



# Historical Assessment of the Transformation of Kibbutzim of Israel's Southern Arava

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## Abstract

Kibbutzim of Israel are utopia-driven communal settlements that spearheaded the return of Zionist Jews to Palestine in the early 1900s. Traditional kibbutzim are completely collective, meaning everything is shared equally, but make up roughly 10% of Israel's 270 current kibbutzim. Political and financial crises compounded throughout the end of the twentieth century to initiate widespread privatization throughout Israeli kibbutzim. The purpose of this project was to assess degree to which the kibbutzim of the southern Arava transformed individually and collectively.

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## Introduction

A traditional kibbutz is a very intimate and completely communal settlement in Israel. Members of the kibbutz, *kibbutzniks*, live on common ground and share all their belongings and income. Until the twenty-first century, kibbutzniks on traditional kibbutzim would even share responsibility for their children, having them learn and sleep in separate children's homes. The idea of a kibbutz was founded on socialist and communist ideology in a radical attempt to establish a "better human," by having an impact on Israeli society through its values of consistent mutual support, inclusivity, equality, and fairness. Kibbutzniks set forth for Israel coming from every direction in the name of Zionism, or the return of Jewish people to the land of ancient Israel. Kibbutzim were the first movement-driven instances of relocation that literally planted the roots of modern Israel.

Until 1948, when the official State of Israel was established, there was a fierce sense of Jewish responsibility throughout the world to assist in the development of the future nation. Jews have been negatively targeted by societies since the fifth century BC, frequently experiencing traumatic belittlement, expulsion, and even death. Zionism seemed the only viable option for Jews after centuries of rejection and persecution from nations all over the world and the rise of violently Anti-Semitic Fascism in Europe during the twentieth century. As they emigrated from countries worldwide, Jews began to rapidly populate the land of Palestine between the years of 1910 and 1950. However, kibbutzim grew more obsolete as urban cities began growing and encroaching on smaller settlements, and the influences of the greater Jewish and later Israeli society began absorbing the attention that once was kibbutzniks'. At the same time, as original kibbutzniks grew older and their children had children, the overall structure of kibbutzim had to adapt to accommodate and ambitions and ideals of multiple generations. With the new phenomena of kibbutz citizens often being attracted to private life in Israeli society, much of the ideological sentiment and solidarity of kibbutz life has dwindled, making the confidence in and sustainability of kibbutzim more difficult.

The purpose of this project is to assess the transformation of the kibbutzim of Israel's Southern Arava region. The Arava Valley is located along the southern tip of Israel's Negev Desert, and includes ten kibbutzim as well as two non-collectivist settlements and the port city of Eilat. I investigated the historical evolution of many of these kibbutzim, grew to know one kibbutz intimately, and compared the functions and ideologies of these communities to two drastically different urban kibbutzim located near northern cities. My goal was achieved through the completion of three objectives. The first objective was to become personally familiar with the people, institutions, structure, and attitudes of one particular community by living on Kibbutz Ketura for seven weeks. My second objective was to then take this deepened understanding of a kibbutz and the repeated themes apparent in its lifestyle and see if they translated to kibbutzim of the larger Arava region. I met with founders and *Maskeerem*, or head kibbutz representatives, of each kibbutz and asked them questions pertaining to their kibbutz' history and operations while relating to themes I'd witnessed on Kibbutz Ketura. Finally, I contacted urban kibbutzim near

Gaza and Tel-Aviv and conducted phone interviews about similar features of their structures. I asked about the kibbutzim's histories and ideologies, as well as their physical and leadership arrangement. These comparisons have allowed me to paint a clearer picture of the contemporary nature of kibbutzim, particularly in the Arava desert, as well as how the kibbutzim have evolved in recent decades.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For more detailed information pertaining to the objectives and methods of this project, see Appendix A

## Chapter 1 Historical Background

The Jewish people have been, at most, tolerated in whatever land they have inhabited. More often, unfortunately, Jewish people have been excluded, exiled, or murdered by European Christians or Muslims for their religious beliefs and practices. Most historically significant to the Jews was their exile from Judah to Babylon around 585 BC, and then the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE. Before their expulsion, Jews resided in the Holy Lands of Jerusalem, Tiberius, Jaffa, Haifa, and Tzfat. These lands are the origin of the religion itself, and as a result are of indefinable importance to the Jewish community. It is no wonder that upon the realization of necessity for a home of their own, Jewish people returned to this land called Palestine first in collective settlements, kibbutzim. Centuries of expulsion, pogroms, and widespread social inequality led to the Zionist Kibbutz Movement, with a mission of reestablishing the Jewish population in their homeland. Such an ambitious goal undoubtedly came with tremendous cost, to both the Jewish and the native Palestinians, who saw rapid Jewish immigration to lands adjacent to their villages. Indigenous Palestinians included mostly Muslims, but also some Christians, as well as those of a variety of sects in the Abrahamic tradition. At the start of the twentieth century, these Palestinians began seeing conglomerates of little white tents housing ambitious and singing young Western and Eastern Europeans, kibbutzniks. This was the start of modern Zionism, which would evolve dramatically over twentieth-century along with the Kibbutz Movement.

The Movement, in tandem with the land of Israel, has changed dramatically over the relatively short amount of time it has existed. As immigration and technological development increased throughout the twentieth century, kibbutzniks were faced with a multitude of challenging factors that forced them to adapt in order to survive. Many of these young Jews had no farming experience but needed to work the land in order to sustain their communities. Later in the century, the kibbutzim that survived the challenges of their formative years were faced with increasing economic pressures following the establishment of the state of Israel. A financial crisis in 1985 resulted in massive debt throughout the Kibbutz Movement that forced the majority of kibbutzim to reevaluate their collective characteristics and privatize some of their functions. Along with this dominant force of change among Jewish kibbutzim was the Movement's declining political influence in the years following the establishment of the state of Israel. The rise of the Likud political party in 1977 shifted governmental ideological and financial support away from the Kibbutz Movement. Additionally, internal changes within the kibbutz came about because of external cultural, economic, and natural influences. Nonetheless, the early pioneers of Zionism, the kibbutzniks, faced the need to change with a loyalty to their unique and communal characteristics.



## 1.1 Historical Significance of the Holy Land

Jerusalem is called the “Holy Land” today for a multitude of reasons, having been remarkably significant to three of the world’s largest religions: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. It has served as the land upon which significant religious events have taken place as these world religions formed. To Christianity, Jerusalem was the land on which Jesus concluded his ministry, was crucified, and finally resurrected. For these reasons, the Holy Land is undoubtedly significant for Christians. For Jews and Muslims, there are strong connections to Abrahamic tradition and thus strong connections to the Holy Land.

The Quran similarly considers the “Holy Land,” which encompasses modern day Israel, Palestinian territories, Lebanon, and some of Jordan and Syria, to be blessed. Jerusalem is mentioned in the Quran as being the destination of the Isra and Mi'raj, a miraculous physical and spiritual journey Muhammad took in 621CE. The old city also held particular significance to the religion as it was the site of Qibla until just after Muhammad’s Isra and Mi’raj journey, when he reestablished it at Mecca. Jerusalem is home to the Dome of the Rock, located on the Temple Mount. This site is particularly meaningful to Muslims because it is religiously understood as the site from which Muhammad made his mystical journey to heaven and learned of the second pillar of Islam (*salat* or prayer).

To Jews, the “Holy Land” is more commonly referred to as the “Promised Land” for the reason that it was promised to Israelites by God. It is such a religiously definitive area that there are even some *mitzvot* (precepts and commandments) that can only be practiced while on the land of Israel. Jerusalem, while one of four holy cities in Judaism, is home of the Temple, making it considerably more sacred to the religion. The Torah mentions “Jerusalem” more than 650 times. The Talmud, which serves as the source of *halakha*, or Jewish law, includes mention of a religious duty to settle the land of Israel. By living and dying on such land, Jewish tradition suggests all sins will be absolved upon your burial in Israel. The “Holy Land” has naturally become the destination of any Jew looking to find geographic fulfillment of their faith.

## 1.2 Arabs in Palestine

Muslim Arab expansion of 600-700 CE led persistent Arab populations to the area of Jerusalem as they conquered Palestine, Egypt and North Africa, Syria, and territory held by the Byzantines and Sassanids. The Muslim army that trekked through the Middle East at this time converted many people of different religious practices to their own. Some Christians, Jews, and all pagans located in present day Israel were converted to Islam by the caliphs’ army. Centuries later, in the early 1900s, Palestinian villages did not have paved roads, working educational, judicial, or legislative systems, and were seemingly decentralized as a result. There appeared a lack of unified Palestinian identity throughout the entirety of the area, despite Palestinians’ shared connection and appreciation for the land. A collective Palestinian identity only began forming as a response to Zionist endeavors and increasing instances of Jewish Aliyah.

The region of Palestine between 1900 and 1910 was, relative to western nations such as Britain and the United States of America, less industrialized. However, according to Israeli reporter Ari Shavit, this land was not uninhabited, a reality Britain officials neglected as they set forth to colonize and develop the land themselves following the First World War. On the land lived hundreds of thousands of Arabs, organized in clans or families in villages. Some of these clans were nomadic, the Bedouins. The Bedouins live within the Negev Desert of present day Israel. Following 1896, some of these tribes experienced the beginnings of the sedentarization process, which accelerated following 1948. Today, Bedouins live in townships built by Israelis and off-grid villages built within the Negev region. These communities are Islamic, speak Arabic, and are traditional and conservative in their customs.

### 1.3 Zionism and Theodor Herzl

The pioneering kibbutzniks brought themselves to the land of Palestine with the ideology of Zionism. Founder of this modern movement was the Hungarian writer Theodor Herzl. A Jew raised by liberal parents, Herzl was surprisingly indifferent to religion. Nevertheless, Judaism stands as an ethnoreligious group, meaning that the Jewish population share some DNA and connections along their ancestral lineage that genetically link them together. For this reason, you do not have to be devotedly practicing the religion in order to strongly identify with the Jewish community. Persecution surrounding the Jewish community for their identity compounded with social and political injustice displayed in events of the time such as the Dreyfus Affair. Widespread turmoil urged Herzl to take action in his writing, leading him to produce *Der Judenstaat* in 1896.

Anti-Semitism has consistently plagued Jewish lives. Even today, there have been reports of Anti-Semitic publications on the grounds surrounding the WPI campus in Massachusetts. It has been through remarkable turmoil that the Jews still survive. Theodor Herzl was no exception to this hate, being victim of name-calling and prejudices. He experienced the social attitudes of the people around him and identified what he called the “plight of the Jews,” a referral to the second-class status of any Jew in a European community. He hoped that if the Jews assimilated to the cultures around them, the hatred would end. It did not. Conditions could not remain this way, thought Herzl, with inequality, expulsion, and death plaguing the lives of too many people. Thus *Der Judenstaat* was born, a pamphlet that proposed Herzl’s solution for the suffering of the Jews. “Der Judenstaat” translates from German to “the Jewish State,” which fifty-two years after this publication exists as the state of Israel. The state of Israel was born due to the mission and message of Zionism.

Zionism is the movement to return those of the Jewish diaspora back to their historical origins, the land of Judea. Before Herzl established a movement, the term *Zion* simply referred to a hill outside of the old city of Jerusalem. Jews were first exiled from this land as early as the 8th century BCE by the Assyrians, and faced centuries of expulsion by the Romans afterwards.

Terribly, the Jews never found a home outside of the land of Judea that truly and openly welcomed them. From their initial expulsion until the late nineteenth century, Jews were exiled, persecuted, and executed wherever they lived in Europe or the Middle East. Zionists like Herzl realized that in order to progress to the degree of becoming a major and respected world religion, Jews needed a nation of their own. The geographical aim of Zionism was, naturally, Judea. The Zionists who not only identified with the ideology and agenda of the movement, but also took action, completed what is called *Aliyah*, and returned to the Ottoman ruled land then called Palestine. These pioneers planted the seeds of what would eventually fruition into the state of Israel.

The mission of Zionist settlers was to establish a peaceful and stable nation for the Jewish people as they escaped persecution in Europe and Russia. For centuries, Jews had been treated as subordinate. Often, they had to flee to avoid death by pogroms or sporadic hate crimes. There seemed to be no safe space for the Jews, no place for them or their religion to flourish. Escaping this tragic reality was the aim of Zionism. It is not surprising that the direction of this mission was Palestine, the area that encompassed the Holy Land promised to the Jews by their God. It was British Jews who first made their way towards Palestine in 1910. Upon reaching the shores of Jaffa in 1897, the British expeditioners were compelled by the importance of their own mission to overlook the Arab populations already living peacefully on the land.

#### 1.4 Balfour Declaration - Treaty of Versailles

The British government issued the Balfour Declaration in 1917 to officially support the establishment of a national Jewish home in, then, Ottoman-ruled Palestine. This national document was one of the first steps towards dramatic political changes on that particular piece of land over the next sixty years. The Balfour Declaration aligned with the final years of the First World War, but preceded the enactment of the Treaty of Versailles. The conclusion of the World War did not indicate upcoming global solidarity and widespread tranquility. In a proactive manner, the Zionism-advocating Balfour Declaration aimed to gain Jewish support of British and allied forces in the years following WWI. Only two years later, the war was concluded with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. This treaty, along with many other global changes, declared the right of minority populations to independence and self-governance. This was a tremendous victory for the Jewish community, as it was interpreted as endorsement for the Balfour Declaration of two years prior. The treaty further declared the establishment of a mandate system (authorized by the League of Nations) in Palestine, which would be controlled by the British. This mandated control was to be temporary until it could be resolved what to do with the Arab and Jewish populations in Palestine. Independence of the Jewish State planned to be given once its people were in a position to successfully maintain self-governance after the resolution of this racial issue.

### 1.5 Rule over Palestine: The Ottomans and the British Mandate

The First World War had tremendous effects on the political environment of Palestine. At the war's commencement, Palestine was under control of the Ottoman Empire. At the start of WWI, around 700,000 inhabitants, almost 90% of them Palestinian Arabs, occupied the land. However, the remaining population was a mixture of many different identities. There were Jews, Christians, and peoples of multiple other sects in the Abrahamic tradition, such as the Druze. Palestine, at this time, was religiously and ethnically diverse. Unfortunately, although local religious communities were organized, Palestine was not politically centralized under the Ottomans. Their judicial system did not aid in establishing uniformity, either. The Ottomans *millet* system of law separated ethnic groups to allow each court of law, the Sharia, Canon law, or Halakha, to establish their own rulings. Although referred to as a system, the millet was not uniform throughout the empire. Similarly, neither were the communities of Palestine.

Before WWI, under Ottoman imperial rule, Palestine did not have the industrial development of western European nations like Great Britain. Throughout the war, the Ottomans struggled to maintain their hold on Palestine as these European nations introduced their industrialized artillery into the region. Before the war's end, the Ottoman control of Middle Eastern territories was overcome by British and French forces with the aid of Arab guerrilla forces under T. E. Lawrence. The British conquered the land of Palestine in 1917. Five years later, the League of Nations officially instituted a British mandate over the region. A mandate of this kind was considered by the League of Nations as temporary, and served the purpose of ensuring the wellbeing of a non-self-governed population, as well as aiding in the advancement of the area towards modernization. This particular mandate officially recognized the historical significance of Palestine to the Jews, but it also promised Saudi Arabia territorial gains for their help against the Turks. It entrusted the British to establish a national home for Jews, while simultaneously stipulating that the rights of indigenous peoples be protected. The limit of this intention was "Transjordan" areas east of the Jordan River. Under the British Mandate, the Arab and Jewish communities were allowed to deal with their internal affairs, the economy expanded, and Hebrew educational systems developed. Simultaneously, Jewish immigration faced multiple obstacles in the mandatory years of Palestine. The White Papers of 1930 and 1939, as well as the 1940 Land Transfer Regulations, restricted the internal communities from growing as Great Britain was concerned about offending the Arab populations. The mandatory era of Palestine ended in 1948, when a civil war erupted and the state of Israel was proclaimed.

### 1.6 Arab Revolt (1936), Arab intifadas

There was rapid acceleration of Zionist immigration in Palestine throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Jewish immigrants from each direction travelled to Palestine to begin a new life and aid in building a future state of Israel. Wary of the dramatically changing landscape and population of Palestine, dominant Arab leaders banded together to form the Arab High Command, or Arab Higher Committee (AHC) in 1936. This committee served as the leadership

of Palestinian Arabs until it was outlawed only a year later after the eruption of an Arab uprising. Despite lawlessness, the AHC spurred the revolutionary attitude among Palestinian Arabs against Israel for years to come.

In 1936, a significant year for Jewish and Arab conflict, the AHC commanded a general strike of Arab workers and the boycotting of Jewish businesses. The identifying population's demands were the cessation of immigration and land sales to Jews and the establishment of an Arab national government. These demands were not feasible or of interest to either the Jewish or British populations, and war ensued. Although the Arabs were deeply committed to resisting any further Jewish encroachments, they could not match the organization of their enemies. Arab leadership, located in surrounding Arab nations, was not physically within the land of Israel or Palestine, which made solidarity and efficient action challenging. Powerful British forces suppressed the revolting Arab populations, resulting in dramatically unequal losses on either side. A little more than 400 Jews were killed throughout the duration of this war, whereas 5,000 Arabs were killed and 5,600 more imprisoned.

### 1.7 UN decision to partition Palestine (1947) - State of Israel

In 1936, twelve years before the establishment of the State of Israel, the Peel Commission announced the British recommendation to partition Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab. However, it wasn't until 1947 until the United Nations decided to officially partition the land largely as a result of the Holocaust's creation of hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees seeking escape from Nazi annihilation. This decision was founded on recommendations made by the UN Special Committee on Palestine. Shortly after the UN's decision to partition Palestine into two states, the British government announced its ending of its mandate. Under the official partition, the Jewish and Arab states would be joined by an economic union, and the Jerusalem-Bethlehem region would exist as an enclave monitored by the UN. The decision to establish two states in the land of Palestine was accepted by the Jewish community, but rejected by the Arabs. Resentment and unrest spurred uprisings that ultimately led to the first Arab-Israeli War, or Independence War, of 1948.

### 1.8 Arab-Israeli (Independence) War of 1948

Following the UN decision to officially partition Palestine into two states, Middle Eastern Arabs felt the circumstances and grants were not fair to Arabs. The Arabs were not satisfied with the division of the land or the inability of the Palestinians to practice national self-determination. Shortly after the UN decision, Arab liberation activists and revolutionaries began engaging in small attacks in cities or against armed forces to stop the establishment of the Jewish State. Eventually, forces from surrounding Arab countries of Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria came to the assistance of the Palestinian Arabs. However, their combined forces were not enough to destroy the newly established state, which had received arms and supplies from some areas in Europe. In March 1949, the conflicting forces signed off on a formal armistice line – the Green

Line. To the grievance of the Arabs, Israel had gained more land than originally designated to the Arab State under the UN's Partition Plan. The area of the Gaza strip would be controlled by Egypt and the West Bank by Jordan until the war of 1967 altered the territorial circumstances.

## Chapter 2 Introduction to Kibbutzim and the Kibbutz Movement

Kibbutzim were unique communities in the first decades of the twentieth century, involving a modest and agriculturally-centered communal lifestyle. Kibbutzniks came from more industrialized or populated areas all over the world to restart their lives with nearly no physical belongings. This served not only to fulfill their Zionist ambitions, but also to test their resilience and dedication to the greater cause of Israel. Starting a kibbutz was and remains an extreme goal, requiring the formation of a sustainable but also content community from members with little expertise or essential materials. Even more so, the later years of the twentieth century posed particularly strenuous political and economic circumstances that required the structural adaptation of many kibbutzim. Nonetheless, there exist around 270 kibbutzim in today's Israel, each of which have evolved to have their own personality but remain in varying degrees ideologically connected to the socialist ideals that are the root of the Kibbutz Movement.

### 2.1 A New Type of Community

The kibbutz movement played a crucial role in the development and success of modern Zionism. It was *kibbutzniks*, or members of kibbutzim, who managed the first sustained Jewish settlements in Palestine in the twentieth century. Despite the nothing that they came with, these passionate young communities worked the land and maintained themselves to a degree that allowed some of them to prosper over time. The overwhelming sense of being a part of something greater than oneself, the survival of the Jewish people, was what motivated young kibbutzniks of the twentieth century to persevere through the struggles that lay ahead of them.

The first kibbutzim were founded by young European and Russian refugees fueled by their dream to establish a new type of human: a human powered by collectivity, teamwork, and hard work. These young Jews left behind their friends, families, and often spirituality in order to start all over. Their primary mission was to return the Jewish people to the Holy Land in an attempt to allow their community to flourish in an area free from Jewish persecution. Their secondary mission was to establish a type of utopian community that thrived off of equality, fairness, democracy, and mutual support. Housed in tents, they had nearly nothing but one another's company and their shared mission. They had only the land beneath them and their own ambition to succeed in the name of Judaism and humanity. Because they had nothing and needed food to survive, the first kibbutzniks valued agriculture and manual labor over much else. Knowing that they must work the land in order to be able to eat or live on it was fundamental to traditional kibbutzim. Despite the odds against them, these early settlers were fueled by their identity as pioneers set forth to better the world for their people.

### 2.2 Traditional Collectivity and Authority

Perhaps the most defining characteristic of early kibbutzim was the degree to which collectivity and sharing founded every aspect of daily life. Everything was everyone's, from books, food,



right down to underwear. Although adults lived separately, all children were housed in children's homes and raised by the community as a whole for the greater part of the twentieth century. This is how the entire kibbutz functioned. Responsibilities were shared; positions of power and work were rotated fairly so that everyone who wanted the opportunity to complete a job was given it. There were no differentiated salaries. Variations in workload occurred on the basis of need. Members who were older or weaker were allowed to complete less strenuous work than others. In return for their collective effort, the kibbutz supported every member's life by providing shelter, services, food, money, etc. "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs," a Marxist saying, served as the foundation for the structure of the kibbutzim of the twentieth century.

Because everybody is an equal player on the kibbutz, there are no members with more authority than another. Democracy and fairness has been and remains a core value of kibbutzim. When decisions need to be made, the General Assembly gathers to discuss and decide on them. This assembly is made up of every adult member of a kibbutz, each of which have an equal say and vote in discussions. Even members who are holding executive or management positions at the time of decision-making hold no more authority or weight in General Assembly meetings than other kibbutzniks. No member is excluded from the General Assembly. Traditionally, when an issue has been discussed, the General Assembly holds a vote, and the majority wins.

### 2.3 Collective Child Rearing

Collective child rearing was a characteristic that strongly defined kibbutzim as it was the epitome of sharing. Rather than living with their parents, all children of kibbutzim lived in children's homes and were raised by every member of their community rather than only their parents. They were the responsibility of entire traditional kibbutz' populations, which established a sense of widespread security and safety as children were allowed to freely roam and play. In this way, children were raised in an environment that instilled an understanding of and value in community and collectivity over individual desire, as traditional of kibbutzim. During the day, children interacted with their own families. At night, they all gathered in the children's house to sleep among one another. As kibbutzim developed throughout Palestine and later Israel, parents began increasingly questioning this means of raising children. Preferring to live with their own offspring, many families discussed and eventually obtained full responsibility for them. Even as this collective tradition faded throughout kibbutzim of Israel and the twentieth century progressed, the sense of communal responsibility remained. Although the parents became increasingly liable for their children, they were still loved, watched, supported by everyone of the community.



## 2.4 The Forces of Change (1977-1985)

The Kibbutz movement faced a multitude of challenging factors following the establishment of the state of Israel. Previously, the pioneering initiative was widely honored as the spearhead of Zionism in the Holy Land. Following the establishment of the state, this honor was belittled by more pressing and seemingly significant national endeavors. A major factor of this shift in prestige was leader Ben-Gurion's stress of the importance of the institutions of the state. The rise of the Likud party to power in 1977 had drastic effects on the structure of kibbutzim. Compounding with this shift in political power was the economic crisis of 1985, which catalyzed the transformation of the kibbutzim itself. Undoubtedly, these events are tied together. With the rise of the Likud came the depletion of government support of kibbutz interests and values. Governmental policies regarding inflation compounded to have detrimental effects on kibbutz welfare as well. Kibbutzim of the 1980s were heavy borrowers, and their ability to repay their debts declined as the economy recessed. The Likud government offered the kibbutz no sympathy in its declaration that the movements' problems were self-induced. The kibbutz at the turn of the century faced so much financial and political distress that change was essential in order to maintain their communities.

Amplifying the detrimental effects of economic circumstances of the 80s was the shift in morale that took place at the same time. Following the establishment of the state in 1948, Ben-Gurion's stress of the importance of institutions made kibbutzniks begin to feel second rate. At the start of their mission, in the early 1900s, kibbutzniks saw themselves as essential gears in the process of revitalization of their homeland. As immigration flourished and the land of Israel developed, the glory of these pioneers dimmed. Kibbutzniks began to be viewed as a special interest group rather than the founders of Jewish settlement in Israel. As Likud rose in power, the influence of the kibbutz over national affairs diminished, including losing certain political positions.

As a result, privatization of kibbutz and increasing independent responsibility led to the change of focus from the collective to the individual. Economic difficulties as a result of a lack of governmental subsidies forced many kibbutzim to privatize and seek other types of profit making in order to survive. As a result, the identity of the kibbutz was challenged. Having been rooted in the ideal of collectivity and equal sharing, personal responsibility over personal affairs was a concept foreign to kibbutznik veterans. Now, they were expected to be responsible for their own services and consumption. The change from "we" to "me" could be seen as the elimination of a core ideal of traditional kibbutzim as it stresses individuality over uniformity. In changing what is considered fundamental to kibbutz culture, members sometimes found themselves questioning the resilience of their mission and the kibbutz dream of utopia.

## 2.5 Transformation

There is no one reason why kibbutzim throughout Israel transformed drastically following the 1980s through the turn of the century. A complex combination of external and internal factors necessitated their transformation, or else many kibbutzim would likely not have survived. As they neared the twenty-first century, kibbutzim across Israel began experiencing a variety of changes: seeking external assistance in the form of occupational specialization, allowing kibbutz members to leave the kibbutz for work, allowing non-kibbutz children to partake in kibbutz' services, shifting towards increased industrialization, as well as shifting responsibility of the collective onto the families.

The most apparent and direct cause of many of these changes was the financial pressure on kibbutzim. Upon losing substantial financial support from the Israeli government, kibbutzim began severely struggling to keep up with the demands of the national and global markets. The production rates of the communities were less than the markets required, and some kibbutzim were beginning to drown. Hence, members were encouraged to seek employment elsewhere, so to bring more income into the collective kibbutz economy. However, limitations within the kibbutz also led to this transformation. On the kibbutz, education was limited to the expertise of the members. When young people were sent away to university, a decision made by the community rather than the individual, they relished the opportunity to enjoy the luxuries of life outside of the kibbutz. As a result, many of them did not wish to return to working the land of the kibbutz. Kibbutz officials had to decide to begin hiring outside specialists in order to achieve their goals of complex industry. The introduction of these salaried workers, in tandem with kibbutz members working externally, led to an increasing social and economic gap between members of the kibbutz. The ideal of uniformity and equality began to drift farther and farther away.

Life on the kibbutz shifted as a result of internal pressures compounded with external ones. The most interesting change in kibbutz life to many modern researchers was the shift from collective to familial child rearing. Kibbutz parents, often mothers, began feeling as though their children should be raised by them in their own home rather than in the children's home. The economic crisis of 1985 did not cause this change; kibbutz began moving away from this collectivity earlier in the century. However, collective responsibility of the children of the kibbutz had become a definitive characteristic of the kibbutz. Similarly, other communal aspects of kibbutz began disappearing at the turn of the century. For example, dining halls began having restricted hours or closing all together. Members began becoming increasingly responsible for their own expenses as some kibbutzim across Israel became privatized.

In the 1990s, after the economic crisis and advent of globalization, some kibbutzim declared their intention to offer differential salaries to its members. Being a direct violation of the socialist foundations of the movement, the Kibbutz Movement threatened expulsion to any

kibbutz who followed this example. In an attempt to soften the blow of the erasure of this fundamental socialist ideal, while still trying to attack the financial plight of the kibbutz, a “safety-net” budget was introduced in some communities. This budget maintained the controversial offering of differential salaries to kibbutz members, but introduced progressive taxation on incomes. Kibbutzniks struggled with the controversial topic of unequal pay within their communities. Much discussion among the collective ensued in attempts to find the best solution to this problem. Alternative solutions were offered including differentiated modes of taxation. Kibbutzim across Israel had to change and adapt to changing circumstances of the evolving world in order to stay alive.

## 2.6 Contemporary Types of Kibbutzim

Even during the foundational years of the Zionist Kibbutz Movement, there lacked uniformity in ideology and practice among every kibbutz. The same is true of contemporary kibbutzim. Categories of kibbutzim recognized by the Israeli government include only three types: collective, renewed, and urban. However, the reality of kibbutzim is more versatile than these three categories. Modern kibbutzim come in many forms and sizes, a dominant distinguishable characteristic being their incorporation of religion into the structure and ideology of members. When misinformed outsiders are asked about the foundations of Israel and its communities, many immediately refer to religion as the driving factor. Interestingly, compared to the 270 kibbutzim currently active in Israel, only about fifteen are self-declared religious institutions. The remaining, therefore, are considered internally and governmentally as secular. What separates these two types of kibbutz is, unsurprisingly, their attribution of religious doctrines to their ways of being.

As economic pressures influenced kibbutz structure across Israel, modes of compensation began separating kibbutzim to a greater degree. The foundational kibbutzim of the Zionist mission valued strict allocation of resources on the basis of member needs. As privatization took hold in the Movement, some kibbutzim started paying differential salaries to their members. Being a controversial change when compared to the socialist ideology maintained by the founders of the Movement, variations of differential compensation came about. Some kibbutzim maintained a purely collective structure, giving to each member what they need in payment for the work that they can provide to the commune. Others, upon privatizing, began hiring salaried workers from outside of the kibbutz, allowing members to obtain their own salaries outside of the kibbutz, or paying their members different salaries based on their position or expertise. Economic and social gaps, on these kibbutzim, widened. Some kibbutzim engaged in mixed modes of compensation. These mixed models served as an effort to transition the kibbutz movement from purely need-based payment to purely market-based.

Two other types of kibbutzim are urban and ecological. Urban kibbutzim differentiate themselves from other forms of kibbutzim by engaging in more service or welfare professions, such as teaching or social work. The most striking characteristic of urban kibbutzim that set

them apart from others are their proximity to or incorporation into larger cities. Urban kibbutzim can either exist as previously agricultural communities that were engulfed by the growing Israeli population around them, or be integrated into previously existing cities themselves. At the start of the twenty-first century, there exists a wide variety of methods of compensation and sharing among Israel's urban kibbutzim. Ecological kibbutzim pride themselves on their goal of living in the most harmonious ways with the versatile Israeli environment that surround them. Water is both a glaring environmental and political issue in Israel. Some kibbutzim have responded to this reality by attempting to find ecological remedies to the region's environmental downfalls. Although all ecological kibbutzim share their goal of preserving the Earth, there currently lacks a unified effort across these kibbutzim. Like people, kibbutzim have evolved to come in all forms. Being kibbutzim, however, there remain traditional defining characteristics that are common to many sites. These similarities include stress of demographic importance, upholding democratic ideals, and providing for those who need.

## Chapter 3 Kibbutz Ketura



*Figure #1: Kibbutz Ketura and Arava Institute directional sign*

Kibbutz Ketura has countless qualities that make it a magnificent place to live. Founded in 1973, this settlement remains one of only around fifty kibbutzim left in Israel that are still traditionally collective in their everyday functioning. This is a significant source of pride for these kibbutzniks, provided the struggles and adaptations they needed to overcome in order to survive through challenging founding years. A particularly dominant influence on the founding of Kibbutz Ketura was its alignment with the Yom Kippur War. Only six days before the kibbutzniks were scheduled to receive the army post of Ketura, the war broke out, forcing everyone to readjust their plans. All of the kibbutzniks were drafted at the time, and many were sent throughout Israel to defend fronts. Almost two months later, the army post of Ketura was ceremonially transferred from Israeli soldiers to new American-Israeli citizens, and the transformation of Kibbutz Ketura began.

Ketura was the first kibbutz born of the Young Judaea Zionist movement. Young Judaea offers a gap year program for students transitioning between high school and university. This program is what connected the young members who banded together to found *Garin Hashachar*, the Aliyah-oriented group that came to be the first members of Kibbutz Ketura. This group of twenty or so were unified in their age, hardships, Movement ideals and goals, and Jewish

education. All a part of Young Judaea, they shared the ambition to be a part of something bigger than themselves. There were three primary goals of establishing Kibbutz Ketura:

1. Help the state of Israel economically, culturally, and militarily
2. Build a nice society for themselves and their children to live
3. Establish the first movement kibbutz for Young Judaea in Israel

Their intention was not to make Young Judaea a kibbutz-oriented movement, but was instead to simply start its presence in the land of Israel. These young Americans were not running away from America as much as they were running towards Israel. In America, they felt that they had no significant place or role. The need for a greater purpose than self-fulfillment made it difficult for these garin members to live in a place where they were not necessarily needed or particularly wanted. There was still a sense of subordination among Jews in America in the 70s, making Ketura's future kibbutzniks question whether or not accessibility to the luxuries of western life were worth the struggle. It was hard for them to find individual purpose in America, so these Young Judaeans strove for impacting the reestablishment of a Jewish national home.

Ketura also had ideological intentions throughout their founding, which remain important to the community today. As common to traditional kibbutzim, those who worked to build the settlement from the ground up have worked to find value in responsibility through self-application to the greater community. Success often stems from a plethora of hardships, and working through them for the greater success of the Jewish home has helped Ketura's members develop their understanding of what it truly means to be a Jew. There was widespread emotionalism with the situation of Israel in the late 60s and 70s, and the garin found purpose in helping build and protect the country they love. They wanted to create good things, a redirection of the idea of channeling positive energy that the 'flower power' atmosphere of the American 60s instilled in these young minds.

What brought the original Ketura kibbutzniks to the Arava valley was the romantic idea of making the desert bloom in tandem with being "frontier men and women" to build something where there is nothing. They wanted to create a home in a barren land to find a new perspective on life outside of what people learn through color televisions. The Arava offered a truly naked environment that resultantly exposed the vulnerability of the people who chose to settle there. The Arava forced Ketura's founders to stop dreaming of fantasies and to take the desert at face value. Once in Ketura, there were no more dreaming of anything that wasn't feasible. They truly had nothing and no experience, and had to begin thinking about approaching settlement in a dry desert in a technical and strategic way.





Figure #2: Kibbutz Ketura's blooming agricultural fields

In 1970, Garin Hashachar came to Israel to start their lives as Israeli citizens, beginning with army duty. They were immediately entered into the *Nahal*, the sect of the Israeli Defense Force that deals with the founding of kibbutzim. While serving, the future Ketura kibbutzniks were sent to other kibbutzim in Israel to learn of their functions and become familiar with the lifestyle. This period took two years; during their last year of service, they were allowed to work on their new home. However, the group was not quite dense enough to establish a solid community settlement. There were only around twenty members, whereas a community of thirty or forty would be able to build and support themselves much more efficiently. To tackle this, representatives of the kibbutz sent out position papers and visited United States universities to recruit young students into their movement. They spoke with hope but of the realistic awareness that what they were asking these young people to do was nearly impossible. Yes, the effort to build and strengthen Israel was a fight, but it was not necessarily these American students' fight. Still today, kibbutzim of the southern Arava have exceptional difficulty recruiting new members to uproot their luxurious lives to come and live in the Arava desert.

Nonetheless, the kibbutz has survived and grown to support a population of about 150 members today as well as 250 valued residents. Before 1973, the founders of Ketura dreamed of a population of 150. This is only one of many goals these youths set out to accomplish that they succeeded in. As outlined in the position papers and student recruitment speeches of Ketura's early years, this kibbutz had traditional intentions. As planned, Ketura is a home that welcomes people of all types, being a pluralistic community where all religious and ideological expressions are welcome. The kibbutz values not only personal expressions of faith, but also new communal

interpretations of important milestones as they redefine and celebrate life together. For example, the children of Kibbutz Ketura engage in a transitional ceremony involving climbing a mountain before they enter first grade, or their schooling years. Ketura has utilized its family-centric lifestyle to build as intimate and transformative society within itself.

Ketura is also relatively close to a city, about a half an hour bus ride from the coastal city of Eilat. The goal of this intentional positioning was to establish a kibbutz that was more than a purely agricultural kibbutz. From the beginning, there was attraction to the idea of creating a kibbutz that is strengthened by a large educational system. Educational institutions bring non-kibbutzniks to Ketura in efforts to better their academic selves while simultaneously influencing the kibbutz environment and culture. This dream was fulfilled by both the Keren Kolot educational and tourism center, as well as the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies located on the kibbutz. Kibbutz Ketura is one of the most demographically diverse locations in Israel as consequence of these institutions. Particularly through the Arava Institute, young students from an indefinite variety of backgrounds blend to tackle life and the environment's greater issues. This advances the kibbutz' effort towards progress, peace, and an overall better world.

The first ten years of Kibbutz Ketura were successful overall. The agricultural fields were planted and taken care of, export contracts were signed for winter vegetables and chrysanthemums, a milking parlor was being built, the turkey sheds were expanding, and new furniture and carpentry equipment were being broken in. The people of the kibbutz determined before its establishment that they wanted to eventually adopt a small industry to assist their economy. However, the kibbutz maintained its farm feel for its founding years until it developed its solar fields, algae industry, microbrewery, and turned the turkey sheds into offices. There were some financial roadblocks during this time, as to be expected by any infant community. Subsidization issues led to some planned additions being denied or postponed, such as a packing house or housing for calves. Nonetheless, the community continued to persevere, work where and with what they could, and slowly expand their kibbutz into a dynamic and culturally dense plot in the desert.





*Figure #3: Inside kibbutz Ketura's microbrewery*

Kibbutz Ketura was founded by a group of Americans that looked to offer pieces of their original culture to Israel. Before the kibbutz, they collectively decided to put off their plans for university in the states when they established a *bayit*, or experimental communal home, in New York City. They postponed their educational futures and waited to experience university in Israel. Today, the kibbutz allots enough money for any kibbutz child to attend university if they desire and the collective allows it. Along with their aspirations for higher education, the founders brought their liking for American sports and music, like baseball and Frank Sinatra. They hoped to not only bring with them American culture, but also a sense of social consciousness they felt in childhood and adolescence in the states had offered them. This consciousness of oneself in tandem with a balanced society has served as the basis for the structure of today's Ketura.

Ketura, like many kibbutzim, was founded through the intention of establishing a different way to not only community life, but kibbutz life in particular. In accordance with their traditional values, Kibbutz Ketura has remained collective in its communal sharing of income and assets. However, Ketura defines itself by prioritizing the individual in tandem with the greater community. The strength of the individual is used to facilitate the strengthening of the entire kibbutz. Through the journey to community fulfillment, everyone is simultaneously encouraged to explore their personal selves and define their own role in the larger kibbutz context. This pursuit is furthered by the opportunities to engage in both professional and unprofessional work to one's own desire. The opportunity to be able to work outside of the kibbutz' confines was defined before the original group even landed in Israel. Similarly, the founders of Ketura knew that they wanted to establish a place that was welcoming to all different

forms of religious expression. To maintain holistic fulfillment of both the individual and the group, art and the act of expressive creation has always been fundamental to solidifying the kibbutz' cultural orientation.

