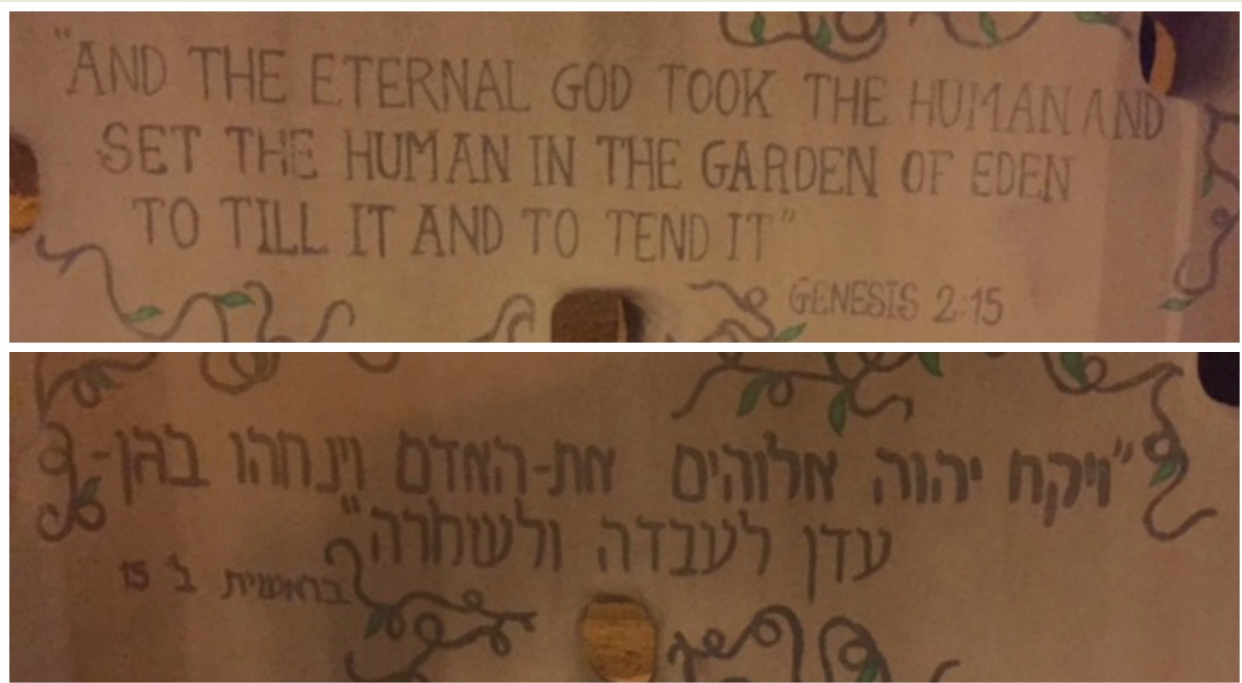


**Flourishing in the Wilderness: Kibbutzim and Their Relationship to the  
Environment Before and After Neoliberalism**

A THESIS

**By Maura Levine**



The University of Michigan  
The Department of Political Science  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for a degree with honors  
of Bachelor of Arts  
May 2015

**Advised by Lisa Disch**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>FOREWORD: “DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE”</b> .....	<b>II</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: A THEME OF NECESSITY</b> .....	<b>1</b>
THE NECESSITY OF SURVIVAL .....	1
INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES: WHY KIBBUTZIM ARE DIFFERENT .....	2
THE FORCE OF NECESSITY .....	5
A PROGRESSION OF NECESSITY .....	7
THE NECESSITY OF ENVIRONMENTALISM.....	10
<b>CHAPTER 2: PREPARING FOR FIELDWORK</b> .....	<b>16</b>
DEFINING ENVIRONMENTALISM AND SUSTAINABILITY .....	16
LIVING MY RESEARCH .....	19
QUANTITATIVE MEASURES .....	22
<b>CHAPTER 3: KIBBUTZIM WITH JEWISH IDEOLOGY FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTICES</b> .....	<b>25</b>
THE BACKGROUND STORY .....	25
KIBBUTZ LOTAN .....	29
KIBBUTZ KETURA.....	40
<b>CHAPTER 4: RECENTLY ECOLOGICALLY-FRIENDLY KIBBUTZIM</b> .....	<b>48</b>
KIBBUTZ BE’ERI .....	48
THE MEGGIDO REGIONAL COUNCIL .....	55
<b>CHAPTER 5: ECOLOGICALLY SOUND KIBBUTZIM WITHOUT AN ENVIRONMENTAL IDEOLOGY; “NECESSITY ENVIRONMENTALISM” TO A TEE</b> .....	<b>61</b>
KIBBUTZ DAFNA.....	61
KIBBUTZ SASA.....	66
KIBBUTZ NEOT SEMADAR .....	72
<b>CHAPTER 6: IS YAHIEL THE FUTURE?</b> .....	<b>79</b>
CONCLUSION .....	85
QUALIFICATION .....	86
<b>APPENDICES:</b> .....	<b>87</b>
FIGURE 1 .....	87
FIGURE 2 .....	87
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .....	88
YOUTUBE LINK .....	90
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	<b>91</b>



## Acknowledgements

When I decided to write a senior honors thesis I did not anticipate the wonderful series of events that would follow. The first person I went to see about finding the perfect project was my favorite professor Dr. Lisa Disch. Through her guidance and enthusiasm I was able to discover new intellectual heights as a capstone to my undergraduate career. To her, I am thankful for this opportunity and for the inevitable self-exploration that ensued.

Professors Dr. Mika LaVaque-Manty, Dr. Margaret Howard and Dr. Philip Wallach were instrumental in fostering my research and giving me the opportunity to explore and prepare for my thesis both remotely during my semester in Washington, D.C. and on campus in Ann Arbor. I am thankful for their belief in my capabilities and allowance in this manner.

My thesis also afforded me the opportunity to traverse the country of Israel and for that I am loyally indebted to the Political Science Department and specifically the Gerstein Family Award for generously funding part of my project.

I thank Sharan, Randall and Reyna Levine, my loving family and grandest support system. They were a constant source of inspiration during my year and a half of thesis research and wonderful traveling companions during my fieldwork in Israel.

Finally, I would like to thank the following Israelis for their time, effort and energy to speak with me during my fieldwork in Israel (December 2014) at the following locations. I was amazed at the outpouring of kindness from these people halfway around the world:

*Kibbutz Lotan:*

Rabbi Leah Benami

Micki Herman

Assaf Barack

Rabbi Daniel Burstyn

Dr. Michael Livni (*Feb. 2015 via telephone*)

*Kibbutz Ketura:*

Laura Shulton

Yoram Hoffman

*Kibbutz Be'eri:*

Yuval Bar

*The Meggido Regional Council:*

Hagar Ruevni

*Kibbutz Yahel:*

Hillel Tobias

*Kibbutz Neot Semadar:*

Yuval Shaul & family

*Kibbutz Dafna:*

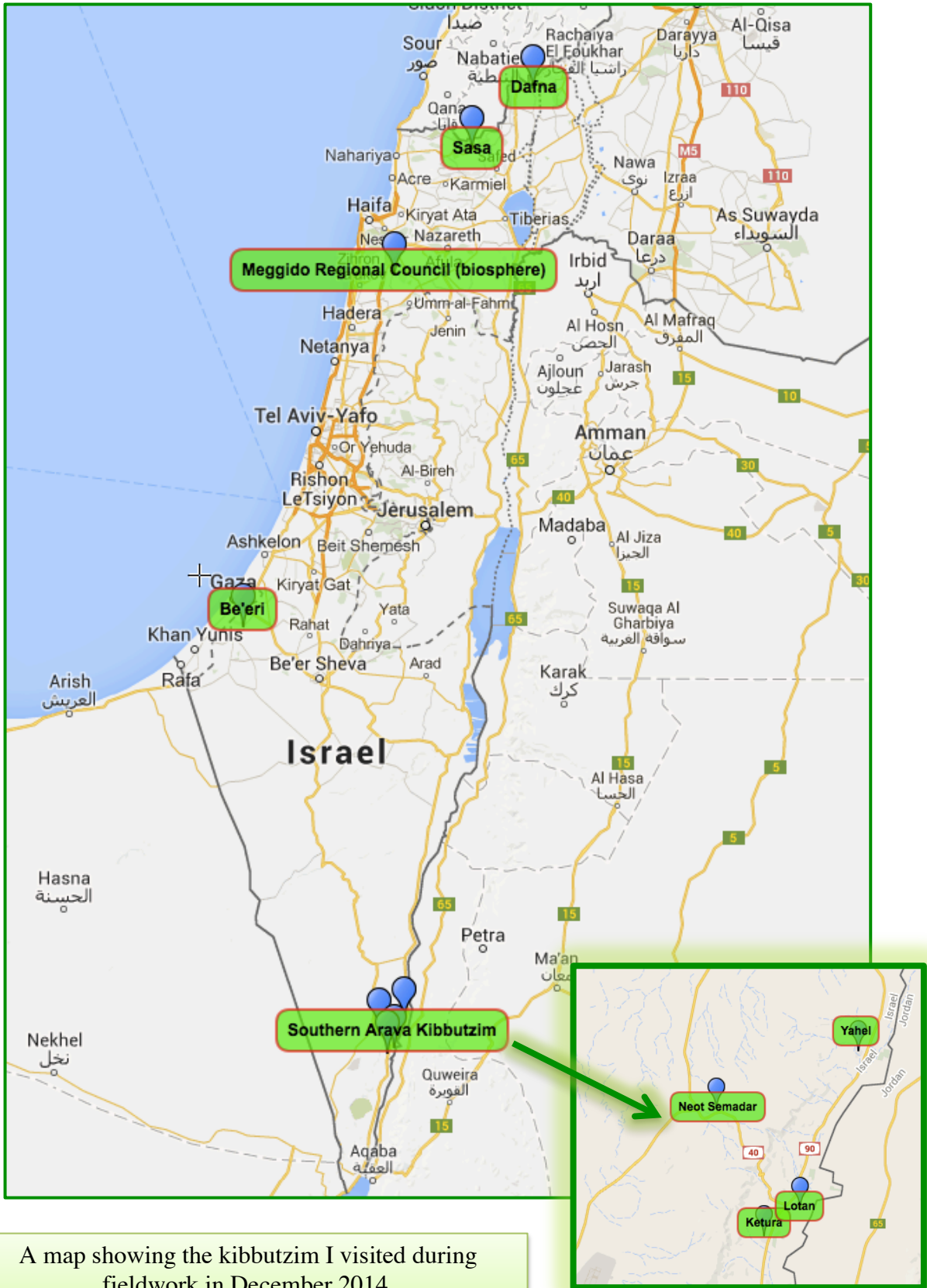
Peleg Itay

On Factor

*Kibbutz Sasa:*

Miriam Ziv

# Map



A map showing the kibbutzim I visited during fieldwork in December 2014.

## Foreword: “Down the Rabbit Hole”

I don't remember the first time I heard about Israeli kibbutzim. As an American Jew, I grew up giving *tzedakah*<sup>1</sup> every Sunday morning at Hebrew School. As we clinked our quarters into the jar, sometimes we were told that the coins we'd saved all week were going towards planting a tree in Israel. As a child I only knew of this mysterious “Israel” from Bible stories. Yet I had a great fascination with this place: we prayed for its borders to know peace during Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and during our Passover Seders my father read the last line of the *Haggadah*<sup>2</sup> to us, “Next year in Jerusalem!” To me, Israel was a foreign land where G-d spoke to Moses, where constant strife tormented the present boundaries, and where Americans liked to plant trees. I didn't understand the politics or the importance of Israel to the Jewish people until I was older.

When my sister Reyna studied abroad in Israel during college she connected with our family that lives in Tel Aviv. My mother hadn't seen her Israeli cousin Mickey in over thirty years and it was a moving experience for Reyna to become so close with them. When we visited Israel that year, my family was taken with the culture. It was so relaxed. People lived communally, even in the city, and were friendly to foreigners and to one another. We felt comfortable in a place where everyone understood what it was like to be Jewish. We vowed we had to return someday as we hugged goodbye our cousins.

Somewhere between my high school visit to Israel and a second year undergraduate class called “Population, Equity and Environmentalism,” I became fascinated with the idea of Israeli kibbutzim. Perhaps it was my interest in intentional communities, maybe it was my unreserved obsession for the Israeli's laid-back culture, or it could have been just hearing about kibbutz

---

<sup>1</sup> Charitable giving, in Hebrew.

<sup>2</sup> The text recited at the Passover Seder.

volunteering from other American Jews. Whatever the motivation, I thought of the kibbutz as a removed, marvelous enigma: somewhere where socialism and Judaism combined, where people revered the earth as I did, and where there were few cares beyond tilling the soil and simply enjoying life.

This fantastical, cliché image was soon to be shattered. When I took the class on Population, Equity and the Environment with Professor Disch, I chose to execute my final project as an exploration of kibbutzim. What I found was astounding and complex. What most American Jews thought about kibbutzim was idealistic. The kibbutz movement had been on the decline, with more and more young people choosing to move away. Then in the early 2000s the movement started back on an upswing, albeit in a different way than “The Golden Era” of the 1960s to 1980s. *Kibbutzniks*<sup>3</sup> had to make huge changes in order to adapt to the new political and economic climate. As I poured through books, articles, and images of the new “revitalized kibbutzim,” I saw that there were vast differences between the old and new types. In the early 1900s kibbutzim were all socialist and mostly agrarian. Nowadays they seem to fall on a continuum, ranging from totally “privatized” communities where people live in Florida-like subdivisions, to fully socialist communities where everyone’s personal budget is the same regardless of the job they have on the kibbutz.

These adaptations were astounding to me. For Professor Disch I analyzed how living in on a kibbutz might inherently tend to save natural resources. I focused on the small but mighty coalition of kibbutzim that considered themselves “eco-Zionist” and took pride in their efforts to live sustainably, far beyond any kind of sustainable living we do in the United States. But I was only scratching the surface. A year later when I returned to Dr. Disch’s office, earnestly asking

---

<sup>3</sup>A member of a kibbutz.

her to be my thesis advisor, we talked about my kibbutz project. We imagined how much more work could be done if I went to Israel and visited these communities myself.

I soon found myself on the fourth floor of the graduate library deep in the stacks every afternoon. I was immersed in research about Israeli environmentalism, the worldwide economic and political changes of the 1980s, and intentional communities. I wondered how kibbutz environmental practices had altered or remained the same since their inception? I wondered how Israelis felt about environmentalism as a concept: did they revere the earth because of religion and/or spiritual devotion or did they just want to stake out the land for Zionist purposes? How had kibbutzim managed to survive so long despite the Gazan rocket-fire falling around them, the government turning their back on them, and the economy plummeting out of their favor? The concept of resilient Jewish communities attracted and confounded me. Kibbutzim were so insular yet simultaneously so welcoming to foreign volunteers. They were still an enigma.

As my project progressed with historical research I asked myself how those kibbutzim with specific “eco-Zionist” motivations compare to other kibbutzim that perform environmental practices but are not necessarily environmentally conscious? I hypothesized that where necessity, and not ideology (like a stated “eco-Zionism”) was the reason for them, kibbutzim’s environmental practices will continue to be resilient to the political and economic policy changes. While I haven’t necessarily answered this hypothesis, I have been able to analyze the ramifications that several different types of kibbutzim have had on the environment and how their ideology (or lack thereof) influences their past and present condition of survival.

## **Chapter 1: A Theme of Necessity**

### *The Necessity of Survival*

The idea of a futuristic place where everyone has the same mantra and lives a focused life is intriguing. I can understand why people would want to live in an enclave with other people all of whom are living for the same purpose. In college I was able to first explore this idea by taking a philosophy class about Ayn Rand. Her writings opened my mind to philosophical questions including why and how we live within a social structure. Before I started my thesis research I thought that in Israeli kibbutzim I would find a match for my desire: a place where people lived an intentional life based on Judaism and a collective community life. The environmental and agrarian aspect seemed like a “return to nature” that profoundly rejected all of the materialistic aspects of our American capitalist society. I wanted to explore the environmental practices in these communities and valiantly report back to America, “See we can do it, too! It’s possible to live environmentally in the modern age!”

You can imagine my surprise and shock when I visited Kibbutz Yahel in the Arava desert and spoke with their self-proclaimed CEO Hillel Tobias, who told me proudly that they just finished construction on the giant strip mall I saw out front. It lit up the desert sky like a beacon of materialism, blasting my notions of kibbutzim into smithereens. What had happened to intentional living? At the time, I hoped to analyze Yahel as an outlier. Throughout my process of analysis, however, I realized that the recent privatization of these intentional communities has led to stark changes among them. I found that although kibbutzim are intentional communities, no two kibbutzim are alike in this new age of “revitalized” groups. Some like Yahel have turned to the capitalist, westernized notion of success. My journey into these communities took me

down a variety of different paths, all of which revealed the force of economic pressure as a driving reason for their practices, environmental or otherwise.

The kibbutz movement has encountered necessity in different ways throughout its lifecycle. All of these ways are related to community survival. The components of necessity, which I will show, had to do with why and how the environmental practices on kibbutzim started. Necessity as a theme helps frame the story of where the kibbutzim's varying environmental practices are today.

The word "necessity" is itself an ideological and social construct. It is not simply factual or empirical that environmental practices are necessary for survival. For example, many of the kibbutzim I studied are in the desert. All of these Arava kibbutzim must contend with the harsh climate and lack of easily attainable resources. Nevertheless, some see conservation and sustainability as forced on them by "necessity," while at least one kibbutz thinks sustainable practices are less than necessary (hence the strip mall). Although several other kibbutzim within mere miles of it are extremely ecologically conscious, Yahel holds a different perspective on what actions are "necessary" for survival. It is possible that some communities do not recognize environmentalism as "necessary," and think that they have other "more important" issues to contend with.

### *Intentional Communities: Why Kibbutzim Are Different*

It is important to note that the kibbutz movement was from the beginning a direct product of the Zionist labor movement. Original *kibbutzniks* were motivated by the thought of a Jewish national revival. Kibbutzim were "not conceived theoretically as an escapist or utopian project."

Rather, they were “inspired by ideas of social justice as an integral part of the Zionist effort to resettle the homeland.”<sup>4</sup>

According to the Fellowship for Intentional Communities, classic intentional communities can be defined as “a group of people who have chosen to live together with a common purpose, working cooperatively to create a lifestyle that reflects their shared core values.”<sup>5</sup> Based on this definition, kibbutzim are unique when compared to other intentional communities throughout history due to their longevity and important state-building role. There are several factors that allow intentional communities to function and remain viable. Chief among the requirements for viability is financial stability. For example, scholars who study New Zealand intentional communities, Lucy Sargisson and Lyman Tower Sargent, write that “members need sufficient material substance” for an intentional society to exist, even if the individuals are content with living a non-materialistic lifestyle.<sup>6</sup> Naturally, problems occur when there isn’t enough to go around. Furthermore, communities “need somewhere to turn when money runs out” in order to avoid conflict and eventual demise.<sup>7</sup> This means a safety net of social resources must exist if financial stability is waning. In applying this requirement to the situation of kibbutzim, it is apparent that the kibbutzim that had the ability to recover after the neoliberal financial crisis in the 1980s and 1990s are those who had the financial resources to stay afloat.

The disintegration of intentional communities is a common theme in researching this subject. But kibbutzim, conversely, did not have the option of failure. It is argued that socialist

---

<sup>4</sup> “Kibbutz Movement,” *Jewish Virtual Library*, 2008, Accessed Oct. 10, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Geoph Kozeny, “Intentional Communities: Lifestyles Based on Ideals,” *The Fellowship for Intentional Communities*, Accessed March 16, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Lucy Sargisson and Lyman Tower Sargent, *Living in Utopia: New Zealand's Intentional Communities* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publications, 2004), 175.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 177.



experiment communities in the United States, such as those following “Fourerism” during the 1800s, failed because they “could not create a society all sufficient in itself; they were forced into constant dealings with the outside world.”<sup>8</sup> Communities such as Brook Farm and The Northampton Association, located in Massachusetts, lacked the financial means to stay alive in a capitalist society. They relied on the outside world and thus were not able to maintain their communal and cooperative values, due in part to this outside influence.<sup>9</sup> The Northampton Association eventually became a neighborhood community without communal principles. In short, reintegration into the outside world kills many intentional communities. By contrast, kibbutzim have always been embedded within Israeli society and for a long time were viewed as integral to the survival of Israel; consequently, their integration did not lead to their demise.

