

One Hundred Years *of* Kibbutz Life



*A Century
of Crises and
Reinvention*



Edited by

Michal Palgi *and*
Shulamit Reinharz

With a new introduction by the editors

**One Hundred
Years *of*
Kibbutz Life**



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**Michal Palgi *and*
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Contents

Introduction to the Paperback Edition, <i>Michal Palgi and Shulamit Reinharz</i>	vii
Preface: The Rise, Fall, and Unexpected Revitalization of the Kibbutz, <i>Michal Palgi and Shulamit Reinharz</i>	xi
Introduction: The Kibbutz at One Hundred: A Century of Crises and Reinvention, <i>Michal Palgi and Shulamit Reinharz</i>	1
Part I: The Unfolding History of the Contemporary Kibbutz	
Introduction to Part I, <i>Michal Palgi and Shulamit Reinharz</i>	15
1. The Early Roots of a Later Crisis—The Kibbutz Crisis of the 1980s and Its Roots at the Time of the Establishment of the State of Israel, <i>Alon Pauker</i>	19
2. From “We” to “Me”: The Ideological Roots of the Privatization of the Kibbutz, <i>Alon Gan</i>	33
3. The Changing Composition of Kibbutz Elites, <i>Menachem Topel</i>	47
4. Crisis, Social Capital, and Community Resilience, <i>Avraham Pavin</i>	59
5. Co-optation and Change: The Women’s Sections of the Kibbutz, <i>Sylvie Fogiel-Bijaoui</i>	73
6. The Meaning of Aging among Mature Kibbutz Members, <i>Yasmin Asaf and Israel Doron</i>	83
7. Varying Spousal Relations in the Kibbutz and the Moshav, <i>Hadas Doron</i>	101
8. Kibbutz 2008: A Way, a Place, or a Home?, <i>Amia Lieblich</i>	123

Part II: Representations of Kibbutz Change

Introduction to Part II, <i>Michal Palgi and Shulamit Reinharz</i>	135
9. The Kibbutz and the Disenchanted: Representations in Contemporary Israeli Narratives, <i>Ranen Omer-Sherman</i>	139
10. Agitated Orders: Early Kibbutz Literature as a Site of Turmoil, <i>Iris Milner</i>	159
11. From <i>Sabra</i> to <i>Children of the Sun</i> : Kibbutz Films from the 1930s to the 2000s, <i>Eldad Kedem and Gilad Padva</i>	173
12. Freedom of Expression in an Ideological Society: The Case of Kibbutz Literature, <i>Shula Keshet</i>	195
13. Values and Sites, Attitudes, and Development—The Status of Cultural “Built Heritage” in the Kibbutz, <i>Irit Amit-Cohen</i>	215

Part III: Reinventing the Kibbutz

Introduction to Part III, <i>Michal Palgi and Shulamit Reinharz</i>	233
14. The International Association of Kibbutzim and Communes, <i>Yaacov Oved</i>	239
15. Redefining the Kibbutz, <i>Eliezer Ben-Rafael and Menachem Topel</i>	249
16. Reinventing the Kibbutz: The “Community Expansion” Project, <i>Igal Charney and Michal Palgi</i>	259
17. Kibbutz Neighborhoods and New Communities: The Development of a Sense of Belonging among the Residents of New Community Neighborhoods on Kibbutzim, <i>Zeev Greenberg</i>	271
18. The Thai Revolution: The Changes in Agriculture in the Kibbutzim and Moshavim of the Arava in the 1990s, <i>Marjorie Strom</i>	289
19. Ecology, Eco-Zionism, and the Kibbutz, <i>Michael Livni</i>	303
20. The New Communal Groups in Israel: Urban Kibbutzim and Groups of Youth Movement Graduates, <i>Yuval Dror</i>	315
Contributors	325
Index	331

Introduction to the Paperback Edition

Michal Palgi and Shulamit Reinhartz

Mark Twain famously quipped, “The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated.” So, too, are reports of the demise of kibbutzim. Israelis who live in kibbutzim know this, of course, but journalists and the general public are misinformed. Their repeated reporting of the kibbutz system’s collapse raises the question as to why this occurs. The hyperbolic reporting could reflect the fact that people simply cannot imagine how the kibbutz system could possibly survive for more than 100 years. Or, more likely, kibbutzim are changing so much that some people don’t recognize that the new forms are kibbutzim.

In January 2013, Israel held its most recent election, bringing many changes to the Knesset (parliament). New parties have been formed; there are over forty new faces in the Knesset, and more women were elected than ever before. A less noticed change is that for the first time in Israel’s history, not a single kibbutz member earned a seat in the Knesset. Previously, the Labor Party and Meretz each reserved at least one special seat for kibbutz members, a practice abandoned in the 2013 election. The likely explanation for this shift is that party affiliation within the kibbutz population has become more heterogeneous. Kibbutz members do not vote as a bloc. Thus parties could not expect to earn a lot of votes by courting the kibbutzim. The collective political ideology, so important in the first decades of the early kibbutzim, has evaporated to a large extent. Kibbutzim no longer are a revered Zionist icon. In fact, one of the political parties, Koach Lehashpiyah [the Power to Influence], ran (unsuccessfully) on a platform that accused kibbutzim of stealing their land, which the party promised to reclaim.

Another factor that contributed to the absence of kibbutz members in the Knesset relates to the decrease in voluntarism among kibbutz

members. When kibbutzim introduced payment to members for their work, members began to expect payment for *any* work including political activity. Finally, the kibbutz population is small vis-à-vis other groups in Israel. Therefore, the parties sought other populations that had a greater voting potential. One such group is the middle class that had been involved in demonstrations concerning economic conditions in the summer of 2012.

Nevertheless, the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics reported that the kibbutz population had grown by 20 percent in the years 2005-2010. Moreover, a full 70 percent of kibbutz population consists of kibbutz members or candidates for membership and their children, as opposed to volunteers and guests. Kibbutz life has become attractive for those who seek a house with a garden, a safe environment for children, and community life at a reasonable price. And now they can do this without having to become members, as the chapter by Charney and Palgi demonstrates.

