

Session 10. 11/5/03. Reading Interrogations. Sociology 929. Envisioning real Utopias.  
*The Kibbutz*

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Here is a website that Linda found useful:

[http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/Society\\_ & Culture/kibbutz.html](http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/Society_&_Culture/kibbutz.html).

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### 1. Richard Thomson

Please note - While conducting a literature review, I recently came across a summary of Hayek's Fatal Conceit ideas which I was reminded of while going through this week's readings. Please don't be alarmed, I haven't jumped on the Hayek bandwagon or anything; I am still a die-hard advocate of cooperatives, worker ownership, and the labor movement.

1. A.) Replicability of Kibbutz model in larger, more diverse and dispersed environments – How effective would the Kibbutz model be where participants do not have one set of over-riding values to bring solidarity and social cohesion? The Crisis article noted on page 16 that the Kibbutz institutions (which did have a set of over-riding values) were increasingly finding it "... difficult to distribute the budgets according to principles that were accepted and agreed upon by all sections of the population." How successful would a Kibbutz be in large metropolitan urban cities, or is it limited only to smaller, rural areas? **[Is the issue here cultural homogeneity or simply shared values in the ideal of the kibbutz? It is hard to imagine something that is as demanding as a kibbutz being able to function with large numbers of people who did not share the kibbutz ideal, but it is less clear that they must share broader cultural traits.]** I am reminded of Hayek's remarks on the ability of the capitalist system to deal with immense diversity in the economic environment:

"We are led—for example, by the pricing system in market exchange—to do things by circumstances of which we are largely unaware and which produce results that we do not intend. In our economic activities we do not know the needs which we satisfy nor the sources of the things which we get. Almost all of us serve people whom we do not know, and even of whose existence we are ignorant; and we in turn constantly live on the services of other people of whom we know nothing. All this is possible because we stand in a great framework of institutions and traditions—economic, legal, moral—into which we fit ourselves by obeying certain rules of conduct that we never made, and which we have never understood in the sense in which we understand how the things that we manufacture function (p 14)." **[This is an interesting quote, but it is making – I think – a somewhat different point from the statement you make above. You raise the issue of the extent to which a kibbutz requires some deeply shared values; the quote raises the issue of anonymity and heterogeneity of needs – markets do well in coordinating people who are dispersed and unknown to**

**each other. But it may still be the case that markets only work well where there is a strong consensus on certain pivotal values, and thus homogeneity with respect to those values is still needed.]**

1. B.) Moreover, there are problems associated with generalizing from the micro- to the macro-- Nations differ with regard to history, culture, institutions, context, etc. How applicable is the Kibbutz model for the rest of the world? Again, I am reminded of Hayek's differentiation between the relations of small numbers and the relations of the large-scale environment:

“If we were to apply the unmodified, uncurbed rules of the micro-cosmos (i.e. of the small band or troop, or of, say, our families) to the macro-cosmos (our wider civilization), as our instincts and sentimental yearnings often make us wish to do, we would destroy it. Yet if we were always to apply the rules of the extended order to our more intimate groupings, we would crush them. So we must learn to live in two sorts of worlds at once. To apply the name ‘society’ to both, or even to either, is hardly of any use, and can be most misleading (p 18).” **[The scale issue is interesting here. It could be still the case that units of production and living could all be kibbutz-like but that there interactions and exchanges could be market coordinated. ]**

2. Competitive economic disadvantage of a limited population and a defined area – If radical reforms are conducted among small numbers of people and in limited areas; economically they are at a competitive disadvantage in competing with firms, workers and industries that are more diverse and can profit from the competitive advantages of not having to rely on one group of people to perform work and one area to produce products. For example, any high-tech firms in the kibbutz would be at a competitive disadvantage compared to one located in Silicone Valley, California or Route 127 in North Carolina. Similarly, firms that could de-skill and outsource work to third-world nations would put Kibbutz industries at a competitive disadvantage in the marketplace due to higher labor costs which would increase the costs of the final product. **[These points are not so obvious. If a kibbutz could sustain its normative cohesion, then this would give it incredible flexibility to change technologies, to respond to competitive pressures].**
3. Would it be better to separate “economic sustainability” of the kibbutz, from the “political and social sustainability” of the kibbutz? – One of the main problems faced by many types of “radical societal reforms” throughout history is in the ability to finance the operations on a continual basis. Should radical reformers focus solely on either “political and social reforms”, or “economic reforms,” but not both? Does the conflation of the two invite problems in diagnosing whether the challenges faced by radical reforms is due to the economic sustainability of the model, or the political and social sustainability of the model, neither, or both? **[You are right, of course, that these need to be distinguished, but they are**

