One Middle Class, Three Different Lifestyles: The Israeli Case

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Traditionally, both the general public and the media have perceived of Israel's secular-Jewish population as a homogeneous entity. This broad over generalized view of the Israelis overlooks the variety of subcultures that make up Israel's secular population. This paper proposes a new and original typology for categorizing social groups in Israel, in particular the middle class. The methodology used to characterize the new typology attempts to overcome the problems inherent in traditional methods applied by Israeli social scientists in classifying Israeli society. The author suggests the sociological notion of 'lifestyles' to explain behavioral diversity in this social class. Three major lifestyles are identified in Israel's large middle class: Post-Zionist Yuppies; the Veteran Zionist Bourgeoisie; and the 'Mitsubishi Mobiles' (the nouveau-riche middle class). The typology proposed is based on five years of research using scholarly material collected and catalogued from numerous disciplines, as well as field research based on diverse means of collection and analytic methods.

Keywords: Lifestyle, Israel, bourgeoisie, mobiles, nouveau-riche, middle class, Post-Zionism, Yuppies.

In the past two decades Israeli society has been severely jolted several times. Changes in the economy, in politics, communications, demography and values have accelerated the erosion of the old societal system based on the unifying ethos of Zionism. Conflicts and repressed tensions have risen to the surface and joined by new conflicts and tensions that have turned Israel into a divided and fragmented country seeking direction. New cultural forces have insinuated themselves into the vacuum left by the extinguished flame of Zionism, and these activate sociological vectors of varying strength, affecting particularly the middle class.

Below a typology is presented of three lifestyles that have emerged in Israel's new middle class during the last three decades. This typology is based on five years of research I have engaged in with my students by different methods: interviews, participant observation, analysis of articles published in the Israeli press, and integration of data collected by Israeli social scientists from several disciplines (see Appendix 1).

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Based upon the research results, we devised a typology comprising 17 subcultures (see Appendix 2). Each of these subcultures was characterized and analyzed along a cross section of 19 classification variables (see Appendix 3).

The goal of the project is to set up a virtual and dynamic database that will use multimedia (text, pictures, film, sound) to document (with the assistance of course participants) and demonstrate the cultural mosaic comprising Israeli society. The documentation will incorporate the institutions, traditions, and lifestyles that make each cultural group unique. The database can then serve as an updated source of information and a pedagogical tool for courses given at institutions of learning throughout Israel.

BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

This paper proposes a new and original typology for categorizing different social groups, in particular the middle class, in Israel. The sociological notion of 'lifestyles' (Chaney, 1996; Bourdieu, 1984) is used to explain the behavioral diversity of these social groups. The method used to characterize this typology attempts to overcome the problems inherent in the traditional ways applied by Israeli social scientists in classifying Israeli society (e.g. Smooha, 1993; Shenhav, 2003). This section outlines these problems, and goes on to describe the method employed in researching the new typology proposed here.

The first problem with the traditional methodology is its tendency to over general-ize. Sociologists usually categorize societies, particularly Israeli society, according to ethnic groups, economic status, patterns of immigration, and to a certain extent gender. These classification criteria are problematic as they tend to be too general, are based on stereotypes, and generate a great deal of background noise that makes it difficult to understand what is actually happening in the field.

According to the criterion of ethnicity, Israeli society is divided into two groups, depending on country of origin. Those from European Christian countries (and their descendants born in Israel) are classified as *Ashkenazim*, while those from the Muslim countries of Asia and Africa (and their descendants born in Israel) are known as *Mizrahim* (also *Sephardim*). This classification is very schematic and oversimplified. First, it is too general, as it lumps together people from a variety of cultures. For example, people from Morocco, Iraq, and Yemen are all classified as Mizrahim, yet there are vast cultural differences among them. The same can be said for those from Poland, Romania, and Australia, all of whom are Ashkenazim. This distortion is especially apparent with immigrants from the countries of the former Soviet Union, such as Azerbaijan, Ukraine, or Lithuania: are all considered Russians and Ashkenazim, despite their cultural diversity. Moreover, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics, a person's ethnic status is determined by his/her fa-ther. Nevertheless, in many 'mixed' families it is the mother who exerts the stronger

social impact, imposing her cultural customs on the family.

Another problem in ethnic classification is that ethnic origin is not necessarily the master (dominant) status indicator. Often, place of residence rather than ethnic group determines social status. For example, those living in the large cities are more likely to climb the social ladder than are those in the outlying towns, so that a Mizrahi family living in Haifa (one of the major and biggest cities in Israel) does not necessarily belong to the same social group as a Mizrahi family residing in the development town of Shderot, which is located on the periphery of the country (see Figure 1). Moreover, education can also overshadow ethnicity. While ethnicity still plays a role it is becoming less relevant; but according to conventional typology, whether someone is illiterate or has a PhD, his/her ethnic group remains the determining factor.

The next criterion in the traditional typology, economic status, is also problematic. The conventional division of Israeli society into three categories, the wealthy or upper class, the middle class, and the poor, is extremely fuzzy. Who are the rich in Israel? Very few people are really wealthy. Indeed, the difference between those in the top decile and those in the next two deciles is very small; the truly opulent are found only in the top one-millionth of the population. And then again, who is poor? Today most people who would be considered poor on the basis of their income own a television, a refrigerator, an apartment, and perhaps even a computer. In the 1950s such people would have been considered rich. In fact, in Israel economic status should be determined not by how much money you have but by how you spend it.

Let us consider, for example, the issue of poverty. If income is the criterion, a large proportion of the Arab population in Israel should be considered poor. A closer examination, however, reveals that many Arabs tend to make their money go farther by buying food in bulk and by building their own houses, which leads to a disparity between the statistics and their actual living conditions. Furthermore, for male-chauvinistic and religious reasons many Muslim men do not allow their wives to work, which also contributes to their statistical poverty, so their poverty is partly an outcome of their own cultural choice.

