goal was to bring to Israeli viewers for the first time the Haredi narrative on Jewish history of the last 200 years. We did not want to explore a limited topic, issues or event from the Haredi perspective, but a very broad one, and we believed that this was a good opportunity to do so.

Television viewers are familiar with the Zionist narrative but only a few know how the Haredi minority, in its entire complexity, understands recent Jewish history. We thought that getting to know the Haredi perspective/s and the ability to make it known would be a first step in finding a common narrative shared by this public and other parts of Israeli society, and which would challenge the commonly found representations of Haredi people and their world. The idea was submitted to the production company Keshet, which was competing over the concession, and it was accepted. This meant that Keshet was committing itself to purchasing, with the help of its development budget, the right to use the proposal as part of its tender for Channel 2. People at Keshet put us in contact with the Belfilms production company¹³, whose people were happy to take on the project.

Initially, our proposal was for a film that would document the efforts of Haredi film makers to create a series that would tell this historical tale, as we realized that it would be best to let members of the Haredi minority determine the contents by themselves. This story would also have dictated the structure of the series and, in that sense, would have reflected Haredi viewpoint to a greater degree. However, this idea was rejected very early on by the producers

12 "Pillar of Fire" is a documentary television series from Israel's Channel One, on the history of Zionism. The creator, researcher, screenwriter and main editor was Yigal Lussin, and it was produced by Yaakov Eisenman. The series was broadcast for five months, during the winter and spring of 1981, and got very high ratings, though it was the only channel at the time. "Pillar of Fire" was written from a Zionist perspective, and included practically no criticism of Zionism and its agents.

13 Belfilms which was set up by Katriel and Noemi Schory is a leading documentary production companies in Israel. At the beginning of our work on the project, the manager of the company was Liran Atzmor, however he left two years later and was replaced by Itai Ken-Tor.

and by staff at Keshet's documentary department. The Keshet representative explained that the post-modern aspects of the idea, i.e. creating a film within a film, or a film that would follow the making of a film, were out of the question for him. We realised that the staff at Keshet were interested in a more conventional, and therefore more commercial, film. Thus, we modified our proposal. In our new proposal, we, the secular makers of the film, would tell its story. After a few weeks of intense work, we submitted a proposal to Keshet, who accepted it with a great deal of interest. We were soon invited to sign a contract. We learned from the media that, as part of the tender, Keshet had presented our series as one of its top projects.

The new proposal also aroused a few fears in us; in the film we had worked on earlier, we followed a young Hassidic divorced man in his attempts to find a new partner. We accompanied him over the period of approximately one year, and wanted to document his search for love. In that sense, the film was meant to follow a well-known narrative, one of the cornerstones of Western culture. We took for granted that we would find strong feelings, expectations, passions and disappointments, but to our disappointment (and our naiveté), the young man we focused on related to the entire issue in a pragmatic and technical way. Most of his efforts focused on a methodical collection of information through his contacts about the women whom the matchmakers suggested to him. Despite our efforts, in what we filmed there is no trace of the powerful feelings we hoped to capture. Finally, we decided for those reasons that the character we were focusing on did not have a strong enough presence on screen, i.e. was neither convincing nor interesting enough to watch.

According to the Haredi perception, as it emerges from the internal debate that is taking place within this minority group, love between two people grows after marriage, if they agree on a common path and shared goals. Thus, both partners need to be very clear about their own worldview, and whether they share goals for the future with the other. Experiencing the strong romantic feelings expected in Western culture is not accepted or allowed here. It is certainly not allowed for a couple to live together before deciding on their future. If we take into consideration the fact that the Haredi matchmaking system functions along the same lines as the young man we filmed, and with a critical view of the idea of romantic love, our decision – based on the absence of the strong feeling we had been expecting – arouses certain question marks. It mainly teaches us about our own world, about our expectations and value scale, as well as about the complexity involved in filming minority groups whose culture

differs from that of the person holding the camera. How can we make sure we will not repeat the same mistake, and not impose our values and expectations? How will we be able to make a film that will teach us something real about the Haredi minority, and not reflect our and our partners' prejudices? These and many other considerations weighed upon the project until the end.

A few months after we signed the contract with Keshet, it won the bid at Channel 2, and we started working on the series. The support of Channel 2 enabled us to obtain funds relatively easily from two other sources: the Geshar Multicultural Film Fund and the AVI CHAI Foundation. We now had four strong and highly experienced partners, by comparison, our own relative lack of experience clearly stood out.

Recruiting participants in a segregated minority group

One of the main tasks we had to deal with at the start was to locate and select participants whose filmed testimony about their life would be sufficiently interesting from a dramatic perspective, and that would at the same time enable us to learn about the topic of the film. In closed minorities, which look upon the media of the surrounding society with suspicion and diffidence, as in the case of the Haredi minority, this is a real challenge. As a result, the participants who eventually accede to the documentary filmmaker's request are often found on the margins of their community; therefore, they are not compelled to adapt to all its rules¹⁴, nor are they its faithful representatives. In an attempt to avoid this situation, we chose to not include marginal characters, and to focus on participants who are deeply rooted in this minority group, even if their "recruitment" would be far more complex. Those who agreed to cooperate with us, despite the threat, had already married off all their children, or were involved in activities which were perceived by the community as necessitating the cooperation with the secular media.

