The Many Lives of Beit Zera: Parallelism and Divergence Between Kibbutz and State

By

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On Language

Given the centrality of the Israeli kibbutz and polity to my research, this thesis is peppered with transliterated Hebrew. I have generally followed the following rule: the first time a transliterated word or phrase is use, it is italicized, with the English translation either in a parenthetical following or comprising the rest of the sentence. All following usages are neither translated nor put in quotations.

The reader may also consult the glossary at the back of the project, which lists more thorough translations for many of the Hebrew words, as well as definitions of institutions, political parties, and other phenomena central to this project.

The entirety of the first chapter, as well as a good portion of the second chapter, take place before 1948, a period spanning Ottoman Palestine and the British Mandate of Palestine. When referring to the organized Jewish community in that land that arose after the advent of Zionist thought, I use “Yishuv,” which is what that community was called contemporaneously and the name it retains across scholarship. When writing about the broader land in question, I use Ottoman Palestine or the British Mandate of Palestine (abbreviated to the BMP) if referencing a specific year that falls under one of those periods. If speaking on the general pre-Israeli period, which spans 1880-1948 in the scope of this paper (and, thus, both Ottoman and British Mandate Palestine), I use “Palestine,” for that is what the indigenous Arab population, the relevant colonial powers, and the Jewish settlers called it contemporaneously.
**Introduction**

Between the ages of 11 and 20, I was an active member of “Hashomer Hatzair,” a Socialist Zionist youth movement. Founded in 1913 in Galicia, Hashomer Hatzair was one of many Jewish youth movements to crop up across Europe at the turn of the 20th century, youth-oriented manifestations of the identity politics that the international Jewish community navigated in that era. When my parents sought a summer camp for me that suited their progressive inclinations, Shomria—Hashomer Hatzair’s camp in Upstate New York—caught their eye immediately. “Just like a kibbutz in the Catskills,” the website boasted. They were sold.

I was raised on stories of the magic of the kibbutz, an institution described variously as a “large communal settlement, combining agricultural with industry,”¹ “the only example of pure voluntary communism in the 20th century,”² or “an equalitarian society guided by the principle, to each according to his need, from each according to his ability.”³ Together, these three descriptions paint a broad definition of the need-based kibbutz model. A more technical definition can be found in Haim Barkai’s 1977 economic study of the model:

Common ownership of property, self labor, communal control of manpower and all other means of production, and the principle of equality that involves the severance of the link between an individual’s contribution to production and his real income are the *sine qua non* of the collective.⁴

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I draw on Barkai’s inventory of kibbutz characteristics to define the need-based kibbutz model as one that practices the Marxist dictum, “from each according to his ability, to each according to his need.” Yet the kibbutz is best understood not just as an economic or social model but also as a historical phenomenon, shaped by external forces and constraints. The first kibbutz, Degania, was founded in Ottoman Palestine in 1909, as a voluntary, collectivist community of socialist Eastern European Jews motivated to shed Jewish reliance on European employment and build a cooperative system of Jewish production and consumption. To achieve their aims, they fled anti-Semitism, violence, and lack of economic opportunity in the shtetls and cities of Russia, Poland, Lithuania, and Hungary (some, too, came from Western Europe), and settled in the Yishuv, the expanding Jewish society in Ottoman, and then British Mandate, Palestine. At the intersect of Jewish and Socialist circles, these settlement efforts over the course of the early 20th century were viewed broadly as the pinnacle of self-actualization, glorified as trading the ‘bourgeois’ lifestyle of the Jewish Diaspora for the challenges of building and maintaining a kibbutz.

In my Israeli-American family, the kibbutz encompassed the good side of Israel, one that still subscribed to Labor Zionism—combining beliefs in socialism, Jewish right to national self-determination, and sanctity of physical labor—and that voted for the left-wing Meretz party in Israeli Knesset elections. The kibbutz, in my childhood, encompassed a vision of Israel that Stav Shaffir, Knesset member of the Labor Party, alluded to in 2015, when she criticized Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for directing public money for private use:

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5 Near, Volume 1, 1-53.
6 Ibid, 7-18.
True Zionism, my friends, is to distribute the budget equally among all citizens. True Zionism is to care for the weak. True Zionism is solidarity, not only in times of war but also in the day to day, to care for each other. This is what it means to be Israeli!

Camp Shomria was the 21st-century American version of this romanticized Labor Zionism I was spoon-fed growing up. The summertime community revolved around the nucleus of one big dining hall, where campers, counselors, and staff ate all their meals—just like all members of kibbutzim (plural) ate their meals in a communal dining hall. Our cabins were called tzrifim (pl. of tzrif), the Hebrew word used in early kibbutzim to describe small wooden shacks with rows of beds. Instead of age groups, we were organized into kvutzot (pl. of kvutza), units of 10-25 kids participating in an ongoing, intentional process of learning together. As young campers, we played games simulating capitalism wherein, although we all completed the same mission, some kvutza members received a handful of candies while others received towering mounds. “And that’s not fair, is it?” our counselors asked us. As teenagers, instead of riding horses or rock climbing as at other American sleepaway camps, we sat in circles and discussed Martin Buber’s I-Thou, Kurt Vonnegut’s “Harrison Bergeron,” and Marx’s Communist Manifesto. If we received a package from our parents, camp regulations dictated that we dump the entire contents into our kvutza’s kupa (‘account’), so that our Snickers or Starbursts might be evenly distributed during group activities. At age 16, we were trained to become counselors ourselves, schooled in democratic teaching pedagogy, for—like the kibbutz—Camp Shomria was governed by direct democracy. As in early kibbutzim, Camp Shomria (as representative of Hashomer Hatzair) matched teachings of economic precepts of

socialism with a general rejection of social norms. Campers were allowed to roam the grounds in our ample free time, go in and out of tzrifim of the opposite sex, and up as late as we wanted. In other words, Shomria was mimicking the original kibbutzim’ rejection of traditional family structure and social norms. I was surprised, then, late in high school, to learn that most kibbutzim no longer follow the model that Shomria replicates.

By 2016, a majority of kibbutzim had rejected the need-based model, undergoing a process the Kibbutz movement has come to call “kibbutz renewal”: introduction of private incomes and private consumption. Some 76% of all kibbutzim temper this privatization scheme with a “safety-net model,” whereby all members’ private incomes are taxed to ensure a buffer of social and economic security for members who earn under a certain minimum.\(^8\) Approximately 57% of these “safety-net kibbutzim” have an additional internal progressive income tax scheme to level up the safety net.\(^9\) Despite the safety net’s intended purpose of preserving some measure of mutual responsibility among kibbutz members, the essence of the need-based kibbutz as conceived in the early 20th century has disappeared. Gone is the centrality of the dining hall, collective budget, and joint child rearing. Today, in place of the original kibbutzim is a network of small communities like many others in Israel, where neighbors smile and stop to chat in the street but eat dinner at home, with their nuclear families, paid for by their private salaries.

\(^8\) The Economics Department of the Kibbutz Movement, “Yearbook of the Kibbutz Movement” (data from 2016-2017, Number 15), *The Kibbutz Movement,* www.kibbutz.org.il/sites/default/files/inline-files/שנתון 2016 סופי.pdf, 44.
\(^9\) Ibid, 58.
In short, Camp Shomria remained far more collectivist and cooperative in practice than most kibbutzim it purported to resemble. As a 16-year-old, I was distraught upon grasping this difference. The perseverance of the original need-based kibbutz was supposed to constitute proof of two facts I had believed to be unwaveringly true: 1) Martin Buber’s proclamation that the kibbutz was an experiment in socialism “that did not fail,” and 2) the presence of a thriving anti-capitalist and economically progressive citizenry in Israel.

Indeed, while I had grown up cognizant of and vocally in opposition to Israel’s occupation of the Palestinian Territories—and the history of settler-colonialism that preceded it—I was not, in my younger years, attentive to Israeli political economy. Only in more recent times, I began to understand connections between Israel’s political and social ills—occupation of Gaza and the West Bank, discrimination against Palestinians within Israel, or ethnic divisions in the Jewish Israeli population—and Israel’s economic ills, notably including an extremely high income disparity and poverty rate, much of which falls along demographic (age and ethnic) lines.\(^\text{10}\)

Beginning with the overhaul and replacement of the planned economy in 1985 through the Economic Stabilization Plan (ESP), the past three-plus decades have seen Israel’s economic inequality increase dramatically among and within all population subgroups.\(^\text{11}\) The early 2000s marked another significant period of increasingly neoliberal policy shifts, primarily relative to direct tax rates (lowered) and benefit


\(^{11}\) Ibid, 315.
programs (cut).\textsuperscript{12} Though Israel’s poverty rate has decreased since implementation of a basket of poverty-reduction policies in 2014, it remains far above the OECD average poverty rate (11.59\%) when accounting for all population subgroups, at 18.6\% in 2016.\textsuperscript{13} The poverty rates among Arab Israelis and ultra-Orthodox Israelis are significantly higher than average (both nearly 50\%).\textsuperscript{14} Much of this poverty can be explained by skewed income distribution. In 2016, the top 10\% of Israeli households boasted an average income 12 times the same measurement in the bottom 10\%—8,846 NIS (New Israeli Shekels) to 4,898 NIS.”\textsuperscript{15} Recalling Shafir’s speech in light of this state of gross inequality and rampant poverty, we may ask what “Israel” and “Zionism” she is referring to; neither the Israel nor Zionism of the present moment seem to fit.

Reflecting on these possible political-economic connections, I believed that there might be a link between neoliberal economics and rampant inequality on the national level and the wave of kibbutz renewal that began in the late 1980s. The timelines matched up, with the first kibbutzim privatizing in 1992, seven years after implementation of the ESP and 15 years after a non Labor Zionist party formed a winning coalition in the Israeli parliament. Armed with this intuition, I spent three weeks in summer 2017 on a renewed kibbutz—Beit Zera, in the Jordan Valley—and

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, 318.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
interviewed members to see if they understood changes their community had undergone as correlated with changes in the Israeli state.

After my time in Beit Zera, I understood that to draw connections between the kibbutz and the Israeli state in the present day requires broader historical perspective. The kibbutz, as noted here, *came to be* as a result of ideological ambition among young Jews building autonomous socialist communities but *spread* because of the role it played in the larger Zionist state and national building processes in Ottoman and British Mandate Palestine. Since its inception, the kibbutz’s trajectory has been entangled with the trajectory of the Jewish state. Thus the central questions of my study: In what ways did the kibbutz relate to critical phases of Israeli history, including (1) Jewish settlement in Palestine (prior to Israeli statehood), (2) state building and consolidation, and (3) the 1977 shift in dominant political hegemony (the shift in governing coalition from Labor party to Likud party)? Conversely, how did the kibbutz’s changing relationship with the Jewish pre-state community and polity (Yishuv), and then with the Israeli state, affect its socialist imperatives?

Finally, how might we best conceive of kibbutz “renewal”—privatization with a maintained social safety net? Is it a synthesis of present-day neo-liberal capitalism with the kibbutz’s original logic of mutual responsibility, or an interim moment of compromise on the way to the end of the experiment of the kibbutz model?

*State of the Field*

The study that follows does not tread on untouched territory. In 1981, Paula Rayman published a volume that explored similar questions, called *The Kibbutz Community and Nation Building*. She pursued in-depth field research of a single
kibbutz, which she gives the pseudonym “Har,” and of the Kibbutz movement as a whole, as it relates to the nation building of Israel. She writes:

Most studies of the kibbutz have focused on internal organization. In contrast, this book concentrates on the relationship between the kibbutz and external institutions… In what ways have state policies influenced kibbutz autonomy, solidarity, and stratification?\(^{16}\)

Har was founded in 1938, and Rayman’s research spans the period between its inception and the late 1970s. Though the Likud party had become leader of the governing Knesset coalition several years prior, that development’s possible impacts on the kibbutz’s future are barely mentioned.\(^{17}\) Furthermore, the ESP—the major change to Israeli economic policy that directly impacted kibbutzim across Israel—only occurred several years after its publication. Though Rayman’s work was comprehensive for its time, she wrote while all communities that self-identified as kibbutzim still followed the need-based model. Rayman introduces her work with the claim that the kibbutz is an experiment that continues to offer “promise of new modes of social organization and social consciousness.”\(^{18}\) She contends that study of the kibbutz in 1981 has much to reveal about “incongruities between communal norms and roles in the larger society, between ideology and material pressure…and the relationship between nationalism and socialism and between communal development and individuality.”\(^{19}\) Between her time of writing and the present, most, if not all, of the dichotomies she lists have come to a head in kibbutzim, resulting in the erosion of the need-based model. And as Rayman hoped to better understand the kibbutz model

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\(^{17}\) Her only mention of a major shift in economic policy occurs in the final chapter, in which Rayman discusses the success of Israel in the late 1970s in opening up international markets to exports. Ibid, 215.

\(^{18}\) Ibid, 3.

\(^{19}\) Ibid, 4.
through its relationship to the state, and vice versa, this study hopes to explain that erosion through a parallel, expanded analysis, spanning proclamation of the first kibbutz in 1910 through the present day. If Rayman’s underlying aims concerned tensions between opposing principles that had not yet yielded a major crisis, this study’s underlying aim is to explain the historical occurrence of kibbutz renewal by the shifting relationship between the kibbutzim and the society within which they functioned.

While no comprehensive account of privatization and renewal explained by the kibbutz’s relationship to the state through the 21st century, privatization and renewal themselves have been thoroughly explored. A first major work on the topic was Eliezer Ben-Rafael’s *Crisis and Transformation: The Kibbutz at Century’s End* (1997). This study, begun in 1991, reflected field research financed by the Yad Tabenkin Research Center, the internal research apparatus of the Unified Kibbutz Movement, and attempted to explain contemporaneous social and economic changes across kibbutzim. By dint of its publication date, this book does not focus on the single most substantial shift—full income privatization—because, by 1997, only ten or so kibbutzim had voted to follow that route. Instead, the book reveals much about smaller changes to the need-based model that led up to this apex of privatization, including but not limited to growing stratification in the kibbutz labor force,

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20 The United Kibbutz Movement, abbreviated to ‘TAKAM’, was the last iteration of the Kibbutz HaMeuchad Federation, which has since merged with the Kibbutz Artzi Federation to form a single Kibbutz Movement. See the glossary for more thorough explanations of each federation, and chapter two for a delineation of their differences and relationship with one another.
privatization of consumption, decrease in directly democratic practices, abolition of collective social practices like joint childrearing, and changes to management structure.\textsuperscript{23} The project was commissioned by (and for) The United Kibbutz Movement to contextualize kibbutz change against broader theory of social change; hence most of Ben-Rafael’s conclusions concern \textit{internal} roots of change, like growing preference for profitability or individualism among kibbutz members.\textsuperscript{24} There are moments when the author sees these findings in broader perspective, for example, finding connections with the Israeli recession of the early 1980s. These are rare moments. The work is thus a window into the kibbutzim’s perceptions of their own changes in the 1990s, as only tangentially related to the kibbutz’s changing relationship to the state. Beyond this broader account, Ben-Rafael employs Weber’s theory of social change to explain decision making in the kibbutz, wherein “…even the most radical changes are…accounted for by given aspects of the existing culture itself, and thereby, also imply social and cultural continuity.”\textsuperscript{25} I draw on his Weberian account, to help explain events discussed in the fourth chapter of this study.

In 2013, the sociologists’ Raymond Russell and Robert Hanneman, and the economist Shlomo Getz published \textit{The Renewal of the Kibbutz: From Reform to Transformation}, an account of kibbutz privatization and renewal based on over two decades of sociological and economic research. Their comprehensive, concise delineation of these changes, to my reading, offer a narrow explanation of kibbutz transformation: that decreasing organizational inertia in some kibbutzim allowed them to change more rapidly, while high levels of organizational inertia in other

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid, 181-183.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid, 156-157.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid, 9.
kibbutzim preserved the need-based model. Underlying their hypothesis is the conjecture that, between 1990 and the 2010s, the kibbutzim’s needs for “material and human resources proved stronger than their loyalty to their traditions.” Indeed, I reach similar conclusions in chapter four of this thesis, but The Renewal of the Kibbutz lacks sufficient contextual historical exploration to explain how loyalty to the need-based tradition of the kibbutz was overcome by material constraints. Ultimately, it is their treatment of the kibbutz as an isolatable model—not as a specifically Israeli phenomenon heavily impacted by even subtle changes to the national agenda—that create the lacuna I perceive in this volume. In this thesis, then, I hope to synthesize Russell, Hanneman, and Getz’s focus on kibbutz renewal with Rayman’s focus on connections between kibbutz and state.

Also notable are the original arguments featured in certain essays in Michal Palgi and Shulamit Reinharz’s anthology, One Hundred Years of Kibbutz Life. Alon Pauker contends that the 1980s economic crisis yielded total organizational transformations across kibbutzim because many members by that point no longer felt passionately about the precept of collectivism. Pauker, whose perspective is similar to that of Russell, Hanneman, and Getz, explains the rise of individualistic tendencies and ideological ambivalence in kibbutzim in the late 20th century in terms of shifts in how the kibbutz model was regarded in 1948, when the Yishuv turned into the State of Israel. At this point, Pauker claims, the kibbutz “was no longer perceived as the

27 Ibid, 104.
spearhead pioneer of significant current endeavors,” leading members to begin to see the kibbutz as a “home” rather than a mission-oriented community, which in turn allowed for increased openness to change in organizational structure. Though I take up elements of Pauker’s account in chapter two, I note the ambiguity of his conclusion, the contention that as a long-term effect of Israeli statehood, “ever since 1985…[the kibbutz] did not demonstrate the self-confidence or relevance that would mitigate the crisis.” The reader is left wondering whether talk of “lack of self-confidence” refers to the community’s resilience or to the need-based model itself.

The following essay in Palgi and Reinharz’s volume, by Alon Gan, resolves the ambiguity in Pauker’s argument. He provides first-hand accounts and statistical evidence to show that, by the 1980s, many kibbutz members were not only apprehensive about the need-based model but were adamantly opposed to it. He echoes Pauker’s observation that kibbutzim became more associated with “home” than “mission” among members—and pairs this observation with a detailed account of objections to kibbutz norms voiced by members in the 1960s and 1970s. Taken together, Pauker and Gan’s work—and broader theoretical contentions embedded in their arguments—strongly inform the theoretical framework of this study. I share the views that, while the kibbutz model served a critical role in early Zionist state-building processes, its diminishing role after independence in 1948 decreased confidence among kibbutz members in the need-based model; and that this represents an ideological and psychological phenomenon enhanced by major national political

30 Ibid.
and economic events of the late 20th century. The material and ideological impact of
national events led to the phenomena that Russell, Hanneman, and Getz call “reform
and transformation.”

**Methods and Intentions**

To this point, I have summarized key studies of the kibbutz model and its
transformation that have critically informed my thinking, and arguments with which I
am frequently in conversation in the chapters that follow. I travelled to Beit Zera in
the summer of 2017 to conduct oral historical research long before this study took on
its current scope and orientation, when I was only vaguely familiar with the literature
described above. Even then, though, I was sure that any research I pursued involving
the kibbutz should be imbued with a degree of the personal largely absent from
existing economic and historical accounts. To achieve this, I followed Rayman’s
model of using history of a single kibbutz to explore the role of the kibbutz as a
broader institution in state and nation-building processes. In explaining her
methodology, she writes:

> This approach permits an intensive examination of community life from the
> pre-state era until the present. Building upon *The Sociological Imagination* of
> C. W. Mills, this study relies on a historical perspective for the study of social
> change in relation to external events.\(^{32}\)

> In *The Sociological Imagination*, Mills points out that social scientists often
> focus on “issues”—difficulties or phenomena that plague society—and rarely delve
> into “troubles,” which occur on an individual basis.\(^{33}\) He argues that greater attention
> paid to individual experience by social scientists might yield fuller understanding of

\(^{32}\) Rayman, 4-5.

accurately locating institutions within a historical narrative.\textsuperscript{34} Rayman heeded Mill’s advice, oscillating between minutia of Kibbutz Har’s narrative and the broad narrative of Israeli history. Though her method creates ample room for stories of Har to inform understanding the kibbutz’s role in the state, she shies away from extensive use of quotations. By contrast, interview material is the central source in my study.

Personal connections to Beit Zera go a long way towards explaining this choice. After having grown up in Carmiel, a city in Northern Israel, my mother and her family immigrated to Houston, Texas, in the early 1980s, chasing economic opportunity. After two years of unhappiness, my mother moved back to Israel by herself at the age of 16. Between 1984 and 1986 (until she turned 18 and joined the Israeli Defense Force) my mother lived in Beit Zera, as an “outside student” in the 

*mossad* (hybrid high school and living space for teenage children of members). Eventually, she joined her family back to the United States and never became a member of Beit Zera. Yet when I ask her about the years she spent there, she is unwavering in her love and appreciation for the need-based model.

It molded me as a human being who went on to live in a capitalist society in such a profound way because I’ve always gone on to believe that whether you are the gardener or the milkman or the doorman or the garbage man or the teacher, everyone should be treated equally. I think the kibbutz model succeeded at least in that. That’s the part of socialism that I will never give up on. Every person that works a full day’s job is contributing something to our society that is valuable. If someone likes medicine and wants to study that, then good for them! But why should they be paid more than the garbage man, without whom the streets would be filled with garbage, and everyone would be sick.\textsuperscript{35}

The years that my mother lived in Beit Zera are critical years in this study, for they are the same years that the ESP was passed and that Beit Zera, along with most

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid, 13.

\textsuperscript{35} Mayrav Fisher, interview with the author, March 28, 2018.
other kibbutzim, entered into a major debt settlement with the Israeli government that would heavily impact its economic future. But my mother, when I asked her, did not remember hearing about those happenings at all. As the above quote illustrates, even living in the kibbutz in the midst of an economic crisis throwing its collectivist precepts into question was not enough to fully counteract appeal of the model. However, other stories she conveyed reveal that she did come into contact with a growing sense of desire for a more individualistic, less different way of life among other teenagers in the kibbutz, even if the connection was never drawn between those desires and the economic crisis raging on a national scale.

When my mother arrived in Beit Zera, she brought two suitcases full of expensive clothing purchased with babysitting money made prior to her arrival. She was embarrassed by her excess, afraid it made her appear incompatible with the socialist way of life, so she bartered all of it for four pairs of Levi jeans and four blue workman’s shirts, the uniform of kibbutz youth at the time. But while she tried to conform to her perception of the right kind of Beit Zera member, the rest of the girls “went gaga for the [bartered] clothes,” flaunting them at every turn.36 Similarly, she once brought a friend from the kibbutz to visit an aunt and uncle Herzliya, who had a private house. The friend was blown away by the size and design of the house. “One day I’ll have a house like that,” she said.37 In retelling these stories, my mother reconsiders her earlier answer to my question on whether or not she noticed any changes to the need-based model in her time in Beit Zera.

Even as a young, clueless person, I knew that kibbutz members were not supposed to be materialistic, but I saw this interest and passion among them in

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36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
anything from the United States, in working there and traveling away from Israel. Our conversations were never about idealism and how to sustain kibbutz living, not at all, even though it was fully a kibbutz in terms of having to work in the fields, give ten hours a week as teenagers. It’s not like we were not part of a very functional socialist community, but everybody’s heart seemed to be going elsewhere, towards capitalism.  

The contradictions embedded in my mother’s memories of Beit Zera in the mid-1980s show the fruitfulness of interview-based research. Studies like *Crisis and Transformation* or *From Reform to Transformation* are able to extract conclusions based on large statistical samples and extensive surveys but their methods do not allow room for the complexity (and often contradictory nature) of members’ though processes that led them to make those choices. In studying the kibbutz as a historical development rather than simply a model, detailed personal accounts of living in the community reveal the range of experiences and perceptions that create the whole. The kibbutz, after all, is a democratic community made up of individuals. Following Ben-Rafael’s use of Weber’s theory of change, I give voice to kibbutz members in an account of changes in the kibbutz rooted in consensus derived from shared experience.

I was inspired to showcase the many voices of kibbutz members—instead of turning them into third-person narrative—by Amia Lieblich’s *Kibbutz Makom*, an oral history of an anonymous kibbutz, also published in 1981. Her work is pure oral history, a series of 59 interviews with sparse interjections by the author only to introduce interviewees and provide minimal contextual information for each block of interview themes.  

By interviewing members of various ages, genders, political affiliations, and ideological inclinations, *Kibbutz Makom* paints a vivid picture of

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38 Ibid.
complexities of kibbutz life and how those complexities change over time. In combining Rayman’s and Lieblich’s methods, I hope to have reached a more complete historical argument that traces relationships between Mills’ categories of “troubles” and “issues” without losing the variety of voices allowed by extensive inclusion of interviews.

In the summer I spent in Beit Zera, I interviewed 27 of its members, ranging from middle-aged to pensioners, all of whom had been present at the 2008 community vote to privatize income. I also consulted Beit Zera’s archives, where I found most of the photographs included in this study. It was with the help of the archivist, and with extensive consultation of Beit Zera’s internal calendar, that I was able to make precise an accurate history of Beit Zera to supplement first-hand accounts I heard in interviews.

Given that the arc of this study follows the relationship between kibbutz and nation, I was fortunate to draw on several excellent histories to advance my understanding of each domain. To ground Beit Zera’s story in history of the kibbutz, Henry Near’s meticulous and expansive *The Kibbutz Movement: A History* (Volume I, *Origins and Growth: 1909-1939*, and Volume II, *Crisis and Achievement, 1939-1995*) became my bible. As for national Israeli history, much of the literature that informed my thinking is in that corner of Israel studies critical of ethno-nationalist trends in Israeli history, for example, attending to issues related to the Palestinian *Nakba* (catastrophe) resulting from achievement of Israeli statehood, continued occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, and ethnic and religious disparities that color Israeli society within the 1967 borders. Of particular note here are Michael Shalev’s *Labour*
and the Political Economy in Israel and Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled’s Being Israeli. The former is a comprehensive political economy analysis of Israeli institutions (political and economic) from the pre-state period through the 1980s. Shalev’s work was instrumental to building this study’s account of the relationship between pre-state Zionist organizations and the Jewish labor movement in Ottoman Palestine and BMP in chapter one.40

Shafir and Peled provide an innovative framework for conceptualizing Israeli history in terms of “the relationship between identity and citizenship in Israeli society…and the differential rights, duties and privileges that are accorded to each group.”41 Their basic idea is that Israeli society has engendered multiple layers of citizenship. This is crucial as it relates to the kibbutz’s embodiment of what they call a “republican discourse of civic virtue,” a product of the Jewish labor movement’s romanticization of giving oneself over to a mission larger than the individual.42 The authors argue that the centrality of republicanism in Israeli citizenship discourse—manifested in kibbutz ideology as “self-fulfillment”—conceals the inconsistency between the inclusionary character of democratic citizenship and the exclusionary character of ethno-nationalist Jewish citizenship.43 The kibbutz, in embodying this republicanism, is thus conceptualized in this study as a reflection of the pre-state and early state ideological hegemony.

42 Ibid, 33.
43 Ibid.
As this study traces connections between the kibbutz and the state, a significant recurring theme is the kibbutz’s embodiment of Labor Zionism of the Yishuv and early state. The literature described above helped me understand that similarities between kibbutz and state were not only in declared commitment to principles of egalitarianism but also in practical exclusion of certain population groups. Indeed, the kibbutz project and the Israeli state came into being as a result of the same Zionist settler-colonization practices—cheap land purchasing, economic exclusion, and physical expulsion. These parallelisms between kibbutz and nation (in ideological orientations, in frameworks of exclusion and inclusion, and in central mission)—as well as deviations from those parallelisms—are vital connecting threads in the chapters that follow.

**Chapter Outline**

Chapter one introduces the reader to Beit Zera’s founding in 1927 before leapfrogging backwards three decades to the advent of Zionist thought in late 19th century Europe. Moving past Europe and through Ottoman Palestine and then British Mandate Palestine (BMP), this chapter shows how the primary goal of the Zionist movement in this period—to establish a sizeable Jewish presence in Palestine—was largely achieved with the help of the kibbutz model of settlement. Particular attention is paid to the synthesis of socialist-oriented ideology with Zionist nationalist ideology resulting from coalescence of the Zionist Organization (later to become the World Zionist Organization, or WZO) with various organizations under the Jewish Labor movement umbrella. The kibbutz, in this period, embodied this synthesis of ideas. For
much of the pre-state period, then, the kibbutz was both instrumental to material goals of Zionist activity and consistent with institutional Zionism’s ideological orientation.

Chapter two shows how this consistency with and instrumentality to state-building processes was significantly undermined as soon as the agenda of Yishuv institutions shifted away from merely establishing a Jewish presence, towards establishment and consolidation of a state. The Jewish labor movement in the 1930s and 1940s became less reliant on kibbutzim for settlement as more waves of immigrants arrived and were absorbed by other settlement models. This chapter will show growth of proto-state institutions that explicitly rank socialist interests as secondary to national interests, particularly in situations when these two ideologies came into conflict. Still, I draw on first-hand account and narrative in this chapter to establish that Israeli national policy (economic) and attitude (ideological) remained, with certain exceptions, sympathetic to the kibbutz as embodiment of the pioneering Zionist ethic. This was true through the late 1970s, even as the need-based model was not generalized to a national framework. The growth that Beit Zera underwent in this period, and its older members’ accounts of the roots and impact of said growth, support this chapter’s broader historical argument.

Factors that began to undermine the need-based kibbutz model are introduced in chapter two; such factors come to a head in chapter three. This chapter traces changes in Israel’s demography and politics between between 1948 and 1977 that led to erosion of the Labor coalition’s credibility and, eventually, created the “ma’apach” (overturning of power) in 1977. Likud’s win meant that the kibbutz model was suddenly neither consistent with nor instrumental to aims of the Israeli state. This
chapter details how this sudden change unraveled in slow policy changes, with a
focus on the Economic Stabilization Plan of 1985 and its negative impact on Kibbutz
movement-wide financial standings. By chapter’s end, I establish that Beit Zera’s
members’ perceptions of the need-based model—its merits and its viability—were
heavily altered by this series of national events.

In chapter four, I start with a discussion of factors leading to erosion of the
need-based kibbutz model in Beit Zera, as in over 75% of other Israeli kibbutzim. I
then delineate what the contemporary kibbutz safety-net looks like, what parts of
original ideology still inform its economic structure, and the degree to which a
dominant neo-liberal mentality has defined new kibbutz policies and protocols.

This thesis, by its close, alludes to certain theoretical questions outside the
scope of my research: is the cooperative model viable as a part of a capitalist
economy? Is a cooperative economic model viable at all? Do certain factors—in
particular, wealth, size of community, frequency of choice, and democratic process—
increase the viability of a cooperative? These are all critical questions on which the
history of the kibbutz project provides great insight. Yet my aim in this study is to
explore the kibbutz project as a historically and geographically-specific phenomenon,
and ways in which its particular relationship to development of the Israeli state
defined its changes and continuities over time. Generalizing from the case study of
the kibbutz as a cooperative in these pages would distract from this aim. Ran
Abramitzky’s *The Mystery of the Kibbutz: Egalitarian Principles in a Capitalist
World* (2018), however, addresses such questions, arguing that ideological fervor
within kibbutzim and the broader environment in which they functioned allowed
them to “overcome their contradictions,” with respect to the so-called “free-rider problem” and the temptations of exit. Abramitzky’s data are comprehensive (I make frequent use of his chart of modern day kibbutzim in the chapters below) and his analysis of viability is thorough. Nevertheless, further attention is merited regarding origins of the relationship between this particular Israeli state and the kibbutz—and the voices of kibbutz members as reflect understanding (or lack thereof) of shifts in that relationship. If Abramitzky’s economic research answers the political and social sub-textual questions of this study, I hope to have answered the political and social sub-textual questions concerning the economic viability of the kibbutz.

CHAPTER ONE

The Jewish Labor Movement, The Kibbutz and Cooperative Colonization

For estimating the true value of agricultural colonization, we must view it in connection with Zionist activity as a whole, and not as something apart.

Arthur Ruppin, 1925

On August 20th, 1927, 25 German and Galician Jews moved from the abandoned Arab village of Um Juni, on the bank of the Jordan River, to an empty plot of land just 2 kilometers away. Here, they would begin building a kibbutz named Beit Zera. Beit Zera was to join the dozens of kibbutzim founded in the preceding decades, sprinkled across British Mandate Palestine. The chapter will explore the

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ways in which this wave of kibbutz growth was different from all other contemporaneous settlement building in the Yishuv. I contend that the socialistic, self-sacrificing, and communal qualities of the model were uniquely instrumental to solving the challenges encountered in the beginning stages of Zionist colonization. Key to this narrative is the qualifier “beginning years,” for the kibbutz model’s instrumentality began to wane once a certain critical mass of permanent Jewish living communities was reached. The story of Beit Zera’s founding illuminates the simultaneously symbiotic and contradictory relationship between the kibbutz model and the Zionist aims of nation and state building.

A note on nomenclature: the term “kibbutz” came into use in the early 1920s to refer to a federation of socialistic agricultural communes, not a single commune itself.46 “Kibbutz” only entered the Modern Hebrew lexicon with its current definition in the late 1920s, when the average kibbutz expanded in population size (10-20 members to 30-50 members) and in production (to include light industry on top of agriculture).47 In the first decades of the 1900s, the rural, agricultural communes that are today known as kibbutzim were called “kvutzot.” But abiding by a chronological distinction between kibbutz and kvutza does not suit this analysis because there was no definitive moment in which kvutzot became kibbutzim; the transition came organically, on the ground, and varied across different federations, political parties, and youth movements. This complication is immediately discernible in the history of the first kibbutz, Degania. At its founding in 1910, the settlement was called a “kvutza,” by its own members, by the Jewish labor movement (JLM) community at

46 Near, Volume 1, 67.
47 Ibid, 93.
large, and by the Zionist Organization that subsidized its costs. Degania exists today, in 2018, as a kibbutz, and its self-written history explains that the kibbutz—not the kvutza—was founded in 1910. How to explain this discrepancy?

Henry Near, preeminent scholar of kibbutz history, contends that for the sake of historiography, “kibbutz” may be used as a “comprehensive name for communal settlement,” even if its narrower definition does not apply to the earliest communal settlement in the Yishuv. “Kvutza,” similarly, has at least two meanings: it might refer to the “small, permanently settled, purely agricultural communal groups” of the first decades of the 20th century, but it can also be used to describe any group of settlers pursuing communal living and work together.

This work will honor the dual meanings of “kibbutz” and “kvutza.” By clarifying how I will navigate these overlapping terms, I hope to raise the accessibility of historical material in which the common use of Hebrew words already complicates reading.

**The Kibbutz Model: 1908-1923**

Understanding the social and economic particularities of the early kibbutz model is key to comprehending its integral role in early Zionist settlement. It would be historically inaccurate to claim that all kibbutzim in this period were identical in model and in practice; as will become clear below, their variances manifested in many ways, from differences in membership size, to the relationship between labor and income, to the sectoral makeup of production, to the Jewish youth movement

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49 Near, *Volume 1*, 408.

50 Ibid.
with which each kibbutz was associated.\textsuperscript{51} And yet, there are basic tenets that can be isolated as distinct to \textit{all} early kibbutzim. Even if such a generalization obfuscates the details of the development of the kibbutz itself, it renders the history of the relation of the kibbutz to the proto-state (and later, the state itself) clearer.

The first permanent kvutzot were distinguished from other settlements in the Yishuv by two defining features: 1) some form of communal living and 2) collective responsibility for production. The latter feature, as a supplement to the initial capital and land outlays from Zionist and Jewish labor-oriented non-profits, paid for communal living expenses. The combination of these two characteristics remained essential to the kibbutz for decades to come, even as the model grew to involve more specific guidelines and tenets.

In practice, an early permanent kvutza settlement looked like this: one or two dozen young adults, ages 15-25, waking up at dawn to begin a long day of work. A majority of these early kibbutz members were men, and they would generally work in agricultural fields or tend to the livestock in the barn (if there was one). In the Jordan Valley, where Beit Zera was founded among many of the first permanent kvutzot, crops included bananas, alfalfa, grape vines, and wheat, though it took some years for the settlers to discover what would grow well in each environment.\textsuperscript{52} The women also assisted in agricultural work, but they were more frequently assigned traditional “women’s work,” albeit work necessary to keeping the community functional and fed: laundry, childcare, cooking for the dining hall.\textsuperscript{53} Breakfast, lunch, and dinner were eaten collectively, at regular hours. After the day’s work, all members would

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid, 79.
\textsuperscript{52} Beit Zera Historical Calendar.
\textsuperscript{53} Near, \textit{Volume 1}, 49.
convene for a nightly meeting to assign jobs for the next day and discuss any other pertinent matters. Legend has it that these meetings often lasted until the crack of dawn on the following workday.\textsuperscript{54} The cycle would repeat itself daily, with rare and infrequent discrepancy: the occasional secular holiday celebration (like May Day or a secularized version of the Jewish harvest festival, \textit{Sukkot}), a birthday celebration, or a late night of folk dancing.\textsuperscript{55} These aberrations from the rigid schedule of working, sleeping, and eating were also always communal. This general contour of early kibbutz life highlights the critical social and economic principles of the permanent kvutza: communalism, democracy, and equality (social, among men at least, and distributional).

In kibbutz oral tradition, there is a famous saying: “a tea kettle in the living quarters will be the end of the kibbutz.”\textsuperscript{56} If a member could make tea and drink it in the privacy of the room, they might stop drinking tea every night with the rest of the kvutza, which would be the first step down the path of individualism. Indeed, from the beginning, kibbutz culture was marked by extreme anti-individualism, a product of the founding generation’s fear that any indulgence in personal ownership would undermine passion for and fidelity to the cooperative way of life. The rigid adherence to communalism in all spheres, then, was meant to serve as a protection against individual material desire. Even if a member \textit{wanted} to stray from the model, the kibbutz framework blocked any channels through which a member could explore such temptation. This mechanism was buttressed by the ideological commitment to the premise that in a totally equal utopian society, the idea of individual expression of

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Koller} Yair Koller, personal interview, June 21st, 2017.
\bibitem{Near} Near, \textit{Volume 1}, 41.
\bibitem{Nesher} Sarah Nesher, personal interview, June 21\textsuperscript{st}, 2017.
\end{thebibliography}
taste was moot. Consider the famous socialist adage, “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs;” in the early kibbutzim, homogeneity in age, background and mission of members eliminated any significant difference in the second clause.57

In housing, this was manifest in a categorical rejection of private home ownership.58 And while what the alternative looked like varied over the years, in the first several decades, it generally meant that members would sleep several heads to a space, in a combination of sturdy concrete multi-purpose buildings and tents.59 Growth of permanent infrastructure typically lagged behind the growth of membership, because each new garin (an organized group of Jewish immigrants drawn from labor-oriented youth movements in Europe, sent to help settle the Yishuv) would double or triple the population size. Moreover, the membership size in these years—between 10 and 30 people per permanent kvutza—was not enough to facilitate serious infrastructural growth and agricultural work.60 As a product of both material constraint and ideological commitment, members of the earliest kibbutz model lived communally and spartanly, with little to no privacy.