Ultra-orthodox Jews constitute another population group classified as poor according to the statistics, but they are not the typical poor. Over 80 percent of those in the potential labor force have deliberately chosen not to work but to engage in religious study. They are neither illiterate nor alienated, and are surrounded by a supportive community, so they cannot be classified as conventionally poor.

Economic status as defined by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, then, does not reflect the true situation on the ground. Today poverty in Israel should be defined more as a spiritual condition, characterized by a violent environment, isolation, alienation, absence of life goals, and low self-esteem. By the same token, the middle class and wealthy should be determined according to their patterns of consumption. Some people only pay in cash, others by check, while still others rely

on credit. Some are savers while others are always overdrawn at the bank. And the issue of 'black' money, not reported to the tax authorities, must also be taken into consideration. In short, classifications of 'rich' and 'poor' are more a matter of life-style and are not necessarily related to income.

Figure 1: Israel, with place names mentioned in the text.
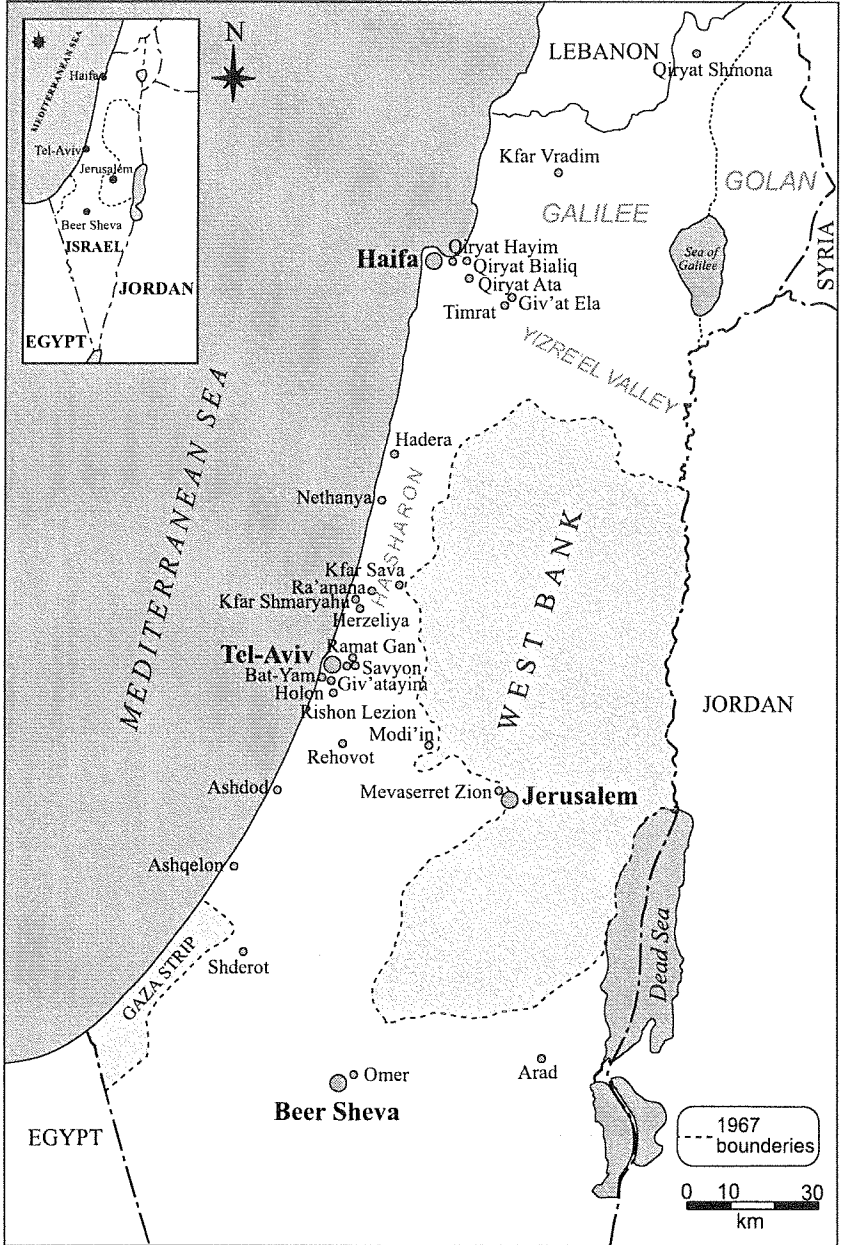
Immigration status, another traditional criterion for social categorization in Israel, is also too general and does not reflect the true social reality. For example, most of the approximately 150,000 people who immigrated to Israel from the Soviet Union in the 1970s are today Israelis in every sense of the word, and their Russian origin is of minor importance. They have little in common with the million immigrants from the former Soviet Union who arrived after 1990. The Central Bureau of Statistics, however, labels them all Russian immigrants. Age at the time of immigration is also a significant factor. People who were over 40 when they arrived usually remain immigrants and oriented to Russian culture for their entire lives, while for the younger people immigrant status is of marginal significance. Country of origin also has an impact. For example, the open and outspoken culture of Latin America makes it easier for immigrants from that region to adjust to Israeli society, while immigrants from English-speaking countries often find it difficult to learn Hebrew and to adjust to the blunt and brusque behavior typical of native Israelis. In all, for some people immigration status has a strong impact while for others it is practically insignificant.

In addition to overgeneralization, the methodology used in conventional sociological research labors under a number of other problems. It is too narrow, for it relies on a limited number of quantitative variables such as education and income. Moreover, it depends on tools such as surveys and polls, which tend merely to scratch the surface, overlooking taste, preferences, and sensitivities, which are crucial in defining a typology. These tools are incapable of interpreting the juicier aspects of cultural behavior. For example, they do not take into consideration how an Arab house looks inside or who visits tattoo parlors. Identifying the cultural genome requires a wider variety of variables and more diverse tools of observation.