Beyond the desire to avoid creating a twisted representation by focusing on marginal figures, it was important for us to do away with the stereotype of the Haredi minority as a black and homogeneous mass of people, and to present its parts in a balanced way as much as possible. We also looked for people who would avoid playing the part of the "spokesperson" defending

14 For example, one can mention the participants in two BBC documentaries on the Haredi community in London: "A Hasidic Guide to Love, Marriage and Finding a Bride," directed by Paddy Wivell (2011) and the first episode in a series entitled 'Jews', directed by Vanessa Engle (2008). At the centre of both are former inmates who were accused of money laundering of drug money or drug trafficking, and who are on the margins of the community.

his community, and who would also be prepared to criticise it, as well as wider Israeli society. Finally, among the six key participants in the series, there are four men and two women; two Sephardi Haredim, one Hassid and three Lithuanians¹⁵. Some of the participants requested and were given the right to veto parts of the filmed material after they viewed its final version. The changes we were requested to make following these private screenings were for the most part minor, but offering this possibility contributed significantly to our relations with the participants and to their trust in us.

History, memory and rating

At the beginning of the process, we already knew that Channel 2, a commercial channel in the first decade of the 21st century, would not broadcast a "heavy" historical series such as "Pillar of Fire". We were striving for a more dynamic product. Therefore, we devoted much time to examining the possibilities of telling the historical tale through participants who were alive and active at the time, while incorporating archival material. We started by holding a series of meetings with Haredi historians and writers, and with academics who wrote about their work. We also met with people who taught history and were involved in its commemoration within Haredi minority¹⁶, and we started looking for archival footage, in Israel and abroad. As we had funding, we hired three researchers¹⁷, who were mainly involved in locating potential participants.

After a few months and tens of meetings, we came up with a draft of the script for the series, which we submitted to Channel 2. The reactions were cold. The participants we chose were described as unconvincing. They were unable to propose a sufficiently interesting life that could be filmed and that would guarantee dramatic development. The script was perceived as "old fashioned" and unsuitable for a commercial channel. Our proposal to incorporate expensive archival material was also problematic. Our partners were unhappy.

In the early stage, the "socially committed" component of our proposal – the intention to give voice to the Haredi historical narrative – was perceived as serving the goals of the concessionaires (Keshet) in competing with other concessionaires. But since the bid had come through, the rules of the game had changed. The ratings of the series became the

16 The Sephardic, Hasidic and Lithuanians are the three main Haredi sub-groups.

16 Such as, for example, Rabbi Tzvi Weinman and Rebbetzin Esther Farbstein who both wrote about the Holocaust, people from the Ganzach Kiddush Hashem organization in Bnei Brak, and from the Holocaust Museum in Washington.

17 One of the researchers was Haredi, one used to be Haredi, and the third had been national-religious.

dominant element in the discussion. Letting the Haredi point of view be known became marginal. Since we also had our qualms about the participants we had located, and given our limited experience, we did not oppose them. We also aspired for our series to reach many people and to enjoy high ratings.

In an attempt to remain faithful to the original topic, we decided to focus on the way the Haredi minority constructs, transmits and commemorates its past.¹⁸ A partial solution to our difficulty was found when we realised that a significant part of the Haredi narrative of the last two hundred years focused on the attitudes towards the Zionist movement and the state of Israel. While sociologists who deal with the Haredi minority tend to describe it as a "counter culture/society" (Friedman, 1991; Sivan, Almond and Appleby, 2004), the Haredi historical narrative is also a "counter-narrative". How does one film this type of narrative other than by holding a series of interviews that deal with past events? This is where the 2006 election campaign played in our favour. We knew that within the Haredi minority election periods bring back to life the question of the relationship with the State. It also sharpens the division into camps, whether it is about political identification, or the actual participation in the elections. Since from the start, we wanted to show the various shades that make up the community, the election campaign seemed like a perfect opportunity. All we had to do was to locate the participants we would focus on. They were meant to represent a range of opinions within the Haredi minority, in relation to the State. The first participant we selected was Shmuel Pappenheim, editor of 'Ha'Eida', the press mouthpiece of the Eida Ha'Haredit, a body that unites a number of anti-Zionist small Hassidic and Lithuanian communities. As we estimated, following Pappenheim's work as a journalist throughout the elections period was fascinating. It gave rise to acute historical tensions between different factions of the Haredi minority regarding the establishment of the State and participation in the elections.

¹⁸ We had in mind films like 'Yizkor – the Slaves of Memory', by Eyal Sivan (1990). This film examines the construction of collective memory within Israeli society, by looking at ceremonies taking place in the Israeli education system, starting in kindergarten until high school.



In the photo: Shmuel Popenheim, editor of 'Ha'Eida'

To counterbalance Pappenheim, and as someone who represents the line of integration and attempts to change things "from within", we chose the late parliamentary member, Avraham Ravitz¹⁹, from the United Torah Judaism party.²⁰ In his youth, Ravitz had been a member of the Lehi movement and had taken part in the celebrations following the establishment of the state. In that sense, Ravitz's life story has gone through many historical events that are important in order to understand the Haredi minority and its changing attitude towards the State.

Our filming during the election campaign went well, and after that, we reverted to writing. In order to receive the approval and funds to continue filming, we had to submit to Channel 2 a document describing the structure of the series and its division into episodes. In addition to the attitude towards the state of Israel, which we were hoping to look at with the help of our

¹⁹ Rabbi Avraham Ravitz passed away a few months after the first screening of the episode in which he appears.

