



Druze Studies Journal

Article:

“‘Modernization’ Discourse in the Israeli Druze Context, 1975-2021:
From Egon Mayer to Abbas & Court.”

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Received: 9 November 2025

First Revision Received: 14 February 2026

Second Revision Received: 25 April 2026

Accepted: 27 April 2026

Cite this article (*The Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition*):

Miles, William F. S., 2026. “‘Modernization’ Discourse in the Israeli Druze
Context, 1975-2021: From Egon Mayer to Abbas & Court.” *Druze Studies Journal*
3. doi.org/10.17161/druze.3.24780

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Abstract

This review and theoretical analysis aim to situate scholarship on Israeli Druze society within the broader literature on modernization and postmodernity. Informed by eight months of ethnographic observations spanning seven years in Druze communities in the Upper Galilee, it examines the nearly half-century evolution of Druze studies from Egon Mayer's 1975 groundbreaking article in the *Middle East Journal* to the 2021 co-authored volume by Randa Abbas and Deborah Court. While both studies start from a theoretical stance of polarity between traditionalism and modernity, the implicit linearity that binds these two phenomena has undergone a radical change. Although still adhering to particularistic religious beliefs and customs, Druze communities of the Upper Galilee have leapfrogged industrialization and embraced a broader Israeli identity, the Hebrew language, and social aspirations. They have also acquired consumerist lifestyles unimaginable when Mayer conducted fieldwork in the 1970s. Framing Druze studies within a discourse of tradition and modernity – a dialectic whose application to the Middle East was pioneered by Daniel Lerner - remains heuristically useful. On the one hand, it enables Druze scholars to appreciate the evolution of social science literature as it relates to their specific subject. On the other hand, it introduces theorists of modernization to a compelling ethnoreligious case that relatively few social scientists have focused on. Ultimately, it aims to reveal how the paradigm of modernity, as applied to the evaluation of Druze in Israel, has changed over time.

Keywords: *Israel Druze Society, traditionalism and modernity, modernization theory, post-modernity*

Introduction

Nothing comes to us from the West which delights the heart.¹

Exactly fifty years before this article was written, Egon Mayer published a thickly descriptive article in the *Middle East Journal* about a Druze village in Israel (Mayer 1975). Since Israel's independence, a few social science articles had already been published on the Druze. However, Mayer's was the first social-science treatment of Israeli Druze society to directly invoke the paradigm of modernization.² Mayer described the village as representative of a developing but still pre-modern society. Conceptually, he placed his analysis squarely within the literature of modernization and speculated thus: "As the modernizing young Druze begin to enter Israeli society, they become increasingly aware of their own 'backwardness' and relative 'inferiority...'. It may be that the coming generation of Druze will assimilate not so much into Israeli society as into the Arab and the Third World society."

Although Mayer did not cite him, the linguist of Arabic Haim Blanc (1952) had, two decades previously, used a modernist language (if not paradigm) to frame the future of the Druze throughout the Levant in almost apocalyptic terms:

It may be claimed, with some reason, that modern conditions have made of... group as the Druzes, little more than fossils, which no combination of supple adaptiveness and staunch resistance can prevent, in the long run, from being doomed to extinction or at least to total subjection to some national state (321).

Despite being Israeli, Blanc does not seem to have himself conducted research among the Druze of Israel. Perhaps it was because, wounded in Israel's War of Independence, he had become blind (*New York Times* 1984). In contrast, Mayer, a sociologist at the City University of New York, indeed conducted research among the Druze. Although Mayer does not specify how much time he spent in the field, we do know that it began in the summer of 1972 (Mayer 1975: 284, footnote). We also know that he anonymized the village as "Bayt Al-Shabab." In terms of East-West civilizational identity, Bayt Al-Shabab was – and by its sociological chronicler Mayer was projected to remain – squarely in the East. In his invocation

¹ Proverb collected in the predominantly Druze village of Ràs al-Matn, Lebanon, by Anis Freya (1974).

² Guttman and Kassem, also in 1975, came close by employing the construct of "traditionalism" in their study of aging among the Israeli Druze. Salman Fallah (1968) appears as the first Israeli Druze ethnographer; his study of Kfar Summaya/Sumai/Sumay (later administratively merged with Kisra) is purely descriptive.

of the modernization trope, Mayer was echoing, albeit in a much more constricted case study, Daniel Lerner's 1958 seminal work, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East*.

