

“DO YOU EVEN UNDERSTAND WHAT OFF THE RACK MEANS?” AMERICANIZATION AND JEWISH IDENTITIES IN THE TELEVISION SERIES FRIENDS*

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes American Jewish identities in mega popular television series *Friends*. The story of the show is centered on six friends: three American Christians, and three American Jews. While the series present American Jews as a normal social reality, there are still problems in terms of their representation. This paper analyzes representation of American Jewish identities in terms of Jewish values and worldviews, and representation of Jewish faith and tradition. A qualitative content analysis of all 10 seasons of the popular show has been conducted. The conclusion of the paper is that the media are enforcing Americanization by creating a cast of Jewish Americans in the American popular culture where Jews are portrayed as Americanized in a sense they embrace Christianity as part of their tradition.

Keywords: Jews, *Friends*, representation, Americanization, religion

INTRODUCTION: MEDIA, IDENTITIES, AND JEWS

This paper discusses representation of American Jews in the US popular culture using mega popular TV series *Friends* as a case study. In that, the paper analyses representation of three Jewish characters in the series and juxtaposes this representation against Jewish tradition and religion, as well as against other scholarly work discussing representation of Jews in the popular culture as problematic.

Jews are often pictured as characters in American film and series, and on a first impression it appears that Jews have an equal status in the US, which is indeed the case as latest polls reveal that Anti-Semitism is at historically lowest level in the US while it is

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skyrocketing in Europe (Kantor 2016; FRA 2013; 2012; Hurd 2014; Rawstorne 2014; LeBor 2014; Baum and Rosenberg 2011; 2010; Evans 2002; Fine 2012; 2012a; 2009; Spencer 2012; 2010; Topić 2014). However, this does not mean that Jews in the US gained the current status easily, and it is considered that American Jews gained high status of integration during the 1960s (Goldstein 2006). But, unlikely for Europe where Jews had to fight for emancipation and citizenship rights that eventually resulted with *Haskalah*¹, in the United States citizenship status of Jews was never in question, and right from the beginning it was possible to be Jewish and American at the same time (Diner 1999). On the other hand, this equal status was always subject to attempts to assimilate Jews, and to define Jewish identity as secular ethnic identity of otherwise acknowledged white group (Stratton 2000; Jacobson 1999; Lipsitz 1998).

When it comes to media portrayal of identities, it is widely considered that media, and TV in particular, are intertwined with creating cultural identities, and this also means that movies and TV shows contribute towards creation of identities (Kosanović 2008). Furthermore, film and television are affecting image creation and shaping of values, and media messages educate and convince viewers of particular worldviews (Shaheen 1997).

What is very often a subject of academic debates is the question whether media (and TV in particular) influence public opinion, or public opinion can take messages from media and construct their own meanings (Lewis 2005). In this way, majority of researchers point to the fact that TV influences consciousness (e.g., Gerbner et al., 1980; Heide 1995; Iyengar 1991; Jhall and Lewish 1992; Lewis 2001; McKinley 1997; Ruddock 2001), however, there are also researchers that insist audience has their own power to make conclusions (e.g., Hills 2002; Hobson 1982; Hodge and Tripp 1986; Jenkins 1992). Marketing research has, for example, showed that information-processing and attention are not crucial for making purchase decisions because purchase decisions can be made even if consumers have not been attentive to advertising since information has entered subconscious level (Heath and Feldwick 2008; Fill 2013). When it comes to media audiences, there is no similar confirmation, but either way, people still watch TV program and despite predictions that claimed TV will lose its position due to new technologies and social networking this did not happen. On the contrary, people still prefer programs designed for collective viewing over on demand programs available at the Internet (Morley 2012; Gripsrud 2010; Marketing Charts 2016) albeit on-demand programs are on the rise. However, many on-demand channels have mainstream TV series available, and thus influence of TV series does not diminish even if people watch the live TV program less.

When it comes to Jews, they have a presence in the American popular culture and television in particular, however, Jewish identities are often presented through neuroticism of Jews, high maintenance of Jews in regard to marrying other Jews, devotion to material stuff such as an obsession with shopping, etc. (Blacher Cohen 1983). With this, audiences are taught about Jewish worldviews, and Jews are often presented in a stereotyped way. Nevertheless, they are also presented though their distinctive ethnicity while religious connotation is rarely present, and it seems that “there is a clear distinction between Jewishness, as ethnic identity, and Judaism, as a religion or a set of rites” (Abrams 2011:

¹ *Haskalah* was a movement that originated in 19th century Europe where a group of Jews (called *maskilim*) started to advocate modernisation and integration into secularising European societies. For more on *Haskalah* see Topić (2014a).

209). In other words, American cinema and television define Jews through their ethnicity that is largely secular.

The Jewish representation has been a problem since early days of Hollywood. At the beginning of mass production, Jews were rarely present in cinema and television; however, at first this was because Jewish producers wanted to hide their ethnic and religious identity to be able to appeal to larger US audience (Abrams 2011; Rockler 2006). This trend continued until *The Diary of Anne Frank* when Chanukah, as a religious holiday, was shown as an important aspect of Jewish faith (Abrams 2011). Chanukah is, however, portrayed as a Jewish equivalent for Christmas, and it is often emphasized that Jews celebrate American Thanksgiving and other holidays that have no religious connotation because of which some authors argued that Jews are portrayed as adherents to American civil religion (Rosenberg 1996) while Jewish holidays and Jewish religion remained historically downplayed (Rockler 2006; Abrams 2011). In many ways, when it occurs at all then representation of Jewish religion is framed inside limitations and as something that Jews abandon as soon as they can, such as in *Cast A Giant Shadow* where the character says:

My religion is American. I went to Temple at thirteen for my Bar-Mitzvah, and once it was over, I was done with the Jews. (Abrams 2011: 213)

Certain scholars recognized the situation not only as ethnic in favor of religious representation, but also as a conceptualization of Jews. In other words, Jews are depicted only as conceptually Jewish, or “literally conceived, more than represented, as Jews” (Brook 2003: 124). In practice, this means that Jewish characters express certain form of Jewish identification, but this identification is rarely religious and deep, and characters as such are represented through ethnic characteristics such as “physical appearance, names, profession, and locality” (Abrams 2011: 213). The ethnic characteristics cannot be attached to reality because Jews are rarely played by Jewish actors in order to truly represent the so-called Jewish look (Rockler 2006; Abrams 2011). This can also be applied to the popular sitcom *Friends* because Jews in the show can be described as conceptual Jews who “exhibit identifiably Jewish cultural and ethnic (although not usually religious) characteristics and were created by Jewish writers and producers, but their Judaism almost never is discussed or problematized” (Brooks 2003: 124).