The democracy of the kvutza and early kibbutz was nearly 100% direct. Each night, all members would meet to allocate the next day’s work, while additional meetings occurred weekly or biweekly to deal with other issues: budgeting, chore rotations beyond agricultural work, the state of the kibbutz as a political project,

58 Barkai, 4.
59 Near, Volume 1, 39.
60 Ibid, 41.
internal social concerns, and everything in between.\textsuperscript{61} Such \textit{sichot kibbutz} (kibbutz meetings), presided over by a \textit{mazkir} (m) or \textit{mazkira} (f) (the frequently rotating leadership position) were held frequently, to ensure collective decision making was constant, and reflected the wants and needs of the community.\textsuperscript{62}

As a social feature, the application of the principle of equality varied from kvutza to kvutza more than the aforementioned features did, particularly in the treatment of women. In theory, though, every kibbutz of the Yishuv period, beginning with Degania, subscribed to the ideas of a) inclusion of women in the labor force, and b) of the “abolition of the bourgeois family.”\textsuperscript{63} The former meant that all members of the kibbutz, irrespective of gender or age, should be able to participate equally in work, chore rotations, nightly meetings, and day-to-day community building through socializing. For this to be possible, the logic went, women could not be stuck at home taking care of the children. Childcare was labor, just like working in the banana fields or cooking in the dining hall, and it would be similarly incorporated into the kibbutz structure.\textsuperscript{64} \textit{Lina meshutefet} (joint childrearing) thus became the rule: children would be raised from infancy with other babies born at the same time in the \textit{beit yeladim} (children’s house). The concept of nuclear family was never fully abolished—at different points in kibbutz history, the methods of cultivating a relationship between

\textsuperscript{62} Near, \textit{Volume I}, 37-38.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid, 86-87. Ironically, the men of the Degania kvutza did not well enforce this policy in the beginning: women were neither members nor participants in the agricultural work, but relegated to cooking and cleaning. There is an extensive literature on the incongruence between theory and practice of feminism on the kibbutz, particularly in these early decades: see Deborah S. Bernstein’s \textit{Pioneers and Homemakers: Jewish Women in Pre-State Israel}, Alison Bowes’ anthology, “Women in the Kibbutz Movement,” and Walter de Gruyter’s \textit{Dynamics of Gender Borders: Women in Israel’s Cooperative Settlements}.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid, 50-51.
biological parents and children morphed in various ways—but the nuclear family was definitively secondary to the idea of kibbutz family.

![Two female members of Beit Zera hanging the community’s laundry. Beit Zera Archives.](image)

Adherence to equality as an economic principle was clear-cut. Regardless of a member’s labor input, he or she would receive equal provisions of food, drink, housing, healthcare, and clothing. Kibbutz members rarely worked in one job for any significant of time, an arrangement that helped sustain the belief that all work was equally imperative to the kibbutz’s survival and, thus, should not dictate differential income distribution. Personal income was entirely absent, and it was not until the 1950s and ‘60s that kibbutzim began to implement a budgetary system of equal per capita allocation of kibbutz profits to their members (like an internal universal basic income). In these early years, such a system was alien, for ideological and practical
reasons, as there was no surplus profit to fund consumption beyond subsistence, and providing basic material needs was more cheaply achieved collectively.\textsuperscript{65}

In this period, third-party benefactors covered most of the kibbutzim’s major initial production and living costs. In 1908, the Jewish National Fund (JNF)—the financial arm of the World Zionist Organization—commenced a practice of purchasing land and leasing it to settlements, including kibbutzim, for 49-year periods of time at incremental rates.\textsuperscript{66} In the case of the first permanent kvutzot (pl.), other Diaspora and local Zionist non-profits also covered the costs of capital outlays and needed supplies, like food and healthcare.\textsuperscript{67} The long-term payoff for these organizations from investing in the kibbutz model will become clear later in this chapter. But for now, the emphasis should be on the fact that until the late 1920s, most kibbutzim did not own the capital inputs and land that their labor inputs allowed to become thriving communities and units of production.\textsuperscript{68} If the permanent kvutza neither owned its own land nor accumulated significant profits, what was its purpose?

Internally, the purpose was to create a lifestyle that embodied rejection of the Western European bourgeois lifestyle, on the one hand, and a traditional, Orthodox Jewish lifestyle on the other, in favor of a third, radical way of organizing social and economic life. But what really separated the kibbutz settlement model from others secular communal settlement models in Palestine was the combination of this social structure with a producer and consumer cooperative.\textsuperscript{69} One might easily call the

\textsuperscript{65} Russell, Hanneman, and Getz, 25.
\textsuperscript{66} Near, Volume 1, 171.
\textsuperscript{67} Arthur Ruppin. Agricultural Colonization in Palestine (London: Martin Hopkinson and Company, 1926), 98.
\textsuperscript{68} Near, Volume 1, 93.
\textsuperscript{69} Hanneman, Russell, and Getz, 1.
kibbutz socialist and move on, because at its essence the structure followed the maxim “give what you can, take what you need.” And yet, the aforementioned particularities of the kibbutz structure go a long way towards explaining their centrality to early Zionist settlement. Most importantly, the rejection of a profit motive paired with a commitment to withstanding severe living conditions for the sake of turning the communal kvutza model into a permanent living community represented a perfect solution to a central dilemma the Zionist organizations and actors of this period faced: achieving successful permanent Jewish settlement beyond the urban centers of Palestine.

**The Multiplicity of Zionism**

In the preceding pages, I have used the term “Zionist” to describe a wide range of actors and organizations, many of which had interrelated but conflicting agendas. Stripped down to a most basic definition, Zionism before 1948 meant the belief in a sovereign nation-state for the Jewish people in the biblical land of Israel. The following section explores the ways in which that basic definition took different forms when combined with other values, ideologies, and material constraints. The conflicts among these multiple Zionisms—and the ways in which some of those visions superseded others at different moments in time—determined the unfolding of the State of Israel.

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70 After the founding and international recognition of Israel in 1948 and to the present, Zionism has come to mean the support of the existing Jewish state, and often morphs in political discourse to mean support for the government of the existing Jewish state. Today, Zionism has come to hold a more multi-faceted political meaning, particularly in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. To exit this paradigm of anti-Zionist vs. Zionist, many have taken to calling themselves “post-Zionist,” implying an adherence to the original definition I’ve outlined above. To a post-Zionist, the term Zionism is meaningless today because its goal—to establish a Jewish state in the land of Israel—was achieved nearly a century ago, and modern political discourse should be rooted in the realpolitik of today. A.B. Yehoshua, “Defining Zionism: The Belief that Israel Belongs to the Entire Jewish People.” *Haaretz*, May 21, 2013, [https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/premium-a-b-yehoshua-who-is-a-zionist-1.5267698](https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/premium-a-b-yehoshua-who-is-a-zionist-1.5267698).
Many argue that Zionism must be understood in the context of a much longer Jewish history. Though I cannot hope to give a succinct and sufficient history of Jews and Judaism in the modern period to provide as context for the Zionist moment, there is an important, long-standing feature of Jewish history to note. Between the destruction of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} temple and the first half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the Jewish people—in varying ways at different moments and in disparate places—were outsiders in foreign lands. In the modern period, until 1948, there was no Jewish State or Jewish empire. And yet—Jewishness, like certain other religions, was more than a faith to many of its followers. To be a Jew was often to be simultaneously ghettoized and encouraged, internally, to avoid contact with non-Jewish society.\textsuperscript{71} Far before the rise of Zionism in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, there was already a marked sense of Jewish identity separate from other cultural, national, or ethnic identities, even if that identity varied between geographic locations. The frequent ghettoization of Jewish communities exacerbated the sense that to be a Jew was one’s primary identification, marking one separate from the national or ethnic group surrounding the Jewish community at hand. In the Eastern Europe of the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries, for example, one might have been a Russian Jew, but rarely a Jewish Russian. This is not to say that there were not Jews who were heavily assimilated into the cultures of their physical surroundings.\textsuperscript{72} It is also not to say that the want for a sovereign nation was popular among Jews anywhere by the 19\textsuperscript{th} century—in fact, the Jewish population prescribing


\textsuperscript{72} Assimilation and Community: Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe, ed. Jonathan Frankel and Steven J. Zipperstein (Cambridge University Press, 2004).
to any version of Zionism at this point was a small minority of global Jewry.\textsuperscript{73} It is only to highlight a preexisting friction between a lack of a Jewish sovereign entity, in the one hand, and a presence of a shared ethnic Jewish identity, on the other.

By 1897, this state of dissonance—buttressed by increasingly violent anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe, the advent of nationalist fervor around the world, and the first cracks in European imperialism—had manifested in the burgeoning concept of Zionism. Theodor Herzl is treated in most of the literature on this topic as the father of Zionist thought. More precisely, he was the father of Political Zionism, which was both a) the broadest version of Zionism, and b) the version of Zionism that came to pass in full achievement of its stated agenda.\textsuperscript{74} Boiled down to its core, Political Zionism was the then-revolutionary idea that the Jewish people should have a sovereign state recognized by the international community, achieved through traditional channels of diplomacy. Most Zionism in this period, though not all, called for this state to arise in the biblical Jewish homeland, the site of the 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} temples, the land that God promised Abraham’s descendents in the Torah. This land was, even then, known in Jewish liturgical tradition as Israel, but, in 1897, was called Ottoman Palestine, a part of the Ottoman Empire.\textsuperscript{75} Herzl was a member of the bourgeois, assimilated Jewry of central Europe. Amidst growing nationalist fervor and competition between nations, he saw that Jews represented an economic and


\textsuperscript{75} The most famous version of Zionism with national aspirations not revolving around biblical Israel was “The Uganda Plan,” which would have given part of the then-British colony of East Africa to Jews as a respite from anti-Semitism.
social threat to the non-Jewish middle class; wherever there would be a minority of Jews in a modern nation-state, he claimed, there would be a natural response of anti-Semitism.\textsuperscript{76} He conceived of Political Zionism as a response to this diagnosis of anti-Semitism, an appeal to the self-interest of these European nations because Jews would move to their own state and stop posing a social and economic threat. But Political Zionism, Herzl argued, was also in the self-interest of the Jews, who in shedding their collective identity of “threatening minority” would better develop a positive, non-victim collective identity.\textsuperscript{77}

The First Zionist Congress, in 1897, was the culmination of Herzl’s effort to begin building diplomatic channels towards the fruition of this idea. The Congress, which took place in Basel, Switzerland, served as the first meeting of the Zionist Organization (ZO), today known as the World Zionist Organization (WZO), the international body dedicated towards the building (and, eventually, support) of a Jewish state.\textsuperscript{78} On that weekend in late August, with the turn of the century looming, 200 European Zionist gathered to put their program in writing. The aforementioned goal of Political Zionism, with its emphasis on Jewish sovereignty in Palestine, was the consensus in the room. But underneath this consensus, the Zionist movement at large was marked by acute factionalism.

One major disagreement centered on strategy. Should the ZO follow practical Zionism and pour its resources and efforts into getting Diaspora Jews to build settlements in Palestine, thereby creating a fact of Jewish life on the ground, or should

\textsuperscript{76} Herzl, in \textit{The Zionist Idea}, 199.  
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.  
it focus its energies on diplomatic and political channels—meeting with British, Ottoman, and American statesmen to garner their support? ⁷⁹

At the Eighth Zionist Congress, held at The Hague in 1907, rather than choosing one path or the other, the ZO settled on Synthetic Zionism. ⁸⁰ As the name suggests, Synthetic Zionism represented a combination of the two tactics. Introduced by Chaim Weizmann, who would become a major figure in the Jewish labor movement in the BMP and, later, a statesman of Israel, it called for a concerted financial and logistical effort to bring Jews from across the Diaspora willing to work the land and built up the infrastructural and societal foundations for a future state, while simultaneously working through diplomatic channels to cultivate support from global superpowers for such an endeavor. ⁸¹ In the years to come, as Palestine switched hands from the Ottomans to the British and as the British Empire began to crumble, the tactics of Zionist politics transformed from support-seeking to confrontational. ⁸² But back in the early 20th century, there were fundamental decisions to be made: if the ZO were to make a concerted effort towards settling Jews in Palestine, what would those settlements look like?

Such a decision would presumably define the character of the future state. In their 1989 book *Trouble in Utopia*, Dan Horowitz and Moshe Lissak explore the “overburdened polity of Israel” by dissecting the interactions of the competing ideologies, agendas, and national stories in Israel history. In describing the Israeli

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⁸² Near, *Volume 1*, 303.
case, they characterize ideology as a set of ideas that arrange the past, present, and future into an action-oriented narrative. Political Zionism, then, can be boiled down to the following: in the past, the Jewish people were given the land of Israel by God and lived there until the destruction of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} temple; in the present, the Jewish people are living in foreign nations and persecuted for their difference and for the economic and social fear they engender; in the future, there will be a sovereign Jewish state in the land of Israel.

The temporal specifics get messier when addressing each branch of Zionism that existed under this umbrella of Political Zionism. On one extreme was Religious Zionism, which saw the mass movement of Jews to the biblical homeland as a “future-oriented act in the present...[as] part of a sacred historical progression toward the end of historical time.” Religious Zionism emphasized the maintenance of a traditionally observant Judaism, and a future state that would embody that on a national scale.

Oppositely, Labor Zionism saw the Zionist project as a means of redefining Jewish life. A new society presented an opportunity to take from Jewish history but rebuild what it meant to be a Jew, away from reliance on whatever national economy Jews lived in and towards control over a whole system of life, from culture to economy to religion. Labor Zionism, which first flourished among young, radicalized Jews in the shtetls of Eastern Europe, was heavily influenced by the Bolshevik

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83 Horowitz and Lissak, 99
84 Ibid, 100
85 Ibid, 101
revolution in Russia.\(^{86}\) As an ideology, it represented a curious synthesis of nationalism and socialism, a mix that led to further factionalism among those who subscribed to its general vision. This splintering within Labor Zionism is important to this story, and its significance will be expanded upon below. But at this juncture, it is important to note the presence—if not emphasis—across all articulations of Labor Zionism on class struggle and Jewish struggle. The future Jewish state imagined by Labor Zionists, though perhaps not purely socialist, would seek to incorporate ideas of social and economic equality, as well as Jewish control over the means of production.

If Labor Zionism was a synthesis of contemporaneous nationalism and socialism, Revisionist Zionism eschewed the radicalism of Eastern Europe but embraced Jewish national ambition with zeal, amplifying the latent militarism of less partisan Political Zionist thought. Coined by Ze’ev Jabotinsky in his 1923 manifesto “The Iron Wall,” this ideology chastised synthetic Zionism and called for rapid change to achieve the goal of a Jewish homeland with “one fell swoop.”\(^{87}\) Thus, its underground Jewish militias—terrorist groups of their time—attempted to take matters (of getting rid of the British Mandate and of outnumbering or expelling the existing Palestinian Arab population) into their own hands.\(^{88}\) In theory, the building of pre-state Jewish settlements was counterintuitive to the Revisionists, a distraction from achieving statehood rapidly and effectively. But as the British Mandate continued to rule Palestine into the ‘20s and ‘30s, its followers conceded that it was


\(^{87}\) Horowitz and Lissak, 103.

\(^{88}\) Near, *Volume 1*, 301-312.
preferable to no settlement at all. Unlike Labor Zionists, Revisionist Zionists were not interested in building a classless, or even socially democratic, society. In fact, along with much of the General Zionist camp (those who subscribed to Political Zionism with no accoutrements), Revisionist Zionists argued that the Yishuv would be built fastest via private enterprise, following what came to be called “the Rothschild model” (to be described below). 89

These four ideological camps—political, religious, labor, and revisionist—represent the general contours of Zionism at the turn of the century, especially those branches of Zionism that were a) active in the ZO and b) had a presence in Palestine.

The First Two Aliyot: Zionism and Competitive Labor

As if often the case with ideologies in practice, there was significant overlap among the tenets of the above-described Zionisms, and very many leaders subscribed to more than one. David Ben Gurion, for example, was a part of the overarching Jewish labor movement, but was also a key actor in the arena of Political Zionism. This particular combination—of Political and Labor Zionism—became critical in the second decade of the 20th century. But the question of Zionist ideologies and their impacts on Jewish settlement in Ottoman Palestine and the BMP did not enter into an empty land. Three decades earlier, in the Ottoman Palestine of 1880, there was already a small but well-assimilated Jewish population. Paul Rivlin, a scholar of Israeli economic history, puts the 1882 population count of Jews in Ottoman Palestine at 25,000. 90 Other scholars put the number closer to 10,000. 91 Either way, at

89 Ibid, 111.
maximum, the Jewish population of Palestine before the rise of Zionist thought and activity was under 10% of the total population. These Jews had generally come from elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire, and had no realistic ambitions of a Jewish nation-state in Palestine; if such sentiments were expressed, they were in relation to a Messianic end of history.92

In the relevant scholarship, 1882 marks the beginning of the First Aliya (mass Jewish immigration) to Ottoman Palestine. Note that the beginning of this period precedes the First Zionist Congress. This temporal gap reveals the complex dynamics of Jewish settlement in Palestine and the organized Zionist Diaspora: much of that early Zionist period settlement was not funded by the ZO itself. And though many of the 25,000 Russian and Romanian Jews of the First Aliya took up agricultural work, the economic structure of the majority of these settlements did not follow the socialist logic of future Labor Zionist settlement.93 With the aid of subsidized wages and land investment from the French Jewish millionaire Baron Edmund De Rothschild (one of the earliest private benefactors of Zionist activity), the immigrants of the First Aliya pursued private agricultural development. Baron Rothschild’s direct assistance helped counteract the Jewish immigrants’ scant agricultural experience and lack of familiarity with the terrain, factors that made them less competitive in the agricultural labor market than indigenous Palestinian workers.94 As historian of Israeli labor Michael Shalev writes, the individuals attempting to actualize Zionism on the ground

92 Lockman, 23.
94 Ibid, 141.
“were at a pronounced disadvantage…[as] they were both less productive [as a result of often not coming from an agriculture background] and inherently more expensive [because they were entirely reliant on wage labor, while much of the local Palestinian population was semi proletarian, having access to land and income beyond farming wages].”  

Moreover, those Jewish settlers who succeeded in acquiring land and building private enterprise in this period most often shirked the role they were asked to play by the Zionist Organization of facilitating Jewish employment, hiring cheaper, more productive Palestinian labor instead.

While Baron Rothschild’s support enabled the founding of some successful Jewish settlements, a great percentage of the First Aliya—an estimated half of 35,000 immigrants—returned to where they had come from, unprepared for the backbreaking labor the Zionist project required. Looking to the future, Zionists of all stripes had to contend with the failure of the First Aliya if they hoped to significantly increase the Jewish presence in Palestine. Practically speaking, the major Zionist institutions and organizations at play were now tasked with conceiving a solution to the plain reality: the comparative disadvantage of Jewish laborers in Palestine was a major cause of the First Aliya’s low immigrant retention rate.

This comparative disadvantage became the material underpinning of the Jewish labor movement’s ideology of *Avodah Ivrit* (Hebrew Labor): that Jews must return to agricultural work or, at the very least, hire other Jews to do manual labor, to reclaim the means of production and empower a Jewish sovereignty. In the thirty years of the Yishuv, and throughout modern Israeli history, Hebrew labor—as a

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95 Ibid, 140.
96 Russell, Hanneman, and Getz, 13.
97 Shalev, *Appendix 1 in Labour and the Political Economy in Israel*, 338.
value—was often cited as justification for policy, like the Yishuv National Council’s decision to cut off unemployment aid in the wake of a major economic crisis in 1927 to ensure that the Zionist project would not perpetuate the former reliance of Jews on institutional aid. But the implicit message of Hebrew labor, particularly in the Yishuv context, was a call for separation from the existing Arab production sphere. In this way, under the cloak of Zionist Labor ideology, the theory of Hebrew labor served as a tool to facilitate the growth and sustainability of an exclusively Jewish economy. When Baron Rothschild cut off wage subsidization in 1900, then, it was no wonder that members of the next Aliya turned to this concept as a way to maintain sustainable agriculture.

The transformation of Hebrew labor from theory to practice began in the Second Aliya (1904 to 1914), the first cohesive immigration of Eastern European Jews to Palestine who were either ideologically committed to the agenda of Labor Zionism or tempted by the promises of a new, economically-independent life and the subsidization that organizations like the ZO promised towards the achievement of this goal. That both of those motives—ideology and economic support—drew immigration simultaneously is critical to understanding the importance of the Second Aliya to future developments of the Yishuv and of the state of Israel.

Ze’ev Sternhell, in his research on the Jewish labor movement in Palestine, contends that the various groups functioning under its umbrella were, with just a few

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100 Shalev, *Labour and the Political Economy in Israel*, 35.
exceptions, “consciously nonideological…with no interest in universal values.”

Sternhell’s account is rooted in the period between the early ‘20s and late ‘30s, when the Histadrut consolidated its power as the proto-state infrastructure of the Yishuv, and was led by Ahdut HaAvoda, the largest and least radical party of the Jewish labor movement (JLM) in Palestine. I contend that Sternhell’s rejection of ideology’s role is incomplete. It prevents him from accounting for the multi-faceted character of the JLM, especially the degree to which ideological commitments to socialism and Zionism informed settlement activity between the turn of the 20th century and the 1920s, during the Second Aliya. Furthermore, it prevents him from accurately describing why the JLM was able to create such a solid foothold in the early Yishuv, a foothold that eventually transformed to the less socialist, more sovereignty-seeking JLM of the ‘20s and ‘30s.

The radical Labor Zionist roots of the JLM are exemplified by figures like Dov Ber Borochov, a Ukrainian Jewish intellectual and a major player in the Diasporic Zionist discourse of this period. In discussing his rationale for seeking a Jewish state in Palestine, he said that, “the landlessness of the Jewish people is the source of its malady and tragedy. We have no territory of our own, hence we are by necessity divorced from nature.” His logic did not fall on deaf ears. By the end of the 19th century, alongside the private settlements funded by Baron Rothschild, the pluga (working group)—a precursor to the permanent kvutzot, wherein labor was cooperatively organized but not on land that belonged to the group—began to crop up...

101 Sternhell, 209.
102 Near, Volume 1, 65.
across Ottoman Palestine. These were groups of young men and women from the Socialist Jewish youth movements of Eastern Europe, like Hashomer Hatzair (the Young Guard), who, like Borochov, conceived of their commitment to socialism as intrinsically connected to the goal of forming a future Jewish state. Their motive was neither financial nor purely nationalist. In the same vein as Borochov, they believed that founding a socialist Jewish would be a part of the global movement towards Socialist revolution. This concept was encapsulated in a well-known Borochov quote from 1917: “Our ultimate aim is Socialism; our immediate need is Zionism. The class struggle is the means to achieve both.”

This line is part of a longer speech that Borochov delivered at the Third All-Russian Poalei Tzion Convention. Poalei Tzion was the first Marxist Zionist political party, founded in New York in 1903 before it expanded to England, Russia, and Poland. In 1906, members of these youth movements brought Poalei Tziyon to Palestine. For the duration of the Yishuv period, Poalei Tziyon’s relationship to the ZO was tenuous. In the late 1920s, the party even broke off into “right” and “left” factions, the latter having rejected the ZO because of its bourgeois character. But rejecting the ZO was a decision that carried weight beyond purity of principles, for the ZO’s financial arm, the Jewish National Fund (JNF), represented a critical source of funding and capital for Jewish settlement in this period.

104 Near, Volume I, 26-35.
106 Horowitz and Lissak, 124.
108 Ibid, 142.
109 Shalev, Labour and the Political Economy in Israel, 39-40.
Recall that an economy already existed in this land before the advent of synthetic Zionism, and that the comparative disadvantage of hiring Jewish labor for British, Arab, and private Jewish employers was strong. Without wage subsidization or some other creative solution, Jewish settlements that relied on sustenance via agriculture were doomed. Furthermore, without the social infrastructure (like healthcare) that these institutions funded, the living conditions in this period were treacherous for settlers—death rates from malaria and other sicknesses were extremely high, and just the physical toil of manual labor to was too strenuous for a good majority. Of the 35,000 immigrants of the Second Aliya, less than 50% stayed in the Yishuv.110

In terms of future impact, those that stayed were many of the most prominent and influential leaders of the Yishuv and of the future Labor coalition government: Golda Meir, David Ben-Gurion, Levi Eshkol, Itzhak Ben-Zvi, and more.111 Physically, too, the settlements built in this period that did become permanent were strategically placed at modern Israeli borders, and thus functioned as critical state-building markers.112 These two facts alone could have solidified the Second Aliya’s gilded place in the modern Israeli narrative of Zionist history. But most importantly to this analysis, the Second Aliya was the first moment that the Jewish labor movement’s partnership with the World Zionist Organization began to bear fruit. This coalition between two overlapping but separate Zionist ideologies and their organizational manifestations is often overlooked in explaining Labor hegemony in Israel, but it is key to this story.

110 Rivlin, 16.
111 Ibid.
112 Near, Volume 1, 50-51.
In 1917, by the time Borochov delivered the aforementioned speech, his belief had translated into thriving cooperative settlements—at least 28 kibbutzim were founded and the number was growing every year.\textsuperscript{113} And yet the earliest kvutzot had failed to turn into permanent settlements. What changed that allowed for cooperative settlement to survive and flourish?

\textit{The Union of the Jewish Labor Movement and the Zionist Organization}

For Jewish socialistic settlement and labor in Palestine, the turning point from failure to success was rooted in the Labor Zionist camp’s decisive victory in the power struggle between proponents of different Zionisms, as manifest in the Jewish labor movement’s partnership with the Zionist Organization. Three major works of scholarship in the field of critical Israel studies—\textit{Being Israel}, by Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled, \textit{Labor and the Political Economy in Israel}, by Michael Shalev, and the aforementioned \textit{The Founding Myths of Israel}, by Ze’ev Sternhell—all point to this coalition as the explanatory variable to the ascendency of labor Zionist ideology. In Michael Shalev’s words, this union represented “a practical alliance between a settlement movement without settlers and a worker’s movement without work.”\textsuperscript{114}

But what did this alliance look like? Was it formally written in contract, or a fact of on-the-ground activity? Moreover, if the Jewish labor movement was as multi-faceted as described above, containing more and less radical branches, some of which were categorically opposed to working with the ZO, what does it mean to say that an alliance formed between the two movements?

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid, 32-34.
Much of the critical Israel scholarship explains this phenomenon as a forced capitulation of the more radical Jewish labor factions to those that would work with resource-rich Zionist international organizations. Shafir and Peled explain that any radically socialist branches of the Jewish labor movement were very quickly subsumed in the quest for ideological hegemony on a proto-state level. Bodies like the Histadrut and the Va’ad Haleumi achieved this through “justifying [their] goal in universalistic terms…[thus] securing the leadership of a broad coalition of parties and social strata.”

In their assessment, Ashkenazi—Eastern European Jewish—elites used the pioneering ideology of the labor movement to achieve their goal of establishing political hegemony, equating the Labor Zionist brand of selfless commitment to the national project with belonging to the preferential group.

This process, which began in the Yishuv period, colored formal citizenship in the future Israeli state, wherein different packages of rights are doled out to different ethnic and religious groups. In this way, the modern Israeli state incorporates certain citizens “into the society by utilizing their resources [i.e. cheap labor]…and giving them [Palestinian Arabs within the 1967 borders, non-Jewish citizens] in return the minimal reward required to ensure their compliance.” The incorporation regime Shafir and Peled see is rooted in the Yishuv period, when the Jewish labor movement, in consort with the Zionist Organization, defined patriotism by the degree of sacrifice one made to the Zionist cause through buy-in to Labor Zionist ideology. From the early days of the pre-state period, then, formal citizenship did not

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115 Shafir and Peled, 66.
117 Ibid, 336.
necessarily translate to national belonging.\textsuperscript{118} From this entry point, at least, the ways in which ideological commitment to a particular brand of Zionism was co-opted for a hyper-nationalist aim—to exclude non-Jews, and even non-Ashkenazi Jews, from the collective—is clear.

Sternhell adds to the case with a detailed history of a particular moment in Yishuv history, when the Histadrut intimidated the Gdud Ha’Avodah (the “single countrywide commune” project that represented a more inclusive alternative to the small, bounded collective models of the kibbutz) into collapse.\textsuperscript{119} Together, the Histadrut leadership and the Va’ad Leumi (national council) undertook a concerted effort to make the Gdud’s economically unsustainable by prohibiting membership to the Yishuv trade unions and enacting a blockade of supplies that were necessary at this stage for all settlements in the Yishuv to survive.\textsuperscript{120} By 1927, the Gdud had dissolved. This incident, Sternhell argues, illuminates the degree to which the leadership of the Yishuv opposed actualization of a genuine socialist utopia, for a truly classless society would have undermined its pursuit of a nationalist—Jewish preferential—society.\textsuperscript{121} The kibbutz, in this story, represents the kind of socialism—limited within the bound gates of an elite agricultural community—that served the proto-state’s image (by creating a model of Pioneerism) without undermining Jewish nationalism through a broader engagement with the class-based and ethnic inconsistencies of Labor Zionism.

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{119} Sternhell, 199.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid, 207.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid, 212.
Both of these analyses, in their attempts to build an alternative scholarship to the mainstream glorification of the socialism of the Yishuv period (and the leaders of the Second Aliya in particular), swing too far in discounting the pockets of ideological commitment to socialism Labor Zionism, even within the sections of the Jewish labor movement that prioritized attainment of nationhood, like the Histadrut. Shalev is more accurate in showing this multiplicity. His reading of the same history that Sternhell explores sees the synthesis of Marxist Zionism with Political Zionism as a realpolitik decision, precipitated by the network of failing cooperative settlements’ needs for better funding and infrastructure in order to survive and become permanent. Rather than “the capitulation of socialism to Zionism” that Sternhell sees, Shalev underlines the difficulty of Jewish immigrant absorption in the first years of the 20th century as a reasonable motive for the labor movement to have built a relationship with the Zionist Organization. Let us remember the competitive disadvantage in employment that these groups had, and the difficulty of building competitive production in an existing market with such minimal capital at the outset. As stated above, without the explicit funding of the ZO, most of these settlements failed.

Neither Sternhell nor Shafir and Peled create a false narrative, but they skip over an important period. The non-ideological, hegemony-seeking quality of the Jewish labor movement at large was solidified in 1920, with the establishment of the Histadrut. The history of the Gdud that Sternhell recounts is evidence of that, as were the Histadrut’s exclusionary membership criteria and contingent and non-expansive
social service provisions. \(^{122}\) But in the decades prior, the events that led to the formal coalition of the JLM and the ZO were more complex. Beginning in 1908, the coalition between Political Zionism and Labor Zionism was a partnership based on mutual reliance—and in particular, that needed the economic and social structure of the kibbutz—to jumpstart the settlement process required for synthetic Zionist strategy.

Shafir and Peled locate the beginning of this coalition (“a settlers’ movement without settlers and a workers’ movement without work”) in 1908, when Arthur Ruppin, the head of ZO’s office in the Yishuv, facilitated the purchase of land with the specific intention of using a cooperative economic model to drive production. \(^{123}\) But this moment is a footnote in Being Israeli, shrinking the significance of the first moment of the cooption of existing Jewish socialist state building ambitions by the ZO. Indeed, the kibbutzim are, in terms of population size and land size, only a small part of the 100+ year history of the Jewish labor movement. But this moment deserves more attention than the critical Israel studies scholarship has given. Between 1908 and the late 1920s, the kibbutzim were a key stepping-stone to a) the labor movement’s ascendancy in the Yishuv and in Israel, and b) the settlement building of the Yishuv that would later become Israel. Switching the question from what the Zionist Organization did for the Jewish labor movement (and, in turn, for the kibbutz) to what the kibbutz (as representative of the Jewish labor movement) did for the Zionist Organization goes a long way towards explaining why the kibbutz was able to sustain its socialist character for as long as it did.

\(^{122}\) Shalev, *Labour and the Political Economy in Israel*, 247-248.
\(^{123}\) Shafir and Peled, 46.
The Kibbutz as Solution to Peripheral Settlement

As outlined above, the unfolding of the first two Aliyot revealed three primary obstacles to Jewish settlement in Palestine: comparative disadvantage in employment, cost of land to pursue agricultural endeavors that might facilitate profitability, and the cost of immigrant absorption. The kvutza presented a creative solution to all three of these troubles.

As a theory, “Hebrew labor” encouraged Zionists to hire Jewish labor over cheaper Arab labor under the logic that doing so would enable further Jewish settlement (by providing employment) while empowering Jews to return to working the land after centuries of alienation in Europe. But this logic clearly failed when applied to private Jewish enterprise between 1882 and the early 1900s. After all, if the profit motive was greater than the ideological motive of Zionist actualization—as it was for many of the Jewish land and business owners who had been in Palestine since far before the advent of Zionist activity—then these poorly trained, less productive and more expensive immigrants stood little chance. Indeed, the members of the first Aliyot had failed to compete in the same economy that their Arab neighbors participated in.124

An obvious way to make Hebrew Labor function in practice, then, would be to build an entirely new system of Jewish production, where the owners of the means of production would be invested in the same cause—establishing a significant Jewish presence in Palestine—as the immigrants facilitating the production. Bringing this goal to life became a primary objective of the partnership between the Jewish labor

124 Shafir and Peled, 40-41.
movement and the Zionist apparatus at large: Hebrew workers for Hebrew work.

Chaim Weizmann, who was highly influential in both the Jewish political bodies in the BMP and in the international Zionist community in this period, pronounced his vision for actualizing such a plan:

…I would like to see a great investment fund controlled by the Zionist organization of the world, as an instrument to Judaise labor in enterprises undertaken in Palestine. I cannot dictate this to a private corporation. This does not preclude the existence of private corporations, but it means the existence of a powerful instrument in the hands of the future Government of Palestine.\(^{125}\)

This is where land purchase enters our story. The Jewish National Fund, beginning in 1901, began to raise money in the Jewish Diaspora—primarily in the United States—and use it to purchase tracts of land across Ottoman Palestine, mostly from private Arab landowners and villages.\(^{126}\) At first, this land was primarily purchased for settlement purposes. But beginning in 1908, the JNF began to buy land as a way to sustain the aforementioned “work-groups,” in which a kvutza would work collectively to produce a collective profit, while not necessarily living communally.\(^{127}\) The land that the JNF purchased was leased to Jewish immigrants at a much lower cost than the Ottoman government or private Arab landowners would have leased it for. This way, the Zionist Organization could ensure sustainable Jewish labor and circumvent the problem of mismatched wage expectations that the Olim had met in privately owned firms.


\(^{126}\) Russell, Hanneman, and Getz, 15.

\(^{127}\) Near, Volume 1, 65-68.
The kibbutz was a synthesis of the two goals that the JNF’s land purchasing strategy pursued: Jewish settlement and exclusively Jewish production. On a kibbutz, the members lived together, but they also collectively owned and operated the factors of production, whose profits would then serve to sustain all living expenses of the collective. In economic terms, the kibbutz was the “symbiosis of family and firm.” In allocating its land to kibbutzim, the JNF could simultaneously facilitate growth of Jewish settlement and Jewish economic sector in Palestine.

But what made the kibbutz more optimal than other firm models that combined work and settlement? An example of such an alternative was the moshav model, the first of which was built in 1922 as a response to the extreme collectivism of the kibbutz, “a more individualistic form of cooperative settlement” where “cooperative” was confined to such features as “communal marketing, the provision of utilities like water and power, and limited forms of mutual support [like an internal income tax].” The JNF did give land to both moshavim and kibbutzim in the Yishuv period, and eventually the growth of moshavim outpaced the growth of kibbutzim. But in these early years, the kibbutz presented two clear advantages: 1) lower cost and 2) stronger ideological commitment to the concepts of mutual responsibility, self-actualization, and “heroic economics”, all of which made a commitment to Hebrew labor over profit-seeking possible.

In 1926, Arthur Ruppin, the director of the Jaffa office of the Zionist Organization, published a book called *Agricultural Colonization in Palestine*, geared

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128 Barkai, 4.
129 Russell, Hanneman, and Getz, 16.
towards convincing Diaspora Zionists that agricultural settlement was just as
important to the political undertakings of Zionism as diplomatic channels. After
cataloguing in great detail the number of settlements in Palestine, their different
forms, the costs associated with each form (in theory and in practice), and the various
sources of funding, Ruppin dedicates an entire chapter to arguing for the benefit of
collective settlement over individual settlement. Two of his major points are material:
the optimization of human resources that collective work allows, and the lower costs
associated with the model. The first point he explains as follows:

This system saves a settler some part of his initial outlay, for by working
collectively the group can to some extent share implements and teams, and the
combined labor of 20 men achieves more than 20 individuals who work
separately.132

On cost saving, he posits a similar result of heightened efficiency, this time
rooted in more concrete numbers.

Group settlement requires a smaller initial investment [beyond land] than
individual settlement. As an example: in an individual settlement, each settler
requires his own a cart. Therefore while a settlement of 60-80 individual
colonists needs the same number of carts, a Kvutza of similar size will
probably need 20-30 carts.133

Any failed kibbutz settlements, he claims, can be explained by the lack of
agricultural experience all Eastern European Jews have, and the learning curve of the
new environment—not by any deficiency of the model itself.134 In 1925, looking back
on almost half a century of attempted Zionist settlement, Ruppin’s work illustrates
some of the ways in which the Kibbutz’s economic structure was cost-saving and
productivity-improving for the Zionist Organization’s overarching goal of increasing

131 Ruppin, v.
133 Ibid.
134 Ibid, 139.
agricultural production and Jewish settlement. At this point, when I refer to increasing Jewish agricultural production, I am not yet talking about production for export, for Jewish settlement activity in rural Palestine was not yet developed enough to operate beyond subsistence production. Ruppin touched on this reality, too:

The Jewish settler in Palestine can best protect himself against foreign competition by depending only to a small extent on the sale of his produce, and by using the largest part of it to satisfy his own requirements.\textsuperscript{135}

Reading \textit{Agricultural Colonization in Palestine} is striking today for lines such as this one. Ruppin—representative of the intersection of the Diaspora Zionist movement and the various movements, parties, and individuals attempting to make Zionism a fact in Palestine—is admitting that the purpose of this early colonization was \textit{not} to generate an economic surplus. Its goal was to spread Jewish settlement in the rural, less cultivated areas of the BMP, and to generate only the profit necessary to make such settlement sustainable.

The growing achievement of this aim raised a paradox. Reliance on ideologically committed philanthropies to support Jewish settlement in the Yishuv was the easiest way to expedite capital accumulation and achieve production sustainability without immediate productivity gains, but it did not solve the problem of creating a thriving Jewish economy to serve as a foundation for a future independent state. Indeed, in these years the Zionist Organization did rely on philanthropic organizations like the Jewish National Fund, Hadassah, and Keren HaYesod to front many settlement outlays and payment of subsequent costs, particularly in the form of capital investment.\textsuperscript{136} But a future country could not be

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\item \textsuperscript{135} Ibid, 104.
\item \textsuperscript{136} Ibid, 91.
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sustained, much less hope to grow, on external aid alone. Thus, the model of settlement in this period needed to facilitate arduous labor and the goal of production while simultaneously cultivating an attitude wherein the realization of a Jewish state would be the reward, not a material surplus.

Here, the ideological components of the Jewish labor movement, as manifested in the kibbutz model, provided a solution. The groups of young people who started the original Jewish collectives in Palestine were incentivized to work by the utopian lifestyle their work promised to yield. Their motive to uproot their lives across the Pale of Settlement in Eastern Europe was not to get rich, but to reclaim and redefine Jewish identity via physical labor. True, in the later Aliyot, once the Jewish labor movement’s relationship with the Zionist Organization was solidified, many Eastern European Jews reached Palestine looking for financial support that they were not receiving at home. This phenomenon is elaborated in chapter 2. But at this early stage, the kvutzot that set out to cultivate and colonize the land were comprised of committed ideologues, often vetted by the central councils of movements like Poalei Tzioni or Hashomer Hatzair. Competitive wages were a non-issue to such individuals; what was at stake was sustainability of living and, thus, sustainability of the cooperative project.