Forty-six years after American sociologist Mayer's article, two female scholars in Israel – the Druze Randa Abbas and the Canadian-born Deborah Court – published their short but incisive book *The Israeli Druze Community in Transition: Between Tradition and Modernity* (2021). Based on interviews with 120 subjects in several Israeli Druze communities, the authors found a high degree of incorporation within Israeli society (not the rejection of it anticipated by Mayer). Most significantly, in the half-century between these two works on the Druze community in Israel, the greater recognized danger of modernization for the Druze has shifted from national to religious identity.

“[G]iven the religious concessions that must be provided in order for Druze to live in the modern world,” write Abbas and Court, “at what point does the very fabric of the religion break down? How many more generations will there be?” This shift reflects, for both the Druze and the wider societies in which they are embedded, half a century of evolution in the political and spiritual realms.

This paper aims to explain this change, particularly in terms of the evolving paradigm of modernization, a framework initially analogous to “Westernization” in its linear notion of socio-economic transformation from traditional society. As such, it also shows – using the Druze of Israel as an exemplar – how the paradigm of “modernity” has changed over time. Spurred by a Cold War competition for allies in the then-emerging “Third World,” modernization theory served both to explain social change in newly independent nations and to implicitly encourage them to follow the Euro-American mode. My use of the terms “modern,” “post-modern,” and “traditional” in what follows mirrors – without intending to endorse – their uses in the previous literature that I review here.

More than a critical literature review, this article is informed by the author's own ethnographic observations spanning seven years in Druze communities in the Upper Galilee. It thus also conveys interpretive reflections on those same subjects of theoretical analysis as they pertain to “traditionalism” and “modernization.” Following Scholte (1972), Nagata (2006), Patnaik (2013), and other scholars who argue for reflexivity (more commonly referred to nowadays as “positionality”) in social science, the paper provides some interpretive biographical insights into the late Professor Mayer and his family background, as well as the author's encounters with the Mayer legacy. Readers are asked to indulge in this foray into reflexive ethnographic analysis.

Israel, Modernization Theory, Jews, and Druze

Israel achieved its independence at an early stage of post-World War II decolonization. American social scientists, influenced by Parsons (1937, 1951) – himself an heir to earlier theorists of European industrial and social change (Durkheim 1893; Weber 1905) – began focusing on the transformation of the cultures, psychology, and economics of the regions we now refer to as the Global South. Notable among those scholars were Daniel Lerner (1958), Walt Rostow (1960), Karl Deutsch (1961), Lucian Pye (1964, 1979), Gabriel Almond (1965), Daniel Apter (1965), Marion Levy (1966), Alex Inkeles (1969), and Samuel Huntington (1971). Given the subject of this paper – “modernization” of the Druze in the Jewish State – it is worth at least a passing mention that, with the exceptions of Pye and Huntington, all these American intellectual sculptors of modernization (as well as Durkheim himself) were Jewish. Such an observation raised the question: To what extent did these scholars’ personal histories, as Jews with living generational memory of their immigrant family origins, influence their intellectual preoccupation with the transition from an “old country” mentality to new, “modern” ways of individualistic thinking and societal reconstruction? A partial answer may be gleaned from Daniel Lerner’s dedication of his book:

For My Mother

LOUETTA LERNER

**Who Passed From Traditional Ways
To A Modern Style
With Dignity And Grace**

Egon Mayer himself (author of “Becoming Modern [in a Druze village]”), it should be noted, was himself a (double) immigrant. Born in 1944, his Hungarian family had escaped the Holocaust by paying the Nazi government, with the controversial Rudolph Kastner as intermediary (Sanders 2016), for permission to leave for Switzerland. That is where Mayer was born and spent his earliest life. His family returned to Hungary after World War II, but, in the wake of the 1956 uprising there, they emigrated to the United States (Berger 2004). One may speculate whether this personal itinerary of multiple origins and identities –

inextricably tied to the Shoah and, therefore, to the international recognition of a Jewish State in Palestine – provides insight into Mayer’s decision to spend time among the Druze. For they, too, by being citizens of the Jewish State, navigate a national existential pathway that the Holocaust has significantly shaped; live in a nation in which they are a small minority; acquire in their youth a language different from their mother tongue; and, also like Mayer, are acutely attuned to the social pressures that give way to assimilation and – as Abbas and Court demonstrate – challenge religious tradition.