**linked – it may be problems in the economic reproduction of the structure that stimulates the political crisis.]**

4. Demand-side vs. supply-side Kibbutzism – substantive vs. procedural manner of implementing Kibbutzist values. Many of the arguments in the Crisis article reminded me of the debates from the “Recasting Egalitarianism” book earlier this semester, over whether or not leftist values can be achieved in a “demand” or “supply” side manner. Can Kibbutz values only be implemented in a demand-side manner? The current situation of the Kibbutz seem to say “no,” that a “supply-side Kibbutzism” is better than “no-Kibbutzism” or an “inefficient demand-side Kibbutzism.” **[I don’t quite get the point here – it would be worth explaining this a little more fully.]**
  
5. Underestimated the benefits of private property – I found it interesting that two of the readings discussed the Kibbutz ownership and distribution of some personal property, e.g. clothes and cars – and how the Kibbutz learned after trial-and-error that individuals were more likely to take care for that which was “theirs.” Kibbutz attempts at public ownership of clothes and renting automobiles resulted in members not taking due care of the clothes or cars. Therefore, the Kibbutz ended up allowing members to have some personal property. What are the implications of this social phenomenon for the larger question of the sustainability of a more “public” ownership of property in the Kibbutz? Wouldn’t neo-liberal economic proponents cite these examples as emblematic of how the incentives are set up inefficiently in the Kibbutz? **[This is very much like the principle/agent residual claimancy arguments in *Recasting Egalitarianism*: a person who owns their own clothes is the residual claimant on the value of the cloths after each use – they have to live with the consequences of their abuse of the clothing. So you are right that this is emblematic of the incentive problem. The “tragic” face of this may be that it is very difficult to combine a solid ethic of responsible use of public property with rights to private property, so that the shift to private property rights as a way of aligning incentives for some goods may have a corrosive effect on the proper use of public property for those goods which remain public.]**

**Random Thoughts** – These random thoughts do not need comments, I provide them in case anyone else wants to discuss them:

6. Over-emphasis on lack of privacy in kibbutz – Can’t one have progressive collectivist values and still desire and enjoy individual privacy? Is privacy not a leftist ideal too?

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## 2. Stuart Meland

I am intrigued by the virtual collapse of the kibbutzim and what it says about the viability of communism/socialism within a larger capitalist culture. The kibbutzim were undoubtedly one of the most successful communist societies in history. Aside from their communal values they had the benefit of being extremely homogenous religious communities devoted to the task of reclamation and repatriation of the nation of Israel. So long as the kibbutzim remained homogenous they thrived (Getz 24, Leviatan xiii). With the growth of a heterogenous population in the 1970's the communal values began to erode (Leviatan xiii). Why were the kibbutzim so vulnerable to the introduction of either capitalist values from outsiders or from the outsiders themselves? **[This is an important distinction: the introduction of values (which may coincidentally be introduced by outsiders) whose content is inimical to the kibbutz ideal, or simply the increase in heterogeneity as such.]** Does this reflect on socialism itself or is it a byproduct of the unique circumstances (Zionism, etc.) present in the kibbutzim? **[Interesting issue about whether the transcendent mission of creating a new nation – Zionism – was important for sustaining the commitments needed in the kibbutz. It might be the case that it was not the passionate commitment to the communalist ideal per se that mattered, but the commitment to a transcendent ideal – an vision that one's actions are part of some greater purpose of historic significance. Once the kibbutz is an established form, and Israel is established as a nation, then it may simply become simply a mundane way of life that enables people to solve practical problems, and as such is simply to be compared with other ways of life and solutions. Perhaps the kibbutz is viable only when it has a “sacred” character and thus is not subjected to that kind of instrumental comparison.]**

Now off on a tangent. I see communism and socialism as reactions *against* other forms of organization as much as they are *for* their own. The founders are generally driven toward the communal structure as a panacea for social inequality, etc. In order to sustain the society they must instill their values in succeeding generations who themselves have never lived outside of the commune. Over time the structure weakens as new generations are predisposed to seek their own ends, if for no other reason than to reject their elders communal values. In the case of the kibbutzim, much of the desire for change seems to have come from within the kibbutz itself (as evidenced in the various polls cited by Getz). The ideological and religious convictions that originally drove Israelis to the communal life no longer inspire the youngest generations in the kibbutzim. Again, is this flaw inherent in communism/socialism? Are there any examples of communist cultures thriving more than a few generations? **[The oldest kibbutzim survived for perhaps four generations before the crisis hit in full force – almost 100 years – so a simple story of the second generation revolting against the practices of their elders isn't satisfactory (although it could be part of the story). Perhaps it is the intersection of this intergenerational story with the historical erosion of Zionism and the transcendent ideal that is at work here.]**

I am also interested in the limits of freedom within the kibbutzim. Can individual freedom really co-exist with socialism? I was amazed to learn how highly the kibbutzim value freedom of expression. How can individual sacrifice coexist with personal freedom? Doesn't socialism require suppression and sacrifice of the individual for the

good of the whole? In the beginning the group expects individual sacrifice. When this no longer works the group requires individual sacrifice. And when this no longer works it enforces individual sacrifice. In this way equality is constructed for the benefit of all people. Now for the kibbutzim this freedom has extended so far as to allow for the deconstruction of the fundamental values of the kibbutzim. Is this a testament to the true freedom afforded members to shape or reshape all aspects of their society or is evidence that the kibbutzim are powerless to prevent their own demise? **[What is really demanded of people is equality, particularly equality of toil and of material consumption, rather than some generic sacrifice of individuality. A regime of high equality may actually afford more time in which most people are able to autonomously develop their own talents and priorities: i.e. toil is equally distributed and thus free time is equally distributed. Since the consumption ethic is not consumerist, this can mean a higher level of free time for the average person than in the nonkibbutz world, and this may lead to higher levels of flourishing and meaningful freedom.]**