This mindset was encapsulated in the phrase hagshama atzmit, which translates to “self-actualization.” In the ethos of the Jewish labor movement, self-actualization meant to dedicate one’s life to a goal larger than individual fulfillment. This framing of what constituted a meaningful life was rooted in the socialist Jewish youth movements of the day, which eschewed political activity for the possibility of

137 Ibid, 87.
creating an ideal, utopian society from scratch. Self-actualization, as opposed to self-realization, meant the “personal enactment of principles.”

In the case of the shared tenets of the groups under the Jewish labor movement’s umbrella ideology, those central principles were Hebrew labor, *ezra hedadit* (mutual responsibility) and *chalutziut* (Pioneerism).

A commitment to achieving Hebrew labor in practice made members of the Jewish labor movement ideal settlers. If the prospect of making Hebrew labor a reality was far and away more important than individual economic gain, youth movement members could be trusted to cultivate settlement even when physical conditions were harsh and economic yields were low. As such, it should be no surprise that a commitment to the long-term goals of engendering Jewish agricultural work and achieving Jewish sovereignty on a national scale was ubiquitous among the young people recruited to build early settlements.

The tenet of mutual responsibility was equally constructive to establishing permanent Jewish settlement. Though used in various contexts with varying meanings throughout Israeli history, for our purposes, one might best conceive of this principle as the idea that the collective must be responsible for each other as a means of ensuring achievement of a concrete goal. In practice, mutual responsibility meant that each individual was equally responsible for the well-being of the collective, and that responsibility for one another’s well-being was a necessary prerequisite to the collective’s longevity. The kibbutz model was a pure manifestation of mutual responsibility, the emphasis always placed on the first half of the old socialist phrase: “Give what you can, take what you need.” A kibbutz member was expected to work

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138 Near, *Volume 1*, 231.
as hard as they could—whether in the fields or in childcare or in pre-state army service—based on this principle, not because of any material incentive correlated to hours worked or labor expended. The incentive was the actualization of Hebrew labor, and transitorily, the building of the foundations of a future Jewish state.

Chalutziyut—Pioneerism—meant to be on the vanguard of a new society and commit whatever one could to facilitate that cause, based on the belief that seemingly impossible goals would be possible with enough grit and passion.\textsuperscript{139} The kibbutz was the pure embodiment of Pioneerism as applied to the endeavor of cultivating agricultural settlement in the peripheral areas of Palestine: a living and working community premised on the goals of coping with severe living conditions and cultivating agricultural development poorly suited for the preexisting environment. This commitment was often described as “heroic economics.” Heroic, because on top of consistently profitable agricultural endeavors (like grain production in the Yishuv period), kibbutzim often planted new crop or changed the direction of existing initiatives to expand the range of goods produced by the Yishuv.\textsuperscript{140} This increased the kibbutzim’s reliance on and indebtedness to loan-giving bodies, all to ensure permanence of settlement.\textsuperscript{141}

Eventually, the principle of self-sacrifice of the individual for the collective good would be expanded beyond the kibbutz’s internal needs and towards a larger national end, as investment in agricultural and industrial infrastructure meant that kibbutzim began to provide for many of the material needs of the Yishuv.\textsuperscript{142} The use

\textsuperscript{139} Horowitz and Lissak, 106.
\textsuperscript{140} Near, \textit{Volume 1}, 182.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid, 63.
\textsuperscript{142} Rayman, 92-107.
of such language by leaders of the Yishuv increased as the kibbutzim became more central to settlement in areas that had little to no pre-existing Jewish presence before 1882, like the Jordan Valley and the Jezreel Valley. The “self-denying, ascetic” attitude enabled kibbutzim to persevere as permanent settlements, churning out production for the good of the Yishuv’s economy while its members lived in austerity.

The central factor behind the kibbutz model’s early utility was the lasting Jewish settlement it created in the areas of the BMP known in the Yishuv as HaPeripherya—the periphery, meaning beyond the population hubs of Jerusalem and Jaffa. As a tool for immigrant absorption, the kibbutz was effective in spreading the Jewish population to the physical boundaries of the imagined future Jewish state. Materially, kibbutzim were crucial to immigration absorption in this period not only because of the number of immigrants absorbed within them, but because of the material resources their agricultural and industrial resources provided for the Yishuv.

**Beit Zera: The Third and Fourth Aliyot and the Ballooning of the Kibbutz Movement**

With hindsight, it is clear that the kibbutz model helped solve the issue of maintaining permanent settlement in the Yishuv, the cost-saving benefits of cooperative production serving the intended purpose of settler colonization. But that this model would promote viable Jewish settlement in Palestine was not obvious.

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143 Near, *Volume*. 190.
144 Russell, Hanneman, and Getz, 25.
145 In present day Israel, *HaPeripherya* is still a part of the national lexicon, a catchall for areas that are not in *HaMerkez* (“the center,” meaning the Tel-Aviv area), near Haifa, or near Jerusalem. The legacy created for these areas by the Yishuv—as less desirable, marked by difficult living conditions and poverty—remains, exacerbated by the fact that many poor development towns were built alongside exiting kibbutzim in the 1950s in these areas to grow Jewish settlement in the area.
when the first permanent kvutza was founded. The cooperative, collective model of production and consumption was a result of ideological passion on the one hand, but significant trial and error of settlement model on the other.\textsuperscript{146} The kibbutz model rose out of practice before it became a theoretically coherent, replicable (and replicated) model.

The Third Aliya, between 1919 and 1923, resembled the Second in the socialist ideological bent and Eastern European geographic origins of its immigrants. The majority of these 40,000 Jews were from modern-day Lithuania, Russia, Poland, and Romania, and many of them came via socialist youth movements that were ideologically allied with the Jewish labor movement.\textsuperscript{147} Unlike the two prior Aliyot the retention rate of this aliya was over 50%. This difference was not on account of stronger ideological commitment to the Zionist cause, but a result of the solidified relationship between the JLM and the WZO and the subsequently improved immigration-absorption infrastructures of the kibbutz and other settlement models.\textsuperscript{148}

Chief among such alternatives was the moshav, where members abided by a degree of social communalism but owned individual tracts of agricultural land, which they developed on a family-firm level. While Ruppin’s claim was true—the kibbutz model \textit{was} cheaper for settlement than the moshav model—the proliferation of moshavim across the Yishuv, beginning in 1921, posed a threat to the early promise of the kibbutz as \textit{the} settlement method of the Zionist Organization.

In the decades between 1920 and 1930, several major developments in the Yishuv—the consolidation of the Jewish labor movement in the proto-state institution

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid, 14.
\textsuperscript{147} Near, \textit{Volume 1}, 79.
\textsuperscript{148} Shafir and Peled, 42.
of the Histadrut, the success of the moshav model, and the prioritization of a nationalist ideology over a labor ideology—planted the seeds for a growing marginalization of the kibbutz model. Between 1924 (the advent of the Fourth Aliya) and the eve of the War of Independence in 1948, the percentage of the Jewish population living on kibbutzim had ballooned to what would be its all-time peak—7.5%—with over 200 separate communities. Chapter 2 will delve into the reasons why the events that led up to and followed the foundation of the state in 1948 made the kibbutz progressively less central to Zionist state-building, but our case study, Beit Zera, goes a long way towards showing the degree to which the kibbutz model prospered in the Yishuv period.

In 1927, Kibbutz Beit Zera was founded by a group of Galician and German Jews called “the Markenhoffs.” Markenhoff was the name of an agricultural training—hachshara—farm in Germany, near the city of Freiburg. In the Yishuv era, “hachshara” referred to the training that Jewish olim underwent in order to learn how to withstand the sparse living conditions and agricultural character of Palestine from hundreds of miles away. Hachshara farms became extremely widespread in the nineteen-teens after the first two aliyot proved settlement without such training to be unsuccessful.

The training at the Markenhoff farm commenced in 1919. The group who trained there was made up of men and women in their teens and twenties, unaffiliated with any of the major Zionist youth movements.

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149 Near, Volume 2, 320.
150 Shalev, Labour and the Political Economy in Israel, 38.
151 Near, Volume 1, 107-111.
152 Beit Zera Historical Calendar.
majority of young Jews training to build cooperative Jewish settlement in this period were recruited from either youth movements (like Hashomer Hatzair) or political movements (like Poalei Tzion) in Eastern and Central Europe.\textsuperscript{153} The Markenhoff group, on the other hand, was comprised of former members of Blau-Weiss, the German Jewish youth movement initiated in 1912 as a response to growing anti-Semitism in Wander-Vogel.\textsuperscript{154} Why they broke off from Blau-Weiss and found their way to training at the Markenhoff farm, nobody knows. Perhaps word of mouth had reached them about the successes building up for the Jewish labor movement in Palestine; since the first Jewish cooperative working group in Palestine reaped a successful harvest in 1907, the legend of kvutza spread quickly among Jewish immigrants-to-be. More likely, though, they were one of many hachshara groups waiting for word from the Yishuv’s National Council or Histadrut to declare the Yishuv ready for an influx of settlement. By 1924, the developments of the Third Aliya period had created a stable Jewish economy and immigrant absorption infrastructure—largely a result of cooperative settlement and work models—and the Histadrut made it known that the Yishuv was ready for hachshara groups to come and grow the Jewish population.\textsuperscript{155}

A few members of the Markenhoff kvutza first moved from Germany to Palestine in 1921, but in the following several years, their various attempts at cooperative settlement floundered. By 1926, 25 of them came to an agreement with the Jewish National Fund to lease a piece of land in the Jordan Valley, though they would have to wait some time before settling there. They moved into the nearby

\textsuperscript{153} Near, \textit{Volume 1}, 107.
\textsuperscript{154} Beit Zera Historical Calendar.
\textsuperscript{155} Near, \textit{Volume 1}, 131.
abandoned Arab village of Um Juni—the same place where the first settlers of Degania had worked the fields as a workers’ cooperative before moving to *their* own plot of land. Then, an earthquake in August of 1927 destroyed much of Um Juni, forcing the kvutza to establish Beit Zera prematurely. Though they had been preparing the land since they had arrived in the Valley, all that existed was a crude farmhouse with 9 cows, built earlier that year—not a single agricultural field was ready for cultivation.  

Over the next five years, the 25 members turned this near-empty plot into a habitable and productive site, with a brick-and-mortar building (called *Beit HaRishonim*, or “The Building of the Firsts”), basic sleeping cabins, a sturdier barn, and fields of bitter orange, alfalfa, and grape crops. It is hard to imagine such a rapid turnaround—and such success at establishing settlement—without the principles of mutual responsibility, self-sacrifice, and communalism established by the first kvutzot.

*Beit HaRishomin*—the House of the Founders—in 1928. Today, Beit Zera’s archives are located in this building. Beit Zera Archives.

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156 Beit Zera Historical Calendar
The Markenhoff group’s tumultuous beginning years in Palestine and their perseverance in establishing a communal settlement are illustrative of why the kibbutz model remained relevant, if not instrumental, to synthetic Zionism through the 1920, 30s, and 40s. Whereas the kibbutz had come to fruition by virtue of the Zionist Organization’s pecuniary support—as a tool of creating financially viable Jewish settlement and immigrant absorption—the model quickly took on a life of its own. The commitment to creating a new way of life—to establishing “a Jewish National Homeland in Palestine on a self-sufficient productive economic basis”—among Jewish immigrants affiliated with the labor movement was as strong as ever.157

This is not to mention the outsized representation of kibbutz members and founders in the ranks of the Yishuv government apparatuses at the time: Yizhak Tabenkin (a founding member of Kibbutz Ein Harod who attended every Zionist Congress, advocating for a network of Jewish socialist communes in Palestine instead of an imperialist state), Joseph Trumpeldor (an early Zionist war hero who defended Kibbutz Tel Hai in 1920), Yosef Baratz (a founder of Degania Alef and representative on the Va’ad Leumi), Golda Meir (future Prime Minister of Israel who joined Kibbutz Merhavia when she immigrated to Palestine from the United States), Meir Ya’ari (the founder of the Kibbutz Artzi Federation and the Histadrut) and Chaim Weizmann (a president of the World Zionist Congress).158

In 1935, Weizmann delivered an address to the 19th Zionist Congress called “In Defense of Collective Economy,” a speech that revealed 1) the particular brand of

157 Near, Volume 1, 160-161.
158 Ibid, 103-107.
Labor Zionism that emerged as a result of the coalition between the JML and the ZO, and 2) the growing disapproval of overtly socialist and class-oriented ideas among Zionist institutional bodies.

“It has become the fashion with us…to attack Marxism, and to speak of this dictatorship of the proletariat [in assessing to the Russian Revolution]. I am no Marxist…. but embodied in this “Marxism”—and here I speak to my friends of the Right—there lies something of the spirit of the Jewish prophetic teachings. And in the Histadrut, with which I am glad to say I am in friendly relations, there is a harmonious synthesis of ideas that have become reality not in a vacuum, but on the unyielding soil of Palestine. This reality has molded the Eretz Yisrael of today, it has drawn the attention of the world…the world longs and yearns for something new and pure, some new form of social life which would show the way out of the existing confusion. The work of this generation in Palestine is a start toward achieving this new form.”

Weizmann’s sentiment reflects the balance he and his peers attempted to strike between appealing to (and co-opting) socialist precepts of equality, collectivism, and mutual responsibility and framing those precepts as useful, but ultimately secondary to, the ultimate aim of Jewish settlement. This chapter has shown that this goal of the Zionist movement in this period—to establish a permanent Jewish presence in Palestine that reflected certain principles of Labor Zionism as an ideology—was aided in large part by the kibbutz model. This allowed for the proliferation of kibbutzim across Palestine in the following decades, the formalization, replication, and glorification of a model that was an aberration from 21st century norms of capitalist production. The proto-state’s reliance on the kibbutz both made the Yishuv’s growth possible and, in turn, created a self-perception within kibbutzim of elitism—of being the essential vanguard for Zionist settlement beyond areas with existing Jewish presences. The following chapter will explore in greater depth how this elitism and exclusivity across the kibbutz movement manifested in

ways incongruent with the changing aims of Zionist state building, and how the proto-state apparatuses of the Yishuv began to distance the kibbutz from its formerly central role.
CHAPTER TWO

From Class to Nation: The Waning Centrality of the Kibbutz to Zionist Development

I felt like we were living in a sort of glasshouse outside of Israel. Israel was happening somewhere else.

Yiftach Sadan, June 2017

By 1939, when this aerial photograph was taken, Beit Zera had expanded and developed well beyond a makeshift barn and single concrete house. 12 years after its founding, it now boasted a “European-style barn,” plumbing and communal bathrooms, a stable, a children’s house, many more single-room “apartments” to replace the impermanent living tents, a dining hall (with a full kitchen), a bakery, a
dairy, and a paved path connecting the kibbutz to the nearest main road.\textsuperscript{160}

Agricultural development had blossomed. In 1936, the members completed the building of a canal and aqueduct to siphon water from the Jordan River at a distance of 1,000 meters with the potential to irrigate 250 more \textit{dunams} (approximately 62 acres) of land than their water supply would have previously allowed.\textsuperscript{161} By 1938, all 1,120 \textit{dunams} of Beit Zera were irrigated and watered. As the photograph illustrates, much of the land that was not turned into living space was plowed, tilled, and turned into fields.

The social and political spheres of Beit Zera had also changed in the interim 12 years. In these decades, Beit Zera’s first generation of children was born. To accommodate this development, an internal comprehensive education system was developed, spanning from infancy to 12\textsuperscript{th} grade. The original membership of 25 had nearly tripled as a result of the combination of the original Markenhoff Group with a kvutza of 60 Hashomer Hatzair members from Lithuania. This union meant that, for the first time in its short history, Beit Zera became a formal affiliate of a larger institution: the Kibbutz Artzi-Hashomer Hatzair Federation, associated with the left-wing Mapai party.\textsuperscript{162}. Participation in the Yishuv beyond Beit Zera increased: as tensions between the Yishuv population and the Arab Palestinian community escalated, the kibbutz’s male members joined the waves of young men—many from other kibbutzim—in the elite units of the Yishuv military, the \textit{Haganah}. Security posts were built in the orchards as a response to an incident of arson in the grain fields (a common offensive against agricultural Jewish settlement employed in the

\textsuperscript{160} Beit Zera Historical Calendar.
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid.
Arab Revolts of 1936-1939). Anecdotally, then, it is clear that Beit Zera’s development was intertwined with the events of the Yishuv at large.

Chapter 1 illustrated the ways in which this relationship manifested in the earliest stages of Jewish settlement. In that period, the kibbutz’s unique characteristics had made it an integral tool to early Jewish settlement in Palestine. In particular, the kibbutz played a key role in populating those areas that had little to no Jewish settlement before 1882, like the Western Galilee and the Negev. This was a result of the passion with which early kibbutz members believed in and abided by the principles of collectivism, self-sacrifice, mutual responsibility, and Zionism, and the degree to which they were willing to accept a low standard of living and difficult labor conditions. Such conditions were a foregone conclusion in these “frontier areas.” Thus, as a tool for immigration absorption, the kibbutz had been effective in spreading the Jewish population to the physical boundaries of a future Jewish state imagined by the Zionist leadership, in Palestine and internationally.

But after the Third Aliya, between 1918 and 1923, the percentage of new Jewish immigrants that went to any agricultural settlement at all—whether it was a kibbutz, a moshav, or a non-collective town—declined as compared to immigrants moving to urban areas. If the kibbutzim were not statistically significant means of expanding the reach of Jewish settlement, what role did the model play in the Yishuv

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163 Ibid.

164 The use of the word “frontier” is indicative of the settler-colonialist attitude with which various Zionist groups approached the question of spreading a Jewish presence across Palestine: as if there was no one living there already. Indeed, the Western Galilee—the birthplace of the Kibbutz—was full of Arab Palestinian villages, many of which were abandoned (for fear of Jewish encroachment, particularly in the 30s and 40s) or bought for an extremely low price by the JNF. And yet, the land had not been previously irrigated or used for the large-scale production purposes that the kibbutz (as a functionary of synthetic Zionist strategy) aimed to achieve. As such, developing this area into arable plots of land often did mean starting from zero.

165 Near, Volume 1, 139.
in the years immediately preceding 1948? Furthermore, how did the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 further modify the kibbutz’s role in the national economic, social, and political orders, if it did at all?

**The Fourth and Fifth Aliyot: Settling Towns and Cities**

The picture of the Yishuv painted in chapter 1, with a focus on agrarian settlement, might create the false impression that a majority of Zionist activity was centered on agricultural development. In reality, urban settlement comprised a majority of *every* stage of Zionist activity, even during those early years during which mainstream Zionist rhetoric emphasized Hebrew Labor, collectivism, and self-sacrifice—all ideological elements embodied by agrarian settlements, such as the kibbutzim.

Before the First Aliya, the demographic hubs of Jewish living in Palestine were concentrated in biblically and spiritually significant locations—Jerusalem, Safed, Hebron, Tiberias—with a presence in the other major cosmopolitan centers of Haifa and Jaffa. The First, Second, and Third Aliyot involved a combination of building new Jewish rural settlements and increasing Jewish settlement in these hubs. The Second and Third Aliyot, in particular, were periods of Jewish agricultural settlement expansion in rural swaths of Palestine with little to no preexisting Jewish presence. As illustrated in Chapter 1, the kibbutzim were instrumental to that development. Within the context of rural development, the founding of new kibbutzim continued to outpace the founding of new moshavim and other rural

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communities until 1948.\textsuperscript{167} Still, while the new immigrants may have been settling in and building rural communities, the retention rate until the end of the Second Aliya was low, so the percentage of the Jewish population in rural settlement never exceeded 18%.\textsuperscript{168}

The Fourth Aliya (67,000 new immigrants between 1924 and 1929) and the Fifth Aliya (over 160,000 immigrants between 1929-1939) represented a shift towards immigrant absorption in urban areas.\textsuperscript{169} The majority of immigrants in both of these periods settled in the new cities and larger towns of the Yishuv, such as Tel Aviv, Zichron Ya’akov, and Rishon Le’Tzion.\textsuperscript{170} Tel Aviv, today the cosmopolitan center of Israel, only became an official township separate from the Arab city of Jaffa in 1921. In the few years following, a massive inflow of capital from the Diaspora poured into Tel Aviv—much of it coming from wealthier immigrants’ private funds.\textsuperscript{171} The confluence of capital inflow and commercial growth made Tel Aviv an attractive site for settlement, particularly for those immigrants of the Fourth and Fifth Aliyot fleeing persecution in Central and Western Europe.\textsuperscript{172} This capital was instrumental to expanding the housing capacities of cities like Tel Aviv and Herzliya, thus creating an immigration-settlement pipeline from Central Europe to the

\textsuperscript{167} Near, Volume 2, 58.
\textsuperscript{168} Rayman, 24.
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{172} Nadav Halevi. “The Political Economy of Absorptive Capacity: Growth and Cycles in Jewish Palestine under the British Mandate,” in Middle Eastern Studies (Vol. 19, No. 4, October 1983), 463.
burgeoning cosmopolitans of the Yishuv. By 1939, over a third of the Yishuv lived in Tel Aviv.\textsuperscript{173}

In that same year, of a Jewish population that had grown to over 400,000 in 1939 from 25,000 before 1882 (at least a 16-fold increase), just over 125,000 lived in what the censuses call “rural settlement,” a category that included kibbutzim, moshavim, and \textit{yishuvim} (non-communal, non-collective small towns).\textsuperscript{174} The Israeli Ministry of Aliya and Immigration writes that, of the total immigrant flow in these years, only a small number chose agricultural settlement and “founded new moshavim and kibbutzim.”\textsuperscript{175} By the end of 1939, the total kibbutz population stood at 24,105—5.41% of the Yishuv.\textsuperscript{176} The population of kibbutzim in Palestine continued to grow, reaching the peak 7.6% ceiling in 1948.\textsuperscript{177} If the kibbutz was so central to the growth of the agricultural foundations of the Israeli state, why do the population numbers not reflect larger immigrant absorption? The answer is at least three-fold: the exclusionary process of kibbutz settlement, the rejection of the collectivist model by the vast majority of immigrants \textit{after} the Third Aliya, and the concurrent changes in the ideology and agenda of the Jewish labor movement in Palestine itself.

\textit{Mechanisms of Kibbutz Settlement: An Exclusive Collective}

An “exclusive collective” sounds like a paradox. How could a community so committed to equality within its own bounds perpetuate exclusion? And yet, in many

\textsuperscript{174} Near, \textit{Volume} 2, 54-55.
\textsuperscript{175} Ministry of Aliya and Integration. “The Fourth Aliya.” “The Fifth Aliya.”
\textsuperscript{176} Near, \textit{Volume} 1, 344-5.
\textsuperscript{177} Near, \textit{Volume} 2, Appendix 2.
ways, the premise of kibbutz was exclusive. Participation in the model required possession of a certain physical capability to meet the high labor input expectations. Furthermore, there were only a handful of specific channels through which individuals could join existing kibbutzim, and not much leeway beyond that. Barriers to entry for each kibbutz, then, were substantial. Early kibbutz members claimed that the model was easily replicable, and that an ideal future Jewish state would be comprised of enough kibbutzim to accommodate every citizen who wished to follow that lifestyle. Near describes kibbutz members’ self-perception in this period as follows:

By the end of the Third Aliya, kibbutz members had a firm factual basis for believing that the strength of the kibbutz movement was on the increase, and that it had already laid a firm social foundation for its own continued expansion. So it would not have been over-optimistic to forecast that the kibbutz would attain a majority in the rural Jewish population, or even in the Yishuv as a whole. 178

And yet, such a broad network is not what materialized in the later years of the Yishuv. The closest that the Yishuv came to a fully egalitarian network of socialist labor was the Gdud Ha’Avodah of the 1920s, a work commune best described as a socialist trade union, with members spread across many different living communities but working on joint development projects, from road building to swamp draining. 179 In 1929, the Gdud disintegrated, partially as a result of internal political disputes and partially as a result of pressure applied from the Histadrut and the more centrist labor Ahdut Ha’Avoda party. As this chapter unfolds, I will offer a more detailed analysis of what the fate of the Gdud reveals about changes to the Jewish labor movement in Palestine, and what those changes meant for the kibbutz.

178 Near, Volume 1, 91.
179 Sternhell, 202.
For now, the Gdud’s significance is to show what the kibbutzim were not. Since Degania’s founding in 1909, the need-based kibbutz model—both on an individual basis and as a network of communities—was marked by selectivity, elitism (rendered by the glorification of that selectivity) and partisanship, all characteristics that limited its role in the developing foundations of the Jewish state. The story of Beit Zera’s population growth between 1927 and 1951 shows how each of the aforementioned features were manifested, impacting the internal culture of the kibbutz and the perception of the kibbutz in the Yishuv beyond.

Beit Zera abided by the gar’in model of member admission adopted by the vast majority of kibbutzim in the pre-state period. Gar’in literally translates to “seed” or “nucleus,” but in the Zionist lexicon, the word came to mean a group of young people intentionally coming together in order to create a new kibbutz or join an existing kibbutz. The Markenhoff group came to Palestine as a gar’in in 1921, and moved through the stages of agricultural training and failed settlement building as a cohesive unit. When the Markenhoff group succeeded in establishing the beginnings of Beit Zera in 1927, the intention was to eventually expand beyond the original group. But how to grow the population without diluting its commitment to collectivism, Hebrew Labor, and material sacrifice?

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180 Beit Zera Historical Calendar.
181 The Hever HaKvutzot Federation was interested in maintaining small kvutzot, while the Kibbutz Me’uchad and Kibbutz Artzi federations wanted to expand the size of their kibbutzim. In the case of the Kibbutz Artzi federation, which Beit Zera belonged to, the condition for expansion was that growth of population would not get in the way of commitment to socialist ideology. Education from a young age, through membership to the youth movement, was key to maintaining this status quo.
Enter “the Lithuanians.” On August 23rd, 1934, a gar’in of 60 Lithuanian members of the Hashomer Hatzair youth movement came to visit Beit Zera. They had arrived in Palestine at the agricultural training camp of Petah Tikva in 1925. Like the Markenhoff group, the Lithuanians attempted settlement several times in their first years, but nothing permanent materialized. The fateful meeting in 1934 resulted in the union of the Markenhoffs and the Lithuanians, resulting in a new Beit Zera. The kibbutz grew from 25 to nearly 90. Though this represented a major growth in membership, the more important change to Beit Zera was ideological.

1934: the first Lithuanian gar’in in Petach Tikva. Beit Zera Archives.

182 Both in the archival materials and in members’ oral histories, this group is referred to as “the Lita’im,” meaning “the Lithuanians.” I have adopted this nomenclature.
Before 1934, Beit Zera had been one of the only kibbutzim in Palestine unaffiliated with a federation. In deciding to combine with the Lithuanians, the Markenhoffs were making a larger decision to transform Beit Zera into a member of the Kibbutz Artzi-Hashomer Hatzair Federation. This decision defined the course of Beit Zera’s growth in the following decades. The Kibbutz Artzi was notoriously more puritanical about collectivism than the other federations, with an emphasis on social collectivism as prerequisites to socialist production and consumption. The Artzi’s internal program, from 1927, explained that:

The essence of the kibbutz stems from its social life, in which it aims at complete integration of the individual and the community in a cooperative life-project covering all areas of life…

Shula, a daughter of two members of “The Lithuanians,” told me an anecdote that illustrated the sharpness of this shift. When the Lithuanians, who came from Hashomer Hatzair, arrived, they saw that the original members had their own libraries in their tents. They said, “this is not okay—we need to have a collective library, because we need to learn together.”

The story of Beit Zera’s integration into the Kibbutz Artzi federation as a result of gar’in-based immigration reveals the double exclusivity of the kibbutz model: the barriers to entry within each individual kibbutz, and the rigid ideological barriers between the kibbutz federations, which precluded the possibility of an inclusive kibbutz movement.

In its first three to four decades, Beit Zera’s population only expanded via 1) the transformation of members’ children into official members, 2) gar’in immigration,

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183 Near, 156.
and 3) the absorption of Yishuv members who belonged to Hashomer Hatzair in non-kibbutz settings.

The premise of self-selection was foundational to the kibbutz’s early success. This is evident in members’ current-day explanations of the differences between past and present. The first members of Beit Zera, like all kibbutz members in the pre-state period, actively and intentionally accepted difficult material conditions as a sacrifice for actualizing their principles. The birth of children into the kibbutz, then, created a problem. If a whole new population is introduced that never chose to take up this way of life, how might the community ensure they ultimately buy into their parents’ commitment?

This was facilitated by lina meshutefet (joint childrearing) where children learned, ate, slept, and played with other children in their age group from infancy onwards. Beit Zera followed this living arrangement. Many of the men and women I interviewed grew up in joint childrearing, and all of them described the kibbutz as their primary family. Shula, in particular, was steadfast on this point:

As children, [Beit Zera] was our world. It was a full world. They educated us towards the values of the kibbutz. They [the founders, including her parents] saw themselves as pioneers of a new society. So they came up with the idea of a progressive and democratic education. We grew up in a kvutza of children our age that had democratic principles, in conversations and votes. Like a mini kibbutz within the kibbutz! Now, at that young age, ideology was not…. you know… you live it. You live that truth. You live collectively, you share everything. That’s just what you know. No one tells you to believe it…that’s just what you know.186

This sentiment—that in the ‘30s, ‘40, and ‘50, the kibbutz ideology was not explicitly taught but rather learned as a product of an all-encompassing socialist and Zionist way of life—was ubiquitous among interviewees of this generation.

186 Ibid.
Collective childrearing may have been in line with the anti-bourgeois principles of kibbutz, but it was also an incredibly useful tool of maintaining a population committed to the need-based model. As long as the children continued to believe that Beit Zera was “their whole world,” there would be no alternative to tempt them towards another lifestyle. One interviewee, of a younger generation, described these members as “like dogs that were trained to think a certain way. They do something that they think is right for themselves, but they don’t know if it’s actually right.”

No kibbutz could hope to grow any larger than its original size by relying on its own children. Such growth was too slow for immediate expansion (the 100th child in Beit Zera was only born in 1945), and young children could not rise to the challenge of hard labor required to continue to expand infrastructure and production. Thus, Beit Zera repeated the process of population expansion via gar’in integration twice more after the Lithuanians, in 1941 and 1950. Both groups were comprised of Hashomer Hatzair members who were only able to legally immigrate to Palestine through youth movement membership in their home country.

1942: Beit Zera members pose on top of Beit HaRishonim, all still young adults themselves, the child of the couple on the right in her mother’s arms. Beit Zera Archives.

187 Sarah Miller, personal interview, June 20th, 2017
188 Beit Zera Historical Calendar, in the Beit Zera Archives, accessed in June of 2017
The first group arrived from Vilna, Poland, in 1940, having narrowly escaped Nazi roundups. Some of their gar’in did not make it to Palestine in 1940, and of that group, those that survived concentration camps or life in the Soviet Union came to Palestine in 1945. Whatever year they arrived, members of the Vilna gar’in were not allowed to join Beit Zera immediately: they had to spend a sufficient amount of time undergoing intensive agricultural training in a hachshara camp like Petah Tikva (near Tel Aviv) or Ein HaMifratz (near Haifa).

189 Beit Zera Historical Calendar.
190 Personal correspondence with Bracha Ben-Tor, Beit Zera’s archivist, March 13th, 2018
Similarly, a group of Moldovan Hashomer Hatzair members left Romania for Palestine in March of 1948 on a ship called The Independence, along with 15,000 other Jewish refugees. Sarah Nesher, an 84 year-old Beit Zera member, told me that her parents had struggled to illegally immigrate to the Yishuv before independence in 1948, and that she chose to join Hashomer Hatzair to ensure her safe arrival to Palestine.

After the war, they opened the youth movements in Romania. Hashomer Hatzair was one of the big ones. I went to Hashomer Hatzair, and at age 13, in 1948. My parents immigrated in an illegal way, actually. But I have a brother who was in Hashomer Hatzair and he immigrated to Israel legally. And he told us to join the movement and come to Israel legally, too.\(^{192}\)

\(^{191}\) Personal correspondence with Bracha Ben-Tor, Beit Zera’s archivist, March 13\(^{\text{th}}\), 2018.
\(^{192}\) Sarah Nesher, interview with the author, June 2017.
Once in Palestine, the Romanians had to train to become fit for kibbutz life, so they spent two years at the hachshara camp in Afula. This gar’in—called the “Independence Kvutza,” after the ship on which they arrived—had intentions of joining a newer kibbutz than Beit Zera, or maybe even starting their own. Sarah spoke of the choice to join Beit Zera matter-of-factly:

When our gar’in first came here, we really wanted to…continue the growth of the movement, to actualize the ideology. But people from Beit Zera came to our gar’in to convince us to join.¹⁹³

By 1951, both of these groups—approximately 60 individuals from Vilna and 29 individuals from Romania—had integrated into Beit Zera, doubling the adult population. On top of these permanent members, Beit Zera also took in teenaged kvutzot from Hashomer Hatzair—those already in Palestine, but also some coming straight from Germany, Lithuania, and Poland—for short stints in the following years to learn about the kibbutz way of life.¹⁹⁴ By the 1940s, Beit Zera was considered an “old” kibbutz, and became a site of formal agricultural training (a hachshara camp) for Hashomer Hatzair gar’inim before they were approved by the Artzi Federation to lease their own land, via the Jewish National Fund.¹⁹⁵

Beit Zera’s early demographic growth shows the degree to which the original kibbutz model was limited in its capacity as an apparatus of immigrant absorption. Only groups of youth movement members who had already committed to making the material sacrifices necessitated by kibbutz life were eligible for consideration. True, the kibbutz was a cheaper model of immigrant absorption than private settlement, as Ruppin argued, but it was also extremely selective. And once a kibbutz was

¹⁹³ Ibid.
¹⁹⁵ Beit Zera Historical Calendar.
established in the pre-state period, the only sure way to join from the outside was through a *gar’in* of the same political affiliation as the kibbutz in question. There are exceptions to this rule, stories involving individual petitions for membership passing the kibbutz community. For example, Golda Meir, the fourth Prime Minister of Israel, was famously rejected twice for membership from Kibbutz Merhavia before convincing the members to allow her to stay:

…They could not imagine that an American girl would do the hard physical work required. Despite the rejection, we were invited to come to Merhavia for two or three days so that the members could look us over…they finally accepted us [Golda and another friend from America] after a third meeting of the whole kvutza. After that I had to be careful not to make any slip expected of an American girl.196

The reasoning behind Kibbutz Merhavia’s two-time rejection of Meir concisely summarizes the particular brand of exclusivity of early kibbutzim. This was not an exclusivity based on class or on connections. Rather, it was simultaneously meritocratic and highly subjective. The existing kibbutz members had full power to decide whether or not a prospective member (or group of prospective members) was fit—physically and mentally—to join their burgeoning community. Under the banner of creating a completely egalitarian and communal way of life, the difficult material conditions of the kibbutzim in the Yishuv necessitated a high level of selectivity to ensure stability in production and ongoing viability. In this way, the kibbutzim’s role in state building, and specifically their commitment to self-actualization, prevented the kind of inclusivity and equality of opportunity that universal socialism promises. This confluence of factors turned kibbutzim into an exclusive elite, one that contributed to important state-building processes, yes, but that contradicted its

commitment to the universalist principle of equality in order to achieve its settlement and production goals.

Internally, too, partisanship and barriers to entry marked the kibbutz movement, most obviously as a result of the framework of federations. The federation system was reflective of what has until now been limited to subtext in this analysis: the multi-faceted character of the Jewish labor movement. The range was not huge, but it was significant, reflected in the youth movements (the Marxist and youth-oriented Hashomer Hatzair versus the socialist but anti-Marxist Hapoel Hatzair), the early Yishuv political parties (the mainstream socialist Ahдут Ha’Avodah versus the Marxist-socialist Hapoel Hatzair), and the late Yishuv/early state political parties (Mapai, the mainstream Labor Zionist party, versus Mapam, the left-wing Labor Zionist party). This description is simplified, of course: the division between left Labor and right Labor was never binary, and many smaller parties rose up and then disappeared at various points in this history, falling at different points on the Marxist/anti-Marxist spectrum. The purpose of providing this abridged version is to get at the sheer complexity of a movement that, at least on basic tenets, seemed to have been in agreement, particularly on the point that the fruition of the Zionist project was contingent on a) physical Jewish labor to “conquer” the soil, and b) some degree of socialist collectivism.

The history of the federations, like the history above, involves rapid changes in a short period of time. In the 1920s and 30s, three kibbutz federations formed, each aligned with one or more of the aforementioned political parties and/or youth

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197 Rayman, 57.
movements. The Kibbutz Artzi Federation, which Beit Zera belonged to beginning in 1934, was affiliated with the Hashomer Hatzair youth movement and with the Mapai political party. The Kibbutz Ha’Meuchad Federation was less devoted to socialism and more committed to whatever the national interest, as defined by the Va’as Leumi and Histadrut (the two pre-site institutions of Yishuv governance and leadership) called for; its allegiance, thus, lay with the Mapam party, which dominated the Knesset until 1968, when it was replaced by the unity Labor Party.

Hever Ha’Kvutzot was the least political of the three movements, loosely associating with certain Mapai factions but much more interested in upholding “the religion of labor.”

These distinctions between the federations were not nominal. In practice, significant tension colored the relations among the three. Particularly fierce was the discord between the Artzi Federation and the Me’uchad Federation, each of which believed its version of the kibbutz model (and its political allegiance) was the right path for the Israeli polity to follow. This resulted in a lack of collaboration or integration between members of kibbutzim that belonged to different federations, though many of these kibbutzim were neighbors, having been founded by strategic settlement process in the First, Second, and Third Aliyot before the advent of the federation system. Yoram, a member of Beit Zera who was born in the late 1940s, looks back on this division with contempt.

198 Near, *Volume 1*, 160-161.
199 Ibid.
200 Ibid.
201 Rayman, 58.
202 Near, *Volume 1*, 208-209.
…In 1948…Hashomer Hatzair decided that we needed to have our own school. I didn’t understand that idea, it seems silly. It was so we wouldn’t get mixed up with the kids of Mapai from other kibbutzim. Kids from Mapam and Mapai couldn’t be educated together. Today, you look at that and see how insane that is. It’s part of the larger downfall of the Kibbutz Movement, the divide between Mapam and Mapai. 203

The overarching structure of the kibbutzim, particularly as functionaries of a larger youth movement and political party apparatus, further limited the possibility of population growth. Not only did immigrants have to be ideologically committed to socialism and Zionism, but they also had to prove allegiance to the particular brand of Labor Zionism that each federation dictated.

Rejections of the Kibbutz Model

Two basic features are required for a unit of settlement to grow demographically: a willingness and capability of the unit to absorb new members, and a desire among potential inhabitants to live there. Non-coercive settlement, then, requires mutual interest. As explicated above, the kibbutz model of settlement did not invite large-scale or inclusive membership. But the obstacles to demographic growth were not limited to kibbutz exclusivity. As the Yishuv developed, the geographic and ideological composition of immigration changed, and so too did the appeal of the kibbutz.