Like all social arrangements, this new kibbutz form has problems of its own. It turns out that these non-members would like to have a role in decision-making. They would also like to shape their cultural environment. And both of these activities lead to conflicts with the kibbutz members among whom the non-members now live. Thus, the innovation of building new neighborhoods on the kibbutz with the purpose of attracting new residents has succeeded too much. As a result of this innovation, in combination with new Israeli laws, most of the kibbutzim have decided to stop developing kibbutz neighborhood for non-members.

The newest plan is to recruit members with the status of “new membership.” These people build their houses within the kibbutz boundaries but do not own the land on which their home is situated. They have no part in kibbutz assets but they can buy shares if desired. The laws might change, of course, enabling the “new membership to own land.” And the decision to enact this plan belongs to the individual kibbutz. Thus, every kibbutz has produced its own plan about the right for non-members to buy shares. One interesting related fact is that these changes have not reduced the number of interested families who want to come or build their house in the kibbutz.

Today’s kibbutz economy has an industrial base, with additional income from agriculture, tourism, and a few smaller branches. The new arrangements that enable people to be rewarded for their individual labor has led to a strong increase in entrepreneurial behavior. A recent survey of kibbutzim in the south of Israel discovered that an average

of ten small businesses were developed in each of fifty-three kibbutzim (Arbel, 2012). This activity suggests an important new trend in which people develop strategies for earning a living rather than relying on standard kibbutz work opportunities.

Clearly, kibbutzim have undergone rapid change since the 1980s with its unexpected national economic crisis that devolved into demographic and ideological crises as well. Kibbutz history is characterized by continuous substantial change, but those that occurred in the 1980s were faster and deeper than those that surfaced earlier. Starting in 1979 and gaining steam quickly was the move, initiated by mothers, to abolish communal sleeping arrangements for children. The transition from “group sleeping” to “family sleeping” produced pressure to build large homes for kibbutz families. This, too, was an unexpected substantial cost. In general, the kibbutz budget system has changed dramatically. Currently nearly 80 percent of the kibbutzim provide salaries to their workers, which is balanced by the new requirement that they pay for services rendered to them by their kibbutz. The standard of living has risen slowly while the values of non-commercialism and modesty have slowly ebbed. Many kibbutzim have adopted Israel’s neo-liberal value set, as a result of which the communities have become less collectivistic and more individualistic.

The development and success of kibbutz industry that began in the 1960s and currently accounts for 70 percent of its economic activity represents a departure from the model of an agricultural rural community to a semi-industrialized one. The combination of industrial success and changing ideology has allowed kibbutz members to sell industrial plants or trade them in the stock exchange. Money that previously had been put aside to care for the kibbutz veterans in their old age, for new economic ventures, for urgent community needs (like infrastructure) and for distribution among kibbutz members according to their seniority in the kibbutz was now used for other, sometimes risky, purposes. Lately many kibbutzim have developed a tourist industry that brings new people and ideas into the mix.

When differential salaries were introduced into the kibbutz, people rightly asked if the kibbutz system had changed so much that it no longer was a kibbutz. In 2002, the State of Israel also asked this question. Until then, Israeli law defined the kibbutz as a special cooperative group to which special rules apply. For example, income tax was levied no longer on the collective but on individual kibbutz members. A committee nominated by the state discussed the issue of definition and recommended

that these communities still fell within the category of kibbutzim (see chapter by Ben-Rafael and Topel).

Currently, kibbutzim fall into two categories: those that have overcome the economic and ideological difficulties that accompanied the radical changes they undertook; and those that are still struggling. But no kibbutz has closed. Even those that are still struggling manage to maintain their sense of community and are trying new ventures. In addition, a few new urban kibbutzim were formed, and of the 267 older kibbutzim, two small ones have changed into Yeshuv Kehilati and one into a Moshav. Clearly, reports of their demise are exaggerated.

Preface

The Rise, Fall, and Unexpected Revitalization of the Kibbutz

Michal Palgi and Shulamit Reinhartz

Contemporary joke: A reporter visits Israel and wants to get a feel for how things are going. The reporter stops someone on the street and asks, “How would you sum up the current situation?” The pedestrian takes a minute and says, “Good.” The reporter is annoyed. “What do you mean by ‘good’? That’s only one word. Give me at least another word.” So, the person turns to him and says, “Not good.”

This joke highlights the dilemma one faces when approaching the topic of assessing the kibbutz on its one hundredth anniversary. Is the situation “good” or “not good”? Or both? After examining the most recent social science research and humanistic explorations that address this question, we have concluded that the answer is “the kibbutz has survived and is likely to survive because it is capable of changing dramatically.” We call the changed kibbutz “reconstituted.” The reader then has a choice—to argue that our notion of the “reconstituted kibbutz” is so far away from the original concept, that it can no longer be called a kibbutz. But to take this approach would defy the recent examinations of kibbutzim by high-ranking government agencies and would contradict the understanding of several hundred thousand people who live in what they call kibbutzim.

Or the reader could agree with us and say that the history of the kibbutz is a history of changes, some motivated from within and some a response to outside pressures. To date, none of these changes—though they are monumental—have led to five essential actions that would compel us to say that the kibbutz is dead: (1) the total disbanding of a majority of current kibbutzim, (2) the departure of a vast majority of kibbutz

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 the formation of any new kibbutzim, and (5) the division of all kibbutz property into parts that would be owned by individuals who formerly constituted the kibbutz. If these five criteria are used to determine the life or death of the kibbutz movement, then we must say that the kibbutz *system* is still alive and that the rudimentary factor that determines if an *individual* kibbutz is alive is the presence of an adequate number of members in a given place to sustain the kibbutz in some way. And many seem to be more than just “alive.” In a September 2009 article, Dina Kraft wrote:

Some kibbutzim are struggling for their survival. But more are undergoing a renaissance as they liberalize policies of communalism. With their reputation for high quality of life, kibbutzim are finding more and more younger people are choosing to stay on the kibbutz and newcomers from the city are eager to move in . . . Kibbutz Ma’abarat is . . . flooded with second-generation members who want to return to live here with their spouses and young families. The wave of returnees to Ma’abarat began about a decade ago . . . Kibbutz Mishmar Ha’Sharon has a waiting list of people wanting to move in . . . The kibbutz expects 30 percent growth in the next two years . . . The recovery for the kibbutzim has been striking. Less than 10 years ago, about half of Israel’s kibbutzim were considered financially unstable. Today that number is down to about 15.¹