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### 3. Adam Jacobs

The original arrangement of the kibbutz set forth in Spiro's article sounds surprisingly like Albert's Parecon. The economic system functions without wages and without money (except for a very small annual concession). Although job complexes were not used, a similar system was adopted where work was apportioned on a non-market basis, and differential monetary rewards for 'better work' did not exist. The public ownership was to ensure that no surplus value was extracted from land via rent or speculation. Yet the kibbutz was integrated into capitalism, selling goods on a market. Is the 'crisis of the kibbutz' just an example of how difficult it is to isolate any independent experiments outside of capitalism from the national and international vagaries of credit, inflation and government policy? What we see in the 80s is the un-Pareconing or un-EPGing of kibbutzim due to macro-economic pressures.

**[The fact that the kibbutz was integrated into a market does seem pretty fundamental here. Parecon's biggest challenge is replacing market coordination with some kind of democratic participatory planning. The kibbutz did engage in internal planning, of course, but this is a much simpler manner than market replacement – it is more like replacement corporate hierarchical planning with democracy inside a firm.]**

This seems to dovetail with Karl Polanyi's idea of the Satanic Mill of capitalism or the latter-day experience with the Asian Tiger economies: social cohesion is a powerful force in driving production. But as social systems become more marketized, it becomes increasingly difficult to adhere to the communalistic values that fostered such high productivity. Was the kibbutz doomed as soon as marketization slipped in? Is the market

always stronger than social cohesion in the long run? **[Excellent issue to discuss. It is also important to figure out precisely what is the mechanism through which the market is corrosive of the more communalistic orientation/values of the kibbutz – is it because the differential between the individual pay-offs talented people can get in the market vs in the kibbutz become so huge? Is it because the competitive strategies the kibbutz engages in within its external relations contaminate the values in the internal relations? or what?]**

Is the medium and environment of the factory essentially hierarchical or anti-democratic? I ask because a debate exists in recent anarchist literature about the 'working class' versus the 'classless class' as the revolutionary force in society. Some maintain that the traditionally conceived proletariat from the factory system will never produce revolutionary praxis on the part of the workers. Instead, the varied class of students, indigenous people, service workers, and others rendered marginal under capitalism will exhibit revolutionary praxis. Although Rosner mentions that 'kibbutz industry ... avoided the use of technologies (such as the assembly line) likely to cause severe alienation among workers,' (33) eventually these alienating tasks were passed off on hired labor. Does the factory system \_itself\_, even outside of capitalism, entail some sort of compromise on human freedom or a utopian ideal? Is it not the social relations of production but the \_medium\_ of production that begets alienation? **[I imagine that there is a nonlinear intensity effect here: a few hours of tedious, routinized, factory-type work would have no inherently alienating effects, but full time work under those conditions does, and somewhere between little and full time there is a tipping point – it is not a simple, linear function. This is why worksharing of toilsome labor is important, and I would think more important than the character of the toil itself.]**

The original kibbutz enterprise was based upon 'what might be termed the moral value of labor.' (Spiro 11) This seems like a very Marxist/Hegelian concept, where purposive activity is the central purpose of human existence. **[I think the term “labor” in the original kibbutz ideal is meant more conventionally as physical laboring: the dignity of hard, physical work grappling with nature. The idea was to increase the value of physical labor for the kibbutz settlers, many of whom were intellectuals. But, of course, the idea might be extended in the way you are suggesting here]**

But in other real utopian schemes, this has not necessarily been the focus - consider basic income, or deliberation day. Maximizing or reifying work could be a tenuous basis for a utopian project - although culture and comradeship can be built around good work, it is unclear how sustainable this is. I do not want to dismiss the kibbutz or denigrate the compromises, because the severe system shock made this something of an exogenous event. But can a utopia be constituted on work?

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#### 4. Zeynep Kilic

The Kibbutz is a complete “organic community” with its principles, its form of production and its form of living. It’s sure that all organizations, which have lasted for a century, have some chances and innovations through these years. The Kibbutz has some chances too especially with the effects of economic development. According to me, two major changes in the form of production and form of living are the changes, which shake the “raison d’être” of Kibbutz and make it something different.

One of the great changes is the meaning of *labor* for Kibbutz. Labor wasn’t just a means of production for human needs; it was more a moral value, even a kind of religion at the past of the member of Kibbutz. As Spiro says, “labor is a great human ideal for the future” (13) and “it is a means of self-realization”. (14) Briefly, labor was one of the first principles of the formation of Kibbutz as a value for its own and as a means of reaching the highest values.