Daniel Lerner’s *The Passing of Traditional Society* (1958) is of special, retrospective interest for our purposes, given that he alone among his peers of the modernization school most directly focused on the general region in which the Druze are concentrated. (The subtitle of his book is *Modernizing the Middle East*.) His study encompassed Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan (where the Levant Druze are concentrated); it also included Egypt (where the Druze faith originated but did not remain); Turkey (where there is no Druze community); and Iran (where no Druze community would be tolerated). There is no chapter on Israel (which he characterizes as a “Hebrew nation”), although the Jewish State did come up frequently in the study’s interviews.

There are six references to the Druze in *The Passing of Traditional Society*. Together, they provide a useful benchmark for understanding the supposed starting point of “Druze modernization,” or at least Lerner’s framing of the process as it encompasses those whom he pluralizes as “the Druzes.”

1. Although it is an indirect association, Lerner dates the beginning of the Westernization of Lebanon from the 1860 massacre of Christians by Druze (p. 170; see Abraham 1975).
2. In referring to the community’s leadership within the overall Lebanese socio-political system, he refers to the “clan power of the Druze feudal leaders” (p. 206).
3. Lebanon’s paramount Druze leader at the time, Kemel (sic) Jumblat – whose policies are alternately depicted in the book as “reformist” and “radical” – represents, according to Lerner, a “paradox.” That is because his support emanated “not from like-minded modernizers, but from Druze peasants who automatically voted for Jumblat as their clan head” (p. 209).

4. Syrian Druze, in contrast to the Egyptian population writ large, manifest “no sense of a proto-national community” (p. 227).
5. “Druze tribesmen” participated in Syria’s 1954 coup that deposed General Adib Shishakli. The coup was co-led by the Druze anti-colonial nationalist, Sultan al-Atrash (p. 300). In 1964, six years after the publication of Lerner’s book, Shishakli, then in exile in Brazil, was assassinated by a Syrian Druze named Nawaf Ghazaleh. Ghazaleh did so to avenge lethal attacks against Druze that Shishakli had ordered while in power. (See Moubayed 2006: 616 and Landis 1998.)
6. Summarizing their overall significance, Lerner writes that the Druze in Lebanon and Syria are a “small but potent sect” (p. 405).

For sure, these comments about the Druze may be relativized by their scarcity in number and lack of elaboration. Still, scholarly focus on “modernity” as it relates to the Druze needs to take them into account. It arose at a moment when many post-World War II, decolonization-era, Western social scientists were trying to understand and predict the fate of ethno-religious minorities in a “Third World” being wooed on the one hand by Western capitalist nations led by the United States and on the other by the Communist bloc headed by the Soviet Union. Egon Mayer was a rare American academic trained in this period who paid special attention to the Druze as they were affected by their “modernizing” transformation, particularly in Israel. In hindsight, he seems to have been wrong in suggesting that the Druze of Israel would be so influenced by the (then) new Third Worldist ideology that they would eschew Israeli integration and identification in favor of an “Eastern” or Arab identity. But he was correct in foreseeing that they would still preserve key aspects of their unique society despite the economic and technological changes whirling around and amongst them. That is where the Court and Abbas analysis picks up where Egon Mayer left off.

The Israeli Druze Community in Transition

“The Israeli Druze Community in Transition” is the main title of Abbas’s and Court’s book; the subtitle is “Between Tradition and Modernity.” Their book is divided into seven chapters, a brief recapitulation of which will highlight their main findings.

Chapter 1 lays out the three central pillars of Druze belief (reincarnation, discretion and reserve, particularly regarding certain religious beliefs, and brotherhood) and five overt principles (as opposed to hidden or “secret” facets)

of the Druze faith. These principles are, in the order they have chosen: truth-speaking, communal protection, ostracism of heretics, belief in the Oneness of God, and unconditional submission to the authority of God. (It is striking that they do not present the monotheistic dimension – conveyed by their preferred formal self-designation as Muwahideen – first.) Factors of Druze uniqueness stem from a history of (Muslim) persecution; the trinitarian protectiveness of religion, women, and land; and a communal wall against inter-marriage. With respect to *Israeli* Druze identity, “solidarity with Zionism” is most proven by staunch (male) participation in the IDF. Since such patriotism does result in combat deaths, the religious leaders have allowed a “religious concession”: the permissibility of burial in, and visitation of, military cemeteries. This is, as they put it, one example of the “need to respond to environmental pressures resulting from modernization” (p. 12).