The First, Second, and Third Aliyot were comprised of mainly Eastern European Diasporic Jews seeking settlement in line with their pre-existing Labor or Socialist Zionist ideologies. Between the late 1920s and the 1950s, such young and committed radicals continued to arrive in organized batches through their youth movements, but their dominance in immigration to the Yishuv waned as Central

203 Yoram Ben Tor, personal interview, June 13th, 2017.
European Jews fleeing the rising threat of Nazi Germany began to arrive in much larger numbers. These immigrants generally came from a wealthier background and were uninterested in forsaking their former way of life for the heroic asceticism associated with the kibbutz lifestyle. True, those kibbutzim that had been around for over a decade, like Beit Zera, had developed infrastructure beyond living tents and rudimentary agricultural structures. But Beit Zera’s remarkably fast growth described in the beginning of this chapter did not create comfortable living conditions. Dahlia, an 85-year-old member, described the discomfort as a child in Beit Zera in the 1940s:

In the children’s house, there was no fan. In the summer it got so hot that they took out the beds/mattresses and put them outside on the concrete, and they put a net against the mosquitoes, and we would sleep under the net.204

Simcha, an 81-year-old member, corroborated that these conditions persisted through the 1950s, when she arrived from Jerusalem through a Hashomer Hatzair gar’in:

“When we wanted to rest, we spilled water on the ground and we napped in the puddle at noon, and if we had to go back to work at 2, we would be completely dry by the time we woke up and go to work until 5. At 4 or 5, there would be some wind, and then it would be nice in the afternoon. People asked us: how can you live in this heat?”205

Her answer, she recalls, was that the vibrant communal life that Beit Zera engendered made up for the material comforts she was foregoing.

It was fun in the kibbutz. I was never jealous of my sisters, all three of them who got houses from my father, who made nice salaries. I loved my life here, and I wouldn’t trade it for any of that.206

Dahlia was born in the kibbutz and Simcha had joined Beit Zera through Hashomer Hatzair: each one had either an emotional or ideological reason for

204 Dahlia Bohrer, personal interview, June 18th, 2017.
205 Simcha Rothschild, personal interview, June 7th, 2017.
206 Ibid.
accepting, and even embracing, such conditions. But for Jewish immigrants who arrived with no ideological predisposition for “Pioneerism,” stories like these of kibbutz life were highly unappealing.  

Furthermore, the capital that these Central European immigrants arrived with would have been scorned on the kibbutz. Though there are records of kibbutzim taking private Diasporic financial donations in the pre-state period, such funds were always put to collective use, and the kibbutz members ridiculed their philanthropic sources. A case in point: in July of 1933, Beit Zera received a lump sum of money through Keren HaYesod (the Yishuv’s fundraising apparatus) from Sir Nathan Laski, a Jewish benefactor in England interested in the Zionist cause. A Beit Zera member named Tzvi wrote contemporaneously, describing the complexity of the exchange:

To us, the whole thing [the existence of a private benefactor]—not the money itself, heaven forbid—was despicable. But what can we do? We have to build the land. The building itself is continuing satisfactorily, and we are even thinking of installing electric plumbing for all of the buildings…. Philanthropy was antithetical to the principle of mutual aid because such easy income represented a threat to the continuation of hard work and sacrifice, even as those funds became integral to the material developments beginning to take place across kibbutzim.

In the coming decades, particularly after German reparation money began to flow into Israel, the kibbutzim adjusted to accepting private funds more willingly. Many scholars of the kibbutz point to this growing accessibility of wealth, and the abandonment of asceticism it enabled, as a key explanation for the changes that

207 Near, *Volume 2*, 322
208 Near, *Volume 1*, 171-2.
209 Tzvi, in 1933, as recorded in Beit Zera’s Historical Calendar.
210 Simcha, personal interview, June 7th, 2017.
eventually led to privatization. This literature will be explored in the coming chapters. But at this juncture, the kibbutz remained ascetic, and this was obvious enough to members of the Fourth and Fifth Aliyot. To these immigrants, the kibbutz was an economically disadvantageous settlement model.

Aside from its collective economic organization, many immigrants were put off by the kibbutz model’s rejection of the traditional family unit and of orthodox Jewish religiosity. Some of these immigrants had zero ideological reason for reaching Palestine, and had only come fleeing persecution. Others were committed to Political or Religious Zionism but were averse to Labor and Socialist Zionism.

Simcha, who spoke so passionately about her love for the communal life Beit Zera during her young adulthood, came from such a family. Her parents were observant Mizrahi Jews, and she was born in Jerusalem. She described her childhood as growing up “in the kibbutz of Jerusalem”—the word kibbutz indicating the insularity of the community. She spoke about the odds against which she arrived in Beit Zera:

I was educated in Hashomer Hatzair against the will of my parents. Orthodox and Hashomer Hatzair don’t go together. But I didn’t listen to my dad. He didn’t know that I was going to peulot (weekly youth movement activities): I always told him “I’m going to the library”. In Hashomer Hatzair, they told us it’s a white lie. In the movement, they told us that a member has to be a person of truth and justice, but they told us to lie to our parents. But it’s a white lie, a lie for the purpose of the truth.

The youth movement groups in the cities, like the branch of Hashomer Hatzair that Simcha was part of, served as the kibbutz movement’s tool against the external

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212 Horowitz and Lissack, 152.
213 Simcha Rothschild, personal interview, June 7th, 2017.
rejection of—or simple ambivalence towards—the socialist, subsistent, and socially radical way of life. But cases like Simcha’s, where children of non-Labor Zionist immigrants ended up joining a kibbutz through a youth movement gar’in, were rare. Rarer still were instances of those immigrants joining a kibbutz upon first arrival in Palestine. Simcha mentioned several times how unique her position in Beit Zera was—not only as a person who quasi-independently found her way to the kibbutz in its early years, but also as a Mizrahi Jew.

To this point this analysis has only alluded to the ethnic dimension of kibbutz exclusivity. But the divisions between Ashkenazi (European) and Mizrahi (Middle Eastern and North African) Jews in modern-day Israel are rooted in the late Yishuv period and especially in the process of immigrant absorption the state adopted to accommodate the mass Jewish “exodus” from the Middle East in the early 1950s.214 The systematic exclusion of Mizrahi Jews from the Jewish labor movement and its institutions is critical to understanding the seeds of the kibbutz’s waning centrality to the Zionist endeavor.

Shafir and Peled characterize the Jewish labor movement of the pre-state period as sharing the “Orientalist outlook of Europe and the European colonial movements,” which “considered its project an outpost of European civilization in the barbaric East.”215 Indeed, it is difficult to conceive of the rhetoric used across the Jewish labor movement—of the “frontier,” of “conquering the soil,” of “uninhabited land”—as anything other than analogous to elitist colonial discourse. The Mizrahi Jews presented a conundrum to this mentality. They were Jewish, yes, but with a

214 Swirski and Bernstein, 69-83.
215 Shafir and Peled, 75.
tradition and language that more closely resembled the Arabs that the pioneers wished
to take the land from.\footnote{216}{Ibid, 76.} Furthermore, these immigrants often subscribed to neither
socialism nor the anti-traditionalism of Labor Zionism.\footnote{217}{Horowitz and Lissack, 152.}

Given this dynamic, it should come as no surprise that kibbutzim—as bastions of Labor Zionism—rarely absorbed Mizrahi immigrants, and when they did, the immigrants often did not stay.\footnote{218}{Lev Luis Grinberg. \textit{Mo(ve)ments of Resistance: Politics, Economy, and Society in Israel/Palestine 1931-2013} (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2014), 105.} Unlike the Israeli state, which had to attempt (if unsuccessfully) a better integration of Mizrahi Jewish immigrants after 1948 to promote a national identity, the kibbutz’s inherent exclusivity never provoked such a need. Thus, the exclusion of non-Ashkenazi Jews from the kibbutz model continued, and became more pronounced in the ‘60s and ‘70s as national tensions between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim culminated in the fall of the Labor Party.

All of this is to say that it is hard to imagine a counterfactual in which the kibbutz model could have grown beyond the scale that it did. Its intrinsic barriers to entry and the external aversion to its radical politics created a ceiling for demographic growth.

\textit{The Jewish Labor Movement: From Class to Nation}

Together, aversion to the kibbutz ideology and lifestyle among the new waves of immigrants coupled with the extreme selectivity of the kibbutzim’s own absorption processes created a major barrier to the kibbutz’s continued importance to the Yishuv’s development. But the obstacles facing the kibbutz model were not only demographic. While kibbutzim remained producer and consumer cooperatives, the
Jewish labor movement’s purported socialism became more and more secondary to nationalist aims. The constructivist socialism that emerged on the proto-national level—whereby select socialist policies of the Histadrut and the Va’ad Leumi were used as instruments for state-building goals—was far from the purist ideology practiced in the kibbutz, creating a rift between the state that members of kibbutzim envisioned and the state that was materializing.

If the 1909 partnership between the Palestine office of the ZO and the settlers of Degania was the first informal coalition between the broader Zionist movement and the Jewish labor movement, the founding of the Histadrut in 1920 (and its first election later that year) represented its institutionalization.219 This moment is a jump backwards in history in an otherwise linear narrative. Indeed, the previous chapter contended that the kibbutz movement was instrumental to the growth of Zionism until at least the end of the Third Aliya, in 1923. But “instrumental” does not mean “ideologically consistent.” These are the two main variables featured in this analysis: instrumentality and consistency. And while the instrumentality of the kibbutz to Jewish nation building in Palestine flipped rapidly in the later Yishuv period (from instrumental to non-instrumental), the consistency of the kibbutz ideology (socialism) with the ideology of the broader state (and the Yishuv the preceded it) shifted less rapidly. The seeds of this ideological inconsistency were sewn as early as 1920, with the founding of the Histadrut.

Definitions of the Histadrut vary across scholarship, but its centrality to the foundations of the Israeli economy and polity do not. In 1920, Jewish immigration was still nowhere near its peak, and retention was extremely low. The World Zionist

219 Sternhell, 179.
Organization and Jewish Labor Movement were in alliance, but their alliance did not have an institutional body with which to consolidate power and ensure an increase in and retention of immigrants. The Histadrut was founded to fill these two needs. Its functions were multiple from the outset: to unionize Jewish labor, to facilitate public works projects, to create space for a local political sphere, and to provide financial services. Some economists emphasize its role as an employment generator. Paul Rivlin is among these scholars:

By generating full employment, high living standards, and job security, the organization aimed to help Jewish workers achieve personal dignity, all of which they had been denied in the Diaspora.

Rivlin gets at the significance of the Histadrut, but does not fully describe its critical role in formalizing the synthesis of the Zionist Organization’s goals with the ideology of the Jewish labor movement. Ultimately, the real central purpose of the Histadrut, as Ran Chermesh puts it, was to be a “vision of the future.” The Zionist movement at large saw the need for a tool to facilitate and expedite the process of settlement in Palestine, and the Histadrut was created to be the many-faceted body to enable that. If the goal of the Yishuv was simply to enable immigrant absorption and a better living standard—if there were no other ideological push factors at play—the Histadrut might have expanded industry and accumulated much more rapidly than it did. As Shafir and Peled explain, in the late 1920, the Jewish National Agency recommended that the Histadrut adopt a policy of channeling funds towards wealthy Jewish entrepreneurs who could expedite profit making, and thus create the

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220 Shafir and Peled, 17.
221 Rivlin, 25.
groundwork for a higher living standard, and incentivize immigration.\textsuperscript{223} This proposal was rejected outright by the Histadrut, by political parties and youth groups in the Yishuv from the Marxists to Jabotinsky’s followers, by workers, and by middle-class property owners.\textsuperscript{224} The Histadrut leadership defended their rejection of the Jewish National Agency’s plan by citing the importance of defending workers’ wellbeing, as well as the need for all Jews—rich and poor—to take part in state building.\textsuperscript{225} The significance of this incident is two-fold: it illustrates the exact mix of Zionism and socialism that led to socialist-constructivism, and it illuminates the Histadrut’s success in corraling the Yishuv population around a given ideological framework in a very short period of time.

As the proto-state institution of the Yishuv, the Histadrut had its own elected leadership, which served as a microcosm of the Yishuv’s political ecosystem. In the 28 years between the Histadrut’s founding and the declaration of Israeli statehood, and for many years thereafter, Mapai (bolstered by smaller, more Leftist parties under the Labor Zionist umbrella) held a decisive majority.\textsuperscript{226} During those 28 years, the consolidation of the Jewish labor movement into the dominant and less radical Mapai party translated into a de-emphasis on socialism in favor of national unity. Ze’ev Sternhell, critical Israel studies scholar, contends that “national unity” was facilitated by a Yishuv-wide reliance on the proto-state for wellbeing and employment—in other words, an induced consensus. He writes:

The array of services the Histadrut provided created a special connection—material but also emotional—between the members and the organization.

\textsuperscript{223} Shafir and Peled, 68.
\textsuperscript{224} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{225} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{226} Shalev, \textit{Labour and the Political Economy}, 31.
There was no other example in the free world of such a dependence on the organization. For the ordinary member, the two organizations, the party and the Histadrut, represented a single system.\footnote{Sternhell, 186.}

The incident of the Gdud Ha’Avodah and its demise in the late 1920s illustrates the degree to which the Histadrut was an instrument of political and social monopolization, as opposed to an instrument of socialist policy. As described earlier in this chapter, the Gdud was the only genuine attempt to build an all-encompassing socialist proto-state, as opposed to the network of isolated socialist communities the kibbutzim came to be. That the Gdud posed an alternative to the Histadrut as a proto-state framework represented a threat to mainstream Labor Zionist hegemony. On this point, Sternhell continues, in the same work:

\begin{quote}
The Gdud was based on the principles of the commune and the common treasury: to each according to his or her needs, regardless of personal contribution. This principle was in contradiction to constructivism [socialism, the ideological core of the Histadrut], which was concerned with building the economy, not with creating an egalitarian society.\footnote{Ibid, 212.}
\end{quote}

As the Histadrut, along with the other pre-state Yishuv institutions like the General Council (Va’ad Leumi) moved towards adjusting to the needs of a future nation, the cultural and political significance of the kibbutz was challenged. The kibbutz embodied the original tenets of the Jewish labor movement: mutual aid, self-sacrifice, Hebrew Labor. The Yishuv leadership embraced these tenets in its first decades because they were instrumental to overcoming the economic and social barriers to establishing a Jewish presence in the “frontiers” of Palestine. Once this goal had been achieved—to a great degree because of the kibbutz model—these
principles at the core of the original Labor Zionism began to undergo a process of co-option or replacement.

Mutual aid, which had been espoused in the kibbutz to encourage social and economic collectivism, became the rationale for Histadrut membership and for a slew of state-sponsored welfare policies. Self-sacrifice became a relic, particularly in the years after statehood, as many Mizrahi immigrants were forced to live in the squalor of temporary encampments, while the living conditions of veteran Yishuv settlements rose. Suddenly, economic sacrifice was being forced onto new immigrants, undermining the glory with which the first Zionist settlers had associated the choice of poverty. The realization of statehood in 1948 made the value of Hebrew Labor irrelevant: the formalization of a Jewish state meant that Jewish institutions and individuals now owned the factors of production, and the struggle to create a Jewish economy was over. The Arab-Palestinians who remained in Israel now transformed from a threat to all Jewish employment to a source of cheap labor. Most of all, though, the synthesis of these tenets—Pioneerism—had become a relic, transformed from its origins in the kibbutz into a catch-all phrase for national commitment, encompassed in David Ben Gurion’s famous concept, “mamlichtiyut,” to be discussed later in this chapter.

**Offense and Defense: the Kibbutz’s Last Stronghold**

In Rayman’s assessment of the kibbutz model’s significance to state-building processes, she repeats a commonly held oversimplification of Yishuv history:

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229 Near, *Volume 2*, 190

230 Shlomo Swirski, “Inequality in Israel: In the End, Israel Produced its Own 1%,” *Israel: The Major Debates*, eds. Eliezer Ben-Rafael, Julius H. Schoeps, Yitzhak Sternberg and Olaf Glöckner (Germany: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2016), 8, 11, 17.
The main function of the kibbutz was to create a material base for a Jewish state in Palestine: land had to be reclaimed, new immigrants had to be supported and frontiers had to be guarded.231

As already established, the kibbutz was an ideologically important but materially minor player in immigrant absorption. The phrase “land had to be reclaimed” is a complex one: whom was the land being reclaimed from? The kibbutzim certainly did serve as a crucial tool of Jewish agrarian development in areas that were formerly inhabited by mostly Palestinian Arabs. Still, even on that front, as a proportion of total agricultural development in the Yishuv, kibbutzim were not predominant. The piece of Rayman’s description that is entirely accurate—and that reflects an important aspect of this history not touched on in this analysis until this point—is the idea that “the frontiers” had to be guarded. Indeed, throughout the pre-state period and past Israeli statehood, kibbutzim (in border areas especially) served as critical sites of Zionist defense and offense.232

Some context on Arab-Jewish relations in British Palestine is required here. Ideological and religious significance aside, early Zionism’s defining effect was the massive influx of a non-indigenous group (Jews) to a previously populated land. Before the advent of the nationalist aim in the 1880s, the Jewish population of Palestine was a small minority among the mostly Arab population, though both were subjects to Ottoman and British imperialism.233 The flood of Jewish immigrants created a multi-layered power struggle. On the one hand, the British were attempting to retain control over their Mandate. On the other hand, Palestinian nationalism also

231 Rayman, 11.
232 Rayman, 267.
233 Shalev, Appendix 1 in Labor and the Political Economy in Israel, 338.
began blooming in the late 19th century, both as a product of the global popularity of nationalist movements and as a reaction to the Zionist encroachment on the land.  

All of this is to say that increasing Jewish settlement provoked rising tensions among all three parties. That the new Jewish residents were explicitly attempting to build a separate economy and taking up scarce land and resources exacerbated the ideological clash of colonialism, Zionism and Palestinian nationalism. The first string of riots against increasing Zionist settlement occurred in the 1920s, culminating in the 1929 violent dispute over the Western Wall. But until the 1930s, the violence was sparse and centered around cosmopolitan population hubs. The incidence and reach of conflict exploded beyond this contained state in 1936. In the following three years, the Arab Higher Committee—the autonomous governing body of the Arab-Palestinian population in British Palestine—declared a general strike (meant to hurt the British), while coordinated attacks on Jewish settlements by Arab-Palestinian militias raged in every part of the mandate. Both the British armed forces and the Zionist settlers reciprocated the violence.

Recall that many of the kibbutzim to this point had been strategically built in areas with little to no pre-existing Jewish settlement. This meant that they were ripe for attacks. In 1937, for example, several of Beit Zera’s crop fields were set on fire; in response, the kibbutz built a watchtower. Beit Zera included, the border

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236 Ibid, 270-278.
237 Ibid, 290-292.
238 Beit Zera Historical Calendar.
kibbutzim’s physical frontline position was critical to the defense of the Yishuv, for keeping the kibbutzim standing as permanent Jewish settlement meant holding onto a physical Zionist claim to contested border areas.239

Geographic placement was not the only way in which the kibbutz model contributed to Yishuv defense. The same tradition of self-sacrifice for the collective good that made the kibbutzim optimal for difficult settlement endeavors also built a citizenry willing and ready to defend the Yishuv and, eventually, the state.240 Almost every Beit Zera member I spoke to mentioned his or her army service within the first five minutes of our interview. Beit Zera members were conscious of the connection between kibbutz ideology and the glorification of their military service. Shula put it this way:

Going to the army was one of the most obvious things. It was very clear to us at the time that you had to give back to the community, go and volunteer for the good of the whole. Yes, I became an officer in the army.241

Indeed, in the Yishuv period and for several decades following, kibbutz members made up a disproportionate percentage of high-ranking military personal and of soldiers in the most dangerous units.242 There were 350 kibbutz-member officers in the Israeli Defense Force at the time of independence, and even though that number decreased in the years following, the trend of kibbutz members joining the air force, paratrooper, and naval units and holding commander positions within those units did not falter until the 1970s.243

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239 Near, Volume I, 320.
240 Mort and Brenner, 2.
242 Near, Volume 2, 230.
But even more important than the contributions to the defense effort by members of existing kibbutzim was the Kibbutz Movement’s readiness to participate in and employ the strategic Zionist settlement campaign in the mid-1930s called “Tower and Stockade.” When the colonial mandate to Palestine passed from Ottoman to British hands in 1921, a seemingly harmless law was passed down, too, prohibiting the destruction of any building with a completed roof, even if the construction of said structure had been unauthorized. In the height of the Arab Revolt, the kibbutz movement spearheaded the weaponization of this law. With the encouragement of all major Zionist organizations as well as the range of Zionist political parties in the Yishuv, 52 kibbutzim were illegally built in this period in “sensitive areas”: on the border of Lebanon, Jordan, and Egypt, and in areas previously dominated by Palestinian settlement. The tactic was dubbed “Tower and Stockade” after the structures that were built to establish this settlement presence.

The 1947 partition declaration of the partition of Palestine and the withdrawal of British rule set off the chain of brutally violent conflicts between the Yishuv, the Palestinians, and the neighboring Arab countries that led to the departure and expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians and to official Israeli statehood. Between 1947 and 1950, this manifested in a full-blown war. As in the late 1930s, the kibbutzim were again instrumental to the Yishuv’s (and Israel’s, after 1948) wartime efforts. Ze’ev Drory, in his study of the kibbutz movement’s contributions to Israeli defense, notes a speech that Prime Minister David Ben Gurion made in the first years

\[\text{Near, Volume 1, 315-317.}\]
\[\text{Ibid, 319.}\]
after the war: “without the resilience of the besieged settlements—it is hard to imagine how the present State of Israel would have remained standing.”

Some scholars of the kibbutz emphasize the degree to which certain kibbutzim, particularly those of the Artzi Federation, were reluctant to join in the defense efforts given their stated commitment to Arab-Jewish peace, or “ahvat amim” (“brotherhood of nations”). The Artzi Federation was particularly committed to Martin Buber’s idea that Palestine was “a land of two peoples.” Shula described the way that Hashomer Hatzair educated on Jewish-Arab relations:

They educated us towards Ahvat Amim with the Arabs. When I was kid, there was still the military rule on the Arabs within Israel. So we would go to protests against the military rule [of Arab communities in Israel between 1948 and 1966].

And yet, in nearly the same breath, she spoke of the excitement with which she joined the army, and the degree to which she conceived of it as her duty (see her comments previously cited). Beit Zera’s case illustrates that while rhetoric may have suggested an affinity towards cooperative relations with Arab neighbors, in reality, kibbutz members were just as (if not more) willing to take up arms in defense of their project. Any conception of the kibbutz’s ideological opposition to the pre-state and post-state conflict with the Palestinian population does not hold water against the reality of kibbutz participation in strategic settlement and the broader nationalist conflict.

In the decades to come, particularly in the Six-Day War of 1967 and the Yom Kippur War of 1973, many leading officers and commanders in the Israeli Defense

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246 Drory, 177.
247 Near, Volume 1, 306.
248 Ibid.
249 Shula, personal interview, June 22nd, 2017.
Force came from kibbutzim. The decline in recent decades of the kibbutz’s role in the IDF is a result of the decline of the original pioneering ideology; this will be touched on briefly in chapter 3. But in this period, across a range of offensive and defensive military activity, scholar Zeev Drory’s conclusion on the kibbutz’s role holds true: “the movement was an integral part of security endeavors in all sectors.”

After ‘48: the Kibbutz as a Relic of Foundational Ideology

In 1948, there were 177 kibbutzim scattered across Israel, a total of 49,140 members in a population of 650,000 Jewish Israelis. By 1950, 37 new kibbutzim had been built, growing the movement by nearly 20,000 new members. But the total Jewish population of Israel had grown much faster, doubling to 1,202,993 by the same year. In terms of net impact, the formalization of the Jewish state—and this uneven growth—further reduced the significance of the kibbutz to the Zionist agenda.

Moving into its statehood, Israel was faced with a curious task. The social and political particularities of the pre-state period—the hands-off approach of the British, the conflict with the Palestinian population, the involvement of the Jewish Diaspora—all amounted to a highly developed system of institutions. Political parties, trade unions, corporations, social welfare apparatuses, and networks of settlement communities: it was all already built. Rather than an independence movement building an infrastructure from scratch to replace a colonial infrastructure, the new

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250 Near, Volume 1, 226-228.
251 Drory, 186.
252 Near, Appendix 2, 364.
253 Ibid.
Israeli state had to adjust the comprehensiveness of the Yishuv’s proto-state bodies, taking on some of their responsibilities while preserving the institutions and practices that had proven effective.

Ben Gurion’s famous idea of *Mamlachtiyut*, best translated as “exaltation of the state” was crucial to facilitating this transition from Yishuv to state.\(^{254}\) The formation of a nation-state meant that the axis of the national community could no longer be voluntary: the “machinery of the government” was now responsible for the livelihood of its citizenry.\(^{255}\) But the ethos of volunteerism—of sacrificing for the community at large—had been the defining characteristic of the Yishuv, the logic by which its members were held accountable. So *mamlachtiyut* became the solution to turning volunteerism into an imperative: to be a citizen of the state meant to commit to the idea of continued national growth. Shafir and Peled summarize this succinctly: the “shift from sectoral interests to the general interest, from semi-volunteerism to binding obligation, from foreign rule to political sovereignty.”\(^{256}\)

The changing role of the Histadrut, the most comprehensive of the pre-state bodies, illustrates this adjustment well. Before independence, by tying membership to employment and services, it had been the tool by which much of the Yishuv population was forced to buy into the Labor Zionist ideology. Now, the state took on responsibility for those services and for ensuring employment. The Histadrut remained dominated by the Mapai party, but that connection no longer translated to an imperative political affiliation for all Israeli citizens. Of course, the hegemony of

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\(^{255}\) Near, *Volume 2*, 185.

\(^{256}\) Shafir and Peled, 18.
the labor ideology among the Jewish population in Israel did not dissipate immediately, particularly among the veterans of the Yishuv. But now there were 600,000 new immigrants, none of whom had lived through the first years of Zionist Pioneerism.

Horowitz and Lissack describe the creation of a labor movement sub-culture in the Yishuv period, a result of the romanticization of the conditions of early settlement life: the plain cloth dress, the songs sung in the fields while working, the celebration of harvest days. This romanticization was totally lost on the new immigrants, particularly as many of them were forced to live in ma’abarot, temporary encampments with even worse living conditions than those early kibbutzim. These immigrants had not lived in the Yishuv, and so had no attachment to this aforementioned culture or to the collectivist ideology behind it.

Mamlachtiyut, meant to inject nationalism with the same kind of reverence once associated with the Pioneerism of the kibbutz, began the process of undermining the labor ideology’s hegemony. In the Knesset, it was often cited as a reason for reconciliation between disagreeing parties. And it worked: in the first decade of the state, the Mapam leadership moved further and further away from mentioning class or socialism for fear of widening the gap between agendas. Golda Meir, Mapam member and future prime minister, famously declared “Socialism in Our Time” in a 1949 public speech and was skewered for it across the Zionist community, in Israel and in the Diaspora. The following years saw a marked decrease in the emphasis placed

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257 Horowitz and Lissack, 131-133.
258 Ibid, 134.
259 Don-Yahiya, 179.
on class issues by the state, and a marked increase in attempts to appeal to the nation as a single, classless body.

What of the kibbutz, then, the embodiment of the volunteer pioneering ethic of the pre-state period? In his essay on the roots of the kibbutz crisis in the 1980s, Pauker argues that the kibbutz’s perception in the public sphere was diminished as soon as statehood was established:

...The Kibbutz soon realized that, contrary to its leaders’ presumptions, it was no longer perceived as the spearhead pioneer of significant current endeavors. Therefore it was no longer entitled to the enormous prestige it had gained for pioneering during the pre-state era. Transformation of the kibbutz’s public state stemmed from the atmosphere created by Ben-Gurion, who sought to place the state and its institutions in the center by canceling the unique status of secondary bodies, including the kibbutz.261

Pauker is partially on the mark: after 1948, kibbutzim were no longer central to the “current endeavors” of the state, and as the labor movement’s civic prestige was replaced by mamlachtiyut, the kibbutz’s broader relevance waned as well. But Pauker is mistaken in drawing a correlation between the kibbutz’s decreasing relevance and Ben Gurion’s attempts to “cancel out [its] unique status.” With this characterization, Pauker alludes to a cooption or incorporation of the kibbutz into the new hyper-nationalist narrative, an inaccurate take. In fact, by suppressing Labor Zionism and, in particular, the collectivism of Labor Zionism that the kibbutz represented, mamlachtiyut made the kibbutz unique where it had not been before, if we accept “unique” to mean different, an aberration from the norm. The post-independence Zionist establishment was not interested in cancelling out the kibbutz’s unique role in pre-state history. Rather, the discrepancy between the kibbutz’s internal norms and the norms of the state was solidified by a frozen image of

261 Pauker, 21
kibbutzim as pastoral collectivist settlements in the Israeli imagination, communities out of touch with the rapid growth and ambitions of the new state.262

Internally, the kibbutz movement kept growing. For the next thirty years, almost 100 new kibbutzim were built, and their collective agricultural and industrial production expanded. In the coming decades, kibbutz production shifted from subsistence-based to export-oriented; many kibbutzim became major sites of primary Israeli exports. And the national shift away from a purist labor ideology did little to change the way of life within the kibbutz.

Take Beit Zera. In 1952, it partnered with five other settlements in the Jordan Valley to open “Safan,” a Formica manufacturing plant.263 Between 1955 and 1957, the kibbutz massively expanded its livestock operation, installing a new henhouse fit with incubators and an entirely new operation for extracting cow’s milk.264 As a part of the national banana grower’s union, the kibbutz began exporting its bananas to the Soviet Union.265 Devotion to the left-wing socialist ideology continued to flourish. The children continued to be raised in the collective Children’s Home and educated in the internal school system through the 1980s.

As the collective wealth of kibbutzim grew and as their production and consumption patterns formalized, the division between their internal worlds and the Israel that was developing beyond their gates grew. Yiftach Sadan, the son of a marriage between a founder of Beit Zera and a member of the Lithuanians, spoke about how this division became visible to him as a teenager.

262 Near, Volume 2, 188-189, 194-195
263 Beit Zera Historical Calendar, in the Beit Zera Archives, accessed in June of 2017
264 Ibid
265 Ibid
As teenagers in the 1960s, Yiftach and his friends were involved in the Hashomer Hatzair movement, as all kibbutz children of the Artzi Federation were. The Jordan Valley, by this time, had expanded far beyond the meager kvutzot of the turn of the century. In particular, the city of Tiberias, which sat on the shore of the Sea of Galilee opposite Beit Zera, had grown to become a hub of mostly poor Mizrahi immigrants. Though hiring outside labor was counter to the ideal of the kibbutz model, Beit Zera had begun to employ some of the men and women from Tiberias to work in its agricultural branches, accommodating the gaps left by children of members who wanted to pursue higher-level managerial work in the kibbutz. Yiftach and his friends saw these workers—contributing to the kibbutz and receiving menial wages but not benefiting from the collective distribution of profits—and began to consider the ways in which their way of life was becoming skewed.

We realized we were living in a weird disparity. We were speaking at this very high standard and functioning on a very low standard. We talked about equality but there wasn’t equality. There were new phenomena that were intolerable. In this new society, women were actually finding themselves more and more in the kitchen or taking care of children [as a result of the kibbutz’s internal labor needs]. I felt like we were living in a sort of glasshouse that’s not Israel. Israel was happening somewhere else. Then they called it the second Israel, all of the immigrations that were coming then. Most of them were from the Mizrah. I said, Israel is there. I saw the parents of those kids working with us in the bananas… and it bothered me. A model that makes sense to organize tens of people doesn’t make sense to organize hundreds of people. It requires a different mode of thinking. There are situations when we want to throw out the bathwater without throwing out the baby. How do we keep the idea and change the model itself? Keeping the soul of the matter without the rest?

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Yiftach’s story illuminates some of the contradictions that arose as a result of the survival of the original kibbutz model within the new state. On this front, the false predictions of Pauker’s claims are important: even if it has been his intention, Ben Gurion did not succeed in cancelling the unique status of the kibbutz via the establishment of statehood. Rather, the founding of the Israeli state exacerbated its divergence from the developing norms of Israeli society. Slowly, this incongruence would lead to the disintegration of the kibbutz’s cooperative structure. Chapters three and four will delineate the different ways in which the changing character of the Israeli state provoked the privatization of need-based kibbutzim and the transformation of the traditional kibbutz lifestyle.

Above: a Beit Zera member handling cattle in the 1950s. Below, the community gathers to celebrate a harvest in the mid 1940s. Beit Zera archives.
CHAPTER THREE
‘Like Thunder on a Beautiful Day’: Ripples of National Change on the Kibbutz

The moment that the kibbutz was seen as a conflict between the individual and the collective, then the individual won.
Tzipora Tal, 2017

In the annals of Israeli history, the Knesset election of 1977 is called HaMa’apach. This word translates two ways: “revolution” and “upheaval.” Both translations accurately describe the event’s gravity. With statesman Menachem Begin at its helm, the Likud party won a majority of votes and the power to form the winning coalition, the first time since Israel’s foundation (and the thirty previous years of the Yishuv) that the Labor Zionist camp did not emerge victorious. To many Israelis—the militarily hawkish, the free-market believers, and the Mizrahi Israelis who had been either neglected or actively boxed out of economic success by the Labor government’s policies—Likud’s triumph represented a glorious revolution. But
to the Labor camp and its constituents, the results of the 1977 election were much like Donald Trump’s election in 2016 America—totally unbelievable until they materialized. Indeed, since the Yishuv period, constructivist socialism had been the dominant ideology in the political sphere, and the kibbutzim thus remained comfortably within the realm of that hegemony. Now, Begin had risen to power precisely by disparaging all that the kibbutzim represented, including a web of long-standing economic relationships among the Labor camp’s institutions, a system of protectziyot (protectionism) that guaranteed financial stability (and often success) for the veterans of the Yishuv while excluding most of the post-1948 immigrants.  

The rejection of the Labor camp’s supremacy in 1977 meant that whatever co-opted or watered-down vestiges of the principles of mutual assistance, agricultural Pioneerism, and collectivism (all of which were heavily associated with the Labor movement) that had informed policy were replaced with a more acute nationalism, economic liberalism, and a general celebration of individualism. To the Israelis on the losing side of this election, such an abrupt shift in the dominant ideological tone of the state was a surprise. With hindsight being 20-20, that this was a surprise was clearly a product of selective viewing and listening. In the 29 years prior, a confluence of factors that did not exist in the pre-state period led to the erosion of the Labor coalition’s political viability. This chapter will discuss those central factors—the wave of Mizrahi immigrants and the labor coalition’s inability to accommodate their absorption humanely, resulting in growing discontent towards all parties in the

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267 Swirski and Bernstein, 3-4, 19.
labor coalition (and belated universalization of welfare policy), the labor coalition’s mishandling of the 1973 Yom Kippur war, and the spiraling debt of the 1970s.

Though it should not have been a surprise, the Likud win was an upheaval for kibbutzim, whose foundational principles became more acutely at odds with the aims of the Israeli state. Though it took Likud seven years to actually implement a program of liberalization policies (under American pressure), the ruling coalition’s commitment to neo-liberal policy was apparent from the start. As soon as the coalition came into power, the Kibbutz model went from embodying the heroic roots of state building to representing a political, ideological, and economic manifestation of Zionism that the new ruling government (and its supporters) rejected. Particularly crucial to the change in external perceptions of the Kibbutz was the degree to which it embodied the elitism of Ashkenazi Israelis in relation to the poverty of Mizrahi Israelis, even if the kibbutzim themselves were not directly responsible for the policies that created and perpetuated Mizrahi oppression. The shift of the kibbutz’s relationship to the state was not limited to a change in attitude: economic policies that had allowed the kibbutzim to grow their agriculture and industry, involving subsidizations of non-competitive production, generous loan forgiveness, and more, were cut abruptly in 1985 as a part of the Economic Stabilization Plan. In the following thirty-some years, this forced many kibbutzim into selling or privatizing their means of production to cut costs and pay back debts, a chain of events discussed in detail at the close of this chapter.

Horowitz and Lissak, 137.

In the literature on kibbutz privatization, the effects of the 1977 election are often explained as being removed from the internal changes occurring within the kibbutzim.\textsuperscript{271} Alon Gal’s “From ‘We’ to ‘Me’: The Ideological Roots of the Privatization of the Kibbutz” is a prime example of such an analysis. Gal accurately pinpoints the rising value of individualism to second- and third-generation kibbutz members in the 1960s as a central cause of the mass privatizations that arose several decades later, but his analysis barely touches on factors outside of the kibbutz to explain the roots of this phenomenon. In his conclusion, he concedes this flaw in his method: “The process described above focused on development within the kibbutz movement. Obviously we cannot ignore their wider context, such as processes occurring in Israeli society as a whole and in Western society generally.”\textsuperscript{272}

I contend that a single paragraph of an aside on the “processes occurring in Israeli society as a whole” is not enough to explain the internal demands by kibbutz members calling for major economic changes beginning in the late 1980s. Why, suddenly in the 1960s, did “the right to assert one’s individuality, the wish to resist the ‘herd culture,’ and the need to behave like everyone else,” supplant the original kibbutz ethos of self-sacrifice, Pioneerism, and mutual responsibility?\textsuperscript{273} Many of the individuals I interviewed attempted to explain this phenomenon as a result of lack of choice—in other words, as the difference between the generation that chose this

\textsuperscript{271} Notable exceptions include several papers in Michal Palgi and Shulamit Reinharz’s anthology, One Hundreds Years of Kibbutz Life (including Alon Pauker’s “The Early Roots of the Later Crisis—The Kibbutz Crisis of the 1980s and Its Roots at the Time of the Establishment of Israel,” and Avraham Pavin’s “Crisis, Social Capital, and Community Resilience,” both of which acknowledge, though do not adequately expand upon, the role of national changes in cultivating the roots of the kibbutz crisis).


\textsuperscript{273} Ibid, 39.
alternative communal and collective lifestyle and the generations that were born into it. For example, Yiftach explained it like this:

Kibbutzim were built by the hands of a group of select people who chose to do that. They chose it, and they agreed to it. Whoever didn’t want it, left. Children who come back to the kibbutz [after the army], what did they actually choose? People aren’t choosing all the time.274

This strikes me as simplistic. That devotion to the original need-based kibbutz model dwindled among kibbutz members’ in the generations following the founders was not just a result of the fact that they were not the founders. Most people are born into economic or social situations that they did not choose, but it is not a foregone conclusion that all such individuals commit their energies to changing that status quo. Across kibbutzim, though, a critical mass of entire generations turned their backs on the model their parents and grandparents had set up. What occurred between the founding generation and privatization in the late 20th and early 21st centuries that made the kibbutz lifestyle—the norms that these people were raised within—become less attractive? Furthermore, membership in the kibbutz was not forced on the children of kibbutz members: why did change occur to the kibbutz model at all, and not just a reduced retention rate of members’ children? The subtext of one particular interview, with a woman named Nili, sheds critical light on this question. She grew up in the kibbutz in the 1970s, just as the national political and economic changes described above were coming to a head. When I asked her about her perception of the kibbutz’s economic and social structure as a child, she told quite a different story than the older individuals I asked:

Of course I knew it was different. In terms of the economy I knew that…a kibbutz is something special, we lived in a bubble, in a different atmosphere

from the rest of Israel and the world. A kibbutz is abnormal. It's something that almost cannot exist today. [My perception of this difference] was sharpened when I got to the army and met other people, of all types and all backgrounds, men, women from all sectors of society, rich, poor. Growing up, I already knew that everything costs money “outside” and that it was only in the kibbutz that things didn’t cost money. Even then it looked wrong to me. It's not normal that you go to the store, and you take toilet paper and you take all kinds of candies that don't cost money, or laces for shoes or get shoes for free, or clothing for free, or food for free, bread, cheese, vegetables, fruits, everything was free. We didn't pay for anything. But that's what I grew up with, it was very comfortable to me, and that was what we knew. Maybe it was comfortable, but it was not real. It was not natural.  