With the effects of 1980’s economical changes, especially with privatization of all realm of the production, meaning of labor and concept of work changed. The economic value of labor took the place of its moral value. Nowadays, self-labor or self-sustaining economy is no longer an issue; primary goal is to plan economic success of the Kibbutz. Related to this difference, labor -for its own- transform to salaried labor in or outside the Kibbutz. Members begin working outside of Kibbutz and hired workers begin to work for it. This is an interactive situation which also strengthens the Kibbutz’s becoming a part of the market economy.

This new situation with all its extensions (business managing, separating economy from community, reducing the existence of community an economic reason, etc.) shows that, now Kibbutz has totally different form that it has before. **[I agree with you that a pivotal shift is in the meaning of labor: from an inherent ideal to a strictly instrumental value. Why do you think this happened? Is it that this ideal eroded and this lead to structural changes in the kibbutz, or were their organizational and structural changes which then contributed to the change in the cultural standard of labor?**

Second change is the change of the *communal life* and diminishing importance of *group*. The base of Kibbutz was intention to live, to produce, to spend together in solidarity and equality. And group always had priority according to individuals. **[The expression “the group always had priority over the individual” may not be quite right, since the ideal of the kibbutz always involved the belief that it created a social structure within which individuals would flourish and their talents develop. The fact that the kibbutzim produced so many artists and scholars and musicians, etc., suggests that**

**the ethic was not exactly the subordination of the individual to the group].** Besides the changes in economic life, becoming group structure more heterogeneous, affected this intention deeply. With other words, balance between collectivism and individualism damaged on behalf of individualism. Privatization is a powerful economic activity, which has direct or indirect influence all the areas of political activity and daily life. It hasn't stand in the limits of economic life in Kibbutz also. The situation of dining halls is the remarkable example of its effects. (Getz; 17) Dining hall is not a simple restaurant for community. It is a meeting room both formal and informal meetings. It is also one of the most outstanding symbols of Kibbutz. Closing of dining halls in some Kibbutzim can be seen as a sign that community doesn't need to be together anymore. This also means that sharing (in terms of feelings, daily problems and ideas, not economical gaining) and solidarity diminish gradually. And we can assume that this going to affect democratic decision making and building future together. Can a Kibbutz survive without a commune? Getz says that the end of the commune won't necessarily be end of community. (25) I can't be so sure about it.

The other two major principles of Kibbutzim are *communal ownership of properties* and *democratic decision-making*. Despite all negative effects of economical changes these two principles remained. But nowadays they are under the risk of these effects too. Increasing business management and doing away with managerial rotation are some of the threats direct towards to democratic decision-making. Likewise selling the houses to the outside residence is a peril to ruin the meaning of communal ownership. That means members begin to see the property of Kibbutz as an investment rather than a life space which belong future generations too.

After these interrogations, I want to add to basic and bigger question which development of Kibbutz reminds me:

- Is economic change the base of the changes at all areas? Is it possible to resist economic determination in the name of defending the principles, ideology and culture? **[It may be that certain economic changes would necessarily bring on certain consequences which would damage the communalism of the kibbutz, but that also it was up to the members of the kibbutz whether or not those economic changes would occur. Hiring outside laborers to do the dirty work may erode communal values, but the decision to hire in outside laborers was not itself economically dictated – this was a choice as a way of solving a problem.]**
- Do the existence and maintenance of a communal life depend on the “closeness” of the outside? Is it possible that a community can be “open” to outside and avoid from deformation at the same time? **[I am not sure that this can be answered in such a general manner, since it would depend upon the character of the “outside” to which a communal life was open. ]**

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## 5. Patrizia Aurich

Regarding the readings on the kibbutz I have two questions remaining which relate to the changes that took place in the kibbutz movement because of industrial revolution.

The reading on Kiryat Yedidim by Melford Spiro emphasizes the relevance of physical labor as one way of the Jews to return to nature, but also to their soil. Spiro shows how the character of an occupation shapes the prestige of one person, pointing out that hard physical labor is the most recognized (Spiro: 14/15). Labor is regarded as a high moral value. Leviatan, Quarter and Oliver in their writing on the crisis in the kibbutz also emphasize the relevance of value in a kibbutz and actually regard to the preservation of these values as one of the mechanisms which kept the kibbutzim longer alive than other attempts of communal living. But then when talking about the industrial revolution and the economic crisis in Israel they show how the kibbutz has been able to adapt these changes while preserving their values. I wonder how the kibbutz could integrate the industrial changes in respect to these values of labor. Doesn't the development of industry demand a higher skill level? How could these changes be integrated in the existing values of labor, such as returning to nature and working physically? Do the high-skilled workers also work physically part of their time? And how does that effect the efficiency? **[It is my understanding that in fact the central moral value of labor has declined considerably and that it is no longer the case that everyone does an equal amount of toilsome labor. I think there remains a high value placed on *work* – on productive contribution – but not on labor in the narrower sense.]**

