

## Common Sense, Good Sense, and Commercial Television

ANAT FIRST

Netanya Academic College, Israel

In an era when identity is a hybrid process, it is interesting to examine whether and how it is possible to glean the presence or absence of certain cultural groups from their representations in a given culture. To do so, I employ two key Gramscian concepts: *common sense* and *good sense*. Using three research reports (from 2003, 2005, and 2011) that employed content analysis techniques, this article assesses the visibility of various subgroups in Israeli TV programs and majority-minority power relations in a variety of genres on commercial channels in the prime-time slot. This article focuses on three aspects of identity: nationality, ethnicity, and gender.

*Keywords:* *common sense, good sense, commercial television, nationality, ethnicity, gender*

### Introduction

This article<sup>1</sup> focuses on the representation of cultural diversity in contemporary television programs. Issues of representation have become highly relevant in the postmodern thinking and neoliberalism of the third millennium. In this era of often hybrid identities, it is interesting to examine the presence or absence of certain cultural groups on specific maps of cultural representation. This study uses the theoretical framework offered by Stuart Hall (1997), which in turn relies on Antonio Gramsci's discussion of cultural hegemony. Gramsci, as is widely known, advocated a quantitative approach in examining societies (Gramsci, 1985). Using three research reports (from 2003, 2005, and 2011) that employed content analysis techniques, this article assesses the visibility of various subgroups in Israeli TV programs and majority-minority power relations in a variety of genres on commercial channels (Channels 2 and 10) in the prime-time slot (19:30 to 23:00) from the early 2000s until 2011.

Two key Gramscian concepts, which will be discussed in detail in the next section, are employed here: *common sense*, a concept widely used in many studies on the media representation of social groups, and *good sense*, whose development and application in this type of research has been quite limited (Gramsci, 1971). The decreasing popularity of Gramsci's theory in the discussion of cultural diversity

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Anat First: [d\\_first@netvision.net.il](mailto:d_first@netvision.net.il)

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representation in media products<sup>2</sup> also deserves to be re-examined in the context of the proposed concepts.

The aim of this article is to discuss both of these concepts and their relations with representation in an attempt to evaluate the reproduction of common sense (which naturalizes dominant ideology) or its erosion and replacement by values that stem from good sense (which produces critical consciousness). This goal will be achieved through the examination of representations of various groups on Israeli commercial television. Although commercial television is inherently driven by profit motivations, which are based on common sense, the approach that guides the present work draws from the normative approach in media studies (McQuail, 2010). Normative theories that refer to the different ideas of various kinds of social rights and responsibilities (like Gramsci's theory) seek to view "public interest" as one of the benefits that communication should provide. Central factors in the composition of public interest are cultural diversity, the social rights of diverse groups, and social responsibility, all of which may be realized only as a result of good sense.

### **Hegemony, Common Sense, and Good Sense**

Gramsci's theories have undergone comprehensive examination since the late 1970s and are most commonly associated with the highly dynamic concept of *hegemony*. According to Gramsci, two types of control mechanisms operate within the state: the mechanisms of the state itself (control and coercion), and the mechanisms of civic society (which operate in the private sphere, creating consensus through the hegemony that makes up social and cultural institutions).

The concept of hegemony is of particular salience in the exploration of representations in the media because of its focus on culture and ideology. In our case, commercial television as a cultural industry is anchored in both control mechanisms: The social and political reality is governed through rules and regulations, and the symbolic reality generates consensus through the dissemination of symbols and representations. In the symbolic reality, commercial television still occupies a central place in the daily cultural experience.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, these two realities are constantly interacting.

Gramsci argues that hegemony's operation can be understood using the concept of *consensus*, which includes both common sense and good sense. He maintains that both types are historically and socially constructed and embedded: "Every social stratum has its own 'common sense' and its own 'good sense', which are basically the most widespread conceptions of life and of man" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 326). Common sense is a mechanism that reconstructs the dominant ideology and culture (Hall, 1997). It is "a conception which, even in the brain of individual, is fragmentary, incoherent and inconsequential, in conformity with the social and cultural position of those masses whose philosophy it is" (Gramsci, 1971, p.

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the 2003 re-edition of Todd Gitlin's most famous book, *The Whole World Is Watching*. Similarly, in the last edition of McQuail's *Mass Communication Theory*, Gramsci is mentioned only once in passing, following a longer sentence on Louis Althusser and his "ideological state apparatus" (McQuail, 2010, p. 96).

<sup>3</sup> For viewing figures and daily ratings in Israel, see <http://www.rashut2.org.il/>

419). It "creates the folklore of the future that is a more or less rigidified phase of a certain time and place" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 173). Nevertheless, it contains "a healthy nucleus of good sense" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 328), which Gramsci defines as "an intellectual unity and an ethic in conformity with a conception of reality that has gone beyond common sense and become, if only within narrow limits, a critical conception" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 333). For Gramsci, "good sense" is exemplified by the "philosophy of praxis." "Good sense" is analogous to "philosophy" in that it is inherently coherent and critical. As he says, "Philosophy is criticism and the superseding of 'common sense'" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 339). Good sense, for Gramsci, may be created out of common sense. This process does not entail "introducing from scratch a scientific form of thought into everyone's individual life, but of renovating and making 'critical' an already existing activity" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 331).