The older kibbutz members alluded to a difference between their lifestyle and the non-cooperative model beyond the kibbutz gates, but they described it as better, revolutionary, optimal—an intentionally different way of life. This intentional difference embodied the purest form of the Labor Zionism that dictated life outside of the kibbutz in Palestine. The kibbutz was different because it was exemplary, not deviant. Now, the founders’ grandchildren—like Nili—were citizens of a greater Israel undergoing the rejection of Labor Zionism. The kibbutz, as an embodiment of that formerly dominant ideology, was suddenly abnormal. The seeds of HaShinui—meaning “The Change,” what kibbutz members call the mass privatization—were sowed not by the mere fact of generational change, but by the growing fissure between the kibbutz and Israel at large, and by the sustained commitment to their childhood communities that these second-, third-, and fourth-generations retained. This chapter’s aim is to reverse the scholarly separation of external and internal roots of kibbutz privatization by arguing that internal discord in kibbutzim reflected many of the same phenomena that eroded the credibility and hegemony of the Labor camp on a national scale in the years preceding 1977.

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275 Nili Yardeni, personal interview, June 5th, 2017.
Preserved Consistency: Kibbutz National Ideology Until 1977

Though the ruptures in the Labor camp’s dominance began to form as soon as statehood came to pass, it took Likud’s victory in 1977 (and the resulting formalization of these ruptures) to change the material relationship between the state and the kibbutzim. Until then, the rationale of the kibbutz model and the rationale for national policies were more similar than different, a congruence that resulted in government funding and subsidization. This direct policy support ultimately allowed kibbutzim to grow beyond their economic means, a phenomenon that ultimately created the 1985 Kibbutz Movement-wide economic crisis.

The two winning parties of the Knesset elections until 1977—Mapai (until 1968) and the Labor Alliance Party (until 1977)—stood on political platforms harmonious with the basic tenets that the kibbutz model encompassed: mutual aid, self-sacrifice for a larger mission, and Hebrew (now Israeli) economic independence. Take welfare policy: the concept of mutual aid continued to dictate the formulation of social services and redistributive pecuniary policy in the same way that it continued to be a central ethos in kibbutz life. When Golda Meir spoke about the first universal national insurance plan, the National Insurance Institute (NII), in 1952, she described the government’s motivation as rooted in “the tenets of mutual aid and help for the needy [that] were established a the very beginning of the workers’ movement in Israel.”

The bill had received pushback when it was introduced a year earlier, particularly from the Histadrut, which had benefited from the reliance of politically

uncommitted workers by “tying social provisions to membership.” But the introduction and eventual passage of the bill represented the synthesis of *mamlachtiyut* (the post-48 Israeli version of Étatisme) with the tenet of mutual responsibility. As opposed to the Histadrut’s use of the rhetoric of mutual aid to attract membership (and commitment to Mapai, its leadership party), the state now used the same rhetoric to cohere a sense of a single national entity. Because Mapai was in leadership, Meir (as representative of the Labor camp) framed the NII as inline with hegemonic Labor Zionism:

> Its integral components consist of mutual responsibility to its members, equalization of the financial burden according to means, the spreading of risk, the responsibility of one age group for another, and the unification of management executive.\(^{278}\)

This logic is nearly identical to that behind the need-based kibbutz model. The equalization of financial burden and the spreading of risk are both the justification for and the result of a production and consumption cooperative. In using this language, Meir is articulating what the kibbutzim proposed in stronger language: give what you can and take what you need. Across my interviews, in asking Beit Zera members to speak to their understanding of the ideological underpinnings of the need-based model, each and every one—even those who strongly opposed the old model—cited similar ideas. Shaul, born in 1932 to parents from the Markenhoff group, articulated the centrality of mutual responsibility to the employment and income structure of the kibbutz:

> [We believed in] equality of work. What we meant by that is that it doesn’t matter where you work, if you are a member of the kibbutz and you work, you

\(^{277}\) Shalev, 100  
\(^{278}\) Ibid, 88.
get the same as everyone else: whether you work as a cleaner or as a manager, it doesn’t matter.\textsuperscript{279}

Tzipora, born to the next generation—in the late 1940s—summarized her father’s understandings of the kibbutz member’s role: “The collective was the purpose. In the individual there was no purpose.”\textsuperscript{280} This quote relays an understanding of the world similar to that which Meir was invoking to justify the founding of the National Insurance Institute. In the creation of a formal Israeli welfare program, one can see how reverberations of the pre-state principle of mutual responsibility—over and above philanthropy or charity—remained prominent once the Israeli state was established.

In addition to illustrating a common ethos behind the original kibbutz model and early Israeli welfare policy, Tzipora’s description of her father reveals another important principle: self-sacrifice. And like the principle of mutual responsibility, the logic of self-sacrifice for a greater mission continued to inform national policy choices after 1948, particularly in the areas of military and economic activity.

The first years of statehood are often called “the austerity period,” marked by a policy of enforced asceticism and planned agricultural production that allowed the new state to accommodate the strain of the doubled population size.\textsuperscript{281} This period marked what was perhaps the pinnacle of kibbutz production for national consumption purposes: the widespread lack meant that their goods were at a premium.\textsuperscript{282} After this period ended in 1952, the government’s policy remained oriented towards regulation and subsidization of both production and consumption in

\textsuperscript{279} Shaul Adar, personal interview, June 8\textsuperscript{th}, 2017.
\textsuperscript{280} Tzipora Tal, personal interview, June 21\textsuperscript{st}, 2017.
\textsuperscript{281} Near, Volume 2, 235.
\textsuperscript{282} Ibid.
order to overcome comparative disadvantages and grow a wide range of sectors. In order to implement this policy, producers were at the whim of the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Ministry of Industry. Kibbutzim, as centers of agricultural production both during the “austerity period” and in the “export and industrial developmental period,” continued in their tradition of adjusting production based on the national modus operandi. For example, in 1962, Minister of Agriculture Moshe Dayan announced that all agricultural producers in Israel would begin to grow “moneymaker” tomatoes instead of the strain of tomatoes that grew better in the Mediterranean climate, for “moneymakers” were more popular in the European market. Beit Zera, like all other agricultural sites that grew tomatoes, fell in line with this policy and began to grow moneymakers. 1962 ultimately proved to be a failed harvest year for moneymakers, meaning that both Beit Zera and the national economy incurred a loss. Beit Zera’s historical reliance on state subsidization of agricultural goods created a symbiotic relationship: it produced what policymakers decided was critical to fund. Despite the moneymakers incident, the planned agricultural economy persisted, with kibbutzim as central players.

But to move beyond subsistence and towards growth of total GNP would require more profitable and diversified production. Between 1955 and 1982, the percentage of Israel’s public investment in agricultural production’s fell by more than

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283 Kay, 102-103.
284 Shalev, 83.
285 Near, Volume 2, 327.
287 Beit Zera Historical Calendar.
And though direct public investment in manufacturing industry remained stabled, government-facilitated private investment in import-substitution manufacturing grew. These years were the peak of Israel’s industrial development phase. The changing direction of growth, and the increased practice of importing certain agricultural goods (like grain, once a mainstay of Kibbutz production), served as impetus for communities reliant on agriculture—like kibbutzim—to develop manufacturing industry. The increasing importance of manufacturing to the kibbutz economy is particularly visible between 1956 and 1960s, when “manufacturing employment grew by 45%, capital stock by 75%, and product by 90%.” As in the “austerity period,” private citizens and enterprises were tools used towards the national goal of rapid industrialization, decreasing human resource investment in agriculture and directing manpower towards manufacturing.

Within this policy regime, the kibbutzim were, once again, important sites of sacrificing internal aims for the national interest. Whereas kibbutzim in the Yishuv had produced a wide array of subsistence crops to feed the Jewish immigrants, in the early 1950s they were tasked with diversifying their cash crops to aid the growth of Israeli agricultural exports. On top of adjusting the makeup of agricultural production, most kibbutzim also began building manufacturing industry in the 1960s. Unlike in the Yishuv period, the Israeli government now had resources to support these directed production changes on kibbutzim, such that the kibbutzim’s

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290 Rivlin, 95.
291 Barkai, 209.
293 Near, Volume 2, 327.
294 Ibid.
295 Ibid.
adoption of national production policy did not require material sacrifices. Data from Haim Barkai’s 1977 book *Growth Patterns of the Kibbutz Economy* illustrates the degree to which this change in production direction was a result of government intervention: well over half of the financing of production activities in kibbutzim came from public funds.\(^{296}\) In the 1970s, the trend of kibbutz production changed again with the redirection of national economic policy, this time towards industrial development. Near explains the degree to which the kibbutzim’s congruence with the aims of the Labor coalition made them choice sites for capital investment:

In 1977, the average investment for each worker in the kibbutz industries was almost twice that for Israeli industry as a whole. The ministry of Industry provided generous loans for industrial development, and these were supplemented by a ‘complementary fund’ set up by the Histadrut bank, Bank HaPoalim: 80 per cent of the capital for a promising project would usually be provided by these sources.\(^ {297}\)

It was the kibbutzim’s history of ideologically-driven production that initially made them central sites of public investment in the agricultural and industrial spheres. Recall the kibbutz theory of self-realization: unlike other private Israeli firms, kibbutzim could be asked to develop enterprise that was not locally optimal if the given enterprise contributed to a larger mission (in this case, Israeli industrialization and growth as an internationally competitive producer). While kibbutzim in the 1950s and ‘60s may not have been highly instrumental to the Israeli state in the way that they were to the Yishuv’s colonization process, the congruence of the kibbutz’s ideological principles and the principles of the labor Zionist hegemony allowed the kibbutz to take on an important production role in the growing economy. Put simply, the state asked the kibbutzim to continue playing a modified role of “pioneer” in the

\(^{296}\) Barkai, 180.

\(^{297}\) Near, *Volume 2*, 240-1.
national economy, and until Likud won a majority in the “Revolution” of 1977, the kibbutzim acquiesced, taking on massive loans in the process. The continuation of a planned economy, and the role the kibbutzim played in its fruition, reflects a continued shared vision between national and kibbutz principles.

While kibbutzim may have continued to play an important role in the Israeli economy, upon a closer examination, the Labor government’s policy platform—defended by the same rhetorical themes that dictated life on the kibbutz—was in practice more exclusionary than socialist, dictated by ethnic cleavages, both between Arabs and Jews and within the Jewish population itself.298 Here, again, national welfare policy is illustrative of the relationship between Labor Zionism on the kibbutz and Labor Zionism of the state. In 1959, the National Insurance Institute implemented the Child Allowance Plan, a program of direct cash assistance to families with four or more children under the age of 14. Scholars like Zeev Rosenhek have classified the Child Allowance Plan as a technique employed by the Labor government to prevent the “extreme marginalization” of (and thus, political rejection by) the Mizrahi Jewish population.299 In 1971, the program was expanded and additional benefits became contingent upon a parent having served in the military, which meant that the service was accessible to all Jews but excluded almost all Arab citizenry.300 The case of the Child Allowance plan illuminates a central contradiction in many of the Labor government’s policies: an appeal to values of equality and mutual responsibility (in this case, by offering cash grants to any family with children) tempered by nationalist

298 Shalev, Labour and the Political Economy in Israel, 272.
300 Ibid, 22.
and ethnic considerations (in this case, a welfare program that could benefit the entire Jewish population while excluding the Arab Palestinian population).

Thus, we can see that the same principles and ideas—of equality, of mutual responsibility, of collective good prioritized over individual want—now served nearly diametric purposes on the national and kibbutz levels. Within kibbutzim, they retained their pre-state meanings: they still translated to belief in a socialist economy, and to the centrality of socialism to the mission of the Jewish state. But on a national level, the function of these principles was changing: they were used to buttress national goals totally separate from the formation of even a constructivist socialist (in the tradition of the Yishuv-era leadership’s ideological inclinations) state. This idea of self-sacrifice, under the forces of nation building, had lost its radical meaning well before 1977, taking on new, more malleable definitions co-opted by the new leadership. Self-sacrifice no longer meant material and social concessions, reflected by sparse living conditions, for a socialist Zionist vision. Rather, it had come to mean the blind following of national dictates. In the economic sphere, this meant participating in a planned economy, resulting in excessive loan taking and sharp changes to the makeup of national enterprise. In the social sphere, the ideas of self-realization and sacrifice for the collective had been co-opted to buttress exclusionary policies like the Child Allowance Plan, which furthered existing divisions between Jewish Israelis and Arab Israelis and Palestinians, by defining “selflessness” as limited to only Jewish citizens. Accessibility to a welfare program that embodied mutual responsibility (the state’s support of family growth) had become dependent on
serving in the Israeli Defense Force, the epitome of Zionist participation, but not of general citizenship.

But even if the state were, at least on a surface level, still guided by the same ideological rhetoric that the kibbutzim relied on, the new role that the kibbutz was asked to play within the national economy began to alter its internal organization. In other words, while the Labor government’s ideological platform may not have contradicted the kibbutz’s structure, the kibbutz’s increasing participation in production for export began to do just that.

**Competitive Production: Paradoxes and Consequences**

In 1962, economist Ivan Vallier published a journal article titled “Structural Differentiation, Production Imperatives, and Communal Norms: The Kibbutz in Crisis.” In characterizing the kibbutz as “in crisis,” Vallier was not referring to a material crisis; in fact, by the 1960s, collective living conditions in kibbutzim across Israel were increasing steadily. The crisis Vallier explores in this analysis involved an increasing structural differentiation in kibbutzim’s production processes, resulting from their role as units of production output within a state moving towards export expansion, and the tension this differentiation created between “the communal norms governing the kibbutzim and their functional position in the wider society.”

Vallier pinpointed several major trends across multiple kibbutzim—increased use of hired labor, adoption of formal communication techniques (like a newsletter) to replace nightly meetings, the formation of a more discernible and stable elite class

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302 Rayman, 264.
within each community, and the decreasing input of the entire community in production decision-making— to illustrate the erosion of total collectivism. The changes to Beit Zera’s production sphere between 1948 and the late 1970s, and their ripple effects on the social and economic spheres, simultaneously corroborate and complicate Vallier’s assessment.

In the Yishuv period, and even in the first years of statehood, neither Beit Zera’s agricultural sector nor its slowly growing industrial sector was oriented towards an export economy. The first factory in Beit Zera was built in 1943, a small production line for packaging the carp bred in its fish farms. But these carp, like the banana, bitter orange, grape and apple crops, and like the dairy and eggs from Beit Zera’s cows and chickens, were used to feed the kibbutz and, beyond that, sold throughout the Yishuv. The year 1951 marked Beit Zera’s first shift from production geared towards domestic consumption to production geared towards export. In that year, the Israeli Banana Grower’s Union began exporting bananas to the Soviet Union, and Beit Zera (along with many other Israeli agricultural units) became a major player in the European banana market.

Once Beit Zera became a part of the Israeli export economy, its internal production rates increased. A pattern emerged: increased outputs led to investment in infrastructure, which enabled increase of outputs in existing sectors and stimulated the development of new sectors. In 1953, Beit Zera took out a large loan from the national Agricultural Bank to build another grain silo for storage of the growing

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304 Beit Zera Historical Calendar.
305 Ibid.
306 Ibid.
307 Ibid.
harvests, and followed through on plans to expand its cooler room for crops like potatoes and citrus that required refrigeration. Three years later, the chicken coops and hatchers underwent a significant expansion, complete with high-tech incubators, and to the kibbutz undertook a project to improve its cow-milking machinery. In 1960, Beit Zera had a record yield from the cowshed of 3,000 liters of milk, and six years later, yet another renovation and improvement of the milking machines was completed. In the following decades, Beit Zera’s crop roster was diversified in the direction of cash crops: avocados and dates, two goods the community still exports, were first cultivated in this period.

Left: Beit Zera member stands over a date harvest. Right: Beit Zera member Yechiel Levavi in the henhouse. Beit Zera archives.

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308 Ibid.
309 Ibid.
310 Ibid.
Expansion in Beit Zera’s agricultural sphere was matched with, and soon superseded by, growth of industry. In 1963, a machine to make plastic goods was installed in the barn complex— in Beit Zera’s records, this is dubbed the birth of the Arkal factory (Arkal stands for Arizot Kalot, which means “easy packages”). In the coming years, Arkal became the focal point of Beit Zera: a major source of income and employment, a project that required the kibbutz to invest in members’ professional development, and—several decades later—both a cause of Beit Zera’s rising debts and the community’s ticket out of bankruptcy.

311 Ibid.
But before elaborating on the story of Arkal’s growth and eventual sale, it is crucial to note that even in the early 1960s, Beit Zera’s general council (consisting of representatives of the community at large) was cognizant of the conflict between growth in production (and the logic of profit maximization) and their commitment to pure democracy, collectivism, and cooperation. In particular, the process of industrialization presented new possibilities of labor division and specialization that undermined the premise of equality of labor upon which the kibbutz had been built.

In 1977, fifteen years after Vallier published his article on the incongruence between the kibbutz’s internal collective imperatives and the imperatives of competitive trade-oriented production, Haim Barkai published *Growth Patterns of the Kibbutz Economy* in the midst of this mass industrialization of kibbutzim. When Barkai conducted and wrote his study, Likud was not yet in power, and so kibbutzim still enjoyed higher levels of government funding and easier access to loans than many other firms.312 And yet, he repeated Vallier’s sentiment: a clear conflict had arisen as the kibbutz attempted to stay true to its most basic precept of pure equality while also serving as a site of competitive Israeli production:

The crucial issue is whether equality, the basic premise of kibbutz life, can stand the strain of industrialization. A possible line of escape is the tacit promise that everyone with reasonable capabilities can be drawn into expert work or managerial function. [This didn’t occur in the kibbutz]. Another escape valve…is of course the job rotation which kibbutz practice has established as a major means of achieving social mobility and preventing of the creation of an entrenched group of functionaries. The resulting conflict between long-term considerations, which favor rotation, and short-run calculations of its immediate cost is obvious.313

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312 Barkai, 180.
313 Ibid, 225.
In Beit Zera, the community took certain measures to prevent this conflict from undermining the need-based economic model and its social corollaries. In 1963, hired labor—which had been tacitly accepted in Beit Zera in earlier decades—was categorically banned. Volunteer labor, too, was looked down upon in favor of employment of kibbutz members. Such measures were explained as barriers against the community turning to cheap labor. Whereas the kibbutz ideology of collective work had meshed well with the proto-national ideology of Jewish Labor in the Yishuv period, now it came into conflict with the national goal of rapid industrialization, a goal that had materialized as a product of pressure to increase the national standard of living, create more jobs for the growing population, and compete in international trade. The ban on hired labor—enforced in most individual kibbutzim and recommended by the Kibbutz Artzi and Kibbutz Meuchad federations—was a means of curbing this tension, ensuring that the comparative advantage of hiring cheaper labor was secondary to the kibbutz principle of collectively managed and maintained enterprise. In Beit Zera’s case, this ban was noteworthy in relation to the growth of Arkal, which could have benefited massively from outside expertise, given that few members of Beit Zera in the early 1960s had advanced technical degrees.

For some time, such precautionary regulations seemed to allow kibbutz industry to grow without threatening the need-based model. While it was clear to Beit Zera members that the goal of output maximization might threaten the collectivist model, the converse relationship was not apparent: it did not seem that the collectivist

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314 Beit Zera Historical Calendar.
315 Vallier, 241.
316 Near, Volume 2, 247.
model was a threat to the maximization of output. In retrospect, some members are quick to highlight how certain imperatives of the need-based model were obstacles in the competitiveness of Beit Zera’s industry. Yiftach is one of the most adamant believers in this negative relationship between the need-based model and economic competition:

How can a manager of a factory, who has to give so much time to the kibbutz in the form of rotational shifts in the kitchen, in the night shift, in the children’s houses, ever hope to compete with a manager in the United States of a similar factory who has all day just to think about his factory? There was a period of time during the War of Attrition that I did 100 days of reserve duty in a single year. And on top of that, I was supposed to do all of the rotational positions necessary to make the kibbutz run. At this time I was the manager of R&D in Arkal. How was I supposed to compete with a manager who doesn’t have all these duties? How can I be a better manager, a more creative manager, a more energetic manager, than the American or the Israeli outside the kibbutz? I lose the race immediately.317

For some time, this tension identified by Yiftach did not impact Beit Zera’s ability to turn a profit. Until 1983, most kibbutzim, including Beit Zera, maintained high levels of profitability, enabled by the subsidization of agricultural goods, high rates of public and private capital investment, and the ease with which kibbutzim—as firms—were allowed to take out large loans from national banks.318 Another important set of sources of liquid wealth for kibbutzim to use were German reparations distributed to Holocaust survivors and their children.319 While in the rest of Israel these funds made private citizens wealthy, in kibbutzim, they allowed for the communities’ overall standard of living to rise dramatically. In Beit Zera, the community debated over whether to use the collective reparation funds to build a pool

318 Near, Volume 2, 345.
or a cultural center; they decided on a pool overlooking the Jordan Valley, inaugurated in 1962.\textsuperscript{320} This rising \textit{collective} standard of living was reflected in continued expansion of multiple-room apartments fit with bathrooms (and the destruction of the last collective bathroom in 1971), the building of new bomb shelters in members’ apartments and in communal spaces (in response to the Six-Day War and the Yom Kippur War), and the building of a new and expansive dining hall in 1975.\textsuperscript{321}

\textit{Early 1960s: a man jumps into Beit Zera’s pool, overlooking the Jordan Valley. Beit Zera archives.}

\textsuperscript{320} Beit Zera Historical Calendar.
\textsuperscript{321} Ibid.
The growth of collective consumption seemed reasonable as Beit Zera’s manufacturing endeavors multiplied and expanded. While Arkal diversified the types of plastic boxes and furniture it put into the market in the 1960s and ‘70s, Beit Zera opened a new, smaller factory in 1964, Matan, which produced musical instruments, such as recorders and drum kits, and music boxes.\textsuperscript{322} In the early 1980s, Beit Zera developed a water filtration technology, which would become its most profitable endeavor under the Arkal umbrella. At the same time, Beit Zera built another offshoot factory: Arkal Media, which produced cassette tapes and VCRs.\textsuperscript{323}

Nationally, by the early 1970s, over half of all kibbutz members were employed in manufacturing industry, resulting in an increase of the percentage of

\begin{footnotesize}
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\textsuperscript{322} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{323} Ibid.
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kibbutz income generated from the sector. At this time, agricultural productivity on kibbutzim was 20-30% lower than manufacturing productivity, and the return to capital investment for manufacturing was generally one and a half times that of agricultural investment, if not double. As a result, the total income produced in most kibbutzim in this era was higher than the subsistence-level output produced mere decades earlier. Beit Zera’s story follows this pattern. As illustrated above, this increase in collective income meant a corresponding increase in the collective standard of living. Based on multiple Beit Zera members’ stories of living through this moment of change, it seems as if this shift in standard of living is more directly central to the story of Beit Zera’s privatization than the “burden of maximizing outputs” that Vallier’s analyses pinpoints. In other words, the tension between the kibbutz’s communal norms and its role as a production unit for the national economy was not a result of the impossibility for the kibbutz to rise up to the higher outputs the state demanded. As chapters 1 and 2 illustrated, the kibbutz model had embraced the practice of “heroic economics” from its inception, rising up to settlement, production, and immigrant absorption challenges as the proto-state and state apparatuses had requested, with the promise of self actualization serving as the sole incentive. The erosion of this ideological imperative was not from the kibbutz’s failure to fulfill its new role as a competitive producer, but from its success.

Rapid growth of income necessarily undermined the collectivism that has been so central to the kibbutz’s original functionality, a condition that had been enabled by the former condition of asceticism. In the first decades of Beit Zera’s

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324 Barkai, 222-223.
325 Ibid.
existence, financial incentives had been nil, replaced by the incentive of the greater
goods of making Zionism and socialism on-the-ground realities. Eating every meal in
the dining hall, sleeping with multiple people in a room, and meeting every night to
discuss the occupational rotation for the next day were not choices the kibbutz made
against individualistic alternatives. Once a member agreed to join the kibbutz, they
were agreeing to this totally communal lifestyle, with scant wiggle room for moments
of privacy. In the early years, living on Beit Zera meant that there was no option but
to buy into the concept of self-sacrifice and communal life. Recall the famous saying
of kibbutz lore: the teakettle in the apartment will be the end of the kibbutz. In Beit
Zera, the asceticism of the early days was accepted by members because they had
made an ideological choice, but those conditions existed in the first place because
there was no alternative: resources were stretched thin even with the cost saving
allowed for by collective living practices.

The rapid increase in income created by the kibbutz’s transformation into a
competitive unit of production created multiple options where there had once been
just one. The growth of resources, enabled primarily by successful industrialization,
introduced the possibility of a lifestyle beyond subsistence. Would kibbutz members
continue to choose an austere collective life when faced with the material capability
to choose a more leisurely existence? How did a rising standard of living erode
kibbutz socialism?

The answer, in short, is that causality was not direct, but it is apparent in
retrospect. Increased material resources allowed for an increase in spending catered
towards each member, as opposed to the collective, which reinforced the doubts that
many kibbutz members of the younger generations already had about the degree to which kibbutz life meant suppressing individuals desires. This domino effect can be illuminated by a closer look at the interlocking material and psychological developments in Beit Zera between the mid-1950s and Ha’Mapach: “The Revolution.”

**Individualism Creeps In**

The effects of the rise of the kibbutz’s collective living standard on the degree to which kibbutz members found individualism to be attractive is apparent in Beit Zera’s history as early as 1957, when self-service was introduced in the dining hall. In the kibbutz, as in most societies, the organization of social life—eating, entertainment, and education—was reflective of and reflected by the economic sphere. In many of my interviews, Beit Zera members cited specific ways that the social sphere manifested in the kibbutz of years past, anecdotal evidence to illustrate more general meditations on and analyses of changes in the kibbutz. For example, Simcha described her early years in the kibbutz, in the 1940s, as follows:

> We had so much fun to sit all day outside, and to talk, and to drink coffee together. It was a really beautiful time, a time of togetherness, without a water boiler or a heater in the house. Everyone ate at the dining hall. Today no one sits outside at these hours. Everyone is in his house, watching T.V. or on the computer. Who sits outside anymore?\(^{326}\)

Introducing self-service in a communal dining hall, one might point out, does not automatically imply kibbutz members spending the day in their own houses, glued to screens, in 2017. And yet, self-service was a fundamental step towards the current non-communal state of affairs. Before self-service, meals in Beit Zera (as in

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\(^{326}\) Simcha Rothschild, personal interview, June 7th, 2017.
most kibbutzim) were distributed by whoever was working their rotational shift in the dining hall, much like a stereotypical lunch lady might serve a rationed portion in a public school cafeteria. As with many of the other phenomena described previously, this was a product of two concurrent factors: a shortage of available resources paired with an ideological embrace of material sacrifice for the dual goals of communal living and Jewish settlement in Palestine. Self-service in the dining hall was a reflection of the disappearance of the first factor. By 1957, Israel was nearly a decade old, and Beit Zera’s growing disposable income allowed for a loosening of the once-airtight communalism.

Flexibility in disposable income led to an incremental development of space for the private sphere to exist alongside the all-encompassing public sphere of the need-based model. The successive relaxation of regulations on access to small luxuries yielded a kibbutz that, within two decades after statehood was established, would have been unrecognizable to its founding members. At first, this manifested in collective decisions by kibbutz members that they should have certain consumer goods—say, a fridge or a telephone—and the subsequent distribution of identical appliances to all members, beginning with the oldest veterans.\textsuperscript{327} In 1961, the first such allowance was granted: a majority of members in Beit Zera voted for the community to purchase small fridges for each apartment so that members might keep milk, fruit, or cold water for non-meal times.\textsuperscript{328} Sometimes, a “luxury” would be introduced to the community as a communal object, like the public phone box installed in 1963, before that consumer good was bought in bulk and distributed to

\textsuperscript{327} Beet Zera Historical Calendar.
\textsuperscript{328} Ibid.
members.\textsuperscript{329} 1968, exactly two decades after Israeli independence, was a major year for such developments in Beit Zera: the first black and white televisions were distributed to members, air conditioners were bought for all apartments, and the community voted to build a mini-market for members to access foodstuffs to be eaten outside of the dining hall.\textsuperscript{330}

Clearly, one cannot separate the introduction of consumer goods to the kibbutz from the basic fact that this was a historical moment of major technological developments and rapidly rising incomes.\textsuperscript{331} Many of the luxuries cited above—televisions, telephones, and air conditioners—were unavailable to most of the world’s population prior to the 1960s.\textsuperscript{332} And yet, their introduction to the kibbutz meant something different than, say, a private citizen of Israel buying an air conditioner. In Beit Zera, the advent of appliances and entertainment in the home meant that members spent less time with the rest of the community. The growing appeal of privacy was yet another dimension of the advent of competitive production on the kibbutz. Each exposure to higher quality and more diverse goods and services for Beit Zera’s members, largely enabled by the birth of Arkal in the middle of this period, fed the desire for more consumer goods and pricey services, entities that reflected a necessitated a higher degree of consumer choice in their use.

One such expenditure that had been scoffed at in the original kibbutz was higher education. Sarah, a self-described member of the third generation, cites these

\textsuperscript{329} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{330} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{331} Moshe Syrquin, “Economic Growth and Structural Change,” in Ben-Porath, 50.
\textsuperscript{332} In much of the world beyond Europe and the United States, such luxuries remained rarities well beyond the 1960s; the fact that these goods became commonplace in Israel in this period indicates the larger fact of Israel’s transition from a developing to developed country, at least as far as its Jewish population was concerned.
changes in the sectoral makeup of labor and of production as intimately related to the
kibbutz’s loosening policy on sending its members, children to university:

[In the 1970s], I think we were already in a time when the kibbutz had
opened to the outside world. Before, it was very closed: everyone
came to the kibbutz from commitment to the collective ideology and
kept a closed community. In our generation, people weren’t willing
anymore to go work in the bananas. We wanted to study at university,
which my parents didn’t do.\textsuperscript{333}

Now, with multiple generations of kibbutz-born children growing up
unenthusiastic about pursuing the agricultural work their parents had committed to,
the creation of an industrial sector that would benefit from investment in technical
knowledge, and the financial capacity to fund advanced degrees, the kibbutz
reconsidered its categorical rejection of investing in higher education. And yet: how
could Beit Zera, or any kibbutz, spend such large sums on an expense that was, by
definition, geared towards a single individual? The compromise developed was to
send Beit Zera’s children to university if they so desired, but only to pursue a degree
that constituted an investment in the kibbutz’s economy, and with the guarantee that
the member would come back to the kibbutz to work in that field. Tzipora Tal, who
finished the army in the early 1970s, pursued a career in mechanical engineering not
because she wanted to, but because the kibbutz told her to.

When I wanted to go study, I had to ask the kibbutz. I wanted to learn
psychology after the army, but the manager of the committee for human
resources said they had just sent someone to learn psychology, and the kibbutz
didn’t need two psychiatrists. So the kibbutz sent me to a career aptitude test,
and the proctor said “you can do whatever you want,” and he suggested I go to
the Technion [a top university for STEM in Israel].\textsuperscript{334}

\textsuperscript{333} Sarah Miller, personal interview, June 20\textsuperscript{th}, 2017.
\textsuperscript{334} Tzipora Tal, personal interview, June 21\textsuperscript{st}, 2017.
Tzipora’s career trajectory illustrates the delicate balance the Beit Zera
attempted to strike between accommodating its members’ wants and retaining the
mutual-aid imperative of the need-based model. This effort to accommodate a balance
resulted in perhaps the most significant shift in the kibbutz model itself prior to the
privatization: the general budget system of the early 1970s. Until that point,
consumption on kibbutzim had followed the logic of equal commodity distribution.
The general budget system was developed as a response to complaints that members
had different needs, particularly within certain product categories (like health or
hygiene); the average kibbutz of the 1970s was significantly larger than the kibbutz of
the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, and members felt that the consumption system should reflect
the presence of more than one “type” of kibbutz member (young, able-bodied, and
willing and able to sacrifice material comfort for the needs of the community).\textsuperscript{335} The
implementation of a general budget system meant that each member received an
equal budget, categorized and itemized among possible spending buckets: food,
hygiene, clothing, etc.\textsuperscript{336} This budget was not meant to cover all consumption: meals
were still eaten communally in the dining hall, and most services were accessible
without use of the budget. Furthermore, this first budget was extremely restrictive:
funds from the clothing category, for example, could not roll over to be used in the
food category. But as minimal as it may have been, the introduction of a budget
system represented the tacit acceptance that kibbutz members had individual needs,
just like citizens outside the kibbutz. The idea of sacrificing oneself, and one’s own
comfort, for the good of a greater cause was no longer categorical.

\textsuperscript{335} Menachem Rosner, Itzhak Ben David, Alexander Avnat, Neni Cohen, and Uri Leviatan, \textit{The Second
Generation: Continuity and Change in the Kibbutz} (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 60.
\textsuperscript{336} Barkai, 20.
In 1971, by a rate of 105-33, Beit Zera voted to introduce this system.\textsuperscript{337} By 1979, the rationing of the general budget system transformed into the more fluid family budget system (or comprehensive budget), wherein a lump sum was allocated to each kibbutz member or family.\textsuperscript{338} Individuals now had a degree of agency over their spending, even if the amount in their budget was still not dictated by their labor inputs. Once again, the kibbutz’s control over the individual’s life was loosened by a material change, and the room for personal preference to dictate difference in choice increased, while the basic principle of equality among members was preserved.

Such a balance became increasingly skewed away from traditional kibbutz tenets as various external forces reinforced the limited individualism introduced by this higher standard of living. Israel’s military victory in the 1967 Six-Day War, and the annexation of Jerusalem in particular, galvanized many Diasporic Jews to come to Israel, either as immigrants or as long-term visitors.\textsuperscript{339} Many of these people ended up volunteering on kibbutzim; as indicated earlier, the kibbutz in the Labor era still embodied the mythic pioneering Jew of early Zionism, and of contemporaneous Zionist mythology.\textsuperscript{340} From one end, the advent of a rotating volunteer corps was helpful to kibbutzim in filling out a work force to achieve high productivity without hiring outside labor.\textsuperscript{341} While foreign volunteers helped kibbutzim abide by their imperative against hiring labor, their arrival contributed to the collapse of the ideological foundations of that policy. To many children growing up on kibbutzim in

\textsuperscript{337} Beit Zera Historical Calendar.
\textsuperscript{338} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{340} David Leach, \textit{Chasing Utopia: The Future of the Kibbutz in a Divided Israel} (ECW Press, September 13, 2016), 5.
\textsuperscript{341} Near, \textit{Volume 2}, 246
these decades, foreign volunteers were a glimpse into the world beyond the kibbutz, a world of freedoms they were not privy to. Shula thinks this was a critical factor in the changing perception among the second and third generations of kibbutz members:

In the 1960s, after the 6-day war, the kibbutz was filled with volunteers who...really changed the kibbutz. They brought with them the culture of sexual liberation, new music, a sense of freedom. Suddenly the young people [on the kibbutz] saw that there was a world outside the kibbutz: a whole world opened up.  

This, coupled with access to the outside world via pop culture (television and radio), threw the lack of room for individualism permitted by the need-based kibbutz model into sharp relief. This series of events reveals two concurrent phenomena: an increase in taste for individualism among kibbutz members, and an increased awareness of the lack of individualism that the kibbutz model allowed for.

Thus, it was no surprise when kibbutz members began to criticize the lack of space the need-based model had left for the individual to exercise his or her independent desires. Indeed, the rhetoric of and decision-making by young adult members across Israeli kibbutzim in this period illustrated a detachment from the traditional ideological motives of the founding kibbutz members. In the early years of kibbutzim, the principle of self-actualization—hagsaham atzmit—had been untouchable. As Tzipora Tal explained, the individual’s purpose in life was to work for the collective—“to work for yourself was to have no purpose, the individual had no isolated meaning.” But in the 1970s, a new idea hit the kibbutz movement, one that spread among active young members across all the federations, written about in the movement’s newspapers and debated in federation meetings. This theory was

342 Shula Ben Nachum, personal interview, June 22nd, 2017.
343 Gan, 34-37.
called *mimush atzmi*, which translates to self-realization or self-fulfillment.\(^{345}\) If self-actualization was the idea that the individual could only find meaning through the collective, self-fulfillment or realization was its direct rejection: the individual should be treated as an independent entity, not just as a part of a whole. Gal succinctly describes the weight of this shift:

> The slogan of self-realization rapidly turned into a mantra, seeking to legitimize any material demand, and the more, the better. The idea of self-realization created an upheaval in kibbutz perceptions and discourse, diverting the focus from the individual as a means to the realization of the aims of society to society as a means to the realization of the individual’s potential. \(^{346}\)

Recall, now, the introduction of self-service in Beit Zera’s dining hall. The principle of self-fulfillment was only officially introduced into Beit Zera’s educational curriculum in 1976, but its roots were established with that seemingly minor decision in 1957, when material desire, instead of basic need, began to dictate the actions and choices of Beit Zera’s members. The ability to act on the impulse to consumer more food, or a different kind of food, functioned as a gateway to acting on other such impulses, a chain of events that culminated in the explicit embrace of an alternate ideology—self-fulfillment—that justified such behavior within kibbutzim.

If this was the attitude that had developed—“the more, the better”—why did kibbutz members remain in an intentional community built to limit such excess? What stopped them from moving to “the city” (as Israel outside of the kibbutz is often characterized by kibbutz members)? Nothing, really: the kibbutz allowed a very open option of exit. And in fact, a mass exodus of children of the kibbutz to the cities *did* transpire between the 1970s and 1990, when an average of 50-65% of kibbutz-born

\(^{345}\) Gan, 40.
\(^{346}\) Ibid, 43.
young adults chose to build a life outside of the communities they were born into.\textsuperscript{347} The years between 1988 and 1990 are particularly notable for the negative growth the total kibbutz movement population underwent.\textsuperscript{348} This phenomenon did not go unnoticed, and the older members of places like Beit Zera spent a considerable amount of time and effort on campaigns to “bring back the sons.”\textsuperscript{349} Yet many members did stay—these were the people at the forefront of the privatization effort three decades later, and at the forefront of propagating self-fulfillment ideas in the 1970s. Gan’s analysis is particularly apt in explaining this phenomenon. He writes:

> We cannot ignore the fact that the main source of affinity with the kibbutz at that time [in the 1960s] was the sense of it being home. If so, we should not be surprised that thirty years later, striving for fundamental changes in the kibbutz way of life did not receive overwhelming opposition on ideological grounds.\textsuperscript{350}

Rather than understanding the kibbutz as a manifestation of a utopian model, the young adults of the 1960s and ’70s saw their respective kibbutzim, first and foremost, as home, a place to which they had strong emotional ties. How did this relate to the process of privatization? Let us imagine a hypothetical alternative scenario: a socialist utopian community that, in most ways, is identical to the original kibbutz. But the missing factor is that no sense of emotional attachment to the land, to the other members, or to the way of life develops. Thus, when the generations born to the founders become disenchanted with the ideological precepts dictating the communal lifestyle, their motive to change those precepts is low: they can just leave. In Beit Zera, as in many kibbutzim, the rejection of collectivism (the model) was

\textsuperscript{347} Ben-Rafael, 84.
\textsuperscript{348} Ibid, Appendix 2, Figure 2, 234.
\textsuperscript{349} Beit Zera Historical Calendar.
\textsuperscript{350} Gan, 35.
coupled with a preserved loyalty to the community itself (the *manifestation* of the model). Sarah, the current *mazkira* (president) of Beit Zera, articulated this logic in describing how she decided to move back to Beit Zera after her army service.

> When I was thinking about where I wanted to live, [I settled on Beit Zera] because I loved this place and my family was here. But the idea, I didn’t love. And I very quickly joined the group that wanted to change things.  