Regarding the higher skill level the question of education arises. In early years individuals who wanted to get further education had to leave the kibbutz. But now the kibbutz actually needs these people in order to survive. Are there any means within the kibbutzim now to develop these skills? And if so, I wonder how the kibbutz can maintain a different value of labor than the outside world while having the same emphasis on skill needs. **[It is probably not plausible for the kibbutzim to provide advanced education – university level and beyond – since these are still relatively small communities, and thus training with a high knowledge requirement would have to be done outside. Unless a community adopts a very stagnant technology – like the Amish farming communities in the US – then self-education is very unlikely to work.]**

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## 6. Matías D. Scaglione

*Crisis in the Israeli kibbutz, communal ownership of the means of production and planning capacity*

Although I still do not get the whole story of why the traditional *kibbutz* – understanding by “traditional” all the variations around the core principles stated, for instance, in Spiro (1963)– managed not only to survive but to achieve remarkable social and economic performances until the crisis of the late eighties, it seems that one salient explicative factor is precisely the effective exercise of such core principles. Such principles as the emphasis on labor and the opposition to hired labor, the public ownership property, the social and economic equality, the abolition of money within the kibbutz, etc., represents but the negation of capitalism, and one of the principal outcomes of this effort is, I believe, the capacity to control the “functioning” of the community, i.e. the

capacity to plan the allocation of resources, according to external social and natural conditions, in order to assure the sustainability of the kibbutz according to its own principles.

The reaction to the financial and economic crisis of the late eighties implied the typical formula of combating “temporary shocks”, as a hyperinflation, with what we can call “permanent reforms”, that is, reforms that commonly oppose in nature the original configuration and whose reversion entails more costs than its adoption. I am particularly interested in two reforms, namely (i) the decrease and potential abolition of *communal consumption* and (ii) the decrease and potential abolition of the *allocation of labor according to the requirements of “productive branches”*, and the actual and potential effects of such reforms on the planning capacity of the kibbutz. Are these reforms eroding and eventually destroying the planning capacity of the kibbutz, considering that this capacity enables the consecration of what used to be the more valuable principles of the kibbutz? Having in mind that communal ownership of the means of production is one of the unchanged principles (Getz, 25), are we facing a case in which the ownership of means of production does not assure the capacity of planning? It should be noted that this planning capacity is similar, for instance, to the one capitalist firms have to control and design its process of production, but obviously not to influence external conditions as the demand. **[This is an interesting general thesis – if I understand your point. You are arguing that a historically specific shock in the 1980s led to adaptive changes as a pragmatic response, but these adaptive changes created new structures that were too costly to reverse and which also undermined the general planning capacity of the kibbutz, which in turn undermined its core values. There are two key elements in this argument: 1) that planning capacity is the pivotal institutional device for reproducing the radical communalism of the kibbutz; and 2) the historically contingent adaptations of the 1980s destroyed this planning capacity. My sense is that by the time the shock occurred in the 1980s there were also fairly deep strains on the conditions for reproducing the radical design of communal egalitarianism in the kibbutzim, and this probably had more to do with the general tension between the demands of this labor-centered egalitarianism and the temptations of the wider market-driven competitive society.]**

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## 7. Elizabeth Holzer

I'd like to consider the kibbutz in the context of conflict. The author of the overview focused on the guiding principle of the kibbutz as support for labor. But it seems to me that they had another guiding principle, particularly in the foundation of the earlier kibbutzim as well as the later ones that were founded in the Occupied Territories, which that came through in the readings but was not discussed as clearly—kibbutzim provide protection for members. Unlike the models we've looked at earlier, these communities were created in situations of hardship. Zionism was central to the ideology and Zionism has in recent practice been an ideology of conflict. It'd be interesting to consider which institutional features serve the goal of protection from harm. To what extent, for example, does the exclusion of Palestinian workers derive not only from the fear of

economic inequality, but also from the fear of violence from Palestinians? **[The early kibbutzim were certainly defensive structures as well as positive ideals of communalism, but I am not certain that this need for defense contributed to the consolidation of the distinctively communalistic values and structures. The protection-function could certainly have coexisted with more conventional community structures – as it did in some farming settlements in pre-Israel Zionism. In fact I am not sure that the kibbutzim were the majority of settlements. In terms of the current occupied territories, I don't think that they really follow the kibbutz model (but I don't have firm data on this).]**

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## 8. Chang

### Kibbutz: Success and crisis

I pay attention to the questions, “What made the success of Kibbutz possible? And what's the reason for the crisis?” My thought reached the sphere of ideology (eg. collectivism versus individualism). The moral postulates of Kibbutz culture, that is, moral value of labor, moral value of the group means (public ownership), the principle of social and economic equality, and individual liberty (Melford E. Spiro) were the key elements to explain its success. The core question is how to balance the relationship between individuals and the community. And I also consider the external factor, such as economic crisis (for example, inflation) affects the value system in Kibbutz. Ideology is not abstract concept according to Althusser. That means ideology has the material characteristic. That's the Problematic (=theoretical frame) to include the context into the analysis of Kibbutz's success and crisis.