It must be noted that Gramsci asserts that these two types of sense—common sense and good sense—are to be understood both epistemologically and sociologically. Furthermore, the two are not mutually exclusive. In his view, in epistemological terms, common sense includes and absorbs certain components of good sense; in sociological terms, good sense is not the exclusive domain of social elites, whereas common sense is common to all of us (Coben, 1998). Although these two types of sense may seem to contradict each other, total opposition between them precludes any changes in the culture. To understand changes in the cultural arena, common sense has to renew itself and develop into a more critical sense, so it needs to be associated with an already existing or viable philosophy of a diffuse nature (Gramsci, 1971).

Arguably, then, it follows that the process of generating good sense is innately linked with common sense. This takes place in the framework of everyday practices. That is, contrary to the belief that one reaches good sense through the method of scientific reasoning, generating good sense is, in fact, entrenched within the everyday and is therefore within the reach of all social groups (Gramsci, 1971). Similarly, common sense is also not necessarily rational or scientific. Rather, common sense is defined as the incoherent set of general assumptions and beliefs common to any given society and epoch (Coben, 1998; Mistry, 2008). As such, good sense and common sense are essentially concepts of ideology and beliefs and the notion of everyday life. Significantly, the process of representation, then, becomes noteworthy and worthy of examination, for representation simulates and reproduces ideology.

Media studies focus on the media as a political (Habermas, 1996) and cultural (McGuigan, 2005) *public space*, in which diverse social groups appear in various cultures, and at the same time, as a cultural product that constructs consensus about the dominant ideology of these social groups within cultures. The concept of common sense has been discussed extensively in such studies (see, for instance, Avraham & First, 2010a; Kama, 2003), whereas the discussion of good sense is still in its infancy (Gencarella, 2010; Ytterstad, 2012), let alone its application for understanding the process of change in group representations. Applying the concept of good sense in studies on representation in various media could contribute to the need for changes in media content, which is produced by those who should renew common sense and, within narrow limits, create a critical consciousness; the need for changes in public perceptions that challenge the content of the media by employing good sense and creating a critical consciousness; and attempts by media scholars to explain how such changes in media contents are, in effect, the reproduction of such changes in society and the culture in general.

### **The Craft of Representation**

Using “common sense” and “good sense” in the context of media representations allows us to focus with a new lens on how a group’s position and identity are reconstructed and reinforced in everyday thought.

The present study relies on the theoretical premises underpinning the concept of *representation*, which in media studies is closely linked to the concept of *identity*. The former concept points to the verbal and visual symbols through which the representer attempts to say something meaningful about something or someone, or to represent the world in a way that is meaningful for other people. This process is a necessary part of the ongoing creation of meaning in a given society (Hall, 1997). In this way, the otherness of people who are different from “us” is charged with meaning. The discussion of representation in this framework is based on the notion that differences between various groups in society are never essential but rather are the product of *social construction*. In this view, social reality is the result of an array of historically rooted social contracts. Media representation is a perpetual process of identity construction, which is also a driving factor in the creation of stereotypes, through which difference and otherness are constructed. There can be no argument that stereotypes are a device designed to help people organize their world in light of the great profusion of stimulants in their surroundings. Moreover, stereotypes often precede concrete information in constructing reality so that the social reality of social groups is regularly being distorted, and these stereotypes inevitably become mere media images. Such images in themselves facilitate the reproduction, or the relatively stable preservation, of the existing social power structure (Downing & Husband, 2005; First & Avraham, 2004; Gross, 1988; Lind, 2010; Van-Dijk, 1996).

There are at least three key dimensions in the discussion of representations, outlined below, that help to locate a social group in a given society at a given time, thereby reproducing or renewing the common sense.

#### **1. Visibility of the Group**

Representations symbolize the group’s existence in the social reality and vice versa: The group’s absence from the symbolic world signifies a symbolic extinction. Visibility becomes a key concept in this context in that power hierarchies are shaped, reinforced, and perpetuated through the increased presence in the media of strong sectors at the expense of weaker ones. Some argue that weak sectors are unable to gain visibility in the media (Avraham & First, 2010a; Kama, 2003). One of the methods available for determining the existence or absence of the “other” in the symbolic reality is through an empirical examination of the actors in the various texts, i.e., a “head count” (Greenberg & Brand, 1994).

#### **2. Characteristics of the Group’s Visibility**

This involves examining the nature of the group’s or the individual’s visibility. This indicator is associated with the *status* or significance of the individual in relation to other participants in a given event and is measured according to the social-professional role characteristics of those represented. The “other”

is usually represented in roles that underscore the power distribution in society (Greenberg & Brand, 1994). Another aspect of visibility concerns the position of those represented as objects or subjects: Are they referred to as objects, with their names, positions, or titles or roles ignored—rendering them, in effect, devoid of personality? Or alternatively, are they seen as subjects with biographies, including their names, statuses, and roles? (Emons, Wester, & Scheepers, 2010; First, 2010).

The use of stereotypes is a central device in the representation process that also affects the nature of that process. It is thus imperative to consider and question stereotypes because of the detrimental effects of their usage. Context is another key dimension affecting the nature of groups' visibility. Using the context of events of order or of disorder is thus a way for a group to construct its appearance in the media. Wolfsfeld (1997) argues that weak groups can usually make an entry into the media only "through the back door," which is characterized by events of disorder.