Things started to (slowly) change from 2000 onwards with movies such as ‘Keeping the Faith’ (2000), ‘Meet the Parents’ (2000), ‘Meet the Fockers’ (2004) who present Jews in a more flexible and acceptable way, and as integrated in American society even though they still adhere to their distinctive tradition (Baskind 2007). Nonetheless, even when Jews are presented as cool, as Baskind (2007) argues for movie *Meet the Fockers*², or when they are presented as a normal American reality, like in TV series *Friends*, there are still problems in terms of their representation.

The situation with television is not much different than situation with film. For example, Byers and Krieger (2006) analyzed three shows that came on air when sitcom *Friends* was close to its end, or *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (aired for the first time in 2000), *Arrested Development* (aired for the first time in 2003), and *The O.C.* (aired for the first time in 2003). In that, the authors showed how series represented Jewish characters as privileged males who

² Meet the Fockers (2004), directed by Jay Roach, written by Greg Glienna, Mary Ruth Clarke, Jim Herzfeld, Marc Hyman, Jim Herzfeld, and John Hamburg. Universal Studio Entertainment, United States.

question their whiteness and who discuss their Jewishness. Authors argue that this representation of Jewishness is showing Jews as “both inside and outside of the sociocultural mainstream” (Byers and Krieger 2006: 279). In other words, characters are debating their identities by, for example, complaining to Jews who celebrate Christmas and who marry non-Jews in *The Curbs* while in the *Arrested Development* Jewish characters appear to be highly assimilated and not too visible, and in the *O.C.* Jews celebrate both Christmas and Chanukah (the *Christmukkah*) by having both Menorah and the Christmas tree (Byers and Krieger 2006).

In this paper, I am arguing that Jewish representation in the American television presents a continuum of historical stereotyping mentioned earlier in this section that adapted to new circumstances. In other words, while the representation was historically stereotyped, the fact that some of the shows present discussions among Jews on their Jewish identity does not mean that the discourse changed. I am arguing that this is not a problem of post-identity politics in the US (Rockler 2006), but a reflection of the general problem of Americanization that is being enforced on everyone who wants to be considered fully American. Therefore, representation of Jews in *Friends* that ended in 2004, and in shows that came on air in 2003 and continued after the lifetime of *Friends* is not much different because Jewish representation still remains based on questioning their distinctive identities and showing them as assimilated into Christian culture, or showing how a minority complain to the majority that accepts Christian tradition. This is a way of envisaging assimilation of Jews into predominantly Christian American culture, and this is done by secularizing Jews from their religion and founding their secular identity in Christian tradition.

The concept of Americanization and American identity founded on Christianity is something that is debated in the field of religious studies; however, this aspect seems to be missing from television debates. In other words, while television scholars acknowledge problematic representation of Jews in the American TV, they do not frame these discussions into a larger debate on whether America is secular. I selected sitcom *Friends* as a representative of this problem because it was broadcast on the turn of millenniums, and because the show presents a narrative of everyday lives of average Jewish and Christian Americans. Unlikely for some authors who labeled this show as “show about nothing” (Hibbs 1999), I believe this show bears importance due to the fact it appeals to population in their 20s and 30s, and the fact it never went off air due to its mass popularity on DVDs and online TVs. I also find this show important because it makes an attempt to show everyday lives of average Americans, or create an image on what the values are, and how they should be expressed in everyday lives.

AMERICANIZATION AND THE CHRISTIAN IDENTITY OF THE UNITED STATES

Americanization is a term describing practices of the United States including its alleged cultural imperialism, mass consumerism and sometimes modernization and industrialization (De Grazia 2008) that are used interchangeably. Most commonly, Americanization is debated through a propagandistic model of cultural imperialism where the United States are accused of imposing their cultural patterns and American way of life over world’s audience via

popular culture (American films and TV series) and American brands and food chains (e.g., McDonald's, Coca Cola, Levi's, etc.). In this, America is accused of imposing their values over the rest of the world without respecting local cultures, whereas local governments are powerless (Maoz 2000; Topić and Sciortino 2012; De Grazia 2008). This argument, when it comes to popular culture, apparently treats audiences as patients who are only passively absorbing media content (Haralambos and Holborn 2002) because critics point towards mass consumerism and behavioral patterns that the American popular culture supposedly imposes.

Americanization of pop culture is also used to describe “globalization of content” (Turner 2004) or creation of various entertainment shows for countries outside of the country of origin of the show (Griffin 2010) such as, for example, *The Survivor*. Americanization is also sometimes understood as if America is mass, cheap and somewhat vulgar as opposed to Europe that is authentic, individual and of good quality (De Grazia 2008; Maoz 2000). The latter is the reason why there is a strong anti-American sentiment in Europe, and particularly in France (Meunier 2005; Miller and Molesky 2004) that has been tirelessly working on positioning itself as a leading country of the EU that is as it is envisaged, meant to take a stronger position on the international scene and compete with the US (Topić and Sciortino 2012).

However, I am using Americanization as a term describing the American identity that is largely founded on Christianity albeit the US are officially secular. I understand the term Americanization beyond normative understanding of everyone being seen as Christian unless stated otherwise, or everyone being wished a Merry Christmas, a problem often emphasized by American authors (see e.g., Berger et al., 2008; Rockler 2006) because this is not only the problem in the US but a wider problem that exists in Europe as well. For example, I am also often being asked if I will be going home for Christmas given the fact I currently live in the UK but am originally from Croatia, and all other EU countries I ever visited slightly before Christmas had the same normative approach towards Christmas greetings.

Scholars from the field of religious studies also consider America to have its identity founded on Christianity unlikely for Europe that is seen as more secular than the United States (Berger 2001; Casanova 2006; Sherkat and Ellison 1999; Spohn 2003). Nevertheless, it has been argued that Europeans think that religion affects policy of the US too much while Americans think that Europe is too secular (Berger et al., 2008). This is often supported with evidences from researches on presidential elections in the US and debates on the EU Constitution, and whether religion should have place in such documents. Berger, Davie and Fokas (2008: 9) confirm that

it has become something of a cliché to state that the United States is a religious society, Europe a secular one (...) but it also becomes clear that the cliché does indeed mirror reality.³

Therefore, America is seen as religious while Europe is seen as the exceptional case, or as the only region in the world where religion does not have a major presence in the social world (Davie 2002; Berger et al., 2008). One reason for this situation can also be found in the Enlightenment where French laicism and the Kantian view of reason (Kant 1784) made an

³ The fact that religion plays an important role in the US has been recognized even by management scholars who debate how business and Corporate Social Responsibility are negotiated in US and Europe (see Doh and Guay 2006).

impact on Europe while the American Enlightenment was influenced by the European one, but it was framed inside libertarian policies of equality. This is in contrast to Europe that distanced from religion and shifted towards radical form of modernity, but remained unequal in regard to social classes.