The essential social nature of Kibbutz is revealed by the relationship between individuals and the community. Kibbutzim were founded upon values of collectivism. And also, individual expression was evident in many of the practices (p.10). The successful survival of kibbutzim depends on a balance between the contrasting values of collectivism and individualism. How is it possible to maintain balanced collectivism and individualism under rapid technical changes of the circumstances? Maybe, the relation to the outer world is really problematic. **[Is the issue here the speed of the technological change or the character of the change? I certainly understand how the relationship to the outer world would potentially be problematic for the reproduction of communalism, but it is less clear that the speed of technological change as such is inherently destabilizing of these specific values. Why do you think this would be the case?]**

Two, to maintain collectivism as the identity of kibbutz, I think, the main work of Kibbutz should be the agriculture because it is the best field for collective labor. **[Is the issue really the ways in which agriculture involves collective labor, or is it the fact that skill differentials will be relatively muted in agriculture?]** But, in terms of economic efficiency, it is not profitable to choose agriculture as the main work of Kibbutz. **[This, of course, depends upon whether the main issue is to generate money**

**income through the market to buy other things or just to provide subsistence for the commune itself]**

But, to accept industry is also problematic to kibbutz culture. It is contrary to “religion of labor”. **[Why is industry inherently contrary to the moral value of labor? Again: is this because of some inherent property of industry or because of increased skill differentiation, or what?]** In terms of moral value of labor, the crisis of kibbutz is explained by the paradox, the failure of the success. Kibbutz was so successful that the kibbutzim experienced the intake of many new members without a background in kibbutz ideology (p.11). This increased heterogeneity of Kibbutz members. **[Is the issue, really, heterogeneity, or simply the fact that the density of people with strong commitment to the distinctive kibbutz values declined? It isn't so obvious that heterogeneity per se matters so much as long as there is a strong commitment on this one value.]** To give the jobs to the new members, Kibbutz introduced the industry. The introduction of industry threatened the kibbutz values of equality and direct democracy in organization and management.

To preserve the traditional value and to deal with the conflicts of value, what strategy can be designed as the alternative if we admit exit is not the good strategy.

## 9. César Rodríguez

1. One way to read the story of the crisis of the kibbutzim told in the Leviatan et al.'s volume is as the inevitable erosion of egalitarian values brought about by the increasing complexity of the kibbutzim's economy. Indeed, the story reads very much like the accounts of the decline of community life in the transition to capitalism around the world. Specifically, the case of the kibbutz system seems to validate Hansmann's claim that egalitarian economic organization is sustainable only when the people involved perform similar jobs. This was possible in an agricultural economy where, as Spiro shows, every member of the kibbutzim performed similar manual tasks. However, it becomes much harder in an industrial or post-industrial economy like the one that became dominant in the kibbutzim and Israel at large around the years of the crisis.

In light of this, and given that I'm hesitant to endorse Hansmann's conclusion, I'd like to raise the following questions for discussion: Were organizational complexity and heterogeneity of tasks inherently at odds with the egalitarian rules of economic and social organization of the kibbutz system? If so, why did the kibbutzim manage to have a strong economic performance for roughly fifteen years (1970-1985) after the onset of industrialization? **[There could be strong economic performance and an erosion of the egalitarian values at the same time. That is: the continuing egalitarianism of the basic social structure could have been backed by weaker and weaker values during the period 1970-1985, but until those rules themselves came under some kind of stress, then this weaker cultural support didn't really matter or wasn't really**

**manifest. The weakening value-basis was translated into institutional change only later when economic crisis intruded.]** Does the tension between equality and efficiency arise only in extreme circumstances of economic recession such as the ones that characterized Israel in the mid-1980s? **[I am not sure that the main tension was equality vs efficiency, but equality vs various kinds of individual aspirations – i.e. high skilled, high educated individuals were drawn to alternatives because the value commitments waned, not because there was really a crisis of efficiency.]**

2. Towards the end of his chapter, Rosner hints at a different way to look at the relation between egalitarian arrangements and economic performance in industrial or post-industrial economies. As he rightly points out, some of the leading theories of industrial organization –e.g., theories of “flexible specialization”— contend that small, cooperative firms inserted in supportive regional networks are particularly well suited to compete, innovate and adjust flexibly to changes in demand. Given that the kibbutz system exhibits many of these traits and that it performed very well in the past, why was the deepening of its practice of economic cooperation not a viable response to the crisis? **[I think that it might well have been a viable response, it is just that many of the pivotal actors didn't want that response because they no longer had any strong commitment to communal egalitarianism.]**

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## 10 Linda M. Zech

A communal settlement based upon the principle “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs” is so attractive it is hard to understand how an economically successful unit based upon would begin to lose its ideological base. **[Nice way of putting this]**

However, the Kibbutz seem to be about much more than this principle – whether the Marxist or Anarchist version. They were created by settlers who had not felt safe, secure or a part of the states in which they found themselves. They longed to resettle their country origin – although in many cases they had been gone from the land for many generations. **[Actually in most cases it was many many centuries, not just generations.]** They also wished to forge a new way of agricultural life – beyond the everyday experience of many of the members. I am trying to get a feel for why there has been a crisis in the Kibbutz.