²⁰ United Torah Judaism is an Ashkenazy Haredi party resulting from the union of the Hassidic Agudath Israel and the Lithuanian Degel Ha'Torah. These two parties united in 1992, in view of the elections for the 13th Knesset, and have since run for seats as a unified list.

first two participants, we were also hoping to deal with issues such as the formation of Haredi identity in Eastern Europe at the time of the Hatam Sofer, the establishment of Agudath Israel, the Zionist movement, the Holocaust, the immigration to Israel, the establishment of the State, and the demonstrations against recruiting women into the IDF. However, the scripts we submitted were once again received coldly, both by people in our production company and by the people at Keshet. The participants we had located were perceived as being unconvincing and the possibility of accompanying them in their life and business did not show any promise of significant dramatic developments.



In the photo: Member of the Knesset, Avraham Ravitz (left middle)

The nature of historical topics is that the possibility of dealing with them by filming in the present is limited, and when it is possible, the present that is filmed is, in most cases, far from containing real dramatic development. After a few attempts, Channel 2 told us clearly: "Move on from your focus on Haredi memory and give us a series about the Haredi minority today, here and now." The people at our production company felt likewise.

We started to think things over once again. Although we feared that letting go of the construction of Haredi memory meant letting go of the focus on the Haredi point of view, we felt we had no choice. At that point, we had already been conducting research for over a year.

We met tens of potential participants and interviewed many more over the phone. We had also written a number of scripts that had been rejected. What were we to do with all the footage we accumulated and about the money we had spent? When we started thinking once again about the series we wanted to prepare, in accordance with the requirements of Channel 2, we realised that fortunately, the issue of the attitude towards the State remained central, and that the two participants we had filmed were still relevant. Although at the editing stage, the focus switched from the past to the present, beyond this, a significant part of the footage was still usable. As with the construction of memory, in order to understand the Haredi minority in the present, its attitude towards the state remains central. We conducted some complementary filming with the two participants from the first episode, in order to get better acquainted with their families and other aspects of their life, and went back to Channel 2 for yet another discussion.

According to the new proposal we formulated with our partners, the series would deal with the present challenges the Haredi minority is currently facing, as a segregated and conservative minority. In addition to its relations with the state, the following episodes were supposed to deal with the impact of economy and employment, and of popular Western-secular culture. The new proposal focused on the areas where Haredi and Israeli societies interact. We hoped that this would allow exploration of the powerful changes taking place under the cover of conservatism, leading to unusual combinations between "old" and "new", tradition and modernity.

Counter-culture, religious extremism or exotica

Although we had given up the idea of focusing on the historical narrative or on the construction of Haredi memory, we remained firm in our intention to avoid recreating common representations of the Haredi minority. We wanted to avoid stereotyping and exoticising it; therefore, we avoided emphasising the various religious ceremonies, unless they were directly linked to the issue we were looking at. We preferred to focus, as much as possible, on daily life and routine, on the family, and on the work and studies of the participants. The title "Filmed on a Weekday" – in addition to the fact that it echoes the caption that appears on the television screen when a Haredi person appears, particularly when broadcast on Shabbat or on a holy day²¹ – is appropriate in that sense. We tried to examine the points where Haredi world and Israeli society meet. Within the framework of our

21 The caption's role is to clarify that the interviewee didn't desecrate the Sabbath

perception of the Haredi minority as an enclave group that is striving to protect itself from the influence of the surrounding society, it was important for us to examine, for example, the Haredi interpretation of and its interaction with the spheres surrounding it or shared by it; such spheres were the political sphere, the justice system, the labour market and Israeli popular culture.

The new proposal was greeted far more positively, although Channel 2 emphasised that the series should also contain scenes and situations that would "draw in" the viewers. The material we filmed with Pappenheim and Ravitz, was described as weak, lacking sufficient dramatic tension, and mainly, that it was devoid of any Haredi exotica. Some of the participants at the meeting suggested that we film religious ceremonies and events, such as the *kapparot* ceremonies, the *Asseret Haminim* markets, kosherising the dishes, and other aspects of the Haredi religious practice.²² We rejected this and claimed that presenting the Haredi outlook on secularism was powerful enough. Channel 2 rejected our claims. We spoke of the series entitled "Eastern Desert Wind – A Moroccan Chronicle", directed by David Ben Shetrit, which presented the narrative of Moroccan immigrants and was a kind of accusatory document against the Zionist establishment. We estimated that our material had, at least in part, the same potential. We claimed that the Haredi minority offered a full and more comprehensive cultural alternative to secularism than Mizrahi culture did, for example, as it comprises an entire scale of values that is for the most part opposed to Western-secular values. This meeting ended with no decision.