Another drawback of the conventional methodology is that because most researchers are male, sociological research tends to be male-oriented even when the investigator is a woman. Men are likely to be interested in the larger and conflictual issues, such as politics, the military, global conflicts, and revolutions. When they read the newspaper, they focus on the front page and the editorials, and tend to overlook the racier and more sensational feature stories. Men tend not to show interest in fashion, aesthetics, parenting, food, and the like. They may sometimes cook gourmet meals, but they are rarely responsible for feeding the kids on a daily basis. But in reality, "God is in the details", and society is too, even though most sociological analyses do not consider such comprehensive parameters in their classifications.

An additional problem of traditional research, not limited to the social sciences, is that most researchers tend to concentrate on one niche rather than integrating work from related disciplines. This approach is tantamount to referring to a single reference point while disregarding the entire map. Integrative analysis may not be academically rewarding, but it is crucial for accomplishing the requisite microanalysis of society. For example, a social linguist in Israel might study the typical mistakes made by Russian immigrants when speaking Hebrew but be totally unaware of

those aspects of Russian culture that affect accents or grammatical mistakes. By the same token, a sociologist examining the cultural alienation of Russian immigrants may not realize that part of this alienation could be due to the linguistic disadvantage. Integrated data yield higher resolution for differentiating between veteran immigrants and newcomers.

In my research I have adopted a different and unique methodology, with the goal of defining the cultural genome of Israeli society. Unlike the traditional, this methodology relies on inductive rather than deductive reasoning. I begin with an assumption or intuition regarding the social genome based on observation of families and groups. Then I go out into the field and examine how different variables behave, adjusting and calibrating my assumptions as necessary according to the findings. I do not use samples but apply interviewing, photographing, and observing people in their social environment. I also make use of natural social observers, such as stand-up comedians, writers, movie actors and directors, cartoonists, and journalists. By these means I investigate commonly accepted categories reflected by social icons. For example, the notion of the yuppie was not my invention but I make use of this category, taking care not to fall into the trap of false categorization or of describing culture by relying on too few social variables.

The method is analogous to the technique used in biology to define the human genome. Individual behaviors and characteristics and social characteristics combine to define the cultural genome, which is a conglomerate of values reflected in different variables. The cultural genome is defined by examining a significant number of variables (20+) on more and more families and by continually modeling the general shape of the category to reflect the findings. The process of observation and data collection is concluded when the findings begin to repeat themselves.

For example, if we examine the extreme left on the Israeli political spectrum, those who tend to vote for the *Meretz* party, we begin to observe a certain composite of behaviors and values. These people are more inclined to wear less conservative clothing and to practice alternative religious rituals. Members of the middle class, by contrast, tend to hold rather conservative worldviews, do not get tattooed, and wear sensible shoes. Each individual, of course, is comprised of a gamut of cultural colors, based on lifestyle, individual behavior, and social characteristics. The inductive methodology used in this research is designed to disclose the aggregation of values that defines the Israeli social genome.

Here are a few clarifying remarks about the typology and categories: 1. My typology does not include all the traits of the individual sub-lifestyles but only those that seem particularly important to me for the purpose of assessing current conditions; 2. My categories are strictly schematic in that in most cases the boundaries between the three lifestyles are blurred, and a fair number of Israeli citizens can easily be included in more than one; 3. Each lifestyle has its own subdivisions, with only minor variations to distinguish one from the others.

POST-ZIONIST YUPPIES

Israeli yuppies are estimated to make up some 5-10 persent of the population. Most are in their prime, and near or already at the height of their professional careers. Aged 16 to 50, they form a part of the creative stratum of society, as software developers, poets, writers, composers, singers, journalists, or scientists; or they belong to the educational and academic world, particularly in the social sciences. Most yuppies were born in Israel to parents who came from Europe or America, but some are immigrants from English-speaking or Latin American countries.

The Israeli yuppie appears in two versions (Almog, 2004). The first can be described as the Republicans (more conservative) with money and clear-cut urban capitalist goals; this individual lives in a prestigious neighborhood in a spacious apartment or luxury villa. This group is very similar to the new upper class in America, which David Brooks has characterized as Bobos (Brooks, 2000). Prominent in this group are lawyers (of the first order), people in the high-tech industries, and owners of private businesses that manufacture or import international products (cars, foodstuffs, haute couture clothing, etc.). Self-absorbed and business-minded, they maintain an international lifestyle that includes many hours on flights and significant time spent abroad, and constant contact with people and companies in other countries.

The second group, which can be described as Democrats, is less affluent and materialistic than the first, less worldly too in its manners and connections; but its affinity for and commitment to politics and ideologies are far greater. In the local vernacular, these yuppies are characterized as dorks [*laf-laf*], freaks, nerds, leftists, or '*Shenkinites*' (after a Soho-like area of Tel Aviv). Some do not live in cities but in hilltop enclaves in the Galilee, in moshav communities in the Sharon, or in other communal settlements, and the students among them inhabit well-defined neighborhoods. Accordingly they may also be dubbed 'modified yuppies' or 'country yuppies'.

The Republicans are meticulous about their trendy appearance, following the standard aesthetic model for yuppies in the West: a slender physique, well-styled hair done by top hairdressers, subtle makeup, designer clothes, and jewelry purchased at prestigious stores in Israel and abroad. They are fond of status symbols that reflect a refined taste (fine leather bags, exclusive watches, and rare ties, GMC Jeeps or Landrovers). They covet expensive 'specialty gifts for men', collector items like paintings, carpets, wines, or cigars, and electronic gadgets to show off and to use (laptop computers, electronic diaries, international cell phones, etc.).

The dorks, however, keep away from eccentric attire as if from fire. They aspire to remain, in appearance and spirit, 'forever young', and therefore wear jeans and flannel shirts. Their thinning hair is worn long, sometimes in a ponytail, or alternatively in a crewcut. Short beards and round glasses are also the dorks' hallmarks, just as body piercing and tattoos are common among Republican yuppies and their children.

Yuppies have small families (1-2 children plus a dog or a cat), and of all the groups in Israeli society they show the highest divorce rate. They inhabit primarily the fashionable neighborhoods of the big cities (see for example Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2000), the Dan region metropolis (Tel Aviv and central Israel), posh suburbs like Kfar Shmaryahu, Afeka, Zahala, Savyon, and Mevaseret Zion, or else community settlements like Timrat, Givat Ela, and Kfar Vradim, and hilltop communities and kibbutzim in Galilee.