Social science has a terrible record of prediction. This shortcoming runs across the board: *psychologists* cannot predict whether someone will become violent again after incarceration for a violent crime followed by long-term rehabilitation activities; *sociologists* cannot predict which marriages will last or which societal grumblings will turn into massive social protests; *political scientists* have a poor record of predicting election outcomes and identifying who the candidates might be in an upcoming election; and *economists*, perhaps the worst group of all at predictions, were unable to predict the global economic crisis we just experienced. Ironically, *economics* is the social science most heavily based in quantitative reasoning, and thus it is burdened with the expectation of having the strongest predictive powers. After the fact, of course, social scientists (like everyone else) are very wise and can point out how various trends “inexorably” led to the present. Perhaps this is all for the better. If humankind were able to predict the future, what would the pleasure be in living? If people knew when they would die, how could they live? And if some individuals predicted an unpleasant future with certainty, how would others react? Would they heed the warning,

bury their heads in the sand, and reject the message as in the Cassandra myth, or even shoot the messenger?

The editors of this volume are no exception to the general rule concerning social predictions. We, too, *cannot* predict the future. But we *can* point to various trends that produced the present. And we can pinpoint what the issues are around which the future hinges. We can suggest terms to clarify the situation. We face the problem of not being predictors head-on in this volume by posing the key question vis-à-vis the kibbutz: “[I]s the experiment in socialist agrarianism still viable or do we now mean by the term ‘kibbutz’ an industrial program defined by the capitalist or free market enterprise?”²

This book is not a celebratory volume about the flourishing of the kibbutz movement, nor is it a eulogy about the kibbutz demise. Rather it is a collection of voices (psychologists, sociologists, writers, economists, artists, and more) that describe the *unexpected* revitalization of the kibbutz. Looking back at Israeli history, it would have been easy for kibbutz theorists to predict decline as soon as they realized that the Israeli public was *not* flocking to kibbutzim as potential members. Even at its peak of about 7 percent of the population, the kibbutzim were a small-scale jewel rather than the major vehicle for building the country, as the cities were. But what these experts could not predict was that the trajectory was jagged, with ups and downs in terms of kibbutz population size and the relevance of the kibbutz model for the development of Israeli society. Little did anyone suspect that a specific countertrend of reinvention³ had taken root as early as the first years of the kibbutz, and that this countertrend was strong enough to hold decline at bay.

In 1990, a little over twenty years ago, as the kibbutz movement marked its eightieth anniversary, people raised the same question they are raising today—what does the future hold? One commentator for *The Jewish Post International*, who was also a member of Deganya, wrote: “There will be a continuation of the development of a viable alternative to urbanization to meet the challenges of modern life. [True] There will be continued fostering of the extended family, with aging parents and their adult children and grandchildren living side by side, linked, but independent. [Partially true] There will be an internalized code of behavior that, while it cannot guarantee perfect social justice, it can organize society so that no one is left out. [Not true⁴]⁵”

The combined voices of the contributors to this volume discuss the ideals, hopes, frustrations, disappointments, and reconstruction efforts

that brought a few solutions to the fading kibbutz ideals. These solutions are not popular among many kibbutz members, but they demonstrate growth and development of the kibbutz on its one hundredth birthday. They also suggest an answer to the question of why kibbutz-like communities in other countries have disappeared, for the most part. Those societies *did not adapt* in the way the current kibbutz is adapting. According to Yoram Kroll, the average life span of a commune anywhere in the world is seventy years. If this is the case, then the kibbutz movement is truly at a tipping point.⁶ The rise of the kibbutz and its “fall” after seventy years of impressive existence have brought about fierce debates and arguments within and outside of the kibbutz. It seems that in the public imagination, the early kibbutz years (i.e., the first four decades) have become a kind of Garden of Eden (when all of us were young) and the later decline is the expulsion (when all of us are all old). This exaggerated image has taken on mythic proportions that make it difficult for people to see what is really going on today. Through the inclusion of a variety of studies, this book hopes to clarify and demystify, rather than justify and fantasize.

When secular Israelis discuss the place of the Jewish religion in Israeli society, they frequently bring up the following widely held attitude: Although they, themselves, do not want to engage in any Jewish ritual practices, they want those who *do* so, to do it in an orthodox fashion. Their words are usually something like this: “I don’t want to go to synagogue, but if I *were* to go, it would be to the kind of synagogues my grandfather would go to.” It seems to be the same with kibbutzim. Many Israelis do not want to belong to kibbutzim; at the same time, they want the kibbutzim that do exist to have classic characteristics. Many kibbutz members and nonmembers are disappointed at what they consider “the lost ideals.” They mourn the present pseudo-kibbutz.⁷ A few others have adopted a kind of Darwinian perspective that sees hope in change. Given the large amount of media attention this topic has received,⁸ we can surmise that the kibbutz still has a significant place in the Israeli self-concept. In such a situation, research and public policy are all the more useful.

It is easy to understand why so many Israelis care about the future of the kibbutz even if they don’t want to join one. After all, the early kibbutzim played an instrumental and elite role in the absorption of Jewish immigrants from all over the world, in the conversion of untilled land for agricultural use, in the creation of a classless society, in the staking of residential outposts and *de facto* borders, and in the training of the

State of Israel's first generation of leaders. In other words, the kibbutz had a major role in shaping the New Jew, the forerunner of the current Israeli. For practical purposes, the debate over whether the "new kibbutz" is "still a kibbutz" was settled recently by the Israeli government who charged the 2002 Public Committee for the Classification of Kibbutzim to define when a kibbutz stops being a kibbutz. According to that report, which is referred to in many chapters of this book, the kibbutz is *changed but exists*.

Until now, kibbutzim have been classified as *identity-based* communities where members bond together to assert a shared ideal. Those who worry about the future of the kibbutz are concerned that the kibbutz will turn into a *geographical* community, i.e., a group of people living in a particular local area with no common ideology or shared culture, and with little meaningful face-to-face contact. Identity-based communities, by contrast, act according to their common ideology, culture, and religion. As is well-known, the entire Western world is concerned that social ties are eroding everywhere as people increasingly become mobile and live in areas of convenience rather than places of meaning. As society loses cohesion on the communal level, we begin to "bowl alone," we marry late and divorce early, and society actually becomes more dangerous because there are few common restraints that we allow to bind us. The "demise of the kibbutz" conversation is thus a small pebble in this larger pond of despair at growing international anomie.