It is also important to note that religion has been tied to longevity and the overall success of intentional communities. According to Sargisson and Sargent, “Religious communities tend to outlast secular ones and this is variously accounted for by higher levels of internal discipline and/or commitment.”<sup>10</sup> Exemplifying this is The Northampton Association, which struggled over having various, non-cohesive religions. According to Elizabeth Nako, there was no distinct religion in the Northampton Community and “the carrying out of different religious views was, perhaps, the occasions of more disagreement than any other subject.”<sup>11</sup> This religious disagreement and disruption caused people to abandon the socialist community and go back to

---

<sup>8</sup> Morris Hilliquit, *History of Socialism in the United States* (New York: Dover Publications, 1971), vii.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Nako, “Socialist Utopian Communities in the U.S. and Reasons for their Failure,” *Annual Celebration of Student Scholarship and Creativity* 14, (2013): 2.

<sup>10</sup> Sargisson and Sargent, *Living in Utopia*, 139.

<sup>11</sup> John Humphrey Noyes, *History of American Socialisms* (New York: Hillary House Publishers, 1961), 158; Nako, “Socialist Utopian Communities,” 12.

mainstream America.<sup>12</sup> Since Jewish people are the exclusive members of kibbutzim, this helps account for kibbutzim's longevity and ability to survive the economic tumult that befell them.

Most importantly, however, is that from the beginning the kibbutz movement was a necessary part of building Israel through many aspects including: "economic, political, cultural, and security activities."<sup>13</sup>

### *The Force of Necessity*

Kibbutzim are unique intentional communities because they needed to survive due to their role in the formation of the State of Israel. For many immigrants survival on kibbutzim was their only option. The environmental practices that kibbutzim undertook were affected by necessity. A unique kibbutz relationship with the earth can be seen from the beginning. Settlers needed to be gentle with the land in order to grow food and thus to survive.

For hundreds of years Jews fled the diaspora to return to Israel. During the First *Aliyah*<sup>14</sup> following a sustained period of pogroms in Russia from 1881-1882, nearly 35,000 Jewish immigrants from Russia, Eastern Europe and Yemen, moved to Israel.<sup>15</sup> These original settlers were tasked with starting a new society from the ground up, which depended on the creation of agricultural communities for food.<sup>16</sup> The land was uncultivated and varied from extreme desert conditions to untamed greenery. They had few natural resources like water and fertile soil.<sup>17</sup> Early Jewish immigrants established farms, and while they desired and attempted to develop

---

<sup>12</sup> Nako, "Socialist Utopian Communities," 12.

<sup>13</sup> "Kibbutz Movement," *Jewish Virtual Library*, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> *Aliyah* directly translates to "ascent" and means a period of Immigration to Israel from the Jewish Diaspora. There have been five recognized *Aliyot* as distinct periods of time between 1882 and 1939. *Aliyot* are generally caused by an event of persecution that force Jews out of their home countries and into Israel.

<sup>15</sup> "Immigration to Israel: The First Aliyah (1882-1903)," *Jewish Virtual Library*, Accessed Oct. 22, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Ran Aaronsohn, "The Beginnings of Modern Jewish Agriculture in Palestine: 'Indigenous' versus 'Imported,'" *Agricultural History* 69, no. 3, (1995): 438.

<sup>17</sup> Patricia Golan, "Greening the Desert," *Jerusalem Post*, Sept. 15, 1985: A18.

modern agriculture on their farms, they did not have the capital to do so.<sup>18</sup> They needed to succeed at desert farming, gain investors, and thereby triumph at their overall goal of creating a Jewish homeland.

Around the same time a Jewish aristocratic French landowner named Baron von Rothschild brought capital-intensive agriculture to Israel. He introduced technology such as the European iron plow. The modern farming techniques helped immigrants establish fruitful communal farms.<sup>19</sup> This mixture of traditional practices and Western technology was a process of trial and error.<sup>20</sup> According to scholar Irit Amit-Cohen, although economic success was not guaranteed “large capital investors rushed into their economic activities in Palestine<sup>21</sup> not only for investment purposes, but also due to the Zionist ideology on which they were nurtured.”<sup>22</sup> Zionist principles such as “...an admiration for entrepreneurship, frugality, and economic efficiency, concern for the workers lacking in means,”<sup>23</sup> a return to nature, working the soil, and a “simple lifestyle” were all factors that influenced wealthy American, Canadian and South African Jews to immigrate to Israel and start private citrus farms, many of which would later become kibbutzim.<sup>24</sup> This ideology is exemplified in Louis Dembitz Brandeis, the director of the American Zionist movement, and his promotion of the “Progressive Concept.” He believed that by moving Jewish people to Palestine and endorsing “nationalized economic activity” in Israel

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Aaronsohn, *The Beginnings of Modern Jewish Agriculture*, 447, 450.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 451, 453.

<sup>21</sup> Palestine and Israel may be used interchangeably throughout my thesis in staying true to the primary historical resources (prior to 1948), which often refer to the territory of modern day Israel as “Palestine.” According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, Palestine constitutes the “area of the eastern Mediterranean region, comprising parts of modern Israel and the Palestinian territories of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank... The term Palestine has been associated variously and sometimes controversially with this small region... Both the geographic area designated by the name and the political status of it have changed over the course of some three millennia.”

Nabih Amin Faris, “Palestine,” *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, Aug. 26, 2014.

<sup>22</sup> Irit Amit-Cohen, *Zionism and Free Enterprise: The Story of Private Entrepreneurs in Citrus Plantations in Palestine in the 1920s and 1930s*, (Boston: De Gruyter, 2012,) 131.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 67.

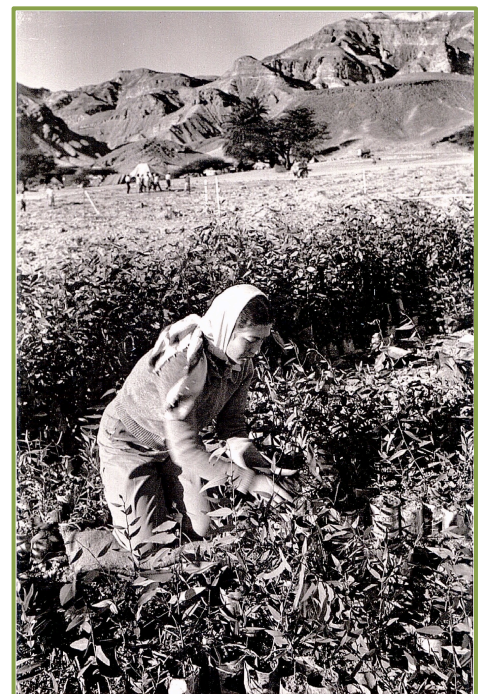
<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 37.

there was a higher likelihood that the land would be preserved for the Jewish people. Jewish immigrants would feel a sense of ownership to the land if they worked and owned it collectively. His Concept said, “in the short term the natural resources, land, water and public services should be supervised by public bodies in order to preserve their ownership by the Jewish people and to ‘prevent capitalistic exploitation.’”<sup>25</sup> During these formative years there was a call for labor and *halutzik*.<sup>26</sup> Brandeis’ “Progressive Concept” movement was the beginning of kibbutzim taking roots in Israel. The first settlers had succeeded. In the process they created little enclaves that would perpetuate their survival: *kibbutzniks* had tilled the land, secured investors, grown food, and established Israel as their island of safety.

*A Progression of Necessity*

Historical image by  
Rudi Weissenstein

After kibbutzim were established, they encountered a period of relative stability, which I will refer to as the “Golden Age.” During the Golden Age kibbutzim enjoyed a level of supreme prestige in Israel. While only four percent of the population in Israel lived on kibbutzim, *kibbutzniks* made up fifteen percent of Israel’s parliament.<sup>27</sup> After the formation of the Israeli state in 1948 until the 1970s the kibbutzim thrived, largely thanks to the political situation.<sup>28</sup>



Under the Labor party, which was the dominant force and leaders of Israeli politics due to their majority in the Knesset, kibbutzim enjoyed federal funding and a sympathetic feeling towards

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>26</sup> Pioneering in Hebrew.

<sup>27</sup> Bruno Bettelheim, *The Children of the Dream*, (New York: Macmillan, 1969), 15.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

their general existence. The Labor party's forgiving treatment of kibbutzim helped the movement remain in continuation from its inception in the early 1900s.<sup>29</sup> The kibbutz "grew in popularity and became the prime instrument of rural settlement."<sup>30</sup>

During the Golden Age *kibbutzniks* tended the land with care. Original settlers held a world outlook that did not define quality of life through material goods and consumption. This shaped their relationship to resources. Services such as laundry and food were communally organized and performed and a single car share existed for each community to complete errands and outside activities. According to former kibbutz member Alon Yakter, the whole group shared appliances, as people didn't have full kitchens or laundry rooms in individual homes. Before the late 1980s, children slept in communal dormitory-style housing and parents had small, single-bedroom apartments.<sup>31</sup> These features of kibbutz life inherently cut energy use and made kibbutzim environmentally friendly communities because there was little waste, whether purposeful or not. Most kibbutzim were agricultural. They worked the land and ate and sold their produce. This also contributed to cutting waste.<sup>32</sup> Through these measures kibbutzim were able to play a role in creating the "dominant Israeli ethos before 1948," long before the sustainability movement of the 1970s hit the rest of the world.<sup>33</sup>

Whereas the urgency to build the original kibbutzim was to establish a viable State and thriving Jewish community, later kibbutzim established during the Golden Age were created to promote Zionism and Jewish expansion. For example, kibbutzim were strategically established along the borders of Israel, particularly in areas that did not have a large Jewish population. They

---

<sup>29</sup> Uri Zilbersheid, "The Israeli Kibbutz: From Utopia to Dystopia," *Critique*, 415.

<sup>30</sup> Ilan Troen, "Jewish Settlement in the Land of Israel/Palestine," *The Jewish Virtual Library*, July 2011.

<sup>31</sup> Alon Yakter, in discussion with the author, March 2013.

<sup>32</sup> Raymond Russell, Shlomo Getz, and Robert Hanneman. "Transformation of the Kibbutzim." *Israel Studies* 16, no. 2 (2011): 109.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Livni, "Ecology, Eco-Zionism and the Kibbutz," *One Hundred Years of Kibbutz Life*, ed. Michal Palgi and Shulamit Reinharz, (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2011), 307.

were placed in these locations to secure the borders with the neighboring Palestinian-controlled territories. Without these strategically placed kibbutzim it would have been easy for Arabs to infiltrate the newly established country of Israel.<sup>34</sup>

The Golden Age lasted about twenty years. Then in 1977 the conservative Likud party took over Israeli politics. Kibbutzim lost their supportive socioeconomic and political environment. The incoming Likud Party left the kibbutzim to confront their hardships without government support, financially or otherwise.<sup>35</sup> This brought a new era of declining population in kibbutzim and the bankruptcy of many of these intentional communities. We will term this period the “Era of Decline.”

There was an enormous challenge to the continued viability of kibbutzim with this extraordinary shift in politics and economy during the 1980s and 1990s. Much of this can be attributed to general world economic changes, but there were also other unique factors that solely affected Israel. New policies forced individual state withdrawals from social provisions for the kibbutzim. Those kibbutzim that survived were forced to adapt. Free market dogma encouraged the privatization of government subsidies. For Israel, this often meant state policies taking money away from kibbutzim. The policies were contrary to the kibbutz way of life and therefore had profound implications for these communities, both as experiments in socialism and as practitioners (whether consciously or not) of environmentalism.<sup>36</sup>

The government policy changes from 1977 forward have been termed by some academics as “neoliberalism.” A more descriptive analysis might deem them “free market policy,” “free

---

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Zilbersheid, “The Israeli Kibbutz,” *Critique*.

<sup>36</sup> The aforementioned process was slow and nuanced. I have shortened it for sake of brevity and because it would take another thesis just to explain Israeli politics and history of this era. Although this section does not do the timeline justice, it helps contextualize the situation of environmentalism on kibbutzim.

market ideology,” or “new liberalism.”<sup>37</sup> For the sake of brevity, I will use the term “neoliberalism” throughout my thesis. I have defined it as a term to distinguish this modern form of capitalism in Israel from the “previous model of development.”<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, my definition includes the historical period when there appeared “a type of market economy found in both middle and upper-income countries that experienced periods of radical market reform, such as the United Kingdom during the Margaret Thatcher era, the United States under Ronald Reagan, and Chile during Pinochet’s reign.”<sup>39</sup> When writing about neoliberalism I will be referring to new Israeli policies that attempted to

...Liberalize the economy, by eliminating price controls, deregulating capital markets, and lowering trade barriers; those that reduce the role of the state in the economy, most notably via privatization of state-owned enterprises; and those that contribute to fiscal austerity and macroeconomic stabilization, including tight control of the money supply, elimination of budget deficits, and curtailment of government subsidies.<sup>40</sup>

For my purposes, kibbutzim can be seen as “curtailed government subsidies” in Israel. They were receiving federal money prior to this Era that was helping them survive. After the Era of Decline, however, some kibbutzim went bankrupt. Others changed their mode of communal living to stay afloat without funding. I have found that these processes meant that environmental practices for some kibbutzim became more salient (to save money and resources) while for others they were wholly discarded (i.e. to conform to capitalist factory protocols).

### *The Necessity of Environmentalism*

Despite the changes that happened during the Era of Decline, many kibbutzim still use environmental practices today in the period that we will call the “Revitalization,” which started

---

<sup>37</sup> Taylor C Boas and Jordan Gans Morse, “Neoliberalism: From New Liberal Philosophy to Anti-Liberal Slogan,” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 44, no. 2 (2009): 144.

<sup>38</sup> (A distinction noted and suggested by scholars Boas and Gans-Morse) *Ibid*, 152.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 158.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 143.

in the 2000s and is continuing today. The harsh landscape in Israel obliges ecological awareness. The country has water shortage problems and vastly varying landscape that stretches from desert to lush greenery in a relatively small topographical area. Additionally, this part of the Middle East has become, in recent years, one of the most densely populated areas in the world. In sixty years the population of Israel increased seven fold, from one to seven million. This has led to “a significant degradation of Israel’s environment.”<sup>41</sup> Exploitation of natural resources, like water, is an ongoing concern.<sup>42</sup> Some kibbutzim have been faulted for factory industrial pollution and often their agricultural utilization of the land is not sustainable.<sup>43</sup>

In this Era of Revitalization kibbutzim have partially “bounced back” from the Era of Decline. According to the *Kibbutz Movement Annual* in 2011, kibbutzim made up fifteen percent of the population in Israel. The journal concluded that the “period of demographic stagnation [in kibbutzim] evidenced by the figures from 1983 to 2006 has clearly ended.”<sup>44</sup> This is based upon the drastic population increase from 119,800 in 2006 to 140,900 in 2010. A prolific scholar of kibbutzim and eco-Zionism, Michael Livni attributes this population increase to the fact that many people are choosing to become “residents” of kibbutzim without being full kibbutz “members,” as defined by Cooperative Societies Regulations and Israeli law.<sup>45</sup> He believes that from this statistical data, we may “tentatively conclude that the kibbutz as a ‘community’ is sustainable.”<sup>46</sup> But he also believes this does not answer the question about whether or not the kibbutz movement will reinvent itself as a “sustainable movement of intentional communities”

---

<sup>41</sup> Livni, “Ecology, Eco-Zionsim and the Kibbutz,” *One Hundred Years of Kibbutz Life*, 306.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Michael Livni, “Kibbutz as a Sustainable Community: What Happened During the Last Generation? An Overview by a Participant-Observer,” excerpt from *Communal Pathways to Sustainable Living* at the 11<sup>th</sup> conference of the International Communal Studies Association (ICSA), Findhorn Foundation and Community, (Scotland), June 26-28, (2013): 265.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 266.



due to the fact that in its post-modern stage of rejecting ideology, kibbutzim are no longer truly intentional communities.<sup>47</sup> The Revitalization has aligned the privatized kibbutzim of late with other contemporary communities that are a part of the worldwide communal collective.<sup>48</sup> Livni also points out that there is no way to know what will happen to these hybrid communities in the future because no parallel historical model exists.<sup>49</sup>

I have seen firsthand that in order to survive the Era of Decline, environmental practices had to become a priority for many (though not all) kibbutzim. This happened out of either ideological reasons or again due to pure necessity from a lack of resources: financial or natural. As will be seen later, my fieldwork revealed a strong ideological environmentalism present at Kibbutz Lotan and Kibbutz Ketura. These communities, however, are generally exceptional. My fieldwork also showed that many environmentally sustainable kibbutzim in the present-day use explicit environmental practices to save money and natural resources. Kibbutz Dafna, Kibbutz Neot Semadar, and Kibbutz Sasa explained to me their reasons for environmentally sound practices, none of which were for ideological reasons. Rather, as will be seen in the following chapters, these kibbutzim are conscious of their resource consumption due to financial reasons, a lack of readily available natural resources, and/or governmental regulations.

Kibbutzim that partake in “necessity environmentalism” practice environmental habits because they see these exercises as a requirement for survival. This does not mean that they are consciously protecting the earth because of an environmental ethos. Rather “necessity” can cover a range of other reasons. For example, I found on Kibbutz Neot Semadar that members use unprecedentedly progressive environmentally sound techniques in order to save money and

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 271, 275.

<sup>48</sup> Michael Livni, “The Kibbutz and its Future: Historical Perspective,” International Communal Studies Association Eighth International Conference (Amana, IA), Session 5, 30 June 2004, page 14.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

fulfill their intentional community's mantra. Members are not necessarily concerned with sustainable preservation of the earth for the sake of future human generations or to stave off global warming, for example, but rather because these practices are necessary for in order for them to live as judiciously as possible.



Top: "Volunteers During Lunch Break," Kibbutz Mefalsim, 1949  
Bottom: "Pioneer," Sodom, 1949  
Images by Rudi Weissenstein





Top: "Pioneers in 'She'ar Yeshuv' in the Upper Galilee, 1940"  
Bottom: "Youth Create the Star of David," 1946  
Images by Rudi Weissenstein

## Chapter 2: Preparing for Fieldwork

### *Defining Environmentalism and Sustainability*

Before I dive into how I went traversing Israel for answers to my pressing questions, it is important to clarify two terms that are somewhat amorphous and depend on their context. These terms are sustainability and environmentalism. Throughout my thesis I will be using these words, though not interchangeably. Their separation is important because of the political and ideological implications that follow each. Environmentalism,

...(As a philosophy) calls into question the impact of human actions on the environment and (as a movement) seeks to alter human-environment interactions to lessen the human footprint on the environment and foster environmental health. As a philosophy, environmentalism is usually associated with human values for conservation, ecosystem protection, restoration, and a deep concern for the natural environment.

As a social movement, environmentalism is associated with local, regional, national, and international political involvement in environmental policy development and reform, green technology development, advocacy for more protected areas, and improved citizen opportunities to shape and influence policies and development activities that affect the environment.<sup>50</sup>

Environmentalism is associated with two main global movements in the modern era, one in the 1960s and the next in the 1980s.<sup>51</sup> According to scholar Timothy O’Riordan, environmentalism came before sustainability as a “necessary first step” based on the innate human desire to change the natural surroundings.<sup>52</sup> O’Riordan argues humans felt a “moral break,” driving them to

---

<sup>50</sup> Emily Huddart Kennedy and Naomi Krogman, “Environmentalism,” *Encyclopedia of Consumption and Waste: The Social Science of Garbage*, edited by Carl A. Zimring and William L. Rathje. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2012).

<sup>51</sup> Timothy O’Riordan, “From Environmentalism to Sustainability,” *Scottish Geographical Journal* 115, no. 2 (1999): 154.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 151.

reform their previous excessive exploitation of the earth. Thus environmentalism has become the human realization to reform their destructive habits that damage the earth.<sup>53</sup>

While the abovementioned history and definition of environmentalism requires that an individual or group is conscious of their environmental efforts with the distinct purpose of preserving the earth, I will argue that even without being ecologically conscious and aware of a prescient need to reform untenable ecological practices, one is still able to engage in environmentalist practices. That is, one can practice environmentalism without subscribing to the ideology of environmentalism, without being an environmentalist.