We decided that the way to guarantee sufficient ratings without emphasising the exotic was to highlight the cultural challenge which the Haredi world pose to secularism, and the various ways the former perceives secularism and criticises it. Carrying out this critical alternative, however, turned out to be more difficult than we had anticipated. In an attempt to follow this path, we constructed the first episode's concluding scene. In this scene, Shmuel Pappenheim is on a private guided tour of the High Court of Justice in Jerusalem, and is given detailed information about the architecture of the building, particularly of the attempt to incorporate motifs from Jewish scriptures. Although this scene and Pappenheim's criticism of the secular justice system does not set any real challenge to the secular justice system, it does testify to the way it is perceived from the Haredi perspective. The tour arouses some strong feelings in Pappenheim, and leads him to ponder on whether he should bring his children there, in order

²² Many films represent the Haredi minority through its many ceremonies, thereby reinforcing the exotica and 'otherness' of this community.

to show them to what extent secular Jews deny their past. Channel 2 liked these sections of footage. In another excerpt, Pappenheim presents an illustrated booklet for children prepared by one of his associates in view of the elections. The booklet covers "the Zionists' misdeeds" since the establishment of the State to this day, in a series of drawings. The founders of the State are described in it as people who stood by while European Jews were being exterminated, since it "served their purpose". These excerpts do not contain a real challenge to secularism or Zionism, either. As the booklet is designed for children it presents a simplified version of views which are common within Haredi minority. New historical evidence or more sophisticated arguments may have given rise to certain question marks in relation to the Zionist narrative about the Holocaust, but the simplistic formulation only presents Pappenheim and his group's outlook as fanatic and infuriating. But like the previous scene in the Supreme Court, it highlights the divide between Pappenheim and his group, and other Israelis.

This episode, the first in the series, also includes a few sections of narration in which the creators of the series speak of the film as a journey they embarked on in order to get to know the Haredi minority and to dismantle some of their own stereotypes about it. The fact of "admitting" to the secular perspective does away with the pretense of presenting an objective representation of reality, and clarifies that the film reflects the perspective of two secular film directors. These bits of narration enhance the strength of our encounter with Shmuel Pappenheim, a member of the Toledoth Aharon Hassidic group, for whom the encounter with us is no simple matter. Indeed, he speaks of his hesitations and reservations.

Pappenheim and Ravitz's personalities emerge gradually, but while Ravitz appears as someone who strives to combine religious ideals with the reality of life in Israel and is prepared to make certain compromises, Pappenheim for his part, appears as more of a zealot. Pappenheim's honesty and the fact that it was the first time that he expressed himself on camera turned his interview into something unusual. Ravitz on the other hand, was already well known to secular viewers, and was very used to the presence of cameras. Our footage of him becomes more interesting when he is joined by his wife, Avigail, who was unfamiliar to our viewers. Pappenheim's great ambivalence in relation to the camera and to taking part in a film were especially intriguing, and he had a stronger presence on screen. This is also why he was given more screen time.

Journalists and film makers are drawn to this "zealot" and this closed world precisely because it attempts to hide from them. For these reasons, the media coverage of Haredi marginal groups is far greater than their share in the population. Thus, certain extremist groups, such as the *Neturei Karta*, who total no more than a few hundred families, make ample use of the media attention they are given, and their views are known throughout the world.²³

How about an episode about women?

A series on the Haredi minority must also look at the role of women. It was clear to us that we would have to challenge the prevalent stereotypes of Haredi women as depressed, passive, voiceless and choiceless. At the same time, although we easily found Haredi women who challenged this stereotype, getting them to take part in the series was more complicated. They rejected the very possibility of being filmed, mostly fearing they would jeopardise their children's chances of finding a good match, or that their children or their partners would be thrown out of the educational frameworks they attended. Were we to reproduce the representation of the Haredi woman in spite of ourselves? Maybe our difficulty was a proof of the truth of the representations? For many years researchers on the Haredi minority thought that Haredi women, who are exposed to Western culture to a greater degree, would be those who would bring about changes from within. Later on they became far more skeptical about this possibility (Friedman, 1999). In many religious groups, the women do not challenge religious conventions; in fact they act towards maintaining them, while at the same time searching for ways to expand their freedom within them. This is why we did not think about devoting an episode to women as a social issue. In fact, the episodes were meant to take a close look at the forces of change that are at work within the Haredi enclave. - Nor did we want to create a 'ghetto' for women. We hoped for equal representation of men and women in each episode, as much as possible; however, the head of our production company, a secular woman herself, thought otherwise and in the end, it was decided to devote a separate episode to women in the Haredi minority.

This decision can be interpreted as based on the secular Western approach, according to which the status of Haredi women – and of women in fundamentalist groups in general – is a 'social problem', given that they are 'repressed', and 'enslaved' by the male religious

²³ For example, the meeting between some members of *Neturei Karta* and the Iranian President in 2006 was covered by the media worldwide. While the *Neturei Karta* people do not take national insurance money and any state funds, and try to avoid unnecessary exposure to Western culture as much as possible, in their links with journalists they are surprisingly unrestrained.

establishment. Liberal secular cinema has taken upon itself to liberate them or at least to lend them a voice. For us it was important that the women who would be the focus of this episode would not confirm this stereotype but rather, challenge it.