### **3. Power Relations Among Groups**

In this dimension, the nature of the interaction of groups indicates the level of affinity among them. For example, the existence of daily social interaction and equality in roles signifies that the power hierarchy between the groups involved is shrinking.

Power relations can be analyzed using the three approaches of colonialism, postcolonialism, and enlightened sexism. Colonialism expresses a relationship of control in which the strong controls the weak, whereas postcolonialism attempts to challenge the strong–weak binary and reveal the control of the knowledge base and its representations (Shenhav & Hever, 2003). In colonialist trends, the dominant majority voice is represented in media discourse, whereas in postcolonial trends, the independent and critical voice of the weaker groups is manifest in media discourse (First, 2010). With regard to the third power relation, Douglas (2010) suggests another system of gender relations that she calls *enlightened sexism*, which she conceptualizes as a response to the perceived threat, whether deliberate or unintended, to the new gendered regime. Although many major steps have been taken in advancing feminism, with the result of apparent gender equality, the enlightened sexism view holds that in present-day society, in which some would argue women's rights are supposedly "in order, there is in fact a regressive revival of traditional stereotypes of young girls and women that in turn work against their achieved progress" (Douglas, 2010, p. 211).

These three dimensions may be seen as hierarchical. Visibility is the first stage. The second stage involves the characteristic of visibility, so the qualitative aspect must be added in order to examine a variety of variables. Thus a group may appear onscreen daily, but because it is being represented stereotypically, it is effectively the victim of qualitative symbolic extinction and a colonialist conception, which represents the prevalent common sense instead of creating a critical consciousness.

The main argument of this article is that representations in Israeli commercial television channels of deeply divided groups are the outcome of common sense, which in turn is penetrated by good sense. In other words, I will examine the extent to which Israeli commercial television fulfills its normative mission as an agent of good sense—striving to create a critical perspective that goes before the camp.

### **The Mosaic of Israeli Society**

Israeli society is a mosaic of social groups. According to some sociologists (for instance, Kimmerling, 2004), starting in the 1970s, the political-cultural hegemony of quasi-Western secular "Israeliness" (male, Ashkenazi/European descent, veteran/native Israeli, and of course Jewish) in Israeli society began to crumble. Yet this hegemonic group *still* manages to preserve its centrality as a leading class that controls big business, institutionalized media, academia, and the Supreme Court—although in these realms, too, its dominant position is showing signs of erosion.

The present article focuses on three distinct types of group identity in Israel—nationality (Jews–Arabs); gender (women–men); and ethnicity (Mizrahim–Ashkenazim)—all of which represent a cleavage in society. Because the discussion of cultural hegemony can transcend issues of economics, nationality, religion, gender, or ethnicity, exposing the dominant group (or groups) will shed light on the picture of hegemony and its gradual transformation.

#### ***The Jewish–Arab Cleavage***

This cleavage involves two key components: the civic component, which is derived from the status of the Arabs as citizens of the state of Israel, and the national component, which is a consequence of the national affiliation of the Arab citizens of Israel with the Arab world and the Palestinian people (Smootha, 1999). In the state of Israel, the "Israeliness" of its Arab-Palestinian citizens is repeatedly questioned and discussed. Their Israeliness is expressed first in their formal status: their being citizens of the state of Israel who make up about 20% of the population. It is also manifest in their sharing in prevalent Israeli lifestyles. Yet the Israeliness of the Arab citizens of Israel is flawed in several respects. The Arabs are the "other" in the state of Israel because they are a national group that exists within an *ethnic democracy* (Smootha, 1999). They are located at the periphery of Israeli society in most facets of life, thus constituting both a demographic and sociological minority. In other words, they have no influence in most of the important areas of life and are defined by some as third-class citizens (Peled & Shafir, 2005). Their own interpretation of their citizenship is clearly inconsistent with the prevailing Jewish interpretation of "loyalty to the state" and identification with the state's predominantly Jewish character and emblems (Peled & Shafir, 2005). Their otherness is twofold: first because of their being a religious-ethnic-national minority in the "imagined community" of Israel, and second because their identity is dependent upon and influenced by the "imagined community" of Palestine. Furthermore, both political entities—one already established and another evolving—are in the throes of a perpetual conflict over the demarcation of their respective borders.

#### ***The Ethnic (or Mizrahim–Ashkenazim) Cleavage***

This division has had lasting effects, peaking in social tension as a result of socioeconomic inequality between those of Asian-African descent and those of European-American descent. It should be noted, however, that each of these groups is in itself far from homogeneous. This cleavage is unique to Israeli society because it originated in the extraordinary historical development of the Jewish people in the Diaspora. Although it is commonly defined as an ethnic cleavage, it lacks the national-religious component

that marks most ethnic divisions elsewhere. The religious element is also absent, because these are all members of the same religion. Neither is it a lingual cleavage, because everybody in Israel speaks Hebrew (Kama, 2005). Kimmerling (2004) notes that in the Israeli state, "Mizrahim" is a culturally, politically, and economically constructed social category. Native-born Israelis who regard themselves as Mizrahim today constitute about half of the state's Jewish inhabitants, despite the fact that determining who is a Mizrahi is extremely difficult, both because of the many intermarriages and because the concept is very much a matter of self-determination and self-identity.