Sustainability will be referenced differently. For my purposes the following definition from *The Encyclopedia of World Poverty* will hold true:

Sustainability means providing for the best for people and the environment for now and for the indefinite future, without diminishing world resources... Hence sustainability is concerned with maintaining a delicate balance between the human need to improve lifestyles and feelings of well-being, and preserving natural resources and ecosystems, on which we and future generations depend.

Environmental sustainability means conserving and recycling natural resources and limiting air, water, and land pollution to amounts that can be assimilated by the environment.<sup>54</sup>

Sustainability is different than environmentalism by virtue of its “incorporation of both an economic and social dimension.”<sup>55</sup> It takes into account much more than just environmentalism and its direct efforts to save the earth through ecological practices. In 1987 the United Nations published the Brundtland Report, which provided the first comprehensive definition of sustainability via the theme of “sustainable development.” The UN outlined problems facing world as human beings progress and put forth ways to sustainably develop and progress society.

---

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Raissa Muhutdinova, “Sustainability,” *The Encyclopedia of World Poverty*, edited by M. Odekon, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1047.

<sup>55</sup> O’Riordan, “From Environmentalism to Sustainability,” 159.

The UN defined sustainable development as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”<sup>56</sup>

Scholars such as Robert Costanza and Herman Daly have critiqued this definition, saying it is not a robust enough way to understand the complex parts that are inherent to limiting worldwide growth. They argue that resource consumption, standard of living, population control and efficiency-increasing technology, among other concepts, are necessary for realistically ensuring sustainability in the future.<sup>57</sup> Regardless of this debate, most scholars would likely agree that sustainability goes farther than environmentalism because it is a new-wave reaction to wasteful human behavior. Sustainability includes governance changes implemented to find more ecologically viable systems and practices.<sup>58</sup> This concept can be seen as a triangle structure with three distinct sides that must be in balance: economic considerations, social stability and ecological practices.<sup>59</sup>

Dr. Michael Livni reaffirmed this idea as it relates to Israeli kibbutzim. He told me that environmentalism is just one part of sustainability because sustainability has strong social implications, including the current differential between developed countries and developing countries’ resource use and finances. Livni believes that it is not “sustainable” to have a society where the social gap differential is ten to one; the term “sustainability,” therefore, contains both environmental and other societal implications.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> NGO Committee on Education, “Our Common Future: From One Earth to One World - A/42/427 Annex, Overview - UN Documents: Gathering a body of global agreements,” 1987.

<sup>57</sup> Robert Costanza and Herman E Daly, “Natural Capital and Sustainable Development,” *Conservation Biology* 6, no.1 (1992): 44.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Mohan Munasinghe, “Sustainable development triangle,” *The Encyclopedia of Earth*, 2013.

<sup>60</sup> Dr. Michael Livni, in discussion with the author, February 2015.

## *Living My Research*

In order to measure the environmental practices on different kibbutzim, I traveled to Israel in December 2014 and toured the country in a small rental car. I traveled as far North as the Lebanese border and as far South as the Jordanian mountains. In the preceding months I contacted over a dozen kibbutzim through email, telling them about my interest in their ecological practices and lifestyle and wondering if they'd be willing to speak with me in person. Many responded. By the time I reached December I had appointments scheduled with eight different kibbutzim eager to meet with me, feed me, and learn about my project. I was immediately overwhelmed by their positive reception, especially because I was a foreigner.<sup>61</sup> My family traveled with me to a few of my kibbutz visits up and down the country. My personal fieldwork research design allowed me to connect with the people I met on various kibbutzim in ways that I didn't even render possible before I embarked.

During fieldwork I asked kibbutz members, volunteers, industry executives, agricultural workers, environmental leaders, and gardeners questions about what kinds of sustainable measures their specific community partakes in, including but not limited to: recycling goods and resources, sharing resources between people and households, "green living" initiatives, nature preservation, and clean energy. These are reliable indicators of sustainability.

I formulated three different lines of questioning: one for "agricultural kibbutzim," one for "industrial kibbutzim," and one for "combination kibbutzim."<sup>62</sup> These three titles signify the primary type of business the kibbutz runs in order to receive income. Combination kibbutzim are those that have both industrial and agricultural income. The lines of questioning differed because

---

<sup>61</sup> Embarrassingly, I do not speak fluent Hebrew.

<sup>62</sup> My interview questions are attached in the appendix.



factories and agricultural tools have different environmental measures and sustainability indicators.

I formulated the interview questions to be as open-ended as possible so as not to lead the interviewee to answer in a particular way. Instead of telling people what I was looking for exactly and asking them how their kibbutz fits the criteria, rather I asked them the manner by which their kibbutz uses resources in general and what their production process is. For agricultural kibbutzim, the questions concerning irrigation, general water usage, erosion and pesticides hopefully helped to elicit unbiased responses because these variables can be easily measured. For industrial kibbutzim, questions about power usage and production, where resources are gathered from, and how the resources are used, will suffice for the same reason. While response bias was a potential issue in my fieldwork, detailed questions about specific areas of resource preservation and environmental initiatives hopefully deterred people from being dishonest about the level of ecological practices that the community and/or factory exhibits. Questions, for example, about how they use and dispose of resources or partake in sustainable farming procedures are variables that cannot be exaggerated and therefore elicited a semi-quantitative response.

Clearly, only studying kibbutzim that present themselves as ecologically sustainable would make for unbalanced data. I also analyzed other types of kibbutzim, especially ones that do not follow the traditional agricultural system anymore but rather engage in capitalism through industry or other enterprises. One such example is Kibbutz Sasa, which now houses Plasan, a company that makes “ballistic and blast protection solutions,” exemplified by the armor they create for United States military vehicles. Prior to the 1990s industry was not a part of Sasa life. Agriculture, primarily in the form of apple orchards, accounted for the Sasa’s income and

viability.<sup>63</sup> Since Sasa now participates in the capitalist economy with a large and profitable industry operation, questioning members about their relation to resources and waste helps to give a contrasting perspective to other kibbutzim that consider themselves ecologically conscious. These interviews were performed using an exploratory technique. I avoided pointed questions and instead let subjects tell the story they would like to, so as not to upset or bias any results.

In designing my fieldwork I was conscious of the danger of perception bias, which could have been an issue during these interviews. People on “eco-Zionist” or “green” kibbutzim and even on industrial kibbutzim, may have a desire to believe in progress. They may recall the days of old as being much more antiquated in environmental practices than they actually were or may have a tendency to overestimate the environmental progress that has happened since new technology has been employed. Kibbutz members of a younger generation may even have a generational complex of this nature by thinking that they are more environmentally progressive than their *kibbutznik* forefathers. I controlled for this by asking questions that require quantitative measurements and through personal observation of practices on the kibbutzim during my visits.

Some of my most informative moments happened when I wasn't in a scheduled meeting or interview, but was sitting over lunch or dinner in a loud dining room and chatting with those around me. Members and volunteers alike were generally curious about my project and made side comments and interjections with their opinions about ecology in Israel and on their kibbutz in particular. Reactions varied from perplexed surprise to passionate disagreement. Israeli's do not hide their emotions; they are known for being brusque and honest. These unanticipated moments of human connection were often the most revealing moments of scholarship and are interactions that I will never forget.

---

<sup>63</sup> “Business,” *Kibbutz Sasa*, Accessed Apr. 10, 2014.

Before I left for my fieldwork, my thoughts about ecological motivation for kibbutzim had been marinating for over a year. I knew from the prior year of historical research that some kibbutzim used religious and spiritual rationale to define their way of life while others were not religious or spiritual at all. All kibbutzim were originally Zionist in nature, created for the purpose of making Israel a supportable Jewish environment, yet some do not necessarily associate with Judaism as a religion. Through fieldwork I discovered a constant the theme of necessity, which describes how immigrants to Israel arrived at sustainable practices not out of principled environmental commitment (spiritual or otherwise ideological) but because they needed build the land of Israel as judiciously as possible to preserve it for future generations and therefore secure the continuance of their people amidst a history of expulsion and persecution.

### *Quantitative Measures*

My first process was to identify how kibbutzim have created and maintained their environmental practices. In order to determine whether or not some kibbutzim have maintained a commitment to environmentalism, some would argue that quantitative measures could be more reliable than self-reporting during fieldwork. Ideally my thesis would feature an equal amount of quantitative and qualitative measures in order to reach sound conclusions. Alas, there is a shortage of readily available numerical/statistical information pertaining to kibbutzim resource use in the past. Despite this dearth, I have relied on several sources that may work as a starting point for quantitative measurements. The first is an article by the Israel Agriculture & International Cooperation Institute. This article provides relevant data about areas such as soil preservation, irrigation, desert resource issues, water preservation, and animal protection in Israeli agriculture, which can certainly serve as indicators of sustainability. Figures 1 and 2 in the

Appendix show two statistical measures that may be of use in comparing against interview data gathered in Israel.

Figure 1 shows how agricultural production in kibbutzim and *moshavim*<sup>64</sup> has gradually become more conscious of water usage. While the amount of cultivated land has increased over time, since 2006 the water consumption has decreased and the amount of recycled water used has simultaneously increased. Figure 2 shows rural settlements in Israel from their founding through present day. This graph demonstrates a renewal period of growth, evidenced by the growing amount of settlements. These settlements show an “affinity for the environment.”<sup>65</sup> This publication uses these measurements to show how the Israeli Ministry of Agriculture is developing environmental and social renewal in agricultural kibbutzim and *moshavim* following the neoliberal crisis.<sup>66</sup>

Another quantitative measurement comes from Melanie Lidman, a reporter for *The Jerusalem Post*, who wrote an article in 2010 about how Israel is the world’s leading wastewater recycler. According to her, “Seventy percent of its [total countrywide] sewage, and 100% of the sewage from the Tel Aviv metropolitan area, is treated and reused as irrigation water for fields and public works.”<sup>67</sup> This recycling is not just limited to cities. Each year 520 billion cubic meters of sewage are generated in Israel. Yet of that vast quantity, “Three hundred and seventy-five billion cubic meters of that sewage is treated and reused.”<sup>68</sup> When it comes to agriculture this means that only 40% of the water used for farming comes from freshwater, non-recycled resources. That number is down from 70% in the past.<sup>69</sup> When there used to be water crises, the

---

<sup>64</sup> Moshavim are Israeli cooperative farming communities. They differ from kibbutzim in several aspects.

<sup>65</sup> The Israel Export & International Cooperation Institute, “Israel’s Agriculture,” (Tel Aviv: Israel), 32.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Melanie Lidman, “Wastewater Wonders,” *The Jerusalem Post*, Aug. 6, 2010.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

farmers were the last recipients of water. Nowadays farmers have “wastewater reservoirs” with secure, high quality water. Farmers can keep producing their agricultural products even during freshwater shortages. This helps them maintain a steady flow of income.<sup>70</sup> While this article does not specifically mention kibbutzim, in using the phrase “farmers in Israel” one may infer that kibbutzim and *moshavim* are represented as part of the farmer category. According to a 2010 article in *Taipei Times*, forty percent of all agricultural output in Israel came from kibbutzim.<sup>71</sup> This statistic does not include *moshavim*, which likely would make the percentage even higher. Therefore, we can conclude that the recycling of wastewater the resultant backup reservoirs are helpful to agricultural kibbutzim. This environmental practice of recycling wastewater and reusing it on crops was created out of necessity for a clean, constant water supply.

These quantitative measurements show how kibbutzim started and maintained environmental practices throughout time. They have adapted to their surroundings, becoming more aware of their resource limitations the longer they tend the earth.

---

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Associated Press, “Kibbutz reinvents itself after 100 years of history,” *Taipei Times*, Nov. 16, 2010.

### Chapter 3: Kibbutzim With Jewish Ideology for Environmental Practices

#### *The Background Story*

Some kibbutzim use Jewish Biblical phrases and Zionist ideology to justify their reasoning for participating in environmental practices. What I will call “Jewish ideology” encapsulates both Zionist environmental rhetoric



Image by Rudi Weissenstein

and Biblical phrases that some Jews have interpreted to promote environmental awareness and practices. Although many Zionists might not consider

themselves “observant” or “religious,” for my purposes Zionist environmental ideology cannot be separated from Jewish religious environmental ideology because they are so intertwined. I have found that “eco-Zionism” can mean environmentalism and sustainability practices for the purpose of Zionist state building and/or due to Biblical rationale.

Tree planting is a part of Jewish culture and Zionist ideology worldwide. Tree planting is also a major symbol of Zionism because planting vegetation is a practical approach to making the land of Israel more habitable for future Jewish generations and is therefore a positive step towards securing a Jewish homeland.<sup>72</sup> This motivation has brought a general tree-planting culture to modern Israel and the Jewish Diaspora.<sup>73</sup> For example, The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI) is an organization that was started by a group of teachers, scientists, and *kibbutznik* activists in 1953 in an attempt to save the Hula wetlands. Their website states that “By creating a love for Israel’s nature we united to protect and preserve this holy land for

<sup>72</sup> Manfred Gerstenfeld, *Judaism, Environmentalism and the Environment: Mapping and Analysis*, (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 1998), 29.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

generations to come.”<sup>74</sup> This phrase echoes David Ben-Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel, who said in 1949 “planting was the only way in which Jews could develop such strong ties to their land that they would never again be thrown out of it.”<sup>75</sup> From the start of agricultural settlements in Israel, Jews may have been aware of the political and cultural requirement of environmentalism and practiced an ecological ethos to preserve the land for future generations. Aaron David Gordon, an early Zionist in Israel, found that nature and labor were inseparable values in the establishment of Israel as a Jewish country. He wrote, “Nature, spread wide open for everybody, is for man exactly what water is for the fish and air for any living being.”<sup>76</sup>

In a 1985 *Jerusalem Post* article Patricia Golan outlined how forests and green-space parks were planted in the Negev desert in the south of Israel. According to her, Yosef Weitz, the head of the forestry department at the Jewish National Fund (JNF)<sup>77</sup>, traveled around the Negev in the 1920s poking the dirt and determining places where trees and fruit could be planted. While other people were skeptical, Weitz was able to build forests that have since thrived. Patricia Golan reported that 300,000 to 700,000 trees were subsequently planted annually, creating spaces lush with trees and experimental vineyards. Her article explains how the JNF spent twenty-five years planting *limans*,<sup>78</sup> small landforms that accumulate enough water through rain and flooding to feed a tree for a whole year. These unique environmental practices prove the Zionists’ desire to make Israel a place where future Jewish generations could thrive.<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, “Mission,” *SPNI*, Accessed Oct. 10, 2014.

<sup>75</sup> Lewis Rifkind, *Zionism & Socialism*, (London: Jewish Socialist Labour Party, 1918), 29.

<sup>76</sup> Gerstenfeld, *Judaism, Environmentalism and the Environment*, 30.

<sup>77</sup> A Zionist organization.

<sup>78</sup> Mini-oases, a Greek word that directly translates to “harbor,” of eucalyptus trees.

<sup>79</sup> Patricia Golan, “Greening the Desert,” *Jerusalem Post*, Sept. 15, 1985: A18.

The term “eco-Zionism,”<sup>80</sup> represents this type of ideological kibbutz environmentalism that “reflects the Divine triple Covenant between God, the people of Israel and the land of Israel. Ensuring the well-being of the land as a part of religious commitment to Divine Creation constitutes an ideological/theological base for eco-Zionism.”<sup>81</sup> This perspective comes from *Midrash*<sup>82</sup>, which reads that G-d took Adam to all the trees of Paradise and said, “...see my works, how handsome and fine they are, everything I have created was created for you. Make sure not to spoil and destroy my world because what you spoil, no one can repair (*Koheleth Rabbah* 7:13).”<sup>83</sup> In adhering to this story some kibbutzim began their sustainable agricultural and services practices in the early 1900s. “The vision of this society was ostensibly grounded in values that were present in Judaism itself, and many of the symbols which conveyed these values were derived from the Jewish tradition.”<sup>84</sup>



Image by Rudi Weissenstein

Some scholars even believe that environmentalism is at the core of Jewish philosophy and has been present throughout the ages, as is evident by Jewish prayers and beliefs. This would mean that Judaism as a belief system promotes environmental practices. Leah Zigmond, Eco Center Academic and Educational Director at

---

<sup>80</sup> “Eco-Zionism” is a term in the Israeli scholar vernacular and was not coined by me.

<sup>81</sup> Livni, “Ecology, Eco-Zionism and the Kibbutz,” *One Hundred Years of Kibbutz Life*, 305.

<sup>82</sup> Ancient commentary on the Torah.

<sup>83</sup> Livni, “Ecology, Eco-Zionism and the Kibbutz,” *One Hundred Years of Kibbutz Life*, 305.

<sup>84</sup> Charles S. Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya. “The Symbol System Of Zionist-Socialism: An Aspect Of Israeli Civil Religion.” *Modern Judaism*, no. 2 (1981): 121.



Kibbutz Lotan, adheres to this theory. She believes that Judaism and environmentalism “are inseparable.” She opines,

After G-d created the world, the Torah tells us there were no trees in the fields or herbs in the gardens, for G-d had not yet sent rain or created a human to work the soil. Only after forming man from dust and blowing life into his nostrils did G-d plant a garden. As it is written, ‘...G-d took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden, to work and to protect...’ \*Genesis 2:5-2:15). From this passage I conclude that to some degree *the whole world was waiting for us humans to get to work*. Note that G-d’s act of planting the garden was unlike the creation of other natural spaces in that G-d simply commanded the latter spaces into existence. The garden, a metaphor for the earth, requires ongoing tending.<sup>85</sup>

Scholars such as Zigmond cite more evidence for theological environmentalism from Jewish religious texts. The medieval Jewish philosopher Maimonides, who is often quoted and cited in Jewish literature, believed that man could reach God through nature.<sup>86</sup> Scholar Joseph Herman Hertz, once the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, observed that Jewish benedictions are “remarkable” for their age-old environmentalism that “thanks God for everything inspiring, beneficent and beautiful in Nature...”<sup>87</sup> Professor Yehudah Leo Levi believes that reading the Torah proves how Judaism teaches environmentalism. He writes, “Adam’s task in the garden [of Eden] was not to enjoy its fruit—although that was certainly an accompanying fact—but rather to administer it, to take care of it.”<sup>88</sup> Through these examples it is possible to see how kibbutzim, with an inherent Zionist attitude, could use Zionism and Judaism to inform their environmental practices.

Kibbutz Lotan and Kibbutz Ketura have done just that. These communities are dedicated to the environment because of the Jewish religion and/or Zionist rhetoric promoting the need to

---

<sup>85</sup> “Earthcare Saving the Plane & Ourselves,” *Reform Judaism* magazine, Winter 2009, 27.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

<sup>88</sup> Yehudah Leo Levi, “Judaism’s Approach to Environmental Quality”, *Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs*, (April 2002), Accessed Oct. 10, 2014.

protect the land for the Jewish people and future generations. They cite these ideological reasons as motivation to live harmoniously with nature and to have a positive relationship with the earth. Not coincidentally, both of these kibbutzim are in the southern Arava desert and are only a few miles apart, making their ideology shared and fluid. Lotan, however, is facing more financial difficulties over the neoliberal privatization changes, which have recently forced organizational alterations upon the community. This chapter explores the reasoning behind environmental awareness at Kibbutz Lotan and Ketura respectively, how each community implements their ideology, and how neoliberal financial changes have affected environmental practices on each in different ways.

### *Kibbutz Lotan*

When I drove up to Lotan and parked the car I had no idea what to expect. It was my first desert kibbutz visit and I was alone. My family had stayed in Tel Aviv. I figured I would end up eating alone somewhere quietly while I reviewed my interview notes and digitized my materials. I was looking forward to the silence of the desert and was hoping to get some reading done. Lotan ended up being anything but silent. When I arrived I noticed the sound of music drifting through the air. Even though I couldn't see many people, I could hear them. For three days there was the constant sound of laughter, music, and chatter.