*What is this kibbutz' relationship with aiding organizations?*

It took a few years for some of the founding members to feel the relationship between the Kibbutz Movement and Ketura was positive. The founders felt a variety of fears regarding the future of their home in its formative years, many of which stemmed from misinterpretations of kibbutzim. The kibbutzniks felt isolation, not just as a result of their geographic location, but also from the realistic challenge of *Chalutzic Aliyah*, or the "pioneering" way of building a Zionist settlement with and from nothing. People didn't always believe that Ketura would survive. For example, upon first arriving to the site, the new kibbutzniks expected to be met by a *tzofim*, or group of Israeli boyscouts assigned to helping kibbutzim. The *tzofim* "played chicken" and did not show because of a lack of faith in Ketura. It took one year for a similar group to show up.

Eventually, after the kibbutzniks spent a few years proving their dedication and success, members of Young Judaea's university sect began re-realizing their commitments to kibbutzim. People began getting excited about making a creative Aliyah, and opened their minds to the opportunity. A change occurred where potential new kibbutzniks began conceptualizing Ketura as an complex opportunity to offer their personal perspectives and solutions to problems rather than existing as one single struggle that needed to be overcome. It was misunderstandings like this one that halted some of Ketura's progress in its first years.

Nonetheless, there are many organizations in place throughout Israel that assist in alleviating the burdens of establishing a new kibbutz. Those that are young and poor receive the most attention from organizations like the Kibbutz Movement, the Jewish Agency, and the Hadassah, all of which have offered Kibbutz Ketura assistance throughout the years. Primary assistance was offered financially, but support came in different forms as well. The Kibbutz Movement, for example, offered (and continues to offer) educational courses that deal with almost every realm of life of a kibbutz. Mechanic assistance was offered by the Jewish Agency and Ministry of Agriculture for things like tractors, cows, or a cowshed. The most dynamic form of assistance came from advisors, or specialists from the Kibbutz Movement. These advisors would come to the kibbutz and tackle any issue that was relevant to their expertise. Consequently, kibbutzniks had to occasionally deal with conflicting advice and make informed decisions on their own. For example, an economic advisor may suggest which cow feed is best for the kibbutz financially, whereas a health or animal advisor would suggest which is best for the cows' health. Now, there is one movement representative that regularly visits the kibbutzim of the Arava. Advisors no longer work with the Kibbutz Movement, but still work with kibbutzim when hired. If you asked, the majority of kibbutzniks on Ketura would say the Movement means nearly nothing to them today.

*How does Ketura approach the concept of humanity?*

Foremost, the emphasis on the individual is fundamental to ensuring everybody's sense of self is fulfilled. Self-awareness, reflection, and creation are essential to the sustainability of independent identities. More generally, the structure of kibbutzim serves to train its members and children in life through experience, not through books or tests. This never-ending education comes from members learning and adapting to their environment together, while engaging with it and each other every day. The person-person connections are fundamental to this value as well. At Ketura, people are respected as people rather than for their sex or origin. They regularly make an effort to listen to and deeply understand the problems, emotions, and ways of life of their peers. When you live and work with the same people every day, your lives become very complicated and intimate. People must be tuned into and honest with one another in order to live peacefully and harmoniously. Through mutual respect, the actions and perspectives of each person on Ketura is inspected in relation to one another. In doing this, the kibbutzniks aim to grasp a deeper understanding of morality and happiness.

The placement of Kibbutz Ketura aids in the exploration of humanity as well. The desert is immense and barren, offering a sort of honesty from the land. The mountains surrounding Ketura on either side are naked. When the kibbutzniks came to the previous army post to start new and complex lives here, they felt naked in their isolation too. From this defenseless and vulnerable position, kibbutzniks began building and defining their own selves to align with the values they have formalized for themselves. They call their society "free," although it does not necessarily resemble the anarchic quality of nearby Kibbutz Samar.

### 3.1 The Arava Institute for Environmental Sciences



Figure #4: The Arava Institute student dormitories

The Arava Institute for Environmental Sciences, or Arava for short, was founded in 1996 by two members of Kibbutz Ketura who had remarkable goals for the future of the Arava Valley's environmental sustainability. It is both an academic and research institution that offers full and half semester programs for students who are passionate about attacking problems regarding the earth beneath their feet. The Arava Institute is composed of five research centers throughout the Arava region and offers two academic programs. It is a leftist, nonprofit organization paired with Ben-Gurion University. The institute's campus on Kibbutz Ketura has brought together remarkable young minds to tackle greater environmental issues while influencing the kibbutz itself with their culture and atmosphere.

What sets this ecological institution apart from others is not its dedication to experimenting with and establishing sustainable systems for living harmoniously with the Negev

Desert encompassing it. Instead, the Arava Institute's definitive characteristic is its social agenda and its pride in "environmental and regional cooperation." The Arava is an international institution that welcomes students and experimenters from all over the world. Many young international students come from all over Europe and North America to research while simultaneously getting a sense for life on an Israeli kibbutz. However, these students only make up one-third of those studying at the institution. One-third of the students are Israeli-Jewish, and the remaining third of the students at the Arava are Jordanians and Palestinians. This demographic is intentional, and encourages healthy discussion of meaningful topics between members of these different and sometimes conflicting backgrounds.

The Arava Institute believes that, since it is an Israeli institution, it must serve as a bridge between communities. Although the institute has no political agenda, it cannot ignore the conflicts surrounding it. Even if unintentional, conversations tend to end up on the topic of conflict. The Arava Valley is located within the Negev Desert, a region naturally scarce of water. When discussing methods of water conservation or desalination, it does not take long before the participants are asking who has the right to control water resources in different areas, such as the West Bank. The Arava Institute and its members offer a safe space for conversations that can be considered controversial in an attempt to build understanding and respect between young people on both sides of conflict. Arava members and students believe that they need to talk about conflict in order to build an honest, respectful, and productive relationships. The intention of these conversations is not to reach a sound solution or compromise, but simply to let every person be heard, and hopefully bring their experiences with them into their own communities. Although it is not unusual for an educational institution to be situated within a kibbutz community, there is no other place in Israel where such diversity gathers to tackle large-scale problems.

The Arava Institute recognizes and discusses issues that arise from political conflict that are otherwise not prioritized within those regions. It is not only the people, but the environment that suffers from political unrest as well. For example, the Hebron Bresur River runs through the West Bank and Israel and deposits into the Mediterranean Sea. A highly polluted river, there is no system in place for cleaning it. Waste travels all throughout the region via this river and eventually makes it to the Mediterranean. Why is there no action being taken to establish a wastewater plant? Neither the Israeli government or those who live in the West Bank have claimed responsibility for management of the water and the payment for such a plant. The Arava Institute aims to tackle problems similar to this one as they further environmental consideration through regional cooperation. The attraction of this mission to young and ambitious students enriches Kibbutz Ketura's culture as it fills the kibbutz with lively, respectful, and progressive conversation from all over the world.

## Chapter 4 Personal Experiences on Kibbutz Ketura

To gain the most sincere understanding of kibbutz life as I could during my seven week stay on Ketura, I got involved in as many regular or traditional kibbutz activities as I could. I engaged in varying social situations and looked to help the community in any way, such as feeding the horses or cleaning up after Shabbat dinner. I did my best to engage as both a participant but also an observer, careful not to interject my own cultural tendencies or habits into these new experiences. Living on the kibbutz in a hands-on way allowed me to better grasp the community's insistence on both an individually fulfilled as well as a communally fulfilled life.

### 4.1 Shabbat on Kibbutz Ketura

Shabbat is the weekly day of rest in the Jewish faith. From sundown on Friday night to sundown the next day, work is set aside. At Ketura, every person practices this tradition to a certain degree. To traditional conservatives, not even cell phones should be used in public spaces. On Kibbutz Ketura, where many displays of religious faith are accepted, there is a mixture of practices. The kibbutz was founded by those who were raised with strong Jewish educational backgrounds. There are many members of the kibbutz today that remain very religious. As a community, everyone is expected to respect the traditions of those potentially unlike themselves. Although you are allowed to do whatever you please in your personal space, using cell phones in public areas is looked upon disapprovingly. Excessive noise should be avoided by everyone on the kibbutz on Shabbat, which can be difficult given it is the most social day of the week for many kibbutz residents.

Nights of Shabbat are the most relaxed and eventful. There is usually at least one bonfire surrounded by young people somewhere on the kibbutz. Being that there is also the Arava Institute located on the kibbutz, there are many young and sociable students about who enjoy meeting new people around these fires. Students and volunteers join each other often as strangers from areas all over the world. Around one small fire you can find people from Uganda, Jordan, the West Bank, Europe, the Americas, and even Kibbutz Ketura itself. The conversations that take place around these fires are the epitome of wholesome and progressive discussion. Everyone is accepted as equals, and when we spoke, we talked about humanity instead of nationality. Everybody was encouraged, even asked to share a story of something that means something deep to them as the rest of the group listened with silence and respect. This conglomerate of people, between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five, sit and speak of suffering, perspective, prejudice, and the future. Conversation is honest and passionate, exemplifying the ever present allure of intimacy and romanticism that defined the pioneering kibbutzniks of the early 1900s. Oddly, however, the ratio of young residents to young kibbutzniks around a single fire can be 10:1 in locations such as the firepit next to the Arava dormitories. Volunteers come from the middle of the kibbutz to share the fire, but much less often do kibbutzniks make the journey. This may suggest a separation or lack of integration between those who were raised on

the kibbutz and those who only stay temporarily. This isn't the only display of this division on Ketura's Shabbat.

Friday night, once the sun has set, Shabbat commences with optional Temple services followed by a special kibbutz dinner in the dining hall. Friday dinner is unlike the dinners of the rest of the week due to additions like a proper arrival time, seating assignments, tablecloths and accessories, wine, and a unique display of foods. Once arrived, all of the people on the kibbutz sit and say or listen to a prayer before saluting, breaking bread, and feasting. At first glance, this weekly event is a tremendous display of mutual respect and sharing. Simultaneously, however, there lacks a greater sense of integration as a result of the seating arrangements. Students of similar programs are regularly seated with one another. The residents of the kibbutz, that is, the temporary non-kibbutzniks are seated together while the families sit among themselves. Even more so, the person who is in charge of assigning the seats is tuned into the more personal social issues between kibbutzniks, such as divorce, and seats them accordingly. In a community that aims to establish a better, more perfect place to live, complicated relationships are found even on the kibbutz. Many kibbutzniks attest to the even heightened degree of complex social dynamics on a kibbutz due to their lives as simultaneous coworkers, neighbors, friends, and family.

The place where people are best presented as equals on the kibbutz is the synagogue. Although nobody is required or expected to attend each service, all are welcome. On some nights, there could be forty rows of chairs set up with only a few of them filled. This may be interpreted as the synagogue's statement that although not all come, all are welcome. Shabbat services are a very mixed experience. Ketura prides itself on its pluralistic religious acceptance and expression. Kibbutzniks and residents express their faith in any way along a wide spectrum of creativity. On Friday night Shabbat, for services and dinner, people wear any combination of clothes from fancy dresses to their work clothes from earlier in the day. There is an open invitation to join those in prayer; residents are equally encouraged to attend even with no previous religious experience. Everybody has the opportunity to experience the religious realm of life on the kibbutz. When a newcomer arrives and more experienced members know of their displacement, it is not unusual that someone sees to it that the visitor had an appropriately translated prayer book, knows what page to be on, and when to physically engage with the prayers. It is a truly supportive and inclusive experience.

Shabbat offers the opportunity for the individuals on the kibbutz to take time for themselves. It's not unusual to find people at the top of a mountain about 200m away from the rear gate of the kibbutz reading, enjoying the sun and view, or writing. The observance of Shabbat, as either a religious or simply ideological observance, encourages every member of this kibbutz to find balance between their individual selves with their role in the overall community. By separating your personal life from your community life, Shabbat serves to enhance everybody's holistic sense of self on Kibbutz Ketura.



## 4.2 The Mountain



Figure #5: A selfie at the top of the mountain, Kibbutz Ketura in the background

Shabbat offers the opportunity to spend time with both the community and yourself. One common way of finding peace and fulfilling one's self on this holy day is by climbing a mountain about 200m from the rear entrance of the kibbutz. It may be steep, but it is a mountain with a path, and is a popular hike for people on the kibbutz. Atop the mountain you can see all of Kibbutz Ketura in a very interesting perspective. You see the entire community you regularly see from the interior in the context of the much larger, barren Arava Valley. In the distance, you can see Kibbutz Grofit or perhaps Kibbutz Lotan to the north. It is a breathtaking view that instigates thinking about your position in Israel and the greater world context. For this reason, it's likely you'll find people who travelled up the mountain alone to journal, think, sit, or just look on their Shabbat. It is a quiet and impactful environment, and offers the opportunity for any individual who needs to distance themselves from the greater community or look into themselves an outlet. Hopefully, in this way, the balance between individual and communal fulfillment can be more easily achieved by the people of Ketura.

This mountain serves a couple ceremonial purposes on Kibbutz Ketura, as well. On the top edge of the mountain facing Ketura, you can spot nine dark barrels. These are all lit during the days of Hanukkah by children of the kibbutz. The illuminated barrels can be seen by the



whole kibbutz, as well as any driver making their way along Arava Road. Additionally, this mountain serves as a ceremonial feat for kibbutz children transitioning into schooling age. Before the start of their first grade year, children climb the mountain with their parents before descending for further festivities. The mountain is used as part of the way Ketura kibbutzniks come together as a community to invent new and personally meaningful ways to celebrate life.

#### 4.3 Cats, Dogs, Horses, Oh My!



Figure #6: Voluntarily shoveling hay for the horses' dinner

During the day, owners of dogs on the kibbutz set them free to roam and mingle throughout the kibbutz. Cats don't always have owners, and can be found wandering or relaxing in the kibbutz at any time of day. Each of these animals is loved and treated as members of the kibbutz family. When they freely wander, many cats and dogs will come right up to you for a pet or perhaps see what's for lunch. Much less often are they shooed away than welcomed with a babying voice and a scratch on the head. There is a sense of communal respect and responsibility for these

animals, although it is not necessarily spoken. They are looked out for and fed when appropriate, and petted whenever possible. This traditional sense of collective responsibility is also relevant to non-pet animals, like the kibbutz horses.

There are four official caretakers of Kibbutz Ketura horses, all members of the kibbutz. These four members are helped by volunteers who visit the kibbutz and either volunteer their time or are assigned to the horses by the kibbutz volunteer program. These visitors help feed and clean the horses, and are repaid with riding privileges. Anyone who comes to the kibbutz and has experience caring for horses can offer a hand if they'd like. The kibbutz principle of providing what you can to obtain what you need in return is captured here. With the horses, volunteers lend a helping hand in order to maintain an earned privilege. They have to pull their weight, otherwise the horses cannot be maintained at all. The people who care for these horses establish an emotional connection to the horses, and come to not mind having to feed them and clean for them. Eventually, mutual respect develops between the caretaker and the animals, and the work of maintaining them no longer feels like work. There is a communal responsibility to care for the animals on the kibbutz for the sake of caring for them.



Figure #7: Sarah Boecker and Ketura's dogs

#### 4.4 Tu BiShvat



Figure #8: Community planting on Tu BiShvat at Kibbutz Ketura

The celebration of Tu BiShvat is not unlike any other religious celebration on Kibbutz Ketura in the way that it exemplifies the kibbutz' foundational value of pluralistic expression. Tu BiShvat is a Jewish holiday that celebrates the new year by planting trees and greater ecological awareness. The traditional celebration involves planting trees in Israel, and multiple planting locations were designated throughout Ketura for the experience. Volunteers and kibbutzniks alike worked together to arrange the festivities. Plants and tools were gathered and properly arranged in the appropriate locations, and snacks were displayed nearby. There was music, singing, snacking, and a "guess the herb" game revolving around tea. Although it was a religious event, people of all degrees of religious expression, including non-Jews, were welcome and provided an inclusive environment. This holds true to the founding kibbutzniks' aspirations for a tolerant society in which all forms of harmless religious expression would be encouraged. Throughout the ceremony, every person helped and shared, including tools and cleanup responsibility. It was a very wholesome display of community gathering, mutual respect, and collective responsibility.





Figure #9: My plant and I, Tu BiShvat 2019

#### 4.5 Cello Performance

There was a special cello performance put on in the *merkaz*, or community center, of the kibbutz one night. Advertisements were posted in public areas; everybody was invited and encouraged to attend. It was an intimate performance, but was very passionate. Two young women performed an extensive set of remarkably versatile pieces, ranging from a variety of styles and cultures. They played with physical emotion and communicated with one another through their instruments, creating a very engaging experience for the audience. For some pieces, the women would introduce additional props, like ankle bells or a stick for strumming the cello's strings. Each piece had its own unique sound, and painted a very colorful picture representative of the rich blending of customs evident throughout Israeli culture.

This performance served not only to bring the community together in shared love and appreciation for string instruments and classical music, but also to keep the population stimulated. Living in the desert, far from others or public entertainment, is a sense of isolation that brings many difficulties. One struggle of living in isolation is having to keep oneself

culturally excited and engaged. It is not convenient to travel to the theatre or a show, so displays of artistic expression brought into the kibbutz community helps diminish this sense of inaccessibility. Despite not being a particularly social event, this cello performance brought people together in their exercising of their own individual interests.

#### 4.6 Pub Ketura

Pub Ketura is a versatile location for the gathering of any and all kibbutz inhabitants. Depending on the time of the year or week, you could find yourself in a riveting dance party in the sun or deep on the dancefloor of the welcoming club. Unfortunately, the beginning of the calendar year calls for the slow process of license renewal, and the pub was only open two or three times during the month of February. Nonetheless, it was a scene of social rejoicing and carelessness that was contagious.

One Friday between lunch and dinner, loud music could be heard from anywhere on the kibbutz. The pub was raging with activity at even 2pm. Nobody was within the confines of the actual pub, however. There was a DJ stand and seating arrangements set up outside of the pub's doors. Every type of person on the kibbutz was present. Young students, kibbutzniks, Arava staff members, volunteers, parents accompanied by their children, and a couple of the kibbutz' dogs. Everybody was either dancing, chatting, laughing, or drinking. People passed and shared hula hoops, frisbees, and anything that could bring your neighbor joy. A staff member of the pub was sure to occasionally walk through the crowd with water, keeping the community hydrated. It was an exceptionally relaxed but simultaneously energetic environment that was hard to ignore. This wonderful display of freedom and harmony was a tremendous way to honor the completion of the workweek and welcome the falling dusk of Shabbat.

Pub Ketura at night is a different but similar environment to the pub during the day. The fun occurs mainly indoors, whereas the outside space is meant for smokers or anyone who needs fresh air. Inside the pub, the walls and lights are dark but are pierced by moving and blinking streams of colorful spotlights. Many of the pub surfaces are painted with comical or relatable images, making the room feel like a sort of familiar party. At night, you find only the young people on the kibbutz: kibbutzniks, students, volunteers, interns. They come to mingle, dance, drink, and not think about work. This, too, is an atmosphere of relaxation and carelessness. You can even find people dancing shoeless on the dancefloor. Although many of these people come as strangers, it is rare that they leave as such. If you are found alone on the dancefloor or by the bar, it is remarkable how quickly somebody will invite you to join them or join you themselves. The door is left wide open even in Israel's winter, amplifying the feeling of social inclusion and accessibility. Pub Ketura is a place of welcoming and celebrating: festivals of life, freedom, and each other.

## Chapter 5 Kibbutz Ketura Kibbutznik Biographies

Six members of Kibbutz Ketura were formally interviewed during this study for the purpose of obtaining a more intimate understanding of the particular kibbutz. Interviewees included people of varying backgrounds: a founder, former or current secretaries, economic managers, Arava Institute staff members, etc. Many interviewees have been a part of the community for many years and have filled multiple roles of interest. All members were asked their personal histories as well as their own perspectives on the histories of the kibbutz.

### 5.1 Bill Slott - Kibbutznik

Bill is a devoted kibbutznik who has been living on Kibbutz Ketura for the entire duration of his life in Israel. Originally from the United States, Bill chose to move to Israel after he obtained his degree from Cornell University. Knowing that he was going to be drafted into the army as soon as he became an Israeli citizen, Bill decided that kibbutz life was the most suitable for his future. He came to Israel alone at twenty-two years old, and was drawn to kibbutzim for a multitude of reasons. Primarily, with no family in Israel, the kibbutz offered a place where he could come home, his laundry would be done, and his meals cooked. More so, all around him were people his age, ready and willing to befriend and support him. The kibbutz offered a reliable sanctuary to the homeless and alone.

Bill also looked to the future when he considered a kibbutz as his new home. Although there were no children around in 1982 besides perhaps a couple of infants, Bill could tell that kibbutz life and ideology were ideal for raising a family. A closed community, children now run freely all throughout the paths and playgrounds of the kibbutz. "You never have to worry about scheduling a playdate," says Bill. "Every moment of these children's lives is a playdate." In addition, you don't really have to worry about the dangers of outsiders within the kibbutz. Daycares and schools are located right near the center of the kibbutz, and the entire community is looking out for the children as they run around. Even when you cannot directly support your children throughout the day, there will always be someone you know around to make sure they're safe.

Children grow up together on the kibbutz, and it builds unbreakable bonds and friendships between the young people of today's Ketura. At the dining hall, you can find tables full of young friends between 12-25 talking enthusiastically. Twelve is the age children start sitting away from their families and closer to their friends, says Bill. What was most remarkable about these young people, to Bill, was the way in which there weren't any "in" or "out" groups of friends. Everybody was included. Drama happens occasionally, as it does in most societies, but at the end of the day, everybody remains friends who can happily eat a meal together. It was this type of unconditional love that was expressed by every single member of the kibbutz that made Bill fall in love with kibbutz life, where he remains for his 37th year.

Bill fell in love with kibbutzim structure, Kibbutz Ketura, as well as a fellow kibbutznik. He now has a wife and children at Ketura, and his family is still growing. When he married, his sister traveled from the United States to visit the kibbutz. She, just like her brother, fell in love with both the kibbutz and a kibbutznik. She has similarly chosen to carry out the rest of her life here, with the people and community she adores. Aside from the opportunities for families, a major attraction of kibbutz life is the lessened sense of stress in daily life. Free time really means free time here. In the United States, when on break from work or a day off, you often find yourself worrying about other things that need to be done such as your taxes or calling your mechanic. At Kibbutz Ketura, the community takes care of these hovering stresses. The kibbutz is taxed collectively, and all cars are shared (not to mention repaired by a kibbutznik mechanic). Bill's sister practices art one day a week on the kibbutz. Her paintings can be found in many kibbutznik homes, as well as community centers around the kibbutz. Compared to the competition of being an artist in New York, the kibbutz offers a remarkably supportive environment for all means of self-expression. In this way, the kibbutz appears as a sort of haven, where family and love can flourish, and ample time can be genuinely dedicated to oneself.

When Bill arrived at Kibbutz Ketura in 1982, when the kibbutz was only nine years old, it was 1/10th the size it is today. Around him were young, ambitious people in their twenties; there was nobody older than thirty on the kibbutz for many of its first years. Then, the closeness of the kibbutzniks was unmatched by any other companionships Bill had previously. Nearly half of the kibbutz would wake at 5am, take tractors across the street, and work in the agricultural fields until lunch. It was grueling work that gave them no immediate benefits, but the community effort made it bearable. After a long day's work, the kibbutzniks would gather in the dining hall for weak tea and flavorless cookies. Bill described this as "the greatest party in the world." You can imagine how spectacular the nights of weddings or other ceremonies were. Their social life was their greatest (and only) entertainment. There were no TVs on the kibbutz, only the stories that the members shared and made with one another.

These early kibbutzniks feared for the future of the kibbutz as they laid its foundations. There were all young and questioned whether or not Ketura would ever survive to see multiple generations. After explaining this, Bill gestured across the dining hall, where at a table sat four generations of a single family. The kibbutz is much larger now, but with all of the beauty of community, there are inevitably some aspects of the early days that veteran kibbutzniks miss. To Bill, the loss of the intensity and intimacy of the kibbutz in the 80's is its greatest casualty, as these factors of kibbutz life only now exist as remnants. As children run and play throughout the kibbutz, Bill jokingly suggests, "You kids don't know the privileges you have or the struggles we faced." Seriously, then, "We were truly blessed to have the early days we did."

## 5.2 Cathie Granit - Kibbutznik; Program Director of Academics, Arava Institute

Cathie Granit, like all kibbutzniks, is a versatile member of Ketura's community. She lives both as a kibbutznik and an employee of the Arava Institute located on the kibbutz. Raised in New Zealand, Cathie has been drawn to the idea of a kibbutz since she was a child in social studies class. How wonderful it must be, to live on a farm among animals and a tight-knit community? She now enters her thirteenth year living at Kibbutz Ketura, and it could not feel more natural to her. It's only when she explains the kibbutz to outsiders that she realizes how odd communal living really is.

Cathie started her life in Israel in 1999, when she met her husband at Kibbutz Ketura. She did not immediately become a member, however. Seven years later, Cathie and her family returned to the kibbutz to begin the member initiation process. At this time, she was pregnant and looking for a suitable job for a woman about to take leave. The Arava offered an appropriate one-month program, and Cathie found her home. She now serves as the Program Director of Academics for the Arava Institute, and oversees a wide range of programs regarding many aspects of academic life at Ketura.

The Arava has had a great impact on Cathie's life in ways much more complex than simply financially. "The alumni are why I love my job," she says. Phenomenal people are attracted to study at the Arava, people ready and willing to take a risk in order to make the world a better place. The students of the Arava are attracted to conversation, progress, and a dedicated mission. The person-to-person connections that come out of studying and working at the Arava are irreplaceable to those involved.

However, life at work and in the kibbutz becomes very complicated for people like Cathie, who both work at the Arava and live as a Ketura kibbutznik. The majority of Arava employees are also kibbutzniks, which leads to very complex relationships between employees, employers, friends, and family. It becomes hard to take and give criticism when it comes to people you know and love intimately. Simultaneously, the kibbutz tone of the institute has many benefits. Within the institute, much like the kibbutz, egalitarianism is a central value. People are respected as people.

What separates these two components of Cathie's life, the Arava and the kibbutz, is largely the way things are organized and run. Within the kibbutz, all members have an equal say in decision-making. In the institute, all employees have a right to be heard and the employers want to make everyone happy, but power is not equal. Cathie believes this is crucial to the success of the institute. At work, there are some people with more authority than others, managers. The hierarchy of positions within the institute is much more defined by power than on the kibbutz. For this reason, members of the institute recognize that it is not actually a kibbutz. This, however, does not dwindle the joy and fulfillment that their employment brings. Cathie, along with many of her peers, has found a harmonious balance of collectivity and hierarchical control within her life.



### 5.3 Sara Cohen - Kibbutznik

Sara Cohen is a woman who has been remarkably influential to the kibbutz she calls home. Her story is much like those of the kibbutz' founders. Raised in New Jersey, Sara joined the Young Judaea Zionist youth movement at an early age. She, with her peers, traveled to Israel for a year between high school and university. Afterwards, sixty of these Young Judaeans gathered to discuss their future with Israel. Of these sixty, thirteen traveled back to Israel during their junior year of university in abroad programs. These thirteen created their own program for their future life in Israel. Of these thirteen, about ten committed to their life in the Promised Land. Like the founders of Kibbutz Ketura, Sara and her companions tested communal life in a shared apartment in New York City. Proving the conditions feasible to their personal interests, they made Aliyah.

Together, this young Zionist group outlined their values and expectations for their future together. As displayed in their group brochure, located in Appendix E, these future kibbutzniks needed a place that valued socialism, equality, creative religious expression, social and political participation, as well as both individual and group development. They wanted a community that was dynamic and supportive, but also small enough that they could make a substantial impact. Brochure in hand, they traveled all across Israel to find their perfect future home. Despite this effort, they proactively knew that Kibbutz Ketura was where they were going to end up. Ketura fit all of these expectations, and was also their "movement kibbutz." Just thirteen years earlier, the Hamagshimim, or university sect of Young Judaea, founded Ketura as their first settlement in Israel. It was a home that was connected to their own personal backgrounds and coincided with all of their predetermined values, but still offered the potential to influence and be influenced. Garin Shacharut, as they called themselves, knew their new lives in Ketura would be difficult, and they were excited by the challenge. For these reasons, almost all of those who traveled to Kibbutz Ketura alongside of Sara never left.

Sara's group joined the kibbutz at a very challenging time for the Kibbutz Movement. 1985 saw drastic changes in the financial support and stability of kibbutzim nationwide, and as a result, many ended up either significantly transforming or collapsing from the economic pressure. Ketura was one of few kibbutzim to withstand this crisis both economically and socially, as it maintained its non-privatized expression of traditional collectivity. Over time, however, the kibbutz transformed in many other ways. Most obviously, there has been significant geographical and demographic growth within the past thirty-three years. As an indirect result, many twentieth century members of the kibbutz feel as though the level of intimacy between all members of the kibbutz has decreased significantly. In 1986, every single member knew absolutely everything about each other. There were no secrets when you lived and worked so closely and consistently together.

The ways in which this work happens has changed significantly as well. In the early years of the kibbutz, every member would rise before the sun to tend the agricultural fields that

kept the kibbutzniks and their economy alive. The solidarity that resulted from unified work such as this is unmatched amongst today's kibbutzniks. As families began emerging, some parents became unwilling to sacrifice family activities for work. The kibbutzniks have lost the spiritual unity that blanketed the first kibbutzniks as they all worked exactly the same jobs towards the same common goal: the tentative survival of the kibbutz. With this solidarity, though, also came bitterness. Excessive, tiring manual labor that reaps no immediate benefits can make anyone eventually feel rancor. For better or for worse, the early kibbutzniks experienced the same hardships as they worked towards the betterment of their community.

Until Sara and her group arrived in 1986, conditions at Kibbutz Ketura could be described as impermanent. In the first thirteen years of the kibbutz, whether or not it would survive the challenges of its desert environment was uncertain. People visited in "trains," or groups, tested the waters, and many decided to leave. There was very little wholehearted dedication to the future of themselves and the kibbutz by newcomers. Even members of the original twenty founders decided to leave the kibbutz for a combination of personal reasons. To be a kibbutznik in a kibbutz' founding years, and even afterwards, is your full-time employment. Much of the population fluctuation in Ketura's formative years was likely in part of the challenge of committing oneself wholeheartedly to a community whose survival was uncertain. Around 1986, the population stabilized. Those who were members of the kibbutz at this time, Sara included, remain there today.

Sara's experiences on Kibbutz Ketura are unlike many of her kibbutznik peers for the reason of her positions. A founding member of Keren Kolot, she helped establish a programming center that now serves both educational and tourist interests. Sara was the first person to hold the position of kibbutz Secretary General twice, and has held it for the longest in Ketura history. Secretary General, or *Maskeer*, is a complicated and unattractive position for kibbutzniks for the reason that it deals with the "dirty business" that naturally occurs among even idealistic members. A position founded by Communist roots, says Sara, the Secretary General can also be looked at as the "general manager" or "mayor" of the kibbutz. The Secretary deals with interpersonal issues between members, such as jealousy, bitterness, or lack of empathy, and is the go-to executive when tensions on the kibbutz rise. Because of the position's intimacy with less comfortable aspects of humanity, Sara believes that those who hold it can either be pushed farther away from the kibbutz, or grow a deeper connection to it. To Sara, her title of Secretary General became a part of her personal identity as it brought her closer to the kibbutz and its people. Social issues naturally arise in even the most utopia-driven communities. Sara's experiences with dealing with kibbutznik issues showed her that despite these tensions, everybody was harmonious and hopeful in their love of the kibbutz at the end of the day. Unified by unconditional love for the community, kibbutzniks throughout the years have proven to Sara and themselves that they are willing to give more than is needed of them to their people, such as time and thoughts. Moments of distress on the kibbutz occur only as moments, until its members settle back into their lovingness.

Having held this respectable position twice, Sara played a large role in her community, both on the kibbutz and throughout the Arava Valley. Until her second term as Secretary General in 2008, decisions on Kibbutz Ketura were made with less aim to reach a consensus. Upholding the traditional kibbutz value of direct democracy, issues were talked about and voted on by the whole community. However, the majority ruled, leaving the minority to *feel* like a minority in a society that values member equality. Sara, being uncomfortable with this circumstance, worked to instill a greater effort to reach unanimity in the General Assembly. This way, issues are more thought out, and members are more encouraged to question decisions and leaders. As a result, these leaders gain greater trust by kibbutz members as they collectively work to determine what and how to decide on issues.

Aside from influencing relations among members of her own kibbutz, Sara reached further with her executive position. As Secretary General, Sara would travel throughout the Arava Valley to represent Kibbutz Ketura and its interests. At conferences, she would not be taken seriously. Sara remembers many occasions in which she would present her position or suggestion to those around her and get ignored, only to watch a man propose the same only a few minutes later and receive the utmost respect. This type of overt sexism, although not seen by Sara on her kibbutz, was evident within the region. “We are not gender equal on the kibbutz, but we are pretty good.” Gender is a complicated subject that has evolved in interpretation and understanding over time. Traditionally, kibbutzim were supposedly ungendered in the way operations were run. Respectively, according to Sara, Kibbutz Ketura has maintained this value, though not entirely. Whether or not the virtue of true egalitarianism within kibbutzim has been sustained over time is still up for debate.

#### 5.4 Leah Kayman - Kibbutznik

Leah Kayman was raised in the suburbs of St. Louis Missouri and later pursued an education in dairy science and filmmaking at the University of Wisconsin. Following her American graduation, Leah grouped with people her age to discuss their futures in Israel and the goal platform from which they would stand. The daughter of a businessman, Leah wanted to live a life where she could play a role in something larger than herself. And so she and six others found themselves at Kibbutz Ketura in 1977, where they would begin the rest of their lives. Following them was thirteen more, a remarkable amount who ended up staying on the kibbutz to even the present day. They anticipated the hardships that were to come, knew it was going to be a difficult life at first, and they persevered anyway.

As appropriate for her educational expertise, Leah worked in the Ketura dairy herds for many years. Then, she aided in the founding of the educational programming center, Keren Kolot. As a result of the commitment this required, Leah had to leave the dairy herd. Nonetheless, she and her co-founders pride themselves on the success of Keren Kolot. Originally founded for short-term programs, the design of each was catered to the group which would be involved while simultaneously focusing on the Arava environment around them.

These programs and the work of Keren Kolot members stressed the importance of accepting people other than oneself. Now, the Keren Kolot center caters to both short- and long-term educational programs, as well as the interests and needs of visiting tourists.

“It’s easy to romanticize the past,” says Leah. Nonetheless, the differences between the kibbutz in 1977 and the kibbutz in 2019 are significant and meaningful. The most significant change, to Leah, is the ways in which people work on the kibbutz. Founded on tilling the land and reaping what you sow, kibbutz work is much more segregated. There are still agricultural fields to be worked, yes. However, not everybody works in them, and not every day. In 1977, everybody worked the same jobs in the same exact clothes, unifying them in more ways than one. They talked of important things over tiring work, establishing bonds that were remarkably meaningful. The wide range of professional expertise that exists on Kibbutz Ketura now is both positive and negative in Leah’s eyes. People work where they are most needed or are most skilled. Some jobs still rotate, but nobody is required to leave a position they fill well. This biggest loss caused by the specialization of professional efforts is the lack of intimacy among all kibbutzniks. In the founding years of the kibbutz, there was an overarching sense that everybody was working together towards one common goal. Leah doesn’t sense that anymore. She doesn’t even know the names of all of the children on the kibbutz today.

Even in a utopia- driven community, there are aspects of life on the kibbutz that are not perfect. There exists a committee to ensure that every job on the kibbutz is filled and that everybody has a job. In a perfect world, every kibbutz job would be filled by a kibbutznik. Since that is not the case, outsiders are hired to fill specialized jobs like those in the algae factory and solar field operations. Unlike these outsiders, every kibbutznik’s salary goes into one kibbutz bank account, even that of kibbutzniks who work outside of the confines of the kibbutz. Since every kibbutznik earns the same amount for their work within the community’s gates, difficulty forms in finding different forms of motivation to work hard. Even more so, the struggle of living and working with those closest to you is the uncomfortable and difficult relationships that have to be dealt with day to day. When you are a technical employee of your next-door neighbor, it can be very difficult to receive harsh criticism from them in the morning and dine with them in the afternoon. Nonetheless, there is an overall sense of happiness and contentment among the people here. No life is truly carefree, and the kibbutzniks on Ketura have found their balance.

### 5.5 Avigail Morris - Kibbutznik, Director of Archives

Avigail is as passionate about kibbutz life as she is about anthropology. Having made Aliyah in 1979, she now spends her 35th year on Kibbutz Ketura. She has completed much of her education in Israel, having obtained her Masters in anthropology at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. This is where she met her husband, Noah, who persuaded her to follow his friends and personal aspirations to Kibbutz Ketura. Noah wanted a life without hierarchy, as well as one that accommodated both the religious and nonreligious. After living on the kibbutz for a while

and having her first child, Avigail finished her Masters in Jerusalem. In 2001, she obtained her PhD in multicultural games.

Despite early speculations, Avigail could not be happier living on Kibbutz Ketura. “What am I going to do with a MA in Anthropology in the middle of the desert?” she thought. Her dream job was in Jerusalem, working in the Israeli Museum. Without it, Avigail has found happiness in a place where her values are shared by the community, her children were raised, and the scenery feels like home. She reached out to Ben-Gurion University to network with those in Israel who shared her professional interests. Her list of teaching achievements is now very impressive. Avigail established an anthropology teaching program for children that still today offers full year courses. Thirty years old, this program is gaining attention from others who have reached out to Avigail to share her expertise. Additionally, Avigail has taught Qualitative Methodologies focused in anthropology and sociology in Eilat. In the Arava’s regional school, she taught in the gifted children’s program. She also taught a gap year program for young students out of high school that did not want to go immediately into the army. She taught in Polynesia for many years, over two trips, and has returned to begin teaching others to run her own program.

Avigail has also been involved in many functions of her home kibbutz. Many committees make up the structure of any given kibbutz, and it isn’t common that committee members remain in one position for long. Avigail has both been on many committees as well as ran a few herself. Twice, she was in charge of the “educational committee”. She was on the “Refugee committee” with the same two people to ten years, a more unusual team-like group. She was on the “members committee” and oversaw many of the private manners that occurred between kibbutzniks. Additionally, Avigail served one year on the “traditions committee.”

Avigail, with her professional expertise, was one of the founders of Kibbutz Ketura’s historical archives. The facility has to be built out of nothing to accommodate all of the history that the kibbutz was accumulating. Without computer documentation, the archives’ purpose is to store, display, and offer engaging programs with objects and information from the kibbutz’ past. She now oversees these archives and is occasionally assigned an “adopted child” from visiting programs whom would have a particular interest in exploring the kibbutz’ history.