The Kibbutz succeeded beyond the wildest dreams of many, building highly productive and economically sound agricultural (and eventually manufacturing) enterprises which survived some of the worst of the economic (and political) ravages of the 80s. But the newer generations who were raised on the Kibbutz were not motivated by repatriation goal – as they now live in a Jewish state – or by the need to overcome existing hardship. These goals required an extraordinary focus on the communal aspect of the early communes. And yet the fires of individual were never doused. So when the pressures eased up it is not surprising that the appeal of other ways of organizing communities –

with ideas that might free the residents of a Kibbutz to indulge in their individual preferences even more – e.g, gaining freedom from undesirable labor (e.g. hiring employees) or depriving of them of a fuller closer parent/child relationship (e.g. by keeping children in the home with their parents).

In Israel the Kibbutzim are only local units of community living – even if federated with others across the country. These communities have always been located within a state - - and would appear to have relied upon the existence of this greater state. While our reading did not go into great detail on the relationship between residents of the Kibbutz and the larger government of Israel, there is no question but the state would have the power to tax, to regulate and to impose criminal laws upon the members of the Kibbutz. The Kibbutz did not really exist in the desert all this time without security provided by a state, roads to take their merchandise to market, and universities to train the Kibbutzim to take on professional responsibilities. Also the “bright lights” of the City were there for the second and third generations to be tempted by – without the memory of having lived hard to secure what they probably take for granted in their home Kibbutz. **[But one might also imagine that socialization processes would be more firmly in place for subsequent generations and that they could be indoctrinated into this ideology more deeply than their parents, who had grown up under noncommunal conditions.]** Unlike many of the Utopian visions the Kibbutz as embodied are purely local. I am curious if there was every a broad goal of creating a state made up of Kibbutzim. **[I don't think so, although the radical left kibbutzim did have a political goal of influencing national politics in a socialist direction.]**

The hardships and the desperate need to find a home is obviously central to the form which the Kibbutz took. The ideological underpinnings had to bow to these considerations. Perhaps if the Kibbutz had not been so driven by their needs to reclaim their homeland and to carve a way of life out of a desolate and unfamiliar landscape - - they would have been configured in a different more sustainable form - one which had principles which could be taught and cherished in the same form by new waves of children. The radical marriage of communal life with a focus on individual freedom – might have required a less austere way of life – while still focusing on the relationship between responsibility for members of community and joint ownership of the means and fruits of their communal production—if bare survival had not been such an issue.

It occurred to me that the Kibbutz experience has some similarity to the reconfiguration of the Native American communities in this country – now that a means of support through legalized gambling has been created for many tribes. I do not know a lot about these communities but I believe that like the founders of the Kibbutz and agriculture – tribal members did not come to the casino way of life naturally. Like the founders of the Kibbutz they had been deprived of tribal lands and rights – only some of which have been restored. But unlike the Kibbutz experience the memory of the Native American life as a community was not generations old. And, these people were at least in the same country if not on their historic land. It is also not clear that there are strong ideological components that bound together those who founded the casino ventures for their tribes (although the success of the ventures has created an opportunity for the tribes to refocus

on their spiritual and philosophical bonds) as there were for the various founders of the Kibbutz.

Perhaps it is easier to create a sustainable community around an economic idea in a relatively homogenous community when the community does not begin on such a challenging basis as the Kibbutz. The Native Americans who created the casinos were not persecuted in the same sense as their ancestors who had been slaughtered. Welfare systems existed to care for their economic needs.

The founders of the Kibbutz lived in a world where Jewish people continued to face frightening discrimination. Their return to a homeland was an act of physical – not just economic survival. Welfare programs of the state of their origin were designed to overcome this kind of threat. If they are now to modify the Kibbutz in way which will sustain it they must decide what principles are most important, why they desire to live in a Kibbutz – rather than greater Israel or some other country for that matter. The anarchists were looking for a way of life that worked with a personal philosophy of freedom. But surely the form of the Kibbutz would have taken a different form if founded at a time when survival was not so critical. **[I agree that the survivalist dimension mattered a lot, but it isn't so clear whether the founding of such communities without that pressure would have had a better chance of enduring as egalitarian-communal settlements. The hardship and danger helped forge very strong solidarities, which are important for this sort of project, and if those had been weaker then perhaps there would never have been an attempt at something quite so strongly communal in the first place]**