I wasn't excluded from this, either. Not an hour after I arrived I had already made a few friends my age who came up to me in the dining hall at dinner and asked me who I was and what I was doing there. (I think they wanted to practice their English, too). They were open, blunt, and friendly. They invited me to have tea with them outdoors at dusk, to look at the stars from a tall, open tower, and to come to "the pub" that they organized for area youth to meet up and socialize. We stayed up late into the night and talked about everything. I was happily overwhelmed as I

soaked up their culture like a sponge. When my last day rolled around I didn't want to leave. I was so comfortable: I was doing yoga on the lawn in the sunshine, petting the wandering dogs, and trying to practice my minimal Hebrew on the young children, who laughed and ran around me in circles. I had friends to say goodbye to when I left. I had never been in a place as friendly as this. Lotan was like something from a dream. I felt like I had been there for years.

Kibbutz Lotan defines their unique group identity as a "...commitment to Jewish creativity and our life in a fragile desert ecosystem..."<sup>89</sup> They use religious rationale to promote ecological sustainability. Founded in 1983,<sup>90</sup> Lotan has proven to be the poster-child of my project because as a community they are focused on dedicating their lifework to environmental sustainability; Lotan is what I thought of when I used to think of kibbutzim. Their unique efforts are consciously justified through Jewish ideology and socialist ideals. Their mission statement, written in 1997 expresses a desire "to till the earth and preserve it,' in our home, our region, the country and the world."<sup>91</sup> Community members and volunteers work to find unique ways "to live in harmony" with the Arava desert.<sup>92</sup> They also cite the Jewish philosophy of *Tikun Olam*<sup>93</sup> as inspiration. "We work towards the betterment of ourselves, our people and the world. Our home is a community of *Shlichut*, outreach. Our way of life constitutes a message we wish to impart to those who enter our gates and to the circles of society through which we pass."<sup>94</sup> During a personal interview, Rabbi Leah Benami, a long-time Lotan member, explained to me the reasons behind Lotan members' emphasis on ecology:

---

<sup>89</sup> "Kibbutz Lotan—Identity Card," (pamphlet, Lotan, Israel).

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> "Kibbutz Lotan Mission Statement: Our Path to the Fulfillment of Our Vision," (mission statement, Lotan, Israel, 1997).

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Repairing the world, in Hebrew.

<sup>94</sup> "Kibbutz Lotan Mission Statement."

We are involved in environmental issues and education from an ideological basis, it's not something we say 'oh we can make money from this trend.' It grew out of the belief that we are living in a part of the world and the Jewish state that is fragile and our impact can be seen very clearly. As you drive down the highway from Be'er Sheva, the closest large city, you see lots of desert besides the *moshavim* and *kibbutzim*. Where there are people living there can be pollution. You see trash thrown out and neglect on the side of the roads. How we take care of this bit of real estate is much more than an economic balance sheet. It is something that we make decisions about something we feel is in line with our values. One of the slogans is that when G-d spoke to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden G-d said, 'the earth is yours to work it, to till it, and to guard/tend it,' it's not just 'it's yours full stop' but it's yours for a dual purpose. You should work it; it won't simply give you everything you need, but you don't have to use it up...<sup>95</sup>

Rabbi Benami's quote shows how Lotan members rationalize their environmental dedication.

They see sustainability as more than a financial necessity but as a human duty to the earth and to G-d. The magazine *Reform Judaism* asked one of Lotan's founding members, Alex Cicelsky, how Jewish teachings inform Lotan's commitment to community and environmental awareness.

Cicelsky replied,

When we built Lotan in Israel's Arava desert, far from the centers of activity, we followed former Prime Minister Ben Gurion's call to 'conquer the wilderness.' Today, as it was for our ancestors who passed through here after the Exodus, the wilderness experience transforms us politically, socially, and spiritually. Here in the gardens that we plant in the desert, Genesis 2:15 is our teacher, advising us, in two Hebrew words, how to nurture the environment in order to realize its potential as a Garden of Eden: *l'ov-da ulshomra*, meaning 'to till and to tend.' The word *ovda* (till) has the same root as *avodah* (the word for both work and worship). So, on the physical side, *ovda* means work—work the land, grow food—and spiritually, its meanings are prayer, appreciation, even reverence.<sup>96</sup>

These two quote beautifully capture Lotan members' attitudes towards the earth and one another.

Lotan members pursue their ideology through ecological activities including: recycling in unique ways, tilling organic gardens, reusing solid waste, alternative building, and birding and nature

---

<sup>95</sup> Rabbi Leah Benami, in discussion with the author, December 2014.

<sup>96</sup> "Earthcare," *Reform Judaism*, 27.

walks. Lotan is also a part of the “Eco-Tourism” movement and members of the Global Eco-village Network.<sup>97</sup>

Recycling waste is done through three means on Lotan. First, there is a large recycling center, which was one of the first in Israel to exist. All items are separated into different bins depending on their type, in order to assure that they will be recycled properly. The roof of the recycling center is made of solar panels. Micki Herman, the general secretary of Lotan, explained to me how recycling was the members’ first foray into ecology during the early 1990s.<sup>98</sup> Rabbi Benami told me that she could not remember when the collective ecological ideology started exactly, but she and Micki agreed that a small group of dedicated members began recycling as well as planting an organic garden well before it was popular in the rest of Israel.<sup>99</sup> Rabbi Daniel Burstyn, kibbutz member and groundskeeper, told me that around 1993 or 1994 the groundskeeper who preceded him chose not to use pesticides on any of the gardens. Subsequently, the community commitment to organic gardening escalated.<sup>100</sup> Lotan recycles organic waste and makes it into compost “for use in the organic garden.” Some of the wastewater from the kibbutz is purified through a man-made wetland.<sup>101</sup> Finally, Kibbutz Lotan uses items that are non-recyclable or hard plastic as the inside “structure” (i.e. insulation) for their desert mud-built structures.

At Kibbutz Lotan there is an entire neighborhood made of mud, which members call the *boostan*.<sup>102</sup> There are also mud benches, walls and overhangs with seating scattered throughout the kibbutz. The structures in the *boostan* are geodesic domes. The students at Lotan’s Center for

---

<sup>97</sup> “Kibbutz Lotan—Identity Card.”

<sup>98</sup> Micki Herman, in discussion with the author, December 2014.

<sup>99</sup> Rabbi Benami, in discussion with the author

<sup>100</sup> Rabbi Daniel Burstyn, in discussion with the author, December 2014.

<sup>101</sup> “Kibbutz Lotan—Identity Card.”

<sup>102</sup> Translates directly to “orchard” in Hebrew.

Creative Ecology sleep in these domes during one of the several programs offered to students desiring to learn more about ecology. The *boostan* also has a solar oven, a mud oven, composting toilets and solar-heated showers: it is a true eco-neighborhood.<sup>103</sup> Mud building did not start at Kibbutz Lotan but was brought over by a woman who watched the process of creating mud structures in India. She then helped the Lotan members create mud buildings based on her experience and knowledge. The members are always experimenting with this process and with different recycled materials. To create mud structures, sand, earth and straw are mixed with water to make the mud that becomes the exterior. The sand serves as the mass, the clay makes the mixture sticky, and the straw is like the skeleton. Sometimes manure is used in the mixture, too. In the desert it takes about a week for the buildings to dry before they are covered with recycled oil (leftover from the Kibbutz kitchen) and turpentine. This mixture is reapplied every four years in order to keep the water from seeping into the mud blend. Old discarded tires, which the Israeli city of Eilat pays the Kibbutz to take, are placed under the mud walls and benches in order to give the structures “good shoes” and prohibit any water from seeping into the creations. Sometimes old bottles or garbage that take a long time to disintegrate are placed inside the walls of the mud structures with wire around them to serve as insulation. These items are displayed through “truth windows” in the structures so that eco-tourism guests and students can understand what goes into the construction and how Lotan uses recycled materials as insulation for its mud structures.<sup>104</sup>

Besides recycling and building with mud, Lotan is also conscious when choosing plants to survive in the harsh Arava desert climate. Rabbi Daniel Burstyn, the head groundskeeper, explained to me the difficulties of gardening amid fragile environmental conditions. He said

---

<sup>103</sup> Courtney Rosser, “An Apprenticeship in Green Living,” *Tikkun*, Sept/Oct 2009, 26.

<sup>104</sup> Assaf Barack (kibbutz volunteer), in discussion with the author, December 2014.

there are five hindrances to plant survival at Lotan: high heat, high evaporation, high solar radiation, salty water, and high lime content in the soil (because the kibbutz is built in a valley of limestone). These factors prohibit Daniel from growing typical desert plants. Instead, he grows plants that thrive in the harsh Mediterranean climate, as well as Australian and African plants that are known for their ability to handle unsympathetic soil conditions. He learned some of these techniques from people in the neighboring desert kibbutzim Yotvata and Ketura.<sup>105</sup> The ability to work with nature instead of changing or removing the soil shows that Lotan not only preaches environmental awareness and preservation but they also practice their ideals of leaving the earth the way they found it.

Adding to their environmental awareness is a well-utilized car share. According to Micki, the kibbutz does not have hybrid cars due to their exorbitant cost. Instead they have diesel cars and trucks, which run on recycling cooking oil produced by students in the *boostan*.<sup>106</sup> Rabbi Benami informed me that the leftover vegetables that are not sold to members or workers in the small shop on the kibbutz are also made into biofuel for the stove and the shared cars.<sup>107</sup> Therefore, despite Lotan's inability to drive hybrid cars due to financial limitations, the members have still found a way to be environmentally conscious by creating their own biofuel. This entire process is much less expensive than if each individual member had his or her own vehicle and had to pay for gas and maintenance regularly.

There are other financial roadblocks, however, that are not as easily overcome. Lotan's environmental awareness is limited by their water measurement system. According to Rabbi Burstyn, the members used to track their water usage and were stricter about using less water, especially in large quantities like when they watered the gardens. In the 2000s, however, the

---

<sup>105</sup> Rabbi Burstyn, in discussion with the author.

<sup>106</sup> Micki Herman, in discussion with the author.

<sup>107</sup> Rabbi Benami, in discussion with the author.

water meter broke, making it impossible for Lotan to measure their water usage. They have not had the funds to get a new meter yet and therefore Burstyn fears they have been using more water than they used to. When I asked him about the possibility of creating a water recycling system where the gardens are watered by recycled sewage (as is common in other kibbutzim), he informed me that they tried to make one of these systems but this proved impossible because the waste from the cows on the dairy farm was too heavy to undergo the necessary filtration procedure. They had no way to separate the dairy farm waste from the household waste. Therefore, Lotan has to pay the high price to use desalinated water for all of the gardens, putting a further financial burden and energy expenditure on the kibbutz. Rabbi Burstyn also commented that simply having a dairy farm is wasteful because cows require six showers a day to keep cool in the hot summer months, using a vast amount of water. Burstyn thinks that the nature of a dairy farm is inherently opposite to their ecological beliefs and identity but the dairy farm is necessary because they have to “make ends meet” somehow.<sup>108</sup>

Despite their pursuit of ecological ethos through financial difficulties, even at Lotan there exists a minority of members who do not care about the environmental ideology. According to Rabbi Benami, people generally do not join Kibbutz Lotan specifically for their impressive ecological ethos, but rather for reasons like the emphasis on liberal Reform Judaism that Lotan also offers. Kibbutz Lotan is one of only two kibbutzim in Israel that identifies as being a part of the Reform movement. This factor has led to a dynamic wherein there are members who follow the ethos and another small group of members that chooses not to. Rabbi Benami thinks that although these individuals are rare, this coalition will always exist. I could not imagine that people are necessarily vocal about their minority opinion, so I asked Rabbi Benami how she

---

<sup>108</sup> Rabbi Burstyn, in discussion with the author.



knows that such a group exists at Lotan. She said that she has noticed how “some people put all their recycling, garbage and compost in one bag and throw it out,” even though there are several bins in the garbage area of each neighborhood, making it easy to separate garbage from recycling and organic compost if one so desired.<sup>109</sup> Member and scholar Michael Livni goes so far as to say that “One who visits Lotan’s website and then conducts an in depth visit will be struck by the apparent dissonance between the vision and reality.” He thinks that “most members” follow “some of the ideals some of the time.”<sup>110</sup>

Since Lotan is a fairly small community (there are only sixty members) it has an uncertain economic foundation. According to Dr. Livni the critical mass of eighty to one hundred members is required in order for a kibbutz to function efficiently.<sup>111</sup> In 2008 Lotan had to hire members from neighboring Kibbutz Ketura to perform some of the necessary administrative, educational, and cultural functions within their community.<sup>112</sup>

With more and more financial difficulties weighing on the shoulders of Lotan in the past decade, they have had to reach out to try and get new members to join. With this process comes the threat of getting new members who do not care about the environment. But more importantly, in order to attract new members Lotan has recently decided to change their financial system by transitioning from a socialist model to a privatized situation where all members earn their own salary either outside or inside the kibbutz and pay only a small portion of their income to the greater kibbutz pot as a “kibbutz tax.” This will not only create a financial disparity between members, like a capitalist system, but also put more unknown strains on the community’s ability to keep their environmental preservation alive. According to Micki,

---

<sup>109</sup> Rabbi Benami, in discussion with the author.

<sup>110</sup> Michael Livni, “Case Study: Kibbutz Lotan—Eco-Zionism and Kibbutz,” International Communal Studies Association Eighth International Conference, (Amana, IA), June 2004, 7.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

generally the younger generations of Israelis and immigrants want a quiet place to build their home. They do not want a community with the “rigidity” of a socialist kibbutz financial system. Since there is less and less funding each year coming from the government, in order to make themselves attractive to new members, Lotan has decided just within the past year to privatize salaries.<sup>113</sup>

Micki is hoping that the privatization change, effective in 2015, will not affect the ecological ideology of Lotan but she does think that during the upcoming transition period there will naturally be a greater effort of people to focus on their private lives as they try and “sort out” the new system and decide how much effort they can put in their nuclear home-life rather than the community. Her underlying hope is that the ecological aspect of Lotan will not entirely die out due to these circumstances. Lotan has been trying to make the ecological practices positive so that everyone wants to participate in them, not practices that are mandatory. Perhaps this effort will foster a connection to the earth that is not easily abandoned after privatization.<sup>114</sup>

Lotan faces many challenges in trying to maintain their ecological ethos during imminent privatization. In building homes for the potential new members, for example, they must consider the cost of building. Micki says there has already been some discussion within the community about what resources to use, how best to build these new structures, and what materials should be purchased. She believes the community needs to eventually reach a compromise because the new members may not have the money to be completely ecologically sound in the process of building their homes, simply because the ecologically sound materials and building processes are not as cost effective as mass produced construction. Since Lotan needs new members so desperately, however, it will have to choose which aspect is most important. Micki says that Lotan is trying to

---

<sup>113</sup> Micki Herman, in discussion with the author.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

find ways to make the environmental aspects of the community financially viable and not “money suckers.” Currently as their elected leader she is looking for outside resources to invest in their environmental projects with the hopes that the small solar power venture or Eco-Tourism business will take off soon.<sup>115</sup>

Rabbi Burstyn has no idea how the privatization changes will affect the gardens or water system at Lotan, both of which are under his jurisdiction. All he could tell me was that “people are scared” because privatization means a whole new way of life. He fears that by 2020 people will realize they do not have the money to pay for communal gardening anymore and if Lotan chooses to cut the kibbutz budget, Burstyn is “out of a job.” For the next few years at least the communal gardens are going to stay under the municipal expenses. Burstyn says this is because Lotan is attractive to people due in part to its lush greenery and ecological appeal; this is not something they are willing to cut out as they try to recruit new members.<sup>116</sup> Dr. Livni echoed Burstyn’s comment. He says the question about the ecological future of Lotan depends on members still being able to pay the communal ecological tax. If they so choose in the future to discontinue the related expenses, this will affect the ability of Lotan to maintain an ecologically motivated community.<sup>117</sup>

---

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Rabbi Burstyn, in discussion with the author.

<sup>117</sup> Dr. Michael Livni, in discussion with the author, February 2015.

## Kibbutz Lotan



From top left to right:

1. A geodesic mud dome in the *boostan*.
2. A bottle depository in the recycling center.
3. A plot of organic gardening in the *Eco Kef*<sup>118</sup>.
4. The solar electricity meter.
5. A compost bin.
6. Mud building underway.
7. An outdoor community dome (made of mud).
8. The recycling center entrance and sign—the oldest recycling center in Israel.
9. The children's playground in the *Eco Kef*.

All images by author.

<sup>118</sup> Translates to “Eco Fun,” a place on the kibbutz where tourists can learn about Lotan’s sustainability efforts.

## *Kibbutz Ketura*

Kibbutz Ketura, conversely, has had financial success, allowing them to expand their living community and industrial businesses despite the changing economy and government reduction of assistance in recent decades. Ketura's main industries are date groves, solar energy fields, a bookkeeping service for other area kibbutzim, and an algae factory. Not coincidentally, most of their businesses have to do with ecology. Ketura also houses the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies on their property and provides housing and an adjacent hotel for the students and their families respectively. The Institute is not a facet of the Kibbutz (it is an NGO) but many Ketura members work at the Institute and the students interact with the community members and volunteers.<sup>119</sup> The Arava Institute focuses on the research and study of a range of environmental concerns. According to their website "Here, the idea that nature knows no political borders is more than a belief. It is a fact, a curriculum, and a way of life."<sup>120</sup>

To further their financial endeavors, Kibbutz Ketura also rents homes to people who are potential new members. These renters pay to live on the kibbutz grounds and also pay to partake in kibbutz services, but maintain their own personal income from outside jobs. Ketura's "renting business" is financially viable while simultaneously prepping renters who are potential new members for what life is like at Ketura. In fact, member Laura Shulton says Ketura only accepts renters that would be a good fit in the future as new members.<sup>121</sup> Thanks to all of these thriving business opportunities, Ketura is generally financially stable. They have not yet privatized anything, a rarity among present-day kibbutzim. Even in their dining hall no money is exchanged and members eat all of their meals there together. Members either work on the kibbutz, contributing to the society and therefore earning their keep, or they put their individual paycheck

---

<sup>119</sup> Laura Shulton, in discussion with the author, December 2014.

<sup>120</sup> "About the Arava Institute," *The Arava Institute for Environmental Studies*, 2013, accessed Feb. 18, 2015.

<sup>121</sup> Shulton, in discussion with the author.

from outside jobs into the communal kibbutz pot. In this socialist model, each member receives the benefits associated with their living community including childcare services and after school programs, the dining hall, communal gardens and living spaces, and the car share, among other benefits. Each family also receives a discretionary budget, but this budget is the same for each nuclear home, making a truly socialist and egalitarian community more plausible here than any other kibbutz I visited.<sup>122</sup>

Some of the members, however, do not believe that Ketura is as equal in finances as it used to be before the Era of Decline. Ketura member Laura Shulton, who also works at the Arava Institute, explained that in recent years the personal budget has grown larger, allowing people to spend their discretionary money on larger items and allowing a materialistic culture to seep in. For example, the Kibbutz used to pay to replace a television, fridge, or computer if it broke in any nuclear family home. Nowadays, since the discretionary budget is larger, people are expected to replace these items on their own, causing differences in the products purchased.<sup>123</sup> Furthermore, Laura says that some people have money from “past lives” (if they joined the kibbutz fairly recently) allowing them to dip into personal funds and take vacations or purchase items that otherwise would not be available from Ketura.<sup>124</sup> This distinction is important because it proves that neoliberalism changed even the most socialist of communities that have “retained” their non-privatized model. By allowing new members to supplement the original generation of *kibbutznik* communities, the Kibbutz culture changed, even if the community did not privatize. Ecological awareness, however, has remained a steadfast ideology at Ketura since its inception.