While an argument that America is less secular than Europe may at first seem odd since certain European countries have official state churches, e.g., in the UK the Queen heads the Anglican church (Ichijo 2014; Berger et al., 2008) while the United States are officially secular, I am also arguing that this is true. In other words, I am arguing that the US identity *is* largely founded on Christianity, and that the media *impose* Christian identity as a desired American identity to everyone including Jews. In that, the media – and TV in particular – are trying to create an American identity that is largely Christian, and this identity is imposed over Jews by creating a cast of allegedly secular Jews in popular culture that embrace Christianity as part of their tradition and even religion. In other words, the media are not just ignoring Jewish religious holidays and distinctive tradition, they are forcing them to embrace Christianity by showing that it is perfectly all right to light Menorah for Chanukah while, at the same time, having the Christmas tree. I am also arguing that the representation of Jews is not particularly centered towards their distinctive culture, but towards mocking the religion. In that, I am building upon Abrams (2011) who noticed the problem of negative representation of Judaism as something oppressive and something Jews want to escape from, and adding that this is a historical discourse of *assimilationist* attempt of the US, just adapted over time to new circumstances.

In the following part I will demonstrate this problem on the example of the television series *Friends* where three Jewish characters are presented as a normal American reality, however, their identities are largely presented in a stereotyped way and as embracing Christianity not only as a part of their Jewish identity but also as a prevailing religious identity in some aspects.

I am arguing that there are three Jewish characters in the series, namely Monica Geller (Courtney Cox), Ross Geller (David Schwimmer), and Rachel Green (Jennifer Aniston). While Monica and Ross are openly called Jewish, Rachel is not explicitly said to be a Jew even though she does have a Jewish name and surname (Rachel Green), and she resembles many of stereotypes about Jews, especially about Jewish princesses “with her Long Island background, love of shopping, and sometimes superficial values” (Rockler 2006: 457; see also Zurawik 2003 and Brook 2003). However, towards the end of the show Ross’s parents behave in a way that, for me, discloses that she is Jewish and that her Jewish identity is the reason why they want her for their daughter in law. I will return to this issue in the last part of the article.

In *Friends*, American Jews are subject to two problematic representations: the already mentioned stereotyped views of Jews which are reflected in representation of Jewish worldviews and values, but also in the way American Jews are trying to be fully ‘Americanized’ in a sense, they are expected to integrate to the level to accept Christianity as part of their own religious identity. In the remaining part of the paper, I will therefore analyze representation of American Jewish identities in series *Friends* in terms of the representation of Jewish values and worldviews, and representation of Jewish faith and tradition. The analysis will show that even though Jews are presented as a normal social reality, their image

is far from balanced and freed from bias and stereotypes⁴. As such, the show makes an attempt to insert Christianity into Jewish everyday lives.

THE TELEVISION SERIES *FRIENDS*

Friends are the most popular sitcom ever produced due to its global popularity, which is visible in the fact that, as the show was going on, its stars were paid million dollars per episode. It was firstly broadcast in 1994, and it was on air until 2004. DVD sales are still strong. For example in the UK, in 2013, 77 000 DVD's were sold, and the show is gaining new audiences that were not even born when the show was first broadcast (Daily Mail 2013). The popularity and importance of the show is also visible in the fact scholars are pursuing researches on this show even though it is no longer on air (McNamara Barry and Madsen 2009; Rockler 2006; Tiljander 2007). Fans are still demanding continuation of the show, or a movie as it was the case with show *Sex and the City*. Facebook group is still alive offering constant reminders about the show, and it has 19,798,812 members.⁵ British Daily Mail (2013) reported that the show is as popular as ever even though it has been 20 years since it has been broadcast for the first time, and haircuts might be outdated. Nevertheless, *Comedy Central* still has episodes screened daily, which shows the popularity of the show even though in 2016 it is 12 years since the show ended, and 22 since it was first broadcast. The show even had an impact on the average talk of American teenagers. For example, Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005) argued that characters used the word 'so' in an excessive manner, which contributed towards change of talk among teenagers who up to today speak in that way, i.e., I am so not doing that, etc.

The show has been broadcast for 10 years and in 10 seasons American and world audience followed lives of average Americans from their independence from parents until adulthood. The story is centered on six friends and their everyday lives: Monica Geller (Courtney Cox), Ross Geller (David Schwimmer), Rachel Green (Jennifer Aniston), Chandler Bing (Matthew Perry), Joey Tribbiani (Matt LeBlanc) and Phoebe Buffay (Lisa Kudrow) who are in their 20s at the beginning of the show, and who live in the same area. They spend every day together in each other places and in a café house 'Central Perk' in New York City. Some scholars called the show as “show about nothing” (Hibbs 1999: 22) while I believe it has a value because it attempts to appeal to creation of values and expression of identities in everyday lives. McNamara Barry and Madsen (2009: 1) write that reason for popularity of the show can also lie in fact the show presented certain true life situations: “(a) friends can be a proxy family for young people, offering invaluable advice, support, and companionship; (b) friends can be of the same or opposite sex, but these two types of friendship work differently; (c) friends may engage in casual sex, but may also become involved romantically; (d) friendships are central to the lives of emerging adults, especially those who are single and not in a serious romantic relationship; and (e) friends help people to figure themselves out and influence their behavior, potentially for both good and bad.”

⁴ The fact that Jews are present in American television and film has, however, been of interest of the anti-Semites around the world who claim, in line with ancient prejudices against Jews, that Jews control the American media and that the American politics is a puppet in hand of Jews who are enforcing their interests and protecting Israel (see e.g., Wistrich 2002; FRA 2012; FRA 2013).

⁵ Retrieved 4 August 2016 at 2:48pm, UK time from: <https://www.facebook.com/friends.tv/likes>.

METHOD

For this analysis, I analyzed all episodes in all 10 seasons of TV series *Friends*. While I watched the series several times before (from the time the series were first broadcast until 2013), for the purpose of this research I watched all seasons three times and then in the fourth watching I was writing notes on each episode. When quoting the original statements of characters from my notes I also re-watched the scene to make sure the quotation is accurate. Watching the series for the purpose of this research was carried out during 2014 and 2015.

I focused on the portrayal of three Jewish characters, and the ways that dialogue and their statements reveal their identity, respect of tradition and faith, and their worldviews.

Examples outlined in the analysis below are the result of a content analysis I carried out based on my notes and perception of the series. Content analysis is particularly convenient for this type of research because it is considered as one of the most important research methods in the field of social sciences due to its ability to “analyze data within a specific context in view of the meanings someone – a group or a culture – attributes to them” (Krippendorff 1989: 403). In addition, content analysis is particularly convenient for an analysis aiming to describe the phenomenon that is the object of a study (Hsieh and Shannon 2005).