### ***The Gender Cleavage***

The inclination to dismiss the gender cleavage altogether stems from the fact that men and women are strongly connected to each other; share similar lifestyles, value systems, norms, and religious customs; and take part in all the discourses of citizenship. The reluctance to acknowledge the gender cleavage is also fueled by the myth of equality, which is rooted in prestate Israel and has been supported throughout its existence by the economic, social, and political achievements of Israeli women. However, a review of Zionist ideology and its endeavor to create a new Jew suggests that it did not encompass the Jewish woman and was, in fact, against her (Kamir, 2011). Regardless of changes and improvement in women's status over the years, the achievements of Israeli feminism can be said to be somewhat disappointing (Kamir, 2011). The social construction still prevalent in Israel society emphasizes the masculine-feminine dichotomy, helping to maintain the status quo and impeding change (Peled & Shafir, 2005). In addition, women are a heterogeneous population group, and within this group, Mizrahi women suffer from a double otherness, and Arab women are even worse off because on top of the gender cleavage, they also carry the burden of national cleavage.

Despite the existence of these cleavages, however, in recent decades Israeli society has undergone significant changes, including improved economic status, representation in state institutions, and social rights. These changes have reconstructed the positioning of these groups (Mizrahim, women, and Israeli Arabs) within the sociopolitical elite, and have weakened the Ashkenazi hegemony (Almog, 2004; Peled & Shafir, 2005). In view of these changes, it is interesting to examine the changing representation of these different groups, in light of the relationship between the "sociopolitical reality" and the "symbolic reality." In other words, based on the assumption that representation takes place in the symbolic reality and interacts with the sociopolitical reality (Adoni & Mane, 1984; Avraham & First, 2010b; Berger & Luckmann, 1967), it is interesting to examine whether the change in Israeli society has found expression in the symbolic reality (i.e., in televisual texts), or, in other words, whether the shift in a society that is governed by common sense and challenged by the critical mechanism of good sense has had an impact on the symbolic reality as part of the interaction between the two.

Thus, this article aspires to explore to what extent over the years (2003, 2005, and 2011) these changes have been reflected on Israeli commercial television. That is, it aims to trace the representation of a continuity of a single hegemonic group (Ashkenazim) or a growing appearance of other groups that indicate the filtration of good sense. It does not, however, aspire to go back to the raw data of the three research reports; rather, it uses them as primary resources.

### Method

As mentioned above, this article presents a theoretical reading of three research reports (see herein). It is important to state here again that this article does not intend to describe and analyze the various aspects of these reports but to use their findings as the basis for my main question regarding the transition from common sense to good sense along the theoretical lines presented in the introduction. However, I will briefly delineate the data collection procedure to provide a better understanding of the data and their validity.

The analysis refers to three consecutive studies commissioned by the Israeli Second Authority for Television and Radio (in Hebrew, HaRashut HaShniyya LeRadio VeTelevizia). The 2003 study (Avraham, First, & Elephant-Lefler, 2004) covered 19 weeks of programming on Israel's two commercial TV channels (10 weeks on Channel 2, and 9 on Channel 10) in that year. The second study (La'or, Elephant-Lefler, & Inbar-Lankry, 2006) employed the same research tools, and its study population was 4 weeks on Channel 10, and 13.5 weeks on Channel 2 from October 2004 to March 2005. The third study (First & Inbar-Lankry, 2013) employed the same research tools, and its study population was 4 weeks on Channel 10, and 8 weeks on Channel 2, from January to June 2011.<sup>4</sup> Table 1 shows the number of items and characters analyzed according to five groups: (a) newscasts; (b) current affairs, investigative programs, and entertainment news; (c) talk shows, lifestyle, and entertainment; (d) dramas and soap operas; and (e) game and reality shows.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 1. Number of Items and Characters Analyzed.**

Genres/Study	First Study	Second Study	Third Study
Newscasts	70% 2,222 <sup>a</sup> (2,877 <sup>b</sup> )	28% 720 (1,147)	42% 731 (1,160)
Current affairs, investigative programs, and entertainment affairs	17% 538 (737)	24% 628 (932)	26% 453 (682)
Talk, lifestyle, and, entertainment shows	10% 321 (485)	44% 1,124 (1,687)	23% 405 (483)
Dramas and soap operas	2% 67 (200)	3% 90 (265)	0.1% 23 (69)
Game and reality shows	0.1% 20 (59)	0.1% 23 (63)	8% 149 (341)
Total number of items and characters	99% 3,168 (4,358)	99% 2,585 (4,094)	99% 1,761 (2,736)

<sup>a</sup>Numbers of individuals/characters

<sup>b</sup>Number of items of each genre

<sup>4</sup> For details, see Avraham et al., 2004; Avraham & First, 2010; First, 2013; La'or et al., 2005.

<sup>5</sup> All programs were Israeli productions and were broadcast in Hebrew.



All three studies focused on content analysis and followed the same quantitative outlines, conducting the quantitative content analysis using several code pages that were created for five grouped genres, as stated in Table 1.