There are many other reasons that the "kibbutz question" grabs people's attention. The kibbutz "dilemma" relates to a wide array of international conversations including the possibility of "green living and green business,"¹⁰ the challenge of ethically managed "international migrant labor,"¹¹ the conundrum of optimal forms of education,¹² the ineluctable goal of "gender equality," the necessity of "sustainable economies,"¹³ the necessity of the comparative desirability of multicultural or unicultural societies,¹⁴ and even the salience of political questions concerning the place of Jews and Arabs in Israel, the Middle East, and the global arena. As Lawrence Joffe wrote in his overview of "100 years of kibbutzim," ". . . Eshbal, the newest kibbutz of all [since 2007] has housed the much-praised Galil Jewish–Arab School, a haven of peace and mutual enrichment for two hundred children of all faiths. Could this be a model for the future?"¹⁵ Here is a new (or an old–new) goal—to create rapprochement between Israeli Arabs and Israeli Jews. At a recent talk in London on a certain aspect of kibbutz life, a member of the audience asked me (SR) how I could have participated in the exploitation and

oppression of the Palestinians, by conducting this study.¹⁶ “Surely, the kibbutz members stole the Palestinians’ land.” For the questioner, this accusation, posed as a statement rather than a question, overrode any other question concerning the kibbutz. For him, the kibbutz was part of a different narrative.

Because the public keeps its eye on the kibbutz in light of all of these frameworks, it is fascinated by trying to determine what the kibbutz augurs for the future. Researchers at the Centre for Innovative & Entrepreneurial Leadership have come up with a four-part developmental schema that can apply to kibbutz history: the vision phase, the actualization phase, the chaos phase, and . . . what is next?¹⁷ *Is it the emergence or the demise phase?* Kibbutz researchers claim that the kibbutz is now at the *emergence* phase, but that its future is enigmatic and uncertain. And since each kibbutz was founded in a different year, even unto the present, each kibbutz (or group of kibbutzim) can be functioning at a different phase in the same chronological year. We, the editors, have reviewed as much literature as we could and concur that the oldest kibbutzim have, indeed, experienced these four stages. We believe the future is one of *increasing experimentations* rather than rigid adherence to structures that no longer serve the needs of the member. We offer this book to those who wish to find out how we reached these conclusions and to join in this conversation.

Notes

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2. The editors thank Irving Louis Horowitz for this succinct version of the “key question.”
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14. "The Kibbutz No Longer Scares Them. The Opposite," *Arnon Lapid*. An entire group of Russian academics joined Kibbutz Dahlia.
15. See Lawrence Joffe, "100 Years of Kibbutzim," *Jewish Quarterly*, July 23 (2010).
16. See Lawrence Joffe, "100 Years of Kibbutzim," *Jewish Quarterly*, July 23 (2010).
17. *Communities "Life Cycle" Matrix*. Centre for Innovative & Entrepreneurial Leadership Version 2.2—2010.



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Introduction

The Kibbutz at One Hundred: A Century of Crises and Reinvention

Michal Palgi and Shulamit Reinhartz

The Kibbutz and Its Multiple Definitions over Time

The years 1909–2009 mark a century of kibbutz life, a century of achievements, failures, and challenges. Regardless of this mixed record, it is undeniable that the impact of kibbutzim (pl.) on Israeli society has been substantial—kibbutz communities and members were involved in building and defending the country and, subsequently, in developing its economy, culture, and arts according to the kibbutz values. Communes and collectives in other countries have not had a similar impact on their environments; nor have many lasted as long as the kibbutz has, to date. During the hundred years of its existence, the kibbutz as a concept and as a reality underwent many changes, as did the country as a whole both before the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and since then. Most significant, perhaps, is that for political, economic, social, and demographic reasons, the kibbutz has slowly moved from the nation's consensual ideal to its romanticized periphery (for more details see Near, 1997). Many articles have been appearing in the Israeli press predicting the demise of the kibbutz as an ideal. Although anyone familiar with kibbutz history knows that in the past, nearly every change in the kibbutz led to doomsday predictions, those who write in this vein today claim that now we *finally* have come to the actual period of its complete demise. The kibbutz, they claim, is an anachronism: although functional in the early years, it is irrelevant today.

The point of this book and its twenty chapters is not to decide the debate as to whether the kibbutz will be viable in the future, but rather to describe a host of changes that have actually occurred and to try to

ascertain their meaning. As this introduction will make clear, the kibbutz population has *increased* lately in terms of demography and capital, a point that is frequently overlooked in the debate about kibbutz viability. It turns out that the kibbutz has become a very attractive place for young people who want community life, particularly when that life is stripped of the early austerity measures. Like the founders who tried to establish a particular society grounded in certain principles, so too newcomers to the kibbutz want to establish a new idealistic society with specific social and economic arrangements.

On the other hand, in order for a group of people to remain a kibbutz, it has to vouch for its members' standard of living and to have all its assets owned by the community (see chapter by Ben-Rafael that explains how housing does not have to be collectively owned). Although the contemporary kibbutz may not be what the pioneers idealized, it is a structure that has adapted well to the current reality. In addition, the kibbutz movement is supportive of a whole range of new ventures in communal living (see chapter by Yuval Dror). To summarize our conclusion, the kibbutz is not dead, just different.