REPRESENTATION OF JEWISH IDENTITIES: VALUES, WORLDVIEWS AND HISTORICAL STEREOTYPING

The series *Friends* showed Jews as a normal American reality⁶, but it is still far from being freed from stereotyping. Three Jewish characters in the series – Ross Geller (David Schwimmer), Monica Geller (Courtney Cox) and Rachel Green (Jennifer Aniston) – grew up on Long Island in wealthy families, which is a typical Jewish representation⁷. In other words, Jews are always pictured through finances, hedonism and greediness, and this particularly applies to N. Y. Jews since New York has a large Jewish population, because of which some speak of Jew York (Bernstein 2013). Stereotypes about Jews from New York, in particular, are something that continually circulates in the public sphere.

For example, in 2013, a reality show at Bravo TV entitled *The Princesses of Long Island* was put on air⁸. The reality show followed six Jewish girls from Long Island in their daily routine, and presented them as girls whose only desire is to find the right person to get married, and naturally they all come from wealthy families and expect to keep living up to the standard. This show, if its characters are deconstructed, shows the historical stereotyping of the American Jews and girls who cast in the show resemble all stereotypes of typical Jewish women. These stereotypes are present in the sitcom *Friends* that was broadcasted before *The Princesses of Long Island* show, which means not much has changed. Girls in the show are

⁶ This is visible in the amount of mentioning Jewish practices throughout the lifetime of the show. For example, in the first season friends were playing basketball with Hassidic Jews (The One With the Thumb, Season, One, 6th October 1994), Chandler dates Jewish women who served Israeli army (The One With The Butt, Season One, 27th October, 1994), Joey’s ex flat mate was Jewish (The One With The Blackout, Season One, 3rd November 1994), Ross brings Israeli wine to celebrate promotion at work (The One With Princess Consuela, Season Ten, 26th February 2004), etc.

⁷ In words of Sydney Harris: “...if the Jews have financiers, all Jews are part of an international conspiracy...” (Harris 1986 in Shaheen 1997: 11).

⁸ Retrieved 29th December 2013 from: <http://www.bravotv.com/princesses-long-island>.

presented as not attending parties before the Shabbat ends, being keen for fashion, getting married for the right person, and staying at home raising children and living up to the standard. Even when these girls work, this is shown as not serious because they work in fashion industry and similar fields, and despite the fact they have degrees and work for what they have the representation is still stereotyped. For example, Joey Lauren is shown as a heartbroken girl who is in no rush to settle down, and who is trying to start a business by having a line of lip conditioning gloss packed with breath freshening drops. Even though she has a modest budget she makes her appearance important, as the show is teaching us. Amanda Bertoncini is presented to work hard ‘for her tiara’ by running a business that sells high-fashion drink holders, and as having a great sense for fashion, wealthy fiancé and a luxury life ahead of her⁹. The reality show in a first episode did a remake of Jon Bon Jovi’s famous song ‘You had me at hello’ to ‘You had me at shalom’, and it generally emphasizes Jewish tradition and culture on Long Island. Jewish tradition and culture are largely presented through hedonism, and as if Jewish girls are only interested in fashion and luxury goods. This applies even to Jewish girls who study and work hard for the lifestyle they have, such as Casey Cohen in *Princesses of Long Island* show, or Rachel Green in *Friends* as I will discuss below. This representation is a general problem in American television where Jews are often portrayed as high maintenance in terms of their pickiness when it comes to finding a Jewish partner, and female characters are portrayed as only keen to find pleasure in shopping (Baskind 2007) and fashion.

In the same way, three Jewish characters in series *Friends* resemble much of the general stereotyped views of Jews in popular culture. In that, Rachel (and her sisters when they appear in the series) is a typical spoiled princess from Long Island who knows everything about fashion, expensive shoes, cosmetics, and generally has no understanding of the real life. This is best seen in the first episode¹⁰ when she comes to live with Monica and says she will go tomorrow to get a job by saying: ‘I’m gonna go get one of those job things.’ Things in her life changed when she realized she does not love her rich fiancé Barry (a wealthy dentist owning a private practice on Long Island), and when she leaves him at the altar and runs to the New York City. In the City, she finds Monica and starts the ‘real life’ by waitressing in the bar ‘Central Perk’ where Monica and her friends hang out every day. However, at first, Rachel is unable to understand that she cannot live from ‘daddy’s credit cards, and friends had to force her to cut the cards off and to start the ‘real life’. Her character is in many ways similar to the reality show *Princesses of Long Island* where daddy’s girls do not work but only look for the right person to get married, stay at home, raise children and socialize with other likeminded women on charity events and luxury lunches. Even after Rachel started ‘the real life’ and obtained employment, her character still resembles princess trait because she is only interested in fashion, and she eventually finds a job it is in the fashion industry. Like *Princesses of Long Island* show, she is also presented as spoiled even though she works hard in the fashion industry and starts from the bottom, like everybody else¹¹. Throughout the series, when she starts making money from the fashion industry, she is constantly shopping,

⁹ For profiles of all contestants, see the following links: <http://www.bravotv.com/princesses-long-island>;
<http://www.bravotv.com/people/chanel-coco-omari/bio>; <http://www.bravotv.com/people/ashlee-white/bio>;
<http://www.bravotv.com/people/joey-lauren/bio>
<http://www.bravotv.com/people/erica-gimbel/bio>; <http://www.bravotv.com/people/casey-cohen>
<http://www.bravotv.com/people/amanda-bertoncini/bio> (Retrieved 29 December 2013)

¹⁰ *Friends*, First season, Pilot, 22nd September 1994.

¹¹ *Friends*, Season three, The One When Rachel Quits, 12th December, 1996.

and she is expressing an extreme interest in expensive stuff and accessories. For example, when Monica buys overpriced boots, Rachel notices new expensive boots as soon as she walks in the room¹².

Rachel's two sisters are also typical princesses, i. e. Jill (Reese Witherspoon) is also only talking about fashion and men, and she comes to Rachel to stay with her to try to find a job as she did, but fails and returns home¹³. On the other hand, her sister Amy (Christina Applegate) is hopeless. She is constantly talking about diets and rich men, she is not able to remember what the name of Rachel's baby is when she gets one¹⁴, she is seeing a married men¹⁵, and later in the show she is planning to get married for her ex-boyfriend's father because he is rich and has a nice apartment¹⁶. Rachel's mom (Marlo Thomas) is also a princess who married Rachel's father too young, and when she decided to divorce she came to Rachel to ask for understanding because as she states, Rachel did not marry her Barry while she married hers.¹⁷ Later in the show, Rachel also mentions that her mom only talks about Atkins diet¹⁸, which also resembles the identity of rich Jewish women only being concerned with personal appearance.