In the photo: Adina Bar-Shalom, daughter of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef and Head of the Haredi Academic College

The first female participant we agreed on was Adina Bar Shalom, daughter of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef²⁴. Adina founded and leads the Haredi academic college where Haredi men and women study separately. The subjects taught include social work, educational counseling, communication disorders, economics, computer science, and graphic design. We realised that by following her work, we would be able to look at issues such as poverty, social distress, the economy, professional training, and employment – all of them issues faced by the Haredi minority. We realised that given her position, Adina was leading significant social change. We wanted to focus on the tension between those leading the change, trying to speed up the process of professional training and establishing higher education frameworks, and the

24 Rabbi Ovadia Yosef was the first Sephardic Chief Rabbi during the years 1973-1983, and served as spiritual leader of the SHAS political party, until his death on October 7, 2013. He was considered by many as the greatest Sephardic rabbi of our time.

conservative forces striving to slow these processes down or to stop them altogether. Although Adina's relationship with her father involves tremendous respect and admiration, she is a smart and energetic woman who is able to forge her own way in a world of men and of Jewish religious laws. She does not act in opposition to this world but finds creative ways to act within it.

The second woman we chose was Rachel Shalkovsky, best known as "Bambi". She is head midwife at the Bikur Holim Hospital in Jerusalem and has delivered over 30,000 babies. She also heads a *Gemach* (a non-profit loaning system in the Haredi minority) to help families in distress. These two tasks she is involved with were particularly suited for the series, since we wanted to deal with childbirth and economic distress. Her energetic and entrepreneurial nature also challenges the stereotype of the Haredi woman as submissive and obedient.



In the photo: Rachel Shalkovsky, head midwife at the Bikur Holim Hospital in Jerusalem

In the course of a meeting with Keshet, during which we showed them some footage we shot of Adina, we were once again told it was weak. "What's missing here is a young woman.

Who's going to want to see a film about two old women?", as it was put by one of the people at Channel 2. What kind of materials would answer their expectations? What they were imagining was that we could bring along footage of one of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef's grandchildren who became secular, if we found such a grandchild, or maybe some footage of one of his granddaughter's forbidden affairs, if there was such. "It will be much easier to broadcast this", we were promised. The story we wanted to tell was different, and involved Adina's attempts to develop the Haredi college she headed. As we met up with her regularly our relationship grew stronger. She opened up and shared with us the links between her activity and her desire to expand the range of possibilities available to Haredi women, also in reparation for the limits that were set to her in the past by her parents and husband. Her life story included experiences that were clear examples of the submission of Haredi women to the male order in this religious minority; however, today she is a testimony to the possibility of mending things, and of the ability of Haredi women to gain power and freedom of action and enterprise. In many respects, only few people – whether men or women, living inside or outside the Haredi minority – achieve similar freedom to that which Adina enjoys in shaping a new social reality. Moreover, Adina is not "just a Haredi woman", but the daughter of one of the most important rabbis in Israel, and the fact that she had never appeared in the media prior to that was a promotion tool which Channel 2 was very much aware of. The film shows Adina and Bambi criticising their own society and thus can be interpreted as supporting the external criticism about the Haredi minority and its gendered division of labour. In this sense, by focusing on these women and the internal criticism they were voicing, the film turned into a call for the emancipation of Haredi women, which can account for the reason why it was so enthusiastically received, particularly by secular viewers.

The depth of stereotypes

In addition to being broadcasted on television and screened in cinemas across the country, the series was screened at a number of festivals throughout the world, and won a number of prizes. We believe that we succeeded, albeit not always to the same extent, to draw a human profile of the range of characters found in the various parts of the Haredi minority. In addition to the focus on daily life and on the meeting points with secularism and Israeli society, we also conducted "life story" interviews, which were intended to enable the interviewees to share significant parts of their life, such as childhood, adolescence and married life, with minimal intervention on our part. We tried to avoid emphasising the

otherness and the exotic aspects of the Haredi minority. Instead we stressed other aspects in the life of the interviewees which at least some of the viewers would be able to identify with. The focus was on the participants' perspective, and even when we did not agree with their point of view, we made a point of not confronting them or rebuking them. The music we used in the series also emphasizes their cultural world. The participants' singing – Shmuel Pappenheim, in the first episode, and Yigal Raveh in the third episode – is integrated into it. According to some of the critics, our efforts were fruitful²⁵ and the participants we worked with liked the series. Some of them attended many of the screenings, and spoke afterwards.

On the other hand, we were forced to make a few painful compromises throughout the process, and renounce our desire to deal with the Haredi historical narrative and the construction of Haredi memory. Our intention to use the Haredi perspective in order to challenge the secular perspective did not really come about either. Although the participants we selected are very eloquent, they do not emerge as interpreters or critics of Israeli society. It may be that we were unable to lead them in that direction, or maybe they were unable to fulfill this role in the first place.

In a few instances, we also slipped into stereotypes. For example, in two narration bits we used the general term 'Haredim', as though we were dealing with a single black mass of people – an image we were actually trying to deconstruct. We also overlooked a few embarrassing mistakes in the English translation, which reveal the assumptions of the translator.²⁶

Once the editing of the series was completed, in 2010, the production company signed a contract with ARTE, the prestigious Franco-German television channel, to broadcast the series. The contract stipulated that the three episodes would be edited into a single one and a half hour film. An editor working for our production company edited it into this new version and wrote some new narration, which were adapted for a public that is not familiar with the Israeli Haredi minority and needs some background information. We conducted some improvements on this narration, although some of our improvements were erased, probably due to time constraints, and the German translation of this narration remained problematic.

25 See, for example, Maya Sela's article ("Her Own Haider (nursery, YH)", Haaretz, 19.9.10, p. 14), or Alon Hadar's article ("Go Outside", Ma'ariv, 19.9.10, p. 18).