The analysis was conducted according to the three above-mentioned theoretical components related to representation:

- (a) *The perceived visibility of the group.* To this end, a count of the number of appearances of the members of the group in each program was carried out (head counting).
- (b) *The perceived characteristics of the group's visibility.* This examined the context in which specific group members were represented; the information provided about them (names, positions, professions, geographical location); and the roles allocated to group representatives in the specific genres (e.g., in newscasts, whether they were experts or layperson; in dramas, whether they were leading or peripheral actors).
- (c) *The perceived power relations among groups.* I analyzed the structured power relations in the various interactions. For example, in games and talk shows, I considered the questions, the guests' identities, and the guests' characteristics (nationality, gender, and ethnic origin) and whether the programs' anchors, reporters, commentators, and moderators presented the group or the group's representative.

The programs were encoded in each project by judges (13 people overall) from diverse cultural backgrounds and Jewish men and women (most were students in various degree programs in media studies) between the age of 25 and 30. The validity and reliability of the system were ensured by a mean intercoder agreement rate from 80% to 93% for the different variables. To achieve this high rate of agreement, the judges underwent prior training, and several pretests were conducted.<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that the analysis below is based on the impressions of the judges rather than objective measures.

The code pages filled by the judges were composed of three clusters of questions specific to each of the five genres (see Table 1), altogether about 100 questions per genre. The clusters related to the following items: (a) the relevant unit of analysis (e.g., name of the program, the date, number of item, chapter, episode); (b) the existence of a group on the screen (to this end, we carried out a quantitative count of the number of appearances of the members of the group in each program, analyzing no more than three central figures on each item); (c) the characteristics of the group or the representative of the group and moderators or reporters (e.g., their context, role, biography [name, place of residence], level of articulateness, and mode of expression and of behavior<sup>7</sup>). Although the method was similar in all three measurements, their respective code sheets were planned to fit the programs that were broadcasted at

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<sup>6</sup> For more on the methods (sampling, reliability, nature of TV channels) of various studies conducted from 2000 to 2011, see, for 2000, Avraham and First, 2010b; for 2006, First, 2010; for 2003–2004, Avraham and First, 2010a.

<sup>7</sup> For example, fighting, crying, creating a provocation.

the time of specific measurement. For example, a codebook related to reality shows was developed in 2005.

Two indicators were constructed for analyzing the perceived characteristics of visibility:

- (a) *The status index*. This index includes six variables:
- Two objective variables: Hebrew language usage, and proficiency/role in the item (expert, public figure); and
  - Four subjective/perceived variables: level of education, professional status, socioeconomic status, and rationality versus emotionality.

Each variable ranged from 0 (having no characteristics of high status) to 7 (having full high status). This index is applicable to all three cleavages.

- (b) *The "backstage" index* (for understanding the concept, see Wolfsfeld, 1997). The term "backstage" (Hebrew, *delet achorit*) refers to the accessibility of weak political groups to the media. Weaker groups enter into the media usually when they adopt abnormal behavior, whereas the strong groups enter through the front door with normative behavior. The index includes three subjective variables that relate to deviant behavior: violence, provocation (appearance or behavior), and sentimentality. The index codes were 0 (having no characteristics of deviant behavior) or 1 (having one or more deviant behavior characteristics).

### **Findings**

To explore whether we can detect a transition over the years (2003, 2005, 2011) from common sense to good sense, I analyzed the representation of the different groups based on (a) the perceived visibility of a group on screen, (b) the perceived visibility of the group's characteristics on screen, and (c) the perceived power relations of the majority and the minority groups. A summary of the findings follows.

#### ***Perceived Level of Visibility***

The findings suggest that in all five group genres—newscasts; current affairs, investigative programs, and entertainment news; talk, lifestyle, and entertainment shows; dramas and soap operas; and game and reality shows—the identified group that dominates the screen is clearly male, Jewish, Ashkenazi (63% in 2003, 48% in 2005, and 64% in 2011). The three measurements also indicate symbolic extinction of the Arab citizens of Israel (from 3% in 2003 to 2% in 2005 to 1% in 2011). Both women and the Mizrahim (that were identified) are more visible on screen; however, they still experience severe under-representation (women from 21% in 2003 to 32% in 2005 to 30% in 2011; Mizrahim from 37% in 2003 to 52% in 2005 to 38% in 2011). Moreover, the findings reveal an improved visibility of women and Mizrahim from one study to next in all different genres, while in all the studied periods we saw a striking exclusion of Arab citizens of Israel.

There is a considerable increase in the percentage of women as the dominant group on current affairs and investigative reporting programs (from 7% in 2003 to 18% in 2005 to 32% in 2011) and a further increase in the visibility of already dominant groups: (secular) Jews and Ashkenazim (from 87% in 2003 to 75% in 2005 to 62% in 2011). The most conspicuous finding has to be the total disappearance of Arab citizens from the cultural landscape, that is, from programs in genres other than news or current affairs.

### ***Perceived Characteristics of the Group's Visibility***

One of the components used to examine the nature of representation is the context in which the groups appear on screen.