On the other hand, Monica falls in the category of a typical neurotic Jew with high maintenance Jewish parents. She is presented as a neighbor from Rachel, but her family is not shown as wealthy as Rachel's. However, it is clear that Monica is not coming from a poor family either. For example, Monica's parents have their own family newsletter published and distributed in Long Island, which shows their status. Her mother (Christina Pickles) also often accuses her of being unsuccessful because of being a chef and not being married, she never likes anything Monica does, and she is extremely critical of her, which is causing anxiety to Monica every time she has to see her parents. For example, when they are supposed to come to Monica's place, Monica is always on the edge of a nervous breakdown, they turned her room to a gym while they kept Ross's room, and when there was a flood in the house her father (Elliott Gould) did not pay attention that all of her stuff will be ruined because of keeping Porsche safe from the water with boxes with her memories from childhood.¹⁹ As a person, Monica is shown as a control freak having to have everything under control, having superior organizing skills, bossing everyone around, and obsessed with cleaning. The cleaning trait shows Monica in a Jewish way in terms of her house being kosher (what Chandler states explicitly in one episode²⁰) and in fact she does not want animals in the house even though she loves dogs.²¹ Monica is shown as a typical neurotic Jew, which has been one of the characteristics of Jewish portrayal in the American television (Baskind 2007). What is quite interesting is that Monica turns out to have one closet in which she has a mess, which brings the question of normality, i.e., is it normal to be as tidy as she is? Would she like to be like everyone else but she cannot due to her Jewish identity and, thus, she has one closet with her true nature while she acts like an obsessive Jew towards the outside?²² Is it too restrictive

¹² Friends, Season eight, The One with Monica's Boots, 6th December 2001.

¹³ Friends, Season three, The One with Rachel's Sister, 3rd February 2000.

¹⁴ Friends, Season nine, The One with Rachel's Other Sister, 21st November 2002.

¹⁵ Friends, Season ten, The One When Rachel's Sister Baby-sits, 30th October 2003.

¹⁶ Friends, Season Ten, The One When Rachel's Sister Baby-sits, 30th October 2003.

¹⁷ Friends, Season Two, The One With The Lesbian Wedding, 18th January 1996.

¹⁸ Friends, Season Ten, The One with Rachel's Going Away Party, 29th April 2004.

¹⁹ Friends, Season Seven, The One When Rosita Dies, 1st February 2001.

²⁰ Friends, Season Nine, The One With The Pediatrician, 10th October 2002.

²¹ Friends, Season Seven, The One Where Chandler Doesn't Like Dogs, 23rd November 2000.

²² Friends, Season eight, The One with the Secret Closet, 31st January 2002.

to be a Jew and observe the religion by keeping the house kosher? This is very much in line with typical representation of Judaism as restrictive religion that Jews run away from (Abrams 2011).

Finally, Ross has a PhD in Paleontology and works in the museum and later as a College professor. He has been married to a gentile Carol (Jane Sibbett) who turned lesbian, but he has been in loved with Rachel since the 9th grade. He is the favorite child of his and Monica’s parents due to the fact he is successful, and he is shown as a geek who always bores his friends with scientific topics that do not interest them, and as slightly neurotic. His character very much resembles a textbook image of a geek only interested in science and having low social skills (American Heritage Dictionary 2013; Merriam Webster’s Dictionary 2013). As a person Ross is labeled as a ‘good guy’ who is always there for his friends including even when Joey is in loved with Rachel, and he lets him try something with her even though it clearly bothers him.²³ However, Ross is also shown as a hedonist interested in shopping and expensive stuff²⁴, which is not the case with Chandler and Joey. In this respect, his character is similar to Jewish boyfriend Carrie dates in *Sex and the City*, who is portrayed as a genuinely nice guy but bad in bed (Berger 1996). In the case of Ross, he is not shown as bad in bed but he is shown as somewhat feminine because he uses masks and facial creams, and is too much into shopping²⁵. Unlikely for Joey and Chandler, he is also shown as cheap and this is mostly visible in his behavior in hotels when he is taking everything (soaps, toilet paper, salts, shampoos, tampons, etc.) in order to get what he paid for²⁶, he is never buying anything from hotel mini-bar²⁷, and he does not leave his room before noon even if he has nothing to do in a hotel anymore²⁸.

REPRESENTATION OF JEWISH FAITH AND TRADITION

Another important aspect of the television series *Friends* is the question of faith and tradition, which is rarely discussed since majority of films and television series project the so-called conceptualized Jews (Brooks 2003), or they portray Judaism as a religion negatively and as an unwanted burden (Abrams 2011).

When it comes to the portrayal of the Jewish faith in *Friends*, it is clear that not only has it been explicitly shown as threatened by predominant Christianity, but Christianity is imposed over Jews and Jews seem to be so engaged with Christianity to an extent that even Monica mocks Ross over insisting that his son learns about Chanukah²⁹. Of three Jewish characters in the series, Ross is the only one that has a feeling for Judaism as a religion as I will discuss below with example from the episode on holiday armadillo.

The fact that Christianity threatens Judaism is not a new phenomenon. Jews exist in America since British colonial time; however, at early days they have been the targets of

²³ Friends, Season Ten, The One After Joey and Rachel Kiss, 25th September 2003; The One Where Ross Is Fine, 2nd October 2003.

²⁴ Friends, Season Six, The One with the Apothecary Table, 6th January 2000.

²⁵ Friends, Season Seven, The One with the Cheap Wedding Dress, 15th March 2001; Friends, Season Six, The One with The Apothecary Table, 6th January 2000.

²⁶ Friends, Season Nine, The One with Rachel’s Dream, 17th April 2003; Season Seven, The One With Monica and Chandler’s Wedding, Part II, 17th May 2001; Season Nine, The One in Barbados, Part II, 15th May 2003.

²⁷ Friends, Season Five, The One in Vegas – Part I, 20th May 1999; The One in Vegas – Part II, 20th May 1999.

²⁸ Friends, Season Seven, The One with Monica and Chandler’s Wedding –Part II, 17th May 2001.

²⁹ The One with the Holiday Armadillo, 14 December 2000; see also Rockler (2006).

missionary work from Protestant churches (Cohen 1999). In this sense, TV showed a reality of the situation. However, the TV is enforcing a type of cast that shows American Jews embracing Christmas as their tradition, by mocking or rejecting Judaism. Therefore, the TV shifted from merely stereotyping Jews and imposing Christmas as an American commercial and civil holiday in an attempt to show that ‘real’ American Jews reject Judaism. This could be the case because Jews reacted negatively and even with hostility to attempts to impose Christmas over them (Flynn 1993), and therefore television series imposed this view by showing how the situation should be. If we take into consideration the fact that American Enlightenment was not framed in anti-Christian context and that the US is not as secular as Europe is, then this indeed makes sense because in secular Europe nobody is imposing Christianity over Jews nor there are researches showing that Jews are encouraged to embrace Christianity (Dencik 1999). On the other hand, in the US, the television is trying to show that Jews *should* embrace Christianity by enforcing these views.

Naturally, one could say that Christian America gives all rights to Jews despite its religiosity while secular Europe is prosecuting Jews because of which many are leaving Europe. While this is largely true, this is also a different topic of inquiry, as this requires analyzing other issues such as European guilt for Holocaust, European modernity, Jewish anxiety over influence of rapidly growing Muslim communities in Europe and similar issues.