In 2009, the Kibbutz Federation counted 267 kibbutzim scattered throughout Israel from the northernmost areas near the Lebanese and Syrian borders to the Red Sea and south near the tourist city of Eilat and east toward the Jordanian border. In fact, until 1967, kibbutzim, as opposed to other types of settlement such as towns, demarcated all the borders of Israel. In this sense they had both military and geographic significance for the country. Most of the kibbutzim were formed by international or Israel-based groups of young people (eighteen to twenty years of age) who had participated in various Zionist youth movements, such as Hashomer Hatzair, Habonim, Dror, Hechalutz Hatzair, Akiva, Gordonia, and Blau Weiss, each with its own particular ideology. Subsequent kibbutz membership came from natural population increase and from new groups tied to youth movements. Today the population size of kibbutzim varies from about thirty to fifteen hundred inhabitants with an average of about four hundred inhabitants. Many communities are top-heavy with older people and an inadequate number of youngsters (see chapter by Yasmin Asaf and Israel Doron for a discussion of aging). Kibbutzim constitute a mere 2.1 percent (120,000) of the current Jewish population in Israel, yet their contribution to the national economy amounts to 40 percent in agriculture, 7 percent in industrial output, 9 percent in industrial export, and 10 percent in tourism (The Economic Unit of the Kibbutz Movement, 2009). On the local scene, therefore, their economy is strong. Kibbutz members and ex-members are

overrepresented in Israeli leadership positions in the fields of government, industry, and the military (Near, 1997) among others.

The kibbutz represents a new model of social life, “. . . a comprehensive system in which members live, raise children, work and create, grow old and pass away. In fact, the kibbutz is ‘a microcosm of an entire society’” (Golomb and Katz, 1971, p. 7) without courts or police or full-fledged hospitals and some other institutions. In the early days of the founding of kibbutzim until approximately 1950, its members regarded working the land as a central purpose. Ideology was highly significant because the kibbutz was always the “other” society, the alternative that needed to be defined and justified. As kibbutz ideology developed, it drew on Zionist, socialist, and humanist values and integrated them to form a coherent ideology of its own (for a discussion of communes in other contexts, see chapter by Yaacov Oved). The stated goals of kibbutz founders were to *cultivate the land* from its wild condition, *build a Jewish national entity in Israel* (Palestine at the time), and *create a just society*. The introductory section of “Kibbutz Regulations” (The Kibbutz By-Laws) states: “The kibbutz is a free association of people for purposes of settlement, absorption of new immigrants, maintaining a cooperative society based on community ownership of property, self-sufficiency in labor, equality and cooperation in all areas of production, consumption and education” (<http://www.kibbutz.org.il/mishpatit/takanon-t/980101.takanon-t.htm> [Hebrew]). A key component of this definition is the word “free.” People are *free* to leave the kibbutz, although not all people are free to become members—they have to prove their ability to live a collective life style. Similarly, “The kibbutz considers itself an inseparable part of the Hebrew workers’ movement in Israel, which aspires to establish the Jewish people concentrating in Israel as a working society built on foundations of social cooperation” (<http://www.kibbutz.org.il/mishpatit/takanon-t/980101.takanon-t.htm> [Hebrew]).

Thus the main values upon which the kibbutz was based begin with *equality* among members as well as among kibbutzim (i.e., all kibbutz members receive goods from the community according to their needs and contribute to it according to their ability). From this idea stemmed some other important practices such as giving equal value to *all types of work* and providing mutual financial guarantees and help *within* the kibbutz and *between* kibbutz communities. The kibbutz movement as a whole aimed to attain a standard of living that was equal in all kibbutzim. Thus economically strong kibbutzim helped weaker ones via taxes they paid to the kibbutz movement. A second important value concerned decision-making. Kibbutzim opted to govern themselves

with *direct* (rather than representational) *democracy* as well as rotation of officeholders both in kibbutz society and in the economic units. A third basic value was *self-labor*, which was rooted in Zionist ideology and the socialist ideal of not exploiting cheap paid labor, particularly Jews from development towns and Arab labor at first but increasingly foreign labor. That meant that members had to tend to the needs of the community and the economy by themselves. In practice, the principle of self-labor was applied to a greater extent in education and less so in production (see chapter by Marjorie Strom).

Nevertheless, differences in the ideals among the various kibbutzim led them to separate and organize into different kibbutz movements. Thus in 1927, less than two decades since the founding of the earliest long-lasting kibbutz, Deganya, two kibbutz movements (i.e., associations) were formed. Hakibbutz Hameuchad believed in establishing big kibbutzim, open to absorbing newcomers. These kibbutzim intended to develop an economy based on a variety of production branches, not solely on agriculture. Hakibbutz Hameuchad kibbutzim aimed to serve the needs of the country and to exercise autonomy in handling their social and cultural life, as well as their work and economy. This organization became the biggest kibbutz movement until a schism in 1951 spun off an additional movement—Ichud Hakvutzot Vehakibbutzim. The root of the schism was political: the kibbutzim in the new movement or offshoot adhered to the Labor Party (Mapai), while the others adhered to a more Socialist Party (Mapam). After thirty years, the two movements reunited. The second kibbutz movement formed in 1927 was Hakibbutz Haartzi. This movement required ideological and political unity among kibbutz members and adhered to the most leftist political orientation of all the movements. In 1929, a third kibbutz movement was formed—Chever Hakvutzot—based on the principles of Deganya, particularly the goal of maintaining small, intimate kibbutzim. In 1951, Chever Hakvutzot joined Ichud Hakvutzot. In 1935, the Religious Kibbutz Movement, which formed seventeen religious kibbutzim, was established. In 1999, Kibbutz Artzi joined the other secular kibbutz movement to form the United Kibbutz Movement.

The Kibbutz Economy: From Agriculture to Industry and Tourism

As is true of economies throughout the world, the Israeli economy at the beginning of the twentieth century was based primarily on agriculture. But unlike the United States, for example, that experienced

rapid industrialization, kibbutzim did not institutionalize industrialization across the board until the 1960s. Industrial innovation provoked many debates about the way industry should be organized in line with kibbutz values and the kibbutz way of life (see chapter by Menachem Topel). Ultimately, kibbutz members developed a pattern of industrial organization that differed from that operating in society at large. This unusual organizational structure drew on kibbutz values, social structure, and culture. Industrialization was introduced into the kibbutz economy within this ideological framework.