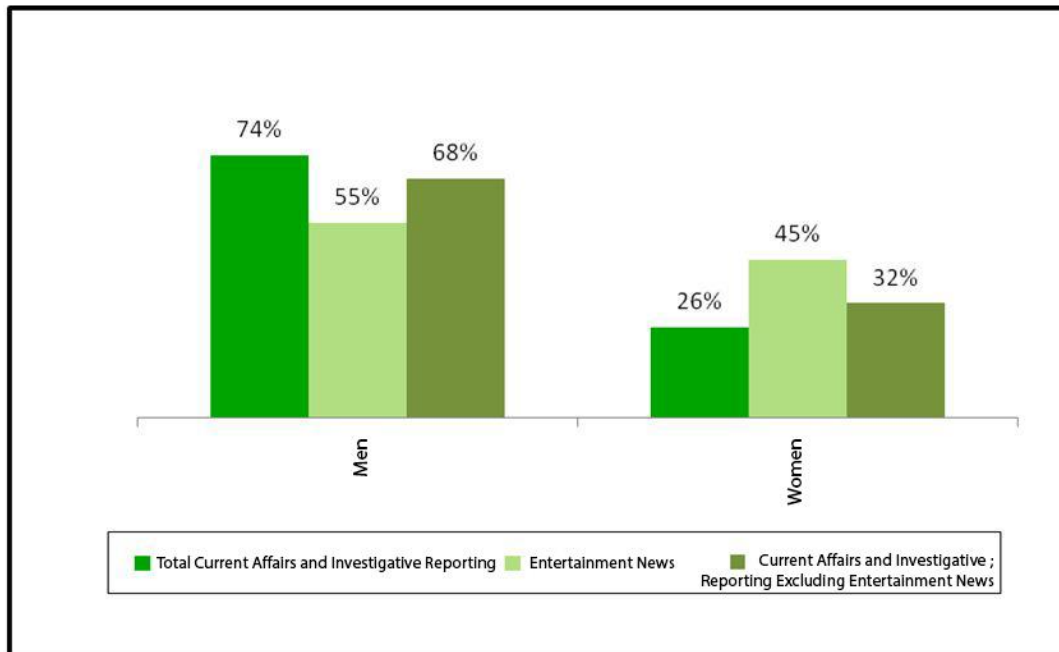
*Arab citizens of Israel.* As of 2011, as mentioned above, this group was still almost totally absent from the entire genre spectrum, and when it does appear, it is on an extremely limited scale, watched mainly in the context of news items or in current affairs programs that deal with topics associated with the group, mainly related to the Arab-Israeli conflict (73% in 2003, 60% in 2005, and 78% in 2011) and crime and violence (21% in 2003, 29% in 2005, and 55% in 2011). The group's absence from other discourses, such as the economic or cultural discourses, effectively reinforces and aggravates its exclusion from the public space, thereby facilitating its estrangement.

*Mizrahim.* Identifying and verifying the ethnicity of the analyzed characters was often difficult, but for those identified, it was found that the group appears in low percentages in newscasts (Mizrahim: 37% in 2003, 44% in 2005, and 30% in 2011; Ashkenazim: 63% in 2003, 56% in 2005, and 70% in 2011), current affairs and investigative reporting programs (32% in 2003, 47% in 2005, and 38% in 2011; Ashkenazim: 68% in 2003, 53% in 2005, and 38% in 2011) addressing central issues, including domestic politics and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But the group appears more often in the contexts of crime and violence (in current affairs and investigative reporting programs and in newscasts); in the contexts of disasters, accidents, and epidemics; and in entertainment items (on newscasts), as compared to the numbers of Ashkenazi characters in the same contexts.

*Women.* As a dominant group, women appear less often on the key topics featured in newscasts and current affairs programs<sup>8</sup> (22% in 2003, 27% in 2005, and 27% in 2011), but they appear more often in the contexts of quality of life, disasters and epidemics, ethical and moral aspects of everyday life (also on current affairs and investigative reporting programs), and gender relations. Thus, women are noticeably present in topics related to consumerism and self-improvement and in discussions of gender-relation issues, and even more so in reality, drama, and entertainment news genres. This type of representation could be construed as consistent with the evolution of the conception of *enlightened sexism* on the Israeli screen. As noted earlier, in 2011 a daily program that deals with entertainment news was included in the genre of news programs. Figure 1 indicates that although women appear more frequently on entertainment news programs, even in that genre they do not constitute the majority of characters.

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<sup>8</sup> The average of the percentages of both genres.



**Figure 1. Character appearance by subgenres: Current affairs and investigative reporting excluding entertainment news, and entertainment news 2011.**

*Subject or object?* To determine which groups enjoy the status of subjects, the inclusion of characters' biographies was examined with regard to whether they were presented with full names, titles, professions, places of residence, etc. In general, most characters were not anonymous, but there was a higher number of anonymous characters among those from weakened groups: women (in news programs) and Arabs (in current affairs and investigative reporting programs). It should be noted that in the 2011 study, there was a significant decrease in the percentage of anonymous characters (only 5%).

*The status index.* Among all the characters that appeared in all the genres, findings showed significant differences in the status index between dominant and minority groups in that the status of characters from the dominant groups was significantly higher than the status of characters from the minority groups. The status of men was higher than that of women; the status of Jews was higher than that of Arabs; and the status of Ashkenazim was higher than that of Mizrahim. It should be noted that over time, findings revealed a decrease in the average status of all the groups that appeared on screen, but with a significant discrepancy between men/Jews/Ashkenazim and Arabs/Mizrahim/women.

*The backstage index.* The data show a growing use of all groups of the back door as a gateway to various genres on the screen, with, however, significant differences (at 90%) between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim and between women and men using the backdoor. No significant differences were found between Jews and Arabs.

