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Opinion

Where have all the women gone?

New Jerusalem ad campaign seems to ignore major sector of population – women. Chana Pinchasi believes this is just one of many signs indicating religious polarization in capital

Chana Pinchasi

A recent Jerusalem bus ad promoting organ donation through National Transplant Center (ADI) perfectly summarizes the battle over the public sphere in Jerusalem.

The ad campaign asks Jerusalemites to sign an ADI donor card, yet it would seem that women are not invited to join the initiative. Apparently, they have not donated organs and do not need transplants. They are simply not there.

We've already seen the doctored images of super-model Bar Refaeli and the Transport Ministry ads for the Jerusalem Light Rail where only men and boys (with a completely secular "look") take the train, but I admit, the fallacious ADI ad placed on busses throughout the capital is a new red line.

This is an incomprehensible gap. Donating organs begins first and foremost, with our most human facet: We are all – women and men, religious and secular, Jews and Arabs, babies and senior citizens – ephemeral and vulnerable.

Signing an organ donor card is admitting that we fear what tomorrow will bring. Maybe I'll need a liver? Maybe one of my loved ones will suffer from heart failure?

And for one moment, there is the wish to prevent my loved ones from enduring the difficult dilemma of having to decide whether to donate organs without my expressed consent should I pass away.

Organ donation is the uppermost expression of mutual responsibility that offers hope. Having an ADI card in your wallet expresses a wide scope of human partnership, showing our capability as people to do good things.

But the ad on the Jerusalem busses undermines that worthy perception. It indicates that not everyone is equal, not everyone is taking part in the noble act in the same way, for example, women.

'Where will it end?'

Removing images of women from the public sphere is, in the eyes of the ultra-orthodox elements in society, a protection of their modesty.

As is fitting for a feminist religious woman like myself, I can understand that need. I have often been riled by the humiliating display of women on billboards. So does this mean there are only two options: Either humiliate women or erase them?

These two extremes share much more than the haredim would like to admit. The ADI ad is a



ADI donor card - where are the women?

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No Girls Allowed

Does Judaism want women to move over? / Rabbi Levi Brackman

Talmud indicates that people who display lack of Derech Eretz are more likely to sin. Those putting up signs in Brooklyn asking woman to step aside would do well focusing on that

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perfect example of a humane, equalitarian and respectful presentation of women. Are there really people who see sexual innuendo in such images?!

My question is, where will it end, what is the red line? Will it be with separate busses where women sit in the back respectfully or maybe with enclosed and separated sidewalks and silencing female soldiers at IDF ceremonies, and what about women serving in administrative roles in the rabbinical courts and so on?

I am well aware of the distinction and differences between the above examples, there are complexities, and yet: They all stem from the same outlook and interests devised between the ultra orthodox communities.

'Open, incisive public debate'

My anger is also related to the methods used by haredi society – the combination of violence and hidden campaigns behind closed doors with unmistakable results.

It is worth noting that the ADI campaign is possible because without even noticing, the city's public transportation system has bowed before haredi demands, and its busses are towing the line – no matter how innocent the women holding the ADI cards look in the pictures.

The lack of open dialogue on the boundaries of the haredi community, its demands on the public and creating accepted facts have led to anger that should be channeled to public pressure.

Haredi society and its leaders must be forced to take part in an open, incisive public debate that will bring about an understanding: What is our common space? How do we want it to look? And after a great deal of anger, mark boundaries that we can accept together.

Until such a debate is initiated we must not keep silent. We must not allow these norms to spread to the heart of the city, a city that must never again have a wall dividing it.

Chana Pinchasi is a doctoral candidate at the department of gender studies at Bar-Ilan University.

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