And so, by “the revolution” of 1977, some changes in the kibbutz had already been implemented, changes that allowed the ideology of self-fulfillment room to breathe, particularly in the realm of consumption choices. But these changes, even those as drastic as the comprehensive budget system, fed the desire for more change rather than sating it. Marc Netsky was one of the aforementioned American volunteers who immigrated to Israel in the early 1970s: unlike many of his peers, he first arrived because he was following his American girlfriend, not because he was enamored with Zionism. After she ended their relationship, Marc found his way to another kibbutz, Kibbutz Beit HaShita. He tells me that he stayed not because he became an ardent Zionist but because he “fell in love with the idea of kibbutz.” He moved to Beit Zera when he met his wife, Miriam. Marc, then, should be a perfect person to illustrate fidelity to the kibbutz ideology in the last quarter of the 20th century. He told me that he had been “initially drawn to the structure.” And yet: Marc ended up becoming a proponent of privatization in the 2000s. He cites the way in which Beit Zera implemented the comprehensive budget system as the reason.

> Initially, I had no trouble living on the kibbutz budget, and working and giving my money. You know, you give the salary to the kibbutz, and that wasn’t a problem. In the course of the years, if the kibbutz had given us back a budget that was reasonable, I probably would not have cared. But it was not reasonable. It put you in a bind. If you wanted to do things—I’m not talking

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351 Sarah Miller, personal interview, June 20th, 2017
about big things, don’t get me wrong—but if you wanted to go out and eat, maybe travel (god forbid), the kibbutz budget was not enough for that. And then, some kibbutzim even today, they give a much bigger budget to avoid that dilemma, and those kibbutzim are not privatized. They give their members a generous budget, and they’re still kibbutzim. Beit Zera never had that kind of money, and they gave us the budget that was from the kibbutz movement recommendation. So maybe in the ‘60s and ‘70s it was enough to live like a monk, but by the ‘80s and ‘90s that wasn’t enough anymore. When you take it into account, and I was workin off the kibbutz at the time, and I knew what I was making, and you look at your salary and go “whoa!” I’m losing a lot here. I don’t mind, but at least give me something that would be reasonable, and they didn’t do that.352

In effect, Marc was telling me that if the comprehensive budget had been bigger, the members would not have had a problem with that method, and privatization could have been staved off. I am unconvinced by this argument. The advent of the comprehensive budget was just one decision in a string of solutions contrived to resolve the tension between the rising desire among kibbutz members to indulge their individual wants (go out and eat, travel) and the collective model. Even if Beit Zera had come up with a “more reasonable” budget, it is likely that another manifestation of this tension between the individual and the collective would have proved unsatisfactory to those members no longer devoted to the premise of self-sacrifice. Furthermore, the subtext of Marc’s hypothesis is that the members of Beit Zera deserve a wider range of choice and personal freedoms as manifested in indulgence in luxury services and consumer goods. This argument is striking in its comparison to the rhetoric of Beit Zera members describing and extolling the Spartan living conditions that were central to life in the early kibbutz.

Sentiments like Marc’s serve to buttress the right-wing characterization of the kibbutz that began to crop up in the 1980s as “socialism for the rich”: members only

352 Marc Netsky, personal interview, June 8th, 2017.
continued to accept collectivism if it meant that they could live a life as comfortable as they might living outside of the kibbutz. Whereas once a comfortable life was anathema to the kibbutz ethic, now a comfortable life was conceived of as a prerequisite to the kibbutz preserving its need-based structure. The changes Beit Zera underwent in this period—in particular, the balancing act of accommodating individual wants and collective needs—illuminates the spiraling pattern at hand: increase and differentiation of production leading to a parallel result for consumption, which enabled more individual choice in consumption, loosening the total communalism of the kibbutz and perpetuating the increasing appeal and possibility of embracing individualism. It was not a teakettle that sealed Beit Zera’s fate, but it might have been a television.

1977 and 1985: The Political and Economic Nails in the Coffin

Sophie arrived in Beit Zera in 1971, stationed there for the duration of her army service. She described her arrival as follows.

In the city, I was just another person. In Tel Aviv, you could live in an apartment and the person who lives on the fifteenth floor doesn’t know the person who lives on the third floor. Here, everyone knew me. The first day I got here was on the eve of Independence Day in 1971. At night, when the lights were on in the dining hall, my breath stopped. It was like the Knesset building. We walked in. There was dinner, and people were dancing Israeli folk dancing. I said, “What is this world?” We lived in tzrifim (pl.), tiny houses with tin curtains. But to me, it didn’t seem pathetic. There were big green grasses, and a pool. Every night we would gather together and sing and dance and grill and chat…there was this air of fulfillment. And everything together, like a magnet. I said, “this is my place.” When I married my husband [who is from Beit Zera], they thought I would take him with me back to the city. How silly! I didn’t come to find a husband; I came to live on the kibbutz.353

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Notice the difference between her explanation of enchantment with Beit Zera and the descriptions of similar feelings by members who arrived in the 1940s and ‘50s: where they described feelings of ambivalence about the physical conditions of the space and focused on the social conditions created by material lack and collectivism, Sophie argues that the physical conditions themselves were attractive—the impressively-large dining hall, the pool, the manicured lawns. That she explains her attraction to the kibbutz as resulting from both a certain standard of living and a sense of social cohesion is illustrative of the delicate balance point Beit Zera had reached: the need-based model preserved in its purist form of collectivism, combined with the ability to provide more and higher-quality material goods and services to its members. In 1971, would Sophie have been as enchanted with Beit Zera had it looked the way that it did in the late 1940s?

Six years later, Beit Zera celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in February of 1977. That the kibbutz reached this milestone with a significantly higher standard of living was largely made possible by the financial support (direct and indirect) it, like all kibbutzim, received by virtue of targeted national economic policy. To Yoram, a born-and-raised member of Beit Zera, this symbiotic relationship is apparent in retrospect.

The whole idea had been that the economic sphere would work with the political sphere, that the state would always support the kibbutz economy. And in the beginning, this was true. The settlement movement of the Yishuv was the community that built the borders of the state of Israel, and the kibbutzim were particularly useful there. This was the ideology, to go and settle at all of the borders. And for a long time, the state—correctly, in my mind—thought it was their duty to help this community continue to exist.354

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354 Yoram Ben Tor, personal interview, June 13th, 2017.
Thanks to this relationship, the Beit Zera of 1977 was legions away from the Beit Zera founded fifty years earlier, boasting over 300 members (not including their many children under the age of 18), well-equipped apartments, expansive social spaces, and several profitable firms. And yet, it was still a need-based kibbutz: a producer and consumer cooperative. The survival of the kibbutz was celebrated in Beit Zera with a big party in the dining hall.355

Three months later, Menachem Begin swept the Likud Party to victory in the 9th Israeli parliamentary elections. This is one of only a handful of national events marked in Beit Zera’s internal history: “The election of the 9th Knesset was an upheaval: the Likud, led by Menachem Begin, received 43 seats, Labor, led by Shimon Peres, 32 seats, and the Democratic Movement for Change, led by Yigal Yadin, 15 seats.”356 Indeed, Likud’s victory represented an upheaval to Beit Zera: it threatened the very order that had allowed for a fifty-year celebration.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Likud’s victory was a surprise only to those who had failed to see that the Labor coalition had alienated a majority of the Jewish population, not to mention the non-Jewish Palestinian population. In the decades preceding the 1977 election, the leadership enacted certain policies meant to mitigate some of this public discontent. In the arena of welfare policy, the expansion of the National Insurance Institute and the introduction of the Child Allowance Program—two universalistic policies that targeted populations excluded from the bifurcated welfare system of the Histadrut—represented attempts to neutralize the “potential threats to the political order” coming from growing public awareness of

355 Beit Zera Historical Calendar.
356 Ibid.
socioeconomic divisions across ethnic lines.\textsuperscript{357} But the universalization of welfare policy, justified through allusions to central tenets of the Labor coalition’s ideology like “mutual aid,” backfired as a tool to neutralize political threats. It ultimately helped the “formalization of the system,” weakening the hegemony of the Labor party.\textsuperscript{358} By expanding the meaning of mutual assistance to cover a wide range of policies, none of which involved the direct collectivism initially implied by mutual aid, the partisan potency of “mutual aid” faded. It became an empty catchphrase, a catchall that the opposition could get behind. In this way, the kibbutz remained simultaneously nominally in line with national policy and yet substantively out of touch even before 1977.

In a more literal way, too, the kibbutz’s ties to the state loosened in the two decades preceding “the revolution.” Between 1948 and 1954, kibbutzim were disproportionately represented in the Knesset, and although this overrepresentation in relation to population size continued well into the 1980s, the ratio steadily declined in the following twenty years.\textsuperscript{359} If its direct electoral influence was already dwindling while Labor held the majority, what was to become of the kibbutz when Labor officially lost its mandate?

That Labor lost to the Likud party specifically made the potential effects of their loss on the kibbutz even sharper. Likud, after all, was a party comprised of a merger of two smaller parties: the hawkish Herut party and the free market-oriented Liberal party. What emerged was an agenda that was nearly antithetical to everything that the kibbutzim represented, especially kibbutzim like Beit Zera that belonged to

\begin{footnotes}
\item[357] Rosenhek, 21.
\item[358] Ibid.
\item[359] Near, \textit{Volume 2}, 256.
\end{footnotes}
the rhetorically leftist Artzi Movement. Whereas the old Israel was embodied by an Eastern European pioneer plowing the fields and eating in a communal dining hall, the new Israel was represented by people like Begin—fierce advocates for a militarily strong Israel and for unapologetic land acquisition, who appealed to the underprivileged Mizrahi electorate by disparaging “the millionaire kibbutzim with their swimming pools.” In fact, most kibbutzim had neither the liquid reserves of nor the factors of production to achieve millionaire status. Here, though, perception was key, for the living standards in kibbutzim were visibly higher than those in centers of Mizrahi population concentration, like the ma’abarot (development towns) or the slums of cities like Ashdod and Tiberias, which often bordered kibbutzim. Whether or not kibbutzim were indeed millionaires was irrelevant: as embodiments of the Labor Zionist hegemony that excluded Mizrahim, they became easy targets of resentment for the deep ethnic and socioeconomic divisions in Israel.

Mizrahi resentment towards the Labor party was not only a result of covertly exclusionary policies. In 1981, in the midst of the following election cycle, the bigoted attitude held by many Labor supporters towards Mizrahi immigrants was revealed when, at the peak of a Labor Alignment rally, movie star Dudu Topaz declared he was happy to see “no chachachim [derogatory term for Mizrahim],

360 Dani File, The Political Right in Israel: Different Faces of Jewish Populism (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2010), 24
361 Barkai, Tables 8.1, 8.2, and 8.3, 140, 143, and 146, for net product income across kibbutzim through the 1960s, which does not exceed 300,000 ILS/year. In Beit Zera, the estimated peak value of its most profitable factory was around 40,000,000 millions shekels in the early 2000s, but that factory was not even built—much less yielding a major profit—until the late 1980s. What created the perception of extreme wealth was the increase in disposable income used to raise the collective living standards from their previously-ascetic place, and the practice of loan-taking used to maintain that standard into the mid-1980s, as the rest of the country experienced an intense recession (see below). The kibbutzim that might be truly classified in the category of extreme wealth are far and few between, though they do exist today.
meaning tacky and sleazy] in the audience.” If Topaz’s comment exemplifies the
degree of racism against Israelis of Middle-Eastern origins among Labor supporters,
Begin’s response to Topaz the following night, at a Likud counter rally, is illustrative
of the ways in which his party capitalized on this tension to garner Mizrahi support.

Yesterday, there were a lot of red flags. Today, there are lots of blue and white
flags. This is the important difference, the historical difference, the ideological
difference, between the Socialist Alignment and us. They haven’t yet learned
what the red flag symbolizes in our time…. This flag is the flag of the
oppression of Jews and the flag of the oppression of the Hebrew language.
And this flag has infiltrated all corners of Israel, from the public buses to the
kibbutzim.362

The red flag referenced is, of course, the communist flag; the oppression,
Soviet crackdown against Jewish religious practice.363 Ironically, by 1981, most
kibbutzim had come to reject the Soviet Union.364 But such press-release politics did
not make a dent in the image of the kibbutz in the national Israeli psyche as
emblematic of the original Labor ideology, which Begin’s government went to great
lengths to smear as in line with the evils of Communism. This was a strategic tactic:
to Likud, the Soviets were not the problem. Rather, the issue was the lasting idea that
Labor Zionism was the hegemonic ideology of Israel. The kibbutz was representative
of this obstacle. In dichotomizing the red flag (as representative of Labor) and the
Israeli flag in the above-quoted speech, Begin articulated the process his
administration began in 1977 of painting Labor-specific principles as in opposition to
Zionism and, more generally, Israeli identity. Likud’s anti-Labor agenda gave

362 The process to get there had been arduous and resulted in the fracturing of many kibbutzim into
new, smaller kibbutzim, divided along lines of those who would tolerate Stalin and those who would
not. For a detailed narrative of how such a division manifested and revealed the conflicts within
Kibbutz socialism, see “Part 2: The Division,” in Lieblich’s Kibbutz Makom, an oral history of an
anonymous kibbutz published in 1981.
363 For an in-depth look at anti-Semitic policies and practices in the Soviet Union, see Anti-Semitism in
364 Rayman, 130-131.
legitimacy to the already widespread negative external views of the kibbutz, simultaneously buttressing the “socialism for millionaires” narrative and disparaging the ideology of socialism itself. The obvious shift of the kibbutz’s role in the ecosystem of Israeli politics was apparent to Beit Zera’s members. Shula recalls:

After the political “ma’apach,” for the first time, the kibbutzim transformed from places that everyone looked to with admiration—an avant-garde that was a model for the rest—into a disgraced community. That was very hard, and it really affected the inside, our internal perceptions of ourselves.\(^\text{365}\)

The ideological shifts that came with major electoral change in the national political arena thus reinforced the internal doubts in Beit Zera, as in many kibbutzim, about the “correctness” of their way of life. The kibbutz movement had always prided itself on being a functionary of the national agenda; now, its very structure had been smeared as categorically diametric to the national agenda. Psychologically, this furthered the already-rolling snowball effect of the rise of individualism on the kibbutz. In this way, a Likud victory amounted to the end of an assumed consistency between the state’s agenda and the kibbutz’s defining characteristics.

If the abrupt severing of an ideological congruence between the kibbutz and the state affected kibbutz members’ confidence in their way of life, Likud economic policy amounted to a tangible assault on the viability of kibbutz production itself. The kibbutzim had significantly benefited from the Labor government’s combination of “protective subsidies” of agriculture and manufacturing, and Likud had won the election on an explicit platform deriding the planned economy.\(^\text{366}\) Before 1977, agricultural production—particularly in the periphery of the country—was treated as sacred, while imported agricultural goods were frowned upon as a risk to full

\(^{365}\) Shula Ben Nachum, personal interview, June 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 2017.

\(^{366}\) Rivlin, 50.
employment. Though it would take seven years and an economic crisis to fully change the former economic order, small changes began in 1977. In the agrarian sector, some of these aims came to pass quickly. Near elucidates:

From 1977 onwards the price index for the production of agricultural goods constantly exceeded that for the prices for which they were sold, and the capital stock invested was gradually reduced. In addition, export opportunities were increasingly restricted as a result of the worldwide recession, and the protection of farmers in Europe and the US by import duties or subsidies to local farmers meant that many markets were closed to Israeli produce.367

This change did not go unnoticed in Beit Zera. Yair became particularly animated when asked about the decreasing profitability of the agricultural branches, a sector of the kibbutz he had been in charge of in the early 1970s.

The attitude of the Israeli government towards agriculture is absurd. Here, the ministry of agricultural doesn’t deal with agriculture. The state is not protecting it, so the industry is going and dying.

And yet, while the agricultural sector underwent this direct affront, public expenditure on social services and certain subsidizations as a percentage of GDP remained exorbitantly high—nearly 70%—as a means of preventing a massive onset of poverty.368 Simultaneously, the liberalization reforms implemented mostly took shape in the form of relaxations on import taxes, provoking a major consumption boom.369 Private and public debts increased as conspicuous consumption was encouraged, with the major national banks manipulating stock prices to create a false sense of stability in borrowing. The kibbutzim were not spared from this practice; in fact, they were disproportionately represented in the “big borrowers” category. Again, Near provides a useful summary of how this fact came to pass in the late 1970s:

367 Near, Volume 2, 345.
369 Kay, 110
Despite the liquidation of the ‘supplementary fund,’ which had given special support to kibbutz industry, money was plentiful—at a price. The credit of the kibbutz movement was good, and it was generally believed that, by creating new industries adapted to changing conditions of the time, it was playing its traditional role of leadership, but in the economic sphere rather than in matters of settlement or defense. The deficiencies in kibbutz industries [reflective of national deficiencies in industrial production resulting from the 6-month production halt created by the unplanned mass mobilization of the ’73 Yom Kippur War] …were either ignored or believed to be temporary difficulties that would be solved as industry reaped the profits of the current watchword: “Expand!”

There was an active appeal for kibbutzim to take on massive debts in order to increase industry and, transitively, production outputs, for this was the movement’s chance to reestablish its traditional sacrificial role in the Israeli political order. Whereas heroic economics had once been manifested in accepting austere living conditions, the policy now manifested in entering a deep debt in order to grow industry and increase production output. With hindsight, a major tension here can be quickly discerned between the collectivist motive of the kibbutzim for expanding industry and the liberalization motive behind the national policy of industrial expansion in the first place. But such a conflict of aims was not clear in the early 1980s, when the succession of half-baked liberalization measures—involving more reductions of import taxes and simultaneous increases in Israeli production subsidizations—only seemed to enable the kibbutzim’s internal goals of industrial expansion. In Beit Zera, the artificial pumping-up of Israeli consumption translated directly to increased spending, manifest in three straight years of construction to overhaul older apartments, the purchase of color televisions, the first kibbutz-sponsored trip abroad (all members traveled to Egypt in one of five groups over the

370 Near, 346.
course of two years), and two water slides added to the pool.\textsuperscript{371} Such spending was not limited to consumption. Beit Zera’s production sector was shifting quickly, too, with new agricultural \textit{and} industrial endeavors pursued: cotton weed and avocado fields, and the opening of Arkal Media in addition to Arkal Water Filtration and Arkal Packaging. Beit Zera was following the “Expand!” dictum, just like everyone else. In 1979, after serving as president of the kibbutz for several years, Shula left Beit Zera to spend four years in a Jewish community in the United States as a representative of the Kibbutz Movement. She returned to a changed community.

When I left, Beit Zera had zero debts. And when I returned in 1983 or 84, we had maybe 150 million shekels in debt. The kibbutzim took loans in this period to build more industry. This was the whole strategy: that the state would authorize the banks to give loans easily to grow settlement capacity and profits. And then in ’83 with the banks crisis, a huge inflation began. In one day, debts that were 10 shekels turned into a million shekels. The state saved the banks, like Obama saved General Motors. But the kibbutzim it did not save.\textsuperscript{372}

This “bank crisis” is more commonly referred to as the Israeli debt crisis, in which the piecemeal, supply-side economic policies of the Likud administration led to catastrophic inflation. The Finance Ministry floundered in its attempts to address the crisis until 1985, under explicit American pressure. The Reagan administration, knowing that Israel was almost entirely financially dependent on American aid, threatened to freeze said support if the Israeli government did not adopt its recommended plan of free-market-oriented reforms—and significantly cut the government spending that Likud had clung onto as a form of electoral economics.\textsuperscript{373}

In 1985, Israel acquiesced to this demand in the form of the Economic Stabilization

\textsuperscript{371} Beit Zera Historical Calendar.
\textsuperscript{372} Shula Ben Nachum, personal interview, June 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 2017.
\textsuperscript{373} Avi Kay’s 2012 account of this chain of events is illuminating, though its entire scope is not directly related to the matters this analysis is concerned with. Kay, 111.
Plan, a rapidly implemented reform package centered on a reduction in size of
government spending, and compounded by financial and foreign currency market
reforms.\textsuperscript{374}

On an ideological level, this economic reform was the definitive end of any
congruence between the kibbutz and the state. After 1985, even principles like mutual
assistance—relics of the era of labor hegemony that had managed to slip into Likud’s
original policy as an appeal to low-income voters—became obsolete. Unlike the
policy developments immediately following Likud’s victory in 1977, the ESP meant
real economic liberalization, and the kibbutz’s socialism became an even more
obvious aberration from the national norm. Mike, who became Beit Zera’s economic
director from ‘95 to ‘91, claims this carried over to kibbutz member’s understanding
of their economic practices:

\begin{quote}
After’ 85, there was a shift in people’s understanding of the kibbutz model. People realized
that we had to act responsibly. To act responsibly, you have to place the onus on the individual, not on the kibbutz. There are many values of
the kibbutz that we can still keep, but the kibbutz can’t be responsible.\textsuperscript{375}
\end{quote}

Materially, the days of taking out easy loans to build up industry were over. But what of the major debts that the kibbutzim had accumulated, those with values
exponentially increased by inflation? The kibbutz movement, in total, had accrued
over 7 billion ILS in debt to the national banks (adjusted for 2012 prices) by 1988.\textsuperscript{376}

As Shula alluded to, the national government had an incentive to bail out the major
banks at the center of the mess, particularly because virtually every Israeli citizen had

\textsuperscript{374} Kay, 111.
\textsuperscript{375} Mike Miller, second personal interview, June 13, 2017.
\textsuperscript{376} Gadi Rosenthal and Hadas Eiges. “Agricultural Cooperatives in Israel.” \textit{Food and Agricultural
Organization of the United Nations, Regional Office for Europe and Central Asiain Policy Studies on
an account in one of the five major banks, all of which were involved in the
manipulation of stock prices that allowed for the crisis in the first place.\textsuperscript{377} And while
this did not apply to the debts of private firms, the state could deal with each of those
cases individually. A settlement of debts for kibbutzim, on the other hand, proved to
be a complex endeavor because of the kibbutz system of mutual guarantees.\textsuperscript{378} Each
kibbutz within a given federation was legally bound to the other kibbutzim in the
federation, and so the debts of the movement had to be forgiven—or not forgiven—as
a whole.\textsuperscript{379} Eventually, a settlement was reached: about 25\% of debt across 248
kibbutzim was forgiven in 1986 as part of the First Kibbutz Settlement, while the
remainder continued to accumulate interest.\textsuperscript{380} In Beit Zera, the debts that were not
given in 1986 played an integral role in dictating the events of the 2000s.

With only some of its debts erased, Beit Zera, like most kibbutzim, could no
longer consider itself in good economic standing, with zero equity as a product of
having to use all future profits not used for living expenses to pay off the remaining
loans. In this way, the debt crisis—and the sharp cuts in loan accessibility and
government subsidization that were part of the Economic Stabilization Plan
package—led to a marked contraction of Beit Zera’s comprehensive budget.\textsuperscript{381} In
November of 1984, the budgetary control method was implemented, a rollback to the
expansiveness of the comprehensive budget system. Between 1985 and 1987, the
kibbutz’s consumption budget (and, transitively, each family’s budget), was cut even
further. All travel abroad, a practice that had only arisen in the previous few years,

\textsuperscript{377} Rivlin, 56.
\textsuperscript{378} Near, 346.
\textsuperscript{379} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{380} Rosenthal and Eiges, 25.
\textsuperscript{381} Mike Miller, second personal interview, June 13\textsuperscript{th}, 2017.
was cancelled.\textsuperscript{382} Members were asked to purchase certain consumer goods that had formerly been distributed without use of budget points, like cigarettes. The many construction products begun in the 1970s were paused or abandoned.\textsuperscript{383}

Yoram says that this turn of events “fell on people like thunder on a beautiful day.”\textsuperscript{384} With retrospect, many Beit Zera members agree that the massive debts revealed by the national economic crisis went a long way towards undermining faith in the need-based model. The premonition that Beit Zera was living beyond its means became prominent. This led to a rising suspicion that fellow kibbutz members were not putting in enough labor to earn enough income to fund the level of spending that Beit Zera was functioning at. Again, Yoram’s explanation is illustrative:

We suddenly realized that there is a connection between how much work you put in and how much output you can take. If one doesn’t remember this connection, like we failed to for a long time in the kibbutzim, in the end it explodes in your face. The kibbutzim were in a period of insolvency. Today, if you ask me about the shape of life then, I have no doubt that from one end, it was amazing. But if you can’t keep it up, then it will fail.\textsuperscript{385}

This resulted in an increase of accusations and tensions, a scramble to place the blame on individual kibbutz members. Members were quick to blame the unsustainability of Beit Zera’s old way of life on the irresponsibility of other members:

Not everyone actually worked. There were people who worked many hours and people who worked very little. So everyone got the same income and food. You lived in a society where there was zero connection between what you do and what you give and what you get. This is what led to the downfall, in the end.\textsuperscript{386}

\textsuperscript{382} Beit Zera Historical Calendar.  
\textsuperscript{383} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{384} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{385} Yoram Ben Tor, personal interview, June 13\textsuperscript{th}, 2017.  
\textsuperscript{386} Ibid.
There were members who just didn’t go to work. Not a lot—but even one is too many. And the budget they got at the end of the year was the same as the factory manager’s budget, and the same as my budget from working in the henhouse, while they just sit around in their house all day and waste [the collectively-paid for] electricity—because they’re not at work. These are things that always bothered me.  

On the kibbutz there were a lot of people who would stand on the side and enjoy the fruits of other people’s labor.

One of the causes of the changes in kibbutzim is that people didn’t treat the economy right. They didn’t know how to keep the budget. They didn’t know how to use what they had, and they threw out so much food. They wasted a lot. This is the thing that made the members go to privatization. There are people who didn’t work. They went to work, and they didn’t do anything. Today, no one can go to work and not do anything. If you go to work and don’t work, you won’t get a salary.

With hindsight, that these members blamed other members’ working habits for Beit Zera’s economic problems is nearly absurd. The profit loss stemming from a handful kibbutz members’ failures to work hard enough in their menial jobs in the banana fields or in Arkal was not what necessitated Beit Zera (or any kibbutz) to take out the loans that it did. The kibbutz’s massive loan taking was a result of their buy-in to the national policy of industrial expansion and conspicuous consumption. This was the real root of the problem.

But these members’ perception of the problem—the blame placed on other members—is more telling in explaining the chain of events that followed. As opposed to what the individual could do for the collective, the burning question on Beit Zera had become what individuals were failing to do for the collective. The balance the community had attempted to strike between creating room for individual choice and preserving a collective economy began to collapse. The drive for self-fulfillment had

389 Simcha Rothschild, personal interview, June 7th, 2017.
superseded ideological investment in a collective economy. The ideological incentive
to work had been surpassed by a material incentive (or lack thereof) to work. Sarah
Nesher— the oldest member I interviewed, who had thus witnessed the longest arc of
change in Beit Zera—told a concise narrative of the change in material desires she
saw come to pass.

At first, we didn’t even have a kitchen in our apartments or anything, and we
didn’t need them, because everything was in the dining hall. But slowly we
got little things, like a gas burner to make coffee. When we would get
married, we would get a present from the kibbutz of a hot plate in the
apartment. Once upon a time, the collective kibbutz didn’t run after what they
have in Tel Aviv, in the city. Whatever we had, we said: this is good for us.
We didn’t run after the products. But, this changed. First, it was teakettles,
then it was the stove, and now people have cars.390

Aharon, when I asked him why Beit Zera privatized, similarly honed in on the
material lack preceding the privatization decision.

Why [did we privatize]? I think the answer is simple, and spelled in three
letters: Kaf-Lamed-Pai sofit [which spells “Kesef,” meaning money]. Money
directs the human being. And the second that a member gets enough money to
travel outside of Israel, two or three time a year, and he doesn’t have problems
of children that he has to take care of…he feels it’s a celebration, it’s
comfortable for him. But the second that you get only the minimal salary,
such that you can only lift your head above water in order not to drown, you
search…you search for other choices. You search for ways to return to the
standard of living that existed on the old kibbutz.391

Together, Sarah and Aharon’s answers show that by the late 1980s, Beit Zera
was no longer a community made up of members that resigned themselves to an
ascetic lifestyle. Four decades earlier, if Beit Zera had experienced an economic
crisis, the *modus operandi* would have been to ensure that the communal integrative
norms would survive. Now, the drive to overcome the crisis came from the desire to

391  Aharon Rothschild, personal interview, June 13th, 2017
regain the living standards of the 1970s. And if the collective could not provide those living standards, then the individual should have the opportunity to provide it by their own labor. We return to Marc’s sentiment: “if only Beit Zera had given a higher budget, I would have accepted the old way of life.” The craving for comfort had outstripped sacrifice, and self-fulfillment had superseded self-realization. Now, with no special national role to play, the need-based model began to look more and more like an obstacle than a goal. It was against this backdrop of national changes—sparking new and perpetuating old internal discontent—that the wave of kibbutz privatization began.
CHAPTER FOUR
“Piggish Capitalism,” Flailing Industry, and a New Beit Zera

The kibbutz is not a ghetto. It’s open to the world beyond: the Internet slips under the door
-Shula Ben Nachum, 2017

On July 4th of 2008, the tensions simmering in Beit Zera—between the individual and the collective, material comfort and ideological fervor, the old pioneering guard and the new generation—were framed as a choice between two paths and put to a vote: to continue the need-based kibbutz model or adopt of the safety-net model. How did Beit Zera get here? In the preceding chapters, I have hoped to draw out a comprehensive explanation of the kibbutz’s role within the Israeli state. This explanation lends a unique perspective to the processes of privatization and hitchadshut (renewal) that this chapter details. Like the other stages of kibbutz history, kibbutz privatization and renewal are best understood through the lens of changes to Israeli society as a whole.
By the late 1980s, the kibbutz movement (and every individual kibbutz within it) had been hit by the national economic crisis. This event is often cited as one among many important catalysts to the process of major change undergone by many kibbutzim in the past decades. I contend that the national debt crisis and the new economic policies that followed was not just one among many separate catalysts leading to renewal, but the central catalyst of privatization.

True: a number of kibbutzim did not privatize, and still follow the need-based model today. These are the same kibbutzim that were able to quickly pay back the debts that remained after the First Kibbutz Settlement because of the degree of profitability of their enterprises, bouncing back quickly to the comfortable and collective lifestyle they had engendered before the crisis. Others were unable to repair the social damage created by what amounted to total bankruptcy and disassembled permanently. But the majority of the 260 kibbutzim that identify as such today followed the same pattern: their firms were sufficiently productive to sustain living expenses and slowly pay back some of the remaining debts, but not profitable enough to regain their former collective standards of living. Beit Zera

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392 Ben-Rafael, Crisis and Transformation, 38-40
393 As of 2017, 16% of all kibbutzim have not yet privatized their members’ income, and retain the designation of “collectivist kibbutz” or “need-based kibbutz.” Kibbutz Yearbook: 2017, 44.
394 In Ran Abramitzky’s recently published book, The Mystery of the Kibbutz: Egalitarian Principles in a Capitalist World, he compiles a nearly comprehensive list of all kibbutzim in Israel and whether or not they are “reformed” (his study includes 235 kibbutzim, where the Kibbutz Movement’s official current count is at 260, a difference that reflects the quick changes in classification occurring across Israeli kibbutzim). In his list, as of 2014, 53 of 235 kibbutzim remain unreformed, or approximately 22.5%. This number nearly lines up exactly with the 25% of need-based kibbutzim the Kibbutz Movement’s “Yearbook” of 2015/2016 lists.
395 The most frequently cited example of kibbutz bankruptcy and disassembly is Beit Oren, which experienced a combination of massive financial loss in the wake of the ’85 economic crisis and a simultaneous mass exodus of the young and middle-aged members of the kibbutz, leaving the non-income-earning population with a debt that was impossible to pay. A group of individuals from across the Kibbutz Movement moved into Beit Oren and, in a 1999 Supreme Court Case, won the decision to have Beit Oren classified as a yishuv kehilati (communal neighborhood), outside the jurisdiction of the Kibbutz Movement and the Israeli Registrar of Cooperative Societies. Ben-Rafael, 41.
found itself in a particularly unfortunate version of that situation in the late 1980s, having invested in expanding Arkal at the moment the debt crisis hit.396

It was in this weakened state—kept afloat by a factory with decent profitability but zero equity, cutting collective consumption, and moving goods and services that had once been “free” into the comprehensive budget—that Beit Zera’s members faced the economic climate created by the ESP. This new Israel was one of free-market capitalism touted as the antidote to all problems in the economic sphere. Benjamin Netanyahu, the current Prime Minister of Israel, rose to power in the Likud party in this period. Outside of his hawkish militarism, Netanyahu is best known for his enthusiastic devotion to free-market economic theories like the Laffer Curve, which encourages sharp tax cuts to corporations and the rich as a means of increasing productivity and national tax revenue.397 As Finance Minister in the early 2000s, Netanyahu implemented such tax cuts and simultaneously razed much of the existing welfare policy.398 Such policies are correlated with Israel’s technology boom of the last decade, a development that has vastly increased the wealth of those in high-tech enterprise, leaving Israel with the nickname “Start-Up Nation”—and one of the highest rates of inequality in the OECD (based on its GINI coefficient of .36).399

Less than a century ago, Israel’s government claimed a commitment to socialism, or at least to the value of material egalitarianism that underscores socialism. Today, its

396 Beit Zera Historical Calendar.
Prime Minister is an unapologetically devout capitalist, who believes the state should create room for “individual initiative and competition to produce goods and services with profit, [without shutting out]… somebody else from trying to do the same.”

That the principles behind the need-based kibbutz model had become antithetical to the principles behind national economic policy was clear in a place like Beit Zera. Shula and Tzipora used the same language—“piggish capitalism”—to describe their perceptions of this national status quo.

The nation turned into a nation of inequality, into one of piggish capitalism, and the power and the reach of the liberal economy to define what is right and what is not right is much stronger than what the kibbutz can counter.

Israel follows the U.S., and the U.S. is a place of piggish capitalism. Slowly, with the influence of people from the outside [on the kibbutz], this piggish capitalism came here [to Beit Zera] in a big way. And that’s how it is today.

Alon Pauker’s insight on the early roots of the later kibbutz crisis is relevant here: as soon as the kibbutz’s centrality to Zionist state-build ended with the founding of the state in 1948, he argues, the newly-founded state began to influence the kibbutz. How does such a theory apply to the situation of the kibbutz post-1985, when the state’s influence began to manifest in a markedly opposite imperative—encouraging competition between individuals—than that of the need-based model? How were material pressures from a rising debt compounded by this deepening disparity between the new national political hegemony and the ideological underpinning of the need-based model? This chapter will parse these questions by

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401 Shula BenNachum, personal interview, June 22nd, 2017.


403 Pauker, 29.
examining the lead-up to Beit Zera’s 2008 decision to privatize income: the arguments and consensuses that colored the process, the minor erosions to collectivist practice that built up along the way, and the demographic differences reflected in the vote itself. These factors reveal how the appeal of communalism declined in relation to the economic success promised—to some—by full participation in a free-market economy. Situated against the backdrop of the shift in national political hegemony, it is impossible to view the advent of the safety-net model as spurred by changes occurring solely within the gates of the Kibbutz Movement.

**The Nuts and Bolts: What We Talk About When We Talk About Privatization**

In 1992, two kibbutzim—Beit Zivan and Snir—became the first to reject the need-based model and adopt a policy of private and differential incomes.\(^{404}\) Privatization is often used to describe all changes kibbutzim have undergone in the past three decades, when in fact privatization—the introduction of private, differential incomes—is just one facet of a larger phenomenon more accurately called *hitchadshut* (renewal), whereby different kibbutzim, at different rates, implemented a slew of economic, social, and cultural reforms to their communities. There was no single guide to kibbutz renewal, though in 1989, as a condition of the First Kibbutz Settlement, the federations all agreed to recommend a menu of changes to their member kibbutzim, designed to increase productivity and profit.\(^{405}\) Russell, Hanneman, and Getz provide a useful summary of such recommendations, which included reduction of directly democratic practices, relaxation of the ban on

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\(^{404}\) Abramitzky, “Data on Kibbutzim.”

\(^{405}\) Russell, Hanneman, and Getz, 43.
outsourcing labor for kibbutz enterprise, privatization of consumption, 
encouragement of kibbutz member’s to pursue outside work with higher salaries, 
introduction of financial incentives for extra hours of work, and the crowning act: the 
privatization of income.\textsuperscript{406} All such reforms combined to undermine many of the 
assumptions that had previously informed the kibbutz lifestyle.

As of the summer of 2017, Beit Zera has implemented all such changes and 
more. The vote of 2008 passed with a majority of 73\%. Ever since, kibbutz members 
earn their own private, and therefore typically unequal, incomes, which they use to 
cover nearly all expenses, including those for food, clothing, healthcare, and 
childcare. On top of national taxes, members are required to pay multiple taxes to 
Beit Zera—\textit{mas pa’arim} (a disparity tax, meaning a graduated income tax), \textit{mas 
catastoph{\textit{a}}} (a crisis tax), \textit{ezra hedadit} (a mutual aid fund), and \textit{mas kibbutzi} (a tax to 
cover municipal costs).\textsuperscript{407}

Collectivity, both in economic enterprise and in the social sphere, has 
shrunken drastically. Beit Zera sold all of its factories by 2010 (a major conflict 
related to the debt crisis and privatization process that is elaborated on below; see 
\textit{Material and Social Consequences of “HaShinui and “HaMizug}). The remaining 
agricultural branches are each run as individual cooperatives, often managed by 
outsourced teams. Beit Zera rents the former Arkal facilities to Amiad, the kibbutz 
that bought the majority of Arkal Water Filtration Technologies (see \textit{Material and 
Social Consequences of “HaShinui and “HaMizug,”} below), along with a number of

\footnote{406}{Ibid, 45-66.}
\footnote{407}{See Appendix 1 for a table of the safety net and gradation of income taxes, with an example case.}
smaller buildings to kibbutz members to run private businesses. This rent, combined with whatever the agricultural branches earn and the taxes that members pay to the kibbutz, comprises the income of the community. This income is used to fund all remaining communal and collective mechanisms: a pension fund for older members, a safety-net fund for members who make below the minimum set amount, and those social services the kibbutz still provides to members without a transactional payment. The particularities of each category are constantly changing based on the financial success of the kibbutz each year, and based on what services members want or, conversely, what services members are willing to forgo. Beyond the economic sphere, kibbutz-wide meetings now only occur occasionally, and only a small number of members attend. This reflects a Kibbutz Movement-wide trend, wherein only 20% of kibbutzim have General Assembly at least monthly, 53% meet 6-12 times a year, and the remaining kibbutzim are lucky to hold five kibbutz-wide meetings in a single year. Most kibbutz members keep up with the happenings of the community through a monthly newsletter, etzlaynu (“here, at ours”).

The distribution of assets—particularly housing—is the last frontier of privatization. When I came to Beit Zera for three weeks in the summer of 2017, I rented an apartment from a kibbutz member who actually lives in Tiberias. He is the son of Simcha and Aharon, two long-time kibbutz members, and became a member right after his army service—giving him the right to an apartment—but eventually moved out. He and his parents continue to pay the electricity and water fees and the housing tax, taking renters whenever they can to cover the cost. This never would

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408 Beit Zera Historical Calendar.  
have transpired on the old kibbutz: when outsiders came as volunteers, or even as researchers, they were housed without monetary payment and were only asked to contribute their labor, like all other kibbutz members.\footnote{Near, Volume 2, 246.} When my grandmother, a 70 year-old woman who lived in Israel until the early 1980s before immigrating to the United States, heard that I was paying rent to live in the kibbutz, her jaw dropped. “How sad—that’s not what a kibbutz is!” she proclaimed.