## 5.6 Judy Bar-Lev - Founder, Kibbutznik

Raised in the Bronx, Judy has been a member of Young Judaea since she was just ten years old. About eight years later, during the organization’s gap year program, Young Judaeans grouped together to discuss their future in Israel. They were drawn to the idea of establishing a kibbutz of their own in a land that meant so much to their personal backgrounds. It wasn’t only the geography that drew the group to the Arava Valley, but the idea of building something where there was nothing. These ambitious young people, between eighteen and nineteen years old, were in the period in their life where anything and everything was possible; they could be

whoever they wanted to be. With positive goal-oriented attitudes and humanistic aspirations birthed of the American 1960s, Judy's group made their way to Israel in 1969.

At first, the *garin*, or kibbutz-focused Zionist group, was not taken seriously when they took their youthful, energetic, and inexperienced selves to the Kibbutz Movement to announce their dream of their own kibbutz. Had it not been for a few sympathetic ears, the group would have had an even more difficult experience establishing themselves in a land they had never lived in before. Many obstacles came their way in the following years, and the Kibbutz Movement offered a helping hand. First, the group was challenged with the need to decide which of five locations best suited their collective goals. Of the five location options the movement offered the group, four were located outside of the Green Line, or pre-1967 Israel borders. The only remaining option was the only one that suited the group's desire to be within the official limits of Israel, Ketura. This option not only avoided political controversy, but also offered the romantic opportunity to make the barren desert blossom.

When the group made Aliyah, they were drafted in the army and sent to two different kibbutzim to learn the functions of the society. The Kibbutz Movement organized the *garin* to first arrive at Ketura to begin establishing their new home on October 12, 1973. Six days before this date, the Yom Kippur War hit Israel, derailing this plan. Many of the founding members, around twenty in total, were still officially drafted at this time and were sent to fronts throughout the nation. As a result, the basic plans for the beginning of the kibbutz were disrupted and the group was reassigned to arrive at Ketura on November 22, 1973. The stresses of the war followed these members, creating social and personal difficulties among the kibbutzniks. This was one of many reasons, Judy believes, many of the founding members did not remain on the kibbutz.

Once their stake had been planted in the Arava, a whole other realm of difficulties presented themselves to these newly independent young people. The members of this new kibbutz had very little prior work experience. They suddenly had to take care of themselves and the community. The challenge of adapting to a newly independent lifestyle was difficult for many of them; you had to have the willingness and capacity to live both modestly and without your families. The summer following their first year on Kibbutz Ketura, the first kibbutz child was born. Now, these new adults had to arrange for daycare services amongst themselves while they continued to work for the survival of their home.

Following the turmoil of the Yom Kippur War, friends of the new Ketura kibbutzniks came from the United States to volunteer. There was a surge of international interest to help. The war established a sense of collective identity among US Jews, which motivated them to offer what they could to assist in the maintenance and growth of Israel. The Jewish Agency also offered aid to Kibbutz Ketura in many forms, such as providing tractors and cows. The Ministry of Agriculture helped as well. Even in a community isolated within the southern Negev Desert, Kibbutz Ketura was not unfamiliar with aid from others. Nonetheless, persistence in hard and dedicated work was essential to the success of these people and their community.

Today, there is a comfortable standard of living on the kibbutz, which requires the continued participation of every member to maintain. Even in this collective and idealistic society, minimum wage is not sufficient for a sustainable and happy life. Agriculture alone was not enough for the growing population of the kibbutz throughout time. Ketura prides itself today on its high quality date orchards, new age Algatech industry, Arava Institute, a growing tourism business, and more.

In the midst of all of the struggle and adaptations that Kibbutz Ketura has been faced with, Judy Bar-Lev speaks of the things that kept the community alive for forty-five years. “The kibbutz should have failed numerous times,” she recalls. However, it was the human aspect of the community that allowed it to thrive. Many financial crises of a kibbutz gaining a solid foundation in a desert environment compounded with resultant social crises. The biggest social crisis occurred around 1978, but what it was about, Judy does not even recall. Since then, the population of Kibbutz Ketura has only risen. The people who have remained a member of Ketura through turmoil and successes love the kibbutz wholeheartedly. This shared love and admiration for the community and its goals is what has and continues to motivate the community.

### 5.7 Moshe Falkof - Kibbutznik

A former Chicagoan, Moshe Falkof was raised in a suburban high school with a conservative Jewish education at its foundation. Following graduation, he considered a gap year program, but his parents insisted he attend university first. He spent his junior year of university abroad in Israel, and returned to finish his degree knowing that Israel would eventually be his home. In 1972, Moshe made Aliyah alone, and joined a kibbutz in Be’er Sheva. This kibbutz, Hatzerim, later adopted Kibbutz Ketura for its similar ideals. For six months in 1976, Moshe was in Ketura aiding in the founding of the new kibbutz. Ironically, Moshe didn’t want to live on a kibbutz like Ketura, one that was small and founded by Americans. He wanted a “classic kibbutz experience.” What kept him on the kibbutz through today was the people and their charm. Here he met his wife and remained to raise their three children, one of which has remained on the kibbutz to begin the membership process.

Moshe has held a variety of positions on Kibbutz Ketura. From 1978-1980, Moshe was the Manager of Economics. This manager is one of five on the kibbutz executive council who are responsible for dealing with more intimate matters of kibbutz processes. Executive council positions are generally difficult to fill, and Moshe was one of the members who felt “thrown in” the position. This was perhaps a result of his educational background in economics. As manager, Moshe dealt with inaccurate accounting agency reports, having to recount every record for himself. He also was not able to balance the economic plan during his two years as active manager. To add to the misfortunes of Moshe’s experience, he didn’t happen to personally connect to the other executives in the council. Although passionate about economics, Moshe shared that he had a negative experience as the Manager of Economics on the kibbutz.

Moshe found himself back on the executive council as Secretary General for two years. Not particularly passionate about this position either, Moshe served where his kibbutz needed him. He offered his opinion that in order to be the Secretary General, you have to be the type of person with a vision. His vision, he calls, was simply to have the kibbutz running smoothly and properly. Eventually, the position of Secretary General was split in two in order to break up the workload and make the position more feasible for kibbutzniks. Now, one branch deals with budgeting, and the other deals with social issues among kibbutzniks.

Adding to his skill set, Moshe worked in the cow herd, orchards, grade school, synagogue, and was even a bookkeeper for Eilat fishers. One of the most personally impactful positions Moshe held, however, was the head of kibbutz Ketura's sect of a national Russian youth program. The program was designed to bring Russians who had newly completed Aliyah to kibbutzim to start their lives. A movement fueled by immigration and various socio-economic reasons, it brought wonderful young people into kibbutz Ketura and made a lasting impact on Moshe.

Having these casual and honest interviews with varying kibbutzniks on Ketura allowed me to begin building a personal relationship with Kibbutz Ketura, both with its people and its history. As they welcomed me into different aspects of their day like their work, mealtime, or home, I learned about the sincere hospitality and sense of inclusion for even strangers on the kibbutz. While learning about the specifics of kibbutzniks' lives, I was also able to see how they lived and treated others. At the same time, the spectrum of personalities of my interviewees offered me an unexpected perspective on the earlier years of the kibbutz. Of the six kibbutzniks I sat down with on Ketura, they were all of similar generations and came to the kibbutz in the first two decades of its life. Not only were they all American Jews with a solid educational background and Zionist ambitions, but they also all had very similar personalities. Each of the people I interviewed on Kibbutz Ketura actually intimidated me to a certain degree. Not because they made me feel out of place but because they were very confident in both themselves and what they had to say about their community. They were stern as they shared what are their greatest values as well as their kibbutz', but also made relatable jokes and voluntarily shared personal information to a stranger. They had big, familiar, and refreshing personalities. Although all interviewed separately, my interviewees were a group of people I could easily envision spending their time together, either in the 1980s or today. The holistic experience that were these interviews reiterated the passion that lies at the foundation of the Kibbutz Movement in a wonderfully personal way.



## Chapter 6 The Financial Crisis of 1985

Although this particular crisis is credited to the year 1985, financial strain and poor financial planning occurred in the preceding years. Overwhelming loans paired with insufficient production and out of control inflation to put both large and small communities in situations that required amelioration. Following 1985, the Israeli government and kibbutzim still struggled as they adapted their economic practices in an attempt to regain financial footing in their varying spheres of influence. The degree of consequences of the economic downfall of the 80s hit different communities in different ways as a result of their actions the years beforehand. Still, the crisis had a lasting effect on both the Kibbutz Movement at large, as well as individual kibbutzim throughout Israel.

### 6.1 The Greater Kibbutz Movement

In 1984, inflation in Israel was at 400%, and national authorities realized that some economic circumstances had to change. Loans that were distributed to kibbutzim at the time were unrealistic and unmanageable. Until this crisis, because of the practice of national Israeli subsidies, there existed an attitude that a loan was a source of money that you didn't necessarily have to worry about paying back. Noah Morris, treasurer of Kibbutz Ketura at the time, feels this attitude was even encouraged by the financial support system upon which many kibbutzim stood. There were many institutions that offered young and poor Israeli kibbutzim assistance, including the Hadassah, Jewish Agency, ICA Agency, and Nir Shitufi Agency. These organizations did not stress the value of repayment or the dangers of overspending. Instead, they offered more loans and unintentionally facilitated massive, widespread debt throughout the Kibbutz Movement. The loan system was finally disrupted when inflation decreased. Loans were written off while the value of loans administered decreased. Steadily, the movement and economy regained its stability after adjusting in multiple ways.

The Israeli government experienced a significant political change not long before this crisis began accruing financial victims. The Likud, coming to power in 1977, was and is notorious for its lack of ideological or financial support of kibbutzim, but this change in national support wasn't the only facilitator of the crisis. Banks and the Israeli government did not want massive debt to drown the movement; bankruptcy was not on the national agenda. Compounding with the shift in governmental power, the actions and attitudes of organizations and settlements associated with the Kibbutz Movement wounded the movement itself. The crisis saw inefficient mutual support between rich and poor kibbutzim. The rich were significantly richer, and there existed significantly more poor kibbutzim in the nation. When the bank of the Kibbutz Movement ran out of money, many rich kibbutzim refused paying off their loans, collaborative organizations lost considerable amounts of money, and non-profitable facilities were forced to lay people off or close their doors. Until the 1980s, there was a solid atmosphere of subsidy by the Kibbutz Movement to maintain kibbutzim's standard of living. With taxes

paid by richer kibbutzim, the movement was able to subsidize the poorer. This system was effective until the 1980s when the system collapsed as a result of economic confusion birthed of outrageous inflation.

Following the wakeup call that was this economic crisis, kibbutzim were in shock, particularly older ones. Kibbutzniks had had a feeling of being “cream of the crop,” as Noah put it. How could a community that is doing its best to establish a perfect society fail? People started to realize that things needed to change. Dramatic changes that resulted from the economic crisis of the 1980s involved kibbutzim structure as well as their relationship with the official Kibbutz Movement. After struggling to survive, many kibbutzim had to privatize in order to maintain their community. These kibbutzim moved to differential salaries, began hiring more outside workers, and shifted responsibility for personal expenses onto individuals rather than the community. Kibbutz Movement officials tried to deem these privatized kibbutzim as not kibbutz at all, but failed. Before, there existed an atmosphere of centralized democracy with the Kibbutz Movement having power over individual kibbutzim. Following this transformation, compounded with decreased financial support provided by the movement as a result of government cuts, kibbutzim started becoming more independent entities. There remained the feeling that, in their common cause, kibbutzim in themselves should assist one another. This feeling was particularly strong among the kibbutzim of the Arava Valley who were unified in their unique needs that resulted from their geographic isolation. The degree to which the Kibbutz Movement impacted their regular functioning dwindled in importance.

Specific assistance of the Kibbutz Movement to individual kibbutzim is more limited today than it was prior to the 1980s, particularly in the Arava Valley. The Movement, however, still supports kibbutzim in both social and financial ways. For example, there was recently a movement representative on Kibbutz Ketura to talk about health. Most significant to the Arava region today is the assistance the movement provides in the midst of their building crisis. The whole of the Arava region currently struggles with the need to expand their housing options as they anticipate heightened membership or student traffic in the upcoming years. There exists a program, led by Ketura, the Regional Council, and the Kibbutz Movement, to provide money for these plans. With additional help from local business cooperatives as well, the Kibbutz Movement has bound with regional representatives to assist their collective desires. The Movement also maintains its principle of offering financial assistance to the needy. It offers aid to very young kibbutzim in order to get their feet on the ground, elderly kibbutzniks on pensions, and also build up funds for collateral loans.

In response to the stress of the economy, kibbutzim across Israel adopted differential salaries and budgets between their members. There are three main reasons why these changes occurred between the 1980s and 2010, according to Noah Morris. The first, being a direct result of financial meltdown, kibbutzniks who were able to make a better salary working off of the kibbutz wanted to simply in order to maintain their community’s standard of living. Second, with undifferentiated salaries, it is naturally unavoidable to maintain a community that consists

of identically efficient workers. Some members grew to live more off of the efforts of others than their own, and other members grew resentful. “If they don’t have to work hard, why do I?” In some communities, those who offered less than others to their communities increased, causing their standing of living to decrease. Finally, it is possible that many children of kibbutzniks returned to their previous homes after university but had no ideological attraction to kibbutz lifestyle. Many returned for the comfort and familiarity of their environment rather than being motivated by the ‘build and be built’ mentality of kibbutz’ founders. The combination of any of these factors could, and did, have impacts on some kibbutz’ structure that couldn’t be ignored.

Nationally as well as regionally, kibbutzim as an entity began pulling themselves back together. Kibbutzim stopped asking for loans and readjusted their relationships with banks. Many were forced to close the industries and services on their kibbutzim that were not profitable. Many of the kibbutzim nationwide privatized spending within their communities, meaning financial responsibility was shifted from the collective onto the individual, which resulted in significant savings overall. Some communal services stopped being provided by the collective while member budgets increased, allowing them to obtain more control over personal spending. This shift in economic responsibility resulted in a heightened awareness of individual consumption across kibbutzim, and kibbutzniks adapted their lifestyles to meet their individual needs. Remaining industries, as well as cooperatives that were owned by kibbutzim, slowly began accruing profits again. The crisis of the 80s resulted in a shift of economic responsibility from larger organizations and the Israeli government to kibbutzim themselves. Similar to this concentration of responsibility was the widespread handoff of financial responsibility from kibbutzim’s collective to members. Even still, there remains a handful of resilient kibbutzim who have maintained their system of undifferentiated member budgeting and kept ultimate monetary responsibility on the greater collective.

## 6.2 Kibbutz Ketura

Noah Morris was the kibbutz treasurer during the height of the Israeli financial crisis of the 1980s. Active for the first time in this position between the years of 1985 and 1988, Noah saw firsthand the challenges and adaptations Kibbutz Ketura faced during this time. Not unlike most other kibbutzim, Ketura was in substantial debt during these years. “I never knew the *kupah*, or kibbutz bank account, to be positive in value,” said Noah. Nonetheless, Ketura survives today as not only an economically comfortable and confident community, but also as a traditionally collective kibbutz with undifferentiated budgets between its members. Noah was enthusiastic to explain how and why it all happened.

Throughout the first ten years of Kibbutz Ketura’s life, there was an overarching sense of confidence in the kibbutz’ economic stability. Noah describes this feeling as an element of hubris, that the Kibbutz Movement was strong and would always remain powerful. Kibbutzniks

worked tirelessly every day to obtain a comfortable standard of living. This standard wasn't one that they established themselves, but instead was out of a sort of instructional handbook provided by the Kibbutz Movement. Follow the instructions, and the kibbutz would always do alright, they thought. This standard suggested investment in things like daycares, clothes, elderly care, or housewares. Being a young kibbutz, Ketura wasn't yet making enough money to provide all of these amenities to its members. To compensate, Ketura took out loans on behalf of the Kibbutz Movement and national banks. Before the 1980s crisis, the Kibbutz Movement offered a web of guarantees that was unlimited in regard of sum or time. The Israeli banks at this time favored these unlimited guarantees, and would provide any kibbutz a loan if its lack of a limit was approved by the Movement. Throughout the early 1980s, kibbutzim all across Israel obtained a plethora of loans they did not have the ability to pay back.

When the Kibbutz Movement bank ran dry, an overwhelming conviction ran across most kibbutzim that they needed to adjust in order to stand on their own two feet. Kibbutz Ketura, under this pressure, closed all of its prior accounts, stopped paying what loans they were working on repaying, and started over in new banks. They also began hiring outside workers to fill technical and higher paying positions in their industries. Members were inspired to obtain higher paying jobs as well in order to contribute a higher sum to the kibbutz collective. Noah himself, maneuvering the kibbutz through this crisis, facilitated change in the way Kibbutz Ketura dealt with their money. Before the economic crisis, members of Ketura had no idea their home was so indebted. Money was spent without consideration of the entire community, a practice that is much unlike the functioning of most other community decision-making. Because of Noah's influence from the 80s on, the kibbutz can no longer take out a loan without all members of the General Assembly voting on it.

A quality of kibbutzim of the Arava Valley that sets it apart from those of other regions is the way in which the majority of the ten settlements have maintained their functioning without challenging the collective nature of the kibbutz. The largest six of these ten have maintained their undifferentiated economic structure, whereas the remaining four have shifted to differentiated budgets. This is only a correlation between size and differentiation rather than causation. Every kibbutz had their own reasons for differentiation. However, kibbutzim with a population lower than a certain amount did face governmental threats to take away any means of production. Smaller kibbutzim may have adopted differentiated salaries in an attempt to attract new members into their communities. Kibbutz Ketura is unique in the way that its members never even considered the idea of privatizing spending on the kibbutz. The community was able to avoid differentiation because it did not experience any of the issues that Mr. Morris deemed responsible for widespread differentiation. There was hardly lack of commitment to the kibbutz in the 80s because the Ketura was still so young then. Ketura was only about a decade old at the height of the financial crisis, meaning it was still composed of kibbutzniks who were wholeheartedly dedicated to their community's betterment and success. This meant that every member offered all that they could in their everyday work, which avoided resentment over

disproportional efforts. Any jealousy about the urban lifestyle was avoided because Ketura was very distant from any city. There was limited allure of more luxurious habits, which avoided temptation against the commitment previously mentioned.

The people of Ketura feel as though although they suffered some painful consequences of the financial crisis, they were significantly less detrimental than those experienced by many other kibbutzim. This was primarily a result of the young age the kibbutz at the time. Many of the kibbutzim of the Arava avoided crippling debt as a result of their avoidance of considerable loans in the unstable financial market. They did have many loans, but they did not overextend themselves to a point of no return. They were a new and small kibbutzim, and received financial and material grants from organizations that didn't expect repayment. Furthermore, the national brake on the economy compounded with debt conversion on the kibbutz to advance the normalization of the fiscal situation.

Beneficial economic investments also helped Ketura stay afloat throughout its challenging years. The date orchards began bringing in substantial profits by the time of the crisis. Knowing that this wouldn't be enough income to support a growing community for decades, Ketura tried new ways of earning money for their collective. They now reap considerable profits from their Algotech and solar power industries, as well as their hosting of impressive academic institutions. Ketura caters to the desires of sizeable tourist interests and offers a variety of educational programs through their Keren Kolot guest services. More well-known is the location of the Arava Institution for Environmental Studies on the kibbutz, which is a remarkable campus for visiting students from all over the world. The interests of outsiders in the affairs of the kibbutz, such as through tourism and the Arava Institute, have helped support and maintain the economy of Ketura.

## Chapter 7 Kibbutzim Descriptions: Arava Valley and Urban Case Studies

Representatives of six of the ten kibbutzim of Israel's Arava, including Kibbutz Ketura, were interviewed for the purpose of this study. Neot Samadar was visited and worked on but no members were formally interviewed. Founding members or *Maskeerem*, kibbutzim representatives, were asked similar but not exactly the same questions about their communities. They were asked about their kibbutz' history, ideologies, culture, as well as miscellaneous information about certain kibbutz positions each interviewee may have filled. Common themes discussed in these interviews by prompt of questioning included egalitarianism and authority on each kibbutz. Additionally, members of two urban kibbutzim were interviewed over the phone in a similar fashion.



Figure #10: Kibbutz Lotan logo, retrieved from <http://kibbutzlotan.com/eco-tourism/?lang=en>

### 7.1 Lotan

Mike Nitzan

Kibbutz Lotan was established in 1983 by a group of young American and Israelis who were passionate about establishing a kibbutz of their own. At the tail end of the era of kibbutzim establishment, this group faced numerous obstacles in their path towards sustainable life in the desert. If establishing a water-heavy agricultural economy wasn't difficult enough, founders of Lotan struggled with an unsupportive national government and public. Nonetheless, they stand today as a community of sixty-four official members of the cooperative association that thrives because of their spirituality in tandem with their mutual support of one another.

In 1979, a group of about forty people just finishing school gathered in the United States for the first time to “dreamstorm” about their collective future. They established their beliefs and goals for the future and ultimately set forth to establish reform kibbutzim in Israel's Negev. “Reform” in this context refers to reform Judaism, the most progressive and liberal sect of the religion. This original forty split into two groups and established two communities, Yahel and Kibbutz Lotan. Although both originally kibbutzim, it is remarkable how these two settlements have grown and adapted to socio-economic pressures in dramatically different ways. The Lotan

project began a little after Yahel's establishment, and aimed to a more conservatively religious communal society than some founders experienced in their years in Israel before 1983.

Lotan's founders headed in the direction of Israel's barren Arava Valley primarily because this was the only location in Israel at the time where there existed any reform kibbutzim. Guidelines of the reform movement insisted that kibbutzim settlements not be located in areas over the Green Line (pre-67 borders), but other motivations brought Lotan kibbutzniks to the Arava as well. David Ben-Gurion, the first prime minister of Israel, envisioned an Israeli desert that bloomed green. He dreamed of conquering the land by establishing a community presence there, rather than only army posts. Being a diverse spectrum of religious people, Lotan's founders connected to Ben-Gurion's vision through the words of Genesis. In one chapter, an almost direct connection is found in wording about conquering land and making it bloom. Later, the Book of Genesis reads of preserving this land and tilling it, which correlates precisely with the physical nature of kibbutz life. Through persistent work on the land, Lotan's members experienced a successful first year of harvest.

Since Lotan was relatively late in establishing itself in the Kibbutz Movement, the kibbutz has only existed in a time where the Israeli government has not financially or ideologically supported kibbutzim. The Likud power is known for its disliking of kibbutzim, and for this reason the members of Lotan have never favored governmental support anyway. There remained other forms of support for their first couple of years, a substantial portion in the form of financial and educational assistance from the Kibbutz Movement. However, the relationship between kibbutzim and the rest of Israel continued to pose obstacles. An economy based on agriculture wasn't as attractive to national investors as big business was. Farms require lots of land, land that could be used for infrastructure or housing, and yield profits hardly comparable to that of corporations. "Israel doesn't love its farmers like some other nations," says founder Mike Nitzan, classifying kibbutzim somewhat of a public enemy. If public perception wasn't hard enough to combat, it is only compounded with the isolation that the Negev Desert creates. The Arava Valley is, respectively, in the middle of nowhere. It is surrounded by nothing but sand and mountains on all sides. Getting anything here is inconvenient, and it is even more difficult to persuade middle-class Jews with comfortable socio-economic backgrounds to leave their lives behind to join Lotan's collective community.



*Figure #11: Kibbutz Lotan bus stop*

The isolation of the Arava doesn't only affect its communities by distancing its inhabitants from Israelis in other areas of the nation. It has tremendous effects on the people of desert kibbutzim themselves. In the Arava, surrounded by nothing but dirt, there is no entertainment outside of yourselves. There is no city nearby where you can easily catch a movie or go out to dinner. Even more so, the Arava is located in the southern tip of Israel, separating it dramatically from not only the rest of the nation, but from other nations as well. Members of these small communities often feel they aren't "a part of things" outside of their own kibbutz boundaries. Members have had to use one another and their creativity to keep their minds sharp and culture overt. As if this wasn't challenging enough, members also regularly battled with the turmoil of life in the desert.

First, the flies and heat were the greatest bother Lotan members needed to adapt to. Summers in the Arava can reach 120°F, and the flies in the area do not care if you persistently swap them away. More detrimental to the survival of the community, however, was the desert's incompatibility with agriculture. If only to make circumstances worse, the products many of the kibbutzim of the Arava manage require high-intensity water use agriculture. There is tremendous scarcity of water in the desert, so kibbutzniks have had to be creative. To combat this necessity, Lotan has adopted and applied mechanisms such as drip irrigation, hothouses, water-wise crops, 70% wastewater recycling, as well as computerized formulas on irrigation to provide precise water distribution. Despite having adapted to many of their hardships, members of this thirty-six year old kibbutz struggle with all the same plights regularly.



What has allowed this small community to survive through these difficult years has been the people who have dedicated themselves to the land and each other, and of course some technological investments. Economically, the dedication of members of the Arava to establishing and advancing renewable energy has caused the greatest success. Renewable energy is a much more attractive national investment than agriculture and battles less opposition. But what has kept the people sane is equally important to what keeps them alive. Life in the Arava has not gotten any easier, but Lotan considers itself somewhat like the mythological figure Sisyphus. Their persistent efforts to support themselves despite being met with countless discouragements is what has sustained them. They persist because they believe their way of life here in the desert is correct, or better than the societies that surround them. Here, they have established an alternative society that is fair, considerate, cultural, educational, economic, judicial, egalitarian, and mutually supportive. Even more so, Lotan kibbutzniks cherish the ideology of the continuity of life, and regularly teach it to their children through example. Children are taught to do, care, question, and create. They learn from their community rather than from books. They are taught not to pursue happiness but to create it in everything they do so that it may persist through time. When tourist groups travel through the area, they experience a taste of this approach to life, and it has greatly affected many of them. They leave Lotan to their own communities speaking of what they have seen. In this way, a small, isolated community has come to impact the lives of thousands.

*“How did the economic crisis of 1985 effect kibbutz Lotan?”*

The first year on the kibbutz was great. Crop yield was sufficient, the members were young and energetic, and a pride and hopefulness filled them as they made their dream come true. Only two years later did the economic crisis strike, forcing them to reevaluate their structure and adapt to their changing world. Lotan saw other kibbutzim of the region hurting themselves with poor investments and changing social structure. The shift throughout the Kibbutz Movement from collective child-rearing to family responsibility required many kibbutzim to reconstruct their houses. Lotan had never had collective child-rearing and avoided this need for reconstruction.

There were a few economic investments that benefited Lotan throughout the 80s, only to come to impact economic success of the kibbutz less in the 90s. These included new agricultural equipment, goats, and goat milk products. Having not considered the future need for kindergarten and daycare, this reality resulted in unexpected expenses from the community. Lotan experienced a “rollercoaster of debt,” being in it, then out, and repeating. To stabilize itself, the kibbutz privatized. This privatization was also motivated by Lotan’s desperate need for more members at the time of economic distress. With membership so low, Lotan faced the threat of closure and disbandment by the Israeli government.

From 2013 to 2015, Lotan underwent a privatization process, the shortest completion of this process in Kibbutz Movement history. Throughout the process, a committee of kibbutzniks oversaw the changes being made and outlined how new life on the kibbutz would work. To

check this committee, the General Assembly regularly met to discuss the changes proposed by the committee. The kibbutz went through what is called economic rejuvenation during these years, where outside administrators from the Kibbutz Movement oversaw economic endeavors and established a credit rating for the kibbutz. Lotan is now comfortable, supporting itself and its community primarily through the production of dates, service and education-based tourism programs, and its partnership with a fish farm growing sea bream in the Mediterranean.

*“How does Lotan fit into the 21st century?”*

It is very difficult to define the 21st century. The interpretation discussed here considers the 21st century an era of screens; even isolated in the desert, Lotan has screens all over. Everybody has a cell phone nearby, and there are computers in offices some kibbutzniks work in. However, Lotan plans to expand considerably with the addition of forty new housing units, and founder Mike Lotan speaks of the type of people likely to fill them. According to Mike, Lotan does not attract people who are looking for a 21st century lifestyle. They are looking for a place embedded in and appreciative of nature, as well as relatively disconnected from the outside world (despite access to cell phones). These people are looking for a strong sense of community life outside of Facebook and Instagram, and a place where they can develop and grow as individuals.

“I suppose what makes us the most ‘21st century’ is our commitment to sustainability,” says Mike. You have to be sustainable here, in the middle of nowhere, without reliable access to water. Without precise care and consideration of your resources, communities of the Arava cannot survive. Today, kibbutzim of the area have adapted their industries to include technologies such as algae processing and solar power. Hopefully in the near future, wind power can be added to the list.

*“What is Lotan’s relationship with the Kibbutz Movement?”*

The Movement was tremendously helpful in the founding years of the kibbutz, as it is for most young and poor kibbutzim. It provided financial and training support, and sent advisors to aid in particulars of the settlement process. Members of Lotan used to even meet at Kibbutz Movement offices weekly to chat about future endeavors. However, when the government stopped supporting kibbutzim, money ran out. The Kibbutz Movement no longer had the finances to allocate to aiding in sustaining most kibbutzim, and the movement’s significance in the lives of kibbutzniks dwindled. Compounding with decreased subsidization by the movement from the later years of the twentieth century on, some kibbutzniks feel as though the interests of the movement are not particularly relevant to kibbutzim of the Arava. The Arava is unique; no other conglomerate of kibbutzim is so geographically isolated in Israel or experiences quite the same environmental challenges. As a result, Arava kibbutzim have bound together to support and advocate for themselves. The role of the Kibbutz Movement in the area has been replaced by the Regional Council.

*“How does egalitarianism of the sexes present or not present itself on Lotan?”*

“We have always been gender aware,” starts Mike. The founding members of this settlement were both men and women, all having an equal say in what they did or did not do. They viewed societies from which they came, as well as those surrounding them, and decided that humans can do better. Today, without any person being forced to work in a particular position, there are more men than women working in the children’s homes, and more women than men serving as economic coordinators. Managers of the date farm are about 50% each sex. Fueling the persistence of this trend is immigration of liberal progressive Westerners who have viewed their coming to a new home as an open opportunity similar to the attitudes of kibbutzim founders. With them comes their ideological proclamations that they must establish a better society. Through this attitude alone, both new and old members of the kibbutz express the versatility of the sexes through their work.



*Figure #12: A street along the edge of Kibbutz Grofit*

## 7.2 Grofit

*Michael Levy*

Grofit is a small kibbutz in the Arava Valley that is uniquely situated on the top of a hill. This previous army outpost location wasn’t particularly chosen by the founding kibbutzniks; this location serves a lot of strategic purposes. Built in 1963, Grofit transitioned to civilian ownership only three years later. The Israeli government of the 1960s intended to settle areas of

the country that lacked beneficial Israeli presence. Grofit, like the other kibbutzim of the Arava, is along the Jordanian border. Only a few years before the Six Day War, the government urged settlement in the Arava both to make the barren desert bloom, as well as establish an Israeli presence along borders with potentially dangerous neighbors. Grofit in particular was situated on a high hill so that it can protect the Arava Road, which connected Israel's southern port, Eilat, to the rest of the country. At the time, important imports such as Iranian oil came from the Red Sea, and needed a protected avenue to the center of the country. The Arava Road serves as the "lifeline" between Eilat and thickly settled Israel. The new kibbutzniks of early Grofit had realized their dream of a kibbutz in an honorable, elevated location. However, one year after Grofit was given to civilians, war struck in 1967, making the Southern Negev of little importance to the Israeli government. Life became difficult on the kibbutz, it's foundations began crumbling, and most every one of the original founders left the kibbutz by 1968.



*Figure #13: View of the Arava Road from Kibbutz Grofit*

Nonetheless, Grofit survives to this day, a happy community of about 180, half of them official members. There have been many more struggles to keep Grofit alive in addition to lack of governmental priority. Primarily, it is exceptionally difficult to make a living on the kibbutz.

Based only on agriculture for the kibbutz' first twenty-five years, the issue of growing profitable crops in sand with brackish water had to be tackled. Farmers turned researchers, and the Arava now serves as a testament to the adaptability of the natural earth. However, there was no drinking water on the kibbutz for many years, and the members were forced to drink the brackish water that also fueled their crops. Additionally, being on top of a hill, building costs are much higher on Grofit than on lower elevations. A more pressing issue, however, is the aging of Grofit's members. When the kibbutz was founded, everybody was youthful and full of energy. By the end of this decade, 76% of Grofit will be above the age of sixty. Without the introduction of many new young people, the community of Grofit will die. Even more so, the community of Grofit also suffers from its geographic isolation. In the middle of the desert, there are no theatres, orchestras, science centers, or art museums. It takes tremendous individual and community effort to keep the culture and minds of Grofit exercised.

It's not all struggle on Grofit; members will attest to the kibbutz being a wonderful place to live. It's most dominant success is its educational system. With much smaller classes than you can find in schools in Tel-Aviv, Grofit offers more than twice the variety of educational programs and advanced classes than many urban schools. Parents on the kibbutz understand that if they don't provide for their children, they will not receive what they need to survive and thrive in the modern world. Education is very expensive on Grofit, but its members do not mind investing all that they can towards the future of their children. Grofit also offers tremendous pension plans to its elderly members. The kibbutz sets aside so much money for retirees that sometimes members end up with more money in retirement than they earned while they worked. On a kibbutz, nobody has to worry about not having enough to support themselves or their children.

Life is pretty good on the top of this hill, particularly for children. Parents don't have to worry about their daughters roaming the streets of the kibbutz at night, because there are no strangers. Members don't have to worry about not having enough financial support should they or a loved one experience an emergency. For children, the kibbutz offers an open world. Many kibbutznik parents, who were raised in other countries, did not have the opportunities or support that the kibbutz children experience. Culturally deprived children often don't get a break in life, or have to act as a superhero to overcome their misfortunes. On the kibbutz, children are encouraged (and supported) to learn sports, musical instruments, travel, and manufacture a fulfilled life for themselves. No matter who your parents are or how you were raised, every child is offered the same opportunity to become anything they want to be. It's a sort of "dream world," where children are free and face a world of open opportunities. The current Secretary General of the kibbutz communicates the successes of kibbutz life in the following way: "Life is petty here. When life is petty, you don't have any real problems."

The first twenty-five years of Grofit's existence as a kibbutz felt like there were no struggles at all. The members were young, passionate, and worked the land for no immediate benefit. They woke up to work for work's sake, and didn't mind it so much. They believed in

working to build a living, not making a living. Crop yields experienced very successful years, but the kibbutzniks didn't really care. It was about the work. Mr. Michael Levy, the current Secretary General, described it as somewhat of a "hippie land in the middle of the desert." People from all over the world joined in Grofit and brought with them positive energy of the life loving 60s. It took about twenty years for these pioneers to start getting nervous about their lives. Agriculture alone wasn't enough to support their growing community and needs. The kibbutzniks had to adopt the idea of industrial work alongside of their fields in order to keep their economy afloat. Today, the community flourishes by the collaborative efforts of their date orchards, dairy herd, tourism, and plastic packaging plant.



*Figure #14: Kibbutz Grofit agricultural fields*

*"How is work distributed among the genders here on Grofit?"*

*"Don't ask a man a question about gender, they're stupid. That's like asking a white person what it is like to be black"* was Michael's immediate and appreciated reply. He continued to share his personal perspective on the matter nonetheless.

About half of the kibbutz' members work outside of the kibbutz. Of the other half, there is no discussion of unbalanced work on behalf of the sexes. The executive positions of the kibbutz have always been represented by both sexes. The treasurer has been a woman for the entire forty-two years Michael has been a kibbutznik. There is always a woman sexual assault



advocate on the kibbutz. There never any groups to come to the kibbutz and stress the need for men in some positions and women in others. The way that work is distributed on Grofit is natural to the kibbutzniks, and not a forced effort. Industries which have traditionally been described as “women’s work” have mostly closed on the kibbutz, including a sewing shop, clothes manufacturing plant, and laundry facilities. Women do, however, represent the majority of the regular staff of the kibbutz kitchen and children’s houses. Nonetheless, women are never assigned or assume a position on the kibbutz because of their sex. Everybody works where they want to work because of desire and capability.

*“How was this kibbutz affected by the financial crisis of 1985?”*

*Kibbutz Grofit shares many characteristics with other kibbutzim of the Arava in the way that it did not “play with fire” in the years leading up to the 80s’ financial crisis. The kibbutz did not invest any money in the gray markets, and saw the worst of the crisis pass them by. The larger kibbutzim who acted irresponsibly, overspent, overextended, and were poorly managed were the ones that suffered the most. Grofit was not one of these kibbutzim, and neither were any of the kibbutzim of the Arava. However, Grofit was a young and poor kibbutz still in the 80s, and had received many loans they had no ability to pay back. In the end, the Israeli government offered some help, and the kibbutz was able to regain a sound economic footing.*

*“Did Grofit privatize?”*

“Privatization” is the most horrendously misused terminology in the Kibbutz Movement, Michael exclaimed. It is used as a bad word, but in the grand scheme of things, privatization simply refers to responsibility, or more independence. People need more independence in order to fulfill themselves, and that is not a bad thing. On Grofit, life is still very collective. All of the houses, work branches, services, machinery, legal and economic responsibility are owned by the collective. Life on the kibbutz is completely communal. Members of the kibbutz bring in different salaries because half of the members work in different professions outside of the kibbutz. However, everyone is allotted the same budget by the kibbutz, regardless of the salaries they contribute to the kibbutz’ communal bank account. The funds that gather in this account are distributed to members, as well as used in ways that take care of the entire community, such as being set aside for pensions or used to build a playground.

Changes were made on Grofit in an attempt to eliminate the amount of unnecessary waste on the kibbutz. A playful example of the situation is as follows. All of the fruit on the kibbutz used to be free for the taking. Take as much as you need; the fruit is yours. People would not necessarily need a surplus of fruit, but would collect as much because it was free. To fit all of this fruit in their homes, they needed bigger refrigerators. To fit bigger refrigerators, they needed bigger houses. Meanwhile, at the end of the day, the fruit that began this domino effect would end up rotten and thrown away. There has been, not unlike most communities, unnecessary loss of goods on Grofit. To combat this, Grofit began allocating more spending money to each

member, but eliminated the freeness of some items. It is difficult to call this privatization in the traditional sense, because the money allocated to the members came from the collective account. With this extra money, members could buy whatever their heart desired. As a surprising result of distributing increased sums, the kibbutz saved money. With increased responsibility for their own usage, kibbutzniks were more aware of their consumption. With a similar effect, the kibbutz attached meters to each house to measure individual usage and provided everyone with a bill at the end of every month. The kibbutzniks did not have to pay these bills; this responsibility remains on the kibbutz as a whole. This simply served as a reminder that energy costs money that is proportional to usage. As a result of these new additions, electricity usage on Grofit decreased by 30%.

The General Assembly of Grofit today is tackling the option to allow differential budgets for different salaries, which would also involve differentiated taxes. Higher taxes on higher salaries benefits the entire community, as the taxes are cycled back into the communal bank account and used to benefit collective interests. This practice would still be considered “kibbutz-esque,” Michael Levy suggests, because every member would have equal opportunity to advance their own salaries. In the end, every members’ needs would remain covered by the collective to ensure a happy and healthy life on Grofit.



Figure #15: Kibbutz Eilat logo, retrieved from [https://logopond.com/b\\_arango/showcase/detail/87923](https://logopond.com/b_arango/showcase/detail/87923)

### 7.3 Eilat

*Roni Shani-Mor*

What makes Kibbutz Eilat unique is the spectacular place in which it is settled. Directly between the Negev Desert and the Red Sea, residents of Eilat have the privilege of experiencing both worlds simultaneously. Even more so, the Arava Valley is surrounded by Israeli mountains on one side and Jordanian mountains on the other. Here, there is next to no stimulation from the outside world. The environment is peaceful, quiet, and clean. It is no wonder why the kibbutz is one of the largest in the area, with 105 members and around 300 residents. It is a beautiful, lively, yet simultaneously serene place to live.