In the second chapter, the researchers focus on generational and gender differences, as gleaned from their surveys, regarding the community’s tripartite identity as Druze, Israeli, and Arab. Whereas older adults tend to see themselves as Israeli *Druze*, younger men more often prioritize their being Druze *Israeli*. Younger women tend to abandon the qualifiers and describe themselves as *Druze*, full stop. And where did these differences in emphasis come from? Whereas the elderly and young women cite religion as the main determinant of their identity, male youth give religion and homeland roughly equal weight in their sense of what it means to be Druze. Familiarity with Hebrew additionally adds to the Israeli nature of their identity.³

Chapter three emphasizes the “remarkable” stability in values across generations. Respect, rather than rebellion, characterizes the attitude expressed by both young and older Druze in Israel. There is a transgenerational consensus that, in the face of “encroachment of the modern world,” Druze identity serves as a “shield” against societal and cultural threats to the community as a whole (p. 36). Be Israeli, yes, but be Israeli while remaining Druze. This chapter nevertheless concludes with a striking “warning bell” with respect to preserving Druze religion and values: unawareness on the part of teachers themselves that “modern and immodest dress” undermines the values that they otherwise are expected to convey.

It is in the fourth chapter that, through the statements of the informants and authors alike, the conflict between Druze religion and modernity is most directly

³ Scholars who have examined the relationship between Israeli Druze use of, and competency in, Hebrew and their identity formation: Isleem (2013), Kheir (2023), and Miles (2024).

articulated. “Clearly, modernization is contrary to religion,” a representative male respondent is quoted as saying. A female adult seconds, “Modernity and religion just don’t go together” (p. 47). It is in this context that one seemingly common-sense observation is proffered, but, on closer examination, it is syllogistic. “It is no longer easy to live the traditional, cloistered village life,” it begins. But then it continues, “that life is gone” (p. 51). If such a way of life is non-existent, then living is not merely difficult: it is downright impossible. Similarly, despite the persistence of the major factor of Druze continuity – “secrecy of the religion” – it is “impossible to stem the tide of modernization” (p. 51).

Over half a century earlier, Lerner had made the point that the general culture and individuals’ psychology of the Middle East at large (not just for Druze) were being transformed by new modes of communication. This, for him and other scholars of modernization, was at the crux of the process:

Whether from East or West, modernization poses the same basic challenge – the infusion of “a rationalist and positivist spirit,” against which, scholars seem agreed, “Islam is absolutely defenseless.” The phasing and modality of the process have, however, changed in the past decade. Where Europeanization once penetrated only the upper levels of Middle Eastern society... modernization today diffuses more widely among the population... Central to this change is the shift in modes of communicating ideas and attitudes – for spreading among a large public, vivid images of its own, New Ways is what modernization distinctly does...

[T]he mass media of tabloids, radio, and movies are now the dominant modes. Today’s Middle East “chaos” is largely due to the shift of modernist inspiration from the discreet discourse of a few in Oxford colleges and Paris salons to the broadcast exhortations among the multitudes by the mass media. (Lerner 1958:45)

While this language sounds quaint to 21st-century ears – particularly those attuned to the political and cultural reverberations of “social media” – it is updated (one is tempted to say “modernized”) by this passage from the Abbas and Court study of tradition and change among the Druze of Israel:

The surrounding culture in traditional societies is no longer just the culture that is physically close, it is internet culture... an insidious, powerful, and unavoidable kind of Trojan horse. (Abbas & Court 2021:53).

Viewing the Middle East writ large in the 1950s (Lerner) and 1970s (Mayer), the Muslim religion is portrayed as the screen against modernization, rationalism, Westernization, progress, etc. Arab nationalism, on the other hand, is viewed as a modernist response that would transform the region in a decolonizing (if Communist-inspired) direction. For the minority Druze in the 2020s, threats are both cultural (in Israel, as described above) and existential (in Syria, as recent killings in Sweida attest). Both “internet culture” and Islamist extremism gnaw at the sense of Druze security and continuity in a region transformed by tumultuous technological and jihadist forces that neither Lerner nor Mayer envisioned.