Kibbutz industry began around the time of World War II, when 13.7 percent of production workers in kibbutzim worked in industry (Rosner and Palgi, 1977). At that time, industrial plants developed from small workshops that were designed to repair tractors and pipe systems. These workshops met a real need on the kibbutz and produced a skilled workforce. However, in the 1960s, a major rise in the *rate* of industrialization occurred: of the 320 kibbutz industrial plants operating in 1981, only 34 percent were established before 1960 (Association of Kibbutz Industry, 1982). In the 1960s, changes in economic and demographic conditions hampered agricultural development and provided the impetus for industrial growth. At the time, the main reasons for the economic turn to industrialization included a mix of surpluses, shortages, policies, demography, and self-actualization needs. Specifically:

1. The market was saturated with agricultural products.
2. A shortage of land and water obviated an increase in agricultural production, and the government-imposed production quota of various crops was insufficient to support the members of various kibbutzim. At the same time, the kibbutz population was growing at a rate of 2–3 percent per year.
3. Israeli government policy supported industrialization, particularly in border settlements. Kibbutzim comprised a large proportion of border settlements, making them eligible for government benefits (long-term loans and grants) for the advancement of industrialization.
4. Older kibbutz members, unfit for physical work in agriculture, were seeking alternative places of work (Reinharz, 2011).
5. Kibbutz members with technological abilities (especially the young) were seeking work in which they could employ these abilities (Palgi, 1998).

In recent years, the kibbutzim have developed a tourism industry that includes hotels and/or bed-and-breakfast facilities, craft shops, museums, galleries, and other tourist services (see chapter by Amit-Cohen). These sites are located throughout the country and include central booking and other conveniences.

Crises in the Kibbutz Economy

The transformations in Israeli society, together with the economic crisis in the mid-1980s, led kibbutz communities to introduce changes that eroded their basic values (see chapter by Alon Pauker). At the same time, the weakening collective ideology of the younger generations and newcomers to the kibbutz made the kibbutz more amenable to change (see chapter by Eliezer Ben-Rafael and Menachem Topel). Taken as a whole, these changes represent an erosion of the barrier between society at large and the “other” society of the kibbutz. New internal regulations in five areas served to lower the barrier between the kibbutz and the surrounding society:

1. Kibbutz societies legitimated *paid hired labor* in both production and education, thus forfeiting the value of self-labor.
2. Kibbutz societies *opened the children’s houses to non-kibbutz children*, thus *diluting* one of the most important channels for passing on kibbutz values to the next generation.
3. Kibbutz societies legitimated and encouraged members to *work outside the kibbutz* in order to increase the cash flow.
4. Kibbutz societies *partnered with non-kibbutz investors* in kibbutz enterprises, that is, investors with a different set of values.
5. Kibbutz societies *rented kibbutz apartments* to nonmembers and *built residential neighborhoods adjacent to the kibbutz*, neighborhoods that do not follow the kibbutz way of life (see chapters by Zeev Greenberg and by Igal Charney and Michal Palgi). As a result, as hoped, the permanent kibbutz population started to grow once again because members stayed and newcomers joined.

Another extraordinary change concerned internal governance—specifically, the transition from direct to representative democracy. The main kibbutz body that functions on the basis of direct democracy is the general assembly of all members (similar to a weekly town hall meeting in other contexts). Nowadays, this general assembly typically meets less frequently than in the past and has been partially replaced by a council of elected members and boards of directors.

Within this whole array of changes, the innovation that has provoked the most vehement discussions among kibbutz members, officeholders, and the general public is the privatization of aspects of kibbutz life (Hecht, 2006; Reinharz, 2011). Although it seems new, the process of privatization in the kibbutz actually started in the 1950s, soon after the establishment of the State of Israel. At the time, a slow shift occurred from the social value of allocating consumption services (e.g., laundry,

education, food, housing) according to needs, on the one hand, to the economically oriented principle of allocating the same amount of money to each member so that he or she could buy these services as they saw fit. In kibbutz jargon, this shift is an example of privatization. An issue that garnered public attention and incited much tension within kibbutzim came at the end of the 1990s, when some communities went beyond allotting funds for personal consumption and started to privatize members' earnings, that is, people henceforth would be rewarded differentially for the amount and type of work they did. By 2010, about two-thirds of the kibbutzim engaged in significant privatizing actions, legitimizing this fundamental change by labeling themselves "differential" or "new" kibbutzim, the other third being the "collective" type or traditional. A few kibbutzim even transferred ownership of houses to their members and some are now considering the division of kibbutz property to members (see chapter by Alon Gan). One can label this extraordinary change as signifying the demise of the kibbutz idea or, alternatively, as yet another set of changes in its hundred-year-old history.

Reinventing the Kibbutz

Ironically, at the same time as some kibbutzim were veering far from their core definitions, a few social groups "on the outside" were *taking on* key kibbutz attributes. Criticism of the kibbutz from within and from the outside, as well as a search for an alternative collective way of life, inspired new initiatives that tried to preserve the basic values of the kibbutz. These new entities were *urban kibbutzim* formed by groups of young singles or young families who believed that a kibbutz should address external problems in Israeli society rather than be focused only on itself (see chapter by Yuval Dror). Specifically, new kibbutzim should be established in which members could live within the communities they served. These new kibbutzim would focus not on production, but rather on developing social and educational activities in depressed areas. In 1979, Kibbutz Reshit was formed in Jerusalem, locating itself in an impoverished area with high crime and drug abuse rates. Following this model, in 1987, Kibbutz Migvan was established in Sderot and Kibbutz Tamuz in Bet-Shemesh. In 1992, Kibbutz Beit Israel took root in Jerusalem. Several additional communal groups have formed since the 1990s. Each of these communities is small, with a combined membership of fifteen hundred to two thousand individuals who earn their livelihood mainly from educational community activities paid for by the government or various nonprofit organizations. This extremely

interesting phenomenon suggests that the original kibbutz idea is still potent in Israeli society, and that if the kibbutzim themselves deviate sufficiently from the key ideas, new groups will form to take up the old banner.

Evolving Family Patterns

The much discussed structure of family life in the early days of the kibbutz movement included the (heterosexual) parent couple residing in a small apartment, and their children living and sleeping in small houses designed for each age-group, beginning with infancy. This structure is widely criticized today as “unnatural” or “damaging to the children,” and hard on parents, though in the early years of kibbutz life, *collective child rearing*, as this arrangement was called, was thought to answer the needs of the kibbutz and to adhere well to modern psychological principles (see chapter by Eldad Kedem and Gilad Padva). With the absorption of newcomers who had not been raised to accept collective child rearing and with the growth in the size of individual kibbutzim, the communities became less homogeneous and sometimes difficult for individuals to adapt to on this intimate level. In this new situation, people found “emotional refuge” in the family in lieu of the “kibbutz” (see chapter by Hadas Doron).