Eilat wasn't always in this precise location, however. It wasn't until 1962 when the government relocated the settlement inland to make room for hotel and commercial attractions in the nearby city of Eilat. Kibbutz Eilat was actually originally on the beach, in the location where these tourist attractions now tower. Fifteen ambitious young people first founded this location in accord with governmental intentions to populate the Southern Negev. They survived through involvement in the fishing industry and by providing laundry services for nearby soldiers.



Today, the newly located population earns its income from successful agricultural harvests, tourism, as well as in their metal industry. Eilat also opens its kindergarten to children from nearby Eilat, and used to own a dairy herd. Work on the kibbutz, although it changes, prides kibbutzniks of Eilat in its variety of professional opportunities.



*Figure #16: Kibbutz Eilat factory*

Another of Eilat's many sources of pride is the way in which it remained traditionally collective throughout the years of its existence. Much like other kibbutzim of the area, life is mostly collective on Kibbutz Eilat. Some kibbutzniks work off of the kibbutz, some work on it. They bring home different salaries, but all of it goes into the kibbutz' communal bank. Every member gets a budget, which can include 10% of your income if your salary exceeds others on the kibbutz. This serves as an incentive for members to further support themselves and the community simultaneously. This opportunity allows each member to both fulfill themselves through increased economic independence, as well as further provides for the community as higher earnings are redistributed for the entire population's needs. In this way, the current Secretary General of Kibbutz Eilat, Roni Shani-Mor feels the ideological idea of the kibbutz isn't damaged.

Isolated life in the desert is not easy, but Eilat exhibits the adaptability of humans. When the kibbutz was first founded, the young members knew nothing about how to live in the desert.

Their first substantial obstacle was to figure out which foods can and would grow there. Through sort of a trial and error process, the kibbutz has established a wonderful variety of fruits and vegetables that it provides to the greater Israel. Fortunately, however, the desert climate allows the crops of Arava kibbutzim to be harvested before others of the country. Their produce is the first on the market. Even more so, the dryness of the desert is more suitable for the cows of the local dairy herds. Simultaneously, however, the cost of living is very expensive when you are isolated from much else. It costs a lot of money to transport goods to and from southern Israel, despite the country's relatively small size. Between the Southern Negev and the rest of the nation lies miles of intricate mountains and troughs which take suitable vehicles and time to maneuver. Settlements in this region need proper cooling and water conditioning facilities in order to maintain themselves. To add to the struggles of kibbutzim of the region, people tend not to want to travel, nonetheless live, in the middle of the desert. Kibbutz Eilat and its neighbors have a very difficult time recruiting new members to expand and amplify their intimate communities. Still, Eilat stands as an exuberant and socially fulfilled community because they have suited themselves and their institutions to their environment.



*Figure #17: Peacock statue outside of the Kibbutz Eilat pub*

Life in the desert is difficult, yes. But it works on kibbutzim because of the people who make it happen. Kibbutzniks of Eilat have to truly believe in the kibbutz in order for it to survive, and that isn't always easy to do. The community has to continually work towards ensuring the population fulfilling its potential. Members regularly meet to discuss whether or not they still believe in the idea and ideologies of the kibbutz, if their current ways of life are sufficient to keep the classification, or if changes need to be made to better fit their desires. Without support and action from the community, the kibbutz can never move forward. They are alone in the middle of the desert, and need widespread support among their peers in order to allow the community to take steps in any direction. To tackle this, the Secretary General and its assistive committee actively work to keep the community interconnected. For example, there is a Kibbutz Eilat newspaper that reports on community and personal happenings such as members falling ill. In this consensual way, every member of the kibbutz is offered the opportunity to be aware of the situation of and offer assistance to a neighbor. "People love helping people," says Roni. The collective effort of the community is what keeps kibbutzim moving.

The General Assembly serves to allow every member of kibbutzim communities to have equal say in the happenings of their own neighborhood. However, a kibbutz is complicated, and authority has to be delegated to smaller, more specialized committees in order to keep the kibbutz functioning efficiently. There are many committees on Kibbutz Eilat, one for every aspect of life. There is a music committee, education committee, health committee, old people's committee, young person's committee, and even a dog committee. Each of these committees has their own budget, organized by the community management committee, and makes their own decisions on issues particular to their expertise. The General Assembly, then, serves to attack more general or overarching issues. Additionally, the General Assembly is the authority that assigns the heads of each committee, as well as the head of the community, the Secretary General. Committees have the right to make their own decisions, but if any changes are to be made on the kibbutz as a result of these decisions, they have to be approved by the collective General Assembly.

*"How did the economic crisis of 1985 effect Kibbutz Eilat?"*

"The 80s were very bad," says Roni. The economy suffered tremendously, and many of the kibbutzniks in the 1980s did not remain on the kibbutz. The population of the community decreased by 30% as a result of the stress caused by this crisis, but Eilat's population has since increased back to a comparable volume. Kibbutzniks decided after this significant density loss that they needed to be more efficient. To ensure the kibbutz' economy would survive, the kibbutz decided to shut anything that wasn't profitable. They also separated the community budget from the industry budget to more accurately measure the kibbutz' consumption and industrial profits. "It's sort of like a family who owns a supermarket. The children eat whatever they want from the market, and your numbers get all confused," explains Roni. The kibbutz

eventually got themselves to an economic position that was able to pay back all of its debt, and is now in a really stable position.

Similar to Kibbutz Grofit, Eilat experienced very limited privatization as a result of the economic crisis. Sometime around 2013, the kibbutz decided to put financial responsibility for electricity, food, and laundry services on the individual families and members rather than being provided by the collective. At the same time, the personal budget of each member increased for spending on whatever they needed. This allowed members to have more control over their lives and budgets, which made many of them more comfortable. This type of change isn't considered "un-kibbutz" by the Secretary General because the money that's being provided to each family still comes from the collective bank account. When people are unhappy about the limitations on their life, they aim to change the whole system, says Roni. As a result of this change, members of the kibbutz seemed to become more happy overall. Even more so, electricity usage went down significantly.

*"How are the genders distributed throughout the kibbutz' workforce?"*

Gender is not a big deal on Kibbutz Eilat; members don't really talk about it. Roni, the female head of the community at Eilat, feels that women are not offered any less options than men. However, she notes, those who manage money on the kibbutz are almost always men and those who work for them are mostly women. Similarly, there is only one man working in young education. Roni shares that she thinks this is because the wage for educational workers is undesirable. High school teachers, however, are about 50% each sex. This trend is not unique to the kibbutz. There are not many males working with children throughout all of Israel. Nonetheless, there are no complaints on Eilat about inequality between the sexes. Nobody is forced to work in a certain position, so everybody works where they enjoy or are skilled at.

*"How does this kibbutz relate to the regional council?"*

The council is an important part of kibbutznik lives. Everything deals with the council. The kibbutz pays taxes to the council in exchange for services and support. It provides social services, special needs services, a health clinic, and aids in arranging afternoon activities for kibbutzniks. Some kibbutzniks work for the regional council, as it is made up of representatives of each community of the Southern Arava. The council does not represent or serve the needs of adjacent city of Eilat, however. The most significant non-kibbutz community that is under the jurisdiction of the Hevel Eilat Regional Council is Be'er Ora, situated along the Arava Road between Kibbutz Eilfaz and Kibbutz Eilat. It is a growing urban population that may soon represent a majority of the regional council's density. The next leader of the regional council may be from Be'er Ora, which would change the whole dynamic of the area in a shift away from kibbutzim. Regardless, the Hevel Eilat Regional Council is the largest regional council in Israel, and is also the least populated. Stretched over such a significant geographic distance, the

purpose of the regional council is to bring everybody together to share their experience and needs.

*“What is this kibbutz’ relationship with the Kibbutz Movement?”*

The Kibbutz Movement is a very active movement, but it is not tremendously involved in the southern Negev due to its geographic isolation. The Movement hosts many courses and conferences, but they are commonly located in more populated areas four to five hours away. The Movement offers training courses for nearly every aspect of kibbutz life, including the Secretary General and educational training. In addition to its lack of accessibility to southern kibbutzniks, Roni believes the movement could be doing more for political life in Israel in regard of representing kibbutzim interests. She feels that the movement should be putting more effort into the integration of kibbutzim in the general society of Israel. Kibbutzniks like Roni feel a sense of social isolation when it comes to the rest of Israel, and they could be a greater effort to connect those of differing lifestyles throughout the nation.

The kibbutz pays taxes to the Kibbutz Movement in addition to its taxes to the regional council for the services it does provide. There is a contact representative from the movement who regularly visits the kibbutzim of the Arava. They visit every one or two weeks to offer support of any community issues the kibbutzim may have. They offer how to solve problems with their expertise of kibbutz dynamics and structure provided by their involvement with the movement. This is the most consistent and direct form of support the movement offers the kibbutzim of the Arava. Although the movement remains able to provide support for a variety of kibbutzniks needs, it is much less relevant to members’ daily lives than it was in each kibbutz’ founding years.





*Figure #18: Neot Semadar art center; photographed by Sarah J. Boecker*

#### 7.4 Neot Semadar

#### A Day in the Life

*Morgan Reisinger*

Knowing that there would be no buses to get me to Neot Semadar before the 5:45am wake up call, I hopped in a car traveling for the kibbutz the night before work. Arriving just in time for dinner on Monday, January 28th, there was little time or sunlight to see the new environment I just landed in. Sarah, my guide as I figured out the lay and rules of the land, remained by my side for most of the next twenty-two hours or so. Immediately after arriving, I placed my bag down in the WPI-assigned house, and walked to dinner.

“Whatever you do, just remember to be quiet,” one of my peers warned me on the walk to the dining hall.

I had expected nothing but the sound of forks and knives clinking for the next hour, and was surprised that that was not the case. Dinner is the loudest of all Neot Semadar meals, but still no full-volume conversations took place. Having expected to need mime-like signals to communicate my need for anything out of reach on the table, I was relieved to hear the people at my table introducing themselves and laughing over soft conversation throughout the meal. Even in a quiet place, I had made three new friends by the end of dinner.

Following dinner, Sarah showed me the tea station. There was a machine for hot water; what really impressed me was the pleasant display of nothing but raw leaves and herbs located to this machine’s side. Walking back to where I would stay for the night, with tea in hand, Sarah pointed out the vegetable garden from which the leaves in my glass were picked.



We didn't even make it back home before I had found another direction to head in. Daniel and Benjamin, two WPI students similarly living and working on Neot Semadar, passed by us on two very different bikes. They'd repaired them themselves, and were now headed to the kibbutz junkyard to search for new bike treasures. I handed Sarah my tea, hopped on the back of Daniel's bike, and we wobbled our way through the dark kibbutz. I couldn't help but look up and smile throughout the entire ride. Neot Semadar is only a fifteen minute drive from Kibbutz Ketura, but here you can see nearly four times as many stars in the night sky. As we whipped through uncomfortable turns, we didn't pass by any kibbutzniks. When dinner is over, so is the night for many.

We arrived back at the homestead after spending a few exploratory minutes among piles of junk to find that everyone is ready for (or already in) bed. Days start early here, so the nights end much earlier than I am used to. Nonetheless, I said goodnight and curled up on the couch.

5:00am, somebody's alarm goes off in another room, waking me up. Still nobody stirred for another twenty-five minutes. Up, dressed, with brushed teeth at 5:15, I began to worry some of my friends would sleep too far past their alarms. 'They're probably used to this, and only need a couple minutes to pull themselves together,' I assured myself. Proving me right, the remaining five in the house gradually appeared, took maybe five minutes to get dressed, and we were on our way. There was no stress to put effort into what they wore, or check how they looked in the mirror. There wasn't even a mirror in one of their two bathrooms. You are what you are, and that is okay. That was a relieving feeling.

As we silently walked to the dining hall at 5:45, the glow of the sun barely began peaking over the mountains to our right. It was still dark, the only real indication of the starting day being the calling roosters somewhere in the distance. For the next twenty minutes, we sat in a semi-circle in the dining hall with hot drinks in our hands. We faced each other, but nobody interacted. Some closed their eyes, some looked at the ground, some ahead. The silence was an opportunity for us to wake ourselves up and prepare ourselves for the long day ahead of us. There were no lights on; the only illumination came from the wide windows as the sun kept slowly rising. It felt very natural. At 6:05, someone in the back of the room softly said "boker tov," good morning, and everybody slowly and silently rose to head in the direction of their assigned work.

Sarah and I were assigned to food processing, a job neither of us were familiar with. We found a kibbutznik who knew where to go, and followed him passed the goats and chickens. The factory was small, but fit what it needed to. Two people awaited us there, with hot water already brewed for more tea and coffee. In the office of the factory, seven of us sat in a circle to introduce ourselves, our work, and our day's goals. We spoke of working in the moment, appreciating the sounds around us as well as our bodies as we integrated them into the processes of machines. I have worked about ten different jobs in my short lifetime, and have never approached a workday with such a focus on holistic appreciation for what was about to come.

We began bottling olive oil for packaging and sale. Each person was placed in a position along the machines: bottle fillers, lid placer, lid securer, and boxer. I was an extra; there was no more places to work in the process. Instead, I folded boxes to be used later in the day, mixed and lifted miscellaneous things that needed to be done, and stepped in olive oil positions as people needed to relieve themselves. Even without a defined position, I still felt useful towards the success of the operation.

8:30am, we broke for breakfast. On our tables were only fresh vegetables which I needed to grab and chop up myself. Whether or not this food too came from the vegetable gardens nearby, I was not sure. Nonetheless, the lack of processed foods and necessity to work for my meal made it all the more worthwhile.

A meeting of everyone on the kibbutz followed breakfast. It was a beautiful day so we met outside in a circle. One woman ran the meeting in Hebrew as some people situated amongst the group quietly translated for those who spoke only English around them. The meeting began with all new people on the kibbutz introducing themselves: that's me. Then, the leader gave updates on the needs of the community. There were many long pauses between everything she said, offering everyone around her the opportunity to both process the information and interject with questions or additional information. The man in charge of the community garden offered everyone the opportunity to visit throughout the day to offer help. Sarah said he does this every day, even though people don't always show up.

Sarah and I headed for the kibbutz office to arrange a ride home for me. After just one phone call, a kibbutznik who planned on traveling towards Kibbutz Ketura kindly agreed to allow me to tag along. After we sorted this out, we headed towards the vegetable garden, where everyone from the food processing factory was weeding. Sarah and I grabbed mulch, and covered the spots the others already cleared. For the short while we were here, we became covered in dirt as we crouched, weeded, and mulched. It would have been tiring work had we not only spent a few minutes in the sun. While we got our hands dirty, we talked over the plants of our purposes in Israel and our academic projects. It reminded me of the stories kibbutzniks who founded Kibbutz Ketura told me of the early days in agricultural fields.

Back in the food processing plant, we finished up the remaining oil bottles. After cleaning the machines and floors, we set ourselves up for our next project: labeling olive jars. Sarah and I manually stuck stickers on jar lids and fed them into a machine that put on larger labels. About an hour after we started this process, the entire factory took a break and filed out to a table in a sunny patch of grass. Here awaited us a display of organic snacks and more hot tea. We sat in the sun for a while and talked about very meaningful topics. One of the people who first introduced our work in the factory offered the first topic. We were asked to talk of our "future thoughts," or times throughout the workday where we found ourselves looking to the future, like awaiting lunchtime or this break. The conversation led to a discussion of time and the different ways in which it can be treated. In looking ahead, we do not appreciate what is happening now. Some of us spoke of the additional work, "pluses," we would have to do later

with unwelcoming attitudes. Others offered different ways of thinking. Instead of saying “I have to go,” perhaps “work is calling me” would make for a better experience, one suggested.

One worker talked of a feeling he had during our morning meeting today, how he felt a revelation when he noticed that every single person was in motion at all times. He spoke passionately and humbly, and instigated a passionate response from another person around the table.

“Thank you for sharing this experience with us. The way that this experience has affected you has made me appreciate other experiences of my own, and look at them in a different way.”

When we headed back inside, one person was asked to wash all of the dishes from our break. The rest of us collaborated to clean up the factory, took out the trash, wiped down the tables, and washed the floor. Despite our previous discussion of future thoughts, my appetite made me exceptionally excited for the upcoming lunch. I knew I was assigned to wash the kibbutz’ dishes after I ate, and this didn’t dwindle my excitement whatsoever.

I arrived in the kitchen, put on an apron, and told somebody I had no idea what to do. Someone immediately offered help, showing me their own station and allowing me to take over as they found other work. We worked for an hour, rotating positions as we tired of one. As I put clean dishes where they belonged, another worker relocated the dish racks to a position that required less movement and work on my part.

“We are always here to help you,” she said. We worked together to complete the whole job, down to the washing of the sinks after we emptied them.

During my short stay at Neot Semadar, I worked a twelve hour workday. I didn’t mind a minute of it. There was a sense of work for work’s sake; these things needed to be done in order for the community and people to survive. I particularly enjoyed the short while I was in the vegetable garden. Through all of the work, I had met so many wonderful and open people. There was an exceptionally greater sense of integration into the community while I was here compared to my stay at Ketura. Because of this, I had felt that I had made 20 new friends by the lunchtime. Even in the times of silence, I was calm. I did not even feel the need to check my cell phone (which I couldn’t, because they are not allowed in public spaces). Compounded with the deepness of the conversations we had, the silence seemed to even amplify the significance of what we did talk about in other moments.



*Figure #19: Expressive figurines situated along a Neot Semadar pathway; photographed by Sarah J. Boecker*

Neot Semadar sets itself apart from all other kibbutzim of the Arava in the way that it denies its kibbutz title altogether. Yes, the settlement is legally and conversationally referred to as a kibbutz, the members and visitors of Neot Semadar attest to its existence as something else entirely. They refer to themselves as a kibbutz for the sake of simplicity and understanding. However, one member offered a very vivid metaphorical explanation of their uniqueness that helped conceptualize their identity. This member compared Neot Semadar as a group to herds of animals. It is easy to look at a group of animals on the ground and declare them a herd as they move together from place to place in search of food. Neot Semadar is more like a flock of birds. A flock moves much less predictably, and in more of a flowing and transformative way. This aligns with the ideological functions of Neot Semadar. There is remarkable emphasis on personal development and reflection through mindful action and honest discussion. By living on Neot Semadar, people every day tackle questions related to the meaning of happiness and their position in the world. It's their uniqueness in this way, as well as their traditional means of expressing their dedication to ideological exploration, that makes Neot Semadar undefinable.



Figure #20: Decorative “peace van” along a Kibbutz Samar pathway

## 7.5 Samar

*Shelly Ashkenazi*

*Samar*, meaning juncus in Hebrew, is a kibbutz that arguably has the most unique aspirations for a redefined approach to kibbutz life in the Arava region. It was only a wild dream in 1973 when a group of 25 conceptualized building a new kibbutz. These future Samar kibbutzniks were raised on much older kibbutzim, and knew exactly what aspects of them to leave behind. Although they weren’t quite sure exactly what they did want, the kibbutzniks planned to avoid oppressive aspects of classic kibbutzim before they planted themselves in the southern Negev in 1976. Their most defining mission was their goal to shift the structure of traditional kibbutzim to meet their desire to cater to the individual over the community. They’ve established a sort of oxymoron within their community with its “organized anarchy” of an arrangement. The founders of Samar wanted the people of their community to take what they needed instead of being given it. With a system of this kind, the community cannot be held responsible for individual action, establishing a new type of collective kibbutz altogether. With any sort of anarchy, however, comes unique challenges to overcome as well.

What brought the founders to the middle of the desert was first governmental suggestion and preference. Secondly, they were drawn to building something where there is nothing, particularly distant from the cities they were raised adjacent to. The wildness of the desert is exciting to young pioneers. In true isolation, you have to be an exceptionally dedicated group to achieve your goals of adapting to your environment. Samar kibbutzniks did not plan to adapt and become one with the desert, however. They wished to create a place that could withstand it and survive within it. Unfortunately, however, none of the founding members had any



experience living in this type of environment, and the group had to learn and grow together. This particular kibbutz has found a way to practice communal life while stressing the prioritization of the individual, resulting in a unique combination of social and organizational difficulties.

Originally, Samar aimed towards communal sharing because every member had only themselves to offer the community. The founding members had very little, and had to collaborate in order to make the processes of the kibbutz function. The kibbutzniks have always valued self-work more than managers, which is why you will find no traditional bosses on Samar. There is the ideology that a person who does or creates is much more powerful and valuable than a person who directs or demands people to do things. There is honor and strength in the physical act of building. For this reason, there is hardly a trace of a hierarchy on Samar. Everybody is their own boss. This puts ultimate responsibility for the present and future of the kibbutz on the individuals, a form of motivation different from what other kibbutzim of the Arava practice. Although cooperation between people is highly valued as well, everybody has the power to decide when and how much they will work. There are no official rules or guidebook to life on Samar, people do as they please. Particularly with the development of multiple generations on the kibbutz, affairs have become increasingly difficult to manage.

People are complicated, and only miracles result in entire communities thinking and acting perfectly harmoniously. Although Samar strives to be a place of seamless coexistence and productivity, that is far from the case. Many social and personal issues arise from individuals' power to take what and act as they like. It is easy to get in the habit of your own schedule when you have the power to define it for yourself. With this, unfortunately, can come decreased interest in working for the sake of others, whether by their request or on their schedule. Nobody is required to work; social pressure and disapproval are the only sanctions for not working. Members of Samar have to be very tuned into themselves, especially when it comes to money. Everybody has (almost) unlimited access to the community bank account, which they access through credit cards. Spending money frivolously is much easier when you don't hold physical money in your hand. Members have to be in control of their spending and aware of how much they are spending relative to the greater community. Otherwise, the community would not survive. As a result of the lack of working for a wage, many children on the kibbutz struggle with the concept of money and earning when they leave the kibbutz. The complicated social relationships and personal understandings that come with living on a small, collective community has led the people of Samar to better understand the constant struggles that arise from conflicting interests of people.

"It is very hard to live in a bubble in the middle of the desert," says former Secretary General Shelly Ashkenazi. Not only does isolation make communities difficult to attract newcomers to, but also makes all internal struggles worse. When the only point of reference is your own community, small problems can be magnified as a greater nuisance when they are pointed inward and not projected into a larger context. Life can also get boring, as desert

inhabitants have less external options as to how they can spend their free time. As members are getting older, the dynamic of the kibbutz is changing although its population is not necessarily growing. There is little sense of security when you live in a lawless community. Older members of the kibbutz sometimes find themselves reminiscing about their old kibbutzim, wishing to regress into some of their old traditions. The concept of a kibbutz is difficult to adapt to when you are not raised within one. The same goes for Samar, even for former kibbutzniks. The systems of Samar are so unordinary that it is difficult for many people to conceptualize, nonetheless identify with it. This is an occasional challenge for some members, but even greater so for candidates contemplating a future life here. With the advancing age of those who founded the “hippie-like” kibbutz, the euphoric atmosphere of freedom and endless play has dwindled. You can no longer find young people naked and shameless in the pool, for example. The kibbutz’ social structure has had to transform to accommodate multiple generations.

In a society aimed with establishing a better and wholesome place to live, Samar kibbutzniks have become familiar with the processes of understanding humanity. Interpersonal conflicts arise naturally, and they have to be dealt with in a progressive way. As shown by their lack of managers or bosses on the kibbutz, Samar values the deconstruction of power. On both large and small scales, Samar kibbutzniks understand that in order to move forward, everyone on a side of an issue needs to recognize and try to understand the others. In person to person conflict, one person has to “give in” to a compromise before the other would be similarly willing to give up aspects of their ideal. Even after compromise is found, there can remain small displays of unequal power in everyday life. Samar stresses the importance of being aware of these “power games” as well as the need to constantly address and ameliorate them. This ideology is what has served as the basis for Samar communications throughout their lifetime.





*Figure #21: Pathway through Kibbutz Samar residential units*

Amplifying the uniqueness of Kibbutz Samar is its expression of its identity through the physical structuring of the community. The individual is the most important aspect of Samar. Everyone is different and special with homes to match. No two houses on Samar look exactly the same on the kibbutz as members add to and transform them in tremendously creative ways. This attests to the kibbutzniks' appreciation for artistic and personal expression in their everyday lives. The people of Samar have found many creative ways to establish their own unique identity while encouraging temporary visitors to connect to and travel with admiration for Samar culture. People between the schooling and family years of life are not necessarily expected to remain on the kibbutz to continue to contribute to its wellbeing. In a romantic way, Samar encourages young people to live their lives out in a variety of different environments. Self-discovery is a journey, one that can't necessarily be completed while only on a small kibbutz in the Arava. Young people are not pressured to commit the rest of their lives to Samar, but instead be free to choose to come back. Not only does this cater to the fluid nature of self-discovery, but also creates a growing population of people in the world beyond the kibbutz who identify and respect the lifestyle of Samar.



*Figure #22: One of many playful mosaic figures on Kibbutz Samar*

The social life of Kibbutz Samar is what the community considers its strength. Their qualities like precise consideration of power difference and support of personal and collective development are more impartial to the success than the economy is. This is one of the reasons there is no industry on the kibbutz, a goal of the original founders. The closest thing to industry on Samar would be Crystal Vision, a technical systems development company. The kibbutz has never had the capital or marketing mechanisms to support industry, so they encourage members to work outside of the kibbutz. Instead of through factories, Kibbutz Samar earns its income from agriculture, dairy farming, Crystal Vision, turf grass production, as well as tourist attractions like bike tours, art workshops, a meditation station, and a desert science center. Money also comes into the kibbutz through its ownership of other organizations, such as the regional packing plant or nearby fish breeding. Despite the prioritization of individual freedom and humanity, members of Samar realize that in order to evolve alongside of surrounding society, economic stability is more important than social structure. Kibbutz Samar is a part of the Negev Business Group and is economically successful today. They experience more income than output, and experience the comforting feeling that “everything on Samar will be alright.”

Despite its abundance of unordinary characteristics, like avoiding industry, kibbutz Samar shares many similarities with other kibbutzim of the Arava. Fundamentally, people of the kibbutz design their lives around the communist saying “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.” This defines the structure of collective kibbutzim in the simplest way. There are no differential salaries between members working on the kibbutz, and all money earned is shared by the whole community. Nobody has a personal account; everybody has a credit card with unlimited access to the kibbutz bank account. A monthly report informs each member and family of their spending, including private spending, but there is no expectation for everyone to spend the same amount. There is simply a recommended spending amount based on family structure and size. There is an inclusive sense of trust that the members of the community respect the needs of the greater collective while tending to their own. Nobody is exactly equal; everybody has a different combination of abilities and personal needs. Samar deals with this reality on their mission towards a better community by establishing a “technical equality.” Budgeting and housing is assigned with consistent consideration of the size and structure of each household, while members remain able to spend money on private and personal matters for their families (ie. music lessons). Everybody is treated as equal in the General Assembly as well, as traditional for kibbutzim. Everybody gets an equal vote, and the majority vote wins. Samar extends their respect for the ability to live their lives the way they’d like to by considering passionate objections to a decision. If there are people in the minority of a decision who feel the decided conditions are absolutely personally unacceptable, the decision will likely not follow through despite the majority ruling. This further enlightens Samar’s dedication to compromise and the understanding of personal perspective in its regular functioning.

Samar stands today as a surprisingly large conglomerate of people of an array of backgrounds living peacefully in accordance with their common values. In this small group of about 100 adult members and 78 children, you can find people from America, Belgium, Ethiopia, Great Britain, Sweden, Germany, Argentina, and Brazil. Interestingly, there are nearly equal proportions of this population that have come from either an urban or kibbutz environment, making Samar an interesting blend of world experiences. Most members wouldn’t change the way their lives are structured on the kibbutz. Members often feel a complete sense of connection to the entire community without any instances of exclusion of the individual. The overarching sense of community on Samar is well represented during the date harvesting season. Not everybody is employed on the kibbutz throughout the regular year, but everybody works extra hours to harvest and pack the dates. Alongside the youthful and energetic kibbutzniks in the orchards you can find the elderly and even children. Everybody understands and respects the needs of the entire kibbutz in this season and ensures their individual effort is being applied to tending it.





*Figure #23: Pathway and wheel decoration in Kibbutz Elifaz*

## 7.6 Elifaz

*Nir Lobel*

Elifaz is a small and intimate kibbutz of only about fifty official members, happily situated within the southern Arava Desert. Because of its particularly small size, Kibbutz Elifaz has had to adapt to fulfill legal as well as social requirements for maintaining a happy and efficient kibbutz. The kibbutz has developed its own personality, heavily influenced by the lives and characteristics of the kibbutz' founders. The kibbutz was established in 1983 by young people who were raised in large cities, which set the tone for the kibbutz' atmosphere. The kibbutz retained its retro style for years after its founding as kibbutzniks spent the end of the twentieth century enjoying themselves and living for the present. Homes were small, parties were frequent, and many single people came and went as they traveled through Israel. In 1996, Kibbutz Elifaz began its most dramatic transformation, initiated by the development of families in the community. However, since Elifaz is so small, every individual family comes together still to feel as unit of the greater family of the kibbutz.

The community is very modest. Drawn to the isolation of the desert, the openness of the environment is interpreted by members as opportunity for growth. With a new international airport being constructed a few miles south on the Arava Road, members of Elifaz are interested in how the Arava Valley is going to develop. The barrenness of the Arava also attracted some members for political and humanistic reasons. In an area of the world so frequented by conflict, some kibbutzniks are drawn to the Arava because the land has nothing and nobody on it. This ideological benefit is balanced, however, by the annual risk of having to survive off agricultural

success. Elifaz has no large industry in its borders, and maintains itself through its agriculture. The largest industry on this desert kibbutz is its solar power, which is common to kibbutzim of the Southern Arava.

In addition to economic challenges, small kibbutzim like Elifaz are often victim to difficult social circumstances as well. Although there are obvious advantages to living in a close community where members know and love one another, there are just as many disadvantages. The familiarity of the members compounds with the isolation of the Arava Desert to make conflicts of interest, social compromise, and personal growth very hard to maintain. You cannot ignore anyone when you live in an intimate community in the middle of nowhere. You can find yourself arguing with someone over work related issues during the day and have to sit across from them at the dinner table hours later. These difficulties has made members of Elifaz more in tune with one another as they attempt to find sustainable peace. Often outsiders come to the unique community thinking it will be like a vacation. When they become more comfortable and complex social relationships become more defined, approaches to sensitive issues have to be reconsidered. Resolving conflict in order to maintain peace is essential in such a small community, and members of Kibbutz Elifaz have become more communicatively intelligent with one another as a result.



*Figure #24: Kibbutz Elifaz, guest houses*

Elifaz, like most kibbutzim, has undergone many changes throughout its lifetime. As such a small population, Elifaz has had to face the pressure of expanding under the threat of governmental intervention. Until the 1980s, the government subsidized many kibbutz interests and provided ample space for new settlements to develop. If a kibbutz does not reach or maintain a particular population, around 50 members, the government will close or take away any of the institutions on the kibbutz that are profitable. Six years ago, Kibbutz Elifaz adopted four families into the kibbutz in order to increase its size by a considerable percentage. The kibbutz still needed to bring in new people, and that meant having to build new buildings/homes. In an attempt to attract even more people to the kibbutz and increase member earnings, Elifaz privatized spending. Disease hit the cow herd in the early 2000s and the kibbutz knew it had to make drastic changes in order to survive. Many services that were previously provided by the collective like laundry or dentistry became private, and members were individually responsible for paying for what they needed. Simultaneously, their budgets increased so that they may be able to afford these no longer complimentary services. Now, every member pays both a baseline tax to the kibbutz as well as a tax that is proportional to their incomes. This way, the community may still have the foundation to support any members who do not earn enough to support themselves.

Although differentiation of earnings and privatization of spending is contradictory to the pure socialist ideals of early kibbutzim, Kibbutz Elifaz maintains a sense of communal responsibility and love. The collective remains to support anyone who needs it, and the kibbutz preserves its feeling of comfort and caring. Secretary General Nir Lobel believes what makes such a complicated and intimate community work as well as Kibbutz Elifaz is the people who make up it. The people hold the community together in a group effort to maintain peace with one another. As one large family, everyone within the kibbutz' fence looks out for one another. You don't have to worry about who your children are meeting or what they are doing on a kibbutz. This is a result of both the familiarity of the community as well as the location of the kibbutz. Elifaz is only about a twenty minute drive from the city of Eilat. Members are regularly engulfed by the quiet and towering mountains without direct temptation from a shining nearby city. However, Eilat is close enough to the kibbutz that members have the opportunity to drive to see a movie or eat at a restaurant. Elifaz is located in the quietness of the desert without the silent pressure of complete isolation.

*"How was Kibbutz Elifaz affected by the economic crisis of 1985?"*

Kibbutz Elifaz' economy survived the 1980s because they changed their money situation before they could collapse. Elifaz was only just being constructed in the mid-80s, meaning that there was no Kibbutz Elifaz prior to the economic crisis. Relative to other kibbutzim throughout Israel, Elifaz' money was well managed and the kibbutz did not have many loans. However, as the kibbutz developed after its first foundational years, members began wanting to earn more for their effort. The concept has always been that if you don't work, you do not earn money on

Elifaz. However, everyone was allotted the same budget no matter their position. At the turn of the twenty-first century, Kibbutz Elifaz started distributing money to its members in a fashion that allowed for sums proportional to each member's income. The budget of each member, although different now, comes from the same collective pot of member taxes. However, people are now more motivated to earn more money every day. As a result of this change, some members began earning more money, and the overall wealth of the kibbutz increased as well. People went on vacations with new financial wiggle room, as they no longer have to wait for or rely on their kibbutz budgets.

*“Where do the different sexes work on the kibbutz?”*

Gender is a smaller problem on Kibbutz Elifaz than it is in other societies around the world. Nobody is expected to work in a particular position as a result of their sex. “It doesn't matter where everyone works; nobody is complaining,” says current Secretary General Nir Lobel. The current executive board is made up of five women and only two men, indicating that executive opportunities are as available for women as they are for men. However, the manager of business is consistently a man on Kibbutz Elifaz, and the Secretary Generals are most commonly women. Nir suggests that perhaps more women are interested or voted in the Secretary position due to maternal strength in empathy and listening.



Figure #25: Kibbutz Migvan Logo, received from <http://www.migvan.org.il/cgi-webaxy/item?1>

## 7.7 Migvan

Nomika Zion

The community of Migvan is a unique interpretation of kibbutz life situated within the city limits of Sderot, located on the northwestern edge of the Negev Desert. Sderot is an urban center situated on 1,727 square miles and has a population of about 25,000 (compare to the 2,000 that populate all of the Southern Arava) (Sderot, 2019). The kibbutz was formed in 1987, only two years after a group of young people imagined its creation and future. Migvan has transformed not only the definition of a kibbutz in their own way, but has also transformed as a community over its thirty-two years of life. Today, the community is centrally located on Hashaked Street in Sderot, but some members live either in other neighborhoods of Sderot or outside of the city's limits. Regardless of where they live, when a person is accepted into the community of Migvan, they are as equal a part of the family atmosphere as those near the center. The first ten years of this community's existence wasn't centralized at all, and members lived in co-housing units spread across different blocks in Sderot. It took even three more years after deciding to reconstruct their community for the people of Migvan to begin the creation of their own



neighborhood. In 2000, the people of Migvan began repositioning and reorganizing their lives together in what they consider their greatest mission as a community.

Embedded in a culturally and ideologically multiplex city, Migvan has developed an economic structure that appeases the different desires of its members. The first twenty years or so of the kibbutz were more traditionally collective than today; everybody pooled and shared all of their earnings. Over the last ten to fifteen years, more families began joining the community that did not want to be included in the shared economic system. These families were drawn and deeply connected to the social culture of the kibbutz, and were welcomed with open arms. Simultaneously, some members who were previously a part of the collective earnings decided to break their ties with the system and keep their earnings to themselves. Today, only six families contribute to the shared economic fund of kibbutz Migvan. Although this has created a technical divide between its members, many communal aspects of life remain.

To the founders of the kibbutz, members who contribute to collective income sharing are a part of the formal “kibbutz.” Those who associate or identify with and contribute to the Migvan population but do not share their income are simply considered a part of the greater “community” of Migvan. This is primarily a technical difference; every single member of the community, regardless of economic sharing, is treated and valued as equal. Everyone who is an accepted member of the greater community and utilizes Migvan’s public spaces has an equal opportunity to partake in kibbutz discussions. The community thrives off of its inclusive social culture and integration, and nobody is excluded from community events.

Even with community members not sharing their income, everybody gives back to the greater collective of Migvan in different ways. The community as a whole pays for essentials for the community, such as food, electricity, waste, and water. The community also shares financial responsibility for expenses related to the community center. Splitting the economic burden of an institution shared and enjoyed by the entire population greatly lessens the burden on any one individual. This way, even the members who enjoy differentiated incomes are comparably contributing to their greater community.

Migvan is a community that values people for people’s sake. Through experience building their community, members have realized that dreams are meaningless without individual support. With nobody standing next to you, nothing can get done. In order to maintain the intimacy that characterizes Migvan, the community does not allow its population to grow too large. The idea of a kibbutz involves living together, and a community too large loses the familiarity that is essential to maintaining the solidarity that allows Migvan to succeed. Some founders of the kibbutz have felt they spent too much time dreaming of the future in its founding years. The pursuit of living harmoniously in an urban kibbutz has made them realize the most important action for them to be taking is forming personal connections with the people many of them will be spending the rest of their lives with.

*“What were the motivational factors that brought this community to this particular location?”*

Most of the original founders of this kibbutz came from kibbutzim of a very different type. They were used to harmonious lifestyles in communities that consisted of people primarily with the same backgrounds and ideological agendas. They were traditional collectives founded on humanist ideals, but these types of communities did not create the environment Migvan’s founders believed would generate the best society for its members. In the 1980s, those who founded kibbutzim were of the third generation of pioneers. The Kibbutz Movement had transformed throughout its lifetime to this point, having taught future kibbutzniks that there is no right or wrong way to design your community. Migvan’s founders wanted to make lots of changes to the traditionally collective kibbutz structure, with concern for the demographics of their community. This is what brought them to the new and growing city of Sderot.

Sderot throughout the early years of Migvan’s existence was considered a “developing town.” Following the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, there was tremendous immigration into the nation from North Africa. It did not take long for the kibbutzim to become the minority within Israel’s growing population. The new inhabitants of Israel were situated in areas around kibbutzim in order to expand the population of the area. Most of these North African immigrants, despite their often Sephardic Jewish heritage, came from Muslim communities and held customs and culture that conflicted with Ashkenazi Jews of the Sderot region. The conflict was multi-directional; both Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews played the culprit and victim in instances of stereotyping and patronization. The relative social tension of “developing towns” compared to harmonious collective kibbutzim was a stark contrast that Migvan’s founders were determined to tackle. These founders were drawn to the conflict and social frustration of areas such as Sderot. In their own way, they wanted to contribute to the betterment of the State of Israel by establishing mutual understanding and respect between adverse populations. This goal was fundamentally birthed from the Jewish principle of *tikkun olam*, which refers to any activity that betters the world. Migvan’s members wanted to create meaningful connections between the people of Ashkenazi origins, Sephardic origins, and kibbutzim through mutual appreciation for humanity. In 1987, when the people of Migvan arrived, there were only 9000 people in Sderot, 80% of which were North African. The city has grown to include 27000 inhabitants today, consisting of a much more complex array of nationalities.