26 In the first episode, for example, the Eida Haredit activists describe a gathering that was dispersed by the police. They called the policewoman "shikse" (a disparaging Yiddish term for a "non-Jewish woman"). In the translation, the word "whore" appears.

The narration and the new version of the film are a fascinating example of how filmed and 'objective' events, in any documentary, undergo a process of subjective interpretation before turning into a film. Thus, for example, the opening scene of the new version is totally identical to the opening scene of the first episode in the series, but the two narrations in this scene are entirely different. In the opening scene, we see a demonstration organised by the *Neturei Karta* in Jerusalem, on the day of the elections, being forcefully dispersed by the police. In the original version, the narration was as follows:

"Some 800,000 Haredi people live in the State of Israel. I have often related to them as a single black and threatening block. In my eyes, like in the media, the Haredim appeared to be faceless, nameless, and with no biographies. I want to take a look inside, to see the shades and more than that – to see how we appear to them."

These words enable us to place ourselves as film directors who come from a different world – secular and distant from the Haredi minority. This way, we clarify that we do not pretend to reflect a single reality 'as it is'; we admit that the film will reflect our perspective as non-Haredim. There is also a declaration of our desire to see the various shades and to dismantle the single black bulk into its parts; however at the same time, a dichotomy is created here between 'us' and 'them' ("the Haredim", "how we appear to them"), as though we were dealing with two clear and distinct groups whereas the borders between the two communities are much more fluid and fuzzy.

The narration in the new version is more problematic:

"About 800,000 Haredi Jews live in Israel – the Haredim. Their often violent struggle for Israel's Jewish religious identity lets them appear as a big, menacing, dark mass in the eyes of the secular population."²⁷

The place of the creators of the film as secular or non-Haredi people is absent from this bit or from any the other part of the film, and the viewer receives a narration that is far more authoritative and which tries to give the feeling that what appears on the screen is the embodiment of reality. According to the new narration, the responsibility for the attitude towards the Haredi public lies entirely with them - the violent struggles of the Haredim to ensure the Jewishness of the State are the reason for the attitude of the secular public. A complex and multifaceted issue is summed up in a simplistic way, placing responsibility and blame on one side only. A few minutes later, the narrator is heard once again:

27 The translation from German into English was done by Isolde Sommer.

"In the tradition of Polish and Ukrainian Jews, many of them wear long coats and black fur hats, speak Yiddish. They do everything possible to distance themselves from their environment. Many of them live in the Jerusalem neighbourhood of Mea Shearim."

This excerpt is also problematic and reinforces the stereotype: the long coat, the fur hat and the Yiddish language turn into the signs of the Haredim, who are presented as a single stereotyped and exotic mass. In fact, only the Hassidim wear fur hats, and only on Shabbat and Jewish holy days, while Hebrew is in fact much more common than Yiddish in most Haredi circles. The description of the Haredi attempt to separate themselves from their surroundings is also partial, devoid of any nuance, and very problematic. Turning Haredi people into a single and exotic entity is, of course, totally opposite to our original intention to show the various shades, sub-groups and differences which, of course, are also reflected in their external appearance.

Unfortunately, these distortions have remained in the German version of the film²⁸. This was a good reminder of the fact that what is presented as the "truth" in documentary cinema is relative, processed and subjective. Two editors can use the same material to create different films with quasi-opposite tones and statements.

The press and the critics

We did not study the films' reception systematically. However, I will briefly relate to the newspaper articles and reviews that were written about it. In Israel, the episodes were screened in cinemas for months, and it seems that many people, particularly those with some degree of interest in religion, found them interesting. All the main newspapers wrote about the series at least once, and some of them devoted more than one article or critique. Some of the critiques were very positive.²⁹ Some writers were attentive to our attempt to challenge common representations of the Haredi minority in the media; it does seem, however, that the familiar patterns of representation of the Haredi minority imposed themselves on the writers. For example, Adina Bar-Shalom's story about her parents locking her up at home so that she would not take the ability tests (*meytzag* tests) at school, in order to prevent her pursuing a

28 Despite these limitations the film was nominated for the Grimme Award (one of the highest German awards for television) for the best TV documentary in 2012.

29 For example, Alon Hadar's critique in Maariv (19.9.10), in which he writes that the series is "the first honest attempt to look at and understand the Haredi individual." He also writes that it succeeds in dismantling most of the common stereotypes about the Haredi minority, "far better than Haredi people have done so far."

course of studies that interested her at the time, was particularly emphasised.³⁰ Not that the details mentioned by the journalist were unimportant – indeed, we chose this as our final scene of the second episode. But the journalists and their editors did not always bother to mention an equally important fact: that today, as a grownup, Adina enjoys tremendous freedom. This freedom enables her to open a whole range of possibilities for young Haredi women, including those who would have been off limits for her in her youth. In her very positive review, Netta Ziv writes:

"The daughter, Adina Bar-Shalom, is a brilliant and impressive woman who decided to fight against the ignorance and poverty which the religious establishment is promoting, and to encourage Haredi women to join the labour market. However, when she stands face to face with her father, she suddenly turns into this weak and obedient girl who was not allowed to study psychology, fearing it would 'arouse doubts in her'".