When it comes to *Friends*, first example, which is clearly acknowledging that Jewish identity is being threatened is found in season seven, episode ‘The One With the Holiday Armadillo’³⁰, when Ross teaches his son Ben³¹ about Chanukah. I will not explain this episode in details because Rockler (2006) wrote an entire paper on it. However, it is important to emphasize that Ben who lives with his mom and her partner Susan (Jessica Hecht) does not even know he is half Jewish, and barely lets Ross teach him about Chanukah as he insist on Santa Claus for that year’s holidays. Ross comes as holiday armadillo who, with the help of Chandler dressed as Santa Claus teaches Ben about Chanukah and, at the end of the episode, Ben is lightening candles on Menorah with Armadillo and Santa while Ross is satisfied for being able to teach Ben about the miracle of Chanukah. However, in order to get the child interested in Judaism Ross needed help from the Christian symbol of Christmas. This episode clearly showed challenges of inter-married families, as well as challenges of assimilation. In this case, Ben’s mom is not Jewish and, thus, Ben is confronted with Christmas and Christian traditions because of which he barely even knows about his Jewish identity. From one point, this can be understood through the role of a mother who is in this case not Jewish, but from another point this can also be understood as a challenge of assimilation of Jews due to inter-faith marriages and an overwhelmed presence of Christianity in the American society despite official claims that the United States are not founded on Christianity. However, inter-marriage does not represent the reality here because even inter-faith couples preserve at least some aspects of Judaism while Ben did not even know he is half Jewish. Nevertheless, preserving Jewish identity is a requirement in some streams of Judaism such as Reform Judaism that asks for children to be raised as Jews only.³² What is also striking in the series is that Monica as a Jewish women expresses no interest to help Ross

³⁰ 14th December 2000.

³¹ Various actors played this character: Michael Gunderson, Charles Tomas Allen and John Christopher Allen (seasons three to five), and Cole Sprouse (seasons six to eight).

³² See, for example, here: <http://www.reformjudaism.org/ask-rabbi-topic/children-intermarriages> (Retrieved 10 November 2014).

but mocks his efforts instead while Rachel (as a hidden, or conceptualized Jew) makes fun of him (Rockler 2006).

In the second instance, the problem of the Americanization of the Jewish identity is visible when it comes to the celebration of holidays, i.e., the series show that Ross and Monica always celebrated Christmas together with Chanukah, which is again an imposition of Christmas over Jews and equalization of Chanukah with Christmas. The latter is also a historical problem in the US television (Rockler 2006; Abrams 2011). Monica and Ross, therefore, often mention celebrating Christmas and decorating the Christmas tree every year, and this is shown many times in the series.³³ They, however, never mention celebrating Easter, which means that the series is accepting typical American view according to which Christmas is not considered as a religious holiday but only as an American commercial holiday.³⁴ This is an American response to European criticism of the United States because Christianity is so deeply founded in the American society. Naturally, Jewish communities reject this view and state Jews do not celebrate Christmas, and research suggests that American Jews started to celebrate Chanukah more intensively than they normally would to avoid the trap of their children being dragged into celebrating Christmas (Berman 2012; Abramitzky et al., 2012). In other words, no Jewish religious stream (Orthodoxy, Conservative or Reform) recognizes Christian holidays as part of Jewish tradition. Confusion often arises from Reform Judaism that recognizes inter-faith marriages in the US; however, not even Reform Judaism recognizes Christian tradition. In its declarations of principles³⁵, the movement only recognizes Christianity as equal to Judaism and as the legitimate attempt to understand the infinitive like Judaism, but all other practices are to be Jewish only. Jews who are not raised as Jews and inside Jewish tradition are not considered as Jews even if both of their parents are Jewish, and let alone if their parents observe Christian tradition (or parts of it) by their own will. Nevertheless, many Jews feel hostility towards Christmas, or “Yule-

³³ Friends, Season One, The One With the Monkey, 15th December 1994; Season One, The One With Two Parts – Part Two, 23rd February 1995; Season Two, The One With Phoebe’s Dad, 14th December 1995; Season Three, The One When Rachel Quits, 12th December 1996; Season Four, The One With Chandler In A Box, 20th November 1997; Season Four, The One With The Girl From Poughkeepsie, 18th December 1997; Season Six, The One With The Routine, 16th December 1999; Season Seven, The One With All The Candy, 7th December 2000; Season Seven, The One With The Holliday Armadillo, 14th December 2000; Season Nine, The One With Christmas in Tulsa, 12th December 2002.

³⁴ See polls and articles on this issue, e.g., <http://www.religionnews.com/2013/12/17/poll-christmas-commerical-holiday-sacred-holy-day-americans/> (12th January 2014); <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/12/22/christmas-religious-secular-poll/4073205/> (12th January 2014); Hammerman, J. (2011). Responding to Merry Christmas, *The Jewish Week*, 9th December 2011. Retrieved 12th January 2014 from: <http://www.thejewishweek.com/features/hammerman-ethics/responding-merry-christmas>; *Judaism About* (2014). How should a Jew respond to a “Merry Christmas” greeting? Retrieved 12th January 2014 from: http://judaism.about.com/od/interfaithquestions/f/xmas_greet.htm; *Being Jewish* (2014). Should Jews Have Christmas Trees? Retrieved 12th January 2014 from: <http://www.beingjewish.org/jewishemail/resp121407.html>; *Moment* (2005). Should Jewish children sing Christmas carols? Retrieved January 12th 2014 from: <http://www.momentmag.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Should-Jewish-Children-Sing-Christmas-Carols.pdf>;

³⁵ See Declaration of Principles for Reform Judaism (1885). Retrieved 6 November 2014 from: <http://ccarnet.org/rabbis-speak/platforms/declaration-principles/>; The Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism (1937). Retrieved 6 November 2014 from: <http://ccarnet.org/rabbis-speak/platforms/guiding-principles-reform-judaism/>; Reform Judaism: A Centenary Perspective (1976). Retrieved 6 November 2014 from: <http://ccarnet.org/rabbis-speak/platforms/reform-judaism-centenary-perspective/>; Reform Judaism and Zionism: A Centenary Platform (1997). Retrieved 6 November 2014 from: <http://ccarnet.org/rabbis-speak/platforms/reform-judaism-zionism-centenary-platform/>; A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism (1999). Retrieved 6 November 2014 from: <http://ccarnet.org/rabbis-speak/platforms/statement-principles-reform-judaism/>

ism,” a term coined by Flynn (1993) to explain assumption that all Americans celebrate Christmas even if they are Jewish.