*“What were some of the greatest challenges this community had to overcome in order to survive?”*

The most tremendous project the kibbutz has ever undertaken was the buying of property and building of a new neighborhood. It is very complicated work, technically and legally. It is difficult to organize and proceed with building many family homes as well as a community center in the midst of a growing city. It was a considerable financial burden, but was carried through in the hopes of paving the direction for urban collective communities like itself to grow.

The community received assistance from considerable consultants or advisors as it maneuvered its way through understanding the processes of urban kibbutzim. Even with significant guidance, building a new community is not easy.

Another challenge of life on Migvan is no different from a challenge of living in any intimate community or family. People who live and work in close proximity to one another for their entire lives are going to experience conflict. Human interests naturally overlap and compete with one another, and it can become exceptionally difficult to ameliorate tensions when your neighbor is also your boss. Fortunately, the people of Migvan regularly practice inclusive and honest discussion of life and issues within the community, making it easier to find compromise and understanding in conflict. The people of Migvan continue to love and cherish one another through the ups and downs of both communal and private life.

The last of what Migvan founder Nomika Zion considers to be the greatest challenges of living in their community is educating their children in a multicultural society. Sderot today is an exceptionally diverse conglomerate of all types of populations. This cosmopolitan environment contrasts greatly with the homogeneity of the kibbutzim that the founders were raised on, unified “bubbles” of similar interests. In Sderot, a melting pot of peoples so close to the Gaza strip, people are not unfamiliar to social rivalry and cultural tension. When you raise children within such a complicated dynamic, you have to consider everybody’s perspective. It can be easy to offend or misinterpret those who are unlike yourself, so educators and parents are careful to instill an open and accepting mind in their children. This struggle, however, results in successes that make the effort worth it. When young people build their identity in a complex and conflicted society, they are exposed to a mixture of ways of thinking about the world. Your sense of personal identity is arguable sharper when you consider a spectrum of perspectives and decide for yourself which are meaningful to you. Even more so, through this process, the children of Sderot are raised to accept people of all backgrounds and agendas.

*“What alterations has this community made from the functioning of a traditionally collective kibbutz?”*

The members of Migvan have always been attracted to the ideologies of a kibbutz. They aspired for collectivity in their founding years, having every member pool and share their individual salaries. Everybody worked according to his ability and was given what they needed. There remains today the priority to ensure every person in the community is supported. However, the community of Migvan quickly began growing, and adjustments had to be made in order to ensure the kibbutz evolved alongside of its people. Families began joining the community for their identification with its social and cultural identity but did not want to be a part of the greater economic system. The separation between members who share their earnings and those who do not is the most obvious difference between Migvan and traditionally collective kibbutzim.

Migvan, even before it was anything more than an idea, was conceptualized knowing full well that there were aspects of traditional collectivity that didn’t work. In contrast to the General

Assemblies of most kibbutzim, the people of Migvan do not ever vote on issues in order to make decisions. Instead, the community gathers in regular “study day” meetings and seminars in order to maintain a consistent sense of solidarity regarding most aspects of their lives. Democracy, to them, is not a matter of everyone having a say and a vote, but is instead a matter of effective conversation. Yes, everybody who is a part of the community has equal opportunity to impact the direction of every group discussion. But when a decision has to be made, it is affirmed by the overall spirit and consensus of the group rather than a majority vote. The way that the community has been able to maintain this method of decision-making is a testament to the effectiveness of another adaptation these kibbutzniks made to traditional kibbutzim.

Work has traditionally been held as a central value to kibbutzniks. Although this remains true to those of Migvan, it is matched with the prioritization of group learning and discussion. Every Friday, the people of the community gather for “study days,” where they practice dialogues and learn new things together. Members share their experiences and perspectives through open and respectful conversations. They give up work on these Fridays in order to ensure the greater sense of community is not neglected. In these meetings and seminars, all issues of the kibbutz are discussed and decided on in a more natural progression than voting. The willingness to sacrifice work for the sake of community dynamics strongly characterizes the people of Migvan. They strengthen their kibbutz not through persistent work but with the maintenance of deep connections and understandings between its members. Even spread throughout (and beyond) the city of Sderot, the people of Migvan are like a broad family. The members set aside time to listen to and understand one another and their needs.

The other most significant difference between Migvan and traditionally collective kibbutzim is the way in which the individual is valued over the greater community. Both are exceptionally important, but the relationship between the two on Migvan is a mirror of that on many early kibbutzim. Traditionally, the individual is expected to serve the needs of the community. Everyone offers what they are able to in order to advance the collective. On Migvan, the community is understood as responsible for supporting the needs of the individual. Every lone person is encouraged to live their lives how they want, fulfill their creative potential, and work in professional fields they are passionate about. The kibbutz has lost considerable income as a result of people working for self-fulfillment over a higher paycheck. In a symbiotic way, this lifestyle encourages every individual to give back to the community what they can. People are happy when they have control over who they are. They establish a deep connection and appreciation for the community that allowed them to define themselves, and are resultantly eager to give back. When you identify with and value a particular lifestyle, you are much more likely to offer great contributions to your society.

*“How are the genders distributed throughout the society of Migvan?”*

“This is the most feminist kibbutz on the planet,” laughs founder Nomika Zion. She describes it as a type of paradise, where there is no stress on one gender to act or provide for the community

differently. She continues to talk of the traditions of her community. What constitutes this community as a “paradise,” to Nomika, is the way in which the men do almost all of the so called “women’s work.” All of the men cook and bake so well they consider themselves chefs. They clean and they raise their children just like the women of the community. The surprising difference, however, is that women are almost expected not to cook. Of course they have the option to, but there would be a sense of surprise if a woman walked into Shabbat dinner with a cake she made herself. When speaking to children, Nomika explains that she would only ever say something along the lines of “tell your father to bring the dessert,” rather than referring to the mother. The men of Migvan have established such a strong sense of superiority in the kitchen that women like Nomika have felt too intimidated to offer their own dish for comparison.

There have been no significant changes regarding where men and women work in the community, although not everything is balanced. In high-tech positions like in the former technical branches of the kibbutz, there are both men and women. However, social workers and therapists have always been primarily women. There is a kibbutznik lecturer in a nearby university; he is a man. People are never assigned work based on their gender. They choose to work in positions that make them happiest and most fulfilled. This absence of pressure to conform to an image of a working man or woman is what has established the sense of serenity among feminist kibbutzniks.



Figure #26: Kibbutz Glil Yam welcome sign, received from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glil\\_Yam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glil_Yam)

## 7.8 Glil Yam

*Linda Ravid*

Glil Yam is a kibbutz situated in the northern Tel-Aviv District and has undergone incalculable transformations throughout its long lifetime. The community has existed since the 1930s, but

didn't settle into their current location until 1943. Then, the kibbutz stood as humble tents on sand dunes. These dunes and its inhabitants were engulfed by the growing Israeli population and the eventual metropolis of Tel-Aviv. Before this metamorphosis, the founding kibbutzniks of Glil Yam built their community from fishing in the nearby sea, baking, and small agricultural projects. Agriculture advanced with time, only to also be mostly absorbed by the skyscrapers and residential buildings that later encroached. These founders were mostly Russian and Polish immigrants who were drawn to the socialist ideals and lifestyle of a kibbutz.

The demographic of kibbutz Glil Yam was tremendously influenced by World War II. Being on the Mediterranean coast, ships carrying Jewish refugees from all over the Eastern hemisphere landed at the Tel-Aviv port. Glil Yam was a part of a movement to absorb these refugees and hide them from the British throughout the British Mandate. For this reason, there were two modes of thought on the kibbutz for the first twenty years or so of its existence. On one hand, you have the kibbutz founders who decided and dedicated themselves to building a new community in the name of Zionism and socialism. On the other hand, you have a considerable population of refugees who were accepted by a community that offered a safe home in a particularly vulnerable time. There was a hope that if these newcomers adjusted to the socialist ways of the Israeli kibbutzim, they and their children would come to identify with the lifestyle in a similar fashion to the original members. This was not always the case. As the community continued to grow over the years alongside the growing city of Tel-Aviv, many young members of Glil Yam became attracted to the allure of the city. Many of them do stay on the kibbutz because they appreciate its aspects that make it a comfortable and familiar place to live. As a result, the kibbutz lost the power of its strong ideological motivations for maintaining solidarity throughout the community.

Kibbutz Glil Yam has experienced extraordinary physical and structural changes over the past fifteen years or so. In the 1990s, the kibbutz changed some of its characteristics that classified it as classically collective. They stopped having children live in children's houses and eliminated the communal dining hall. The kibbutz also added its first synagogue. The most dramatic change on Glil Yam was the complete privatization of spending. Until 2006, when the kibbutz was traditionally collective, everyone shared everything, pooled their money into the collective, and received equal budgets in return. The members of the kibbutz were supported by the communal fund of the kibbutz and the collective provided whatever goods or services everyone needed. Today, every individual or family on the kibbutz survives off their personal salaries, owns their own cars, and pays for any services the kibbutz has to offer. The kibbutz has also become much more public, offering previously collective services like the dining hall to everybody who pays for them. What differentiates members from non-members is the lower cost of these services.

Power and responsibility has shifted entirely from the general community onto each individual or family, which greatly challenges the socialist ideals of the kibbutz' founding. Now, many more people work outside of the kibbutz confines and in the larger city nearby. Success



has become person-oriented rather than kibbutz-oriented. What is “kibbutz” about Glil Yam is very general now; the General Assembly only handles broad and overarching issues and decisions. Every lone person or family has considerably more power to define and construct their lives independently from the kibbutz collective. Unfortunately, these changes has made many older members feel “locked into” the kibbutz. Members did not own any property until 2006, and were quickly expected to support themselves by their own means. The members who do identify with the collectivity of traditional kibbutzim often have difficulty with these structural changes.

Kibbutz Glil Yam has also grown greatly in population since its original founding. Today, no new members are accepted into the community unless they are married into a family. There simply is no more room for additional families on the property. Although the kibbutz is still a relatively small community of around 300 members, most members don’t know everybody on the kibbutz. Perhaps to combat the dwindling sense of community within the kibbutz, changes have been made to make the kibbutz look and feel like an aesthetic village. They added new red roofs to housing, upgraded many internal paths, and added new beautiful gardens. Where possible, the setting is kept modest and homes are arranged to be intimate. Reconstructing the kibbutz to look and feel like a cozy village makes maintaining a sense of responsibility towards the general community easier. Members of Glil Yam are encouraged to engage in familiar group activities like celebrate birthdays in efforts to preserve solidarity and mutual appreciation between members and the kibbutz.

The physical transformation Kibbutz Glil Yam underwent could be seen as an attempt to differentiate the kibbutz community from the skyscrapers and industrial buildings that currently warp and diminish the atmosphere of the kibbutz. Older buildings on the kibbutz have been transformed into high-tech offices and rented residential units. Buildings that used to house kibbutz oriented industries, like a chicken coop, are now occupied by more contemporary industries like Dell. There is a comical saying on the kibbutz that comments on the changing industrial makeup of the community. “Don’t leave your shoes outside because you’ll come back to find a startup in them.” The large wheat, potato, and avocado fields that kibbutzniks used to work have been sold back to the national land authority and turned into six or seven-story buildings. Not only was this economically beneficial, but the people responsible for the expanding city of Tel-Aviv wanted buildings in place of inconveniently large crop fields. The small and modest Kibbutz of Glil Yam has turned victim of its environment in a way that allows it to be mistaken as an undifferentiated sect of Tel-Aviv.

Despite the shrinking uniformity and the eventual complete privatization of the kibbutz, Glil Yam maintains many of its traditionally socialist practices still today. The General Assembly still has ultimate authority when it comes to decision-making in the community. Everybody has equal say in General Assembly meetings and voting, as true to socialist democracy. There are many committees on Glil Yam to support and assist the executive members of the kibbutz like the Secretary General and the kibbutz Treasurer. However, the

number and size of many of these committees has shrunk as a result of the kibbutz' privatization. Since members now take care of many of their own personal needs, like healthcare, the community does not need committees to manage these affairs. Nonetheless, the kibbutz still upholds its respect for socialism that was more dominantly exhibited for the majority of the kibbutz' life. Even in the 1970s the kibbutz was completely collective and communal in its affairs. They even continued to use their children's houses traditionally until the late 1990s. At thirty years old, the small kibbutz was still situated among residual sand dunes and had a very basic traditional kibbutz structure. The kibbutz had animal farms, large agricultural fields, and small residential buildings. It wasn't until about fifteen years ago when dramatic transformation began as the kibbutz and Tel-Aviv became more intertwined.

Kibbutz Glil Yam has switched from supporting itself off farming industries like chickens and large agriculture to the renting and selling of space to residents and larger corporations. Although the kibbutz still has chickens and agricultural crops, the profits from these industry is not comparable to that of larger industries. The buying of kibbutz services from members is not a tremendous source of income either. The economic stability of Kibbutz Glil Yam has transitioned from the actual fruits of kibbutzniks labor to the success of real estate. It has become very difficult for the community to continue to feel as though they are a unified people, but there does remain a general sense of respect for the community. Members tend to care about their homes and their neighborhood, and often offer their own time to keep the flowers watered or the streets litter-free. Despite the dramatic transformation of life on the kibbutz, outsiders still peer into neighborhood of Glil Yam and feel a sense of something different, something good, in the air.

*"How was kibbutz Glil Yam affected by the 1985 financial crisis?"*

Kibbutz Glil Yam fell into a deep financial hole during the 1980s that it is still working its way out of. However, the spectrum of industries on the kibbutz were effected to greater degrees. The kibbutz itself had a solid investment policy and didn't lose much in the markets. However, the industrial side to the kibbutz felt the pain of being fiercely unable to pay back any loans victim to outstanding interest. Moneymaking sects of the kibbutz that were more involved in investment culture suffered the greatest blow, whereas the kibbutz was very conservative with its spending. However, the kibbutz as a whole did suffer consequences that resulted in an overall metamorphosis of the entire community. The kibbutz sold much of its agricultural land back to the land authority after the 1980s, which was a major change in the physical structure and appearance of the space.

*"How are the different sexes treated on Kibbutz Glil Yam?"*

From the 50s to the 90s, there was a widespread awareness of changing social circumstances for women. Not only on kibbutzim throughout Israel, people were hearing and thinking about the different roles the genders played in an evolving contemporary society. Many kibbutzim did not

make addressing the “gender issue” a high priority, however. Instead, kibbutzim simply offered the same authority and opportunities to everybody and let members work where they chose. Although an undeniable attempt for equality, there remains an imbalance of the sexes on most kibbutzim investigated in this study. Often, since everybody is offered the same opportunities, the concept of gender isn’t discussed in daily life or regular decision-making. People simply live their lives working where they want to work. What is exceptionally consistent under these circumstances, however, is how archaically classified “women’s work” positions remain dominated by women. Daycares and children’s schools are consistently managed by women, for example. On Kibbutz Glil Yam, positions more in charge of running the kibbutz have always been filled by men. This is surprisingly true to an even greater degree among the younger generations. The older members of the kibbutz are who would claim not to consider gender in everyday lives and kibbutz functioning. The younger generation, although more aware of differing circumstances for sexes, do not advocate for or against change in a political manner. This is more often the case on university campuses than kibbutzim. Israeli women are perceived by some within the Israeli population as quite strong and domineering, but aren’t similarly as quickly associated with thorough education or thoughtfulness, says our female interviewee. Being that executive members are voted on by the General Assembly, perhaps the lack of women as Glil Yam executives illuminates gendered biases within a community that is striving towards opportunistic equality.

## Chapter 8 Authority in Singular, Local, and National Kibbutz Contexts

As kibbutzniks founded themselves in this new and peculiar lifestyle, kibbutz, they relied on both their own ambition and the expertise of other organizations to get themselves started. The Kibbutz Movement offered direction, courses, advisors, finances, and even guidelines to how to make a collective community work efficiently. This served as greatly helpful for the young people who came from more urban or privatized communities who knew nothing about living communally in Israel's environment. As kibbutzim of the Southern Arava grew older and became self-sustaining, they relied less on the help of large organizations like the Kibbutz Movement and began advocating for their own unique desert needs. The region's kibbutzim have become primarily governed by the more localized Hevel Eilat Regional Council, in which members and kibbutzim's singular representatives (*Maskeerem*) are involved.

### 8.1 The Maskeerem

The position of the *Maskeer*, or Secretary General of a kibbutz, is like the General Manager or Mayor. They represent the kibbutz in larger contexts, as well as manage many of the internal affairs of the kibbutz. The position can sometimes be very difficult, and includes dealing with many of the ugly interpersonal issues that occur between members of the community. The Maskeer of any kibbutz is responsible for assimilating new members to the kibbutz, integrating people from urban backgrounds into collective kibbutz life, including teaching budgeting and finance concepts. This management position, although it consists of tremendous social responsibility, does not get compensated any differently on kibbutzim that do not have differentiated salaries, like Ketura. This lack of financial reward, in tandem with the strenuousness of the work, makes the position very hard to fill on many kibbutzim, even those with salary differentiation. The Maskeer must be available to the community at all hours of the day, making it difficult to manage any free or personal time. The current Maskeer of Kibbutz Eilat even mentioned allotting fifteen extra minutes to her walk to work to account for all of the people who will stop her along the way. An unfortunate consequence of this position on some kibbutzim is the shift of the Maskeer member from a friend or peer on the kibbutz to more of a manager of the kibbutzniks. Although the Maskeer is responsible for dealing with some ugly problems, a kibbutznik is likely less willing to speak of the downfalls of the community with the Maskeer in the same fashion they would with their roommate in the pub.

The Maskeer is a very important position on kibbutzim, and it opens many opportunities for those in the position. As the Maskeer is expected to travel throughout the region and perhaps Israel, they have a consistent opportunity to experience life, culture, and people outside of the confines of their own kibbutz. "I didn't really interact with people off of the kibbutz until I took the position," says current Maskeer of Kibbutz Elifaz. Being the Maskeer not only allows you to engage more with people of the area, but with other kibbutzim of the area too. The *Maskeerem* (plural of Maskeer) come to gather bi-monthly in meetings following regular Regional Council meetings, which they also attend. The purpose of these new meetings between regional

Maskeerem is to allow all ten of the kibbutzim of the Southern Arava the opportunity to share their communities' individual needs in the greater context of the Arava Valley. Because these are relatively new and infrequent gatherings, the Maskeerem of the Arava are still working out how exactly they should best approach and present individual and collective needs of the region. Currently, the Maskeerem meet to discuss issues and offer advice, but rarely take immediate action. There is talk about hiring an outside professional to attend these meetings and "make something of it" in the future. When you gather ten perspectives into a room and discuss many issues in many ways, it is very difficult to get much done in a timely manner. Nonetheless, the Maskeerem of Israel's Southern Arava are excited by this opportunity to collaborate with their peer kibbutzim.

The Maskeerem of kibbutzim of the Arava Valley are a very important part of their intimate communities. Those who fill the position must be people with a vision and forward thought, even if that vision is simply to keep the kibbutz running properly. They must be mindful, or continually act with intention and reflection, and also remain strong in their ability to maintain faith in their community. Seeing the uglier issues between your neighbors and friends can either bring you closer to or farther from the community as you tackle such problems. Fortunately, many kibbutzniks who take on this responsibility are aware of these circumstances and often find themselves closely identifying with their title as Maskeer. Still, the job is not attractive to many people and many kibbutzim of the Southern Arava have difficulty filling it. On some kibbutzim, like Ketura and Grofit, the position has been split into two half-time positions to make the lessened responsibility more attractive to potential candidates. Now on Kibbutz Ketura, one Maskeer manages budgets whereas the other manages the social and cultural vision of the kibbutz. Splitting the larger position into two part-time positions also served to avoid having to hire a Maskeer from outside the kibbutz community. Despite the downsides to Maskeer responsibilities, kibbutzim of the Southern Arava maintain their traditional value of servicing the intimate needs of kibbutzim from within each kibbutz itself. As a result, many of the kibbutzniks who take on these responsibilities find themselves more deeply connected to their communities than before.

## 8.2 The Kibbutz Movement

The official Kibbutz Movement and its relationship with the kibbutzim of the Southern Arava has evolved significantly throughout time. The Movement was much more involved in the everyday lives of kibbutzniks twenty years ago than it is today. It offered courses, seminars, advising assistance, and advocated for kibbutzim politically. Today, all of these services are still offered, but to a lesser degree. Particularly to kibbutzim of the Southern Arava, the benefits offered by the Movement are inconvenient and inaccessible. Courses and seminars are too expensive and difficult to get to, being that they regularly take place in more populated cities up north. The financial crisis that struck the Movement in the 1980s made it increasingly difficult

to support the needs of many kibbutzim. The Movement shifted to maintain an even more stringent focus on assisting young and small kibbutzim. In the Arava, after the kibbutzim dug themselves out of the debt they had at the close of the twentieth century, they became more self-sufficient and many began asking to what degree the Movement was still relevant to their goals.

As the kibbutzim of the Arava were first developing, members were much more involved in Movement affairs, and vice versa. Some kibbutzniks took weekly visits to the Movement headquarters to discuss finances and the future of their communities. The Movement offered resources for every aspect of kibbutz life. There were training courses for every position on the kibbutz, and a sort of guidebook manual for how things can and should run on this collective type of community. The Movement served as the “experts” in communal living, and was an informative resource as well as a financial one. The most direct form of support the Movement offered developing kibbutzim was the assistance and guidance of advisors. These advisors had a spectrum of specialties and would visit kibbutzim to offer their expertise in attempts to solve a kibbutz’ problems. However, these advisors sometimes offered conflicting advice that forced the kibbutzniks to make executive decisions. For example, an economic advisor may suggest which feed to provide your cattle that would reap the most financial benefit whereas a livestock advisor may suggest a feed that is the healthiest. Discrepancies like these opened doors for kibbutzim to define themselves and their industries in accord with their personal identities. The Movement’s expertise became more of suggestions, as kibbutzniks of the Southern Arava became more comfortable in their ability to maintain and define their own communities. Today, consulting advisors will occasionally be hired by kibbutzim for specific problems, but they are no longer affiliated with the official Movement.

Expert advice from the greater Kibbutz Movement became increasingly less relevant to the lives of kibbutzniks of the Southern Arava because of their unique and definitive geographical location. The ten kibbutzim of the Southern Arava experience a particular set of difficulties as they aim to thrive agriculturally in a dry and barren environment. Their desert surroundings compounded with geographic isolation of the desert and made the recommendations and assistance of the Kibbutz Movement less applicable as kibbutzim grew out of their formative stages. Now, the official Movement is only involved in regular kibbutz happenings in the Southern Negev in much more minute ways. Training courses and seminars are still regularly offered by the Movement, but they remain relatively inaccessible to desert kibbutzim. In place of many official advisors, the kibbutz now sends a single representative throughout the region to visit with and answer any questions kibbutzniks may have. This representative is also present at the larger regional council meetings and the meetings of the local Maskeerem. Some Maskeerem still believe that the Movement can be beneficial to their communities, despite its dwindled influence. The opportunity to travel for informative courses, as well as having a connection to a resource that can provide answers to challenging kibbutznik questions can be very beneficial in certain circumstances. In the larger scheme of things, some kibbutzniks of the southern Arava feel the Movement needs to be doing more for the entire



movement as a whole, rather than individual kibbutzim. In particular, the Movement is much less involved in Knesset activities than it has been previously. There used to be a greater initiative to integrate kibbutzniks with the larger society of Israel in an effort to tie this traditional element in Israeli culture to modernizing influences in contemporary lifestyles. This initiative was in part an attempt to diminish isolation that can result from living in an intimate and selective community like a kibbutz. However, there are no non-kibbutz communities throughout the Southern Negev aside from Be'er Ora, Shaharut, and Eilat, so this unifying effort of the Movement was not effective in the Arava region. As the kibbutzim of the Southern Arava began growing and solving their own problems together, the Kibbutz Movement was facing a crisis of its own.

Until 1977, there was a remarkable sense of pride in kibbutzim throughout Israel. The communal settlements were understood to be the cornerstone of the new Jewish national home, and were respected as such. They were important pieces to the foundation of the new nation until the rise of the Likud political party in 1977. The Likud, a right-wing secular party, did not share the same love and appreciation for kibbutzim as leaders before. Often in interviews, kibbutzniks described the Likud as “hating kibbutzim (Kayman, L; personal communications).” The national support for these collective communities was gone, and with it went substantial financial support. The government stopped subsidizing the Kibbutz Movement, and the Movement had to reconfigure the aid it could offer growing kibbutzim. It was with the rise of the Likud that many consider the Kibbutz Movement to have died. It narrowed its scope of objectives, and only had limited economic resources to offer kibbutzim in dire need. On a national scale, kibbutzim began shifting towards becoming leftist politically, as the greater Israeli society shifted to the right with the Likud. With this rebranding came the transformation of kibbutzim overall and their relationship with the Kibbutz Movement.

### 8.3 The Hevel Eilat Regional Council



Figure #27: Tourist Map of the Southern Arava, indicating each Hevel Eilat settlement and more

The ten kibbutzim of the Southern Arava, along with the settlements of Be'er Ora and Shaharut, are represented and governed by the Hevel Eilat Regional Council. Encompassing the most southern parts of Israel, this is both the country's largest geographic and smallest populated council. Councils, both regional and local, divide the whole of Israel into more intimately governed groups of different settlements. The extent of the Hevel Eilat council does not reach Israel's southernmost city of Eilat, however. The relatively small communities that are within the council's jurisdiction are separated by at least an hour drive, making it difficult for consistent

and reliable communication across the entire region. The purpose of the Regional Council is to bring together the voices and representatives of all of these southern communities. Although there are twelve distant settlements represented by the council, they share similar desert environment, isolation, and the particular hardships that come from the tandem of the two. Furthermore, despite Be'er Ora's currently increasing population, ten of the council's communities have ideological connections to socialism and the kibbutz lifestyle. Even more so, six of those ten are traditionally collective kibbutzim, which today make up less than a quarter of the more modernized Israeli kibbutzim population. There are many things that tie the settlements of the Hevel Eilat Regional Council together, making it imperative to the area's growth and prosperity that they communicate effectively and consistently about regional issues.

In order to maintain an effective Regional Council system as a larger unit, the individual associated settlements must maintain a positive relationship with the council. Many aspects of regular life deal with the council, such as schooling and afternoon activities for both children and adults. Just like non-kibbutz settlements, the kibbutzim of the Regional Council pay taxes to the council in exchange for services and support such as health assistance by clinic and special needs resources such as schooling. The council itself is currently made up of people of the area, making it predominantly kibbutzniks. Many voices active in regional discussions, therefore, have a familiarity with the hardships and perspective of kibbutzniks. The substantial increase of the size of Be'er Ora has some kibbutz representatives wary, however. Some fear that one of the next heads of the Regional Council will represent Be'er Ora and shift the dynamic of regional support away from the interest of kibbutzim. Being that the council advocates for the needs of all local settlements, it is important that all affected populations be proportionally represented.

As a likely result of the area's unusual density of traditionally collective kibbutzim, it is not surprising that the settlements represented by the Hevel Eilat Regional Council exhibit a heightened sense of communal responsibility. This responsibility extends passed the limits of individual kibbutzim throughout the entirety of the Hevel Eilat Region, despite some structural and ideological differences between these communities. There is consistent awareness and consideration of the needs of others, as well as the desire to help thy neighbor. Collaboration between the industries on kibbutzim helps solidify economic trust in one another while supporting kibbutzim who may occasionally perform unfavorably. The date and dairy industries are common among communities situation within the southern Arava. The Regional Council, however, does not have the legal authority to achieve some of their economic needs, so some matters are handled by an affiliated economic corporation. There are many business cooperatives active throughout the region that are not necessarily a part of the Regional Council, but responsibility is not strongly differentiated between economic organizations of the area. Some of regional economic management is carried out by the Regional Council, some by its economic arm, and some by unaffiliated corporations.

The small number of kibbutzim in the vast southern Negev Desert are unified and represented by the Hevel Eilat Regional Council. The council is a tool by which uniquely

challenged communities advocate for themselves and one another in a communal effort to advance the area towards prosperity. The council plays an important part in the everyday lives of the people of southern Israel, and is uniquely important to the kibbutzniks of the region. Due to the geographic isolation of the area and the difficulties particular to agriculturally based settlements within a desert, the Regional Council has come to serve as representative of the interests of the kibbutzim of the region. These kibbutzim are unique for their location as well as their concentration of traditionally collective kibbutzim, and have come to obtain most of their support from the Regional Council rather than the official Kibbutz Movement. This transformation was catalyzed by the decreased activity and local support of southern kibbutzim by the Movement following the rise of the Likud political party. The combined effort of the settlements of the region make the area's voice throughout the greater Israel louder, making attempts to gain attention or assistance like loans easier than it might be for an individual community. The Hevel Eilat Regional Council offers a place for all twelve of the region's communities to openly communicate in a regular and inclusive environment.

## Chapter 9 Discussion of the Arava Kibbutzim's Evolution and Identity

The evolution of Israel's kibbutzim has been complex and varies in intensity and form from kibbutz to kibbutz. Traditional collective kibbutzim of the early twentieth century were relatively uniform in their structure and ideological motivations. As years passed, kibbutzim grew older along with their members and they had to change the way they worked in order to sustain multiple generations' values. Unified by their unique environment, the kibbutzim of the Arava have transformed into individual communities as diverse as their members. They have evolved to embody whatever their community has come to understand as the most appropriate and sustainable form of a kibbutz. Socialism and the integrity of the entire community remains at the forefront of kibbutzim agendas in the Arava Valley as kibbutzniks come to know themselves more intimately and experiment with democracy.

### 9.1 What Makes the Arava Unique?

The first Israeli government under Prime Minister Ben Gurion was driven to settle the southern Arava and establish an Israeli presence in the region. A vast desert, there was next to nothing between Israel's southern port of Eilat and more populated cities like Be'er Shiva when the first kibbutz, Yotvata, began forming. The valley makes up the southern tip of the country and is sandwiched between the countries of Egypt and Jordan. At the valley's southernmost point is the Gulf of Aqaba, through which ships find the Red Sea. In order to secure the Arava Road, the only long strategic link connecting Eilat to the center of the country, the government supported the advancement of the Kibbutz Movement into the region. There was an additional ideological attraction in settling the area, however. Aside from the mountains that encase the valley, the Arava is a flat, dry, sandy environment that provides unique obstacles that are particular to such a landscape. The task of establishing settlements that traditionally support themselves from high-intensity water use agriculture was a bold challenge. The kibbutzim of the north have much richer soil and can sustain crops more easily. Nonetheless, when this challenge was conquered, the people of Israel (with governmental support) succeeded in "making the desert bloom," a romantic dream that can be traced back to religious roots.

What makes the kibbutzim of the Arava Valley particularly different from the remaining kibbutzim of Israel comes from the isolation of this barren desert. The north holds the majority of Israel's population, stemming from the development of large cities like Tel Aviv and Haifa. Separating the valley from more populated areas is over a 3 or 4-hour drive, which makes transporting goods, supplies, or people difficult and expensive. These kibbutzim do not have nearby cities to provide convenient supplies and services on demand, as do northern kibbutzim. The kibbutzim of the Arava still today struggle with drawing interested new members to the barren area. The lure of urban luxuries can't be found here, with the closest escape being the most southern city of Eilat, which is designed to cater to tourists. Kibbutzniks of the Arava do



not have the casual option to spend a fun night on the town, see a movie, eat at a restaurant, or visit a science center. Cultural stimulation on the Arava's kibbutzim comes from the environment and the people who choose to live there. Kibbutzniks have adapted to an increased need for creativity in self-expression, pulling a meaningful lifestyle from the nothing that surround them. Kibbutzniks along the Arava Valley have written and put on their own plays, developed their own holidays, and have learned to celebrate life in their own unique ways. Today, artists will perform or visit these kibbutzim by request in order to offer an unordinary and pleasant night for members and residents.

## 9.2 Gender on the Kibbutz

The first kibbutzniks seemed to have adopted a sense of being genderless in their communities. Everybody shared the same responsibilities, rotated jobs, worked in the same clothes, and had the same amount of authority in General Assembly meetings. It did not matter who you were or where you came from, you would be up at 5am to work in the field with everybody else. Of course, equal and ardent effort was required by the pioneering kibbutzniks, even those who founded kibbutzim in the latter half of the twentieth century because of limited resources in previously unoccupied areas such as the Arava. In order to build a successful community from the ground up with only a small group of young people, you need as much help and shared responsibility as you can muster. However, nowadays the social dynamic on kibbutzim has changed, and over multiple generations subtle societal and gender imbalances have emerged.

During the majority of the interviews with older members of the Arava's kibbutzim, a commonly repeated phrase was that their kibbutz has always been "gender aware." There were always both men and women in the founding garins of the Arava's kibbutzim, and they all played an equal role in supporting one another through their founding years. After asserting this awareness, multiple interviewees found themselves uttering a "but..." and offering a personal experience that suggested otherwise. In a general sense, the genders are presented as equals on kibbutzim of the Southern Arava, but each case is particular to its own community. Regularly, the executives of each kibbutz are balanced between men and women, although some positions tend to be filled more frequently by one sex. For example, the position of Maskeer is most commonly filled by women on some kibbutzim. It is in less authoritative positions where we see a gendered divide. For instance, on most every kibbutz of the Southern Arava, the majority of school teachers are women. One interviewee suggested that was because of the lower salaries of teachers than other positions, making the title undesirable among men. Another interviewee suggested women preferred to work with children as a result of their natural material and empathetic character. Either way, no woman or man is forced to work a particular position as a result of their sex. People are encouraged and free to work wherever on the kibbutz they have the skills and find the most happiness. Women and men concentrate in particular positions on kibbutzim as a result of their own personal preferences rather than social pressures.

Differential densities of the sexes in positions was not always the case on some kibbutzim, however. In the 1970s, the first decade of the kibbutz, two groups of feminist women journeyed to Kibbutz Ketura declaring a necessity to change their gendered working system. They were dissatisfied by this imbalance between workers and set forth to change the densities of the sexes in particular positions (they did not use the term “gender” at this time). For a while, women were forced to work shifts driving tractors and men were forced to take shifts working in the children’s homes on Kibbutz Ketura. The goal of this effort was to show to the kibbutz’ children that the genders are versatile, and that either males or females can do anything. Eventually, members decided that forcing somebody to work in a particular position based solely on their sex was immoral and the practice was abandoned. The members resettled into their more comfortable positions as the kibbutz grew older.

“Everybody is allowed to work wherever suits them” sounds like a very inclusive work structure in theory. However, where the flaw appears regarding inequality between men and women is in the subtleties of some kibbutz cultures. In one Ketura kibbutznik interview, when asked about genders, women were referred to as being forced into “positions of responsibility” on the kibbutz when they were forced to work outside of the children’s homes. Were teachers and caretakers not responsible for the lives of dozens of children? Of the entire future generation of the kibbutz? When speaking to another interviewee, she described never feeling oppressed on her kibbutz. Immediately afterwards, however, she offered her daughter’s contact information because she has “*tons* of stories about inequality on the kibbutz.” This remark suggests a different or greater awareness of gender issues in younger kibbutznik generations. A third interviewee described social pressure on women who traveled to other kibbutzim to work to remain in their workplace for their lunch breaks, whereas there was no similar pressure on the men. “The hardworking, tired men were allowed to go home and make their own meals, whereas us lazy women were expected to stay and take what we’re given.” Outside of the intimate kibbutz community, larger problems arose. One woman Maskeer discussed never feeling overt sexism on her own kibbutz, but when she traveled to represent her kibbutz in larger contexts, she frequently was ignored and disrespected by the men around her. On her kibbutz, she was respected and listened to as a result of the reputability and expertise she had within her community, as they had more familiarity with her. In the greater Israel, she was ignored simply because she was a woman.

Consensus throughout the Arava kibbutzim is that gender issues simply are not discussed. This lack of discussion is not because problems do not exist or are being shoved under the rug, but because these female kibbutzniks do not feel as though they are being treated unfairly. Women do not feel as though they are being offered any fewer opportunities than the men, social groups are rarely exclusive, and the members of the community genuinely support one another.



### 9.3 Kibbutz Identity

As kibbutzim have grown to sustain themselves and develop throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, they have taken on a remarkable variety of characteristics. Each kibbutz is defined by the people who found and create it, making kibbutzim personalities as complex and unique as their members. Kibbutzniks have come from countries all over the world to establish new homes Israel, and have brought pieces of their original culture with them to share and adapt with others. The culture and atmosphere of each kibbutz is molded by both their members' personal histories as well as whichever major historical events occurred around the time of their founding. Still, kibbutzniks pride themselves on their new approach to life and community. As each kibbutz grows older, its members find new and inclusive ways to develop both their individual and communal selves together.

#### 9.3.1 Personalities of the Arava

I had very little difficulty feeling at home as I visited the kibbutzim of southern Israel because so many kibbutzniks of the area are Americans. Often around me, I heard songs of the Jackson 5 or mention of a movie I had recently seen. American culture, accents, and attitudes were everywhere. Kibbutz Ketura, a dominant source of the research for this project, was founded by a group of twenty year olds born of the American 60s. They were raised in what current Kibbutz Grofit Maskeer referred to as “never never land,” an American society fueled by the idea of the positive channeling of energy in a greater world of hardship. The idea of living freely, finding one's purpose, and contributing to a greater source of good were common themes among young American conversations throughout the 60s and 70s.

At the height of the Vietnam War, many young people who made Aliyah were familiar with violence and determined to contribute to the betterment of the world in personally meaningful way. The Americans who came to the Arava to begin new lives on kibbutzim shared a lack of meaning in their lives back in the States. America was at war at the time many of them made Aliyah, yes, but they were instead much more ideologically driven to join the Israeli Defense Force all the way across the world. In America, an individual soldier didn't hold as much weight as they did in Israel at the time. America is vast and the army is impersonal, making many American Arava kibbutzniks feel as though they would have been easily replaceable if they were to join the American army. Even more so, there remained prejudice against American Jews that made many of them feel as secondary citizens. These kibbutzniks simply did not identify with the American global mission as strongly as they did the Israeli national one. There was no sense of building or creating for the survival of a neglected people in the Vietnam War. Being Jews, these Americans were drawn to Israel in the decades following the establishment of the State. There was romanticism in the idea of joining a new nation's army, fighting for a people religiously and ethnically similar to you, and being a substantial player in

the development of the country. In the Israeli Defense Force (IDF), these Americans found more meaning in both their actions and their personal purpose. They were not joining a force to defeat or destroy anyone else but to build a safe and comfortable place for a persecuted people. As they did so, they brought with them the parts of America they did identify with, like baseball or Journey, and incorporated them into their new Israeli lives. Although these kibbutzniks found more of themselves in building Israel, they remained culturally connected to their origin country in a way that allowed them to blend its culture with that of Israel.