A Kibbutz may also not be appealing to young people who have felt freedom – and with that freedom crave greater diversity. While Kibbutzim may support greater personal liberties and freedom than when first founded, they are still likely to offer a limited amount of diversity. The homogenous goals and purposes of the movement are the glue that kept the communes together for many years. Now that residents are more secure than in their early days, there is a freedom to explore other life styles and methods of organizing work – which is likely to pull a number of residents away. So perhaps, paradoxically, it is the focus on individual freedom that must be blamed for the undoing of the Kibbutz once the survival motive – which created the need for much of communal based structures – deteriorated. **[Does this suggest a more foundational problem – the individual freedom and communal egalitarianism are not a stable social combination?]**

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## 11. Jay Burlington

My thoughts, ripe for critique!:

My comments focus on the selections from *Crisis in the Israeli Kibbutz*. I would like to suggest that the reason that the changes experienced by kibbutzim since the 1980s have

not significantly impacted their core governance (through direct participatory democracy) might be because the political sphere in kibbutzim is not viewed as problematic in the same way that the economic sphere was.

Kibbutzim seemed to adapt to external pressures in a way that allowed them to continue to adhere to their core values (cf. p. ix) through the 1960s and 1970s. But this changed with the more severe economic pressures of the 1980s.

Getz argues in Chapter 2 since the mid-1980s markets and hierarchies have made substantial inroads into kibbutzim and have somewhat replaced cooperation, and that this is effecting a decommunalization of the kibbutz (p. 25). Both privatization (understood as “the transfer of consumer budgets from kibbutz control to personal control by the member” (p. 14) and the use of business-oriented concepts of management have increased. The egalitarian allocation of rewards to members of the kibbutz has resisted change, although there is “an increasing readiness to accept differential rewards” (p. 23).

But hierarchies have made less of an inroad in the area of general governance of the kibbutz. For example, both the idea of 1) centralized decision making in the form of a representative council and the idea of 2) a “controlling committee for restricting the powers of managers and committees” (p. 21) have been rejected.

This suggests to me that members of various kibbutzim view the political decision making process as inherently different and distinct from the economic sphere. I would speculate that this is because the economic crisis, which arrived in the kibbutz due largely to outside pressures, seemed to require changes in the economic management of the kibbutz, while the core of the political beliefs – in direct democracy, for example – have not been perceived to be flawed in the same way.

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I realize that the above leaves aside the question of why the communal ownership of the means of production. I would think this is because this is understood as a political decision in the way that considerations of economic efficiency are not.

**[Interesting idea that there is something distinctive about the economic dimension that made it more vulnerable to decommunalization than the political level. In a sense this implies that relatively radical political equality is viewed as less problematic than radical economic equality. One possibility is that there is no equality-efficiency trade-off at the scale of the kibbutz between political equality and political efficiency (i.e. the quality of the decisions that get generated) whereas there is an equality-efficiency trade-off at the economic level. Or it could just be that there were much bigger pay-offs to high skilled people from defections from economic communalisms but not from political equality.]**

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## 12. Eric Freedman

I have a number of questions about the *Kibbutz: Venture in Utopia* reading that may not serve as discussion openers, but perhaps Erik or someone else who knows about Kibbutzim could say a little bit about them.

I was wondering why it was Eastern European Jews who set up the largest experiment of this kind. Did they share a special regard for Karl Marx as a fellow Jew? **[I think Marx's Jewish background was not important here. Socialism was a vibrant movement in Europe at the time, and it was closely identified with Marx. I think the general socialist culture of Europe in which Jews played a big role is what mattered here.]** Weren't many Jews bankers and financiers, as part of their legacy from the middle ages when they were not allowed to own land, etc., and wouldn't that suggest (at least according to Marx) a natural anti-communist inclination? Spiro did mention that they were petite bourgeois types, many of whom had no experience in agriculture. So why did they want to set up cooperative farms? Also, what types of Jews were they? Orthodox? Reformed? The people in the Kibbutz Spiro researched seemed to shun religiosity, which suggests they had a quite interesting social identity—as Zionists, they identified with some sort of Jewish community, but as orthodox Marxists they denounced religion altogether. **[Lots of them were also intellectuals, and at least some workers. They chose agriculture because they had to eat – there really wasn't any alternative for most settlers.]**

This last point brings up something else I was interested in hearing more about. I know that Erik wanted to bracket the issue of the displacement of Palestinians, but it seems like to clearly understand the Kibbutz movement, we cannot leave Zionism out of the picture. (It seems they could have, but did not, set up communes in the United States, for instance. **[Actually, there were some cooperative farms set up by Jewish immigrants in the upper Midwest – in North Dakota I think. The crucial difference with the US was that there were big cities and the industrial revolution here, so alternatives to agriculture were possible.]**) Was there something about their ethnic/religious identification that contributed to the initial success of the movement? In other words, in drawing conclusions from the Kibbutz movement, we might hypothesize that religious convictions such as Zionism help contribute to the sustainability to socialist experiments of this sort. **[Zionism is less a “religious” conviction than an ethno-nationalist ideology.]** On the other hand, by defining the community as exclusively Jewish (and using biblical references to support their project, etc.), they ultimately compromised the egalitarian and democratic nature of their utopian vision.