At the same time, in the 1950s–1960s, the importance of kibbutzim for the attainment of national goals began to diminish. Kibbutzim turned inward and members concentrated more on developing themselves as people. This shift further aided the change in the centrality of the family and was matched by an increasingly sharp gender division of labor in kibbutz occupations. The kibbutz increasingly became a family-oriented rather than a nation-oriented society. Many of the alterations that took place at the end of the 1980s and throughout the 1990s affected the role of the family and gender equality. For example, women, more so than men, pushed for a change in the sleeping arrangement of the children, and, as a result, in the 1970s and 1980s, many kibbutzim abandoned the children’s collective sleeping arrangements. Children started sleeping in their parents’ apartments rather than in the kibbutz children’s houses (Shepher, 1967; Palgi, 1991). By the end of the twentieth century, nearly all the kibbutzim changed their educational (i.e., dormitory) system and the family came to dominate kibbutz life. This sea change transferred more chores from the public domain to the private home, from communal to family responsibility. Examples of these transfers include the closing of the communal dining room and communal laundry services. Research

shows that from the women's point of view, these transformations led to a greater investment of work hours in the private sector and in the family house (Palgi, 1994, 2002), a change women desired.

What happened to women during these processes? To answer this question, we have to recognize that although strikingly imperfect, the kibbutz did promote a version of gender equality (see chapter by Sylvie Fogiel-Bijaoui). Most women belonged to the kibbutz workforce (although the range of jobs for kibbutz women was limited because of their obligation to work in childcare, at least periodically). Their personal economic situation was equal to that of men, in terms of the individual budgetary allowances they received, pension plans entitlement, general insurance, and occupational security. The socioeconomic situation of a single female parent was similar to that of a single male parent. Neither faced any danger of poverty or inability to support her or his dependents. Participation in the governing bodies of the kibbutz was open to all members (Palgi, 2003) regardless of gender.

The current transformation of kibbutz society has had mixed effects on women. Opening the outside job market to the kibbutz has expanded the variety of women's occupations, has allowed women to penetrate new occupations, and has enabled women to achieve more in professional and economic fields. In turn, these achievements improve their social status. However, this trend also exposes women to the social discrimination, increased gender inequality, and increased inequality among women that exists in the larger Israeli society. The abolition of extensive branches of communal services such as the dining room and laundry has erected new stumbling blocks for career-oriented women. As the kibbutz loses its unique characteristics, women lose the advantages that the old kibbutz bestowed upon them: economic equality, equivalent social security, and legal equality. The status of women in the kibbutz is nearing the status of women in Israeli society with its advantages and drawbacks (Palgi, 2003).

Cultural and Educational Activities

Kibbutz festivals and cultural activities were well known to the larger public and attracted many visitors who spent their vacation in the kibbutz. Some of these activities formed the cornerstones of Israeli culture. In 1937, the first art museum was opened in Kibbutz Ein Harod, and forty museums and galleries have been opened in kibbutzim since then. In 1939, the kibbutz movement inaugurated two publishing houses (Sifriat Hapoalim and Hakibbutz Hameuchad). Merged in 1999, these presses

publish Israeli literature, children's books, poetry, encyclopedias, and books on philosophy (see chapters by Shula Keshet and Iris Milner). Two teachers' colleges have been opened, the first in 1940 (Seminar Hakibbutzim) and the second in 1950 (Oranim), initially for kibbutz educators and later for all students. Kibbutz youth have organized and led many of the Israeli youth movements. The kibbutz movement has its own choir (since 1957), orchestra (since 1970), theatre (since 1964), and dance group (since 1964); all of them perform in Israel and abroad. The contribution of kibbutz members to Israeli folk dancing was enhanced by the inauguration of the yearly folk dance convention in Kibbutz Dalia in 1944. Kibbutz writers (e.g., Amos Oz), poets (e.g., Nathan Yonatan), composers (e.g., David Zehavi, Michael Wolpe), musicians (e.g., Galilah Ribner), and painters and sculptors (e.g., Shmulik Katz) are well known (see chapter by Ranen Omer-Sherman). In recognition of the flourishing of the arts in kibbutzim, this volume includes a discussion of the arts to illustrate changes in the kibbutz over the past hundred years.

Future of the Kibbutz

The history of kibbutzim shows that they are moving from a welfare society to a market society. Members are more independent economically from one another; there are new forms of membership for their adult children, "a member with economic independence" (full participation in kibbutz life but economic independence with no rights over kibbutz property); mutual aid in the kibbutz is more limited; and trends in privatizing property are evident. Given all these transformations, the question arises as to the future of kibbutzim. The answer depends on the vision of its members, and on the local and global economic and political processes that will affect strategic decisions the kibbutzim will have to make. Will they be able to find a new meaning and mission (see chapter by Amia Lieblich)? Are they going to require candidates for membership to agree with the new meaning and mission? Are they going to limit the nonmember population so that kibbutz members remain the majority? Will they be able to attract entrepreneurs to develop new ventures within the kibbutzim in accordance with their new meaning and mission (see chapter by Michael Livni)? Are they going to keep the community small and maintain a rural ecological environment? Will they wither or be socially resilient (see chapter by Avraham Pavin)? Will they be able to unite and formulate a common action program for impacting on the surrounding society or are they going to be merged into neighboring towns (as some government officials have initiated)? These are only

a few issues that will determine whether the kibbutzim will develop their own unique social economy by updating their communal, social, and economic way of life or whether they will become ordinary gated neighborhoods or suburban residential communities.

The aim of this volume is to look at all the issues discussed in this introduction in greater depth. We believe that the work of people doing research in a variety of disciplines can help us understand what Martin Buber claimed to be an “experiment that did not fail” (Buber, 1949). These original chapters written by leading scholars and practitioners of the kibbutz encompass many (but not all) facets of kibbutz life. As editors, we sought to identify fresh topics that both document and disentangle the complexities of kibbutz life. As the kibbutz enters its second century, it is important to take a step back to examine how contemporary changes might lead to its ultimate demise or, as Charles Darwin might have said, whether social groups such as kibbutzim are *invigorated by changes* that lead to their adaptation and survival.