### 9.3.2 Which Was Your War?

Israel is a small area of Earth's surface but has been the site of a significant portion of human conflict. The land itself has spawned considerable controversy, while simultaneously defining and being defined by its inhabitants. Being that kibbutzim have been founded throughout nearly the entirety of the twentieth century, there are kibbutzim that were founded during different historical crises. Conflicts that have come to influence kibbutzim structure and culture are not limited to the land of Israel, however. Many kibbutznik immigrants came from calmer areas but were nonetheless impacted by world events that surrounded their childhood and adolescence. Kibbutzim are usually founded by small groups of young people, around the age of twenty. They come to Israel or relocate within it to establish collective communities in a type of reaction to the world around them. In Israel's Southern Arava, kibbutzim culture was particularly influenced by the Second World War, the Vietnam War as mentioned above, as well as the Six-Day and Yom Kippur Wars.

World War II had less of a direct impact on the kibbutzim of Israel's Southern Arava. The region of Israel was uninhabited by civilians until the 1960s, more than a decade after the end of the catastrophic war. Being a genocidal war particularly aimed towards Jews, it had a tremendous effect on the population and demographics of Israel as Jews fled from European terror. Cities began flourishing around ports such as Jaffa (Tel-Aviv), and kibbutzim had to adapt or react to the growing country. Many kibbutzim, such as Kibbutz Glil Yam and Kibbutz Migvan, either integrated or grew into these urban worlds. The physical and ideological structure of these kibbutzim began shifting from the purely agricultural and collective kibbutzim they were. Many of these urban kibbutzim were the childhood homes of Southern Arava kibbutzim's founders. For example, the founding members of Kibbutz Elifaz all came from larger Israeli cities, and the founders of Kibbutz Samar came from larger or urban kibbutzim as well. They were drawn to the desolate desert as young adults knowing not what type of community they wanted, but instead what type of community they *didn't* want. They took their experiences as children with them as they created their own personalized communities in the south. Particularly, founders of Kibbutz Samar were dissatisfied with the limiting structure of financial sharing or equal distribution traditional to kibbutzim. Instead, they established a type of anarchical settlement where borrowing and earning are almost uncapped or unmonitored. Samar kibbutzniks are free to earn and spend however they please rather than how the greater

community pleases. On Kibbutz Elifaz, its founders chose the quiet and open desert for the isolation. Its members wanted the closeness of an intimate and small kibbutz. The expansion of Israel's cities and growing population from World War II led some Israelis to the vast desert for refuge.

Many of the Arava's kibbutzim were founded between the 1960s and 1970s, the decades that encompassed both the Six-Day War and the Yom Kippur War. These were two inexplicable significant wars for the Israeli people and geography as well. Kibbutzim were people founded by people around the age of twenty as they were simultaneously drafted in the Israeli Defense Force. When war broke out, sometimes disrupting commencement plans, many kibbutzniks had to leave their kibbutzim to defend the front. Being soldiers in either war created an impermeable personal connection to the purpose of the conflict while molding the perspectives of these kibbutzniks on their homeland. Kibbutzniks who were also soldiers either found themselves drawn closer to or farther from kibbutz life after their service. On Kibbutz Ketura, the founding members were sent to defend Israel only six days before they were scheduled to begin building their kibbutz. When they returned after their service, some of these kibbutzniks brought the hardships and turmoil of war with them. For many reasons, some social and some personal, many of the founding kibbutzniks did not remain on the kibbutz for more than two years. Those who stayed, however, often found themselves even more deeply devoted to the new life and lifestyle they had committed themselves to building. Often in interviews, members of different kibbutzim would refer to the same concept: the mindset and passion you find on each individual kibbutz and in each individual member depends on "which was their war."

### 9.3.3 Balancing the Self and the Group

The ways in which individuality is understood and appreciated on Israeli kibbutzim are fundamental to the establishment of the "new human" that the first kibbutzniks aimed to create. Traditionally, the community is understood to focus on the kibbutz rather than individuals. Ironically, this results in a greater awareness of individual responsibility for the sake of the greater community. For example, there is often no cleaning staff on kibbutzim. Each member must therefore maintain their own space, as well as clean up after themselves in public spaces. Doing so reinforces the role that each individual has as an active member of a community. In some cases, like at Neot Semadar, members of the kibbutz understand their personal responsibilities as a form of dedication to the people around them. In maintaining one's own self and space, the individual supports and maintains the whole community.

At first glance, it is surprising that many members of kibbutzim want to be housed along the perimeter of their community. Being that centers of communal life are often situated in the center of kibbutzim, there is high concentration of activity within the center. Community is the center of kibbutz life, so why wouldn't members want to live a short walking distance from the action? However, even kibbutzniks can only handle so much community. By settling farther away from the center, people create a haven for themselves and their own thoughts. People need

to be alone sometimes; there are many aspects of life that are private. By isolating themselves from the action, members benefit from less noise, as well as the opportunity to be with only themselves. This way, they have the power to choose how much communal activities they wish to partake in day to day. Similarly for these reasons, it is not uncommon to find “vacation huts” or hidden retreats on kibbutzim. In a lifestyle centered on the collective, today’s kibbutzniks find balance between their communal and personal lives.

#### 9.4 Transformative Kibbutz Definition

Traditional kibbutzim, the early and completely collective kibbutzim, were unified in their Zionist mission, age group, regular manual labor and agricultural labor, and even clothing. As they followed the Kibbutz Movement’s recommendations and guidelines for successful collective living, early kibbutzniks worked with what little they had to fulfill their basic but ambitious needs. As the nation developed around and with them, kibbutzim had to reevaluate what constituted as the most successful and sustainable community. Economic, social, and political pressures resulted in a wide range of transformations across kibbutzim. In many cases, privatization of spending made many kibbutzniks wary of their communities’ abandonment of traditional, socialist kibbutz values. Many of these self-defining communities worked within themselves to ensure the integrity of their kibbutz as they figured for themselves the true and most meaningful definition of kibbutz.

##### 9.4.1 Privatization as a Dirty Word

The privatization of spending on kibbutzim Israel-wide has been a topic of controversy among kibbutzniks since the economic crisis of the 1980s. Kibbutzim have been founded on socialist and communist ideals, and differentiation and individual responsibility for member spending challenges those standards. Nonetheless, most of Israel’s kibbutzim privatized to keep their communities alive in decades of particular financial and political strain. On most kibbutzim today, members are liable for their own spending but are still offered many collective services by the greater community. In the Arava, a remarkable six of the ten kibbutzim have avoided privatization and remain traditionally collective. This is a source of pride for these kibbutzniks, especially those who have been members long and have deep ideological connections with kibbutz. The kibbutzniks of privatized kibbutzim are no less proud of their communities, however. Rather, they show even more pride in their peers in some cases for their dedication to vital community needs, as well as creative and flexible ways of maintaining their kibbutz’ socialist integrity. There is no one way to privatize spending, and there resultantly exists a range of approaches to individual and collective balance across the kibbutzim of the Arava Valley.

It has not been a seamless transition from traditional collectivism for every privatized kibbutz in the Arava. It takes much discussion and debate in General Assembly meetings to work through the specifics of privatization and ensure the entire community supports the

intended changes. Some kibbutzim have chosen complete privatization so that all members are responsible for all of their individual expenses. Others have privatized only some expenses, such as electricity, while continuing to support the remainder of the kibbutzniks' financial needs. The privatized expenses are typically more mundane and regular, like food or laundry. In most partially privatized communities, the collective manages more severe or stressful expenses like medical care or schooling. This way, the greater kibbutz remains communally supportive of the unexpected or strenuous expenses in its kibbutzniks' lives while simultaneously offering the individuals more autonomy and freedom when it comes to their daily lives. The kibbutz also offers increased budgets when expenses are added to member responsibility so everyone has enough money to support themselves. This way, kibbutzniks are allowed the opportunity to define their own spending and have more control over their lives. In some cases, this strengthens those members' sense of confidence and contempt in both themselves and their greater community despite the shifting reality away from pure socialism. Still, kibbutzim throughout the Arava employ a variety of different methods of responsibility sharing. Those that have privatized their communities have privatized different expenses, allot different budgets, and tax members differently. So, the original concept of privatization as a simple shift from communal to individual financial responsibility has become more complicated and undefined.

#### 9.4.2 Evolving Understanding of Democracy

Every kibbutz in the Arava was originally founded with dedication to upholding democracy. Every kibbutznik had an equal say in community affairs, a principle of self-governing that has persisted through time. The way in which these members participate in this democracy has shifted on some kibbutzim, however. Democracy in its simplest form involves the presentation of an issue, the voting of every adult member of the community, and the winning of the majority. Democrats pride themselves in equal participation of every member of the community, but there is an essential aspect of this process that doesn't align with the traditional intention of solidarity between kibbutzniks. When everybody votes and there is a majority, there must also be a minority. Those left having been denied the option of their choice in a particular decision are left to feel like a minority. The majority versus minority dynamic of democratic decision-making allows everybody to have a say in the happenings of their home, but does not result in maximum satisfaction as a result of this minority. It is a battle of strength; whichever side is the largest in number gets their way. The feeling of displeasure that comes with being placed in a minority on a collective kibbutz has led members from kibbutzim throughout the Arava to reform the structure of General Assembly meetings altogether.

The goal of changing General Assembly discussions was to give everybody an even greater sense of inclusion in decision-making than through cold enumeration of votes. Secretary Generals on multiple kibbutzim of the Arava, including Ketura and Grofit, have changed the way issues are talked about on their kibbutz in an attempt to minimize dissatisfaction and build consensus decisions. Before this change, there was little effort on these kibbutzim to reach

compromises on decisions. Sides to an argument were proposed, but not disputed in a thorough attempt to reach a collective understanding or middle ground of disagreements. Now, there is a greater effort to reach this consensus. Issues are more thought out, and there is now greater encouragement to question decisions and perspectives of those around you. Longer and more thorough discussions of issues allows every member of the General Assembly meeting to have a larger and more detailed say in how each decision is made. By allowing people to spend more time with issues, hear and respond to each argument and counter argument, compromise is more often reached, leaving the least number of people disgruntled as possible.

When reading about kibbutzim in textbooks, it appears that the epitome of traditional collectivism and equality is the General Assembly. It is where everybody gathers to discuss every change being made in the community, and everybody has an equal say. In attempted execution of this decision-making process, however, the ideal isn't quite reached. A vote is a tally that counts for only that tally. However, with exhaustive discussion of each decision, members offer more substantial influence on the perspective of their peers, allowing the community to learn and evolve through communication. For this reason, it is not the General Assembly in itself that is a measure of democracy. Instead, it is the inclusivity of the conference and openness of the conversation that is more valuable than what decision is made.

## Chapter 10 Does Utopia Work?

The original intention of the Kibbutz Movement in Palestine and later Israel was, aside from fulfilling Zionist ambitions, creating both a better place to live as well as better humans. In a way, the restructuring of communal living by kibbutzniks was commentary through action on the wrongs of the world around them. Zionism was birthed as a reaction to the horrific injustices done onto the Jewish population for centuries, including social exclusion and persecution. The Jews were tired of being treated as less than human in a world where power and respect were not balanced between people. In reestablishing their home in the land of Judea, kibbutzniks strove to take matters into their own hands. They set forth to build from nothing the most inclusive and supportive environment for not only Jews, but anyone who came peacefully. Their goal was equality, spirituality, and happiness. In a word, kibbutzim aimed for utopia.

The foundation for kibbutzim structure and authority has always been socialism and communism; kibbutzniks stressed the importance of everybody being of equal value and respect, having equal say in decisions, while also having enough to maintain their individual needs. In the Arava, kibbutzim strive to obtain and maintain direct democracy through use of the General Assembly (GA). At GA meetings, everybody has equal opportunity to attend and contribute to the discussion. On most kibbutzim, issues are talked about and voted on. Every adult kibbutznik has equal weight in voting. Even executive members of kibbutzim do not have any more authority in decision-making than other kibbutzniks. However, it is common that their voices are more closely listened to during discussions as a result of their perceived expertise in certain topics. Nonetheless, the typical format for GA decision-making is voting where the majority wins. Some kibbutzim, as discussed above, have found flaws even in this seemingly perfectly inclusive democratic model and have changed the way democracy is approached. Every case of more effective democracy in the Southern Arava is a result of kibbutzniks' intention to create a system of decision-making that makes less and less members unhappy in the end. However, every kibbutz is different, so there exists a wide variety of means to this common end. Even on kibbutzim just five kilometers apart like Ketura and Grofit, members attack the need to consensus in different ways. A natural result of building any community is reacting to the specific needs of your own peers. Throughout the Arava, kibbutzim employ a variety of decision-making tactics, such as establishing different sizes and authority of executive boards or councils. On each kibbutz, still, decision-making is not simple and easy. Members of each kibbutz have needs that are particular to their own community, and it can be very difficult to get everybody to agree on topics no matter how thorough the discussion. In many interviews, the Maskeerem of kibbutzim would speak of their decision-making processes as evolving currently as they aim to ameliorate the struggles of reaching timely consensus. As kibbutzim grow and their populations evolve, so do their needs and perspectives on the issues around them. However, kibbutzniks of the Southern Arava are making consistent efforts to evolve their methods of problem-solving alongside of them.



Kibbutzniks aim to reach total equality not only through authority and decision-making, but also in regard of the sexes. Egalitarianism has been an initial goal of many early kibbutzim and still serves as a motivating factor for many new kibbutz members in the Arava to join this communal lifestyle. Traditionally on kibbutzim, egalitarianism was primarily exhibited by the workforce that regularly consisted of both men and women working tirelessly in kibbutz fields before their regular daily positions. Jobs often rotated, giving everyone the opportunity to work wherever they'd like. The General Assembly has always represented a consistent outlet for all members of the kibbutz to voice their opinions on the issues that pertain to them. A wave of feminism in the 1970s pushed greater awareness of the sexes and the role of women on kibbutzim. After the initial years of hard manual labor necessary to build a new kibbutz, kibbutzim require less strenuous teamwork. Kibbutzniks come to settle into their more mundane positions such as childcare, laundry, or executive duties. For reasons other than force or social pressure, more women tend to work in social positions like in schools or as the Maskeer and men tend to work in more labor-intensive jobs on the kibbutz. When asked why this is, every interviewee in the Arava mentioned a definite awareness of genders on their kibbutz but a lack of any gender issues. "We don't talk about it," or "we have no problems with gender" were usual responses. Kibbutzniks are working in roles that make them happy, so there are almost no complaints about sexism or inequality on Arava kibbutzim. Still, there were multiple references to more subtle and social forms of sexism on and off these kibbutzim, such as imprecise language regarding women. There definitely is much less overt sexism on Southern Arava kibbutzim than can be found on American streets or even in grocery stores. There is an atmosphere of open and equal opportunity and inclusion for everybody on kibbutzim, which likely contributes to minimized complaints. There is no outright feminist effort to obtain this near equality; it is what kibbutzniks refer to as simply part of their lifestyle. In one interview, a kibbutznik put it: "we are not completely gender equal here, but we are pretty close."

Another more ambitious goal of most of the Arava's kibbutzim is to find true and honest happiness in all their members. Means towards this consistent goal takes many forms in the southern valley. On Kibbutz Ketura, kibbutzniks sometimes create and perform their own theatrical art to creatively bond as a group or hike a nearby mountain to clear their own mind. On Kibbutz Samar, there is nearly unlimited borrowing and room for artistic expression in the community so that members are free to define their own lives and how they spend their time. On Kibbutz Grofit, there are therapeutic horses. Although all different, each of these aspects of kibbutz life are designed to offer kibbutzniks the opportunity to exercise and fulfill their creative and emotional selves. Kibbutzim are highly focused on humanity in this way. There is a romantic approach to discovering one's self in an unusually communal environment. By offering consistent outlets for kibbutzniks to explore and transform their personal selves, each individual is strengthened by growth in confidence in their own selves. By engaging in some of these activities in a group, such as theatrical performances, kibbutzniks feel the support of their peers while sharing the personal selves they've grown prouder of on their own time. A kibbutz

with stronger individuals is stronger in itself as members are often more confident and willing to contribute to the greater community when they are more at peace with themselves. Surprisingly, on settlements centered on sharing everything and owning nothing, there is remarkable emphasis on the personal self and individual fulfillment.

There are many aspects of life that constitute a utopia. Happiness would be the most obvious, but no more important than fairness, freedom of expression, inclusion, or mutual support. All of these components of a good life and more can be found throughout the Arava's kibbutzim. Even still, life is not perfect. Living intimately and in isolation can exaggerate the social issues that arise between kibbutzniks, making small conflicts seem catastrophic. Fortunately, kibbutzniks are socially oriented and determined to solve whatever issues arise within their communities. In the Arava, they've become more tuned into the natural conflicts of interest that occur between people and are continuously finding new ways to ameliorate them. Nonetheless, there remain unavoidable social discomforts such as proximity of recent divorcees or simple distastes of personalities. More so, many young adults who were born into these unique systems of financial sharing find themselves struggling with more normalized methods of earning and spending as they enter the global academic and professional worlds. Kibbutzniks of the Arava do not claim to have achieved the greatest or most proper form of community. However, they are aware and proud of their efforts to minimize suffering. Overall, the kibbutzniks of the Arava attest to the positive and life-changing environments they have built for themselves. They are happy people, most of whom claim they would never dream of living anywhere else.

## Afterward: Troubles Researching in a Foreign Country

There were many aspects of life in Southern Israel that affected the ease of my researching process in a country foreign to me. Fortunately, none of them were detrimental to the outcome of my project or halted its progress in a severe way. Every person I interviewed, not unlike nearly everybody else in the region, spoke some degree of English. There was virtually no language barrier to overcome throughout my stay in Israel. The only instances that required extra effort to translate from Hebrew were when I would visit kibbutzim websites or a small number of other online resources. Still, there was often a “translate” option at the top of my screen. The lack of an essential need to learn the native Hebrew in tandem with frequent contact with the American culture Ketura’s members brought with them allowed me to avoid culture shock. Additionally, the environment of the Southern Negev, although dry and nearly barren, is so beautiful that my seven weeks there felt like a vacation. Even in intimate and sparse communities like desert kibbutzim, there are always readily accessible people willing and eager to welcome or spend time with you. Israel’s southernmost kibbutzim exude an exceptionally comforting and hospitable atmosphere that made it difficult to feel out of place, even in such an unconventional environment. Issues arose as I gathered my research in more technical and logistical ways, such as figuring transportation or scheduling interviews.

The most frustrating aspect of my stay in Israel’s Southern Negev was definitely traversing the open environment in a predictable fashion. Despite there being only one road that runs the length of the Arava Valley and connects all of the kibbutzim, the Arava Road, it was confusing and imprecise to navigate from kibbutz to kibbutz. Regional and national bus schedules overlapped but did not tell you when a bus was to reach your particular bus stop, only when it left its original location. Guessing when exactly a bus from Tel-Aviv, four hours away, would reach Ketura was nearly impossible with a mobile tracking app, and made scheduling precise meetings difficult. Even more so, you must alert your bus driver when he has reached your stop in order to make him let you off, and it took the hard way to learn that. Scheduling interviews or meetings was also made difficult by the relaxed nature of the Arava’s work pace. I was advised not to pre-schedule meetings with kibbutzim until I had reached Kibbutz Ketura for the reason that Israelis prefer not to plan so far ahead. In most cases, I would reach out to a handful of stakeholders via WhatsApp and they would all get back to me telling me what time and day of that same week they’d like me to visit. Sometimes these appointments seemed to conflict with the confusing bus schedule or even each other. Additionally, I had to rely on kibbutzniks reading their WhatsApp messages and being willing to respond to a stranger in order to achieve many of these appointments. It was an inconsistent process, but proved to be less stressful than it definitely could have been as a result of kibbutzniks’ attitudes. Nearly every person I had reached out to was prompt in their response and eager to give me any information I needed. There was a great sense of hospitality even in interviews in which I was a visiting stranger, making the data collection process not only engaging but also comfortable. The

obstacles that stood between myself and the outcome of this project were, although sometimes frustrating, minor. In summation, my time researching in Israel was “*magical*.”

## Note on Sources

The only chapters throughout this body of work that required primary and secondary source research are Chapters 1 and 2. Which source pertains to which of these chapters can often be determined by the title of the work referenced. For example, the following sources were used to build Chapter 1 Historical Background:

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Similarly, the following sources were used to create Chapter 2 Introduction to Kibbutzim and the Kibbutz Movement:

Fölling, Werner, and Maria Fölling-Albers. *The Transformation of Collective Education in the Kibbutz: The End of Utopia?* Frankfurt Am Main: P. Lang, 1999.

Levi, Sarah. "The Revival of the Kibbutz: A Uniquely Israeli Institution." *The Jerusalem Post*. March 10, 2018. Accessed January 10, 2019. <https://www.jpost.com/Magazine/A-uniquely-Israeli-institution-543296>.

Palgi, Michal, and Shulamit Reinharz. *One Hundred Years of Kibbutz Life: A Century of Crises and Reinvention*. Routledge, 2017.

Chapter 3 reports my findings as I lived and met people on Kibbutz Ketura while Chapter 4 describes what I did while I was there. The following chapter includes only information that the interviewees listed shared with me. Similarly, the information displayed in Chapter 6 The Financial Crisis of 1985 was obtained in a personal interview with Kibbutz Ketura's former Treasurer. Chapter 7 includes only information I learned in personal interviews with kibbutzniks while in Israel. The remaining Chapters 8-10 only involve my own interpretation of the information I gathered while actively researching on the ground in the Arava Valley. There are few exceptions to this information, which include kibbutzim websites that were referenced while interviewing and studying the Arava's kibbutzim.

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## Appendix A: Methodology

Reut Parnes is one of three support staff members of the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies working with WPI students at kibbutz Ketura. Reut was assigned to my project, and therefore served as my go-to contact when I needed assistance forming connections with people in kibbutzim. The first workday during my stay on the kibbutz, Reut and I met very briefly to discuss what my aspirations were for the next seven weeks, as well as how she may be able to assist me throughout that process. Following the meeting, I wrote up a general list of people I'd liked to speak with, activities I'd wished to fulfill, and types of other kibbutzim I wished to visit. From there, Reut worked on reaching out to kibbutz members, both in Ketura and other local kibbutzim, to connect them with me in order to move my project forward.

The goal of this project is to assess the transformation of kibbutzim throughout the southern Arava region of the Negev Desert. To achieve this goal, I adopted multiple perspectives and maintained an openness to change throughout the data collection process. First, I obtained a deeper familiarity with one particular kibbutz and the people who make it up. Second, I visited and compared kibbutzim throughout the entire Arava region. Lastly, I contrasted the history and transformations of these desert kibbutzim with two kibbutz case studies from urban settings.

### Objective 1 Obtain a personal and intimate understanding of a particular kibbutz

#### *Biographical Interviews - Kibbutz Ketura*

At the start of the second workweek of my project, Reut gave me the names and contact information of six kibbutzniks on Kibbutz Ketura. She described a little about who they were and their role on the kibbutz and left me to reach out to them. Later that day, I sent WhatsApp messages to each of these members, introduced myself and my project, and asked if they'd be willing to meet with me to help me further my research. I explained that these "interviews" would be very loosely structured, casual conversations aimed simply at letting me get to know the people of the kibbutz and their ways of life better. All of the kibbutzniks I reached out to were willing to meet with me, and promptly scheduled times over the next couple of weeks for us to sit down. Since I am located on the kibbutz, I offered to adjust my schedule to fit whatever suited these members best. I hoped, in this way, to eliminate as many inconveniences as I could for my interviewees. I met them wherever and whenever suited them best. One kibbutznik, Bill, responded so quickly and accommodatingly to my request that he replied "I will be at the dining hall in ten minutes for dinner." Here, we simply sat and chatted over our meals. It was the least stressful and most natural form of data collection I have ever partaken in.

The remaining interviews took a slightly different form. Once the scheduled time of each interview came, I met each respective kibbutznik at their desired location with a notebook and pen in hand. I had brainstormed some questions for each interviewee to move our conversations along and gain more specific information about topics that interested me. The questions that I

asked were tailored to the position of the interviewee. For example, I asked Cathie Granit, Program Director of Academics at the Arava Institute, questions about the institute in addition to general “what’s your story?” type questions. For all interviewees, I asked baseline questions. These included:

- Where are you from?
- What brought you to kibbutz Ketura?
- What has made you stay on the kibbutz?
- How have things changed on the kibbutz throughout your experience here?
- Is there anything you miss about your first years here?

During all interviews, I asked conversational questions about topics I was interested in learning more about throughout our discussion. For example, if an interviewee mentioned a dislike of a particular experience on the kibbutz, I would ask why they felt this way. I also asked clarifying questions about specifics that I didn’t fully understand at the time. At the end of each interview, I informed my interviewee that I would be writing about our conversation in my report, and asked if they would be comfortable if I used their name. I offered two alternatives: I could use an alias in their description, or not write up a biography for them and simply draw conclusions out of my notes from our conversation. The majority of my interviewees closed our meeting with an offer to meet again if I find I have any more questions for them in the future.

### *Thematic Coding and Data Analysis*

For all Ketura interviewees except Bill Slott, I used my notebook and pen to jot down notes on our conversations. These notes did not take the form of full sentences, so that I would be able to keep up with my interviewees’ trains of thought. I then typed up these notes, which can be found in the appendix. From these notes, I wrote short biographies of each interviewee to include in this report. I then color-coded the interview notes based on themes I discovered and wished to look into further and discuss in my discussion. I extracted the colored sections and organized them into an Excel spreadsheet for easier reading and assessing. There is one interview from Ketura that was not included in this coding and analysis process, Noah Morris. This is because Noah’s interview was not biographical in nature; it served to address specific information pertaining to the Israeli financial crisis of 1985.

### *Personal Experiences (Journal)*

In addition to arranged meetings and conversations, I engaged with the kibbutz community in as many ways as I could. For logistical reasons, I could not be a technical “volunteer” in order to work full shifts in places like the kitchen, so I had to find less structured ways of engaging with the community. I engaged in both religious and secular activities, those that served to strengthen individual fulfillment, and those that strengthened the community. I wrote briefly about these experiences in a journal-type format.

## Objective 2 Assess the evolution of kibbutzim of the southern Arava valley

### *Secretary Generals (Maskeerem) Meeting*

Reut had provided me the number of a man who was responsible for organizing and running the bi-monthly meeting of all of the Secretary Generals of the Arava region. Upon introducing myself through email, he insisted that I call him to schedule a meeting. He informed me that there was to be a meeting of all of the Secretaries from kibbutzim in the area later that week and asked me to come. I used the regional bus schedule to get myself to kibbutz Yotvata on time, and called my contact upon arriving to locate the meeting.

I joined an intimate circle of about eight people in the center of the kibbutz Yotvata dining hall. They were all speaking Hebrew, so I sat and observed until I was introduced to the group. Upon introduction, I re-introduced myself in English, and asked a few questions about the purpose of the meeting as well as the Secretaries' relationship with the Regional Council. At the end of my allotted ten minutes of the meeting, I told my company that I would love to visit their kibbutzim to meet with either them or others to further my research. My initial contact later collected all of their WhatsApp numbers and forwarded them to me. This meeting connected me to a representative of every kibbutz within the Arava.

### *Kibbutzim Day Visits*

With the contact information of the Secretaries of the Arava kibbutzim, I sent a WhatsApp message to each of them with a request to schedule a visit. Only a couple of them replied, so I asked Reut to find other contacts for the kibbutzim of the ten I had not yet reached. I promptly sent each of them emails including more information about my purpose in Israel and intention to meet with them. I offered my email and phone number and informed them that I would love to schedule a meeting within the next couple of weeks.

Some of these contacts got back to me with no information other than insisting I call them. These calls were very brief; those I called were happy to help and simply wanted to talk to set up a day and time for me to visit their kibbutzim. I scheduled other visits through email. When a day and time was set to visit a particular kibbutz, I worked with both the regional and national bus schedules to organize how I would be getting myself to and from these appointments. When I arrived at each kibbutz, I called the person I was to meet to learn where to go. All of my interviewees met me at the bus stop of their kibbutz and showed me to either their office or their home.

Each interview lasted about one hour. I asked consistent, but not precisely identical, questions to each kibbutz representative. All of the same themes were covered: their kibbutz' ideological and financial history, structure, and gender distribution. I took electronic notes on my computer during these interviews, which can be found in Appendix C.



## Objective 3 Contrast the transformation of kibbutzim of desert and urban environments

### *Urban Kibbutzim Phone Interviews*

Reut, once again, provided me with contact information for members of a few urban kibbutzim in Israel. Two of them got back to me following repeated invitations to connect, kibbutz Migvan and kibbutz Glil Yam. Kibbutz Migvan is located about five hours away by bus, less than a mile away from the Gaza strip. Kibbutz Glil Yam is located just outside of Tel-Aviv. Due to time and travel limitations, I was not able to visit these kibbutzim. Instead, I scheduled phone interviews with a founder or an experienced member. Upon the commencement of the phone calls, I asked a series of questions I had brainstormed beforehand. These included technical questions pertaining to the location and infrastructure of the kibbutzim, as well as their histories and values. During the phone calls, I took electronic notes and then wrote them into a cohesive description of the kibbutzim. These descriptions were later used to compare and contrast urban kibbutzim to the desert kibbutzim of the Arava.

## Appendix B: Kibbutz Ketura Interview Transcripts

### **Bill Slott (1/14/19)**

- Grew up in US; Went to Cornell; Decided to move to Israel after college (22 yrs)
- Came to kibbutz when it was 6 years old
  - o Now: 10 times the size (space)
- Knew he was going to be drafted as soon as he became a citizen
  - o Kibbutz was a perfect fit for a single soldier
    - *Laundry done and meals made* when he got home
    - Always had *friends* around to socialize with
- Fell in *love* with kibbutz life
  - o Phenomenal place to raise kids
    - Everyday is a playdate
    - Don't have to worry about danger or lack of *support*
    - Young people *always support each other*
      - There are *no "in or out" groups*
      - Drama happens but everyone is friends at end of the day
  - o *About the community, people around them*
- Young people get own apartment between 11th and 12th grade
  - o Begin sitting in friend groups ~12
- *Fell in love* with other kibbutznik
- *Free time as free time*
  - o Others have to worry about taxes or getting their car repaired etc.
- Worked many jobs
  - o Worked 3am with cows for multiple years
  - o Used to be assigned by committee, not anymore

- Never a rule that you *had* to do the job you were assigned
- If someone really liked one thing, they didn't have to do other jobs
- Hardest jobs to fill: "Director of..." because it implied real work and effort that wasn't compensated for
- Sister came for his wedding, *fell in love* with kibbutz and kibbutznik
  - Art is *supported by whole community* - in communal areas
  - Was always given one day a week to paint, has own studio
  - Contrast to being struggling artist in New York
- Then:
  - Half of kibbutz woke up at *5am to work*, jobs that didn't give them any benefit
    - In *fields* across the street
  - *Long days*
  - *Social life only entertainment*
    - No tvs
  - Fear of the kibbutz not surviving
  - 10 times smaller
  - No one older than 30
  - *Intensity and Intimacy*
    - 20 minute break over weak tea and crackers was greatest party in the world
    - Real parties (ex. weddings) were that much more special - partied like there was no tomorrow
    - Grueling work with the same people
    - Dining hall as only community space, after meals they socialized and partied there
- Now:
  - 5-10 people *wake up early to work in fields*
  - Multi-generational (fear of not making it here)
    - Even family of 99 year old has 4 generations on the kibbutz
- "you kids don't know the privilege you guys have today"
  - "But we were truly *blessed* to have the early days we did"

### **Cathie Granit (1/16/19)**

Q: What is your role at the Arava Institute?

- Program Director of Academics
  - In charge of wider range of programs than Academic Director
    - Ex. community/campus life

Q: What is your history with the Arava and Kibbutz Ketura?

- Grew up in New Zealand
- Met husband at kibbutz 20 years ago
  - Moved to Ketura 7 years later (2006)
  - Became kibbutznik
  - Very pregnant, knocked on Arava's door looking for suitable position
  - Arava had month-long program perfect for her
  - Remains at Arava as the Program Director of Academics
- Allure of kibbutz as a child (social studies): *farm, animals, living together*

- Kibbutz life seems so **natural** to her, but explaining it to others makes her realize how odd it really is

Q: What, do you feel, has been the most successful aspect of the Arava and the kibbutz?

- The Alumni - “Why I love my job”
  - o Phenomenal people are attracted to the Arava Institute: people who are open to *conversation, progress, missions*
  - o All *take a risk* and go against family recommendation to *partake in something larger than themselves*
- *Person-person connections and change*
  - o Alumni take their experiences into their own communities
    - One step at a time
- *Value-based education* remarkable about kibbutz
  - o As children get older, one school day is dedicated to *work/learning trades*
  - o *Work in itself becomes a value*
- Photo competitions between students encourages personal and creative expression

Q: What is the relationship between the kibbutz and the Arava? How do they support each other?

- The Institute plans to expand - add an entire new campus on site
  - o Would bring about 150 new students
  - o Compares to the ~100 adult members of the kibbutz
  - o Logistical issues
    - Limited space: ex. 60 new people in the dining hall for meals
    - Economic pressures of supporting larger community
  - o Majority of kibbutzniks in *favor of expansion* anyway
  - o The students of the Arava, despite their size, are aware and *respectful* of the ways in which the kibbutz supports them; respects their *traditions*
- **Institute pays rent** to be there, supports kibbutz economically, kibbutz offers space/food
- Institute is isolated and small in size
  - o Good: allows easy group movement between centers; “off the radar” projects
  - o Bad: perhaps a larger group or public acknowledgement would facilitate greater/more rapid change
- Since kibbutzniks makeup most of the staff of the institute, complex relationships must be dealt with
  - o Ex. You could be the boss of someone your daughter’s age and not like them as an employee, but *respect and love them as a neighbor and friend*

Q: Is it unusual for there to be an institute or organization in the middle of a kibbutz?

- Nope; kibbutz often offer short-term Jewish programs for outsiders
  - o However, there’s no place in Israel where so much *diversity gathers to collaborate*
- Institute considers itself a leftist organization with no political agenda, but a tool for policy change
  - o Not entirely true in practice
    - Arava only place in Israel where Palestinians, Jordanians, Israelis, South Africans, North Americans, Europeans come together to collaborate

- It is not a peace institute but uses the *environment and human need* to facilitate personal connections/bring people together
- Field of Dreams analogy
  - Bringing people together to *create something useful for humanity*: the creation draws more people in
  - “*Build it and they will come*”
- An Israeli institution, but considered a bridge between communities
  - Students may not always agree in the end, but that’s not the objective. The point is for them *to be heard*
- Arabs and Jewish Israelis studying/working together
  - Arava stresses sensitivities of those not like yourself; not allowed to wear t-shirts with a political stance on it
  - Palestinians: difficult contrast between befriending Israelis as they are (humans), then watching them grab their guns and go to work in the army
    - Mentioned by Palestinian alumni around campfire
  - Emphasis in Arava to know the “other”
    - Do not group together identities such as “the Palestinians”
    - Do not eliminate **individuality** and *personal perspective*
    - Connects people as people instead of nations

Q: How do you feel kibbutz values are or are not exhibited within the Arava institute?

