

A Bridge over Troubled Waters: The Mizrahi Middle Class as an Agent of Urban Change

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—ABSTRACT—

Social and spatial inequality is a major topic in urban studies in Israel and throughout the international community. The existing literature has explored the creation of urban borders, mechanisms of ethnic and class segregation, and regimes of urban ethnocracy that have fixed and duplicated the social and spatial disparities among different social groups. As research that focuses on the processes of change in the city of Yavneh, it was easy for the present study to assume these interpretative frameworks. In the 1980s, a military neighborhood and a civilian neighborhood were established in Yavneh. These neighborhoods consisted of free-standing homes that became the homes of members of an upper-middle-class population. This point of encounter between such sharp sociological and spatial contradictions had the potential to turn Yavneh into a segregated city based on ethno-class enclaves.

In practice, however, even though these contradictions existed in Yavneh, they did not produce segregation, but rather laid the foundation of Yavneh as we know it today – a desired home for the Israeli middle class. The study examines the centrality of the Mizrahi middle class, which we refer to here as "urban mediators" and which engaged in moderating the disparities and managing the encounter between the different populations. The article adds a new element to the documentation and analysis of the Mizrahi middle class and the role it has played in contexts of urban development. The study is unique not only in its built-in focus on the creation of the middle class, but rather also in its identification of this class's strategies of action and its significance for the sociology of Israeli society. The article calls for the formulation of new theory to document and elucidate the processes of social and spatial mobility in Israel.

Keywords: middle class; social mobility; Mizrahi community

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