Most yuppies hold undergraduate or graduate degrees in the social sciences, engineering, medicine, computers, architecture, or law, but there also are many autodidacts who have acquired knowledge through reading and travel in Israel and around the world.

Their children's education is a top priority for this group, and large sums of money are invested in it. Children of yuppies attend the best schools and take part in countless after-school enrichment programs.

In most yuppie families both husband and wife work, usually full time and in professions of high social standing. Many own lucrative businesses that require considerable management acumen. Popular professions among yuppies are engineering, marketing and management (largely in the private sector), law, art, journalism, academe, and recreational activities (tour guides, yoga and shiatsu teachers, etc.). Yet some Republican yuppies prefer the non-working wife who pampers herself and spends hours shopping or at cafes and fitness clubs.

Yuppie lifestyle is characterized by great intensity. Yuppies don't ride buses; most families own at least two cars—one for each spouse, and sometimes more for the grown children. One's personal career is central, and most hours of the day are devoted to it. Work hours are long, with little time left strictly for family and home. The need for quick stimulation arises along with the need to beat the clock and score high in achievement. All this produces tension, emotional chaos, and extreme mood swings (from euphoria to depression). Women commonly suffer guilt feelings, torn as they seem to be between the wish to be good mothers, wives, and lovers, and the aspiration for the highest levels of professional life.

If one might generalize, yuppies are self-absorbed, curious, of sophisticated minds, suspicious, and practiced in social manipulation; they possess the necessary qualities for survival in our achievement-oriented society.

Most yuppies consider themselves secular and have an intense dislike of the religious establishment, especially the ultra-orthodox political parties. Of late the increasingly fierce rebellion against the fetters of religion has emanated from this group, as evinced by their civil marriages, civil burials, non-kosher food, and entertainment activities on *Yom Kippur*. The children of yuppies are largely ignorant of Jewish tradition and its sources (the Bible, *Talmud*, *Mishnah*, etc.). The *Shemoneh Esreh* prayer and the *Shulkhan Arukh* are all alien to them.

By and large, yuppies support the political left (*Meretz* party), yet some Republican yuppies lean toward the center (Labor and other centrist parties like

the anti-orthodox *Shinui*). The prevailing feeling within this group is that the state of Israel has been progressively deteriorating in terms of morals and its society is becoming aimless and brutal. Under the Netanyahu government (1996-1999) there was a great deal of frustration because of what was (mistakenly) perceived as yuppies' helplessness and inability to affect Israeli public opinion. It was the dorks who founded and launched the various protest organizations of the left (Peace Now, *Yesh Gvul*, *B'tzelem*, Progressive Judaism, etc.) and who frequently participate in protest demonstrations against government policy, in forums that criticize society, and in seminars on identity and the future of Israel. Many members of this group have published articles in periodicals, and many of the columnists in the daily press belong to this group, thereby underscoring still more the image of the Israeli media in the eyes of the Israeli public as 'hostile'. By contrast, the Republican yuppies have in recent years developed a form of social escapism, viewing their private careers, financial success, and hedonism as the essence of life.

Of all the groups in Israeli society, the yuppies have moved farthest from the erstwhile Zionist worldview and way of life. Motivation to serve in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) has substantially declined in recent years, particularly among reservists. Many dorks regard Zionism and its history with a critical, even cynical eye. Most believe that we are not as 'beautiful and pure' as we have been inclined to see ourselves because our sins (primarily those of the Ashkenazi elite and the *Mapai*, ancestor of present Labor party, establishment) concerning Holocaust survivors, immigrants from Muslim countries, women, and the Palestinians have not yet been expiated.

For the yuppies, living outside Israel (for a limited period or permanently) has become a realistic option owing to frustration in the political sphere, but also because higher education (particularly the command of English) and professional expertise have made it easy to obtain work abroad. This in turn nourishes the need for self-actualization in terms of both career and family. Many have already lived in another country for some period of time.

The yuppie's worldview is formed by an ideological triangle: capitalism, democracy, and globalization, even if the dorks' capitalism is social-democratic and humanistic. What I have elsewhere described as the "democratic faith" (Almog, 2002) consists of a belief in: equal civil rights, a competitive achievement orientation, economic efficiency, private initiative, career development and professional fulfillment, financial success and a nest egg, sensitivity to animals and the quality of the environment (especially for the dorks), freedom of thought and creativity, skepticism and criticism, self-awareness, emotional openness, feminism (even anti-*machismo* for the dorks), intimate couple relationships, liberated sexuality, protective but liberal parenting, command of information through the latest communications networks, aesthetics and health awareness (reflected in diet, physical activity, cosmetic treatments, and the like), a refined taste, knowing what is going on in the world, Western fashion trends, and continuous change.

THE VETERAN ZIONIST BOURGEOISIE

This upper middle class group, which fills middle to upper management or engineering and teaching positions in Israel, is often referred to as Israel's elite. It carefully guards against infringement upon its standing and resource control by way of formal selection systems (education, professional experience, etc.), and informal ones (personal contacts, inside information, behavioral codes) (Etzioni-Halevy, 1993).

A sub-grouping of this culture would comprise members of the traditional rural veteran workers' community—the kibbutz or moshav—with its own unique features. But in its collective cultural orientation this subgroup is easily incorporated into the veteran Zionist bourgeoisie.

The veteran Zionist bourgeoisie—of older average age and with a wider age range than those of the yuppies—makes up 20-25 percent of Israel's population. The majority of these people have already spent one-half to two-thirds of their lives working: some are approaching retirement, while others are already retired (age range 40-70). They are Israeli-born except for a small minority who came to Israel at a very early age. A majority, 70-80 percent, are Ashkenazi, although from a cultural standpoint the Sephardim among them too have been '*Ashkenazied*'.