Chapter 5 of Abbas and Court focuses on the status of women in Israeli Druze society. Much progress has been achieved in gaining equality, though there is a problematic (if not ironic) problem at the level of higher education: many young Druze women are more highly educated than young Druze men. The following chapter focuses even more directly on modern education and its implications for the future of Druze society. There is a major dilemma, as highlighted on page 83: While older Druze in principle favor higher education for their children, daughters as well as sons, socialization in that sector inevitably leads to lessened adherence to religious “laws.” Prime examples are when women a) drive motor vehicles; b) mix socially with non-family member men; and c) wear modern dress. Depending on the severity of the transgressions, ecclesiastical penalties can range from being barred from access to the “inner religious secrets” of the Druze faith to mothers of such transgressing daughters being subject to a form of excommunication (p. 83). This penultimate chapter encapsulates the dilemma of a theme running throughout the book: the inevitability of – and controversy over – “religious concessions.” This poignant passage puts it thus:

[There is one] burning question... [G]iven the religious concessions that must be provided in order for Druze to live in the modern world, at what point does the very fabric of the religion break down? At what point is there no one left, except a few sheiks, who know the inner secrets?... How many more generations will there be? (84)

The last Abbas and Court chapter is a comparative one: “Implications for Israeli Druze and Other Traditional Societies in the Post-Modern World.” Three modernizing influences that the Israeli Druze experience are universal: the work world, contemporary culture, and the need for technology. It is in this context that the authors step outside their usual zone of academic neutrality to note the

“insidious influence of popular culture” (p. 88). They return to the relationship between Druze culture and religion: “inseparable.” Yet, in post-modern society (in which the Israeli Druze are embedded) “religion is a *part* of culture” (p. 92; my emphasis). They conclude by recognizing the necessity of religious concessions and by arguing in their favor. Such concessions must follow organized dialogue within communities and be blessed by the Druze religious leadership. (Whether the “leadership” referred to is at the national or community levels is not specified.) This is the path, they leave the reader pondering, that will “enable more Druze to enter into the secrets of the religion and bring it to future generations” (p. 93).

Commentary from the Field

Between 2013 and 2022, including four months in 2015, I conducted eight stints of fieldwork in an Upper Galilee Druze village that most closely neighbors the one that Egon Mayer studied. (Mayer pseudonymized it as “Bayt Oz.”) Most of what Abbas and Court relay in their book resonates with my own observations and experiences in Bayt Oz. In this section, I wish to focus on a few of their examples and provide three additional ones observed during my fieldwork, particularly as they relate to the above-mentioned literature. These relate to gossip, driving, and wedding music. But first, a reference to an additional, relevant aspect of modernization.

Over a century ago, sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (1887) drew attention to the loss of interpersonal, face-to-face relations within the community (*Gemeinschaft*) as modernization constructed a new kind of society (*Gesellschaft*) based on impersonal social transactions and occupational role identity. The Israeli village of Bayt Oz is very modern (indeed, postmodern) in many respects, particularly in its inhabitants’ use of communication technology and their access to low-cost international tourism. But in many respects, the community remains a *Gemeinschaft*. Westerners who have never had a taste of *Gemeinschaft* life have little idea of what they are missing, in terms of the intense social bonds and community-based identity that this “pre-modern” social life affords. But it works the other way around, too – villagers who have “seen the world” often encounter difficulties when returning to their particular *Gemeinschaft*, seeing their relatively closed society as they had never perceived it before.

One family from Bayt Oz had the opportunity to live in France when the government sent the husband to study at a war college there. The experience left a linguistic mark on the family. “It was the first time that we could really feel free,”

says wife R. “Free from the scrutiny of the community. Free to do just whatever we wanted, to go wherever and whenever we wanted. Even now, during summer vacation, we do not feel truly free here in the village. There are all the obligations we need to attend to – weddings, families. We can’t decide to just stay at home, to do nothing, just relax.”

“Why not?”