My grandmother had hit on an important point. Historically, kibbutz firms had always enjoyed a unique legal position within the economy: income tax was calculated as if the community (as collective owners of the enterprises) were a collective of identical individual households.\footnote{Rosenthal and Eiges, 36.} This means that even while all of Beit Zera’s firms now function with their own managements and as if they are independent, their taxes are still calculated by the aforementioned formula, yielding a far lower tax rate than their non-kibbutz equivalents.\footnote{Ibid.} The continuation of this relationship to national taxes is contingent on the legal classification of the kibbutz as a cooperative organization, under the ordinance of the Registrar of Cooperative Societies.\footnote{Ibid, 33-35.} The wave of smaller reforms in combination with the chief act of introducing differential incomes might have put this categorization in jeopardy, had it not been for a 2005 Supreme Court case that resulted in the creation of a two-part classification for kibbutzim: one for the traditional need-based kibbutz and one for a renewed (safety-net model following) kibbutz.\footnote{Russell, Hanneman, and Getz, 97.} Although the new definition recognizes the characteristics of “related wages according to individual contribution

\begin{footnotes}
\item[410] Near, Volume 2, 246.
\item[411] Rosenthal and Eiges, 36.
\item[412] Ibid.
\item[413] Ibid, 33-35.
\item[414] Russell, Hanneman, and Getz, 97.
\end{footnotes}
or seniority, allocation of apartments, and allocation of means of production to its members, excluding land, water, and production quotas” as acceptable for a renewed kibbutz, it also includes a clause dictating that the community is “organized on the basis of collective partnership in assets, self-employment, [and] equality and cooperation in production, consumption, and education…” 415 At present, most renewed— i.e. privatized— kibbutzim maintain the legal classification of “kibbutz” (and are treated by national regulations as such) even as many of these communities actively eschew the dictum of “equality and cooperation in production and consumption.” The “cooperative” character of the kibbutz firms is barely accurate anymore, putting into question the longevity of their legal classification as cooperatives. 416

A very basic question has reached the every-day conversations of kibbutz members across Israel: “what makes our kibbutz a kibbutz?” What differentiates a privatized kibbutz from a yishuv kehilati, a town that embraces a degree of communal cultural activities, while its members become totally separate economic actors? In their volume on the process of kibbutz change through the early 2000s, Russell, Hanneman, and Getz write that, “Officially, the introduction of differential salaries or private ownership on a kibbutz signifies not the end of the kibbutz, but its renewal.” 417 Ben-Rafael, too, insists that what defines the kibbutz model today is not a set of characteristics, but a “collective identity” rooted in a shared navigation of the

415 Ibid, 98.
416 Rosenthal and Eiges, 36.
417 Russell, Hanneman, and Getz, 123.
tensions between opposing forces—individualism and collectivism, enterprise and entrepreneurship, and self-sacrifice and materialism. He writes:

What still ties the *kibbutzniks* [colloquial term for kibbutz members] to each other resides in their very concern for the questions that arise...How far does sharing egalitarianism still matter when individualism wins the day? What are the limits of the requirements of entrepreneurship where members are, after all, partners? What general societal aspirations are left, beyond—and not on account of—the pursuit of collective-egoistic interests? The transformation of the kibbutz has made these preoccupations into the very essence of the kibbutz identity.

This criterion of collective navigation of change is meant to provide a common denominator for what binds all communities that are still legally called kibbutzim. But Ben-Rafael wrote *Crisis and Transformation* in 1997, at which point only 10 kibbutzim had passed rulings in favor of full privatization of income. Today, when that number is over 200, such a definition seems outdated, for it presumes a continuation of a conversation that has been at least nominally resolved in the majority of such communities.

Beit Zera remains a kibbutz by Ben-Rafael’s definition, by Russell, Hanneman, and Getz’s definition, by the Israeli Registrar of Co-operative’s definition, and by the Kibbutz Movement’s definition. And yet, the Beit Zera of today is an entirely different entity, governed by a different set of assumptions and principles, than the Beit Zera that once was. This analysis’s purpose is not to answer the question of whether or not Beit Zera is still a kibbutz, or even the question of what can (or should) be called a kibbutz in the 21st century. Rather, an understanding of Beit Zera’s members’ personal handling of this question reveals much about how the

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418 Ben Rafael, 219.
419 Ibid.
420 Abramitzky, “Data on Kibbutzim.”
current political and economic atmosphere within which kibbutzim function continues to affect their internal lives. This project will thus conclude with a series of answers to these questions from Beit Zera’s members. Before addressing the question explicitly, one must understand how Beit Zera became the community described above, and the social and political implications of those processes.

**Private Choice and the Free-Rider Dilemma**

Chapter three explored the growing tendency among Beit Zera’s members to blame their neighbors’ lack of hard work for the community’s financial problems. Their complaints reflect the relevance of the free-rider theory: an equal dispersion of responsibility for the collective living standard meant that some members would slack off and rely on others’ productivity. That more and more members became suspicious of other members is, perhaps more than any other social phenomenon on the kibbutz, illustrative of a sharp break from the kibbutz prior to 1985. Belief that the free-rider problem was rampant in Beit Zera seems correlated, based on general narratives provided by my interviews, with a more general preference for individualism over collectivism, the former as a product of the latter. In this way, we can understand this kibbutz-specific criticism (of the free rider) as a product of the more general division between the norms of the need-based kibbutz and the norms of the capitalist economy outside the kibbutz.

Ayelet is a prime example of these overlapping concerns. She was 33 years old when she married her husband and moved to his hometown of Beit Zera. Ayelet had grown up on another kibbutz, Gan Shmuel, so she understood the full extent of collectivism and communalism that the traditional, need-based model entailed when
she moved to Beit Zera. It was the end of 2001, and she had spent the past decade—the entirety of her post-army, adult life—living in Tel Aviv, as she remembers, "freely." \(^{421}\) Ayelet’s life in the city had given her a taste of an economic model—the free-market capitalism within which most of the world’s population lives in—that was better suited to her personality. Returning to the kibbutz, she remembers, “didn’t feel good—it felt restrictive.” \(^{422}\) Ayelet had a lot to say about Beit Zera before its privatization, and very little of it was positive.

I really don’t believe that everyone needs to share with everyone else, that there needs to be equality between what we get. No. I think everyone has different capabilities, and different needs, and each person should earn his or her salary based on what he or she can do. I don’t think it’s right, this lack of connection between the money I get and the salary I generate. \(^{423}\)

Her case was rife with economic principles that could have been picked straight from the pages of Hayek on individualism and incentives.

Why would a person wake up in the morning and go to work if he knows that at the end of the month he’ll get the same 4,000 shekels? It creates mediocrity. One of the best things that could have happened to the kibbutzim is the privatization. This idea that the person needs to make a salary and care for his family is a good thing. It connects the human being to his capabilities, pushes him forward. I think that the way of life of the kibbutz did not facilitate excellence. This idea that everyone is all the same—this always bothered me. What a crazy thing! It always baffled me. I think it’s against human nature. \(^{424}\)

On top of the lack of material incentive, Ayelet also criticized the need-based kibbutz for the ways in which it created a spider web of accountability between individuals, leading to the erosion of social relationships in moments when the collective economy experiences failure, or even just poor performance:

\(^{421}\) Ayelet Keren, personal interview June 12\(^{th}\), 2017.
\(^{422}\) Ibid.
\(^{423}\) Ibid.
\(^{424}\) Ibid.
If I make a choice not to work for a year, I should have the freedom to do that without affecting other members. The second that we become tied together, my neighbor can see me make such a choice and will get angry with me. I don’t want that connection with people! You do what you want, and I’ll do what I want. On the kibbutz, they would say things like: “He works really hard,” or “he shows up to work late in the morning.” Who cares? Why does this interest you? But I understand why it interested people—because they were reliant on one another. This is exactly the problem. How a person wants to work should be their choice. It’s not my business. Take the responsibility.  

Responsibility was a concept touched on in nearly every interview I conducted in Beit Zera. Members ranging in age from their early 40s to their late 80s, people who voted for the 2008 privatization and those who voted against it: almost all of them agreed on this one particular point. The need-based kibbutz model prevented the individual member from rising up to accept responsibility for his own economic condition. As Mike put it, “the onus was on the community.”

Nicknamed Saraleh by most who know her, Sarah, Mike’s wife, is the mazkira (general manager) of Beit Zera, and has been for the last seven years. She was born in the community, to a father who escaped the Holocaust and ended up in Beit Zera and a Lithuanian-Polish mother who came to the kibbutz in a second generation of “the Lithuanians.” She has no negative memories of growing up in the kibbutz—she describes it as “like summer camp all the time.” But in her young adulthood, in the 1970s, Sarah read Ayn Rand’s Atlas Shrugged, known for converting many young people to economic libertarianism. To a child who grew up in a community where the collective was holy, one can only imagine how disorienting lines such as “I swear by my life and my love of it that I will never live for the sake of

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425 Ibid.
426 Mike Miller, second personal interview, June 13, 2017.
427 Sarah Miller, personal interview, June 20th, 2017.
another man, nor ask another man to live for mine” might have been.\textsuperscript{428} And yet, Saraleh was moved; she had found a text that articulated her internal frustrations:

I read Ayn Rand and it gave me a lot of ideas. I’m not saying I agree with what she said 100%, but I think Beit Zera’s problem was that it didn’t strike the right balance between public and private life. It was too public. The kibbutz didn’t let people decide on their own lives. The whole economic protocol was like that. If you did what you loved and worked hard but got the same amount as someone who didn’t work hard and didn’t put in effort, and that same person also makes economic decisions for you, because everyone chooses together, something is flawed in that.\textsuperscript{429}

The subtext of Saraleh’s critique of the kibbutz model is a call for individualism: the dichotomy of public life versus private life is a proxy for collective versus individual life. She says, “the kibbutz did not let people decide on their own lives,” when in fact the founding members of kibbutzim were actively choosing a particular lifestyle, albeit one that engendered a lack of economic choice once a member bought into the need-based model. Thereafter, the fact that members’ children did not become official members themselves until choosing to do so at age 18 indicated the degree to which the kibbutz allowed for a clear option of exit. Indeed, every year between 1985 and 1989—the four years following the debt crisis and the ESP—more than 1,000 young members rescinded their kibbutz membership.\textsuperscript{430} Saraleh could have left Beit Zera; the kibbutz had given her that choice. What Saraleh really wanted was for Beit Zera to adjust to her desire for a change in the economic sphere. In other words, not choice, but possibility of change.

It was the combination of lack of material freedom and lack of channels to change the kibbutz’s regulations to allow for more material freedom that Saraleh is

\textsuperscript{429} Sarah Miller, personal interview, June 20\textsuperscript{th}, 2017.
\textsuperscript{430} Ben-Rafael, 40.
disparaging. Across Israel, it became more and more common for the young and middle-aged members who had not left their kibbutzim to voice criticisms like Ayelet and Saraleh’s against the need-based model. That lack of material freedom had become synonymous with a lack of choice (as opposed to an integral characteristic of kibbutz life as defined by ideological considerations like equality, Pioneerism, and mutual responsibility) speaks volumes to the rejection of those ideological tenets. The timing of these criticisms shows that the reforms detailed in the following section were contingent upon the growing gap between the foundations of the kibbutz movement and the direction of the Israeli state.

1986—2008: Reforms Along the Way

The reforms implemented in Beit Zera between 1986 and 2008 can be distinguished as primarily economic or social in nature, though the nature of the cooperative model meant that an economic reform often heavily affected the social sphere and vice versa. The biggest change to the kibbutz model outside of economic privatization was the replacement of lina meshutefet (joint childrearing) with lina mishpachtit (family childrearing). Many studies, academic and artistic, have focused on this shift alone, and the psychological implications of joint childrearing for the members who experienced it. This project’s focus does not leave room to expand on joint childrearing’s causes or effects, but its abolition reveals an important sea change in the universal kibbutz culture. In Beit Zera, joint childrearing ended in 1990.431

Many of my older interviewees indicated that they did not understand the problem with joint childrearing: they enjoyed it, and their kids did, too. Saraleh, who is in her

431 Beit Zera Historical Calendar.
mid-50s, had the opposite view. To her, joint childrearing was absurd. The way she explained the difference between her view and the older generations’ view is illuminative:

I really could not stand *lina meshutefet*. We couldn’t understand how our parents stood it, but they were very busy—they were busy with building the kibbutz. It worked for them, to have the time off. People my age, it didn’t work for us anymore, so we got busy with changing it. The second that it changed, in the early 1990s, it started to change the kibbutz. Because the moment that your kids are at home with you in the evenings, you can’t go sit in the dining room and socialize with all of the members every night anymore. Everyone started looking out for his or her own family. The kids grew up and wanted to study, and you want to give that to them, and suddenly you realize that you can’t give it to them—they need to wait in line with the rest of the kibbutz. It started with these little every day things; the kibbutz model didn’t suit us anymore.432

In the social sphere, joint childrearing was the embodiment of the kibbutz as a collective, wherein the nuclear family took a back seat to the aim of creating an all-encompassing equality across the community. As Saraleh explained, and as older members alluded to, the system was beneficial to the material needs of the kibbutz. Like collectivism in general, it was cheaper—all children could live in bunk beds in a single house, while couples lived in single-room apartments of a standard 32 square meters.433 Beyond direct material considerations, the fact that working members only spent two hours a day with their children freed up more hours of the day, hours that could be used to do extra work and to strengthen social ties with other kibbutz members.434 Indeed, as Saraleh said, before industrialization and the introduction of machine labor, kibbutz members were busy building and maintaining the kibbutz.

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432 Sarah Miller, personal interview, June 20th, 2017.
433 Expansion of apartments to accommodate children required a standard addition of 20 square meters, a costly endeavor when applied to a kibbutz of Beit Zera’s size—484 members, averaging about 200 apartments—in the mid 1980s and early ’90s. Near, *Volume 2*, 248.
434 Lieblich, 100.
The practice of *ma’amatz* (which translates directly to “to put in an effort” and was used to describe contributing hours of manual labor well beyond a nine to five workday) was common. Within this scheme, childrearing was treated as another economic and social task for the kibbutz to tackle as a collective. As Tzipora told me, joint childrearing made it so that children’s own parents were not their family—“the kibbutz was our family.” This enabled the reproduction of the communal norms implemented by the founders.

The growing appeal of individualism in the 1960s—in particular, of the idea that individuals have divergent wants and needs—began to undercut these functionalities. The rejection of joint childrearing was a result of individualist sentiment, while the introduction of family childrearing substantially reinforced individualist ambition. The examples Saraleh cites illustrate this cycle: that the biological family unit carried increased importance created conflict with the economic constraints of the need-based model, which undermined the parent’s ability to prioritize their own children’s needs and desires over other those of other members of the kibbutz. For these parents, the end of joint childrearing did not dissolve a frustration with the kibbutz model. On the contrary, it revealed the ways in which the economic model did not suit their social wants.

Saraleh’s husband, Mike, was the *merakez meshek* of Beit Zera—a general industrial management position that amounts to CEO of a kibbutz’s production—between 1986 and 1991. A few years earlier, the kibbutz had sent him to study economics and management with the intention of installing him in this position upon

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436 Mike Miller, second personal interview, June 13th, 2017.
his return. No one could have anticipated that he would be tasked with the herculean challenge of managing the kibbutz’s finances and industry after such a major financial crisis. Mike is mentioned here because, due to the effects of the crisis, the individual in charge of each branch or facet of the kibbutz became far more important than in years prior. In the original model, the frequent rotation of jobs among all members had been critical as a means of actualizing the premise of the equal value of all labor, and of all laborers. As chapter three touched on, the industrialization period in kibbutz history introduced the idea of educational investment in individual members, and subsequently created a class of technocrats, even if there was a rotation of positions among them.437

Such a concentration of jobs in a particular segment of the population should not have affected the collectivism of the kibbutz if all decisions had been made in the General Assembly vis-à-vis directly democratic practice. But in the late 1980s, kibbutzim across the Kibbutz Movement instituted representative General Councils—called mazkiruyot (pl. of mazkirut)—that met weekly or bi-monthly, while the General Assemblies only met a few times a year.438 Now, instead of a rotating kibbutz president (mazkir/a) overseeing community-wide decisions, decision making in Beit Zera was mediated by at least three groups: the mazkir/a, the mazkirut, and the professional class of managers of the kibbutz’s firms. Post-1985, the pressure of turning a higher profit meant that, in the sphere of production in particular, more and more decisions were made by the management of the various firms without kibbutz-

438 Ben-Rafael, 58.
wide consultation.\textsuperscript{439} The collectives’ role shrunk. Even though all major decisions still required kibbutz approval, this change in the day-to-day functioning of the community undermined its characterization as a single “collective entrepreneur.”\textsuperscript{440}

There is one event in Beit Zera’s industrial history that lucidly reflects the decreasing importance of communal decision-making. In 1992, the three branches of Arkal—Arkal Water Filtration Systems, Arkal Plastic Moldings, and Arkal Media—were divided into three separate enterprises, with separate managerial boards and marketing and sales teams. Mike explains how Beit Zera reached this decision:

In the late 1980s and early ‘90s, we contracted with a strategic consultant group to see if we could improve [Arkal’s] strategic performance. This led to the correct decision to separate the three production activities. Each business activity would have a separate manager, a separate team. That proved to be valuable in improving the results of each of the three companies until the end of the 90s.\textsuperscript{441}

Indeed, in 1997, Arkal enjoyed its highest profit margin ever.\textsuperscript{442} That an outsourced, private consulting group was brought in to increase the profits of a communal, collectively owned enterprise sounds ironic. In the chapter of \textit{Crisis and Transformation: The Kibbutz at Century’s End} entitled “Kibbutz Capitalism Challenged,” Ben-Rafael explores the shift revealed by such anecdotes: placing greater weight on economic considerations at the expense of the collectivist norms of the kibbutz became more and more frequent in this period.\textsuperscript{443} Yiftach, a Beit Zera member who was highly instrumental in the changes Arkal underwent between the early 1990s and the mid 2000s, summarized his perception of this balance by citing a

\textsuperscript{439} Mike Miller, second personal interview, June 13, 2017.
\textsuperscript{440} Ben-Rafael, 95.
\textsuperscript{441} Mike Miller, second personal interview, June 13, 2017.
\textsuperscript{442} Beit Zera Historical Calendar.
\textsuperscript{443} Ben-Rafael, 93-128.
verse from the Hebrew Bible: “eem ein kemech, ein torah,” which roughly translates to “if there is no flour, there is no Torah.” With this quote, Yiftach explained that if a community cannot support itself materially, there can be no successful spiritual or ideological life. It was this sentiment—one that is nearly opposite to the stories told by Beit Zera’s older members, in which the ideological components of the kibbutz offset their material lacks—that came to define, and be reinforced by, these changes to Beit Zera’s production sphere.

While these production changes undermined the communal-integrative norms of Beit Zera, they did not totally undo them; even today, collective ownership of kibbutz enterprise is one of the only remaining vestiges of the need-based model in Beit Zera. On the consumption side, though, definitive change occurred much more quickly. In 1996, Beit Zera passed a slew of consumption privatization measures: electricity consumption, newspapers, haircuts, cosmetics, and most significantly, food were now all to be paid out of kibbutz members’ individual budgets instead of the kibbutz’s collective budget. Granted, the money with which members purchased these goods still came from a budget that was evenly distributed from the collective kibbutz income. Now, though, the comprehensive budget was expanded; the less income the kibbutz spent to pay for goods collectively, the more it could put in each member’s budget to pay for their own spending. Sophie ran the kibbutz’s supermarket at the time. She describes the shift she saw in consumption habits as a product of this consumption-side privatization.

445 Yoram Ben Tor, personal interview, June 13th, 2017.
446 Beit Zera Historical Calendar.
People used to come in, go to the fridge, take vegetables—it didn’t matter to them that it costs the kibbutz. Suddenly, when it cost money from their individual salary, people would take one carrot, one cucumber, and one tomato. This process happened slowly: first, just the things in the supermarket, then the dining room was privatized. Some older members stomped their feet and said: “What is this embarrassment that I have to pay for the dining room now! I’ve lived in the kibbutz my whole life.” What they didn’t understand is that they had been paying for it their entire lives. 

In describing the privatization of consumption this way, Sophie touched on a critical impetus for the decision: the perception of wastefulness by Beit Zera’s members. A symptom of the larger perception of a free-rider epidemic, the deteriorating financial condition of the kibbutz as a whole created an uptick in how members assessed another’s behavior. Privatization of consumption was a step in the direction of undoing the direct relationship among members’ economic activities. Even though the income that member X brought in to the kibbutz still affected the total income and, thus, the amount of budget distributed to each member, the amount of food member X ate, or the number of cigarettes member Y smoked, or whatever other consumption activities they partook in, no longer affected the amount of collective budget spent beyond the collective capacity. The privatization of consumption in Beit Zera functioned as a check for accountability on the individual’s habits, the first time that such a mechanism was implemented.

This begins to explain the reactions of the “older members” who “stomped their feet”: they had grown up in a kibbutz culture that assumed the individual would be accountable for all of their actions as a result of participation in an experiment in communalism. Perhaps Sophie is right, and this demographic did not understand the correlation between the income they generated and the consumption they participated

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in, but I think her reading of their rejection is mistaken. It seems more likely that the
embarrassment came from the blatant affront to the ideological maxim of the kibbutz,
“give what you can, take what you need.” Privatization of consumption enforced a
regulation to the latter half of the maxim that assumed an inability on the member’s part to enforce this premise on his or her own. It reflected a rising distrust in
members’ willingness for self-sacrifice. Viewed against the events that followed in
the coming decade, the privatization of consumption is reflective not only of a
growing distrust in each individual’s readiness to consume modestly when
consumption goods were provided at no individual marginal cost, but also a
disillusionment with the merits of self-sacrifice. This toe dipped in the waters of
private choice increased members’ desires to define the size of their budget, too. This,
of course, would require the introduction of a connection between labor input and
salary, whereby the differentials among members’ labor values and inputs would
translate to differentials in salary. In other words, a private, market-determined
income.

Shaul, who was born in Beit Zera in the early 1930s, noticed that the
implementation of private consumption budgets fanned the existing flames of
discontent with the need-based model among a certain segment of the population.
This, in turn, created a tangible tension between the members who shared the long-
term aim of income privatization and those who did not.

From the minute that people started to talk about privatization—and it was
clear from the get go that there would be people who would come out of it in a
good economic situation and people who would come out less well—this
influenced the relations. It was in the atmosphere of the kibbutz—you felt it
wasn’t the same, even though we continued living as it had always been. But
in terms of the closeness of the community—we used to talk about everything with each other, and this disappeared.\textsuperscript{448}

In the early 2000s, income privatization was put to a vote for the first time. The \textit{mazkirut} decided that a simple majority was not a high enough standard for this particular change; a 3/4 majority would be required to reflect sufficient consensus.\textsuperscript{449}

In this first vote, the community was split down the middle, and the proposal did not pass.\textsuperscript{450} It was in this context of a divided kibbutz that an intentional process of consensus building began around the proposal to implement a system of private, differential income.

\textit{Tzevet Evik: Searching for Consensus in a Divided Community}

Ben-Rafael’s \textit{Crisis and Transformation: The Kibbutz at Century’s End} provides a comprehensive, kibbutz movement-wide study of trends in kibbutz renewal through the late 1990s, with a focus on the question of agency. In a community built around collective decision-making, how does a change to those very collectivist norms come about? Ben-Rafael hypothesized that, based on Max Weber’s theory of change in democracy, “aspirations and commitments to change… might be accounted for…by tensions or dilemmas embedded in, or at least relating to, the structure of the collective identity.”\textsuperscript{451} He tests this hypothesis against a 636-person quantitative social survey of members across 170 kibbutzim. On the relationship between consensus and discord vis-à-vis a number of economic and social changes on kibbutzim where they had been passed, Ben-Rafael concluded that there was a

\textsuperscript{448} Shaul Adar, personal interview, June 8\textsuperscript{th}, 2017.
\textsuperscript{449} Beit Zera Historical Calendar.
\textsuperscript{450} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{451} Ben-Rafael, 177.
general “Zeitgeist of change” that affected most kibbutz members, whether or not they agreed on the ways in which this change should manifest itself. 452 Statistically, he found that:

Changes nearly always obtain much more support than opposition, in all layers of the populace. This, however, is not to deny that different social categories may, to some degree, share different perspectives. A salient finding is that the higher-status layer is most involved in the process of change and constitutes its strongest support for all three strings of changes, especially management. 453 He claims a consistency with a Weberian theory of consensus, whereby agents of change capitalize on the problematic facets of a codified social order that are visibly problematic to the rest of the community, too. 454

Before 2008, the social order in Beit Zera was that which the need-based model dictated, and the “issue area” came from the tensions described above: between competitive enterprise and the kibbutz as a “family firm”, between individualism and collectivism, and between the kibbutz as a sacrificing body and the kibbutz as a space of material comfort. And, as the accounts of many members showcased earlier illustrate, a Zeitgeist of discontent was tangible. Ben-Rafael’s finding that members’ in the “higher status-layer” of the kibbutz were at the forefront of calls for change to the need-based model rings especially true for Beit Zera’s case. Nearly all individuals I interviewed who worked in management of kibbutz enterprise or in management-level positions outside the kibbutz were also highly involved in the debate as proponents of privatized incomes. If it had been a community where management made decisions without democratic accountability, Beit Zera would have introduced private incomes long before 2008. However, the democratic

452 Ibid.
453 Ibid, 197.
454 Ibid, 155.
procedure still in place meant that privatization would not transpire on the whim of Beit Zera’s management class. In light of this, a strategy was devised to turn the 50% support for privatization of the early 2000s into the 75% support they sought.\footnote{Yiftach Sadan, personal interview, June 19th, 2017}

Enter *Tzevet Evik* (the Committee of Evik, named for one of its founders), an informal committee founded in 1995 by a self-selected group of Beit Zera members, intent on selling their own vision for its future.\footnote{Beit Zera Historical Calendar.} Yiftach, one of the founders of the committee, is the same man who, as a teenager in the 1960s, felt Beit Zera was like a glass house looking out onto the greater Israel—a place that was both exclusionary and abnormal. In 1995, he was the manager of development and innovation at Arkal, a position that gave him a particularly negative understanding of the need-based model’s ability to accommodate competitive production. To Yiftach, a successful future for both Beit Zera and Arkal would require major changes to both entities. He expressed this idea with a potent tone of urgency. Yiftach explained the committee’s purpose as three-fold: to pinpoint the problems of the kibbutz, to define a tangible vision of an improved Beit Zera, and to design the tools to reach that vision. He describes the first two processes as follows:

> We did very basic, foundational work to 1) understand the problems of the kibbutz and 2) to learn from others what solutions were available. [By 1995], there were many kibbutzim before us that had gone through this already, ten places at least. One of the most important insights that we learned was about the rate of change. So we learned that it was always important to measure our pace. As they say, why did the Jews have to wander forty years in the desert? They had to wander because a nation of slaves had to transform into the nation of chosen people. In 2000, there were two people who made a big mistake, the same people who thought we were going too slow the whole time. They brought an external consultant, and tried to move things along faster. This was
a little after 2000, and the vote didn’t pass. The community stopped them. If you go too fast, the kibbutz won’t be behind you.457

As strongly as Yiftach felt about privatization, he understood that an attempt to stage a major change without ¾ of the members’ support would flounder. Here, we recall Ben-Rafael’s findings: that the process of change on kibbutzim did not, generally, “occasion any acute head-on confrontations between polarized camps.”458 True, major changes to the kibbutz reflected a degree of consensus by definition of their passage through the democratic process. And yet, Beit Zera’s case complicates Ben-Rafael’s conclusion that such consensus was a product of an organically collective discontent. In Beit Zera, Tzevet Evik embarked on a pointed mission to create a consensus. Some members I interviewed went as far as calling the committee manipulative; Yiftach himself called their activities “tricky.”459

In the five years of its existence, the committee spearheaded two major projects: a series of topical lectures by academics, open to the community, and a hypothetical economic exercise called doch shkifut (transparency reports). The practice of bringing economic, anthropological, historical, sociological, and religious experts—not only to speak on the topic of kibbutz, but on Jewish and cooperative experiences in general—continued throughout the early 2000s, past the year that Tzevet Evik disassembled. This strategy was targeted at undermining Beit Zera’s older population’s perceptions of the need-based kibbutz: its centrality to the Zionist

457 Yiftach Sadan, personal interview, June 18th, 2017.
458 Ben-Rafael, 177.
459 Yiftach Sadan, personal interview, June 18th, 2017.
project and to Jewish history, as well as its economic viability. In retrospect, Yiftach contends that this strategy succeeded: “it started a bunch of waves.”

The transparency reports served a corollary purpose. Instead of targeting older members averse to change on ideological grounds, it was geared towards those members who would benefit most from a privatization of income. In 1996, the first such reports were released, including a receipt to each member revealing the exact salary they would be receiving if it didn’t go straight from their place of work to the collective economy, as well as the difference between that salary and the comprehensive budget they received each month.

For the transparency reports to work, its recipients would have to disregard the founding ideology of the kibbutz model: that all labor is of equal value. Otherwise, why would members working in higher-paying jobs be tempted by the prospect of undoing that premise? The ideologues of the early 20th century Beit Zera would have laughed at the materialistic logic of such a strategy. But by the late 1990s, the appeal of both individual self-fulfillment and material luxury in Beit Zera had risen to levels that would have been unrecognizable just decades earlier. Additionally, this period saw a growing acceptability of kibbutz members taking on employment outside of the kibbutz’s firms, touted by the Kibbutz Movement as a method to increase the collective income. While this practice partially achieved that goal, it also created a peculiar dynamic between member income and collective income that had not existed when every member worked on the kibbutz. Recall that based on the premise that all labor is of equal value, Beit Zera paid an identical salary to all

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460 Ibid.
461 Ben-Rafael, 116.
members: this meant that a member of Beit Zera like Yiftach, who was a manager in Arkal, was generating the same kibbutz-dictated salary for the collective income as a member like Simcha, who worked in Arkal’s production line. Simultaneously, outsourced employees in Beit Zera’s firms performing identical job functions would be paid a salary closer to the market rate for whatever the position was. In practice, this meant that a non-member manager in Arkal Water Filtration was making the same as a Beit Zera member who had found identical work in a competing water filtration factory, but a Beit Zera member in that position in Arkal was making a significantly lower salary, on par with what Simcha was making in production.

By revealing these phenomena, the transparency reports provoked an increase in Beit Zera members looking for work outside of the kibbutz. This meant that, each year, more and more members generated salaries higher than the budgets they were receiving. Compounded by the pull of individualist ideas already prevalent on the kibbutz, the transparency report facilitated a process whereby more and more Beit Zera members developed a preference for differential incomes. As Aharon put it, very simply, “when the difference between salaries became visible, it made the member think: I work as an engineer; I want to get the salary of an engineer.”

Neither the lectures nor the transparency reports were forceful or overtly calculating. Rather, each might be understood as a psychological experiment. Yiftach, at least, sees it this way:

We put the kibbutz in front of a mirror. It’s not easy to take a community that you live in, that you are a part of, and to undress it—to make it naked. We turned people around 360 degrees so they would see everything, and then we said choose how you want to proceed. Look, I can give people a clean mirror, but I can’t make them open their eyes. There were people who kept their eyes

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shut. And these were the same people that weren’t willing to see the problem in front of us in the economic sphere. It comes from the same place: a sort of repression, a running away from the truth that things are moving.

The latter part of Yiftach’s characterization reveals an acceptance of the inequality that privatization would present. Even though Beit Zera’s enterprises had floundered, failing to sustain the living standard its members has been used to, the comprehensive budget system did enable a higher salary for certain members who had worked their whole lives in agricultural branches or in menial labor jobs. Furthermore, the comprehensive budget provided a living for the elderly, members who no longer worked but had no pension plan to speak of, as the need-based model was their pension plan. Thus, by 2008, the people left unconvinced of the merits of income privatization were almost all of pensioners’ age or close to it, people who had either retired from the work force or would not have time to pursue an advanced degree and earn a higher salary in the years they would remain in the workforce. This meant, in other words, members over the age of 55. These members who had little to gain materially from privatization were the same members who were most fully socialized into the need-based model, and thus the same members who were most convinced of the merits of collective living on an ideological level. To middle-aged and younger members, the equal credence given to both ideas—commitment to collectivism and fear of being left without a sufficient living—translated into an equation of the two ideas. Ideological commitment to the need-based idea began to seem synonymous with fear for what might happen after privatization.

This was the kind of tension already apparent when, in the early 2000s, the high profit margins of two of Arkal’s now-separated branches—Plastics and Media—

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began to slip.\textsuperscript{464} Before the 1992 split of Water Filtration, Plastics, and Media, all of the profits from Arkal had gone directly to the kibbutz income to fund living expenses, which had forced the company to take loans in order to grow and diversify.\textsuperscript{465} To combat this phenomenon, at the time of the split, it was decided that Beit Zera would only receive a 50\% dividend of whatever profit each branch were to make each year, a means of ensuring that the companies could make future investment without taking on large loans.\textsuperscript{466} The several consecutive years during which Plastics and Media made no profit pushed Beit Zera to take loans itself—not for investment, but to maintain the existing level of the comprehensive budget. Mike explained what happened as follows:

The kibbutz did not really adjust its standard of living to the situation; it continued to spend without taking into account what real money it had. Between 2000 and 2008, the situation deteriorated. People were getting older and generating less income, the agricultural branches were not as profitable as they had been before, and the kibbutz entered a severe financial crisis. Arkal Media was merged back into Arkal Plastics [to try to salvage it]. Then, Arkal Plastics had some very bad years. It essentially went bankrupt. So the kibbutz had no option but to sell it off at a very low price to whoever would buy it. The kibbutz didn’t get any income from that—it just paid off debt. This caused a situation where the kibbutz needed all the money that members had saved up from what they hadn’t spent of their monthly budgets. So the kibbutz froze all of those assets. Someone who technically had 10,000 shekels in the bank couldn’t go take that out because the kibbutz, as a collective, had no money.\textsuperscript{467}

Beit Zera’s instinct to turn to loans to maintain its members’ standards of living is rooted in the precedent set by the Yishuv period: the state will support the existence of this community because of its centrality to the national project. While that relationship had changed by the early 2000s, the practice of loan taking by

\textsuperscript{464} Beit Zera Historical Calendar.
\textsuperscript{465} Mike Miller, second personal interview, June 13, 2017.
\textsuperscript{466} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{467} Ibid.
kibbutzim had become routine. Mike describes this mentality is irresponsible, but historical context raises the questions: how could the kibbutzim have preceded any differently?

By 2005, Arkal Plastics and Media were gone, and all that was left of Beit Zera’s industry was Arkal Water Filtration: a highly successful company, but not quite profitable enough to pay off all the debts Beit Zera had accumulated. In such a climate of crisis, the pressure to reach a decision on privatization mounted. The majority of Beit Zera’s members began to see a future vote as a litmus test for rationality, a choice between a framework that would allow for many members to prosper (the safety-net) or a framework that held all members hostage in a state of material lack (the need-based mode), justified by the small number of members who would not necessarily prosper under the safety-net model. As Sophie put it: “if you have a headache, and forty other people also have headaches, will your head hurt less? No, your headache will stay the same.”

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Material and Social Consequences of “Hashinui” and “HaMizug”

Of the 27 people I interviewed, only four voted against privatization in 2008. In total, 183 people voted for, 66 against.469 Two years later, in 2010, the management of Arkal, on behalf of Beit Zera, signed a deal—part merger, part sale—with Amiad, a nearby kibbutz, and Bermad, an international water control systems corporation.470 The merger was enabled by privatization. Before 2008, the kibbutz had relied on Arkal Water Filtration’s profits in order to supplement individual

469 Beit Zera Historical Calendar.
incomes and cover the living expenses of the collective. Now that the safety-net model had minimized the kibbutz’s responsibility to use all such income to cover collective living costs, profits from a sale could be used to make a significant dent in Beit Zera’s debt. Indeed, at this point Beit Zera was still in major debt, unable to successfully fulfill even the safety-net functions that privatization was supposed to guarantee. Most of the accounts that had been frozen before 2008 remained frozen, and Beit Zera was under threat of foreclosure. The narrative of what happened next is murky: many members disagree on whether Beit Zera had to sell Arkal Water Filtrations, on whether better management of all three Arkal enterprises could have prevented the kibbutz’s financial crisis in the first place, and on which members in management positions at the time did or did not design the deal with their own personal profits in mind instead of a just consideration of the community’s income. Ultimately, what can be said for certain is that a sale did transpire, at a far lower profit margin than the 40 million dollar minimum most kibbutz members had expected. Arkal was ultimately sold for a 10 million dollar price tag with Beit Zera retaining 5% ownership.471

Thus, in the span of two years, the wave of changes that the 1977 national election and 1985 economic crisis had spurred was expedited and formalized, resulting in a new Beit Zera. The implementation of “HaShinui”—the change, as it has come to be called—occurred rapidly. The collective kibbutz account was split into personal accounts, and an ATM was installed on Beit Zera’s grounds.472 The kibbutz’s supermarket was replaced with a branch of Alonit, a private supermarket.

471 Ibid.
472 Beit Zera Historical Calendar.
Management of the dining hall—the holiest of kibbutz institutions—was transferred to an external catering company. Once in control, the company announced it would only serve lunch during the weekdays and Shabbat dinner on Fridays, for it was assumed that kibbutz members could surely use their newfound economic independence to provide for their own meals. The minimum salary that Beit Zera’s safety net dictates is 5,000 shekels a month: if a member of working age makes under that amount, the funds collected from the disparity tax are allocated to round out their monthly income. Such was the new Beit Zera—a community where the public sphere contracted, leaving expanded individual responsibility in its place.

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473 Ibid.
474 Ibid.
475 See Appendix 1.
The overwhelming majority of individuals I spoke to are, at least generally, satisfied with this new way of life. Beyond this satisfaction, two major trends are discernible. On one end of the spectrum, the middle-aged members I interviewed—i.e. members who were not a part of a founding generation—indicated either ambivalence or discontent with the degree that the safety-net model still creates an economic reliance among members. Marc articulated a common sentiment within this category: he supports the safety-net model because he understands that without it, the kibbutz would no longer be a kibbutz.

I’d be happy if I didn’t have to do it [pay the disparity tax], but I don’t have a problem with it. I still live on a kibbutz, and that’s part of the kibbutz that I like. I think the kibbutz should also support people health-wise...I’m for a reasonable amount of collectivity. So I don’t have an issue. 476

Saraleh conveyed a similar sentiment:

I think that what arose today is the right model because it allows the individual to choose his own life but also keeps a level of responsibility between people. If someone falls, and lives under the bridge, we won’t let them stay there. Even if that means I have pay a little more taxes, I like to know that the people next to me are not homeless. When it comes to crises where the person is not responsible for their situation, the kibbutz should continue to help. It should not leave people alone to deal. If Beit Zera were to disassemble this protection, then it would not be a kibbutz anymore. 477

Saraleh’s intuition that a kibbutz is defined by a certain degree of collective responsibility for the wellbeing of its members is not unique; nearly every Beit Zera member I interviewed repeated the same theory. What differentiates Saraleh’s answer from others’ was her assessment of how well the Beit Zera of today fulfills that function. Most members of the group informally knows as the “the pensioners” (i.e.

476 Marc Netsky, personal interview, June 8th, 2017.
477 Sarah Miller, personal interview, June 20th, 2017.
the older members of the kibbutz) agreed that, in practice, the safety-net model in Beit Zera does not fulfill its purported function. While many of them voted for privatization, they felt it had been implemented unfairly, and without enough attention to maintaining a sufficient level of equality. Aharon, for example, pointed to the fact that the same people who led the privatization process a) emerged with high salaries, on par with the market value of their management positions, and b) directly benefited from the merger between Arkal and Amiad in ways that the rest of the kibbutz did not.