The bourgeois family consists of five to six people (parents plus three or four children) and it inhabits, for the most part, the coastal plain. The largest concentrations are found in Haifa, the Tel Aviv suburbs of Zahala and Afeka, a number of Jerusalem neighborhoods, Raanana, Givatayim, Ramat Gan, Herzliya, Holon, and north Netanya; in the moshav communities of the coastal plain and the settlements of the Yizre'el Valley, and in Kfar Sava, Arad, Omer, Modi'in, Rehovot, and Rishon LeZion.

The educational profile of the bourgeoisie is similar to that of the yuppies. So is its employment profile, with the addition of a number of professions lower down the ladder in terms of prestige and income (middle management, insurance and sales representation, teaching, career army service, etc.). There are also more wage earners than self-employed in this category, as compared with the yuppies. Here, however, the number of women who work full time is slightly lower than among the yuppies (because of differences in education). As a result, the gap between men's and women's professional standing and role in the family is wider than among the yuppies.

While the veteran Zionist bourgeoisie shares the yuppies' basic capitalist democratic philosophy it is somewhat more moderate and restrained in embracing Western global models and political values. The majority traditionally vote for the prime-ministerial candidate of the Labor Party, with a minority voting for the center (in the 2003 elections many voted for the anti-orthodox *Shinui* party) and the right. Still, the first generation is slightly more rightist in its political views than the second generation.

The Zionist bourgeoisie is characterized by a measure of political ambivalence.

On the one hand it feels bound to and proud of the Zionist-Sabra culture of the past (Almog, 2000), but on the other hand it acknowledges that that world is gone forever because of the many cultural and political changes that Israel has undergone, especially the rise of a right-wing political culture. These people are at once pleased with the country's rapid progress and fearful for its cultural and political future. Their restraint and caution stem from solid lifestyles and intense security concerns as citizens who have invested the proverbial blood, sweat, and tears in Israel's wars and army reserve duty. They frown on radicalism on both the left and the right, and see themselves as a shrinking island of sanity in a sea of excess. In their eyes, the right-wing nationalists are a befuddled, immoral, and dangerous lot, who share responsibility for the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, whom they view as one from their ranks. Yet they also perceive the post-Zionist left as a negative phenomenon. The latter takes pleasure in destroying the Zionist myth on which they were raised, and it presents, to their mind, a one-dimensional picture of the Middle East that does not take into account the idiosyncrasies of the Arab world.

The last three years of the terrorist ('suicide bombers') assault on Israel, supported by the Palestinian leadership, have caused a psychological shock to the Zionist bourgeoisie. Many members of this group have been forced to reconstruct their political views and embrace a stronger nationalism; they take a very skeptical view of the peace process.

Many members of the Zionist bourgeoisie—nostalgic for the days of their youth—still cling to Zionist-Sabra traditions and keep in touch with old friends without zealotry or conservatism. Examples of this are their participation in community singing and choirs featuring Israeli folk songs, folk-dancing groups, and study tours of the country. This group continues to make up the backbone of the Israeli Defense Force, and both the veterans and their children serve in the reserves until they reach retirement age and even beyond (many of them still enjoy the IDF folklore and the timeout that reserve duty offers). Yet their motivation to contribute has been diminishing in recent years.

Members of the veteran Zionist bourgeoisie are secular in their way of life and thinking, but unlike the yuppies they are not militantly anti-religious. In statistical records they are classified as '*secular*' or '*traditional*', but a more accurate description of them, in my opinion, would be 'secular Jewish'. Their Jewishness is an ingredient of their identity, and to them Israel is first and foremost a Jewish state. For all their love of democracy they cannot accept the idea of 'a country for all its citizens', opting instead for the preservation of some of the fundamentally Jewish character of the country, even if this contradicts the moral and philosophical tenets of their liberalism.

The image characteristic of the Zionist bourgeoisie combines youth movements and army code concepts (Spartan culture, working shirts, working sandals, a pompadour hairstyle for men and a bouncing ponytail for women) with the typical codes of the Western bourgeoisie (suits, ties, high-heels, etc.). Bourgeois men and women

cultivate a neat and clean appearance appropriate to their social standing and guard against a loud and provocative or an overly refined and avant-garde exterior. In recent years, however, the tastes and sensibilities of this group and of the yuppies have drawn closer—owing to the way the yuppie culture is promoted (see above) and the influence on the bourgeoisie of their own children and grandchildren (who are, for the most part, yuppies).

THE 'MITSUBISHI MOBILES' (THE NOUVEAU-RICHE MIDDLE CLASS)

The 'Mitsubishis' (named after the most popular Japanese car in Israel until recently) are either Israeli-born or people who came to Israel at a very early age. Most of them are of *Sephardi* (*Mizrahi*) origin. There is a sprinkling of *Ashkenazim* from families that are neither financially established nor educated. This is a category that in the 1980s and 1990s experienced upward mobility, mainly economic (Ayalon, Ben-Rafael, and Yogev, 1993; Melman, 1993). Their number is estimated at 20-25 percent of Israel's population,[1] and includes most of the ethnically mixed married couples (which make up about 20percent of all marriages among Jews). These people live all over the country, but are mostly concentrated in the metropolitan areas of the coastal plain (Qiryat Hayim, Qiryat Bialiq, and Qiryat Ata, near Haifa; Haifa itself; Hadera, Netanya, Tel Aviv, Holon, Bat Yam, Ashdod, Ashqelon, and Rishon LeZion—the last, in my estimate, having the largest concentration).

The Mitsubishis love life and are full of *joie de vivre*. They have turned family events like circumcisions, bar mitzvahs, and weddings into grand celebrations within the society itself; they have made Middle Eastern music, with its strong rhythms, an integral part of Israeli folklore. Also, thanks to them, the 'barbecue feast' (*mangal*) and the practice of spending weekends in hotels in Eilat, Turkey, Cyprus, and Greece, are today a staple of Israeli culture.