Kibbutz Ketura is formally associated with the Jewish Conservative Movement and uses Judaism as a support for their ecological awareness, though in a different way than Kibbutz

---

<sup>122</sup> Shulton, in discussion with the author.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

Lotan. Ketura does not have an official Rabbi and frankly Yoram Hoffman<sup>125</sup> notes this is because “We don’t need anyone telling us what to do;”<sup>126</sup> they pride themselves on being Conservative and observant Jews, yet liberal thinkers. Ketura members feel a deep connection to the earth. At inception, Ketura was built with Eco-Zionist motivations, but Michael Livni contends that this ideology has since morphed and become less stringent.<sup>127</sup> Since the Arava Institute allows and encourages Arabs and Jews alike to participate and study together in an effort to foster peace through environmental education, Livni argues that it is impossible for Ketura to still fit proper Eco-Zionist protocol. Ketura is now precluded from being a formal venue for Eco-Zionist ideology.<sup>128</sup>

Despite losing the formal Eco-Zionist label, Yoram explained to me that there is an ever-present rationale behind environmentalism on Ketura. He says members feel “a constant battle against progress” when discussing industrialization and development of their desert area. These topics are often discussed and debated in their community.<sup>129</sup> One example of this is the community’s reaction to a recently proposed plan to put a high-speed rail train from Be’er Sheva to Eilat along Route 90, passing directly in front of the Kibbutz entrance. As Yoram and I sat up on top of a mountain in the desert, looking down on the expansive green oasis of Ketura, Yoram turned to me and said that the high-speed train planned, “is madness.” He believes that there is something about the solitary nature escape that would be ruined by the construction and then daily noise of this magnitude. Yoram, as a representative member of Ketura, does not understand how people can destroy the earth and the serenity of the desert, yet he mentions that in recent years he has been surprised and saddened by the changes to the natural environment that have

---

<sup>125</sup> Hoffman is a longtime member, current gardener and the “ecology man” at Kibbutz Ketura.

<sup>126</sup> Yoram Hoffman, in discussion with the author, December 2014.

<sup>127</sup> Livni, “Ecology, Eco-Zionism, and the Kibbutz,” 310.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Hoffman, in discussion with the author.

inevitably occurred. Yoram says that Ketura as a community believes that they should be able to live in nature and look out at the undisturbed mountains. Now there is a huge oil line in their backyard, which was installed as a joint project between Iran and Israel (the last collaborative project before the political break). This project has had lasting affects. As a community living right near the oil line, Ketura fears that a line break could mean devastating consequences for their green community, covering their entire property in oil.<sup>130</sup>

As they battle construction and “progress” in the desert, Ketura members still pursue their ecological ideology. Recently there was a debacle over the community getting a telephone tower. The telephone company wanted to put the tower in the front gate area of the kibbutz, but the members put up a fuss, requiring that the obtrusive object be placed behind the kibbutz discretely in the sand and not on their coveted, lush green-space. The company finally agreed to this and Yoram reported to me triumphantly that the subsequent phone service has been perfect even though the tower is not in the front yard.<sup>131</sup>

Besides a general, underlying, ideology of protecting nature and their sacred space, Ketura also follows important procedures that distinguish itself as ecologically friendly and environmentally cognizant. Through recycling, a special water desalinization process, composting efforts, organic gardens and solar energy, Ketura is at the cutting edge of living sustainably. Its date fields are watered with recycled community wastewater, saving the energy of producing desalinated water in large quantities while simultaneously reusing water. Like other ecologically friendly kibbutzim Ketura has a recycling center area on their grounds, encouraging members to separate their trash and place glass, plastic, and organic waste in separate containers. Unique to Ketura, however, is the new compost machine. Yoram says this

---

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.



machine is a pilot project given to their community by the Hevel Eilat Regional Council, of which they are members. The machine takes organic waste from the dining hall and transforms it into soil, which Yoram then uses for his organic garden and for the communal gardens around Ketura. While he says this machine is frustrating and members are still trying to get used to it, he is pleased that they have an opportunity to try using composted soil for his organic garden.<sup>132</sup>

While several kibbutzim have water desalinization plants on-site (especially those in the desert), Ketura's setup is unique. Yoram showed me how the brackish water that is expelled from the desalinization plant is funneled down through tubes into a natural, grove-like hot tub. The water is lukewarm and sits in the ground like a hot spring year round. Kibbutz members, volunteers, and Arava students enjoy the pool of water as a place to relax, making good use of this innocuous "waste" runoff from the desalinization plant. Additionally, although the algae factory uses a lot of water for production, Ketura is conscious of this and has been using desalinated water since 1981. This helps to cut back on energy costs and freshwater consumption, an ever-present issue in the Arava desert.<sup>133</sup>

Solar energy is an ecologically friendly alternative to the electric and gas present in much of Israel. Ketura is at the cutting edge of producing and using solar energy, and in 2011 created the first commercial solar field in Israel under the umbrella of parent company "Arava Power Company."<sup>134</sup> The Arava Power Company is trying to supply green solar power to the whole southern region on a commercial basis.<sup>135</sup> Ketura calls its branch "Ketura Sun." This includes twenty acres with 18,500 photovoltaic solar panels on the opposite side of Route 90 from their

---

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> "Company Profile," *Arava Power Company*, Accessed Feb. 18, 2015.

<sup>135</sup> Livni, "Ecology, Eco-Zionism, and the Kibbutz," 311.

living compound. They produce nine million kilowatt hours of energy per year.<sup>136</sup> Currently they sell the energy they produce back to Israel, which is then sold to area kibbutzim. Ketura Sun is in the process of building another field of even larger size to continue reaping the profit from this enterprise while simultaneously using sustainable means to produce clean energy. According to the Ketura Sun website, “Over the course of 20 years, Ketura Sun will offset the production of approximately 125,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide. Co2 emission reductions by Ketura Sun are the equivalent of planting 180,000 trees.”<sup>137</sup>

Besides these institutional methods of sustainability, Ketura also performs common kibbutz shared resource tactics to offset its ecological footprint. The communal laundry room still exists on Ketura, and although some people have used their discretionary budgets to purchase small washing machines for their nuclear homes, Laura Shulton told me it is oftentimes easier to take your laundry to the communal laundry room.<sup>138</sup> Additionally, the car share program at Ketura is heavily used. Laura told me that using the shared cars can often be logistically difficult because you must sign up for them on the computer, making it difficult to be spontaneous and take a day trip without previous planning. Members also have a rotating job duty of driving other members to the nearby town of Yotvata and back on a bus-like route all afternoon. Ketura members are not allowed to own personal cars so the car share is utilized constantly.<sup>139</sup>

Based on Kibbutz Ketura’s present financial success and simultaneous development of ecological projects, their environmental future seems promising. Unlike Kibbutz Lotan, their financially successful businesses have allowed them to maintain a socialist model of living

---

<sup>136</sup> “Ketura Sun.” *Arava Power Company*, Accessed Feb. 18, 2015.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Shulton, in discussion with the author.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

without needing to privatize. I fear less for their forthcoming ability to maintain an ecological ethos.

I hypothesized that kibbutz environmental practices will survive The Era of Decline where “necessity,” not Zionist and Jewish ideology, was the original reason for their environmental practices. Lotan would therefore appear to prove my hypothesis. Their struggle in adopting a new economic system may have a bearing on their ability to practice environmentalism. When environmental practices are compatible with financial stability in ideological communities, however, my hypothesis may be disproved. At Ketura for example, we see that the algae factory and solar fields are two practices that promote environmental ethos while simultaneously bringing the community financial reward. At Lotan no such luxury exists because their ecological businesses have not been as fruitful. It appears that in adjusting to neoliberalism, an ecological ethos has been a hindrance to Lotan but a success to Ketura. Thus I can only conclude that my hypothesis is reliant on financial success.

## Kibbutz Ketura



From top left to right:

1. The water desalination system at Ketura.
2. The new industrial composting machine.
3. A view of Ketura in the desert from the top of a nearby mountain.
4. The desalination runoff pool.
5. The famed Ketura cell phone tower.
6. An outdoor community center at Ketura.

All images by author.

## Chapter 4: Recently Ecologically-Friendly Kibbutzim

As I met with people in all different types of kibbutzim, I realized that most kibbutzim did not have an inherent ecological ethos like Lotan and Ketura. Most partake in environmental practices to some degree in but this is rarely because of a distinct desire to promote environmentalism as a cause. Rather, the people in these communities see the earth as their home and treat the land with care because they think that is the only way they will survive. For some kibbutzim this means more environmental practices than for others. The kibbutzim featured in this chapter have recently taken on ecological projects and practices. They each fit the theme of necessity environmentalism because pursuing ecological paths made their chance of survival during the Era of Decline higher.

### *Kibbutz Be'eri*

When arriving at the gates of Kibbutz Be'eri, one would never guess that this quiet community is only a couple of miles from the border of Palestinian held Gaza. Although it is situated in the tense northeastern corner of the Arava desert, Be'eri has vast and lush gardens that bloom in an array of green and pinks. Be'eri has a peaceful aura. Children ride around on bicycles, dropping them haphazardly in the lawn of their neighbor's yard without even a hesitation to tie them up as they run off to find friends. Everywhere I walked with my guide Yuval Bar, people stopped him to congratulate him on the birth of his new grandson. When Yuval told me, in a solemn tone, that just last summer during the most recent battle the Kibbutz was used as a war base for Israeli soldiers fighting in Gaza, it was almost hard to believe. It was ironic to me that a place so serene, so lush, and so "safe" was so close to one of the most war-torn stretches of land in the world. This fact was not easily forgotten during my visit, however.

The community was built with iron roofs and walls. Everywhere we walked there were megaphones launched high in the air to provide an emergency siren system and bomb shelters to the left and right. Yuval told me with a shudder how scary it is when the sirens go off: “Like something from my nightmares.”<sup>140</sup>

Be’eri was strategically placed in such a volatile zone. The community was established in 1946 following the Yom Kippur War. Members cite their history of establishment as a project of turning the desert green. They did this because treating the earth well was the only way to make viable farming and a comfortable living space in the arid land.<sup>141</sup> Be’eri holds the largest in population of any of the kibbutzim that I visited. It boasts an impressive 1,050 members and holds many acres of land, including surrounding agricultural fields and a nature preserve.<sup>142</sup> The main industry is a printing factory called Be’eri Printers, established in 1950, which is on the grounds of the community. The printing factory and community life are quite separate and therefore would require two distinct ecological analyses. My fieldwork did not produce much information about the ecological aspects of Be’eri Printers. I focused primarily on the environmental practices in the living community.<sup>143</sup>

The little information I did find about Be’eri Printers shows that they claim to be dedicated to environmental protection. They use “high standards of production and responsible management of the resources...”<sup>144</sup> It was difficult to find any detailed information explaining this further, even while visiting in person. Obviously as a printing company questions about paper waste, resource use during production, and chemical use arise, but with little data it is difficult to draw any conclusions about Be’eri’s dedication to sustainability or protection of the

---

<sup>140</sup> Yuval Bar, in discussion with the author, December 2014.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> “Environmental Protection,” *Be’eri Printers*, Accessed Feb. 18, 2015.

environment. Online, the factory highlights their longtime participation in the “Beautiful Industry in a Beautiful Israel” competition, which is managed by the Council for Beautiful Israel and the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labor.<sup>145</sup> According to Be’eri Printers website, “The goal of the competition is to promote environmental care, improve the appearance of Israel’s manufacturing environment, and benefit human welfare and the community as part of Be’eri’s overall concept of the quality of life.”<sup>146</sup> They also mention that “Be’eri Printers has consistently received the highest score: Five Beauty Stars, in all the years that it has participated in the ‘Paper and Printing’ category of the competition.”<sup>147</sup> Beyond this, however, there is no data to conclude that the printing factory is environmentally conscious in present day or in the past. There is also no way to find the criteria for a score of Five Stars, making this measurement almost irrelevant.

The community life at Kibbutz Be’eri is a different story. Within the last decade Kibbutz member (and my guide) Yuval Bar has taken up a unique project to promote recycling in the community and has become a leader of recycling in all of Israel. Communities and individuals travel from all over the country to tour his “recycling *momlecha*”<sup>148</sup> and ask him how to create similar projects of their own. Yuval explained to me how his recycling plan was ahead of the regional municipal council and their recycling program but that now the council has trucks to come to collect the recycling. This development started subsequent to the inception of his program. Yuval says he started the recycling project because he wanted to make a positive difference for future generations and he wanted to leave behind a legacy of bettering his Kibbutz.<sup>149</sup>

---

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Momlecha means “kingdom” in Hebrew.

<sup>149</sup> Yuval Bar, in discussion with the author.

Yuval's recycling program has both classic and innovative ways of reusing goods. First he showed me the neighborhood recycling areas. There are several areas sprinkled around the kibbutz in convenient spaces for the adjacent nuclear homes. Members bring their trash to the area closest to their home, separate their recycling based on type into several different bins, and then put their organic waste into a compost bin. All of the compost that is collected is taken to the periphery of the kibbutz grounds to be made into soil for the community gardens. Trucks provided by the municipal council pick up the separated recycling each week. Through this process there is very little trash that is not recycled or composted.<sup>150</sup>

Unique to Yuval's recycling program, however (and probably how he gained such fame) is the *momlecha*: one central place near the Kibbutz entrance where members take items they no longer want or use. Other people come and exchange or just take items they want. Therefore, the *momlecha* is constantly changing because people are always bringing in items and taking away other items. Yuval says this has created a community mentality where "If someone needs something, they come to the kingdom to get it" before leaving the kibbutz grounds to find the desired item elsewhere.<sup>151</sup> The area itself is large and items are separated by category. One part is all electronic goods, one region is household furniture, and housewares sit on another table, while artwork is scattered variously about. Central to the *momlecha* is the children's playground, which is an area where recycled materials are arranged in such a fashion that it makes a well suited space for children to play in. Since this space is always changing, it stays interesting to the member children who constantly use it. Yuval says the *momlecha* is one of the most popular

---

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.



places for families to gather on the weekends because the children love to play in it and it is outdoors.<sup>152</sup>

This creative and unique way of recycling exemplifies the socialist sharing mentality that is also present in Be'eri's financial structure. Be'eri, like Ketura, has not privatized at all. They still have a communal laundry room, a communal dining hall, and a successful car share.<sup>153</sup> They are a community that seems content sharing goods and resources, cutting down on their ecological footprint just by virtue of living simply and sharing appliances and services.

While it is difficult to quantify the success of Yuval's project, there are some numbers that point to his accomplishment. Before Yuval started his project there were 140 trucks per year that came to Be'eri to remove general community trash. This trash would be taken to a landfill. After the first year his recycling project was implemented only seventeen trucks were needed to haul out trash throughout the year. That is almost a ninety percent reduction. Now there are less than ten trucks per year that come to take away trash for a landfill. All the rest of Be'eri's waste is recycled or composted. Additionally, they do not burn any trash at Be'eri. Yuval told me that he is conscious of the damaging affects of burning waste on the environment. He does not believe that it is sustainable to burn waste and therefore says that at Be'eri "we fight against doing that" even though this practice is a common way to get rid of trash in Southern Israel.<sup>154</sup>

Besides a unique recycling system, Be'eri also has a couple of other recent projects that show its environmental practices. For example, Be'eri just started using donkeys to mow the grass instead of electric or gas powered lawn mowers. Yuval says right now they are just in the experiment phase of donkey mowing. In the winter the donkeys do not eat the grass quickly enough. They are still trying to balance this newer ecological experiment. Additionally, Be'eri

---

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

has recently implemented solar panels on the roofs of nuclear homes and community buildings. They are looking for new ways to obtain or create clean energy.<sup>155</sup>

It is difficult to pinpoint what changes, if any, Be'eri underwent during or after The Era of Decline. Since their printing business is so successful, it allows members such as Yuval to have the “free time” to start projects such as the recycling program. If neoliberalism had hit their community harder it is possible Yuval would have had to work outside the kibbutz due to the financial constraints of privatization and therefore would not have had the same time to put into creating the *momlecha* and the rest of his recycling program. The fact that Be'eri was financially stable during the Era of Decline made it possible for Yuval to work on bettering the community. Much like Maslow's hierarchy of needs where self-actualization and higher thinking can only occur when basic needs are met first, Yuval and Be'eri prove that environmental practices are plausible in kibbutzim when basic needs are provided for.<sup>156</sup>

---

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Saul McLeod, “Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs,” *Simply Psychology*, 2007.

## Kibbutz Be'eri



From top left to right:

1. Yuval Bar and I in front of a Be'eri neighborhood recycling center.
2. The sign in Hebrew that says "Ha'Momlecha" (kingdom) at the momlecha entrance.
3. A special recycling jug for collecting batteries to recycle.
4. A view of the momlecha.
5. A section of art at the momlecha.
6. A community cactus garden that borders the momlecha.

All images by author.

### *The Meggido Regional Council*

Another newcomer to environmental awareness in Israel is the Meggido Regional Council, a group of kibbutzim and *moshavim* located in the northern territory. Regional councils are elected local government authorities in Israel.<sup>157</sup> The Meggido Region consists of the following kibbutzim: Dalya, Dafna, Ein HaShofet, Gal'ed, Givat Oz, Hazorea, Megiddo, Mishmar HaEmek, Ramat HaShofet, and Ramot Menashe. The following *moshavim* are also members of the Council: Ein HaEmek, Eliakim, Midrakh Oz, and Yokneam Moshava. At Kibbutz Dafna, Peleg Itay the Director of Export and Sales for their footwear industry, informed me that the Meggido Regional Council is one of the most environmentally conscious regional councils in all of Israel. The members feel a strong sense of community and responsibility to one another and to the earth in this region, more so than in other Israeli regions. This is perhaps because their geographic distance from one another is quite small or perhaps because they are all small, homogenous establishments.<sup>158</sup>

The Meggido communities are able to work together to create environmental change. Their dedication to the environment started in 2011 when they asked to join the World Club of Biospheres, a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) regulated program. According to Hagar Ruevni, the coordinator and current director of the biosphere program, area residents came up with the idea of a biosphere. She says that around 2006 residents asked one another at how they wanted their area to look in ten years. They decided that they wanted to create a healthy relationship between nature and their use of the land. Residents began to make a master plan and quickly realized that their model looked like biosphere regions that they knew from other places in the world. The leaders visited all the

---

<sup>157</sup> "Israeli Government & Politics: How Does the Israeli Government Work?" *Jewish Virtual Library* created by the American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, 2015.

<sup>158</sup> Peleg Itay, in discussion with the author, December 2014.

settlements in the municipality. Members worked in teams to decide how they want each specific facet of the biosphere to work including tourism, economy, and construction along with other areas. The Council was able to reach a consensus in a relatively short period of time.

Interestingly, UNESCO did not provide the Council with any money to fund the project because Israel is a developed country, but thankfully members were able to secure most of the funding they needed from the Israeli government. Hagar pointed out that now that the biosphere is fully functioning the Regional Council is responsible for paying for everything, meaning the community members are paying out of pocket.<sup>159</sup> This is a testament to their high level of dedication to this ecological undertaking and their collective desire to preserve the land.

Hagar finds it important to note that the Ramont Menashe Biosphere Region<sup>160</sup> is not a reserve. Reserves imply completely untouched land. The biosphere, however, has three separate zones: a core zone, a transition zone and a buffer zone. The three zones vary from untouched land to factory grounds and living space (see the image on page sixty). This model allows community members to use the land for human growth and living space while simultaneously assuring the sustainability of their fragile region.<sup>161</sup>

Surprisingly, almost all of the kibbutzim in the Meggido Regional Council currently have factories in order to generate profit. There is a plan to build a large Karmel Industry Area sometime in 2015 or 2016.<sup>162</sup> The point of the biosphere region is to strike a balance between allowing people to work and use the earth for financial welfare while simultaneously protecting the land and not overusing or overdeveloping it. According to Dr. Livni, “Biospheres will impact on the environmental behavior of all the settlements and will connect the area’s ecological

---

<sup>159</sup> Hagar Ruevni, in discussion with the author, December 2014.

<sup>160</sup> The official name of the biosphere region, created by the Meggido Regional Council.

<sup>161</sup> Ruevni, in discussion with the author.