“People will talk. Other villagers constantly look at you and talk about you. Always checking up on you... Yes, it is done ostensibly out of concern. But sometimes it’s like a bear hug.

“Here, we stay together,” continues R., “even when the children grow up. It is critical that we stay physically close to each other. *That* is life.” The exception extends to a handful of young men who have indeed left the village to live overseas.

It is not overnight that a *Gemeinschaft* society transforms into a *Gesellschaft* one. N., brother of a village school principal, has also often traveled overseas and puts it this way: “Here in the village, we are a little bit modern.”

His brother E., the principal, exudes *Gemeinschaft*. “When I coach for the soccer teams in the area, I do it to contribute to the community. I am a volunteer. I am constantly solicited by other teams that would pay me to coach them. For all the hours I put in, I could have earned eight thousand shekels by now. But I don’t need it. I don’t coach for the money.”

Mobile Women

“The single biggest stumbling block in the meeting between religion and modern life,” write Abbas and Court, is the issue of driving. How and why this particular technology came to be considered off-limits to women in an ancient religion is unclear. Druze splintering from Islam predates the Wahhabist branch of Islam, which in Saudi Arabia banned women from driving in the kingdom until 2018, by seven centuries. Not even the second Taliban regime has imposed a nationwide ban on women driving in Afghanistan (although local authorities have begun to do so). Of course, there is no Druze government as such, and the “ban” is a non-legally enforceable declaration by local clerics. Still, social ostracization, not to mention communal excommunication, is a strong disincentive.

Different explanations were afforded to me. This one was from a highly intelligent, accomplished, and strictly religious woman. (In the village, she is nicknamed “Ninja,” for she dresses in a particularly austere manner):

“Just as there are two hemispheres to the brain, there are two spheres to humanity,” Ninja explained to me. Male and female. And they are very different. Take driving, for instance.

“When a man drives, he looks straight ahead. He’ll remember the road and the direction because that is all he’s looking at. But a woman? She’ll look to her left and right, at this garden, at that yard, commenting all the time: ‘Look at that! Oh, isn’t this yard pretty!’ From this perspective, it is a matter of attentiveness at the wheel and, thus, safety.

A high-level school administrator, on the other hand, a male, provided a very different rationale: “Imagine a woman behind the wheel who gets into an accident. And she accidentally kills someone. She could go to prison. Ought we encourage the chance of any of our women being imprisoned?”

In practice, since driving is increasingly indispensable for professional women, the ban is applied in effect only to religious women – that is, those who have voluntarily taken the vow to lead what is considered an orthodox life. Non-religious women and their families are not under the pressure that religious ones are to observe the interdiction.

From a secular, Western perspective – the paradigm that informed modernization theory - the link between female driving and modernity should be obvious. Gender-neutral economic opportunity and personal freedom go hand in hand with societal transformation. That Druze women in high-tech Israel are still grappling with this issue is highly reflective of the continuing strength of religious authority, a form of power whose diminution modernization theory had both predicted and welcomed.

Wedding Music

Unmentioned in the Abbas and Court book is a “modern” phenomenon that has riven the Druze community where I lived. This is the question of wedding music – or, more specifically, the employment of professional singers and bands or recorded (Arabic) music to animate the wedding reception. Because of the threat of excommunication, families who wish to include a “modern” entertainment component in the weddings they host hire entertainment halls in other towns or villages. These alternative communities are, by and large, Christian.

Invariably, the wedding ceremony itself occurs in the village itself, according to time-honored custom. Men and women are segregated, with the men from the bride’s and groom’s villages engaging in a formal exchange of praise and prayer-

leading. Humility is on display: one by one, an elder is nominated to deliver the praise or prayer, but declines on the grounds that he is not worthy. He names another, “more worthy” than he, to deliver the requisite lines. The other will similarly decline, and so on, until repeated nominations wear down a nominee; he then utters the ritualized phrases.

Traditional wedding feasts, as they occur in the village itself, segregate men and women; adjoining halls host male and female celebrants, who dine separately. “Modern” families allow mixed seating at their wedding banquets, which, to repeat, need to be held outside the village itself.

At those extra-village celebrations, “modernity” can literally be imbibed: alcohol, otherwise banned in the village, is freely served and flows accordingly.