The Mitsubishi is loud and persistent, clever, and sometimes sly. His/hers is the combination of shrewdness and humor peculiar to the Jews of the Middle East, along with a highly developed sense of commerce. He/she is open and warm, emotional, and demonstratively affectionate. But he/she is 'nobody's fool', and he/she 'wasn't born yesterday'. In other words, the Mitsubishi has the self-confidence and authority of the experienced and successful veteran. Still, as is typical of upwardly mobile people, he/she retains his/her suspicions and sensitivity about dignity and status and craves social recognition because of the stigma attached to his/her Oriental origins and the social gap that has not yet been closed (Cohen, 1998; Cohen and Haberfeld,1998). Unlike members of the lower classes, the Mitsubishi is not vocal about deprivation and discrimination, but in his/her heart, he/she still harbors residual bitterness and a vague feeling of being inferior to the veteran Ashkenazi community. Until the educational gap between Mitsubishis, yuppies, and Zionist

bourgeoisie is closed, and the word '*Mizrahi*' disappears from the Israeli lexicon—a process currently in progress within the second generation of Mitsubishis, the invisible psychological and sociological barriers between these groups will continue to exist.

'Nouveau riche' tendencies (a product, typically, of social mobility) and the integration of 'Middle Easternness' into 'Americanness' are characteristic of the Mitsubishi personality. These traits are manifest in the Mitsubishi's tastes, sensibilities, consumer patterns, housing choices, and personal appearance. What is particularly obvious is his/her lack of refinement and marked preference for kitsch. Among the external identity markers of the Mitsubishis are: small paunches hanging over tight slacks (sometimes called the beer belly); blond or burgundy-streaked hair in women; James Dean hairstyles in men; heavy makeup and tight pants emphasizing the hips of even heavy women; short tops exposing the navel; colorful sneakers; high-heeled shoes; and jewelry.

The Mitsubishis are enthusiastic shoppers and also love to window shop. They watch a lot of television and listen to the radio. They—and even more their children—are greatly influenced by advertising and American television series, and are easily susceptible to the temptations of shopping malls, both in Israel and abroad. The cultural heroes presented by the Western celebrity industry in movies, television, sports, music, and fashion serve as important models for them in terms of thinking and behavior. One of the consequences is the current high level of consumption of popular international brands (original and counterfeit), like Lacoste, Golf, Levis, Crocker, and Nike.

The educational level of the Mitsubishis (elementary and high school) is higher than their parents', while their children's is even higher than their own. Most define themselves as traditional in religion, and they are classified accordingly in the conventional nomenclature of sociology. Yet in recent years they seem to have become more religious, as indicated by the percentage of votes cast for *Shas*, the religious *Sephardi* party, by their kissing of the mezuzah at every entrance, going to rabbis to receive blessings, and frequent use of the expression, 'God willing'. In my opinion, this ostensibly heightened religiosity is for appearance only. While it is true that a small number within this group actually succumbed to the influence of the *Shas* campaign and became observant, most, particularly those of the younger generation, lead outright secular lives. I also think that secularization is outstripping the reverse process. Increasing numbers are daring to experiment with non-kosher meat; more are engaging in non-marital sex; and fewer are attending synagogue on the Sabbath. According to recent surveys, more Jewish Israelies—including those defined as traditional—now advocate the separation of 'Church' and State, the curbing of religious coercion, a reduction in state financial allocations to the ultra-orthodox, and the membership of Reform and Conservative representatives in religious councils.

An absolute majority of Mitsubishis vote for *Likud* right-wing candidates on both the municipal and the national level. In the 1996 elections some divided their

vote between Benjamin Netanyahu for prime minister and *Shas* for the *Knesset* (the Israeli parliament). But in the last elections (2003), which restored the traditional Israeli voting system (using a single slip for a party and its leader) most of them returned to their political home—the *Likud*. Their political preferences are not based on ideology and do not consistently conform to the official platform of the right. Essentially, the majority's political outlook is highly pragmatic and approximates that of the Labor Party (Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research, 1997). The Mitsubishis accept the principle of concessing territories for peace and prefer general security to a rigid 'security for security's sake'.

Another important political characteristic of this group is their hostility and sometimes even racist attitudes to Arabs, which partly has its roots in their own Middle Eastern origins and partly is an outcome of their simplistic political perception (typical of low middle classes all over the world).

Unlike the 'dorks' and the Zionist bourgeoisie, who often struggle bitterly and self-righteously to construct a logical and coherent framework of values, the Mitsubishis—like many other middle class elements in the world, whose sensitivity to contradiction is limited and whose emotions often overpower logic—live quite happily with contradiction. They do not see it, and spiritual and intellectual gratification is not a high priority to them. For example, in their eyes Shimon Peres merits being in the pantheon of Israeli leaders, but also "Netanyahu is good for the Jews". Equality for women is all well and good, but at home the male Mitsubishi doesn't do 'women's work' and his wife is expected to obey him. He is not against concessing territory for peace, but he does not hesitate to drive around with a sticker on his car reading "The nation is with the Golan." The judiciary is precious and worthy of respect, but so is Rabbi Ovadia Yosef (a Mizrahi religious leader) who slandered Israeli judges as 'wicked'. The Mitsubishi will see a doctor for treatment, and at the same time seek a blessing or an amulet from a living kabbalist or will prostrate himself/herself on the tomb of a holy man.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The well-known saying about "the prophecy given to fools" is appropriate sevenfold with regard to predicting Israeli culture, in which the quick and extreme fluctuations and changes constantly re-shuffle the cards even for the most cautious of commentators. Nonetheless, social change is not entirely chaotic. Sociology assumes that it is possible to carefully assess future trends on the basis of past trends and analysis of the traits of the participants in the cultural system. Presented below is a cautious assessment regarding their potential for change and their possible influence on other groups within society.

The Post-Zionist Yuppies

Though the yuppies constitute a relatively small group, their cultural power is vast. Indeed, I believe they have the greatest impact of all the sub-cultures because their values are those of democratic western society, so that their culture (and therefore their lifestyle as well) is disseminated by the best modern technology has to offer, particularly the media. In addition, a large number of those holding positions of power and influence—those who shape public opinion in the western world and Israel, particularly in the fields of art, science, law and communications—are to some degree close to yuppie worldviews and lifestyles. Thus the 'promotional mechanism' of the yuppies is multidimensional and powerful.