<sup>162</sup> Karmel is the name of a nearby mountain and town in North Israel.

endeavor to an international framework.”<sup>163</sup> To implement their recent project the Meggido Regional Council has been working with already established factories, making them more environmentally conscious and changing some of their wasteful habits. Hagar says the Council will not close down a factory if it is not “up to par” but it will require the factory to change the methods it is currently using in order to become compliant. Per UNESCO rules, if a new factory is planned in the region, such as the incoming Karmel Industry Area, the new factory must pass strict regulations. Furthermore, the biosphere has strict requirements about landscape preservation and factory maintenance, meaning that even with factories the communities are conscious of how they are treating the earth.<sup>164</sup>

Cleaning the water was another positive environmental project the Meggido Region undertook following the establishment of the biosphere region. Community members removed cattle from the streams, thereby making it impossible for them to continue roaming around and defecating in the water supply. Before this initiative the cattle were infecting the streams and making the water unusable for agriculture. Since implementing these changes, however, the cattle have been moved to smaller more specific areas to drink. The water is now clean and available for agricultural use.<sup>165</sup>

The biosphere regulations also attempted to change members’ wasteful behavior. To do this the Regional Council encourages people to recycle more and waste less through formal education programs. According to Hagar, communities have started recycling programs that include separating organic and non-organic garbage with special boxes for glass and plastic respectively.<sup>166</sup> These education programs are an important step in assuring that all community

---

<sup>163</sup> Livni, “Ecology, Eco-Zionism and the Kibbutz,” 311.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ruevni, in discussion with the author.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

members, not just the leaders and developers, are aware of the necessity of environmental awareness.

Despite these advances, clean energy and energy consumption are still debated topics amongst the communities in the Council. There have been questions about whether or not wind energy is a plausible alternative to their current method of electric energy. The first question is if their geographic area produces enough wind to render wind turbines reasonable. Second, Hagar worries that bats and other birds might fly into the turbines and die, effectively raising the insect population since birds naturally control the insect population. In an agricultural setting, offsetting this balance could be devastating to area farmers.<sup>167</sup> While these questions are being debated, the Council has been testing small solar panels through a pilot project. However, Hagar told me that soon all of area industries would be switching over to gas power per new Israeli statewide policy: within the next five years Israel will be completing a large gas pipeline throughout the entirety of the country to service all of the industrial factories.<sup>168</sup> Therefore, the possibility of future wind and/or solar power would only be for residential and community purposes.

Although some barriers exist to creating a perfectly sustainable biosphere, the Meggido Regional Council has the motivation to continue their project. Recent Israeli and older European regulations require that exported products come from environmentally sustainable factories. Hagar relayed to me that prior to the implementation of biosphere regulations, many of the factories were already “quite clean” because they had to follow the strict European regulations.<sup>169</sup> Additionally, all of Israel is experiencing a new wave of environmental policy and regulations of late. The Legal 500 wrote in 2012 that,

---

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ruveni, in discussion with the author.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.



This new generation of environmental regulation, mostly introduced and promoted by the Israeli Ministry of Environmental Protection (MOEP), is based upon one common principle - the adoption of modern and internationally-accepted environmental norms and principles, focusing primarily on those reflected in EU environmental directives. The polluter-pays principle, the precautionary principle, life cycle analysis, transparency and public participation - all of which are well-rooted environmental concepts in developed countries - were swiftly introduced into the Israeli environmental legal sphere, along with the application of best available techniques (BAT) standards.<sup>170</sup>

This article helps to explain why many factories in the Meggido Regional Council were already beginning to adopt new regulations based on recent Israeli directives before the biosphere was even created. The creation of the biosphere was perfectly timed in conjunction with the new requirements from the Israeli Ministry of Agriculture. For example, Kibbutz Dalya has a factory that produces soap and other industrial cleaning products as their main form of income. The changes in pollution output and waste in recent years was mostly due to the new government regulations, not the subsequent biosphere regulations.<sup>171</sup>

Although the creation of a biosphere is heartening, the ability these distinct communities have to compromise and create an environmental biosphere plan is probably due to their homogeneity. Their recent ecological feat is impressive but not representative of what other regions in Israel or the world could be capable of. As Hagar mentioned, all of the area settlements are exclusively Jewish Israelis. She does not believe that a project of this magnitude could have been possible if groups with differing races, religions or nationalities had been involved, simply because ideologies and viewpoints vary so vastly between different people-groups.<sup>172</sup>

---

<sup>170</sup> Herzog Fox & Neeman Law Office, "The Coming of Age of Environmental Regulation in Israel – Recent Aligning with Stringent EU Standa," *The Legal 500 Israel*, December 2012.

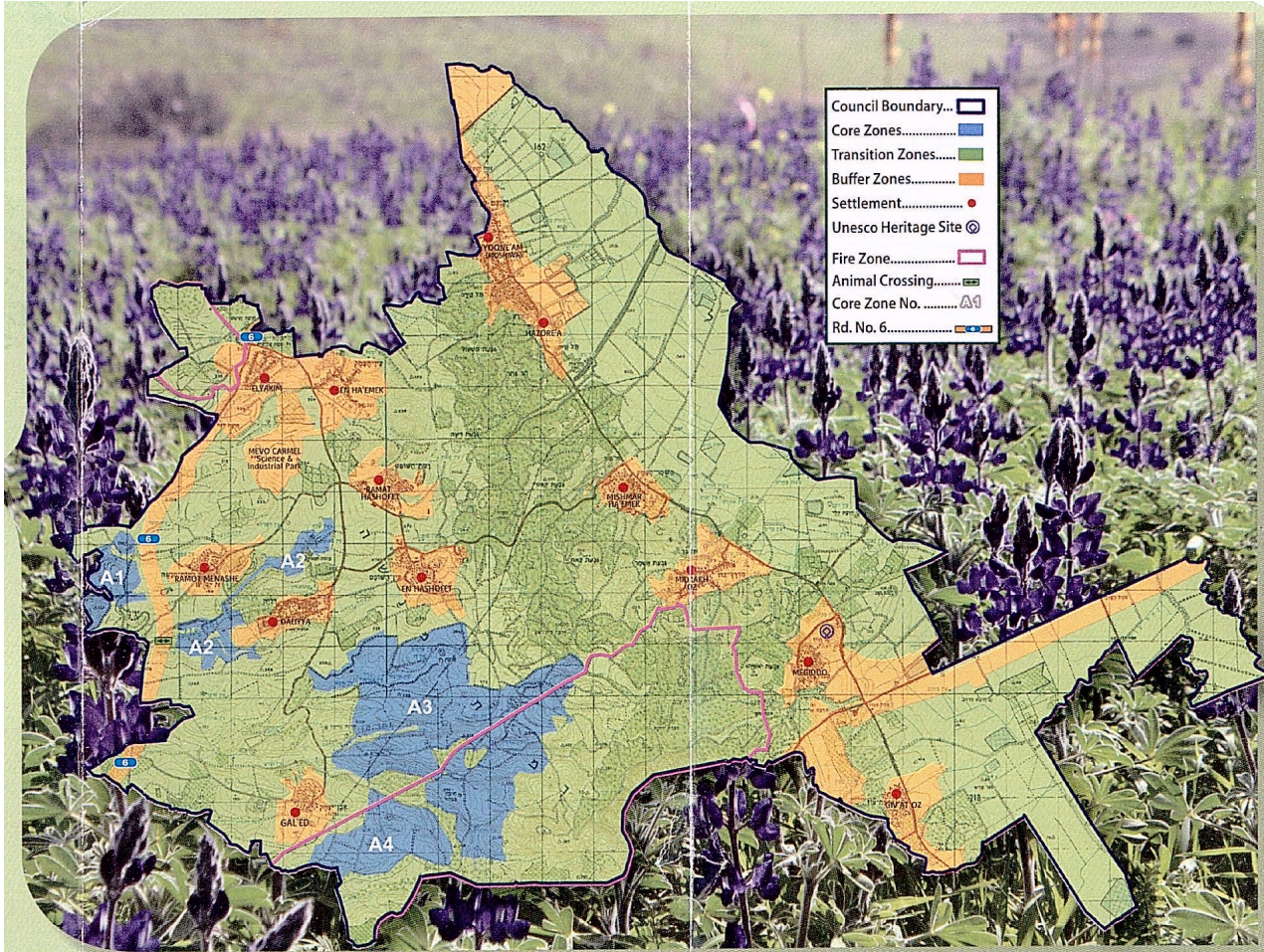
<sup>171</sup> Ruevni, in discussion with the author.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.



The Meggido Region's newfound environmental practices may be helping them adjust to neoliberalism. Since they are trading more with capitalist countries in a post-neoliberal world, they need to produce products that those countries will accept. Many capitalist countries require environmental standards on exports that kibbutz factories did not use before. Therefore, although more factories may have been established in the Meggido Region after The Era of Decline to help kibbutzim make ends meet, the biosphere environmental rules have regulated these factories and helped the communities both: 1) ensure business from Western countries with strict environmental regulations, and 2) promote sustainability in their region.

A map of the Meggido Regional Council's Ramont Menashe Biosphere



## **Chapter 5: Ecologically Sound Kibbutzim Without an Environmental Ideology; “Necessity Environmentalism” to a Tee**

Several of the kibbutzim I studied during my fieldwork, and I argue the majority of kibbutzim in general, are environmentally friendly because it is easier for them. Each of the kibbutzim discussed in this chapter have found unique ways to be ecologically friendly without having to spend an inordinate amount of money to do so. In fact, many of these kibbutzim have found it less expensive to run their communities with environmentally sound practices. While some countries see sustainable practices as difficult, time consuming, and expensive, these communities have found just the opposite. These kibbutzim successfully use environmental practices to save natural resources, time, and money.

### *Kibbutz Dafna*

While up in the North near the Lebanese border I visited Kibbutz Dafna, which is a part of the Meggido Regional Council. They have a successful factory that produces shoes near the world-popular Naot factory. In fact, Naot recently purchased Dafna. Although Dafna started out only producing riding boots they now make an array of shoes, one pair of which was featured in *The Hunger Games* films. As a successful company Dafna realizes that they use environmental practices to stay profitable as a business entity and they are not afraid to admit it. When I visited Dafna I spoke to Peleg Itay, the director of export and sales at the Kibbutz footwear factory, and On Factor,<sup>173</sup> a community member who has lived in Dafna for decades. After my interviews On showed me around the factory and the community grounds.

---

<sup>173</sup> Pronounced “own” in English.

At the start of my interview with Peleg Itay, he immediately told me that Dafna's clearly defined ecological practices are more for business than any inherent ideology. He said that it is good to tell consumers that the factory is "green" because it helps improve sales. This is not deceptive, however, because Dafna does indeed engage in environmental practices. Since the countries Dafna exports to have strict requirements about environmentally friendly factory production, this has been a motivation for Dafna to become less wasteful. Peleg informed me that other procedures they take, such as saving water, electricity, and paper, are more for financial reasons than any philosophy they hold about protecting the earth. Peleg believes that it is hard to find a factory that is "green" for ideological reasons and not solely because "being green" makes economic sense.<sup>174</sup>

During the Golden Era when Dafna was fully socialist and non-privatized, Peleg says the factory workers cared less about the bottom line. They had more financial leeway and protection, likely due to government aid, and their factory was less efficient. Some of the inefficiencies included worker carelessness and wasted resources. For example, employees used to print out every email that was transmitted or received during correspondence with a buyer. Nowadays all correspondence is kept electronically because it is a waste of money to use that much paper on a regular basis. The same logic was used to start turning out the lights in the factory at night. To turn a bigger profit they have had to save money and therefore cut back on the electricity bill. The easiest way to do this is to turn off the lights, air conditioning and heat at night.<sup>175</sup> As surprisingly easy as this sounds to many Americans, during the Golden Era this was not automatically thought of at Dafna. The factory was not in a profit-making mindset, leading to these kinds of wasteful inefficiencies. Dafna is a good example of how neoliberalism and

---

<sup>174</sup> Peleg Itay, in discussion with the author, December 2014.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

capitalism can change a factory. Neoliberalism stimulated their sustainable impulses.

Environmental resource-saving practices became a priority because saving money became a priority.

Now that Dafna is run with a capitalist, profit-driven mindset in a post-neoliberal setting, they are more environmentally sustainable in several ways. First, all of the soles of the shoes they make come from recycled materials. Peleg explained that this is because when they recycle old soles and scrap rubber in-house they save the cost of buying and shipping new materials. Even though the soles of the shoes look black they are actually a recycled mix of other colored shoes Dafna has created previously and then melted down to make new soles.<sup>176</sup> Second, they have stopped using chemicals almost entirely. Due to new Israeli environmental and health regulations the spray they used to use on some of the boots to make them shiny is now outlawed. They have ceased spraying boots at all. Additionally, Peleg says management is planning to implement a new digital archive system so that all of their financial records do not have to be printed out for accounting matters. While this effort will save a tremendous amount of paper, Peleg argues that their main motivation was simplicity. He thinks it will be much easier for factory executives to find necessary paperwork through a computer search instead of looking through an antiquated filing cabinet.<sup>177</sup>

At Dafna, much like at Kibbutz Be'eri, community life is kept separate from the factory production aspect of the Kibbutz. While my analysis of Dafna was mainly focused on the ecological practices of the factory, On also showed me around the expanding Kibbutz grounds. He proudly showed me the new homes that are being built on the property. A bubbling stream runs through the construction zone. The builders clearly skipped over it while building. The

---

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

stream and surrounding wild vegetation make for a peaceful area that seems relatively undisturbed despite the half-built structures scattered around. I was impressed with the way the community was avoiding cutting down trees and leveling the ground to make room for new structures. Instead it seemed as if they were deliberately leaving pockets of nature. They also have, like many other kibbutzim, recycling center areas. Dafna may claim that they have no inherent ecological ethos but this simple gesture shows how they care for the earth, even if they don't recognize it. After all, they are a participating community in the Meggido Regional Council and therefore they are a part of the abovementioned biosphere.

Kibbutz Dafna is a good example of how environmental practices kept a community viable during neoliberalism. Dafna switched to factory practices that saved money, time, and resources because the incoming capitalist economic structure required it. Thanks to this switch the factory has become more ecologically sustainable. Dafna supports my theory that necessity environmentalism pushes kibbutz factories to be ecologically sound.



## Kibbutz Dafna



From top left to right:

1. On Factor shows me the recycled shoe soles in the factory.
2. A natural stream flowing through Dafna's newly built community.
3. A recycling area at the Kibbutz.
4. On Factor shows me Dafna slippers being made.

All images by author.

## *Kibbutz Sasa*

The ride to Kibbutz Sasa was a mini-journey within itself. After I had been to Dafna and the Meggido Regional Council, I dragged my parents with me even farther north. As the pattering rental car climbed up the northern mountains along the twisty-turny two tracks, I gulped with anticipation. The sky kept getting darker and darker and we could feel the moisture building in the air. We had no idea what to expect. My Mom, sitting in the front seat, kept asking me how far until we had to make our final turn. I kept saying to her, “we’re only ten minutes away.” In my defense, Google maps really did keep telling me ten minutes. But this quickly became a family joke because after seventy-minutes of the same conversation Google maps still said “ten minutes.” I suppose even technology cannot predict the time it takes to climb the mountains in a rental car before a rainstorm. When we finally reached Sasa, we were only a couple of miles from the Lebanese border and high up in the sky amongst thick clouds. It was getting dark when we started our tour with Miriam Ziv.

Miriam is one of the most interesting and unassuming people I have ever met. She is soft-spoken and silver-haired with piercing blue eyes and a gentle voice. As she would later explain to us, her father, a talented artist, was on the *kindertransport*<sup>178</sup> from Germany and came to Israel as a survivor of the Holocaust. All of his family perished in the War. It seemed as if Miriam carried this weight with her, allowing her recently deceased father and his art to guide her through life as a surviving German Jew. She carries his scars as she tills the soil of Israel and hides away in the beautiful haven of Sasa; life has been good to her and she feels responsible for enjoying it because the rest of her ancestry did not. Neither of us knew what to expect from the other when we started around Sasa together. Later when we said goodbye it was as if I was

---

<sup>178</sup> Translates from German to “Children's Transport.” This was a series of rescue efforts that took thousands of Jewish children to England from Nazi Germany between 1938 and 1940. “Kindertransport, 1938-1940,” *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, 2014.

saying goodbye to an old friend. There was something magical about her lovely presence. I never wanted to leave.

Instantly we could see that Sasa is one of the most profitable kibbutzim in all of Israel. Although the buildings carry remnants of history, they have been updated to state-of-the-art community areas with expansive glass windows, beautiful art on the walls, and expensive lodge-like furniture. Sasa houses Plasan, a company that produces lightweight armor for military vehicles. Plasan has encountered wild financial success through providing their products to the American military during the recent Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>179</sup> Since their business makes a substantial amount of money each year (in the millions), they have been able to retain a socialist structure with an area school for youth, non-privatized food, and a car share. Miriam explained to me the environmental practices that Sasa partakes in.

Kibbutz Sasa has a recycling program and an organic waste composting system. The municipal council of Sasa's region, called *Kiryat Shmonah*, put the recycling center in place. There are twenty kibbutzim in this council and there is "quite an active" recycling program within this group.<sup>180</sup> At Sasa members regularly separate glass, cardboard, newspaper, electronic machines, and plastic from the rest of the trash. Twice weekly the municipality comes and picks up the recycling in a general garbage area, which has been collected from the bins placed throughout the Sasa neighborhoods.<sup>181</sup> While this process may sound normal to many Americans, in Israel an organized recycling program is unique and new for the country as a whole. The level of awareness about the importance and value of recycling has risen in recent years.<sup>182</sup> Miriam informed me that on Sasa there is a member who is "crazy for compost." He puts buckets in

---

<sup>179</sup> Miriam Ziv (Kibbutz Sasa member, head groundskeeper, and wife of Plasan CEO) in discussion with the author, December 2014.

<sup>180</sup> Ziv, in discussion with the author.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Hagar Ruevni, in discussion with the author.



every neighborhood and the dining hall, hoping that he will collect organic waste. She says that soon the municipality will also start collecting and making community-wide compost by giving each family a bin specifically for organic waste. Obviously this is a step that makes the aforementioned gentleman quite happy.<sup>183</sup> While these recycling and composting practices are not necessarily easier for Sasa to implement than just throwing all waste in one area, they show a willingness to comply with Israeli regulations and help set the stage for understanding the rest of their ecological practices.

Sasa is green, quiet, and surrounded by trees. The grounds are encompassed by the Mt. Meron nature reserve. In 1949 the American Zionist settlers in the region planted pine trees that still stand on the property today. Miriam told me that within their quiet community there is a general consensus to keep the growth as natural and wild as possible. As the head groundskeeper she and her team perform minimal trimming and let the gardens grow naturally with native plants. She also showed me where Sasa has recently built a new neighborhood near the entrance of the compound. The gardens in this area are perfectly kept and it seems as if the new houses are built strategically between large trees. Miriam told me they did have to remove some trees to make room for the new neighborhood, but she also highlighted how she made sure to retain a plot of land right in the middle of the neighborhood full of dense undergrowth. There is a path that leads through this area, allowing residents to take a woods stroll. Miriam said that when she walks through this undisturbed plot she feels like she is suddenly in the middle of nature.<sup>184</sup>

As she led me around the neighborhood we stopped at one particular olive tree. She pointed up to it and said to me, “I held up this tree up with my bare hands during construction.”

---

<sup>183</sup> Ziv, in discussion with the author.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

To me this exemplified her dedication to the environment: she was willing to quietly stand in the middle of a construction zone to save an olive tree.