- The majority of the staff are kibbutzniks (Ketura and other) - that sets the tone
- *Egalitarianism as central value*
  - Also what brought Cathie here as a kibbutznik
- Difference: structure of power (kibbutz has structure, but it is different)
  - Organizations need more structure and a hierarchy than a kibbutz
  - There is more organized decision-making - managers
  - Not everyone is equal in decision-making
  - It is important to consider employees and make sure they are happy, but at the end of the day, the authorities have the final say
- The institute recognizes that it is not a kibbutz, and that it must run differently
  - It shouldn’t run the same way as a kibbutz: Cathie

**Sara Cohen (1/16/19)**

- Raised in New Jersey
- Part of Young Judaea youth movement
  - Young Judaea founded Kibbutz Ketura
  - Came to Israel during her gap year (not called that at the time)
    - 60 people gathered afterwards to discuss their future with Israel
      - 13 went back to Israel in their junior (U) year abroad
        - These 13 created their own program for life in Israel
          - 10-11 committed to life in Israel
- The ~11 who decided on life in Israel
  - Outlined their *values collectively* - made a brochure
  - Met with people of kibbutzim all over Israel
  - Although they actively considered/visited other kibbutzim, they ultimately knew Ketura was where they would end up

- They finished college in the states, then lived together in a house for a year
    - A “test run” of how things would go on the kibbutz
    - An experimental (“trial”) communal lifestyle in Queens, NY
- Made aliyah with people her age
- What they were looking for:
  - Ketura was their “movement kibbutz”
    - Founded by Young Judaea, the group they were a part of
  - A community small enough where they could *make a substantial impact*
  - *Egalitarianism*
  - *Pluralistic* religious community
  - Sara: where *people were nice to each other: nonviolent communication*
  - *Socialism, small social gaps*
  - Not over the green line: pre-67’ borders
- They began looking for their home kibbutz in a very difficult time
  - 1980s was chaos for kibbutzim
    - Many fell, couldn’t support themselves
- Changes between the kibbutz then and now:
  - Physical growth, population
  - Can’t say “*intimacy*” to the same degree
    - Really knew absolutely everything about the people around you
  - Real sense of *solidarity* in the early days, but also bitterness
  - Pre-1986: Kibbutz felt like a train station
    - People would come, visit, test the waters, but **hardly dedicated themselves**
    - 1986 was when things stabilized; people who were there are still here today (“*permanence*”)
  - The way kibbutzniks work is very different
    - Everybody used to *work in the fields* every morning before their “regular jobs”
    - *Everybody, every day*
    - There was a huge feeling of *working together towards a common goal*
    - When families started emerging, young mothers started being less willing to sacrifice family activities for work
      - Children were hard to sustain/care for with this lifestyle
    - We were glad when this hard work was over; we do not miss the exhaustion or the work itself, or the lack of compensation
    - There was absolutely no time for anything other than work
      - Why many people didn’t stay permanently before 1986
      - What you were *full time and wholeheartedly was a kibbutznik*
- Life as the Secretary General
  - *Communist roots*
  - General manager, “Mayor”
  - Elected position
    - Search committee looks for people whose names to put up

- Single candidate would be controversial
  - Sara was elected as a young and *inexperienced* kibbutz member, many people had doubts
  - You were supposed to stand up and say why the other person should be elected, not yourself (didn't exactly work out that way)
- Sara was elected at a time when the kibbutz movement was in chaos
  - 1980s, kibbutz couldn't survive under economic crisis, 2008
- Interpersonal relations manager, social life
- Was first person to hold the position twice, terms ~10 years apart, has done it longest
- Position can bring you closer to or farther away from kibbutz life
  - Brought her closer; title became her identity
- Very tough job in many many ways
- Dealt with **bitterness and jealousy of people, lack of empathy**
- Was also an uplifting job because it showed her the dark side of life on the kibbutz, but ultimately everybody *came together at the end of the day in their love* for the kibbutz
  - Moments of distress only as moments
- Learned that the majority of kibbutz members loved kibbutz all the time
  - *Members willing to give more than needed to the kibbutz (time and thought)*
- Founding member of Keren Kolot
  - Original intention to be an educational programming center
  - Now serves educational and **tourist** interests
  - Workers at K.K. did not want Sara to be put up for Secretary General; spoke about why not to elect her. She was too valuable to Keren Kolot
- Decision-making throughout her years on the kibbutz
  - Sara served as part of the change in decision-making
  - Until her second term as Secretary General, there was little effort to reach consensus when making a decision
  - The founders were deeply dedicated to *democracy*
    - Vote and the majority wins, leaving the **minority** to feel like a minority
  - 5 **management** positions on the kibbutz: 2 Secretary Generals, 1 "HR" type representative, treasurer, and business manager
    - Authority is "unofficial," regards day-day life
    - No more say or authority within the *General Assembly* or committee decisions
    - Power comes from respect/expertise that comes with the position
      - "When I was S.G., it was the first time that people really listened to me when I was talking"
      - "All of the *responsibility but none of the authority*"
        - Runs some committees, sits on others
      - *Very very little decisions ever made by one person*
    - *General Assembly still has ultimate authority*

- Change: now more effort to reach general consensus
  - Issues are more thought out
  - Members are more involved and encouraged to question decisions and leaders
  - Makes the elected officials more trusted by the people of the kibbutz, which is not true for every kibbutz
  - *Make decisions about how and what to decide*
- *Egalitarianism*
  - Two feminist “trains” of potential kibbutzniks came to Ketura in the 70s
    - 70s understanding of gender was different. “Gender” wasn’t used
    - They brought social and employment change with them
  - Then: stressed a *balance of genders* in each type of position, “male” or “female”
    - Men **forced to work** in children’s houses; women **forced to drive** tractors
    - Aim was to show the children of the kibbutz the *versatility of people*
  - Eventually: people stopped being **forced to work** in places they didn’t want to
    - Moral dilemma of forcing people to do work they aren’t enjoying or best for
    - Now there is only one man working in the children’s schools
  - Now: “**we are not gender equal** on the kibbutz but we are pretty good.”
    - Gender and their roles is no longer even discussed on the kibbutz, no wrestling of **gender issues**
    - The only place where the genders are *truly equal*: synagogue
    - 27-year old daughter saw tons of **inequality** on the kibbutz
    - **Inequality between genders** on a kibbutz even worse than the same thing elsewhere because the kibbutz was supposed to be something better, different
    - The current business manager is only the second woman to hold the position
    - Not okay to put someone in a position because they are a certain sex
  - There has been *no overt sexism* on the kibbutz, but **definitely** in the Arava valley
    - When Sara would leave the kibbutz to represent it elsewhere, she would not be taken seriously
    - 10s of times she would say something at a meeting, get **ignored**, then later a man would say the same thing and gain respect, be heard
    - *Respect from fellow kibbutzniks* could have been a result of their *familiarity* with her and knowing her credibility
  - The kibbutz relationship with gender has evolved over time
    - Now young women are **less willing to give up** family activities for work
    - There are still strong women’s groups in and around the kibbutz

#### Leah Kayman (1/17/19)

- From the suburbs of St Louis Missouri
- Came to Kibbutz Ketura with a group in 1977
  - 7 came at first, then 13 more
    - Many of them stayed, whereas many founding members left
    - They knew it would be *difficult*; they signed up for it



- Met in America, set up *goal platform* (some were realized, some were not ((ex. Peace in the middle east)))
  - Daughter of a businessman, wanted to be a part of something larger
  - Wanted to be in a place where they could have a *substantial impact*
- Studied dairy science and filmmaking at University of Wisconsin
- Worked the dairy herd for many years on the kibbutz
- Established Keren Kolot, had to give up dairy
  - Founded for short-term educational programs
    - Catered the design of each program to the group involved
    - Stressed *tolerance of people* other than yourself
- **Economic and social problems** of 80s and 90s were not cause-effect, they worked in tandem to create a crisis within the kibbutz movement
- Has no personal complaints about the kibbutzim that privatized
  - If it's *what they needed to do to survive*, let them be
  - Ketura maintained their *traditional economic model* while others strived for different models
- Kibbutz only 20% owners of Algaetech and Arava Power
  - TV/Media has painted the kibbutz as being very rich (ex. Kibbutzniks as millionaires)
  - Still, they have good salaries and no complaints
- Keren Kolot:
  - Founded in 1990s
  - Many people come and go, which is saddening
  - You meet many new people and then they **leave after a short time**
  - Tensions between the **tourist** and educational aspects
    - Educational programs prioritized
    - Used to run long (year) programs
    - **Sell rooms**, meals, sing karaoke, etc
  - Programs are tailored to the group, and are Ketura-centric
- Kibbutz Ketura is very *transparent and honest*
  - You could look up the salaries of every member easily
  - *No sense of some individuals "running" the kibbutz*
- You become a *jack of all trades* on a kibbutz
- Proper *allocation of work* hours important to running the kibbutz properly
- Kibbutz' greatest values: *democracy (close to direct), self governing*
- Easy to romanticize the past
  - *Everybody worked the same jobs in the same clothes*
  - Talking to people over *hard work - deep connections*
- Now: kibbutzniks are **spread out professionally**, which is good and bad
  - *Wide range of expertise*, although not as dynamic
  - People work where they are most needed or are the best
  - Since there is *no compensation difference*, you need to find *different sources of motivation to work hard*
  - Some *jobs rotate*
  - HR committee ensures *everybody has a job and all jobs are filled*

- Perfect: all jobs filled by kibbutzniks
- Reality: **outsiders hired to fill jobs**
- 100% of worker salaries go into the kibbutz bank account, even if working off the kibbutz
- Complex relationships between work and friends/families can be very difficult
  - Very hard to give criticism or receive it, good or bad
- Spread jobs means less *intimacy*
  - Before there was the sense that *everybody was working hard towards a common goal*; that's gone
  - Leah doesn't know all of the kibbutz' children's names

### Avigail Morris (1/18/19)

- Made aliyah in 1979, has spent 35 years on the kibbutz
- Got her masters in Anthropology at Hebrew University, Jerusalem
  - Also where she met Noah
    - Masters in Statistics
    - PhD thesis on how language and culture affects how people understand fractions and statistics
  - Finished her degree later, after living on the kibbutz and having her first child
  - 2001 got her PhD in games
  - Dream job: working at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem
- Noah wanted to live on a kibbutz
  - Life *without a hierarchy*
  - He had friends at Ketura
  - A place that *welcomed both the religious and the nonreligious*
- Avigail couldn't be happier on the kibbutz
  - She adores the people and their values
  - Wasn't initially excited about the geography, but it has grown on her and became a sense of home
  - Where her children were born and raised
- "But, what was I going to do with a MA in Anthropology in the middle of the desert?"
  - Reached out to Ben-Gurion University, networked with people
  - Created a teaching program for children - anthropology
    - Full year courses
    - 30 year old program, still running well today
    - Gaining attention from others
      - Being reached out to and asked to give talks around Israel
  - Taught in Eilat and the kibbutz' regional school
    - Qualitative Methodologies with anthropology and sociology focus
  - Taught in the regional school's gifted children's program
    - After living abroad for a year, came back to work only here because it paid more
  - Now teaching people to teach her program ("passing the torch")
  - Also taught in "gap year" program for students out of high school that didn't want to go right into the army, wanted to keep learning
- Has taught in Polynesia for many years (1994 and 2011)

- There are lots of committees on the kibbutz
  - She has ran a couple and sat on many
  - In charge of educational committee twice
    - Population got too big and the committee had to break up by age group
  - “Refugee committee” more like a team, 3 people, 10 years
  - “Members committee”
    - Deals with problems on the kibbutz that are private
    - Answers to Secretary General
  - “Traditions committee” for one year
  - Committees *rotate*
  - How to get on a committee
    - Volunteer
    - Be asked
    - Have your name put up by the recruitment committee
    - Fill out an interest form
    - Members fill out form saying who they want to be on a committee
- Children on the kibbutz
  - Children used to live in *childrens house* - stopped 1983
  - Children still seen as the *community’s children*
  - *Decisions made by community*
    - When/what the child started eating
    - What the child wore (only allowed 6 outfits)
    - What their education would look like
  - Caretaker took children to the doctor, *represented parent*
  - Children were then put into the school system at 1.5 months
    - Now, **parents can decide** when to put their kids in the system up to 1 yr
  - Now, system of caretaking more broken down
  - When money gifts would be given to a child, the family had to give the money to the community, which collected all of it and bought *something for the entire children community* (ex. tricycles)
    - Maintained sense of *community and equality*
  - Now, parents can pay for **extra music lessons**, etc. (**not equal**)
  - Parents used to leave their children all alone at home, and a guard would come by and check on every child
    - Now, they wouldn’t dream of doing that
    - **“Babysitter” monitor** as turning point: shift of **responsibility from the community to the family**
  - Less responsibility taken by parents when children are teens
    - Ex. System is responsible for dealing with drinking/drugs
  - In 8th grade, school week is shortened from 6 days to 5 days + 1 work day
- Avigail is in charge of the archives, helped build it
  - Had to be *built out of nothing*
  - Kibbutz kept collecting items from their past
  - Purpose: to store their past, display it, and have engaging programs around it
  - No computer documentation

- What's persisted over time:
  - Kibbutz core values
    - *Democracy, work, tolerance, consensus, pluralism, zionism*
    - Are difficult to maintain; kibbutz has to be selective
    - Members have to: be a *good worker, and get along* with everyone else
  - Kibbutz is mostly leftist, but there are some rightists
- What's changed:
  - Religion: people **less respectful** of those who observe the Sabbath
    - Now, some people *do whatever they want in their own backyard*
    - *Tolerance* now understood as multi-directional
    - Still considered a bad change by some religious members
    - *Groups of members are discussing* how to fit religion into kibbutz life
  - Kibbutz is rich now
    - No debts, *self sufficient*
    - Families get bonuses when kibbutz does well
    - Good pension plan for members
  - Cow herd gotten rid of in 2014
    - Wasn't just a place for cows; *everybody worked there*
    - Avigail worked for 11 years
    - Disappeared because Algaetech was expanding, didn't want bacteria so close to their organization
      - Also, milk not profitable enough
    - Profit from the sale went to:
      - Special needs program
      - *Higher education for children*
      - The elderly, to lessen their burden on the community
      - A kibbutz trip to Crete, went in 3 groups

### Judy Bar-Lev (1/20/19)

- Ketura as an infant kibbutz, cannot be taken as an example of the entire kibbutz movement
- Raised in the Bronx
- In Young Judaea since she was 10
  - Org. changed in 2011
    - Gap year program essential factor in establishment of Ketura
    - Members (including Judy) *grouped together to discuss their future* in Israel
    - Drawn to the idea of *building their own kibbutz*
    - Allure of Ketura wasn't the geography, it was the idea of being the *first ones to build something on nothing*
    - Group of ~20 18-19 year olds; *in the years of their life where they can be anyone or do anything*
    - Came to Israel in 1969
- Influences of kibbutz founders: Vietnam War, flower power
  - Channeling energy into something positive

- Attracted to the idea of a kibbutz
- Group of ~20 went to the Kibbutz movement saying they were *young energetic people* who wanted to start a kibbutz, and they were laughed at
  - One person understood them, helped them obtain what they needed
  - Had 5 locations to choose from: 2 in Golan (outside of Israel) and 2 over the green line
- Struggles
  - 1st: deciding which of the 5 options to choose from
    - Decided against those related to controversial political boundaries
    - Ketura sold with the *romantic idea of making the desert blossom*
  - All were young with *very little work experience*; even cleaning a floor
  - *Young people immediately had to take care of themselves*
    - Following summer: first child was born
      - Had to arrange for daycare while parents worked
  - Those who stayed had to have the *willingness and capability to live modestly and without their families*
    - Wasn't always a case of wanting; was often a capability issue
  - Kibbutz has **trouble reminding members (now) of their need to make a living**
    - Otherwise, standard of living can't be met
    - Can't be **met on minimum wage** either
- Kibbutz system works because of **higher salaried members**
  - Algaetech, power
  - Failed with *agriculture*, reasons very unimportant
- Government promised that it would make Ketura a priority in the 70s - it didn't
  - Yom Kippur war - shift in government
    - Likud "hated the kibbutz" - Judy
- Organized by movement to first arrive at their kibbutz on Oct. 12, 1973
  - Inherited small army base with dining hall, 4 small buildings, and small barracks
- Yom Kippur war: Oct. 6, 1973
  - Many of the ~20 of the founding group still officially enlisted, sent to the fronts
  - Made aliyah, all drafted and some sent to different (2) kibbutz to gain practice in their functionings
  - War created havoc within the kibbutz' members
    - Why many of them **didn't stay very long**; many left after 2 years
  - Were resultantly reassigned to come to future kibbutz location Nov. 22, 1973
    - Soldiers given few days vacation at this date
      - *Planted things* - for the future of the kibbutz
    - Soldiers then sent back to the fronts, slowly were released back to the kibbutz
    - The next year: they had a few *harvestable crops* to be packed and sent to market
- Friends visited from USA after the Yom Kippur war
  - Created heightened *sense of collective identity* among US Jews following
  - Increased donations and visits following the war

- Wanted to help
- Jewish Agency helped by providing tractors and cows to the kibbutz
- Ministry of Agriculture helped by building a cowshed
- “What was the most successful aspects of the kibbutz in its early years? What has allowed it to survive this long?”
  - *The human aspect*
  - Ketura should have failed numerous times
    - Many **financial crises** (which influences the following)
    - **Social crises:** biggest around 1978
      - “Who remembers?” - what it was about
      - Since then, the population has only risen
- Those who have remained with the kibbutz have a harder time remembering specifics of their past with the kibbutz
  - Those who have parted could tell you what they had for breakfast the day they left or the G.A. agenda of that week
- *How decisions are made has stayed (in general) consistent*
- Changes in decision-making
  - Structure now has to deal with 3 generations
    - 4th generation mentioned in Bill’s interview not a member
  - How *jobs are given out*
    - First 20 years: static; you were *expected to meet the needs of the community* with work that was uncomfortable and not fun
- ~second 20 years of kibbutz Ketura: established new “declaration of understanding”
  - **Members entitled to “hitch their wagon to a star”**
  - *Decisions made by committees or teams*
  - Committees *elected by General Assembly*
  - Teams appointed due to specific knowledge (ex. Cars team)
    - Long term: 5-6 years
- Heads of committees *elected by General Assembly*
  - Single candidates need 2/3rds of vote
- Now: ~160 members of kibbutz
- Getting rid of the cows heartbreaking
  - You can’t let *romantic endeavors* continue without other sources of income
- When the kibbutz does well and has dividends for a year, the standard of living is not affected
  - Doing so well is a result of where members work and their **differential salaries**
  - Many **do not work within the confines of the kibbutz**
  - **Algae workers** make lots of money
  - **Special researchers** are brought in to work in Algae and technical positions
- There are both: not enough interesting jobs on the kibbutz to keep everyone employed and satisfied, as well as not enough at all.
  - This is a problem in the whole region: being in a desert
- “How is this kibbutz connected to Eilat?”
  - Higher positions like regional council or mayor travel for representation purposes
  - General services: ex. Dentist or shopping

- Some work there regularly, teach at Ben-Gurion
- Ministry for interior (Judy) goes regarding student visas
- Some go for kids' sports or music lessons
- Doesn't play a major role in daily lives
- Regional clinic
  - Multiple insurance companies in Israel
  - 2000: Israel paid for small clinics in every kibbutz
    - Couldn't afford that; led to regional clinics that absorbed nurses from kibbutz clinics
  - Ketura has no nurse among its members: sets it apart
- "How does this kibbutz fit into the 21st century?"
  - Produced highest number of college graduates in Israel
    - Sets aside budget every year that goes towards *sending children to university*
  - Kibbutzim in general are lagging behind everyone else
    - Not necessarily a bad thing
    - Nothing wrong about living without being attached to a screen all day
    - Western children struggling with: *social communication*, reading, *engaging*
  - People and the kibbutz as one entity have to consider the *balance between personal development and community development*
- Foremost: the kibbutz maintains its *social values*

### **Moshe Falkof (1/22/19)**

- Grew up in Chicago, went to a suburban high school
- Had a conservative Jewish education all the way through high school
- Almost did a gap year program; parents said he had to go to university first
- Spent junior year of college in Israel
- Finished university in America knowing he would make aliyah
  - Studied economics
- Made aliyah alone in 1972
  - Joined kibbutz in Be'er Sheva "Hatzerim"
  - This kibbutzim adopted Ketura for its similar ideals
  - For 6 months, Moshe was in Ketura helping set it up (1976)
- Moshe didn't want to live on a small *or* an American kibbutz
  - When he read of kibbutzim, he wanted a "classic experience"
  - Stayed on Ketura since 1976 *because of the people*
    - Met wife here, raised 3 daughters on the kibbutz
      - 1 daughter on the kibbutz, may start membership process
- 1978-1980, Manager of Economics
  - "Thrown into" the position
  - Member of exec council who should more or less really know what's going on on the kibbutz (behind the scenes)
  - Couldn't trust accounting agency reports - had to double check every #
  - Didn't balance economic plan
  - **Didn't connect to the other execs, making his experience negative**



- Was also kibbutz Secretary for two years
  - o Secretary has to be a person with *a vision*
    - His vision: make sure the kibbutz runs properly
  - o Position split into 2 so that they can each work half time
    - **Nobody wants to be** the Secretary
    - One manages budgeting, another social issues/vision
- Also worked in: cows, orchards, grade school (12 years)
- Bookkeeper for Eilat fishers (5 years)
  - o Maritime agricultural project in Eilat
  - o Worked there during their “heyday”
  - o Environmentalists claimed they were the ones ruining the coral reefs
  - o Gov’t officials came down to investigate the circumstances
  - o Some officials were impressed by the complex system
- “Naale” program: national program that brought Russian youths to kibbutzim
  - o Was head of kibbutz sect for 6 years
  - o Project cause: socio-economic reasons, immigration
  - o Only Russians who were new to Israel could participate, just making aliyah
  - o Not refugees, kids who came before their parents
- 1976: “wild west”
  - o People throwing water in the dining hall
  - o Was housed in a storage room
  - o All *young kids and volunteers in their 20s*
    - Some talked of membership then **left**
    - *Inexperienced, needed help*
    - *Strong work ethic; picking/packing; very long days*
  - o Very little amount of children
  - o *Everyone loved by whole community*
  - o Strong process of *democracy, very strict*
  - o Expectations (of founding members): learning center (Keren Kolot, Arava)
  - o *Have power to refuse or accept people, still*
  - o Responsible leadership was established in the kibbutz’ first 10 years
    - Treasurer supported by finance committee
  - o Religious issues: ex. Members’ parents very religious and visited, couldn’t get a minion for rosh hashanah
    - How could the kibbutz be **pluralist without providing?**
    - Founders had strong Jewish education
- Moshe has been “technician of the synagogue”
- Now: less *intimacy and familiarity* between the adults and kibbutz children
- Founded the kibbutz with lots of help from Kibbutz movement advisors
  - o Now, 95% of members would say the movement means nothing to them
  - o **Advisors** had different specialities, would sometime give conflicting advice
    - Ex. Feed cows X for health or Y for profit
  - o Now: advisors do not work for the kibbutz movement but they work with kibbutzim
  - o Kibbutzim can spend lots of money on advisors for little reward

- The kibbutz got used to the idea of being poor when it was new
  - o Now, they *aren't wealthy but they are very careful*
- 80s economic crisis didn't effect Ketura
  - o Didn't have money "out there"
  - o Had no loans in the gray market, some were elsewhere
  - o Debt conversion made the debt more manageable
    - 400% annual inflation at the time
    - "Shimon Paris" put brakes on economy
    - Things normalized
    - Kibbutz could now talk to government, kibbutz movement, and banks to settle their **debt**
  - o There has never been talk of **privatization**
    - Even in the group that wanted changes at this time, "**privatization**" was not in their vocabulary
- 78-80: time of *surprises, instability*
  - o Couple got married on mountain, then next day announced their **leaving of kibbutz**
- **Gender issues**
  - o Men in *children's homes*, women in "*positions of responsibility*"
  - o **Issues no longer talked about**, the world changed
  - o *Gender distribution* became part of the way the kibbutz functioned, he feels
  - o Different methods of assigning work have been tried
    - Differing periods in different positions
  - o No grade school teachers as men now
- Structure: there's always been committees
  - o Kibbutz was advised to contract them into a simpler system: only happened in education
    - This would allow more people to participate in *democracy*
  - o Ketura gets more members in their *GA meetings* than many other kibbutzim
- The kibbutz is a remarkable blend of different people: why does it work?
  - o Kibbutz offers the opportunity for *everyone to express themselves*
  - o Kibbutz offers the opportunity for *uneducated people to advance in areas of their own personal skills and interests*
    - "Ed" turned into the kibbutz' main businessman with no education
      - "Natural leader of people"
      - Managed debt conversion
      - Head of board of directors for Algatech, solar panels, and fisheries
  - o "Florenca" treasurer: no college degree, became "super treasurer" due to personal interest and spunk

#### **Noah Morris (2/6/19)**

- Treasurer of kibbutz in 1985-1988
  - o Suggested upon his arrival in kibbutz
  - o Was in charge of cost accounting in Ardom "testing ground"
  - o Later appointed treasurer

- Was later treasurer for half-time during the late 90s (another crisis)
- Before: feeling that economic condition was strong
  - Element of hubris: kibbutz movement was strong and would always be powerful
- Standard of living aim not based off of work, but based off of “instructional book” from kibbutz movement
- Wasn’t making enough money at the time to get all desired things, so got loans from movement
  - Web of unlimited guarantees without limit to sum or time
  - Banks would give any loans to kibbutzim who got “unlimited guarantees” from the movement
- Lots of loans in 1985 they couldn’t pay back
- 1984: 400% inflation in Israel, began getting under control
- Loan system and how you got your money got disrupted: loans written off, value of loans decreased
- Remained the attitude that a loan was a source of money you don’t have to worry about paying back
  - Noah feels this way of thinking was even encouraged
  - **Young kibbutzim felt strongly supported**
  - Loans and grants cover industry and other items - #covered
  - Support agencies what encouraged kibbutzim to gain more debt
    - Eka agency and Nirashitufi agency - gave loans
- Marathon meeting: big Kibbutz movement bosses met with kibbutzim, filled out forms
- Mini-marathon about investments
- Rich kibbutzim refused to pay off their loans, organizations lost lots of money, laid off people, closed facilities
- Massive debts throughout movement
- Up to this point: bank of kibbutz movement
  - Ran out of money in months, giving loans
- Ardom: owns corporations throughout kibbutzim of area, also ran out of money in 80s
- When money ran out: feeling you had to stand on your own feet
  - Ketura: Closed all accounts and started again in new banks
  - Stopped paying loans back
- Banks or government didn’t want this bankruptcy
- Change in gov’t - Noah doesn’t think it’s the main reason
- 1950s, rich kibbutzim much richer than poor
  - By 80s, more poor than rich kibbutzim
  - Movement had strong mutual support between rich and poor kibbutzim
- Noah facilitated kibbutz Ketura change: kibbutz cannot take a loan without the members voting on it in General Assembly
  - Debts accumulated without the members’ knowledge
  - Audited accounts weren’t important to Kibbutz movement

After the 1980s:

- People in shock, particularly more so on older kibbutzim

- Kibbutzniks thought they were the “cream of the crop”
- Up until the 80s, no pension schemes, kibbutzim will support them
  - Ketura one of first kibbutzim to put aside money for pension scheme
  - Now all have to by law, some older kibbutzim had difficulty
- Atmosphere of central democracy with central Kibbutz movement having power over individual kibbutzim
  - Kibbutzim moved to differential salaries: movement tried to claim those who did aren't kibbutzim, movement failed
- Movement as a whole started putting self back together
- Cooperatives in area owned by groups of kibbutzim were also affected by crisis
  - Powerful again today, put themselves back together
- Movement back supporting very poor kibbutzim, old people on pensions, built up funds for collateral loans
- Whole Arava area: building crisis
  - Program led by Ketura with local council and kibbutz movement: money for houses (Ketura and Lotan)
  - Local business cooperatives supporting program too
- Kibbutzim remained in feeling that they are here to support each other
- Regional council vs Kibbutz movement
  - Idea that the regional council doesn't have to function as other bureaucratic councils do
  - Almost whole population of the Arava are on kibbutzim
    - Be'er Ora: community near Eilat, not kibbutz, slowly becoming dominant, important
  - Council is dominated by a kibbutz atmosphere, although it includes Be'er Ora
  - The council can run business ventures so it owns a company that does it for them, gives lots of support to kibbutzim
    - Runs rubbish collection and landfill, pump profits into council interests, encourages tourism
  - Ardom: owned by 10 kibbutzim in area, runs various businesses (dates biggest), started new businesses, some spun off to new ownership
    - Various other organizations like Ardom
    - Water, farming, farming research largely dominated by Ardom, helps regional council
    - Financial support: serves like kibbutzim bank
  - Miske Hanegev
    - Represents 51 kibbutzim in southern Israel
    - Gives Ketura lots of support, ex. building project
    - Buying organization, make agreements with suppliers so 51 kibbutzim get same benefits
  - Movement gives social support: ex. someone came to talk about health
    - Other kibbutzim get much more support
    - Also money for collateral loans
- **(Zerem Shitufi) 40-50 kibbutzim who don't have differential salaries in Israel: support group through movement**

- 1995-2010: most kibbutzim moved to differential salaries
  - o Arava kibbutzim: larger ones remained without differential salaries, smaller ones differentiated
  - o 3-4 reasons why kibbutzim differentiated salaries (Noah)
    - Financial meltdown: members able to make a better salary wanted to do it to avoid lower standard of living
    - Number of people who didn't pull their weight increased, people got upset
    - Children of members came back and had no ideological attraction to the kibbutz lifestyle, came back for comfort
  - o Ketura didn't have any of the above problems
    - Also very young kibbutz, people were strongly committed
    - Dates began being very profitable, now also have solar and algae orgs.
    - Were very close to financial meltdown, didn't reach it
    - Not close to a city: attraction of urban life
    - Isolation made it easier, no attraction of city
      - Ketura type of nature reserve
    - Luck from making money in dates
    - Making money not from just being a kibbutz, Jewish tradition and Arava institute for ideological betterment
      - Mutual support strengthened by interest in outsider interests
    - Renewed kibbutz, was trying with only agriculture at first, then added the Arava, algae, solar,; tried new things
      - Official 'renewed kibbutzim' "gave up and became villages"
- 1983 Noah came, no outsider workers

## Appendix C: Arava Kibbutzim Interview Transcripts

### Gabi Banet (1/30/19) - Yotvata/Yahel/Grofit

- Raised on kibbutz Mishmar Hanegev in central Israel
- Born 1959, kibbutz about 10 years old at the time
- Doesn't consider it a kibbutz on which he lived, just where he grew up
- Still remembers and *respects* the kibbutz, but he was never a member
- When he left the kibbutz for the army in 1977, there were *still collective children's homes*
  - o *Children's houses* were weird but only when looking back on them as an adult, it is what it is when he was growing up
  - o Some children suffered from the intensity of problems that resulted from always being around these kids; intensity of problems matched *intensity of familiarity* with one another
  - o *Children's houses* not as idea for best living situation, but a solution to *security concerns* of unstable kibbutzim of the early years
  - o Children's homes gotten rid of in 80s
- In order: left kibbutz for army at 17/18, spent 1.5 years hiking South America, went to university, spent 2 years studying (?) in Philadelphia, moved back to Israeli desert to

kibbutz Grofit with wife, left Grofit with wife to build house on Yahel where he lives now

- What brought him back to the desert: the physical beauty
- Works at kibbutz Yotvata - school
  - Directs scientific research - biology
  - In charge of greenhouse
- Kibbutz Yahel
  - Small community, even relative to Grofit
  - One of few kibbutzim with expansion: buy land and build a house
  - Two groups within the community: community association of members; everybody + this association
    - association deals with branches of kibbutz (dates, cows, etc)
- Not very many differences between the different kibbutzim he lived on aside from size,
- Is a very adaptable person, no qualms with new kibbutzim or living in US for 2 years after university
- Changes he's witnessed within kibbutzim and the Kibbutz movement
  - Big ones: rise of the Likud and **privatization** of kibbutzim
  - Prior to 1977: huge sense of *pride* in kibbutzim as being fundamental to Israel, now a minority
  - Likud brought dislike and lessened support of kibbutzim, *ostracization*, **feeling 'less than'**
  - Kibbutzim now "leftist" as Israeli society shifts towards the right and the support of religious institutions
  - Kibbutzniks remain *proud of themselves and their communities regardless of social and political pressures*
  - Anger and resentment towards shifting Israel still among kibbutzniks, even more so in Gabi's opinion
    - Nothing changed in favor of the movement over the past 40 years

### Mike Nitzan - Lotan (2/4/19)

"Who are you: where are you from; did you go to school?"

- Raised in Southern CA
- Studied at UCLA and Berkley
  - At Berkley, got involved in Zionist groups and activities
  - "Rehabilitation of the Zionist movement" towards Aliyah
- 1979: grouped with 40 people interested in establishing a kibbutz
  - Split between Yahel and Lotan, Lotan later
  - Americans and Israelis
  - Met a few times in the US to "dreamstorm"
- Used to volunteer on a secular kibbutz when he was 18
  - Had a mentor: Holocaust survivor
  - Had lots of work *responsibilities*: *respected* the kibbutz lifestyle
  - Didn't like the secular aspect of the kibbutz
- Was "Conservodox" growing up; liked the idea of a reform kibbutz
  - Only one reform kibbutz at the time, in the Arava
- Progressive Judaism in Israel comparable to Conservative Judaism in US

- Met future wife and made Aliyah with 6 others
- There was nothing here at the time: Lotan in 1983
- Was the first marriage on kibbutz, had first wedding, children, and grandchildren
- Got his doctorate from Hebrew university
- Worked in dates for 10 years, dairy for 6 years, was Secretary General twice
- Now: In charge of planning and design, project management

“What brought you to the Arava region?”

- This is where reform kibbutzim were being established
- Reform movement guidelines: not over Green Line or in Golan
- Ben-Gurion’s *vision* to make the desert green and *conquer the land* (establish presence)

“What were some of the greatest struggles this kibbutz has faced in its attempt to survive?”

- Were “wandering Jews” for a while
  - o Government was not interested in settling the desert, money in urban areas
- Creating an economic base based in high-intensity water use *agriculture* (dates, cows, crops)
- Drawing people to the region who came from a socioeconomic background and had professional interests
  - o “Good Jews are expected to become doctors and lawyers”
- Lotan at the tail end of kibbutz settlement
- *Distance from anything: people, cities, center of country, other countries*
  - o Didn’t feel “a part of things”
- Flies, heat
- Today: all of the same struggles, but more so
  - o *Agriculture* is now more of a **public enemy** than a national interest
    - Using lots of land for little economic benefit
    - Israel doesn’t love *farmers*
    - Government loves **big business** over *agriculture* despite the *pride* of farming
    - Farms take up lots of land that could be used for housing

“What are some of the biggest changes or adaptations this kibbutz faced as a result of these struggles?”

- Renewable energy in region (Ketura); hopefully wind power one day
  - o Economy off of renewable energy more attractive than such off *agriculture*
- Kibbutz as “Sisyphus”
  - o *Persistence* with banging head against a wall because of the belief that this *lifestyle is “correct”*
    - “I think we live in an *alternative society* that is more *fair and considerate* than others around the world”
    - *Mutual aid, culture, education, economic justice, egalitarianism*

“What have been some of the greatest successes of the kibbutz in its attempt to survive?”

- Educational **tourism** branch has brought thousands here over the years
  - o They take a piece of Lotan with them to other parts of the world
    - School replicated in Jerusalem, etc
  - o Lots of youth groups come for their “experimental education”
- *Small community affects the lives of thousands*



- The persistent ideology of the continuity of life
  - o Children *taught through doing, living, caring*, not books
  - o Giving tree
  - o No pursuit of happiness, they *create happiness* that remains (counter: iphone)
    - *Establishing something different* as constant satisfaction

“How did the economic crisis of the 1980s affect this kibbutz?”

- Kibbutz was established in 1983: sense of *ignorance* resulted from young people who successfully started their dream
  - o First year was good economically (crop yield)
- Existed both on the tail end of kibbutzim creation and kibbutzim **privatization**
- Saw other kibbutzim having **crises from poor investments** and the change from collective *child rearing* to **family-centric life** (housing reform)
  - o Avoided by Lotan who never had *collective children's houses*
- Developed *agricultural* equipment and goat herds/milk that were successful until the 1990s
- Kindergarten and daycare expenses
- Severe **debt** rollercoaster: in, out, in, then out
- Government policy change of the 70s (Likud) made Lotan exist only in a time where the government was anti-kibbutz
  - o Kibbutz didn't enjoy governmental support for this reason

“What are the biggest changes/adaptations Lotan made as a result of this crisis?”

- **Privatization** (2013-2015: shortest process in movement)
  - o A committee oversaw the process and rewrote how the kibbutz would be run
  - o Met 48 times in a year while the *General Assembly* met 27 times to discuss their job
  - o Went through process of “economic rejuvenation”
    - **Outside administrators** in accord with the Kibbutz movement consulted and assisted over four years
    - Obtaining a **credit rating** was only possible through the help of these advisors
    - Kibbutz remained *collective* throughout these years

“How do you feel this kibbutz fits into the 21<sup>st</sup> century?”

- Difficulty defining 21<sup>st</sup> century
- They all have personal “screens” and are connected to the outside world, phones are always close by
- People work on screens in **offices**
- Kibbutz is planning on expanding with 40 new houses
  - o People attracted to the kibbutz aren't looking for **21<sup>st</sup> century lifestyle**; they want to be “unplugged,” *close to nature*, silence, *close community*
- Kibbutz slogan: “Where *spirit and land* meet”
- Ben-Gurion's plan to make the desert blossom + religious roots
  - o Genesis chapter on *blooming and conquering land*
  - o Later in Genesis: preserving and *tilling the land*
- “Sustainability,” *preservation of resources*

“What is this kibbutz' relationship with the Kibbutz movement?”

- Help of **advisors** good in founding years
- Today: movement and **advisors** of little significance to them
  - o Not relevant due to differences of Arava kibbutzim and movement interests
- When the government stopped helping kibbutzim, so did the movement (no \$)
- Members used to meet at the movement offices every wednesday
- Instead, the regional council of the Arava serves as their movement
  - o 10 kibbutzim of the Arava different from all others due to *environment/isolation*
  - o 6 of these kibbutzim are *collective*, a large percentage of the 10% collective total (of 270 total kibbutzim in Israel)
  - o Urban sprawl reached other areas of Israel and kibbutzim reacted to it
  - o Region as advocates for themselves

“How is *egalitarianism* of the genders displayed on the kibbutz?”