Contrary to official Jewish position, the series shows Monica sharing Christmas messages such as that Christmas is more about being with the ones you love³⁶, or that Chandler as her husband should be at home for Christmas because that is the time people spent with their loved ones³⁷. The story of Christmas does not end here. Ross also tells friends a story of Christmas trees and their history, and Rachel and Phoebe are looking for Christmas gifts that Monica bought them so to know what to buy to her³⁸. In season seven, Monica is making candies for her neighbors to get to know them better, to make them love her, and to spread the Christmas joy. At the same time, she has a blanket with David’s star in a front of the Christmas tree³⁹, and in some other episodes we can see that she has both the Christmas tree and a Menorah⁴⁰. It is also revealed that Monica always had to decorate the Christmas tree in their family.⁴¹ At the same time, Ross knows very little about Christianity, which again makes an attempt to show that Christmas is not a religious holiday but more of a civil American holiday deeply founded in the American identity. This is visible, for example, in the episode ‘The one in Barbados: Part Two’⁴² when Ross says to Chandler he will take the New Testament from the hotel, and Chandler ask him why since he is Jewish. Ross then replies: ‘To learn about Jesus’⁴³. Ross, Monica and Rachel also exchange gifts for Christmas, which is most clearly visible in season four, episode ‘The One With Chandler In The Box’⁴⁴ when friends since many of them are jobless, decide to buy one present to one person using the rule of the Secret Santa. Ross gets Monica, but asks Chandler to trade because he is as he states, already buying Monica gift for Chanukah, which is again bringing the notion of dual celebrations amongst American Jewry. When Rachel asks Chandler if he would like to get a handset for phone calls for Christmas, Ross angrily asks: “Should we all expect gifts that are stolen from your office?”⁴⁵

There is only one concept from the Jewish tradition that are clearly visible in the whole series. That is, firstly, the concept of ‘zivug’, or a perfect match that exists in Judaism. According to the tradition, every person has a soul mate and before a girl is born God says: She will marry XY (Goldwasser 1995), which means that every girl has the right men waiting for her somewhere. This is, in the series, visible with Monica and Chandler who, as it turns out, were meant to be together since it was revealed their crush exists since Monica’s High school time.⁴⁶ Even though there was no romantic connection between them in years when they were neighbors, with a strange line of events at Ross’s second wedding⁴⁷, Monica and

³⁶ Friends, Season Six, The One With The Routine, 16th December 1999; Season Nine, The One With Christmas in Tulsa, 12th December 2002.

³⁷ Friends, Season Nine, The One with Christmas in Tulsa, 12th December 2002.

³⁸ Friends, Season Six, The One with the Routine, 16th December 1999.

³⁹ Friends, Season Seven, The One with All the Candy, 7th December 2000.

⁴⁰ Friends, Season Seven, The One with the Holliday Armadillo, 14th December 2000.

⁴¹ Friends, Season One, The One with the Monkey, 15th December 1994.

⁴² Friends, Season Nine, The One in Barbados – Part Two, 15th May 2003.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ 20th November 1997.

⁴⁵ Friends, Season Four, The One with Chandler in the Box, 20th November 1997.

⁴⁶ Friends, Season Five, The One with All the Thanksgivings, 19th November 1998; Season Six, The One That Could Have Been – Part One, 17th February 2000; Season Six, The One That Could Have Been – Part Two, 17th February 2000;

⁴⁷ Friends, Season Four, The One with Ross’s Wedding – Part One, 7th May 1998; Season Four, The One with Ross’s Wedding – Part Two, 7th May 1998.

Chandler end up together on a one night stand but then turn out to become a happy couple first living together, then marrying and then adopting children. Ross and Rachel are also presented as meant to be together, and friends generally tend to believe there is one right person for everyone⁴⁸. Even Phoebe, who was presented as a quirky non-Jewish girl found her right person by an accident⁴⁹, and eventually married him. This shows that Judaism and Christianity and their distinctive traditions are shown as merged in the US; however, we can still consider it as a challenge of assimilation because the concept of ‘zivug’ is a minor attribution to Jewish culture in comparison to what seems to be expected from Jews, i.e., embracement of a holiday that celebrates birthday of a person Christians consider as Messiah that undermines one of the founding postulates of Judaism as a religion.

The other aspect of Judaism that is shown is the high maintenance of Jewish parents who expect their children to marry with Jews, which is a continuation of stereotyping. In *Friends*, this is particularly visible when Ross’s parents are trying to convince Ross and Rachel to marry by telling their friends at Long Island they are married when they got a child⁵⁰, and by giving Ross grandmother’s ring to propose Rachel when she was about to give birth to Ross’s child⁵¹. This episode, for me, clearly revealed that Rachel is Jewish. This also clearly shows the importance of marrying other Jews, and particularly when women is in stake, i.e., when Monica wants to marry Chandler there is no problem with that, and the conclusion that can be drawn is that because Monica is female their children will be Jewish. In the same way, they want Ross to marry Rachel while they did not express so much interest in Ross marrying Carol and Emily when it happened before. On the contrary, when Ross gets a daughter with Rachel, his father looks moved, and states she is his first grandchild⁵² implying that the baby Rachel delivered is Jewish and, thus, the only one that counts even though Ross already has a son with Carol who is not Jewish. All friends express outrage with statement from his father, which again brings the framing of Judaism as oppressive and being against love, and only seeking finding a Jewish partner no matter what. This is again something Jews should apparently reject. Representing love as the only thing that matters is also a common way of presenting Jews as marrying gentiles in the US television (Pearl and Pearl 1999) where it is often showed how Jews want to marry out of their religion, which brings problems because, as Abrams (2011) argues, Judaism as religion is shown as oppressive.

Weddings also have an immensely important place in the series because all three female characters are obsessed with weddings and marriages. This very much resembles the stereotype of Jewish princesses who even though no longer live lives typical of their family circle remain devoted to expensive weddings and luxury. However, what is striking is that weddings are shown only in Christian tradition. For example, when Rachel runs away from her wedding, she states she left Barry at the altar⁵³ and after she becomes Maid of Honor at his second wedding the ceremony looks like a Christian wedding⁵⁴. While we do not know

⁴⁸ *Friends*, Season Eight, The One Where Joey Tells Rachel, 28th February 2002.

⁴⁹ Phoebe and Joey agree to set each other up on blind dates, but Joey forgets. When Phoebe asks him about the name of her date, he lies Mike and then goes to Central Perk café and shouts ‘Mikel!’ to see if someone answers. One guy does, and this eventually turns out to be Phoebe’s future husband (*Friends*, Season Nine, The One with Pediatrician, 10th October 2002).

⁵⁰ *Friends*, Season Eight, The One in Massapequa, 28th March, 2002.

⁵¹ *Friends*, Season Eight, The One Where Rachel Has A Baby – Part I, 16th May, 2002.

⁵² *Friends*, Season Nine, The One Where No One Proposes, 26th September 2002.

⁵³ *Friends*, Season One, Pilot, 22nd September 1994.