Although Ziv's portrayal is more balanced, she interprets Adina's choice not to go against her father and the religious establishment as a proof of her weakness and childish behaviour. In line with Mahmood's analysis (2005), this can be explained as stemming from the feminist-Western worldview, according to which only an open rebellion against the male and religious establishment will enable Adina to achieve self-fulfillment. The possibility that for Adina, self-fulfillment can only be achieved with the help of and within the boundaries of religion and its commandments is not even considered.

In another article, the creators of the series are described as having succeeded to "break the locked door open" onto the Haredi world (Levy, Kol Hazman, 12.12.08). This description emphasises the importance of the series and the challenges in its making. Haredi community is portrayed as a monolithic group, locked up behind heavy gates that protect it from its surroundings; a magical and exotic world sheltered from the eyes of all, which has been revealed thanks to the creators of the series. Flattering as it is, the terminology once again depicts the Haredi minority as passive, weak, and exotic. Reality is far more complex, however, and the Haredi minority is anything but a single mass of people. There is no element of everyday life in this minority which does not involve some meeting, partnership, and relations with its non-Haredi and even its non-Jewish surroundings. Moreover, the

30 For example, the news item that appeared in *Achbar Ha'ir* (the equivalent of *Time Out*) on 3.2.09 entitled "It's Hard Being the Daughter of Rabbi Ovadia" (Netta Ziv, *Achbar Ha'ir*, *Haarets*, Feb 3, 2009).

participants in the series chose to be involved in the series of their own free will, each one of them based on their own considerations.

The viewers

The episode that seems to have drawn the most positive reactions from our viewers was the one dealing with women, "The Rabbi's Daughter and the Midwife", and many reported that they identified with the women participants. Shmuel Pappenheim and Michael Rothschild also drew a lot of interest. At the time, Pappenheim was editor of "*Ha'Eida*". The film follows him in his work, and in the background we see his modest and neglected office. It is clear to the viewers that we are dealing with a man leading a very modest life, and motivated by a strong ideological passion and strong religious fervor. This is all the more so with Rothschild, who invites us into his small, not to say ascetic home, comprising two tiny bedrooms and a living room, where he raises nine children with much pride, faith and joy.

The reactions to Yigal Revach were very different. In his youth, Yigal dreamed of becoming a Torah scholar but he gave this up and opened a successful advertising company that markets the products of leading firms to the Haredi sector. The episode follows him in his efforts, together with people from the Bezeq phone company, to come up with a 'kosher' internet service. It also follows him on a trip to the tombs of Hassidic Tzadikim in the Ukraine, a journey he undertakes regularly, in order to fill himself up with "spiritual energy". His frequent trips (up to eight times a year, as he reveals in the film) are made possible thanks to his financial success. The sharp switches between his crying on the tombs of Tzadikim to conversations on his cell phone one moment later about new advertising contract aroused reservations among many viewers. The viewers also hear that during one of his trips to Uman, Yigal is asked how he manages to switch so quickly between lamenting himself on the tomb of the Hafetz Hayim and a business phone conversation. One of his friends replies in his place and says that the entire world is built of both body and soul, but the interviewer quiets him down, as though looking for another answer. From the secular perspective, these opposites do not go hand in hand. How can one cry over the tomb of a rabbi who died some eighty years ago, one minute, and rejoice over some material gain, a minute later? The fact that Revach's parents emigrated from Morocco but in spite of this, he adopted the hegemonic Ashkenazi rabbinical establishment, add to his lack of credibility in the eyes of many viewers. The situation merely hints at the large gaps between the Haredi and the secular perceptions in this regard. In the course of the editing, a conscious attempt was made to

soften these tensions. Excerpts in which Revach's transitions from deep religious emotions to earthly dealings related to his business, which were likely to seem somewhat comical, were not included. Our secular audience didn't appreciate Revach's investment in both the spiritual and the earthly world, which for many seems to exclude one another.

A closer examination teaches us that such tensions underlie the Haredi worldview. Haredi education is characterised by the aspiration towards achieving highly spiritual goals. Haredi rabbis understand that not all the members of their flock are able to reach these lofty spheres. But, they choose to lead a life that aspires towards divine ideals, even if many are far from achieving them, rather than a life geared towards human and achievable goals that from the start imply compromising and accepting mediocrity.

To distinguish between those who sin out of weakness and those who sin out of principle, Halachic literature distinguishes between the "heretic by appetite" and the "heretic out of spite". Although it is clear that many will not be able to fulfill all the religious ideals, it is expected that they will keep their failures to themselves (viewing them as weaknesses due to human "appetite"), and will certainly not display them; consequently, hypocrisy and concealment become part of the routine (Rose 2006).

This hypocrisy – a direct outcome of the aspiration towards spiritual ideals despite the earthly limitations of human life – is to a large extent contrary to the conventions commonly found in Western culture. Particularly due to the influence of Western psychology, these tensions between desires or aspirations and reality are perceived as problematic and as drawing a heavy price in psychological terms; thus, Western psychology is investing tremendous efforts in helping people "come to terms with themselves", and "accept themselves" with all their urges and drives. Doing away with the religious dimension and the aspiration to the sublime help reduce these tensions.