Moreover, the yuppies are an inseparable element of economic and educational development, thus attracting many if not most strata within Israeli society. When tracking recent changes in Israel and in the western world in areas such as legislation, higher education, status of women, attitudes toward career, production and consumer patterns, status of environmental protection and other social parameters, it becomes clear that the yuppie model is the one which is gradually dominating Israeli society by means of ongoing friction and confrontation—occasionally with certain situational losses—with its keenest opponents: nationalistic extremists, Orthodox, and conservatives. Expanded capitalism, democratization and globalization are the key processes underlying change in Israeli society since the establishment of the state, as has been the case, without exception, in all western societies.

Another interesting indication of the growing dominance of yuppie culture is its geographical dimension. As in most places in the world, in Israel as well the geographical and cultural dimensions are synchronized. Thus, the centrality of the yuppies in Israeli culture is reflected in their geographical centrality, with most yuppies living in Tel Aviv and the center of the country.

Clearly, the growth of the yuppie way of thinking and lifestyle has contributed and will continue to contribute to the democratization of Israeli society and its economic prosperity. At the same time, this mentality and lifestyle have been, and will continue to be, responsible for potentially harmful cultural fallout. 'Darwinist' capitalism opens huge gaps between societal strata, creates alienation and envy among many of the populace, and leaves hundreds of thousands jobless, insecure, and feeling a lack of self-worth. The pressures and tensions involved today in career development extract a price in health, making many people tense and hysterical. The growing democratization in education has neutralized the cautionary capability of society's watchdogs, contributing to anarchy in behavior and a loss of control within the family, in school, in the army, at the universities and in other societal institutions. When parents, teachers, lecturers, commanding officers or employers lose the legitimacy of their authority, society also loses its authority and legitimacy. A new generation has recently been arising in Israel, one which is fundamentally flexible, open, and creative but, at the same time, lacking in respect, modesty, restraint, and refinement—the generation of 'just kidding'. This is a generation that has un-

dergone a certain moral 'castration' because of its exposure to psychological values (which remove responsibility) and electronic learning, wherein everything is 'kind of ... y'know ...' and 'trips'. This generation cries easily, embraces easily, confesses easily, and admits guilt easily. But it is also very egocentric and far less prepared to sacrifice itself for the greater benefit.

Higher education and psychological values have brought about increased self-awareness and societal awareness, but at the same time have also created artificial relationships between individuals. The yuppie loses human spontaneity, instead donning thousands of masks (personae). He/she often is excessively judgmental and critical, thus increasing the potential for depression and despondence. Fourty years ago, the American sociologist Erwin Goffman (1969) published his famous study on the theatrical dimension of life. He crowned his work with the symbolic title "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life." In our present day, it would seem that Goffman's metaphoric crown has become an oppressive reality. All of life has become a stage, with the play lasting a lifetime. One of the reasons for this may be that yuppies tend to seek niches of authentic human relations, for example psychotherapy or cults, where they can, at least once, be 'themselves'.

The intensifying competition for jobs and social repute only amplifies the 'me culture', with its attendant detrimental risks (for example, alcoholism, drugs, marginal culture, homelessness). The level of social solidarity also is decreasing; with the rise of yuppie culture, patterns of distrust and social manipulation also increase. Intense competition and the craving to become richer and richer are making marketing a supreme goal and creating a populist culture wherein the commercial consideration (sales, ratings) becomes the dominant one.

This never-ending quest for stimulation and its attendant rising stimulation threshold transform violence into pleasurable entertainment, creating apathetic and dissatisfied people constantly on the lookout for excitement (one of the first sign of this was the 1994 murder of taxi driver Derek Roth by teenagers from a yuppie background). The need for variety in clothing, food, entertainment, partners, and more raises the level of internal tension and contributes to personal and social instability. The worship of beauty which characterizes yuppie culture is also dangerous, as it educates people to look only at appearances and creates chronic dissatisfaction in the individual.

Many also note the personal and societal price extracted by the culture of the communications media (television, Internet, cell phones). Loss of the ability to form abstractions, the inability to be alone and comfortable with oneself, addiction to programs and broadcasters, excessive eating, a decline in written and verbal capabilities, taking pleasure from harsh visual violence, these are only some of the evils with which society will have to cope in the future because of the rise of yuppie culture.

Finally, the movement toward globalization promoted by yuppie culture threatens the ability of the individual to create an articulated identity, creating instead

a monolith of tastes and associations and thus risking amplification of the level of alienation in society. It also threatens to dilute and, perhaps, eradicate the cherished assets of Jewish and Zionist culture (the Hebrew language, 'society of learners', Jewish solidarity, and the like).

All of the trends described above have already started to have an effect, which can be expected to broaden in coming years. Within educated segments of society, including among the yuppies, calls are already being heard for an examination of values. In various forums, in think tanks and the press, there is growing mention of such concepts as 'new left', 'social democracy', 'democratic Judaism', 'social sensitivity', and the like.

The Veteran Zionist Bourgeoisie

Because the veteran Zionist bourgeoisie is the social stratum which holds most high- and mid-level positions of control in Israeli society, its cultural strength is still great and significant, and it will continue to be so for the foreseeable future. On the other hand, its political strength is limited—certainly in its own eyes—and is today dependent on the other groups in Israeli society whose collective electoral strength is greater than that of the Zionistic bourgeoisie. Many members of the bourgeoisie feel threatened by the growing political strength of the Orthodox, the ultra-Orthodox, the new immigrants, and the nationalistic extremists, and they regard the rise of the populist, loud, and violent elements in Israeli culture with disdain and quiet rage. Among other reasons, this feeling of threat derives from a lack of understanding of the sociological forces operating in Israeli society. They learn about these other groups primarily through the media, rather than through personal contact. The feeling also derives from denial or blindness to the fact that Israeli society is undergoing processes of decentralization and democratization that are softening and breaking down the walls which had been constructed by the Ashkenazi elite and which are gradually weaving a variety of textures into the fabric of Israeli society that did not exist in the past.