The change was supposed to be an even distribution between the members. The kibbutz has means of production, and the means of production were not distributed evenly. Whoever was “close to the plate,” received more.

Given the limitations of my research, I was unable to corroborate the truth of Aharon’s accusations in terms of the distribution of profits from the merger. But beyond this specific accusation, there is at verified truth in Aharon’s larger claim. Privatization, as one might expect from its foundational logic, did not lead to an even distribution between the members; the very premise of privatization is to replace the equal distribution of goods and services with a system of differential incomes. A major challenge presented by privatization, then, was to ensure the financial security of the segment of the population no longer in the work force. In 2008, Beit Zera’s youngest official member—not including children of members still living on the kibbutz—was 40 years old. The average age on the kibbutz was 55.

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478 The majority of my interviewees belong to this age group: Sophia Levavi, Shimcha and Aharon Rothschild, Shaul Adar, Talma and David Yarden, Lina Arnon, Yoram Ben Tor, Dahlia Bohrer, Yair Koller, Sarah Neshner, Shula Ben Nachum, and Yiftach Sadan.
480 Mike Miller, second personal interview, June 13, 2017.
frustrations come from the kibbutz’s handling of a glaring obstacle to privatization: sustaining the population that had worked all their lives in the kibbutz without the possibility of saving for retirement.

Back in the early 1990s, when Mike was *merakez meshek*, he spearheaded a basic pension program for older members, a safety measure for a future scenario in which incomes would be privatized so that these members would have something to live off. Today, this fund is supplemented by funds from the kibbutz’s various internal taxes (primarily the graduated income tax) and its general income to guarantee a pension of 3,817 shekels a month from the kibbutz.\(^{482}\) This, plus national social security and whatever the individual can make on the side, is the income that pensioners receive. Aharon contends it is not enough: “the problem with this amount is that you can barely hold your head over water; you can’t live on this.”\(^{483}\)

Indeed, as of 2016, the average monthly before-tax income in Israel was 18,671 ILS per household, and 15,427 ILS after tax.\(^{484}\) Pensioners in Beit Zera who do not work extra jobs come nowhere near this level. Such a comparative financial condition, particularly in the face of the culture of materialism on the renewed kibbutz and the fact that most of their neighbors are able to exceed the average salary, is difficult for many to swallow. Simcha, Aharon’s wife, reiterates these frustrations.

The privatization didn’t do us any financial good. This is why I clean houses to make money. This is why Aharon goes to work [at a water park on the Sea of Galilee] where it’s very hard for him. He has had two heart attacks—and he’s only 70 years old. And then there is the disparity tax [the graduated income tax]. The second that they add money to your bank account, they take

\(^{482}\) Mike Miller, second personal interview, June 13, 2017.

\(^{483}\) Aharon Rothschild, personal interview, June 13\(^{th}\), 2017.

it away, citing the disparity tax. It’s like they cover our eyes and pull the rug out from under us. They increase the pension but add money to the tax. The harm that was done by privatization was to the older people. For the young people, there was no harm. They work hard, and they’re fine. What’s hard for me to hear is when the younger people say that they are funding our lives. This hurts the most. When a young person says, “We’re earning a living for you! What did you even do?” It’s like everyone forget that we worked so hard. We had something called “ma’amatz,” where after hours, we would go work extra in the dining hall, in washing dishes. It was on the dime of my own time. And I also worked on Shabbat. Today, whoever works on Shabbat gets 200% overtime salary. However much I gave back, however much I invested into the kids, the community, and the older people—it’s as if it didn’t happen. If I worked those hours for a salary, I would be a millionaire. But what am I left with? Nothing. 2,000 shekels in social security, and 3,800 shekels pension. Together, Aharon and I get about 11,000 shekels a month. And it’s not enough: we have to pay the community tax, water tax, plumbing, electricity, food, and help our kids, however much we can.485

Members in Mike and Saraleh’s generation believe that they are doing the best they can—perhaps more than they should even be doing—to ensure that those in Aharon and Simha’s position can live comfortably. But this older generation, upon seeing the difference between their own finances and these middle-aged members’ growing salaries and accumulation of material luxuries (extensions on their houses, fancy cars, vacations), are unconvinced. They question whether the norm of individualism that creates this disparity can truly be tempered by a preservation of the original kibbutz principle of human equality. The conflict that the issue of pensions reveals between the younger generation and the older generation’s experiences with privatization is symptomatic of a larger disagreement on whether or not a privatized kibbutz can also successfully ensure a minimum of social and economic security.

Indeed, there is a growing sentiment among wage-earning members that privatization did not go far enough. As Ayelet puts it, the change “should have been more sharp.”

485 Simcha Rothschild, personal interview, June 7th, 2017.
Today, as fewer and fewer Beit Zera members who were pensioners before 2008 remain, the incentive to retain the safety net in its current iteration is decreasing.

One issue area is that of healthcare services. Since privatization, all of Beit Zera’s members belong to one of Israel’s four healthcare providers within its single-payer system. Between 2008 and 2017, Beit Zera also committed to using part of its collective income to cover additional services that the national healthcare system does not cover. As of 2016, the kibbutz began to cut back on these services. To Aharon, this development is horrific, representative of the demise of whatever semblance of mutual responsibility was left. In the early 2000s, their grown son had suffered a severe accident, relegating him to a life of intensive physical therapy and institutional living. Aharon describes the change in support that the kibbutz provided:

Now, in the years when there was a kibbutz, we got help—we got rides to the hospital, the community acted okay. But when privatization began, we had to drive there all the time, once in three weeks, to visit him. Offers of rides, offers of financial help: nothing. We have to stand in this situation alone. When I tell this to friends in other kibbutzim, they don’t believe me. When Simcha turned to the manager a few years ago, she got a response that implied that we were trying to rob the kibbutz, a response that brought her to tears. Instead of coming and trying to understand, from the point of the public sphere of the kibbutz—nothing. They don’t acknowledge me. This is in contrast to when there was a kibbutz, and there were medical problems, the kibbutz supported the member from all directions. Today, we’re standing in the middle of a broken trough. ⁴⁸⁶

In the weeks that I was in Beit Zera, it just so happened that the mazkirut was in the process of finalizing a decision to cut off the medical rides service that Aharon alluded to (which he and his wife had already been boxed out of, for their son’s medical emergency did not qualify for the ride service). As mazkira, criticisms like

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Aharon’s have not been lost on Saraleh. When I inquired about this particular change, she had a response at the ready.

Since privatization, we kept services like rides to get people to their doctor appointments, and we covered and subsidized medical costs. Things that are more related to the older members. But today, this is going and changing. This is hard for the older members to understand. But I try to explain to them: if we expand the pension—it was originally 2,000, now it will be almost 4,000—we’re taking money from the kibbutz and enlarging the private budget that each pensioner gets. This is privatization. It can’t be that we’ll give people more private money but also continue to pay for everything. That doesn’t work. Still, it’s very hard for them: they feel like we’re throwing them by the wayside. But we’re not! We’re lowering their taxes, so that they will have more private money. But they don’t understand that. They don’t work anymore, so they can’t go out and work to grow their salaries. So we’re trying to do it gently, without hurting anyone, because at the end of the day they did build this kibbutz. But we tell people our age and younger: you have to worry for yourself. You have to have responsibility, to care for your pension. Eventually, we want to get to the point where everyone’s pension comes from the work they do, just like in the rest of Israel.  

It is exactly on this point—on being like the rest of Israel—that the wage earners’ prescriptions for the future diverge from the pensioners’. To the latter category, looking like the rest of Israel means embracing the “piggish capitalism” of the Likud administration, and allowing a want for individualism to bleed into selfishness. Tzipora was livid when she heard about the kibbutz’s plans to cancel medical rides. Her older brother had been a driver for the service for many years, and she claims that he only got a “symbolic stipend” from the kibbutz. In other words, she think that this program shutting down does not come from financial considerations, as Saraleh explained, but from a total rejection of the mutual responsibility the service represented. “Did you all totally lose it?” she mimed asking the rest of the kibbutz in our interview, growing red.

Sarah Miller, personal interview, June 20th, 2017.
Who could cancel that? Only people who can get to the doctor themselves—only people who have cars and who have the ability. What will people do who don’t have cars? How can you even accept decisions like that? It’s…it’s…. it sounds bad. And it is bad. 388

Conflicts like this bring to the fore the underlying question of the post-privatized kibbutz. What constraints are preventing communities like Beit Zera from totally abandoning mechanisms that reflect the communal norms of the need-based kibbutz? In other words, why does the safety-net kibbutz exist in the first place, as opposed to a regular community of private individuals like any other? From the above series of interview excerpts, one obvious answer is that the remnants of the old kibbutz only exist to accommodate the older generation that has no other way to make a living. There is certainly a group of younger members, people like Ayelet, who believe this wholeheartedly, and who would love to see these mechanisms whither away in the near future.

But there are members who are more optimistic. These members think that it the current combination of collectivism and individualism may not be perfect, but that it is sustainable. Yoram, a pensioner himself, thinks that the 5% collective ownership of Arkal, and the continued total collective ownership of the agricultural branches, is one way in which the communal framework that exists today is preserved.

One of the things that Beit Zera’s privatization kept is that the community still collectively owns the means of production. The moment that you keep that, you’re keeping the basis of the collective interests of the community: people will have a shared interest in something. It’s very important if you’re living communally like this to have shared interests. 389

Others think that a shared cultural investment—in holidays and community events—is key. Still others think that all it takes is that the right members will step up

489 Yoram Ben Tor, personal interview, June 13th, 2017.
to serve in Beit Zera’s leadership bodies, members who still care about maintaining the safety net. Shula is one of these members. Indeed, after the 2008 vote, she joined the mazkirut with the explicit aim of ensuring that the implementation of privatization would be less dorsani—an adjective that literally means, “to stomp on others.”

On a theoretical level, the sentiment that it is possible to achieve a balance between collectivism and individualism is more common than the converse in Beit Zera. This fits nicely into Ben-Rafael’s definition of what makes a kibbutz, based on a more general definition of utopia—“a collective where the desire for a better way of being pertains to the members’ practical and daily preoccupations.” But in practice, Beit Zera’s original ideological dicta of what makes a “better way of being” are barely still reflected in the community’s rules and regulations. The safety-net system reflects an equilibrium of Beit Zera’s current memberships’ preferences, but the members most invested in maintaining the mechanisms rooted in collectivist preferences will no longer be around to ensure this balance in the coming decades.

At its core, the story of Beit Zera’s 2008 privatization, and the safety-net model that emerged, is a story of shifting weight assigned to competing principles: individualism on the one hand, and collectivism on the other. In the past, the socialist dictums of the need-based kibbutz model were reinforced by the varying roles it played in the state-building and national economic, political, and social aims. While most members did not directly connect kibbutz renewal to 1) the evolution of the dominant national ideology or 2) the related withdrawal of the state’s material support of the kibbutz, the language they use to describe the process of change in Beit Zera reveals the degree to which privatization is about a rejection of the foundational

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490 Ben-Rafael, 228
tenets of the need-based model: of Pioneerism, of mutual responsibility, and of equality. The preceding three chapters argued that this counter attitude emerged as a result of the aforementioned national-scale changes. This chapter, then, showcased the results of that changed attitude in Beit Zera.

Three decades ago, one of the figures primarily responsible for the liberalization of Israeli economic policy touched on the seeds of the argument this thesis has put forth. Milton Friedman, who was instrumental in crafting the ESP of 1985, spoke at the 1988 Symposium on American—Israeli Economic Relations, disparaging the need-based model while praising the role the kibbutz had played in the Yishuv period.

In the early days of Israel, the pioneers who set up the kibbutzim, and who spent their lives working for the preservation of the development of Israel, were in the main, animated by that socialist ideal. If they had not been so animated—if there had not been that kind of idealism—it is far from clear that Israel could ever have existed as a free and independent state… there has been such a paradox for so long—that so many Jews have simultaneously been the major beneficiaries of a free-market system and the major opponents, theoretically, of such a system.⁴⁹¹

Friedman is citing the same tenets—Pioneerism, equality, and the asceticism they entailed—that Arthur Ruppin, back in 1925, celebrated as enabling the success of the need-based model in actualizing Zionist settlement aims. The paradox he cites, though, is a product of the moment in which he spoke: the exact historical moment at which the Likud government made a concerted effort to distance Israel’s future from

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its Labor Zionist origins. The kibbutz, as the embodiment of Labor Zionism in its purest form, becomes the villain in Friedman’s narrative, the last segment of Israeli society that has not caught up to its government’s embrace of free-market liberalism, and the tenet of individualism that lies at its foundation. It seems as if, by 2017, much of Beit Zera’s population had internalized this sentiment. On the safety-net kibbutz, as in today’s Israel, the individual has become priority, while collectivism has been reduced to a handful of regulatory mechanisms—a vestige of the kibbutz that once was.
CONCLUSION

Chapter four ended by locating the root of Beit Zera’s privatization not in its members’ agency but in the anti-collectivist, anti-egalitarian shift in Israel’s dominant ideology and economic policy. Indeed, my interviews reveals that the principles that defined Beit Zera’s original identity—equality and mutual social and economic responsibility—are on thin ice. This allows for a tidy ending to my analysis, wherein the deterioration of egalitarian principles on a national level are reflected in—and continue to inform—the departure of the kibbutz project from its original need-based model.

But I cannot give Milton Friedman the last word in Beit Zera’s story. Chapter four’s ending must be tempered by another side of the renewed Beit Zera: its recent demographic growth. Before 2008, Beit Zera’s population stood under 200 members, with few of these members’ grown children choosing to make the community their home.492 Today, Beit Zera’s total population is about 600: 258 members who pay the safety-net and associated taxes and 29 of their under-18 year-old children, 21 non-member adult residents who are the children of kibbutz members, 15 soldiers, and 152 renters—residents with no formal connection to the kibbutz—and 59 of their children.493 In their introduction to 100 Years of Kibbutz Life, Palgi and Reinharz create a five-category litmus test for whether the kibbutz project “is dead”:

…. 1) The total disbanding of a majority of current kibbutzim, 2) the departure of a vast majority of members from their kibbutzim, 3) the non-arrival of any new members to replenish the places of those who have left, 4) the complete halt in formation of any new kibbutzim, and 5) the

492 Correspondence with Beit Zera’s Archivist, March of 2018.
493 Ibid.
division of all kibbutz property into parts that would be owned by individuals who formerly constituted the kibbutz.\textsuperscript{494}

In Beit Zera, before privatization, the second and third outcomes seemed a likely fate: of the members who remained, most were older, and their kids had chosen to live outside of Beit Zera. What, then, allowed for Beit Zera’s turnaround, for the alleviation of the imminent demographic threat it had faced?

Many members (whether satisfied or dissatisfied with the economic impacts of privatization) agreed that the particular balance struck by the safety-net model between communal life and economic and social freedom is appealing to young Israeli adults today. Many of the pension-age members I spoke to, after speaking at length of their heartbreak concerning the end of the need-based kibbutz model, admitted that they voted for privatization for the sake of demographic growth.\textsuperscript{495} Shula was particularly firm on this front: “If Beit Zera won’t get more kids to come back, in a very short amount of time we will be an old age home, and then we’ll be a graveyard. Because there’s nothing we can do: the biology does its business. We can’t let this project die.”\textsuperscript{496}

The privatization and renewal processes that so many kibbutzim have undergone since the early 1990s is thus often justified by a demographic corollary to the ideological anti-collectivist argument: this is what the young people want, and what will help grow kibbutzim’s membership.

\textsuperscript{495} Shula Ben Nachum, personal interview, June 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 2017.
\textsuperscript{496} Ibid.
An understanding of a more general trend of population absorption sweeping privatized kibbutzim across Israel is required here. In the past decade, many “renewed” kibbutzim have begun selling parts of their land to external developers to build new neighborhoods within the physical kibbutz, where residents would not be formal kibbutz members but have the option to participate in the kibbutz community and would be encouraged—though not required—to pay the community taxes. This process, meant to provide a source of community income through the initial sale, often perpetuates discord between the new homeowners and the existing kibbutz members; the absence roadmap for how exactly their relationship should function and how involved the new residents should be in the community, which often creates tension. 497

Beit Zera, too, has an option of residency for individuals who marry into the kibbutz, or who rent unused apartments from the kibbutz (another source of income). In Beit Zera, this population is comprised mostly of student renters enrolled in the regional college (the Kinneret College), though there are some residents who remain non-member renters for other reasons. Ayelet, for example, was a non-member resident of Beit Zera when she first married her husband, though she has since become a member.

But to facilitate a large-scale increase in its population, Beit Zera took a different route. In 2016, it decided to open up applications for kibbutz membership. On top of the introduction of differential incomes and the privatization of food, this was yet another step away from the original model, in this case for the purpose of

cultivating community. In the old Beit Zera, prospective members came through one of only a few routes: a youth movement garin, an army-base placement, or marriage. The perspective member, even one that fit under these categories, would then undergo a process of approval by vote of the entire community. The “expansion,” as it is called in Beit Zera, is open to all applicants. True, these applicants still have to come before a board of veteran members and present their families, but the standards for acceptance are drastically different. Simcha explained to me her criteria in voting.

I voted for all of them [the applicants]; if they had a family and kids, I voted for them automatically. It’s nice to hear children’s laughter around here. It’s nice to see the kibbutz coming to life again. It’s in the way that they [the young people] want. It’s not how I would have wanted it, but it’s their way.498

Simcha’s quote brings to life the underlying tension embedded in the economic and social changes that Beit Zera (along with so many other kibbutzim) is experiencing. Privatization was the result of the middle-aged generation rejecting the need-based kibbutz model and, instead of abandoning the kibbutz entirely, instead pursuing a path of reform—that much is clear from the rhetoric and actions that unfolded in the 21st century. Sandwiching that generation (the current “leaders,” and the bulk of the current work force) are an older generation and a younger generation with very different attitudes. The older generation is left with no choice but to accept—and even celebrate—the influx of new members. Even if they have come with no ideological attachment to the original precepts of the kibbutz model, they have come with an intention to keep the kibbutz model alive. Shula was the interviewee most adamant about this.

Some people here didn’t want to bring in new members: we worked here our whole lives, they said, and now, new [non-ideological] people from Tel Aviv

498 Simcha Rothschild, personal interview, June 7th, 2017.
will come and join. But they didn’t understand that there will not be a
continuation of the kibbutz if new people don’t come.\textsuperscript{499}

Shula is right: the introduction of a whole new population group into Beit
Zera has prevented its extinction. This researcher, upon leaving Beit Zera, was left
with another question: what will become of Beit Zera once people like Shula are not
around anymore? Today, the community has entered a state of flux, with a safety net
that is slowly contracting, a growing population of young families who own their own
homes (decreasing the individual’s reliance on collective goods), and a dwindling
population of kibbutz members invested in retaining any vestige of the need-based
model. Where does Beit Zera go from here?

The shrinking of the pensioner generation is sure to be impactful, and not just
on the ideological makeup of the kibbutz population; they represent the last group of
people who are still fully reliant on the kibbutz to provide an extra degree of financial
security. When the kibbutz’s need to accommodate this group disappears, so too will
the last constraint on a fuller privatization of assets. Aharon, a pensioner, strongly
believes that this process is already happening, as if he and his peer group are already
gone.

The young people drag the kibbutz to what they want it to look like. They
want a different kind of kibbutz. They want a community—a \textit{yishuv kehilati}
(communal neighborhood)—they don’t want the kibbutz anymore.\textsuperscript{500}

Ayelet, who fits into the “young people” category Aharon is pointing to,
corroborates his premonition.

Listen, I think that it’s important that we take the good things from the
kibbutz. I am in favor of a socially conscious state, of a state that is

\textsuperscript{499} Shula Ben Nachum, personal interview, June 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 2017.
\textsuperscript{500} Aharon Rothschild, personal interview, June 13th, 2017.
responsible for its citizens—I don’t think it should be every man for himself against the wolves. But I think that the smaller the collective aspect is, the better the community will be.  

Ayelet’s take is revealing from two angles. On the one hand, she is corroborating Aharon’s premonition that the collective aspect of Beit Zera will continue to contract. On the other hand, though, her caveat—that she is in favor a “socially-conscious state”—goes a long way towards explaining why Beit Zera still exists at all, for it is not just the middle-aged members who grew up in Beit Zera who make up its current 600 residents. 

On the Kibbutz Movement’s official website, there is a list of 73 kibbutzim that are koltim (which literally translates to “capturing,” though in this context it means accepting new members). Between 2005 and 2016, the total kibbutz population grew from 117,000 to 170,000, including members and non-member residents.  

Beit Zera’s role as “home” may explain why certain members were so committed to facilitating major changes in the 1990s and early 2000s, but it does not explain the increased demand to join kibbutzim. What explains the appeal of the safety-net model as an alternative to entirely non-collective living outside of kibbutzim in the Israel of 2018? 

Chapters one through four detailed the ways in which different stages of Israeli national history prompted change to the kibbutz model. Is the same correlation true for the burgeoning appeal of the safety-net model? In this conclusion, I cannot fully answer such a question, but this is an issue ripe for more careful research. In the 

502 Kibbutz Yearbook: 2017, 41
space below, I can only offer a set of observations that point to the beginnings of an answer.

In July and August of 2011, the streets of Israel—first in Tel Aviv, then beyond—erupted in protests against the rising cost of living, increased inequality in wealth distribution, and erosion of public social service programs.⁵⁰³ Hundreds of thousands of Israelis across socioeconomic backgrounds set up tents and camped out for weeks on end. This series of events became known as Mechaat Tzedek Chevrati—the Social Justice Protests. A poll conducted by the Israeli Channel 10 reported that 98% of Kadima voters (the largest centrist party at the time, and the major opponent of Likud) supported the protests, while 85% of Likud voters—citizens who presumably buy into the commitment to liberal economic policy at the center of the party’s platform—also supported the protests.⁵⁰⁴ It seemed as if Israeli society was in consensus, if not across all political issues (least of all security and the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza), then at least on the issues of wealth distribution and the accessibility of a certain basic material security to all citizens.

Recall the “Zeitgeist of change” Ben-Rafael referred to in explaining the wave of economic, social, and organizational changes kibbutzim were undergoing in the 1990s. The Social Justice Protests revealed a similar phenomenon: a mass rejection of the economic disparities created by thirty-plus years of economic policy in line with the Economic Stabilization Plan. Though the protests did not result in any dramatic change in governance, ripples of impact can be identified. The coalition formed in

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Israel’s last national Knesset elections in 2015 is particularly illuminative. The Likud party, still led by Benjamin Netanyahu, won 23.4% of the votes and formed a coalition with four right-wing and religious right-wing parties—the Jewish Home, United Torah Judaism, Shas, and Yisrael Beiteinu—and one centrist party, Kulanu. Where the other parties in the coalition represent a maintained commitment to conservative social and hawkish military policy, Kulanu’s defining policies might broadly be called egalitarian economics. In light of the common anger among Israelis that the state does not ensure a certain standard of living for all citizens, the inclusion of a party committed to a vision of an egalitarian economy in an otherwise rightward-leaning coalition seems significant. Even more telling is the range of ministries and agencies that Netanyahu assigned to Kulanu, among them the Finance Ministry, the Construction and Housing Ministry, and the Labor, Welfare, and Health Committee.505 While the party whose 1977 election solidified the end of the need-based kibbutz may still have general support among the Israeli public, the economic policies it has propagated for over four decades have come to roost in the form of widespread inequality. The actions of both the public and the governing coalition itself strongly indicate a rejection of this status quo, and a popular interest in alleviating the social and economic alienation that liberalization and individualism created.

Consider the appeal of the safety-net model against these events. It is true that Beit Zera is no longer a kibbutz according the traditional need-based model of the kibbutz was defined. It is also true that it may not even be a kibbutz based on Ben-

Rafael’s looser definition of a “collective identity-based community,” given the affront to the remaining collective economic aspect of the kibbutz presented by plans to divide formerly collectively owned assets among veteran kibbutz members for private ownership. But the 25 young families that have joined Beit Zera since 2016 do not see the safety-net model as the end of the kibbutz; rather, they see Beit Zera in its current form as a version of communalism they can swallow, an opportunity to escape the “piggish capitalism” Shula and Tzipora described. In the issue of Etzlaynu that ran while I was living in Beit Zera, this group of new members wrote a joint letter to the community. An excerpt from that issue:

On April 22nd, we—the seventeen “veteran” families of the first absorption plus the eight new families—celebrated out selection and acceptance to Beit Zera…We feel a part of the broad community of Beit Zera, as proven by our families’ will and energy to participate—each one according to its ability—in the communal activities. It is not in jest that we say: “it takes a whole village to raise a child,” and it should be the kibbutz’s duty to absorb new families into the community, a task that Beit Zera did with great success. Thank you and goodbye! Signed in the name of 25 excited families.506

Perhaps more than any words of long-time Beit Zera members, this message demonstrates an overt appeal to the principles of the kibbutz tradition in describing the kibbutz of the present. I do not take this to mean that the pendulum is simply swinging back towards collectivism, a negative reaction to individualism in the safety-net model. Rather, it evidences the degree to which the kibbutz has always, even in its renewal, retained some aspect of its need-based model in the public Israeli eye. When I asked Saraleh about her guesses for Beit Zera’s future, she articulated a similar point:

‘Kibbutz’ is a word that has meaning. Even if we change it a little, still, people who come from the outside, they think we’re a bunch of communists. [The

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506 Etzleynu, (“At Ours”), “Number 9 of the 83rd Jewish calendar year, May 31st, 2017.
name] carries a meaning, and it doesn’t matter what you will do to change it.\footnote{Sarah Miller, personal interview. June 20\textsuperscript{th}, 2017}

Against the economic and social transformations this analysis has explored, Saraleh’s words reify the point made as I introduced this project: the kibbutz is a historical phenomenon more than an specific model. The model’s organizational structure and internal imperatives may have changed drastically, but the word “kibbutz,” to many Israelis, continues to conjure an ideal of communal living in so far as it is representative of a critical phase of Israeli history—the many decades of Labor Zionist hegemony. The appeal of Beit Zera, to these 25 families, is the legacy that remains—the glorification of traditional kibbutz principles in rhetoric even if those principles no longer translate to practice.

If this thesis has fleshed out the symbiotic relationship between kibbutzim, the Yishuv and Israeli state, the process of membership absorption sweeping kibbutzim indicates an erosion of that symbiosis. Kibbutzim, in the face of a national policy program whose commitment to individualism and liberalism has now wrought deep inequality, are embracing (if only in small ways) their unequivocally communal identity. In March of this year, Nir Meir, the Secretary General of the Kibbutz Movement announced that the organization would support and aid its communities in settling some of the thousands of Eritrean and Sudanese refugees Prime Minister Netanyahu has arranged to deport in the coming months.\footnote{“We Will Be a Part of a National Program to Distribute Asylum Seekers.” The Kibbutz Movement. April 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 2018. https://bit.ly/2ERni3K} Such a vocal counter-government stance is an aberration from the practice of falling in line with national aims that defined kibbutzim through the late 20\textsuperscript{th} century. The membership growth in
kibbutzim resulting from—as opposed to despite—their differences from the Israeli beyond throws a wrench into the argument that the parallelism between kibbutz and state will continue indefinitely.

In arguing that the various mutations of Beit Zera’s lifestyle and model are products of national-level changes, I have not placed explicit emphasis on Beit Zera’s members’ agency. But though the impetus towards privatization, as well as other social and organizational renewals, was a result of the changing relationship of the kibbutz to the state, the shape that those changes took was a product of the care with which Beit Zera member’s handled their community’s future. The common denominator among all 27 of my interviewees, informing the words of the most devout advocates of the need-based models and most ardent individualists, was a love for their community and belief in its longevity. Sarah Nesher, responding to my question on where she sees Beit Zera in the future, spoke with heartening resolve: “They thought the electrical kettle would destroy the kibbutz and it didn’t; this privatization business won’t destroy the kibbutz, either.”

In light of Beit Zera’s recent absorption, I am inclined to agree. The Pioneerism, the total economic collectivism, the enforced equality—those all might be thing of the past. But a version of the egalitarianism at the core of the original kibbutz remains in Beit Zera, as it does across the Kibbutz Movement, and it is what has drawn scores of new members, searching for respite in an Israel whose policies convey a marked rejection of egalitarianism.

—Sarah Nesher, personal interview, June 21st, 2017
Appendix 1
All tables courtesy of Beit Zera member, Mike Miller.

Bet Zera Internal Tax on Net Income Above Safety Net Amounts Above

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount Above</th>
<th>Per Cent Tax</th>
<th>Accumulated Tax</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;1000</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;1700</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;2400</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;3100</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;3800</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;4500</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;5200</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;5200</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example: married couple with 2 children, age 3 and 5
Net Income after State taxes ₪20,000.00
Less Safety Net for Couple (2*4650) ₪9,300.00
Less Safety Net for Child under 4 ₪1,534.00
Less Safety Net for Child above 4 ₪1,162.00
Less 1% for mutual aid Tax ₪80.40
Net Income for Internal Tax Purposes ₪7,923.60
Internal Tax Paid (245+12% on 7923-5200) ₪571.76

Figure 1 (left): table illustrating Beit Zera’s graduated income tax rates, calculated by net income levels after accounting for the safety net amount guaranteed to each member.

Figure 2 (left): Safety net amount guaranteed to each Beit Zera member based on their status.

Figure 3 (above): an example member family’s internal tax rates, calculated from their net income, a number reached after putting aside the sum they are guaranteed by the safety net.
**Glossary**

**Ahdut Ha’Avoda**: The first political party of the Jewish Labor Movement, founded by David Ben Gurion in 1919. Its primary platform was to drive the agenda of Hebrew Labor.

**Aliya**: Historically, *aliya* refers to one of five mass immigrations of Jews from the Diaspora to Ottoman and British Palestine and, after 1948, to Israel (as in, the First Aliya). In Modern Hebrew, to “make Aliya” also means the act of any Jew from the Diaspora immigrating to Israel.

**Avodah Ivrit** (lit. Jewish or Hebrew Labor): The idea, born in the growing Zionist discourse of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, that Jews must return to agricultural work or, at the very least, hire other Jews to do manual labor, as a means of reclaiming the means of production (socialism) and empowering Jewish sovereignty. Hebrew Labor was cited as a necessary prerequisite to achieve both Zionism (a sovereign Jewish state in Palestine) and Jewish cultural revitalization, and was both the rationale for and the tool to building an economy independent of existing Arab labor and business.

**Ashkenazi** (pl. Ashkenazim): Jewish with European or Eastern European ancestry.

**Ezra Hedadit**: Translates to mutual aid, and comes from the broader labor Zionist idea of mutual responsibility. Broadly speaking, mutual aid in this context was the ideology that members of the collective must be responsible for each other as a means of ensuring achievement of the supra goal of state-building. It functioned as many of the Yishuv leader’s rationalization for certain types of pecuniary and in-kind aid, while serving as their basis for rejection of other, more philanthropic models.

**Gdud HaAvodah** (lit. labor battalion): the socialist Zionist work group founded in 1920 in the Yishuv. The Gdud was contracted for work projects across the BMP, and its members all received an equal cut of the profits. The group was disbanded in 1929 after a concerted effort to stunt its growth by the Histadrut.

**Hachshara Camps**: Agricultural training facilities across Eastern and Central Europe where soon-to-be Jewish settlers learned how to undertake the labor required to build rural communities and pursue a successful agrarian livelihood. Into the 1920s, such camps were established across the Yishuv to train those Jewish immigrants who had settled in more urban areas but wanted to join a rural settlement, like a kibbutz.

**Hitchadshut** (lit. renewal): The term used by kibbutzim to describe the wave of internal economic and social reforms that began in the 1970s—spurred by a combination of financial constraints, ideological shifts, and demographic changes—and continues today. These changes often include, but are not limited to: introduction
of private incomes and internal income taxes, privatization of social services, distribution of collective financial assets among members, opening up of housing in the kibbutz to non-members, and the privatization and distribution of housing. Over 90% of self-identified kibbutzim today have undergone or are undergoing renewal. Hitchadshut is a more appropriate description of what has happened to kibbutzim than the more commonly used privatization, given that the changes in kibbutz society are not limited to the economic sphere. A kibbutz that has undergone this process is called a “kibbutz mitchadesh.”

Igud Shitufi (lit. Cooperative Committee): a network of regional agencies within the Israeli Ministry of Economy and Industry that regulate the activities of cooperative enterprises in their given area. As Kibbutzim are still considered cooperative enterprises, they fall under the regulative jurisdiction of this agency.

Histadrut: The proto-state institution of the Yishuv, dominated from its inception in 1920 by the Jewish Labor Movement (in the form of a coalition of Ha’Poel HaTzair and Ahдут Ha’Avodah until 1930, and Mapai until 1948). After 1948, some of the jurisdiction of the Histadrut was transferred to the formal state apparatus, but it retained ownership of many major firms and financial institutions, a close relationship with the labor coalition, control over the largest Israeli trade unions, and a monopoly on certain spheres of social service, like health care, until the 1990s.

Jewish Labor Movement (JLM): The JLM encompasses the multiple groups and affiliations of Jewish immigrants to Palestine who self-identified with the global phenomenon of Jewish labor movements. I am not the first to bind such a group for the sake of showing the overarching consensuses and collaborations between the prominent figures of the Yishuv, particularly as they were reflected in party representation (Mapai and Mapam) and institution building (the Histadrut). Some have ventured to call this amorphous group the Zionist Labor Movement; I resist this temptation because, even though Zionism became an accurate descriptor, the foundations of the movement in late 19th and early 20th century settlement building were often not motivated by a goal of future Jewish political sovereignty, but simply of Jewish Labor in the biblical homeland. Other authors, like Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled in Being Israeli, reject Jewish Labor Movement as an accurate descriptor, instead using Labor Settlement Movement (LSM) to emphasize the physical settlement of Palestine central to the Yishuv. But Jewish Labor Movement (JLM), what many of the Yishuv leaders referred to themselves in this period, is more apt for this analysis, given the importance of proclaimed ideology.

Kibbutz: Traditionally, an agricultural community based in the premises of a collective, socialist economy, undoing conventional social structures (like the nuclear family), and revitalizing Jewish connection to the biblical land of Israel through manual labor. Kibbutzim (plural) flourished in the British Mandate of Palestine, and then in the State of Israel, between the 1910s and the 1970s. Between the 1980s and the early 2000s, most kibbutzim underwent major changes in their economic and
social structures. Today, over 90% of communities that call themselves “kibbutzim” have neither a socialist economy nor a collective social structure.

**Kibbutz Artzi:** The federation of kibbutzim originally founded by the Hashomer Hatzair youth movement. Originally a network of 85 Hashomer Hatzair kibbutzim that came together to form the federation in 1927, Kibbutzim in the Artzi federation were traditionally more ideologically stringent (in commitment to socialist economy and collective economy) than other federations. In 1999, the Artzi federation merged with the Takam federation (a product of an earlier merger between two smaller federations) to form Tnuat HaKibbutzim (the Movement of the Kibbutzim). Beit Zera was not originally founded by Hashomer Hatzair but quickly became incorporated in the Kibbutz Artzi movement; many of its members were brought from Europe to the Yishuv and Israel through Hashomer Hatzair.

**Kibbutz HaMeuchad:** The federation of kibbutzim founded in 1927 by Kibbutz Ein Harod as a less radical alternative of the Artzi Federation. Meuchad kibbutzim were historically larger than kibbutzim belonging to other federations.

**The Kibbutz Movement:** in 2000, the then-two largest kibbutz federations—the United Kibbutz Movement (TAKAM, the reunified version of the Kibbutz HaMeuached Federation after a politically-driven split in the 1950s) and the Kibbutz Artzi—merged to form a single movement.

**Knesset:** The Israeli parliament, founded in 1949.

**Kvutza:** The predecessor to the kibbutz phenomenon; a late 19th and early 20th century model where a small group of radically leftist, generally Eastern European Jews would pursue intentional, subsistence-based living as a means of actualizing their ideology of Jewish socialism in Palestine.

**Likud:** Israeli political party founded in 1973 by Menachem Begin as a neoliberal, right-wing alternative to the Labor coalition. It won a landslide majority in the 1977 national elections—the first time Labor ever lost—and has played a dominant role in Israeli politics since. Likud leads the Knesset today, and other than a unity government following the 1984 election and a labor coalition from 1992 to 1996, has remained in power since 1977.

**Mamlachtiyut:** the Israel-specific version of Étatisme, coined by Ben-Gurion in 1948. In the Israeli discourse, mamlachtiyut represents a version of political religion, wherein the needs of the state are to be prioritized above any partisan biases.

**Mapai** (Mifleget Poalei Eretz Yisrael, or the Worker’s Party of the Israel): The merger party of the two major labor parties of the Yishuv—Ahдут Ha’Avodah and Ha’Poel HaTzair—founded in 1930. Historically categorized as central-left, particularly as compared to Mapam (its rival to the left), until the two parties merged with several smaller labor-coalition parties in 1968 to form Avodah, the Labor Party.
Mapam (Mifleget Poalei HaMeuhedet): Self-identified Marxist-Zionist party founded in 1948 by a merger of three leftist parties of the Yishuv, two of which were heavily based in the largest Kibbutz movement (Kibbutz Artzi). In 1968-69, merged with Mapai to form Avodah, which won 50 out of 120 seats in the Knesset that election.

Mazkirut: a representative governing body of the kibbutz, which is democratically elected and rotates every several year. The mazkirut is comprised of several defined positions—mazkir/a (president of the board), gizbar (treasurer), and menahel meshek (manager of industry)—along with general seats.

Mizrachi (pl. Mizrachim): Jewish with ancestry from the Middle East, North Africa, or Spain.

Moshav: a semi-collectivist agricultural settlement, wherein families own and cultivate their own plots of land while the community engages in collective investment, marketing, and purchasing, and engenders a strong sense of collective community. The moshav model was conceived of as a tempered-down alternative to the extreme collectivism of the kibbutz, appealing to immigrants in the later aliyot looking to retain a degree of traditional family life that the kibbutz model did not allow for.

Need-Based Model: The original kibbutz model. A producer and consumer cooperative defined by a collective income used to cover all community costs in lieu of private incomes.

Olim: Those who “make Aliya,” or those who immigrated to the Yishuv as part of one of the five first Aliyot.

Safety-Net Model: The most common kibbutz model as of the early 2000s. Members earn private and differential salaries, but the community sets a minimum salary, according to calculations of living standards, and members are taxed an internal differential income tax that enables the community to round up the accounts of members who do not make the minimum salary on their own.

Va’ad Leumi: Translated to National Council, the Va’ad Leumi was the political body—proto-government—of the Yishuv, founded in 1920. The Va’ad Leumi was comprised of an executive counsel and a range of sub-departments, including a social welfare department that was the predecessor of today’s Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services. Its executive served as the representative counsel to the Zionist General Council (a board organized by the Zionist Organization.)

Yishuv: The organized Jewish community in Ottoman, and then British Mandate, Palestine
List of Interviews

Nili Yardeni, personal interview, June 5th, 2017.
Mike Miller, personal interview, June 6th, 2017.
Simcha Rothschild, personal interview, June 7th, 2017.
Marc Netsky, personal interview, June 8th, 2017.
Shaul Adar, personal interview, June 8th, 2017.
Lina Arnon, personal interview, June 11th, 2017.
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Ayelet Keren, personal interview June 12th, 2017.
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Dahlia Bohrer, personal interview, June 18th, 2017.
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