### ***The Perceived Power Relations Among Groups***

Power relations were examined using variables such as public figures and program moderators and experts invited to give professional opinions. One striking finding was that there were no Arab moderators at all. Among characters whose ethnicity was identifiable, 85% were Ashkenazim, compared to 15% Mizrahim. Women constituted 37% of the moderators, compared to 63% men. Power relations were also evaluated according to the role played by the personality/character in the item (owners of symbolic capital [expert/commentator/public figure] versus those without symbolic capital [common people]). Arab commentators and public figures appeared only on newscasts, and not once in any other genre. Here too, Jews with symbolic capital were the overwhelming majority (83% Jewish experts and public figures versus 35% Arab citizens in the same roles). It is interesting to note that even in lifestyle programs, where it would seem that gender relations would be biased in favor of women, the percentage of men (as experts and public figures) was still much higher (49% compared to 19% women).

In sum, in all the studies, the perceived hegemonic group whose presence transcends all genres is the group composed of Jewish men identified as Ashkenazim. This group dominates the entire spectrum of onscreen roles: subjects of coverage, actors, interviewees, commentators/experts, interviewers, and moderators. This means that the reproduction of the group's dominance relies not only on those *presented* but also on those *presenting*.

A review of the findings demonstrates the status quo of the three respective cleavages on screen: the complete lack of Arab representations, the still lacking representation of women, and a problematic representation of the Mizrahim. This last challenge is because Mizrahi identity, as mentioned above, is fluid; its construction is dynamic and undergoes changes so that it is effectively a hyphenated identity. It is therefore quite possible that the perceived participants, moderators, or commentators in various genres who choose to emphasize their Western cultural capital rather than their Mizrahi cultural capital have been identified by coders as Ashkenazim instead of as Mizrahim. Conversely, positive identification of Mizrahim as such always took place when the prevalent stereotypes regarding Mizrahim were conspicuously present among the participants, thereby perpetuating the reproduction of these stereotypes or, at best, authenticating or validating them.

All of these findings are consistent with research done in recent years both on the representation the Arab citizens in the Israel media (Elbaz, 2013; First, 2010) and on the representation of women in the media, despite the considerable development of women's status in "socio-political reality" (Lachover & Lemish, 2015) and with the ongoing debate about the role of Mizrahim in Israeli society (Alush-Levron, 2007; Bitton, 2011).

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

The main argument of this article followed the advice of Gramsci (1971) and used numbers as a tool to understand how hegemony is reconstructed (common sense) and deconstructed (good sense) to reveal the work of media representation in popular culture. As stated above, representation is a necessary process of the ongoing creation of meaning in a given society. This process contains at least three

components (visibility, the nature of this visibility, and power relations) and takes place through mechanisms of routinization. One of the key mechanisms in operation in society is cultural texts, and in our case, television programs. The most prevalent ideological routinization mechanism couched in these cultural texts is common sense; at the same time, this mechanism is being challenged by good sense. This process allows for discussion of cultural change along with the continued existence of cultural hegemony. In other words, the contribution of this conception is not limited to the discussion of the nature and quality of representation; it also provides a better understanding of the processes involved in designing, routinizing, and naturalizing, or challenging, the representation.

Israeli commercial television channels serve as a case study of the representations of diverse and deeply divided groups. This type of representation is the outcome of common sense penetrated by good sense. The relations between these two senses are displayed in the following matrix. By showing the existence of the two mechanisms, Table 2 contributes to our understanding of the nature of the change—i.e., whether it is merely qualitative or a more fundamental change that is related to the nature of the representation and its overall contribution to changing the power relations in society.

**Table 2. Common Sense, Good Sense, and the Work of Media Representation.**

	Visibility	Character	Power
National divide (Jews & Arabs)	Common sense dominates	Common sense dominates	Common sense dominates
Gender divide	Common sense heavily penetrated by good sense	Common sense partly penetrated by good sense	Common sense penetrated only to a limited extent by good sense
Ethnic divide	Common sense partly penetrated by good sense	Common sense partly penetrated by good sense	Common sense penetrated only to a limited extent by good sense

*The national divide.* The total absence of Arab citizens of Israel except from current affairs and investigative reporting programs seems to suggest their continual exclusion and is a fairly true reflection of the state of relationship between the Jewish and Arab citizens of the state of Israel in the sociopolitical reality since 2000. Thus, in this context it should be noted that the sample did not include *Arab Work*, an important comedy series written by an Arab Israeli scriptwriter and featuring Arab actors in the lead roles. The choice of producing *Arab Work* may indicate the trickle-down logic of good sense, especially because the origin of the writer, the player, and the show contain criticism of Jewish-Israeli society. Also not sampled were reality programs in which Arab women usually represent the Arab sector. The inclusion of these programs could have increased the representation rates of Arab citizens found in these other genres. It should also be noted that while the appearance of an Arab woman as a token in the various reality shows is indeed significant and can be seen as a sign of good sense, their positioning vis-à-vis Jewish society tends to not be critical or defiant and usually does not challenge the Jewish social-cultural

order.<sup>9</sup> In conclusion, it could be said that the colonialist common sense that regards the Arab citizens of Israel as concrete or potential enemies at worst or as marginal at best continues to be the dominant sense alongside a less than minimal growth in good sense.