⁵⁴ *Friends*, Season Two, 16th May 1996.

who Barry's second wife is, Barry's surname does reveal Jewish identity and therefore we might ask why were his and Rachel's wedding framed into Christianity. Monica, on the other hand, also had a Christian-looking wedding⁵⁵. While it is obvious that Monica was not able to have a Jewish wedding since Chandler is not Jewish, her wedding resembled too much Christianity in it (Rockler 2006). On the other hand, this is also a typical representation of a Jew marrying with gentile. As Pearl and Pearl (1999) argue, it has been very common to pair Jews with gentiles so that larger American audience can identify with the couple since they, as directors seems to believe, cannot identify with a Jewish couple only. Monica's wedding also had an altar, and the only sign that the marriage is not Christian is the fact it was performed by a civil servant, who is in this case her and Chandler's friend Joey who got ordained online, and got authorized to perform weddings by the State of New York⁵⁶. Ross's wedding with Emily also had an improvised altar in the city hall in London, and resembles no similarity to Jewish weddings, or an inter-faith wedding.⁵⁷ Both Ross's and Monica's wedding show Maid of Honor and Best Man but these roles look Christian and there is no chuppah, or any other aspect of Jewish wedding ceremonies such as marriage contract, recital of blessings, or any other aspect to point out that the wedding is inter-faith.

What is particularly emphasized is the importance of wedding and luxury that is supposed to go with, which is very much a stereotype of the Jewish princesses, a concept already explained. Therefore, Monica dreams about her wedding, and she expects her parents to pay for it from 'Monica's wedding fund', however, since she is not a favorite child it turns out parents spent money for her wedding. After Monica says she has no money for the wedding, Rachel starts to cry because Monica will not be able to afford, among others, rustic Italian feast and satin gown but off the rack wedding gown. When Chandler asks Monica and Rachel why it is so important to have an expensive wedding, Rachel angrily asks him 'Do you even understand what off the rack means?'"⁵⁸ When Monica eventually goes to buy a cheap wedding gown in a shop in Brooklyn, Rachel looks intimidated for being there, and comments in surprise on the way Brooklyn looks like.⁵⁹ Another issue with luxury weddings occurs when Phoebe says she will marry in the city hall and Monica almost faints, and states that weddings are more important than donating wedding money for children in need.⁶⁰ When Rachel and Phoebe argue which one of them will be Monica's Maid of Honor Rachel explains how she was preparing for Monica's wedding by keeping something blue, something new, something borrowed and something old, and she says how she and Monica dreamed about being Maid of Honor to each other in childhood⁶¹. This same story about something new, blue, borrowed and old is shown when Monica and Chandler first decide to get married in Las Vegas, and when she takes Chandler to the store to find something new, and then

⁵⁵ Friends, Season Seven, The One with Monica and Chandler's Wedding - Part One, 17th May 2001; The One with Monica and Chandler's Wedding - Part Two, 17th May 2001.

⁵⁶ Season Seven, The One with Truth about London, 22nd February 2001; The One with Cheap Wedding Dress, 15th March 2001.

⁵⁷ Friends, Season One, Pilot, 22nd September 1994; Season Four, The One with Ross's Wedding - Part One, 7th May 1998.

⁵⁸ Friends, Season Seven, The One with Rachel's Book, 12th October 2000.

⁵⁹ Friends, Season Seven, The One with the Cheap Wedding Dress, 15th March, 2001.

⁶⁰ Friends, Season Ten, The One with the Home Study, 13th November 2003.

⁶¹ In the series this turned out not to be the case with Rachel's wedding with Barry because Monica and Rachel lost contact during college, and Monica was not invited to the wedding. However, Rachel who was a spoiled daddy's girl, came to look for Monica in the City when she ran away from her wedding (Friends, Season One, Pilot, 22nd September 1994; Season One, The One with the Evil Orthodontist, 6th April 1995).

insists she also needs something old and something borrowed⁶². She and Chandler also write vows they read to each other at the ceremony⁶³ something also coming from Christianity, and not from Judaism where only men has an obligation to recite vow and put a ring on women’s finger.⁶⁴

CONCLUSION

Even though we cannot prove that media have an absolute influence over identity creation process, or that audience acts as patients who absorb media content in a non-critical way, we can still argue that media do have a large influence over their audiences. In that, media create stereotypes and expected roles. From this particular example in the sitcom *Friends*, we can see that Jews are seen as hedonist, devoted to luxury and comfortable lives even though they work hard for what they have, and that Judaism is an overwhelming religion. We also saw that agenda of the television series corresponds with the official American agenda that insists United States are secular, that Christmas is almost a civil holiday everyone embraces, and that the obsession with Christian holidays is nothing but commercialism. While it might be the truth that Christian holidays turned out to be more commercial than religious, the connotation is still Christian and implying that everyone celebrates Christmas even if they are Jews, creates an uneasy feeling of pressure to accept habits that are not local and commercial but religious. It does not contribute towards evidencing secularism either, but quite the opposite. Secularism of Jews is used to Americanize them into the Christian culture. Furthermore, implying that everyone celebrates Christmas and mocking Judaism, presents a clear agenda of pointing towards the direction and level of assimilation expected from Jews in the US despite otherwise impressively good treatment of Jews. The TV agenda clearly corresponds with the official American agenda that insist Christmas is an American commercial holiday rather than the religious one. However, the TV is also enforcing a particular cast for Jewish Americans that insists Jews should fully embrace the American culture, which is a Christian culture regardless of what proponents of this view state. We see this type of cast in both *The Princesses of Long Island* show and in *Friends*. We can also find this element, presented in a different form, in television series *O.C.*, *Arrested Development* and *Curb Your Enthusiasm* that also present a (slightly changed) way of imposing Christianity over Jews.

Series like *Friends* and others mentioned in this paper apparently did not make a bad impression over American non-Jewish audience since Anti-Semitism presents an issue in Europe and not in the US; however, Bravo TV in 2013 broadcast its reality show where Jews are presented in a way that has similarity with *Friends* that were broadcast earlier, which presents a continuation of stereotyping of the American Jews that is indeed a historical problem. Nevertheless, with Christian agenda this becomes a serious challenge for the largest Jewish community outside of Israel. In a long run, with this line of stereotyping and imposing the assimilation, the media are encouraging ‘othering’ and showing distinctive identities as

⁶² *Friends*, Season Five, The One in Las Vegas – Part Two, 20th May 1999.

⁶³ *Friends*, Season Seven, The One with the Vows, 3rd May 2001; The One with Monica and Chandler’s Wedding – Part One, 17th May 2001.

⁶⁴ Some modern Jewish weddings have both spouses reading vows and putting a ring, but there are no vows like with non-Jewish weddings.

having to assimilate or always face fear to be considered as 'other' and, thus, different in a negative and stereotyped way.

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