While modernization theory never grappled directly with the desirability (or not) of recreational drugs, the ambiguous status of alcohol (socially banned in the village, consumed by some outside the village) is another example of negotiated modernity. The extent to which female Druze celebrants could toast newlyweds with champagne represents an even further point of contestation between what many Druze would still characterize as an unbreachable line between tradition and modernity.

Conclusion

Today, the neighboring Israeli Druze villages of “Bayt Al-Shabab” and “Bayt Oz” barely resemble Mayer’s portrayals and hardly match his predictions. Ironically, “Bayt Al-Shabab” is none other than the Upper Galilee community of Beit Jann – famous throughout Israel for taking first place nationally in the *bagrut* (high school matriculation/baccalaureate) exams in 2013; it has subsequently replicated its feat. “Bayt Oz” (half the size of Bayt Al-Shabab) has also been making great strides in its educational accomplishments: its Comprehensive Secondary School in 2013-2014 scored in the upper 10% on the *bagrut* in science and, by 2022, was 6th overall nationally.

Such achievements are emblematic of the socio-economic changes that have, over the last quarter of a century, transformed the Israeli Druze sector. Financial support for the educational sector in the Druze Upper Galilee Bayt Oz from ORT, the Jewish philanthropic NGO, accounts in no small measure to the successful *bagrut* results as well as to the sense of solidarity with Israeli and international Jewry.

Tempering the pride of Druze educational success within the Israeli school system is the Israeli political system. Passage of the 2018 nation-state law has given rise to dissatisfaction within all levels of Israeli Druze society, including the most integrated, for its tacit downgrading of Druze contributions to Israeli society (Zeedan 2020). In terms of modernization theory, the Davies' J-Curve theory of vehement reactions to frustrated rising expectations in a socio-economically "modernizing" society fits the contemporary Israeli Druze situation (Miles 2023). It is perhaps for this reason, at least in part, that the Israeli government is currently taking measures to improve infrastructural and social service development in the Druze sector (Government of Israel 2024; *Jerusalem Post* 2005). Such government investments, Rostow (1960) demonstrated early on, are key to the economic growth → modernization → growth process.

The framing of Druze studies within a discourse of tradition and modernity is quite illuminating. On one side of the academic coin, it enables Druze scholars to appreciate the evolution of social science literature as it relates to their specific subject. On the other side of the coin, it introduces theorists of modernization to a compelling ethnoreligious case that relatively few social scientists have focused on. It also provides new perspectives for subdisciplines. For example, Zeedan and Luce (2021) have demonstrated the relative paucity (only nine) of scholarly publications on Druze women from the heyday of modernization theory until the 1990s; a substantial and continuing uptick has followed. And while Abbas and Court do not explicitly integrate modernization theory in their 2021 book, their "tradition and modernity" framework is inevitably embedded within it.

Egon Mayer's premature death at the age of 59 means that he never had the opportunity to follow up on his Druze research or to revisit his modernization-as-Arabization thesis as he then related it to Druze youth in Israel. Interestingly – and perhaps paradoxically – in contrast to his overseas focus on a Middle Eastern group that categorically (if not vociferously) forbids intermarriages (the Druze), he is most known for his later work that encourages his *own* endogamous group (the Jews) to accept intermarriage as a normatively neutral facet of American life (Mayer 1985; see also Phillips 2006).

One of the conundrums regarding the concepts of modernity and modernization is the temporal component: When does "modern" begin? When does "modern" age out into "traditional"? Such linear questions are all the more puzzling when it comes to the Druze, whose cosmology does not accept the linearity of time. The essential doctrine of the Druze faith, Tawhid, teaches the

Oneness of the Divine and that all creation manifests this Oneness. But creation itself is outside the realm of space and time; hence, the futility and “paradox of assigning a sequential order” to it (Obeid 2006, 130). If the origin of the Divine universe, and the knowledge that is encapsulated within it, is itself a-temporal, how can we know (contemporaneously if not transcendently) when that of the modern has supplanted the epoch of tradition?

In a nod to those indigenous skeptics of modernization who are among the subjects of this paper, I shall conclude as I began: with a proverb. I do so not necessarily to endorse the teaching, but to acknowledge it. The proverb, again, is from the predominantly Druze village of Râs al-Mata, Lebanon:

Stick to the old; the new may not last.

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