- Kibbutz has always been “*gender aware*”
- Overrepresentation of men in children’s schools
- Disproportionate amount of women as economic coordinators (60%)
- Date managers: 50/50
- Founders both *men and women*
- Proportions not of stress to be equal: a reaction to *ideological proclamations* brought to the kibbutz by liberal progressive Western immigrants
  - o *An attempt to establish a “better” society*
  - o Resultant *expression of gender versatility*

#### **Michael Levy - Grofit (2/13/19)**

- From Detroit, moved to Israel 1972, on and off until 1977 for permanence
- Came to Grofit, intention was kibbutz, immediately came to South
- 3 Kibbutz in the Arava at the time
- Farthest thing from Dogmatic: somebody who believes in the State of Israel, if you think it comes from humanistic reason, not at expense of Palestinians, 55% of land is uninhabited desert. Come where there is nobody, cause no problem
  - o Can settle infinite people here without taking land from anyone, intruding on anyone
  - o Never thought of yuppy life
  - o Young people will come because it is a good place to live
- Grofit settled as military outpost in 1963, civilians took over 1966
  - o Part of plan to settle area with kibbutzim
  - o 67 war the next year, this area became little priority, things fell apart here
  - o First settlers, most left in 1968 to set up fishermans commune in Sinai
  - o Those who have been here the longest have been here since 69
  - o 91 members, equal residents
  - o New Zealand, Columbia, Japan, US, Argentina, England, Ireland people here
  - o Israeli youth movement started Grofit, Nahal group, Israeli settlement
  - o (Levy) Came here because it was Israeli, didn’t want an American
- Grew up in 60s America, “Never never land”
  - o One black community in Jewish, and Catholic neighborhood, White people left, chaos broke out
- Second time as Maskeer, extremely difficult to find people to fill position

- Fill in blanks from Ketura, all applies
- Many things about kibbutz that are terrible, but still believes in kibbutz
- Pressure to do it, nobody wanted to
- Too overwhelming, just finished principal job for 10 years (16-20 hr days)
- Grofit decided to hire somebody from the outside (2-3 yrs ago)
- Two people working part time to avoid bringing in someone from outside
- May still happen, people willing to do it in the future, not now
- Motivations to settle here
  - No decision, not up to them
  - Social democrat government said “we’re putting settlements where we need them”
  - This area was settled for blooming the desert and strategic military: neighbors are potentially nuclear, dangerous
  - On the hill to protect the Arava road
  - Eilat as Israel’s southern port, Suez canal not open for shipping (Egypt not friends)
  - Tremendous relationship with Iran at time, Oil came in ships via Red Sea
  - Dug underline pipeline to circumvent Suez canal in oil shipping
  - Eilat gateway to Africa, Black Africa allies until 1973
  - “Lifeline” between rest of country and southern port
- “physical defective men and women” at ceremony of Ketura during Yom Kippur war
- Ketura grew up in different Israel, after 67 war, people’s perspective defined by “which is their war”
- Struggles
  - Extremely, extremely difficult to make a living
  - Growing in sand, brackish water (farmers turn research workers)
  - Building costs much more expensive on the top of this hill
  - Members too old, 76% above 60 at the end of the decade
  - Need young people or the community will die (literally)
  - Very far away, no theatre, art museum, science center, orchestras
  - The weather’s bad
  - No purified water in the beginning years
  - Live in extremely petty society, everything becomes WWII
- Successes
  - Excellent school system
    - What we don’t give our kids, they won’t get
    - Offers more programs, advanced classes, with so many less students than in Tel-Aviv
    - Very expensive
  - Pensions
    - Tremendous amount of money in pensions, won’t be struggling economically, some have more money after retirement than when working
  - Life is good, particularly for children
  - Life is petty: we don’t have serious problems
  - Don’t worry about daughters walking street at night

- Don't worry about not having financial support if emergency
- "Dream world"
- Some members grew up culturally deprived, kids don't get break in life or need to be superheroes
- Kibbutz encourages music, sports, travel, fulfilled life
- Opportunities open up for children that may not in other areas, no matter how terrible their parents are
- Every kid is born free with an entire world of options
- Everybody's needs taken care of by community, special needs children: stresses lessened
- First 25 years, believed in working, not making a living
- Agricultural yields could be brilliant and nobody cared, it was about the work
- Nobody felt they were struggling because they were young
- "Hippie land in the middle of the desert"
- Took 20 years to get nervous about life, learn you need industry AND agriculture to survive
- Now: mixed economy, industry and tourism, in common with all of neighbors
- The Arava: grandiose things coming from a tiny desolate corner of the world
- Don't ask men gender questions because they're stupid
- Half members work outside of the kibbutz
- Other half: laundry closed, sewing shop and clothes manufacturing closed, many women work in kitchen and children's schools
  - Men also there but much less
- Executive positions balanced
- Treasurer almost always been female
- In young population: grew up in different world; range of gainful employment wider than 30 years ago
- Never any "trains" of feminist ideals, movement to balance work
  - Stupid American ideas
- Board of Directors of Grofit not trained for their position, could take course to train
  - Levy wanted less than 40 year olds and mostly women to go to these courses, not the reality (mostly men, some older)
- **Gender Issues** not talked about, but dealt with when need be
- Woman as sexual assault consultant
- Natural lifestyle, not political stance
- Women run work branches, because of *desire and capability*, not gender
- Parents want kibbutz children to be different than everyone else in the world
- Society still chauvinistic, much less than a generation ago, nowhere near north America, Europe
- Board of Directors vs General Assembly
- Theory: *completely democratic egalitarian society*, every member on every single issue
- Many years, every issue brought to *General Assembly*, met 40 times a year
  - Spent a lot of time **talking about "garbage"**
  - Would have arguments about stupid things
- Thought arose: Democracy has to be **inefficient**

- 1999/2000 major change: on the verge of bankruptcy
  - o If we don't take control of the situation, we will end up like other kibbutzim who appoint outside directors to save us
  - o Did it on their own
  - o Big wigs of kibbutz movement came to Grofit and heard members talk about what they'd done over the years
  - o Officials didn't believe they were being successful and could do it
  - o "What's this bullshit that's going on in Grofit?"
- GA elects Board members, votes on big issues
- Now, GA meets only about 5-6 times a year, not 40
- Board of Directors meets almost every week
  - o Every member has access to meeting minutes, has right to oppose decisions
  - o No decision acted on for a week to give members time to process and appeal
  - o Levy thinks Board is "overboard", has fought to increase member involvement
- Committee elected by GA, came up with questionnaire, went to every house and asked every member how they felt about a million things, including how they felt about their involvement in democracy
  - o Made composite of all of the answers, presented to GA: 1. Compilation of everything members said about questionnaire 2. Translation of what members said into small series of principals about which direction Grofit should be going in
  - o Kibbutz was completely divided about the direction of Board of Directors involvement
- Even in a perfect democracy, voting is an act of violence
  - o Who is stronger? The majority
  - o Should be judged by how open the discussion is rather than the decision that's made
  - o Sara's general consensus issue
  - o Measure isn't how many people vote, it's how many people were active in the discussion
  - o Not everybody has the ability to speak their mind to a group, but they still want to be heard
  - o GA is not the measure of democracy
  - o Is democracy a technical system, or an opportunity for people to take control of their lives?
- Economic crisis
- Didn't play with fire, didn't invest in gray markets
- Passed us by
- Took many many many loans they could never pay back
- In the end, Grofit did get some government help, but didn't have traumatic experience
  - o Nobody in the Arava did
- Kibbutzim that acted irresponsibly had the hardest fall, Grofit behaved
- Big kibbutzim way overspent and were overextended and were poorly managed
- Poor kibbutzim didn't have this overspending issues like this
- "Privatized" most misused word in movement
- Privatization = Responsibility, more independence

- People need more independence to be able to fulfill themselves
- Periods where people are dissatisfied with their lives here
- All houses, work branches, services, machinery, legal and economic responsibility owned by the collective
  - Absolutely communist (don't write this), communal
- Anything that was un-egalitarianism was deemed privatization
- Rotten fruit taken because it's free, need bigger refrigerator, bigger house, then throw out fruit anyway – joke example
  - Gave members more money to do with whatever they wanted, cut expenses for shrinkage
  - Kibbutz saved money
  - Not privatization because the money allocated comes from kibbutz, common sense
- Meters for house electricity, paid for by kibbutz
  - Members given bill at end of month but didn't have to pay it
  - Electricity went down by 30%
  - Usage went down because people were reminded that electricity costs money
- Members bring in different salaries but get the same budget
  - Differentiation vs Privatization
- Even with differential budgets for differentiated salaries, differentiated taxes
  - Still kibbutz-esque because every member has opportunity to advance their salaries/budget
  - Decision being decided on currently
  - Higher taxes on higher salaries benefits entire communities
  - Every member still has all of their needs met
- People are now allowed to keep their personal money (inheritances) and budget serves as pocket change
- Levy not a believer of egalitarianism because the word is a line
- Believer in cooperation, support, nobody has to ask for help, everybody has respect
- “We all get this much at this time”
- Need to accept everybody has different needs in terms of where your money goes, or the solidarity has to be broken up
- Regional council vs kibbutz movement
- Kibbutz movement “died”
  - Very limited in scope
  - Not nearly the same as 20-30 years ago
  - Does have economic resources for kibbutzim in dire need
  - Economic resources that allows for certain activities
- Region has always had high sense of communal responsibility
  - Neighbors help neighbors
  - More socially oriented than anywhere in the country
  - Institutions aid this
    - Date, fish industries involved with a lot of kibbutzim if not all
- Economic burden on kibbutzim for housing tremendous
  - Commercial banks, kibbutz movement helped

- Asked for same assistance they would give a young couple, mortgages
- Happened because kibbutzim cooperated in their ask for aid
- Council: legal municipality, abides by laws and conditions of State of Israel
  - Open communications between all of kibbutzim
  - Economic corporation set up to do the economic things the Council cannot because of national law
  - Business cooperatives not necessarily part of council but people don't really differentiate between the responsible orgs of the area
  - Some economic management of region dealt with by council, some by cooperation, some by economic arm
- Cooperation between kibbutzim sense of pride
- Most important for area: demographic growth

### **Roni Shani-Mor - Eilat (2/14/19)**

- Eilat is special because it lies right between both the sea and the desert
  - Remarkable contrast
  - No stimulation outside of their area, peaceful, clean, quiet
  - 105 members, ~400 people total
  - Moved to current location from the beach in 1962
    - Beach founders - 15 total
    - Lived off of fishing industry and army laundry
    - Government decision to move, so hotels could be put up
- Has the Russian childrens program Ketura used to have
  - Only kibbutz still with program
- Roni has been here 34 years, Maskeer for 7 months
  - Didn't want to take the position at first, doesn't mind it now
  - Was asked to take the position
  - Needs to be available all day and night, exhausting
  - Leaves house 15 minutes early to accomodate for everyone stopping her with their issues
  - Took training class through the Kibbutz movement first
- Eilat still traditionally collective kibbutz, like Ketura
  - Different salaries but equal member budget
  - People can earn 10% of their salaries if they make more
    - Encourages members to earn more for the kibbutz
    - Strengthens kibbutz because individuals can fulfill themselves, everybody is helped with more money, and the idea of the kibbutz isn't damaged
- Difficulties on the kibbutz are less now because they learned how to live in the desert
  - Had to learn which crops would grow, now have wide variety (trial/error)
  - Benefit of desert environment: First region in the country to harvest, first in market, cows are healthier in dryness
  - The location makes everything more expensive
    - Transporting goods to and from
    - Heating/cooling facilities
    - Water conditioning
  - People don't want to live in the middle of the desert



- Life in the desert is hard, but it works because the people here really want it
  - o You have to want and believe in the kibbutz to keep it alive
  - o Kibbutzniks meet regularly to discuss if they still believe in the kibbutz
  - o The community is what keeps things moving; collective effort; you're alone in the desert; have to work on maintaining community regularly
    - Eilat newspaper tells of sick people so that the community can go help them; people like to help people, need to be a part of the community
    - When lots of communal money go towards helping one sick person, the community is ironically strengthened because people like to help people
- General Assembly decides everything
  - o Elects heads of committees
  - o Elects maskeer
  - o Committees for every aspect of life: music, education, health, old people, young people, dogs - each have their own budget
  - o Maskeer's "community management" committee manages budgets
  - o Some committee decisions don't have to be GA approved, but every change does
  - o There are regulations for every aspect of life
  - o The GA deals with general, basic problems, committees specialize
- 80s was very bad; Roni was young and not a member yet
  - o Many people left, 120-80 members
  - o To survive: needed to be efficient
  - o Community separated from industries
  - o Shut down nonprofit activities, everything that didn't make money
  - o Since then: community budget is separate from industry budget, totally different
  - o Its like a family who have a supermarket, children eat from supermarket
    - Had to separate because it was impossible to keep track of what was being lost/consumed
  - o Kibbutz paid all of its debt, all behind them, in really stable condition now
- Limited privatization
  - o 2013-14, decided to change electricity and food and laundry only to privatized, small things
  - o Added to personal budget, member budget increased, more control over own budget
  - o Don't change the kibbutz this way because money still comes from the collective
  - o People feel better because they have more control of their lives/budget
  - o Otherwise people want to change the system when they don't feel they have enough
  - o Electricity usage went down after privatization
- Gender not a big deal here
  - o Woman feels women aren't offered less options
  - o Money management mostly men, money workers mostly women
  - o Only one man in young education
  - o High school teachers 50/50
  - o Male teacher have specialties, women more versatile
  - o Not many males working with kids in Israel all together

- Salaries low in education – undesirable
- Regional council important part of kibbutznik lives
  - Everything deals with council: school, afternoon activities
  - Kibbutz pays taxes to council for services and support
  - Health clinic, social services (special needs services)
  - Have to keep relationship with kibbutz and council good
  - Some kibbutzniks work for council
  - Be'er Ora is growing and is going to change the whole area, next leader of council may be from Be'er Ora and change the whole dynamic of the area
  - Large area, Regional council's job is to bring everyone together
  - They do a good job, have good people doing their best
  - Consists mainly of people of the area, primarily kibbutzniks now
  - Does not deal with Eilat
- Kibbutz movement
  - Arrange courses for kibbutzniks (ie maskeer, education); one for every aspect of their lives
  - Contact person between movement and kibbutz visits every one or two weeks, community issue support, offers how to solve problems, works with kibbutz all throughout area, lives on diff kibbutz
  - Kibbutz pays taxes to the movement
  - Arrange conferences
  - Very active movement, but can't take much part because of distance from the activity (Tel-Aviv conferences)
  - Could do more for political life in Israel
  - Working on involvement of kibbutzim in the general society of Israel, to connect kibbutzniks to everyone else
- Money from tourism, agriculture, heavy metal factory that may have to shut down
- Love variety of work opportunities
- Cows partnered with Yotvata
- Kindergarten open to children from Eilat, income

### **Nir Lobel (02/20/1) - Elifaz**

- Founded 1983, was army post, until 96 – Single people coming and going, parties, small houses, no thought of pension, living for now
- 1996 shift with families, “real kibbutz” arose from families, all families like a family
- Managing money for a small amount of people doesn't require much complex thought
- 12 years on Elifaz, secretary for 2.5 years
  - Took maskeer position because it is important position, saw potential in collaboration between kibbutzim – secretary meetings still figuring out what they want to be/talk about (issues, future, support, etc), maskeer doesn't have any free time
- From city, moved to arava at 27 with a 1 year old to see what the Kibbutz movement can do for them
- Scoped out kibbutzim, didn't want to go near Gaza, Elifaz looked like it was stuck in the 80s

- 1 year candidacy life on kibbutz
- 26th member to join, 53 now
- Until maskeer, didn't see anyone outside of the kibbutz
  - o Position opened Nir to the area, the people
  - o Want somebody professional to host gathering from Secretaries to take minutes and "make something of it" – you talk so much about so many things with so many perspectives, it takes time and effort to get anything done
- Now, they just talk about stuff then meet again in 2 months, no action, consulting advice
- Meet with head of council, then only the maskeerem
- Maskeerem have agendas not relevant to council
- Regional advisor from Movement comes to meetings too
- Kibbutz movement before 20 years ago, much more involved in everyone's life
- Everyone used to go to movement every week to manage debts
- People started asking why we need the movement
- Nir thinks they still need them for guidance and training, learning how to create/manage kibbutz
- Also has connections to Knesset members
- Courses for every job in kibbutz
- Managers of committees, many committees, same as Knesset
- Courses are far away and expensive
- Kibbutz movement guy goes to regional council meeting to offer assistance, guidance
- Changes
- Business manager 6 years ago started change with money
  - o Put money aside, fixed loans
- 6 years ago, four families had to come, govt said too small a community for the land they were given
  - o 4 families didn't become members
- Agricultural union – every kibbutz a part
  - o Advisor from agricultural union can come without being asked and manage the kibbutz, regional council also sent in advisor – made procedure in kibbutz
  - o "Break something to fix it" – their tactic
- Had to decide if everybody gets budgets
- Everybody still working together and caring for one another, support
- Budget for everyone according to kids, "new kibbutz", "old kibbutz" traditionally collective sharing
  - o Needed to bring new people, build new buildings
  - o Everybody pays taxes – permanent, for everybody; and another according to income, kibbutz helps if you're below minimum
  - o Taxes as pooling of the money – keep salaries and pay for personal expenses
- If you don't work, you don't get money. In traditional kibbutz, you can not work and still get money
- Second and third generations lost sense of need to work to keep kibbutz alive
- 2003 – disease in cow farm, had to kill many, dates bad harvest, budget decreased, cut everything

- Kibbutz recovered from cutting things, utilities that used to be free no longer (like laundry, dentist) and increased budget
- Everybody on Elifaz from city
- Very comfortable place to raise children, if you have a problem, sickness, it is taken care of
- 2011 – business manager came to change economic processes
- Opportunity to get quietness, no conflict here “Israel without fighting with anyone”
- Openness seen as potential, airport brings more opportunities
- Risk every year surviving off agriculture
- Solar power biggest industry, haven’t found solution to finding big income in the Arava
- No big industry on Elifaz
- Small kibbutz like family, advantage and disadvantage
- Arguing with people you have to go home and eat dinner with
- Can’t ignore anyone
- People come thinking vacation, then social relationships become clearer, people realize how to talk to one another, resolve conflict, maintain peace
- Struggles
- Financial and social – some people didn’t want to be a new kibbutz, community crisis
  - Sometimes only 5 people come to big party because group fighting
- Had to redefine “who are we” after changing kibbutz, “who do we want to be?”
- Have to approach issues gently, don’t want to scare people
- Maskeer now seen as manager instead of friend, nobody “talks shit about kibbutz to him”
  - Seen as management
  - Maskeer has to assimilate people, teach them kibbutz ways
  - Integrating people from urban backgrounds – teaching to put everybody before themselves
  - Teaching concepts like budgets, money sharing
  - Educating children on kibbutz allows handling what is being taught
- Business manager from 7 years ago, now manager of Lotan, Elifaz member
  - Talked of Elifaz in bad way, “people are leaving, its small”
  - Fought with everyone, changed way of functioning of kibbutz, people upset, name calling
  - Can’t understand management position and kibbutznik position until you sit there and live it
- Good people on Elifaz, Nir thinks everyone “holds” it
- Good they aren’t close to Eilat but can reach it, quiet of desert, city/restaurant life
- Children grow up in best environment ever, never worried who they’re going to meet
  - Children need to spend years out of kibbutz to realize what they had on the kibbutz
- 1980s, didn’t collapse
- Changed money situation before they collapsed – proactive
- No Elifaz before crisis began
- Money managed, cleared, not too many loans
- People want to make more money – shift to allow proportional budgets “little bit more”
- After change, everybody kibbutz makes more money in general, people took vacations

- People took better/more jobs, didn't wait for or rely on budget
- Hardest – making salaries different between members
- Kibbutz gender is smaller problem
- Management – 5 women and 2 men
- Business manager as only men in Elifaz
- Secretaries mostly women – empathy, listening
- “It doesn't matter where everyone works” – Nobody complains

#### **Shelly (02/20/19) - Samar**

- Drives shuttle, worked in accounting, English teacher, cfo for 6 years, maskeer for 3 year, resource development
- Arava – somewhere different from where they grew up, get as far away from city vibe
  - o Downtown high rise of Chicago, visited other kibbutzim around Israel with Nahal
  - o Friend from Yotvata, came to visit, empty ~70 people, naked people in pool
- Samar different from other kibbutzim of Arava
  - o Founded in 76 by people who grew up in kibbutz, knew what they didn't want but not what they wanted
  - o Felt oppressive aspects of life on their older kibbutzim
  - o Stronger focus on equality (power, not material or earnings)
  - o Everybody responsible for selves, has to get a job, take what you need
  - o Nothing was locked besides guns/medicine – based on lots of responsibility and trust, self-restraint, mutual respect
- Everybody's a boss, it's everybody's house, everybody's everything – complete independence
  - o No rules/guidebook
  - o Legal set of rules imposed by larger entities, how it functions as legal entity
  - o No limitations on housing, allotments
- People build their homes and lives according to their personal expression
- Children lived together in beginning, not many children (2-3), changed very fast when parents wanted their children
  - o Over in all kibbutzim by first Gulf War
- Has become much harder to manage in general – multi-generational
- Naked in pools as young people – different dynamic too
- Yom Kippur War shaped those who founded
  - o Young people were either in the war or on the kibbutz' people left for war from – gained sense of responsibility
  - o Because of these people and their understanding of responsibility that founded Samar
  - o “Hippie-ish”
- Harder to grasp lack of security/comfort in fluidity of life
- Biggest rule: everything you want or need goes through kibbutz meeting
- When taking what you need – harder to take care of family needs outside of kibbutz needs (ie schooling)
  - o A technical limit on what you spend, committee to monitor spending
  - o Budget planning based on family spending averages, past
  - o Have to always be in control with credit card of kibbutz
  - o Have to be aware of yourself when you have no limits, know what you need
  - o Money easy to spend frivolously when it isn't in your hand
  - o Sometimes young people leave the kibbutz confused about work and money
  - o Don't work to earn – a lot of kids have problem with this
- Samar refuses to take ties or hire cheap labor (Bedouin, Arab, Chinese)

- People do come in to work but earn normal salaries
  - Didn't want to make money off of people
  - Invested in farming equipment to make up for less labor
- "It is so hard to live in a bubble in the desert"
  - Problems oversized when magnified back in to community
  - People get older and regress into wanting traditions of their old days, kibbutzim – elsewhere
  - Struggle with people falling back on what they know instead of wanting to create/continue with their new life
  - People don't want to live here, not enough jobs, housing no different financial burden
  - Difficult for people to idealize kibbutz as concept, nonetheless Samar
- Shelly not into kibbutz as a concept, Samar is own entity
- People struggle everywhere, but Samar has its own charm
  - Quality of life, children walking barefoot to kindergarten
- Sometimes gets boring, have less choice in what to do during free time
- RnD station for solar energy collection – flower, no longer in use
- Decisions made by General Assembly, all changes have to be collectively agreed on
- Becomes difficult to manage work, why go to work if you don't have to?
  - No sanction for anyone who doesn't work
  - Social pressure to pull your weight, some people don't care
  - Lots of committees, no heads but representatives
  - Nobody calls themselves the one maskeer, there is a team, but one represents
- Successes: not having labor ties but young groups and community service groups instead, community work, idea of not checking bottom line kept them away from managing in "bottom line atmosphere"
  - Decision to grow organic dates, helped extremist who think they are invading on land lessen stress, keeping connected to earth
  - Ability to grow/build your own space
  - People study, always had much more of the recommended percentage of students at a given time
  - Freedom for studying and self-development
- Shift from having box with money in it for the taking, nobody would record how much they took, personal account of how much you take – change, mixed opinions on good or bad
  - People don't like being measured, others need measure to control themselves
- Personal challenge (Shelly) – Private voting from open voting – broke trust between members
  - Mixed options for voting (ballot or open), people felt too much pressure to express selves, intimidation
  - Need open and honest communication always between people, ballot challenges, don't know if people are speaking and acting in different ways – makes integrity unclear
- Gender – can work wherever they want, settle where they are comfortable
  - Gender issue about food
    - When working off the kibbutz, men were unquestioned when they traveled to eat; women expected to "make do" because they worked less
- Financial crisis did not affect Samar because it was a baby kibbutz at the time. Government and organizations helped young and poor kibbutz, Samar had no loans about, no extra money being overspent

## Appendix D: Urban Case Study Interview Transcripts

### Nomika Zion - Migvan (02/19/19)

- Kibbutz Migvan founded 87, 32 years old
- Two years after founding idea
- In Sderot, another neighborhood
- 10 years, decided to buy land and create own neighborhood, moved 3-4 yrs later
- After ~ 14 years, lived in co-housing, on two different blocks
- Community part of Sderot life in every sense
- Built a street, other families joined and there is no more room in kibbutz street but they live in other neighborhoods - Hashaked Street
- Flexible kibbutz, members can be found in variety of circumstances/living
- All part of community, engage in activities together
- Other people live out of Sderot completely but they are still considered part of community
- First 20 years, classic kibbutz
- Made major changes in 80s to structure of kibbutz
- Wanted classic kibbutz
- All salaries go to kibbutz bank account
- All needs of members covered
- According to ability, according to need
- Over last 10 or so years, more families joined but didn't want to be part of economical system
- Became extremely involved in social culture of kibbutz anyway
- Some decided to leave the economical sharing system
- Many are part of community but not system
- Two branches (94 when most members in economical sharing system)
- High-tech, build websites
  - o Directors and owners kibbutz members
  - o Separated from kibbutz economy as well
  - o Kibbutzniks still work here
  - o Also became burden instead of asset, lost some money, difficult to manage, specifically in Sderot (near Gaza, conflict)
  - o Directors wanted rights, transferred over, now own
- Venim (?), biggest NGO in Sderot, active all over country
  - o After 18 years kibbutz decided NGO got too enormous, separated from economy kibbutz
  - o Mix of kibbutz and Venim economy too difficult to manage, burden on kibbutz members
  - o Kibbutzniks still work there, still huge impact on Sderot life
- Founder raised in classic traditional kibbutz in very political family
- Founded on humanistic ideals
- Came from harmonious people, no conflict
- Wanted to Tikkun (repair)
- Early 50s, big immigration from north africa to populate it next to kibbutzim



- Most came from Islamic countries, major conflict between Sephardic jews
  - Tikkun - to repair/fix something
  - Settlement towns”
  - Stereotyping, patronization in both directions, “white v black”
- 50s-70s, kibbutz already as minority, but kibbutz movement was like role model
  - Took responsibility and part in all social and national forms of kibbutzim life
  - Agriculture, politics, etc
- Founded in Sderot because it was a developing town, wanted to be situated right in center to repair relationships (9000 people, 80% from morocco and africa, rest Europe) now 27000 people
  - Wanted to create mutual relationship, understanding, respect between different communities
    - Kibbutzim, Ashkenazi, Sephardic
  - Wanted to live in kibbutz because they believed in kibbutz values
  - Multicultural, can find all types of communities
- Changes
- 3rd generation of kibbutz
- People living together for long term, most important thing not just idea/dream/social image, sharing social image
- Spent so much time and energy creating ideology of collectivity
- After few years, children and other people joined, realized most important thing is the people
  - Who are these people you’re going to share your life with?
  - Shifted to spending energy building relationships instead of dreams
  - Can’t fulfill your dreams without people alongside of you
- Don’t want to grow too much, want to stay small and intimate
- over 100 today, still small to keep idea of living together, intimacy
- How we observe new people, how people join
  - Many criteria, more than 35, no degree, examinations, got rid of all of these things, irrelevant
  - Relevant: everyone who wants to join can do it
    - You identify with main idea of urban kibbutz
    - Both sides feel good together after living together for couple years
- Because they had to develop their dialogue skills, nobody works, they gather in dining hall and study “study day”
  - Learn something, discuss their life
  - Unique from classic kibbutzim
  - Helped to develop stronger connections, communication
- Economic burden too heavy in crisis years, couldn’t meet every week, had to adapt format
- Put individual in center instead of collective
- Individual had to serve the collective
- They said: if people want to live together, the most important thing is the individual, community should support individual rather than other way around
- People allowed to make differential salaries

- People encouraged to fulfill creative potential, find where they want to work
- Kibbutz has given up lots of income because people choose happiness in work rather than income
- Revolution in 80s - privatization in a new light
- People much more willing to contribute to a life they identify with, find value in
  - o In a greater effort to contribute to society
- Sharing
- Live together for many years, founders especially
- Like a broad family, gives it its strength
  - o Beginning years of working on communication/learning together as foundation for this
  - o People learned to find solutions to everybody's needs
    - Understanding people as people
  - o 24/7 people want to help and contribute to the kibbutz
    - When people look at this from the outside, people doing something for the community's sake, see it's special
- Only part of kibbutz shares economic system 6 families
  - o "The Kibbutz"
  - o Everybody else "the community"
- Other families part of greater system in different way
  - o Buy all food together, pay for community center expenses
  - o Economical burdens lessened by everyone's contribution
  - o Finance expenses of electricity, water, waste, everything
  - o Still not considered part of "kibbutz"
  - o Connected to people, social life, community, children
- Decision-making changed
  - o Study days, seminars, kibbutz meetings used to discuss absolutely everything
  - o Never vote
    - Discuss things together in different meetings/seminar
    - Decided off of overall spirit of the group, how they feel as a community
  - o Everyone who shares public space has say in discussions
  - o Discussions lead to decisions without voting, didn't lose dynamic skills
- Changes statement against the failures of classic kibbutz
  - o No voting, democracy different
  - o Individual over collective
  - o Study over work
- Struggles - "challenges"
- According to law: a kibbutz, like Arava
- When they had to build the street and houses = biggest mission of their lives
  - o Very complicated, needed both family houses and community center in a growing city
  - o Had to pay for many advisors, consultants
  - o Heavy economic burden
  - o Hoped to pave way for other urban communities
  - o Legal solutions to technical problems of project

- 3 major
  - Same as classic kibbutz or close families anywhere, having to live with same people
    - Continuing loving and cherishing family through life and conflict
  - How to educate children in a multicultural society
    - Classic kibbutz “a bubble” majority from same background, ideological background
    - Better to build your identity in a conflicted society, complex, people with different ideas and agendas
    - It sharpens your own identity when you develop it around so many conflicting ideas
    - Acceptance of everyone, openness to every type of person
- Gender/Equality
  - “Most feminist kibbutz on the planet”
  - Men “chefs” - all cook well, raise children, clean do everything
    - Can be surprising when women do domestic work
    - Some women felt they couldn’t compare in kitchen
    - “Tell your father to bring the cake”
  - “Paradise”
  - Everyone knows the skills of each member
  - Therapists/social workers, mostly women
  - Lecturer - man
  - High tech - blend
  - Like that the whole time

**Linda Ravid (02/21/19) - Glil Yam**

- Daughter of German jews who came to states in 38-39, Reform Jew in CA, Zionist
  - Summer Camp (Newman) - met first Israelis, enthralled, kibbutz enchanting
  - Increased socialist/communist tendencies, kibbutz grew more like dream
  - Volunteered on kibbutz in 1971, met husband
  - Finished university in States, joined garin, didn’t move to Israel with garin, volunteered at hospital in Be’er Sheva
  - Moved to Glil Yam in 1979, remet guy from 1971, got married
  - Been kibbutz member from 1981, 4 kids
  - Wanted to be part of peace initiative
  - Community control of healthcare, education, sense of purpose, political activities drew her to kibbutz
  - Only American on kibbutz
  - Don’t like direction kibbutz and Israel is going in
- Glil Yam originally founded 1930s? Been on land since around 1935
  - Tried to make all of the work (Arab) in the cities Jewish
    - Person who carries stuff off of ship - porter, post office jobs
    - “Menial tasks” to make it Jewish
    - Point to show that Jews can do tasks, run societies, rather than being money launderers (attacking stereotype)
  - City commune of Glil Yam

- Originally tents sitting around sand dunes, no city
- Became bakers, fishers, basic agriculture
- Became more advanced agriculture
- 33-43, kibbutz lived in different places
- “Where the tractor stops, there’s a border” method of establishing borders - watch towers
- Founded by Russian and Polish immigrants
  - Refugees came to shores on ship
  - Became part of movement to rescue and accept refugees, hide them from British
  - Refugees had different perspective of kibbutz than founders
  - (50s-60s) some people very strong ideological connections, visions; other people along for ride, have no other choice
  - Very different ideological base from Arava
    - Defined by “your war”
  - Still very socialist
- When you put children in an environment they would absorb lifestyle - not true
  - Being so close to a city added temptation - ideological motivation was much less than other kibbutzim because of environment
  - People stayed on Gili Yam because they understood it was a desirable place to live
- Left-wing branch of kibbutz movement would be selective about what refugees they would accept
- 1971 - still had sand between buildings ~200 members
  - Long buildings, 4 units, tiny rooms
  - Very basic
  - We’re totally collective - children’s houses until late 90s
    - Now daycare
  - Animal farm
- Close to old border of Israel - until 67 “narrow waist” of Israel
- Changes
  - Didn’t used to have synagoge, now does
  - Accepts no members from outside, have to marry in - out of room
  - Took things apart in 90s
    - No children’s houses, no eating dining room
  - 2006 - decided to privatize
    - (before) Everybody got same budget no matter where you worked, based on number of children
    - People have own cars, live off own income
    - Collectivity reduced tremendously
    - New generations much less politically and ideologically motivated
      - Much more family oriented over community (no longer everyone in the same boat)
      - There for comfort and familiarity
    - Members don’t know who is married to one another, even on a small kibbutz (~300 members) don’t know everyone

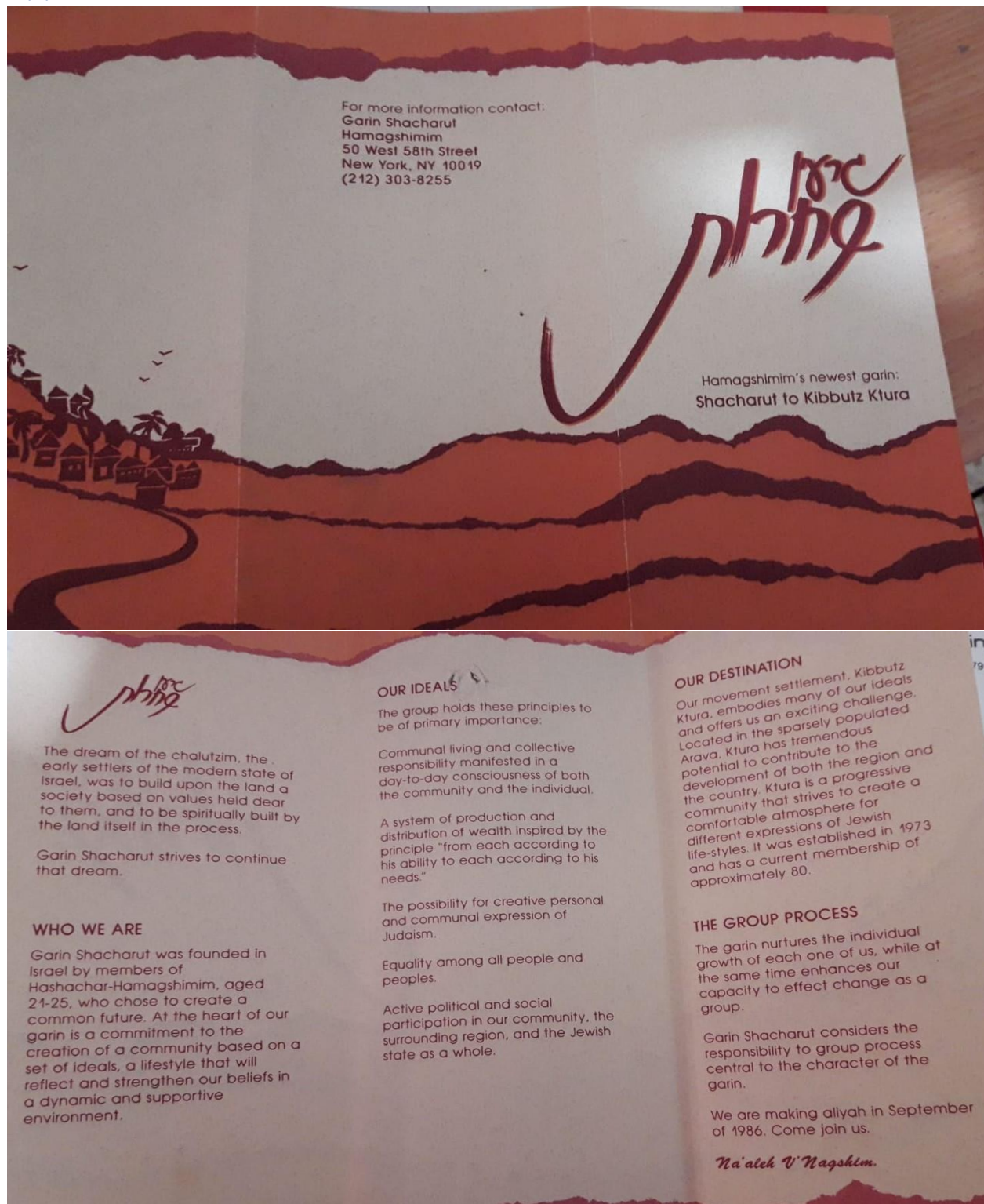
- Linda knows about half of the member
    - Locked into kibbutz lifestyle because they didn't own anything until 2006
  - Physical changes: more aesthetic
    - New red roofs - "villagy"
    - Everyone can add on to their house now, used to all be the same exact building
    - Upgrading of internal paths
    - New gardens
    - Older industries turned into high-tech offices - people moved into offices
      - Book editing for example
      - From chicken coops, kibbutz oriented buildings
      - "Don't leave your shoes outside because you'll come back to find a startup in them"
      - Used to have huge field crops (wheat, potatoes, avocado)
        - Land given back to land authority - financial benefit
        - Didn't make sense to have big fields in growing city - people wanted buildings
      - 6-7 story buildings in what used to be fields
    - Two new heavy-duty roads, boxed in by freeway
    - Kibbutz reducing in size, being warped by buildings around/inside
    - Still have dining hall and children's homes in center
    - Still have some groves, not as extensive
  - Also more public, dining hall open to public
  - Very few people ideologically motivated
- General Assembly still has ultimate authority, gather and vote
  - Many committees
  - Has maskeer
- Some committees have shrank because people take care of their own needs
  - Less communal decisions about lives (healthcare)
- Still communal effort to support those who don't make enough money to support themselves
- Not still such a great place to live
- Village aspects - homes are modest, intimate: what make place enjoyable
  - Nature, gardens, simple environment
  - People look out for one another, always willing to help
  - Still sense of responsibility to support community
  - Celebrate things together - ex. Birthday of kibbutz
    - Helps fuel sense of continuity
- Kibbutz can do a whole lot more to support the community as a community
  - People still really want to **contribute** and help one another and their homes
  - "It's all about me" - theme for young people
    - Want good lifestyle, good home for children, go on vacations
  - Volunteerism in young people in tandem with desire for good life

- Kibbutz used to be more of an isolated place, used to set trends, national leadership came from kibbutz
  - o Now more personal-success oriented
  - o Some say it's exposure to city
- Until 15 years ago, less of a meeting between kibbutz and Tel-Aviv
  - o When privatized
  - o More people work outside of kibbutz
- "Kibbutz" characteristics more general than specific - contrast to Arava
- Kibbutz makes money
  - o Past: agriculture, chickens
  - o Today: still agriculture, much smaller percentage, chicken farms, renting of apartments and buildings (high-tech, Dell), buying of services by members not huge source of income
  - o Grain silo now architect office
- Members pay much less money for kibbutz' services (schools) than outsiders
- Financial 1985 crisis
  - o Kibbutz fell into very deep hole, still climbing way out of it
  - o Gave land away for money, still paying off debt
  - o Husband said they were very solid in investment policy
  - o Didn't lose anything in the markets
  - o Impact that the industrial world felt
    - Became impossible for industry and investment cultures to pay back anything - with interest (killer)
  - o Kibbutz was always conservative, was very modest and "solid"
    - Kibbutz not victim to crisis as much as industrial components
- Genders
  - o In Arava: 50s-90s gender awareness of changing social circumstances
  - o In Glil Yam: older people don't consider gender
  - o In younger generation, an awareness but its not political
    - Israeli women (polish, Jewish mothers) quite strong: domineering, dominant; not necessarily educated or thoughtful regarding running kibbutz
  - o Running in the kibbutz dominated by men
    - In both old and young generations (young moreso)
  - o Anglo-Saxon awareness
  - o Young people more aware on university campuses, not necessarily the kibbutz
- Every kibbutz has its own personality based off of who founded it - Samar
- Challenges
  - o If you mention "kibbutz Glil Yam" to people who know it in Israel, people deny its kibbutz-ness because it's in a city
    - People neglect its founding, ideologies
    - "Oh, you're a millionaire!" Nadlan - realty kibbutz
    - False image in public, result of media portrayal
  - o Suit against the kibbutz from people who left the kibbutz who want a part of its successes, "part of the action," ex. Selling of fields

- Maintaining sense of community, caring for others



## Appendix E: Garin Shacharut Brochure





# Hashachar • Hamagshimim

50 West 58th Street • New York, N.Y. 10019 • 212-355-7900

Dear Chevrei Hamagshimim,

Are you planning your aliyah within the next couple of years? Interested in kibbutz, or more specifically, Kibbutz Keturah? If so, Garin Shacharut would love to meet you and talk with you. Who knows? After that, you might want to join us. Garin Shacharut is the newest movement garin, established last fall by a group of 80-81 Year Coursers while back in Israel together. The enclosed flyer explains a bit more about us.

This summer, now that all of us are back in the States, the garin process is just getting underway. We welcome new input, ideas and others who share our dream of life in the Arava. On the weekend of September 14th-15th we will be meeting in the New York area. Anyone interested in finding out more about Shacharut, or coming to the kinus in September, please call: Rachel Feit 212-929-7855 or Julie Baretz 914-268-2983 or the National office 212-355-7900.

N'aleh v'Nagshim,  
Rachel Feit  
Sara Cohen  
Julie Baretz  
Alan Gluskoter  
Barbara Mann  
Stu Wagner  
Bryan Silverberg

Sponsored by Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of America

# חברת גרין ליישוב ולחבנות

## WHO

GARIN SHACHARUT was founded in Israel by chevrei Hamagshimim who chose to create a common future after several years of movement involvement together. Each of us is planning to complete an undergraduate education within the next two years.

## WHAT

We are striving for a community founded on the following principles:

SOCIALISM - Commonly owned means of production and distribution of wealth according to need.

COMMUNAL LIVING AND COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY - Day to day living with a consciousness of both the community and the individual, provision of services, and being nice to each other.

JUDAISM - Emphasis of our relationship with Jewish values and tradition, creative exploration of our Judaism, and reflection of Jewish ideas in our environment.

EQUALITY - A belief in equality of all people and peoples.

GROWTH AND OUTREACH - Providing a healthy environment for the education and growth of ourselves and our children, while also being an integral part of Israeli society and helping to build the Jewish State.

## HOW

GARIN SHACHARUT was founded first on a set of ideals. From the beginning we agreed that we needed a place where we could live responsibly in an environment where we could question and be challenged. We wanted a small community where we could create an intimate society for ourselves and also contribute to the building of Medinat Yisrael.

## WHERE

We have chosen KIBBUTZ KETURAH as the place where we can best fulfill our goals and ideals. As members of Hashachar we feel that Keturah, our movement kibbutz, embodies many of our values while still offering a great challenge to us. A settlement located in the sparsely populated Arava, Keturah has tremendous potential to contribute to the development of both the region and the country. Keturah is a progressive community that strives to create a comfortable atmosphere for different interpretations of Jewish life. It was established in 1973 and has a current membership of 73.

## WHEN

Our final date for Aliyah is July 1986. In the ensuing time many chevrei garin will be actively involved in leadership in the movement, either in Hamagshimim, Young Judaea, or summer camps.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR DISCUSSION, please contact:  
Garin Shacharut, Hamagshimim, 50 W. 58 St. NY, NY 10019 212-355-7900