Through examples like this, one can see Sasa's desire to keep the natural environment healthy. Full time work of individuals like Miriam allows the undergrowth to remain tamed yet natural. Furthermore, it requires less work in the long run. While it may have been easier to let the construction workers flatten the existing olive trees, Miriam and her community are dedicated to the ecology of the area enough to plan the new neighborhood buildings around the trees and to create a nature space within the new construction.<sup>185</sup>

Water use follows similar reasoning on Kibbutz Sasa. Miriam told me how they treat all of their sewage and use this recycled wastewater on their orchards, which stretches out for several fields beyond the parameters of the compound. She says there is a general consensus among community members not to waste water, mainly because Israel has such a water shortage issue but also because water is expensive. By using their own recycled wastewater they save money and water simultaneously. Furthermore, since laundry is communal on Sasa, resources are preserved inherently through washing large loads together, thereby saving energy and water. Miriam did inform me, in a regrettable tone, that she must water the gardens in the summer, for otherwise the plants would die from dehydration and drought, which is all too common in the hot summer months.<sup>186</sup>

More proof of environmental practices on Sasa is the recent solar energy endeavor. Miriam told me that lately the community has begun using solar-heated water and they have added solar panels to the roof of the factory. Sasa sells the energy back to the company that provides their electricity and they receive a refund on their electric bill for their production

---

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

efforts. Here, cost is a strong motivation for the Sasa community to “go green.” In the United States and America such incentives are not as widespread. It is rare to see solar panels on a nuclear home or hot water heaters on the roof. At Sasa practices like this are the norm because it is cost efficient and the sun is plentiful.<sup>187</sup>

Before neoliberalism Sasa was exclusively agricultural. Now they house a hugely profitable factory. Sasa is a unique case because to survive the Era of Decline they had to create Plasan, but in doing so they have been able to maintain a fully socialist structure in community life. Despite the factory business, their socialist community saves resources and participates in environmental practices. Sasa’s longevity may be increased by their care for the earth, but it appears that finances are more of a factor in their survival as a socialist community. They participate fluidly in the capitalist, post-neoliberal world, which ironically allows them to continue socialist practices in their community life. Although environmental practices are not necessarily a priority at Sasa, they are sprinkled into daily life.<sup>188</sup>

As we ended our tour the rain was pouring down in heavy sheets, a winter-only occurrence in Israel. Miriam took us to the topmost point of Sasa and stood with us in the pouring rain. She pointed to the miles of greenery stretched out below. Miriam feels a connection to the land, evident by the look in her eyes and the pride in her voice. I kept thinking how special it was for her, a child of survivors, to be in Israel, tending the land and saving olive trees. To me she exemplified Jewish survival. She is a caretaker of the lands that have saved her and her family. It suddenly became so apparent why she and so many other *kibbutzniks* like her would feel so dedicated to the land even without a quantitative, environmental ideology: she wanted to

---

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

care for the land that had saved her. She wanted to protect it for her son and for the Jewish generations to come.

### Kibbutz Sasa



From top left to right:

1. Miriam Ziv and I during the interview in the Sasa community center.
2. A recycling center at Sasa.
3. The Plasan factory—as close as we could get.
4. A nuclear family home at Sasa with one of Miriam’s gardens out front.
5. Overlooking acres of Sasa orchards.

All images by author.

*Kibbutz Neot Semadar*

A week after visiting Kibbutz Sasa I drove through the sunny Arava along a dry, expansive highway in the South. I saw no sign of human life for miles. When coming around the last corner I suddenly noticed the start of abrupt, dense greenery stretched out like a haven: Neot Semadar appeared like an oasis in the desert. It was Friday night and I had been told by my contact Yuval Shaul, not to arrive after dark for fear of not being let into the community gates after the start of *Shabbat*.<sup>189</sup> I pulled up just in time and Yuval showed me to my guesthouse. He told me to come down at 6:00 p.m. for Shabbat dinner in the communal dining hall. He told me that I would eat with his family.

At the dining hall everyone was silent. Yuval was wearing a white linen shirt, as was everyone else, and he whispered to me not to speak during the meal. None of the community talks when they eat, as a gesture of meditative contemplation. As I walked into the room fifty faces turned and followed me to my seat next to Yuval, his wife and his two children. A lap dog sat obediently on his son's lap and it felt like even the dog's eyes were glued on my black shirt and unfamiliar face, wondering who the foreigner was. (I missed the "wear white" memo). Despite my awkward entrance, I found everyone to be friendly. When the whole room was full and every chair taken, the community leader stood up and a musical interlude began. I sang along to the Hebrew Sabbath songs as best as I could and felt a calm connection to these smiling people. Although their lifestyle was so different from my own we could share the familiar tunes together and I instantly felt more comfortable.

I ate in silence with everyone else. After the meal was over people started light conversation and several members who could speak English came up to me, asking me about my

---

<sup>189</sup> The Jewish day of rest from Friday night at sundown until Saturday night at sundown.

project and looking at me with curiosity. I asked them about their roles on the kibbutz and before I knew it I had started my fieldwork without even having my notebook in hand!

I found out that Neot Semadar is an intentional community but their ideology is not based on the environment. Instead, they focus on living with an emphasis on interpersonal relationships and compassion towards others. To exemplify this, they eat all of their meals in silence around a communal table in order to have personal reflection time. This is unique because on most kibbutzim the dining hall is the mainstay of the community. Neot Semadar's distinct ideology has incurred a byproduct of making them an extremely environmentally sustainable community and the most ecologically sound of all the kibbutzim I visited.

Each and every member is vegetarian by ideology. They have community gardens that have not been exposed to pesticides in twenty-five years. In these gardens the members grow everything they eat at the meals in their communal dining hall: all of their vegetables and fruits are grown on site and their goats to produce the milk from which they make all of their own dairy products. They even grow the wheat they use to make their own bread. Yuval Shaul, the "ecology man" at Neot Semadar, told me that they started this entire process about twenty-five years ago when they went to visit Deliyahu, another kibbutz in the North of Israel. Deliyahu is committed to growing food without pesticides and taught the members how to best construct organic agriculture.<sup>190</sup>

When it comes to food waste, Neot Semadar is creative in their approach. All of the food from the dining hall is either composted or sent as scraps to feed a wide array of goats and chickens. No food is sent to the landfill. In the winery, one of the several ecologically sound businesses on Neot Semadar, all parts of the grape are used. The grape skins leftover after wine

---

<sup>190</sup> Yuval Shaul, in discussion with the author, December 2014.

production are given to the goats. Any other remnants are composted. The same procedure follows for the olives the members use to make olive oil. Absolutely nothing is wasted. If there is any leftover fruit after production or harvest, the community processes it into fruit leather or juice for community consumption. When I asked how they came up with such ingenious ways to use all their food waste creatively, several members told me it was logical for them to do so. They felt it was the easiest way to live communally in the desert. This community proves necessity environmentalism to a tee.<sup>191</sup>

As mentioned, much of the organic waste eventually makes it into the compost at Neot Semadar. It follows that they would have a large compost area. In fact, they have nearly two acres of compost spread out in a field on the outskirts of the kibbutz property line. Here they go through an elaborate composting process and use the resultant product as soil for their gardens and other plants. Yuval told me that he read about how to make hot water out of compost in a book. He subsequently tried the process himself. Yuval then created a video, available on YouTube, showing this process. He said the result had a horrible odor at first but he had succeeded: the energy conducted by the enormous compost pile was enough to make hot water.<sup>192</sup> This kind of innovative, industrious and sustainable behavior is the norm at Neot Semadar.

Water is generated and used in unique ways at Neot Semadar. According to Yuval, the Kibbutz has an agreement with the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) military base nearby, allowing the community to take the base's wastewater and recycle it for use on their expansive gardens. Yuval explained this process as being economically sensible for both sides,<sup>193</sup> Neot Semadar gets

---

<sup>191</sup> Kibbutz Neot Semadar members in discussion with the author, December 2014.

<sup>192</sup> Shaul, in discussion with the author.

For YouTube video see link in the Appendix.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

the water for free and the military base gets rid of wastewater they would otherwise have no use for.

Yuval also explained to me how the goats and chickens are cared for on the farm. Neot Semadar is one of the only farms in Israel that allows goat kids to stay with their mothers for weeks after birth. On most other farms they are separated only hours after birth to lessen the risks of disrupting the flow of milk and harming business production. Also, goats are usually not let out to graze very often because the energy they expend during the process causes them to produce less milk throughout the day. On Neot Semadar, however, the community feels like the goats' quality of life is ultimately more important than the financial bottom line and the goats are allowed to graze on designated fields for an hour twice a day to eat alfalfa and enjoy fresh air.<sup>194</sup> This is an interesting fact when taken in conjunction with Neot Semadar's peaceful community philosophy. It seems that another byproduct of their philosophy is animal welfare.

The goats on Neot Semadar farms do not eat from the same field everyday. Rather, Yuval has implemented "holistic grazing," a method that he says is practiced in Zimbabwe. In this technique, large herds are led on to small fields, naturally pressing the grass down. This process allows for natural decomposition to happen faster, thereby protecting the land from overgrazing and resultant soil erosion.<sup>195</sup>

The Kibbutz has other industries besides dairy goats and chickens. Members also create organic beauty products, artisan crafts, and wine, all of which is sold both domestically and internationally.<sup>196</sup> The artisan crafts are produced in the main building located at the center of the Kibbutz. The members built this large structure by hand, which took them twenty years. It was designed with a "self cooling" tower that stretches up through the center of the building. A pool

---

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> "Neot Semadar's Organic Products," *Neot Semadar*, Accessed Feb. 20, 2015.



of water collects in the basement and vents throughout the many levels of the building to carry cool air from the center column to each room. This inventive design is unique to Neot Semadar and has become a tourist attraction due to its distinctive appearance.<sup>197</sup>

When I first stepped inside the main building I instantly felt the “air conditioning” that Yuval was talking about. The air was cool and damp like a basement. The cooling tower they engineered and built was fully functional. Yuval then told me that the next rooms we were going to see were for “arts and crafts.” When I think of arts and crafts I think of children playing with glue, puffy paint, and pipe cleaners; it is a diminutive phrase. You can imagine my surprise when I stepped into the workshop rooms and saw huge looms with half-made intricate blankets, pottery wheels, shelves of hand-painted ornaments, and perfectly carved wooden furniture. The beauty of their handmade crafts was breathtaking. Yuval explained how many of the members are artists who make jewelry, furniture, and pottery. They use an apprenticeship system where the youth learn a craft beside the adults from a young age. The beauty of these goods was unparalleled to most other art I saw (even in galleries) while I was in Israel.

Although Neot Semadar does not practice organized Judaism, all members are Jewish by birth. There is a sense when talking with different members that they feel a sense of obligation to the earth and their project of greening the desert, even if it is not always for an explicit ecological ideology. I have concluded that the reason for their ecological consciousness is due to necessity environmentalism and the fact that their alternative ideology requires positive relationships with all people and animals, including the living and breathing earth.

It is important to note that Neot Semadar wasn’t created until 1989. The implementation of neoliberalism in Israel was in its height during its period of establishment and growth. I argue

---

<sup>197</sup> Shaul, in discussion with the author.

that Neot Semadar's life philosophy and resultant environmental practices were born from a desire to leave mainstream life in a neoliberal world; the community was created as a response to the new economic and political phase in Israel. Since Neot Semadar has been so successful with its renewable environmental practices, socialist community structure, organic products, and artistic endeavors, it proves that it is possible to function as a sustainable intentional community within the capitalist structure. Its environmental practices were ironically born from a rejection of neoliberalism and have helped it become a successful business entity. Neot Semadar is proof that environmental practices can help intentional communities survive (and even thrive) during neoliberalism.

## Kibbutz Neot Semadar



From top left to right:

1. Neot Semadar Winery grapes drying in the hot Arava sun.
2. The community-built workshop and cooling tower.
3. The guesthouse I stayed in during fieldwork. “The walls are made of mud and strawberries.”<sup>198</sup>
4. The Neot Semadar manmade reservoir.
5. Yuval Shaul points out a diagram and explains to me how the cooling tower in the building works.
6. The large compost piles on the outskirts of the community.

All images by author.

---

<sup>198</sup> A quote by Yuval when explaining to me how the new guesthouses are built partially from organic materials and mud, similar to the structures at Lotan.

## Chapter 6: Is Yahel the Future?

I now circle back to the most perplexing Kibbutz of them all. Kibbutz Yahel. The community that destroyed my hopes for finding utopia in kibbutzim and the place with a glaring strip mall that seems so far removed from these other green sanctuaries. How does Yahel do it? And is Yahel the future?

Yahel is located just miles from both Ketura and Lotan. While this community is not completely environmentally ruinous, it does not think about ecology or earth preservation as a goal. Within the last decade Yahel has become majority privatized and capitalist. Leadership charges members for the personal consumption of all resources, making them less like a defined kibbutz and more like a group of people living together in a standard neighborhood. Yahel is unattached to the environment and it appears to be out-of-sight-out-of-mind to Yahel administrators.<sup>199</sup>

When I went and spoke with Kibbutz Yahel's CEO Hillel Tobias, I found his priorities to be in business and making money. Hillel had little to tell me about their efforts or need to be ecologically sound. Everything was contextualized in the manner of how it has been privatized in order to save money. For example, Kibbutz Yahel was the first of all kibbutzim to place electric meters on members' nuclear homes—a huge step of privatization that most kibbutzim have not yet reached. Administrators have not fully privatized water yet, but they are attempting to. They want to put water meters on every house and make each member pay for his or her own water usage. Currently, Hillel says they have no conception of how much water the community is using, nor do they seem to care. As long as the costs stay low, he is content.<sup>200</sup>

---

<sup>199</sup> Hillel Tobias, CEO of Yahel, in discussion with the author, December 2014.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

In all fairness Yahel has endured a great amount of financial hardship. This might be why they have achieved such a level of extreme capitalism and privatization. During Israeli neoliberal policy changes Yahel had to find ways to recover from a crippling debt. To solve their financial difficulties Yahel made major changes. Their industry is mostly agricultural including fields of “dates, pomelos, onions, melon, watermelon and peppers.”<sup>201</sup> Their transition to pure capitalism is exemplified best by the menacing strip mall outside their gates, which services the highway and gives all profit back to the Kibbutz.

When it comes to recycling and composting Hillel says that he thinks some members do these ecological practices in their nuclear homes, but there is not much of a community-wide effort. The dining room, which is fully privatized and members must pay to eat at, does not compost or recycle. Hillel says this is because “putting this restriction on them would be too harsh—they can barely make ends meet as it is.”<sup>202</sup> I had not heard a similar complaint about recycling being expensive or a difficult-to-manage “restriction” from other area kibbutzim, especially considering the fact that the Hevel Eilot Regional Council has taken extraordinary efforts to collect recycling and start composting.<sup>203</sup> I found this comment to be indicative of how Yahel feels about environmental efforts. Administrators think these processes are too difficult or costly to undertake when the kibbutz is merely trying to stay financially afloat. This is an entirely different approach than any of the other kibbutzim I visited, many of which use environmental practices to save goods, resources, and money.

Yahel’s relationship to water is also different than the other kibbutzim I studied; it has a history of water problems. In 1987 Yahel experienced a major water crisis on its property.

Dissolved iron from the wells infiltrated the system and Israeli water companies did not have the

---

<sup>201</sup> “Kibbutz Yahel Today,” *Kibbutz Yahel*, Accessed Feb. 18, 2015.

<sup>202</sup> Tobias, in discussion with the author.

<sup>203</sup> See page 44.

correct filtration system to fix the problem. The Kibbutz incurred a large debt as it tried to restructure and had to bring in the United States based Culligan Company to solve the problem. Then in 1989 there was a problem with the Culligan water filters. Gravel filled the system and Yahel sued Culligan. Culligan fixed the problem and now Yahel enjoys water serviced through a system in Eilat, the town at the southernmost tip of Israel. It is a remote controlled system that allows them to use as much water as they desire. Once the iron problem and lawsuit were over, the agriculture was able to function properly again and Yahel started to regain some of the profit that was lost during the water system failure. When prompted to comment on their community as heavy water consumers in the harsh desert, Hillel said, “We do not have a general conversation on the kibbutz about saving water or turning off faucets just because we live in the desert,” implying that my question was off base.<sup>204</sup> This obviously came as a surprise to me, especially considering Yahel’s past water problems. Perhaps they were tired of worrying about water for so long so now that their water problems are solved they don’t want to think about it anymore?

As far as other inherent ecological practices that most kibbutzim possess and that I was hoping to find on Yahel, there is a small car share. It consists of three vehicles to share amongst sixty members. Hillel says people also have personal cars, including himself as Kibbutz CEO, and there is no rule about people not being allowed to have other cars, such as exists at Ketura to make the community more egalitarian. Frankly, the only environmentally sound practice I found Yahel to partake in is the sewage recycling system used to water their date groves.<sup>205</sup>

While Yahel is different from the rest of the kibbutzim I performed fieldwork on, its community may not be too far from the rest of the general Israeli population and therefore cannot

---

<sup>204</sup> Tobias, in discussion with the author.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

be seen as an outlier (although I still desperately wish they were).<sup>206</sup> Hagar Ruevni of the Meggido Regional Council informed me that most people who visit Israel from the United States and Europe are astounded at how little people recycle in Israel.<sup>207</sup> There are no laws against plastic bags like there are in many other parts of the world, including America. Most supermarkets and stores in Israel only offer plastic bags.

Recycling and composting are new concepts to Israelis. Israel did not even establish the Ministry for the Protection of the Environment until 1989, which is late when compared to other developed countries. This ministry is considered “minor” and so is its budget.<sup>208</sup> Rabbi Leah Benami at Kibbutz Lotan told me that she is fairly certain that if recycling were not a new law Israelis would not recycle at all. She believes people here have “the vending machine mentality,” implying an attitude of disposability. She explained that “Here in Israel there is a real aspiration towards the European or American lifestyle...”<sup>209</sup> This aspiration towards materialism may be the reason that Israel as a country is less ecologically conscious than one would assume, especially in conjunction with their limited natural resources.

Dr. Livni also commented on this issue, explaining that the Era of Decline in the 1980s and 1990s was simultaneous to the rise of the green political movement: “The two passed like ships in the night.”<sup>210</sup> Therefore, his explanation is that there are some kibbutzim (like Yahel) that have not joined the green movement, as it is relatively new, but are still reeling from the their economic changes. Their form of privatized and capitalist governance naturally leads them

---

<sup>206</sup> Livni, in discussion with the author.

<sup>207</sup> Ruevni, in discussion with the author.

<sup>208</sup> Livni, “Ecology, Eco-Zionism and the Kibbutz,” 306.

<sup>209</sup> Benami, in discussion with the author.

<sup>210</sup> Livni, in discussion with the author.

to treat the environment in such a way.<sup>211</sup> Livni is perhaps more realistic than I when he says that “A lot of kibbutzim do not relate to the environment and Yahel is indicative of this.”<sup>212</sup>

The kibbutz movement in Israel seems to be a living, breathing animal because it is always changing. The different generations of *kibbutzniks* continue to adapt these intentional communities to present-day concerns: politically, economically and ideologically. Environmental practices on kibbutzim are no exception to this general rule. While past generations may not have been as conscious about preserving the earth, we have seen that they still assumed practices that were inherently protective of nature. Nowadays, in the period of Revitalization, many youth are returning to the kibbutz lifestyle. The increasing population in cities is drawing people in droves back to the southern desert and northern countryside. These youth are often concerned with the prescient issues of our era, including the reality that our earth is not a garbage can; we must use responsible and “green” practices to assure the continuance of human society.

What is the future of kibbutzim? My fieldwork has revealed two clear paths. The first is that kibbutzim will buckle under the continued pressure of privatization and (like Kibbutz Lotan) they may have to set aside ecological ideas as they focus on greater financial survival. The other option is that education on the necessity of living sustainably will continue to permeate kibbutz culture. In this more optimistic scenario, future *kibbutznik* generations will live more and more sustainably as time progresses. The latter is an idea proposed by Dr. Livni, who bases his opinion on current education efforts in kibbutzim, including that of his children who live on Kibbutz Gesher Haziv. Gesher Haziv is partially privatized but has recently become involved in environmentalism and spreading awareness much like the Meggido Regional Council and its recent education efforts. Livni argues that the current generation growing up and living on

---

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.



kibbutzim feels a strong connection to the land. For this reason alone, above any other spiritual ideology, they may attempt to preserve and protect their homeland.<sup>213</sup>

I believe that financial stability is at the core of determining the future of environmental practices in kibbutzim. In communities like Kibbutz Sasa where money is not (and will probably never be) a concern, the ability to maintain positive ecological practices is most likely to remain because they do not have to sacrifice their actions for cheaper, but perhaps more environmentally detrimental, activities. In places like Kibbutz Lotan, however, the possibility of building new neighborhoods without using ecologically friendly materials is in the air. They are in a Catch 22: they do not have the financial resources to spend on expensive building materials and they need new members in order to gain more money. Therefore, their ecological ideology may have to fall to the wayside as they try to build their community.