Towards the end of the first episode, during Pappenheim's tour of the Supreme Court, which I described earlier, he reaches a new understanding: secular Jews are aware of their religious "origin" and of the religious commandments, but consciously decide not to act according to them. For Pappenheim, this understanding is painful. He had an easier time with secular people when he perceived them as 'captured infants'³¹ and their actions as stemming from

31 A Talmudic term referring to a Jew who sins as a result of being raised without knowledge and understanding of Judaism.

ignorance rather than a conscious decision to act in opposition to the religious commandments. Now he has to account for the reason why secular people choose to act this way, despite having knowledge. In a similar vein, in the course of the research for the film, one of the sons of the late Rabbi Ravitz, expressed doubts as to our motives to understand Haredi perspective. "If you really listen to what is being said to you", he said, "you will most certainly become religious, so there's no chance that you'll listen." In other words, even for Rabbi Ravitz's son, he who really listens and understands Haredi worldview can only be convinced; thus, if we listen we will certainly "return to the fold".

In the context of our series, however, we should ask whether this kind of expectation is mutual. In other words, is it possible that secular Israelis expect that when a Haredi individual comes out of the 'ghetto' – the protected Haredi space of the yeshiva and the kolel – and 'listens' and is exposed to the secular worldview through higher education, when he acquires a profession and joins the labour market, he will become more Israeli and behave like them in many other respects? Or is it just that once Haredi individuals join higher education and the labour market they become our equals and competitors and we employ a more critical perspective towards them? Isn't this just another example where the different habitus (Bourdieu, 1977b) will make integration easier for those Haredi individuals who are culturally more similar to the group they are trying to join? Will success in integrating into wider Israeli society be dependent on cultural assimilation?

It seems that our viewers and we were able to identify far more easily with those who filled the slot of the Haredi who is closed off, the zealot, the one who lives a humble life and who, in many ways, is more 'exotic', whose way of life is perceived as being more 'traditional', focusing on the 'spiritual' or the 'ideological'. On the other hand, the 'new Haredi', who combines different worlds, the 'old' and the 'new', the spiritual and the earthly, gave rise to doubts and suspicion in the viewers and in ourselves. Do we expect those who have come out of the Haredi enclave and have been exposed to higher education, for example, to be more like us, to change certain aspects of their religiousness? Are we disappointed when they 'insist' on maintaining this same religiousness, even after having been exposed to 'our' world? Do we reject their attempt to combine spiritual and earthly aspirations?

Conclusion

An examination of the process of the creation of the series has revealed its complexities and the various pressures, demands and intentions of the participants. A film involves a team with differing views. Even less crucial partners, such as the person translating the captions, are able to alter the meaning of the work. The analysis of the process has revealed the gaps between our original intention, as the creators, and the final product. Each stage in the process and each decision we made opened a whole range of possibilities for us to make mistakes. The process meant we had to constantly reexamine our views and feelings in relation to the participants and to ensure that our preconceived ideas and stereotypes did not stand in our way and cast a shadow over what we were able to show to the viewers. In that sense, the reflexivity which the anthropologist is committed to should also be applied to the documentary film maker. I have shown the outcome of the work on the series, its achievements and flaws, from my own perspective, along the process of its creation; the places where we managed to challenge the stereotypical representation, and the places where we perpetuated it, whether willingly or unwillingly. As I tried to show, once the process of creation is completed, the process of interpretation by viewers and critics begins – and they also choose the parts which serve their preconceived ideas and ignore what is less useful to them. Real change in people's perceptions and views is hard to create and internalise. The representation of the Haredi minority seems to be 'locked up' around a small number of images – first and foremost the 'exotic' and the 'zealot' – and any attempt to challenge these images or to suggest some alternative is not easily accepted. To judge based on our film, when Haredi people do join secular spaces, without giving up on their Haredi lifestyle, they arouse suspicion and there seems to be some expectation that they change their positions and their behaviour and that they become more like 'us', the seculars.

One-dimensional and superficial stereotypical representations are likely, in many cases, to serve the needs of commercial television, which strives to avoid complex messages that call upon the viewers to exert some effort. Does the solution imply transferring the camera into Haredi hands, so that only Haredi people will come up with representations of their own society and life? It is certainly right for Haredi people to take part in creating such representations, although it does not guarantee a fair representation either.

Our starting point and the desire to do away with stereotypes and to 'humanise' the Haredi minority is in all likelihood very far from the interest of most leaders of the community, particularly those who fear that if the sides come closer Haredi minority members will

assimilate. For these Haredi leaders, a certain degree of tension that stems from prejudice and stereotypes can actually function as an ideal barrier against 'too much closeness'. Shmuel Pappenheim spoke in such terms in the episode in which he took part. It is worth noting that he himself underwent a tremendous change – according to him, to a large extent, due to his participation in the series. Pappenheim is still part of the Toledot Aharon Hassidic community, but he is now in charge of job placements, for the Joint Distribution Committee's "Mafteah" ("Key") organization; in this role, he is responsible for integrating Haredi people in the labour market, and for recruiting them to the IDF's SHAHAR program. As someone who stood at the forefront of the Haredi isolationist struggle, in his new position he is working towards quasi-opposite goals, including the integration of Haredi people in places of work, professional training frameworks and academic studies, which are often of a secular nature. Pappenheim, who is also about to complete a BA in communications and political science, intends to pursue his studies until he earns a PhD. He sums up the process he has undergone by saying: "I have matured".³²

32 From "Under Badatz Supervision", Tali Farkash, Ynet, 2.3.11. A follow-up film about Pappenheim, directed by Ron Ofer, is presently being shot.

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