*The gender divide.* There is still evidence of the existence of the gender cleavage. The quantitative aspect exposes the considerable discrepancy in prime-time programs between the number of men visible on screen and the number of women visible: 70% of the characters are men and 30% of them women. Thus, common sense still governed; that being said, however, we see a progressive increase in the quantity of women on screen, which indicates the filtration of good sense. In the context of these appearances, the percentage of women presented in private, personal contexts is much higher than that in the context of national issues. Thus, their rate of appearance in different genres is not uniform: In current affairs and news programs, fewer women were visible, whereas in lifestyle and reality shows, considerably more women were visible. Moreover, in news and current affairs programs, women consistently appeared more often on items concerning the private sphere (lifestyle, quality of life, etc.). Findings also showed that women's status index is still lower than the status index of men.

Regarding gender power relations, the percentage of women among moderators was still very low (only 37%). This finding underscores the weakened position of women, although the number has increased over the years. It would therefore seem that in the context of gender, good sense may have diffused somewhat into common sense, and the television industry may have begun to internalize good sense concerning women. But then how can we explain the phenomenon of enlightened sexism? Could it be said to challenge the concept of diffusion? There seems to be consensus among men and women alike that women occupy different and separate spaces—the public, the cultural, and the private. The problem is that this sensibility rekindles old fears in both genders, and these fears in turn revive and reinforce sexist stereotypes designed to re-demarcate male control in new ways.

*The ethnic divide.* The findings are far more complicated with regard to the ethnic divide. As noted above, the reliance on surnames or physical appearance to perceive identification (in many cases) is misleading and can impede correct identification. Many family names have been Hebraized, no longer offering clues in identifying an individual's ethnic origin. Physical markings have hybridized due to changes in education, consumption, and personal care habits. Furthermore, cultural markings have also hybridized due to a mixing of cultural characteristics used by both groups. The very fact that the study identified Mizrahi participants based solely on the stereotypes defining the ethnic cleavage is in itself a remarkable substantiation of the supremacy enjoyed by the Western Israeli culture associated with Ashkenazi descent. Therefore, while we can trace good sense in a process of change, common sense continues to position the two groups in a hierarchical order.

It should be noted that the usage of the same language in the tables with regard to women and Mizrahim stems from the similar processes of representation the groups have undergone: Both reflect a change for the better in terms of volume; in both groups, the characteristics of representation tend to be

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<sup>9</sup> For a detailed discussion, see Elias, Jamal, and Soker (2009).

stereotyped in accordance with the group (women, enlightened sexism; Mizrahim, stereotypes), and power relations are far from egalitarian.

As Gramsci argued, proper use of numbers helps in the discussion of normative theory. Hence, it seems that for the purpose of collecting evidence of the existence and transformation of social-cultural hegemony, administrative research is still a viable method for discussing issues of representation in the cultural world. Such research on the representation of groups is necessary because the media in general and television in particular serve as central sites for exposing the presence of social-cultural hegemony while examining how that hegemony is reproduced or fractured.

This case explains the reproduction process using the concepts of common sense and good sense and the interactions between them. It could be said that practitioners in the television industry are mostly governed by common sense and remain oblivious to good sense, which has intellectual and moral features and is supposed to illuminate, even if in narrowly defined borders, a perception of reality that may have become obscured by common sense. This is reflected distinctly wherever the Arab citizens of Israel, comprising a fifth of the country's population, are concerned. It seems that those involved in television content production, who are supposed to embrace and apply good sense and serve as the leading edge in illuminating new realities, instead revitalize and reshape the prevalent common sense. Thus, content producers have often failed in their attempts to adopt a normative approach to media studies to view public interest as one of the benefits that communication should be expected to provide.

This failure is all the more remarkable in view of the understanding that the generation of good sense is inherently linked with common sense and that it is within the reach of all social groups (not necessarily the hegemony). Indeed, a small item in *Haaretz* on March 11, 2013, reported that in a viewers' survey conducted by the Second Authority for Television and Radio,<sup>10</sup> the majority of the respondents (77%) said that cultural diversity was important to them. Furthermore, 72% of the respondents said that representation of women in current affairs and news programs was important, especially in areas that are generally perceived as "masculine" concerns.<sup>11</sup> According to the survey, viewers are of the opinion that minorities, including Israeli Arabs, are subject to negative coverage. A third of the respondents noted that Arab Israelis are presented negatively on newscasts and suffer from negative representation on reality, entertainment, and talk shows. Based on these findings, could it be that the Israeli commercial television industry has failed to update its own common sense in a manner that truly reflects the renewing sensibilities of its diverse viewership?

In sum, the introduction of the notion of good sense as a central concept in representation discourse enriches the normative approach to media studies. Applying this normative concept allows for a different perspective on the study of hegemony in the context of group representation on commercial media. As mentioned, good sense is not exclusive to the hegemonic group; instead, it resides in each of the members of a given society at a given point in time. Especially in an era when audiences regularly

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<sup>10</sup> The survey was conducted in September 2012 comprising 737 respondents in a representative sample of Israeli citizens.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.haaretz.co.il/gallery/television/1.1960572>



apply and refine good sense as they engage with the plurality of media and content, those involved in content production on commercial television channels (which in most countries are still the central channels of the public sphere) are increasingly required to apply critical tools—good sense—to express the social and moral responsibility expected of them.

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