My second conclusion is that the kibbutzim with specific ecological consciousness and ideology like Lotan are not more likely to survive as environmental communities in the future. Evidence for this idea is that when rough financial times hit any given intentional community the first idea to go is that which is not necessary to short-term survival. In this case it would be the ecological component present in places like Lotan or Ketura.

Oftentimes these changes are out of the communities' hands. For example, what will happen to Kibbutz Ketura if a high-speed train and new oil well are placed near their grounds? As they try to deny "progress" and construction in the southern Arava they must admit that sometimes these processes are not up to them. If these methods of "progress" indeed infiltrate Ketura, those members with a strong connection to ecological preservation may abandon their community, leaving it to become capitalist and wasteful, like Kibbutz Yahel. Although the

---

<sup>213</sup> Livni, in discussion with the author.

optimist in me wants to deny this outright, I see intentional communities as solely dependent on their own personal circumstances. Before I started this project I thought that all kibbutzim were ecological and liberal. I now see the unbelievable fight for survival these communities have, which often leads them down different paths.

### *Conclusion*

When I finished my fieldwork at Kibbutz Lotan I almost didn't leave. I fantasized about extending my trip. I would call my family and tell them I'd meet them at home in a few weeks or months. I wanted to stay in this little haven and continue feeling the wet mud squeeze between my perfectly manicured fingers as I pressed it against a wall in the *boostan* that Assaf had asked me to assist him with. Every once in awhile I go back there in my mind. I feel the Arava sunrise on my skin and smell the clay as it stains my hands. I imagine myself scrubbing off my manicure, walking through the door of the volunteers' cabin and dumping my backpack on the ground, content to stay with the little I had brought. Above all I imagine myself helping everyone I had met nurse this little community back to health. Sometimes I feel ashamed that I walked away from this beautiful paradise as it so desperately clung to life. I feel like I betrayed the members by asking them about their anxieties, watching them clutch one another in fear of the impending privatization changes, and then driving away. I know I can't stop the future but I want to be there for it. I feel like I walked into and then out of a story without getting to read the ending. I didn't know when I started my thesis project that this would happen—that I would become so close with the people I met. I never thought that I would partake in a battle within myself in trying to stay objective during analysis. I feel personally attached to these communities and their lifestyle.

As I boarded the plane back to America, parts of me stayed behind in Israel. A part of me is still in Miriam's blue eyes. I see her pleading for peace in Israel and for the safety of her border community. Another part of me is still at Neot Semadar, laughing in a dusty, unregistered Jeep bumping along on a mountain tour with Yuval as he assures me that the car will survive. The other kibbutzim hold scattered pieces of me that resemble the same form. I suppose the most surprising result of my project was that if someday I go back to collect these pieces of myself and rekindle the connections I made, I might find that these communities are gone. I might find that privatization has wiped them out or that my connections have moved away because things changed too much for them to stay. In my dreams I find everyone safe and calm: I see all the gardeners still gardening, I see everyone in the communal dining hall, and Miriam's biggest worry is how and where she can replant her favorite olive tree. I suppose my scariest conclusion is that this might not be true: that politics and economics are the strongest enemy to these fragile intentional communities and that even if the good guys try they may not prevail.

### *Qualification*

Throughout my thesis project I was limited by several factors, primarily finances and time. If this were a graduate or doctoral thesis I would have attempted to spend six months or more in Israel performing fieldwork. I would have spent more time on each kibbutz and polled every kibbutz in Israel to have more accurate data. Furthermore, it would have helped if I were fluent in Hebrew or had a translator. Many of the people I interviewed had basic or intermediate level English skills and perhaps some of the information was lost in translation. If I had more funding for my project I would have hired a translator. If I had more time I would have become fluent in Hebrew before embarking on this journey. Due to these technical limitations, my conclusions and generalizations may not be as accurate as they could have been.

## Appendices:

Figure 1:

### Use of Land and Water in Agricultural Production 2011

	1949	1970	1998	2001	2004	2006*	2011
Total cultivated land (1,000ha)	165	411	410	384	380	300	283
Cultivated land under irrigation	30	172	194	188	225	152	165
Water consumption (MCM)	257	1,340	1,365	1,022	1,129	1,108	1,189
Fresh water (MCM)			918	563	566	519	509
Recycled and brackish water (MCM)			367	411	512	544	680

\* Not including pasture.

Figure 2:

### Development of Rural Settlement in Israel, 915 Settlements (35 without Year of Founding)



## *Interview Questions*

For agricultural kibbutzim:

1. What “happened” to your kibbutz between the 1980s and 1990s? Did you notice any changes? What kind of changes, if any?
2. Where did your kibbutz get funding from when it started?
3. Where does it get funding from now?
4. How has the governing structure evolved over time?
5. Explain any changes in the governing structure. When did these changes happen?
6. What does your kibbutz produce from farming? Are they edible goods? Have you always produced that item?
7. What else has your kibbutz ever produced while you’ve lived here?
8. Has agricultural production changed? If so, how?
9. What do you do on a regular basis to interact with agricultural production?
10. What are some of the other jobs on the kibbutz for agricultural production?
11. Do you rotate jobs?
12. Does your kibbutz recycle? If so, how do you recycle and what do you recycle?
13. Has your kibbutz always recycled?
14. When did your kibbutz begin recycling?
15. How do you get water on your kibbutz?
16. How does your kibbutz obtain energy?
17. How does your kibbutz use energy?
18. Has this changed over time?
19. How does technology play a role in your kibbutz?
20. Do you use irrigation? If so, what kind?
21. Are you aware how much water you use as a kibbutz per year? How do you know that?
22. How do you measure that?
23. Do you consider erosion of the ground-soil? How or Why or Why not?
24. What resources, if any, do you share on the kibbutz?
25. How do you share resources?
26. How has sharing resources changed over time?
27. Do you have discussions in the kibbutz about the environment?
28. Do you consider yourself religious or spiritual?
29. How does your kibbutz interact with Judaism?
30. Do you have religious services regularly on the kibbutz? Do you discuss the environment as it relates to religion? If so, how?

For industrial kibbutzim:

1. What “happened” to your kibbutz between the 1980’s and 1990’s? Did you notice any changes? What kind of changes, if any?
2. Where did your kibbutz get funding from when it started?
3. Where does it get funding from now?
4. How has the governing structure evolved over time?
5. Did people’s roles change in governance and the industry? If so, how?
6. Explain any changes in the governing structure. When did these changes happen?
7. Has your industry changed over time? If so, how?

8. What else has your kibbutz ever produced?
9. How do you interact in the production process? Explain this job, if possible/applicable.
10. Have you ever done more than one job on the kibbutz?
11. Do other kibbutz members rotate jobs?
12. Does your factory consider the environment in production? If so, how? (please give concrete examples of how the factory “considers” the environment in production)
13. How do you get water on your kibbutz?
14. Do you use water in production? If so, how much?
15. Do you recycle goods in your factory? If so, how?
16. What kinds of goods or resources do you recycle?
17. How does technology play a role in your industry?
18. How does your kibbutz obtain energy? How do you use energy?
19. How do you know those measures? Do you keep track of how much energy you use?
20. Do you share resources? If so, how?
21. What do you mean by “share?”
22. To your knowledge, is the environment ever discussed on the kibbutz when it comes to industry? In what context?
23. Do you consider yourself religious or spiritual?
24. Does the kibbutz hold Jewish spiritual or religious events or services?
25. Does the kibbutz have any connection between the environment and religion? If so, explain how or why you say yes or no.

For Combination kibbutzim:

1. What “happened” to your kibbutz between the 1980’s and 1990’s? Did you notice any changes? What kind of changes, if any?
2. Where did your kibbutz get funding from when it started?
3. Where does it get funding from now?
4. How has the governing structure evolved over time?
5. Explain any changes in the governing structure. When did these changes happen?
6. What does your kibbutz produce from farming? Are they edible goods? Have you always produced that item?
7. What else has your kibbutz ever produced while you’ve lived here?
8. Has agricultural production changed? If so, how?
9. What do you do on a regular basis to interact with agricultural production?
10. What are some of the other jobs on the kibbutz for agricultural production?
11. Do you rotate jobs?
12. Does your kibbutz recycle? If so, how do you recycle and what do you recycle?
13. Has your kibbutz always recycled?
14. When did your kibbutz begin recycling?
15. How do you get water on your kibbutz?
16. How does your kibbutz obtain energy?
17. How does your kibbutz use energy?
18. How do you know this measure?
19. Has this changed over time?
20. How does technology play a role in your kibbutz?
21. What resources, if any, do you share on the kibbutz?

22. How do you share resources?
23. How has sharing resources changed over time?
24. Do you have discussions as a group in the kibbutz about the environment?
25. Do you consider yourself religious or spiritual?
26. How does your kibbutz interact with Judaism?
27. Do you have religious services regularly on the kibbutz? Do you discuss the environment as it relates to religion? If so, how?
28. Has your industry changed over time? If so, how?
29. What else has your kibbutz ever produced industry wise?
30. How do you interact in the production process? Explain this job, if possible/applicable.
31. Have you ever done more than one job on the kibbutz?
32. Does your factory consider the environment in production? If so, how? (please give concrete examples of how the factory “considers” the environment in production)
33. Do you use water in production? If so, do you know how much?
34. Do you recycle goods in your factory? If so, how?
35. How does technology play a role in your industry?
36. To your knowledge, is the environment ever discussed on the kibbutz when it comes to industry? In what context?

*YouTube Link:*

Kibbutz Neot Semadar creating heat from compost video:

<[https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=56&v=4vpWuo\\_QJhM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=56&v=4vpWuo_QJhM)>

## Bibliography

- Aaronsohn, Ran. "The Beginnings of Modern Jewish Agriculture in Palestine: 'Indigenous' versus 'Imported.'" *Agricultural History* 69, no. 3, (1995): 438-53.
- "About the Arava Institute," *The Arava Institute for Environmental Studies*. 2013. Accessed Feb. 18, 2015. <<http://arava.org/about-our-community/about-arava/>>
- Amit-Cohen, Irit. *Zionism and Free Enterprise: The Story of Private Entrepreneurs in Citrus Plantations in Palestine in the 1920s and 1930s*. Boston: De Gruyter, 2012.
- Associated Press. "Kibbutz reinvents itself after 100 years of history." *Taipei Times*. Taipei, Taiwan, Nov. 16, 2010.
- Bettelheim, Bruno. *The Children of the Dream*. New York: Macmillan, 1969.
- Boas, Taylor C., and Jordan Gans-Morse. "Neoliberalism: From New Liberal Philosophy to Anti-liberal Slogan." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 44, no. 2 (2009): 137-161.
- "Business." Kibbutz Sasa. Accessed Apr. 10, 2014. <<http://www.ksasa.org/>>
- Clark, Christopher. *The Communitarian Moment: The Radical Challenge of the Northampton Association*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995.
- "Company Profile." *Arava Power Company*. Accessed Feb. 18, 2015. <<http://www.aravapower.com/Company%20Profile.>>
- Costanza, Robert and Herman E Daly, "Natural Capital and Sustainable Development." *Conservation Biology* 6, no.1 (1992): 37-46.
- "Earthcare: Saving the Planet & Ourselves." *Reform Judaism*, Winter 2009.
- "Environmental Protection." *Be'eri Printers*. Accessed Feb. 18, 2015. <[http://en.beeriprint.co.il/environmental\\_protection.html](http://en.beeriprint.co.il/environmental_protection.html)>
- Faris, Nabih Amin. "Palestine." *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. Aug. 26, 2014. Accessed Oct. 10, 2014. <<http://www.britannica.com>>
- Gerstenfeld, Manfred. *Judaism, Environmentalism and the Environment: Mapping and Analysis*. Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 1998.
- "The Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) and the Environment." *Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs*. Jan. 2002. Accessed Oct. 10, 2014. <[www.jcpa.org/art/jep3.htm](http://www.jcpa.org/art/jep3.htm)>.
- Golan, Patricia. "Greening the Desert." *The Jerusalem Post*. Sept. 15, 1985: A18.



- Goodman, Paul, and Arthur D. Lewis. *Zionism: Problems and Views*. London: T.F. Unwin, Ltd. 1916.
- “Green Zionist Alliance - Israel's Environment, Nature...” Green Zionist Alliance. Accessed Apr. 10, 2014. <<http://www.greenzionism.org/>>
- Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005. Print.
- Herzog Fox & Neeman, Law Office. “The Coming of Age of Environmental Regulation in Israel – Recent Aligning with Stringent EU Standards.” *The Legal 500 Israel*. Dec. 2012. Accessed Jan. 2015. <<http://www.legal500.com/c/israel/developments/22344>>
- Hilliquit, Morris. *History of Socialism in the United States*. New York: Dover Publications, 1971.
- Huddart Kennedy, Emily and Naomi Krogman. “Environmentalism.” *The Encyclopedia of Consumption and Waste: The Social Science of Garbage*, edited by Carl A. Zimring and William L. Rathje. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc). 2012.
- Israel Export & International Cooperation Institute. “Israel’s Agriculture,” (Tel Aviv: Israel), 1-62. Accessed Dec. 3 2014. <[http://www.moag.gov.il/agri/files/Israel%27s\\_Agriculture\\_Booklet.pdf](http://www.moag.gov.il/agri/files/Israel%27s_Agriculture_Booklet.pdf)>
- “Israeli Government & Politics: How Does the Israeli Government Work?” *Jewish Virtual Library*. Accessed Feb. 18, 2015. <[http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Politics/how\\_govt\\_works.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Politics/how_govt_works.html)>
- “Immigration to Israel: The First Aliyah (1882-1903).” *Jewish Virtual Library*. Accessed Oct. 22, 2014. <[http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Immigration/First\\_Aliyah.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Immigration/First_Aliyah.html)>.
- “Ketura Sun.” *Arava Power Company*, Accessed Feb. 18, 2015. <<http://www.aravapower.com/Ketura%20Sun>>
- “Kibbutz Lotan—Identity Card.” Pamphlet, Lotan, Israel.
- “Kibbutz Lotan: Mission Statement, Our Path to the Fulfillment of Our Vision.” Pamphlet, Lotan, Israel, 1997.
- “Kibbutz Movement.” *Jewish Virtual Library*. 2008. Accessed Oct. 10, 2014. <[http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud\\_0002\\_0012\\_0\\_11103.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0012_0_11103.html)>
- “Kibbutz Yahel Today.” *Kibbutz Yahel*. Accessed Feb. 18, 2015. <<http://www.yahel.org.il/Volunteers.aspx>>

- “Kindertransport, 1938-1940.” *Holocaust Encyclopedia*. 2014. Accessed Feb. 15, 2015. <<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005260>>
- Kozeny, Geoph. “Intentional Communities: Lifestyles Based on Ideals.” *The Fellowship for Intentional Communities*, Accessed March 16, 2015. <<http://www.ic.org/wiki/intentional-communities-lifestyles-based-ideals/>>
- Levi, Yehudah Leo. “Judaism’s Approach to Environmental Quality.” *Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs*. April 2002. Accessed October 10, 2014. <<http://www.jcpa.org/art/jep4.htm>>.
- Leviatan, Uri, Hugh Oliver, and Jack Quarter. *Crisis in the Israeli Kibbutz: Meeting the Challenge of Changing times*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998. Print.
- Lidman, Melanie. “Wastewater Wonders.” *The Jerusalem Post*. August 6, 2010.
- Liebman, Charles S., and Eliezer Don-Yehiya. “The Symbol System Of Zionist-Socialism: An Aspect Of Israeli Civil Religion.” *Modern Judaism* 1, no. 2 (1981): 121-148.
- Livni, Michael, Mark Naveh and Alex Cicelsky. “Building Bridges of Clay, Mud & Straw: Jews and Arabs Learn Natural Building in the Desert.” *Communities—Journal of Cooperative Living*, no. 131 (2006). 42-46.
- Livni, Michael. “Case Study: Kibbutz Lotan—Eco-Zionism and Kibbutz.” International Communal Studies Association Eighth International Conference. (Amana, IA). June 2004.
- “Ecology, Eco Zionsim and the Kibbutz.” *One Hundred Years of Kibbutz Life: A Century of Crisis and Reinvention*, ed. Michal Palgi and Shulamit Reinharz, New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2011. Print.
- “Kibbutz as a Sustainable Community: What Happened During the Last Generation? An Overview by a Participant-Observer.” Excerpted from *Communal Pathways to Sustainable Living* at the 11<sup>th</sup> conference of the International Communal Studies Association (ICSA), (Findhorn Foundation and Community, Scotland). June 26-28, 2013.
- “The Kibbutz and its Future: Historical Perspective.” International Communal Studies Association Eighth International Conference (Amana, IA), Session 5, June 30, 2004.
- McLeod, Saul. “Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.” *Simply Psychology*. 2007. Accessed Mar. 15, 2015. <<http://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>>
- Mehrel, Lilian T. “Green Shalom: The New Kibbutz Movement.” *Green Shalom: The New Kibbutz Movement*. Winter 2006. Accessed Apr. 10, 2014. <<http://www.kibbutzlotan.com/#!green-shalom-the-new-kibbutz-movement/c1z5x>>

- “Mission.” *Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel*. Accessed Oct 10, 2014. <<http://www.natureisrael.org/Who-We-Are/Mission>>.
- Muhutdinova, Raissa. “Sustainability.” In *The Encyclopedia of World Poverty*, edited by M. Odekon. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. 1047-1048.
- Munasinghe, Monahan. “Sustainable development triangle.” Ed. by C. Cleveland. *The Encyclopedia of Earth*. Jan. 29, 2007. Accessed Mar. 15, 2015<<http://www.eoearth.org/view/article/156365/>>
- Nako, Elizabeth. “Socialist Utopian Communities in the U.S. and Reasons for their Failure.” *Annual Celebration of Student Scholarship and Creativity*. 2013. Paper 14.
- “Neot Semadar’s Organic Products.” *Neot Semadar*. Accessed Feb. 20, 2015. <<http://www.neot-semadar.com/organic-products>>
- Neril, Yonatan. “Judaism and Environmentalism: Bal Tashchit.” *Chabad-Lubavitch Media Center*. Accessed October 10, 2014. <<http://www.chabad.org>>.
- NGO Committee on Education. “Our Common Future: From One Earth to One World - A/42/427 Annex, Overview - UN Documents: Gathering a Body of Global Agreements.” 1987. Accessed March 16, 2015. <<http://www.un-documents.net/ocf-ov.htm>>
- Noyes, John Humphrey. *History of American Socialisms*. New York: Hillary House Publishers, 1961.
- Palgi, Michal, and Shulamit Reinharz. *One Hundred Years of Kibbutz Life: A Century of Crises and Reinvention*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2011.
- Pavin, Abraham. *The Kibbutz Movement, facts and figures*. Central Bureau of Statistics, State of Israel, 2006. Accessed Apr. 10, 2014. <<http://www.kibbutz.org>>
- Rifkind, Lewis. *Zionism & Socialism*. London: Jewish Socialist Labour Party. 1918.
- Rosser, Courtney. “An Apprenticeship in Green Living.” *Tikkun*. Sept./Oct. 2009.
- Russell, Raymond, Shlomo Getz, and Robert Hanneman. “Transformation of the Kibbutzim.” *Israel Studies* 16, no. 2 (2011): 109-26.
- Sargisson, Lucy, and Lyman Tower Sargent. *Living in Utopia: New Zealand's Intentional Communities*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing. 2004.
- Troen, Ilan. “Jewish Settlement in the Land of Israel/Palestine.” *The Jewish Virtual Library*. July 2011. Accessed March 15, 2015. <<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/isdf/text/troen.html>>

Warhurst, Christopher. *Between Market, State, and Kibbutz: The Management and Transformation of Socialist Industry*. London: Mansell, 1999.

Zilbersheid, Uri. "The Israeli Kibbutz: From Utopia to Dystopia." *Critique*: 413-434. Dec. 2007. Accessed Mar. 2014. <<http://libcom.org/library/israeli-kibbutz-utopia-dystopia-uri-zilbersheid>>

"Zionism: A Definition of Zionism." *Jewish Virtual Library*. Accessed Apr. 16, 2014. <<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Zionism/zionism.html>>



My sister Reyna and I looking at old kibbutzim photos by Ari Weissenstein (The Photohouse, Tel Aviv)