It is important to note that, in spite of the fact that many of the Zionistic bourgeoisie fear that a cultural war is taking place in Israel which will have ramifications upon their future, and in spite of the fact that they feel that their country "has been stolen from them," they are not doing much about it. Essentially, as in other places around the world, the veteran bourgeoisie is a 'sleeping giant', complaining but passive. Its weak protests will change to forceful action only if and when it feels personally threatened. Meanwhile, the threats are only theoretical and have had no effect whatsoever on this group, which, in recent years, has raised and improved its standard of living.

The 'Mitsubishi Mobiles'

The impact of the Mitsubishis on Israeli society is great and deep. Essentially, it

is they who turned Israel into a country with a broad middle class (as is common in countries of the West). The increased capitalistic, American, democratic, and even Middle-Eastern nature of Israeli society is, to a large degree, the product of how this group has developed. Their political support made the *Likud* party as powerful as Labor (actually even more powerful), and it is one of the central factors for what has been the even divide between the right and left wings in Israel.

For the Mitsubishis as well, the geographical dimension plays a significant role. Indeed, in the past sociologists have failed to identify this group because they did not make a geographical diagnosis. Social mobility among the Mizrahim is clearly related to place of residence, with those living in the center of the country much more mobile than those who remained in the periphery. This, however, is about to change with new government plans for building trains and improved highways linking the periphery to the center, which will serve as an impetus for 'Mitsubishi mobilization' in the periphery. Someone living in Qiryat Shmona, for example, will be able to work and study in Haifa without being forced to sell his home and move, thus becoming a Mitsubishi.

To a great extent, whether future Israeli society is religious or secular is dependent on the Mitsubishi group. In my opinion, this group's affinity to 'MTV culture' is stronger than its affinity to *Shas* culture. The Mitsubishis like to live well, and they are enchanted by western culture. Religion offers comfort, stability, and respect to those who have dropped out of the race for achievement. At the same time, however, it offers poverty, ignorance, and coercion (and there is nothing the Mitsubishi hates more than coercion). As the generations go by, both the ethnic factor (Mizrachi) and the religious factor will gradually disappear from this group, and it will gradually mold into the yuppie group.

Finally, I offer some remarks about the scientific and moral implications of the lifestyles typology proposed here. First, the lifestyle typology is symbolically reflected in Israel's geographic landscape, dominated by five types of cities. The cosmopolitan culture of Tel Aviv, which strives to emulate New York, reflects and symbolizes the lifestyle of the yuppies, who indeed reside mainly in the center of the country. The 'sleepy' bourgeoisie culture of Haifa reflects and symbolizes the lifestyle and world view of the veteran Zionists, many of whom reside in and around this northern city. The up-and-coming new metropolitan area comprised of the cities of Holon, Bat Yam and Rishon LeZion is characterized by a nouveau riche lifestyle, and many of the mobile Mitsubishis have purchased homes in that area which has become a so-ciological symbol of the new Israeli social mobility. Israel's two other major cities, Jerusalem and Beer Sheba, also represent cultural lifestyles, with Jerusalem symbol-izing the more conservative and fanatic groups in Israeli society—the nationalist extremists and the ultra-Orthodox—and Beer Sheba corresponding to the lifestyle of those who have remained in the periphery. As indicated above, new government programs to bring the periphery closer to the center will probably have an impact upon the cultural fabric of Beer Sheba as well.

Second, dividing Israeli society in general and the new middle class in particular, into different lifestyles may lead to better resolution in the sociological picture of the Israelis. Typifying these cultural nuances is important from the moral as well as the sociological point of view. A database of lifestyles seeks also to promote tolerance and respect for others, based upon, among other things, familiarity with the cultural world of the other. Stigmas and stereotypes are cultivated by ignorance and lack of knowledge. Hence, a database that represents the cultural world of diverse groups within Israeli society is likely to help bring people together. Furthermore, the in-depth treatment given to each 'tribe' transmits a symbolic message that everyone is of equal social importance and everyone has a place in Israel's cultural space.

NOTE

1. This estimate is based on three parameters: 1. The number of Sephardim among voters for Likud and Labor; 2. The percentage of 'traditionals' within the population; and 3. The frequency at which families with 2-4 members are recorded in the respective demographic category, low housing density, and the continent of origin of the head of the household (Central Bureau of Statistics, 1998 Statistical Yearbook).

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Data Sources

1. Academic articles and books
2. Encyclopedias, lexicons, and atlases
3. Articles and stories appearing in magazines, journals, and the daily press
4. Publications and reports issued by organizations, institutions, and government and private research institutes (government offices, municipal and local authorities, the Central Bureau of Statistics, etc.)
5. Archives, libraries, and computerized databases
6. Internet sites and databases
7. Museums and private collections
8. Informant interviews: researchers (anthropologists, historians, linguists, researchers in the fields of art and education, etc.), people from within the subculture itself, service providers who come into daily contact with the subculture
9. Documentary films
10. Area photographs

Appendix 2: Subcultures

1. Yuppies
2. Veteran bourgeois Zionists
3. Kibbutzniks
4. New middle class
5. Religious Zionists (knitted skullcap)
6. Poverty-stricken periphery (disadvantaged groups)
7. Shas party supporters
8. Ashkenazi ultra-orthodox
9. Immigrants from the former Soviet Union—Christian states
10. Immigrants from the former Soviet Union—Muslim states (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, etc.)
11. Arab bourgeoisie
12. Arab working class
13. Bedouins
14. Druze
15. Ethiopians
16. Foreign workers
17. Small subcultures (Circassians, Samaritans, Armenians, etc.)

Appendix 3: Classification Variables

1. Historical background
2. Population
3. External identifying features
4. Economic attributes
5. Residence
6. Family
7. Health and hygiene
8. Entertainment and leisure
9. Food culture
10. Music
11. Language and speech patterns
12. Information and communications
13. Mobility patterns
14. Education and schooling
15. Religion and faith
16. Ethnic group
17. Attitude to law and criminality
18. Army, security, and national service
19. Political behavior