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12 One Hundred Years of Kibbutz Life

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Part I

The Unfolding History of the Contemporary Kibbutz



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Introduction to Part I

Michal Palgi and Shulamit Reinhartz

In this, the first of the book's three parts, we present the work of scholars who have studied the *status of the kibbutz in Israeli society*. We focus on the decline of communal ideology and the link of that decline to changes in the kibbutz way of life, such as the kind of people chosen for leadership roles within the kibbutz. This part concludes with a look at changes surrounding the *individual in contemporary kibbutzim*.

Alon Pauker's historical analysis of the roots of the changing status of the kibbutz in Israeli society points to the role of kibbutz leadership. According to Pauker, *kibbutz leadership did not manage to find an alternative role for the kibbutz after Israel gained independence*. The leadership's failure to adapt to the new situation by finding new goals spurred a double reaction. First, the status of the kibbutz in Israeli society diminished, and second, the kibbutz became very vulnerable, leaving it open to nearly total collapse during the economic crisis of the 1980s. *Alon Gan* delves further into kibbutz development by analyzing the overt slogans as well as the covert aspirations evident since the 1960s. He describes five indicators of the process of ideological change from extreme collectivism to blatant individualism. Both Pauker and Gan maintain that the changed ideology was at the root of privatization in the kibbutz. The economic crisis only exposed and enhanced it. In other words, they adopt the Weberian rather than the Marxist model of change, with ideology driving the economy rather than the reverse.

Throughout the history of the kibbutz, "the female member problem" has persisted unresolved.¹ Despite promoting gender equality in many domains, the kibbutz system is thought to have failed in the project of creating gender equality in the division of labor and the division of power.² Men have always controlled the economic functions, and women

controlled the services offered in the kibbutz. Because of the persistence of gender inequality, at the end of the 1960s, the Kibbutz Artzi movement held a special convention to find ways to improve the status of women kibbutz members. Their recommendations enabled women to participate more fully in public life in part by allocating one working hour a day for household chores, thus operating under the assumption that household tasks were the responsibility of women. The contradictions inherent in these decisions and the general social and political atmosphere at the time did not improve gender equality. But the faulty suggestions did bring the topic to the forefront, leading to the secular kibbutz movement's formation of a department for the advancement of women in the 1980s. *Sylvie Fogiel-Bijaoui* analyzes the formation and activities of the department, its ups and downs, as well as its cooptation by the kibbutz movement and the reasons for its weakness today. The underrepresentation of women in key positions in the individual kibbutz and in the kibbutz movement, and the continuous threat to shut the unit down, are blemishes on its activities. Nevertheless, Bijaoui maintains that the department will not be eliminated.

Gender inequality also appears in the chapter by Menachem Topel, which deals with changing kibbutz elites. He shows that changes in the kibbutz supported the formation of new social relations including distinctive elites. Topel's chapter examines these new elites composed mainly of technocrats and people with advanced degrees. He points out that at the beginning stage of the kibbutz when values of equality were predominant, the elite consisted of people who had good standing among kibbutz members and had valuable social capital, that is, connections within and outside the kibbutz. Moreover, the technocratic kibbutz elite included many nonmember managers. The change in the characteristics and structure of the elite occurred as a result of the emergence of more individualistic values. According to Topel, the change in the nature of the elite was another impediment to women. *Avraham Pavin's* chapter looks into this issue. He maintains that during times of crisis a high level of pro-social behavior, such as volunteerism, mutual assistance, the desire to cooperate, the motivation to help one another, and to work together for the good of the whole, is essential. When there is a debate about kibbutz values, polarizing factors between members emerge, reducing the community's social resilience. Accordingly, the more radical the changes in the kibbutz, the more its resilience declines. Current sociological theory suggests that social resilience is required for safety and survival in response to threat.

Kibbutz social resilience reflects the level of its social capital. One facet of social capital is the quality of the relationships between its members. The changes in the kibbutzim that were obvious at the end of the last century were opposed by the older generation and advocated by their children or grandchildren. The children of the founders are considered to be “the young elderly” in kibbutz society. The way the “young elderly” managed the changes in the kibbutz determined its social resilience. Through in-depth interviews, *Yasmin Asaf and Israel Doron* tried to understand how these people perceive their position. The researchers found that the “young elderly” wanted to cut loose from the protective umbrella of the kibbutz. They believed in their *own ability* and in the strength of their *own families* to help them in their old age. Many of the young elderly have key positions in the kibbutz and feel that they are in control of their lives. Their multiple roles in the changing kibbutz include caring for their elderly parents and helping their adult children raise the grandchildren.

Do the new economic and social pressures caused by the changes affect family stability? In her comparative study, *Hadas Doron* tries to answer this question by asking kibbutz families and moshav families about their marital relations. She found that the level of spousal interdependence is affected by the organizational and economic arrangements prevailing in their community. In the kibbutz, each individual has personal rights regardless of gender and marital status. Each person receives from the kibbutz personal services that are usually provided by the family. Therefore, spousal interdependence is low and so is the cost of separation or divorce.

This part concludes with a chapter in which psychologist Amia Lieblich identifies three *developmental stages* of a large kibbutz that symbolizes many other kibbutzim. Using in-depth interviews and regular returns to this kibbutz over the years, she shows how the kibbutz changed from an ideologically driven community to a “regular” village. From a psychological perspective, however, the kibbutz remains a home that its members cathect emotionally. Her chapter describes the kibbutz at its peak period, its slow descent from the peak, and its new slow ascent. Her chapter suggests that we understand the kibbutz anew as a home rather than as previously appropriate as a way or a place.

Notes

1. See Shulamit Reinharz, “Toward a Model of Female Political Action: The Case of Manya Shohat, Founder of the First Kibbutz,” *Women’s Studies International*

18 One Hundred Years of Kibbutz Life

Forum 7, no. 4 (1984): 275–87, for a discussion of how an early founder predicted that gender equality would not be forthcoming in kibbutzim.

2. Eyal Kafkafi, “The Psycho-Intellectual Aspect of Gender Inequality in Israel’s Labor Movement,” *Israel Studies* 4, no. 1 (1999): 188–211.