Tourism and the Construction of Community Boundaries in a Galilee Kibbutz

by

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Abstract

The mounting focus on the tourist industry by kibbutzim in the last decade, calls for an assessment of the implications of tourism development on the life of kibbutz members and the changes in the local identity and boundaries. In the present study, based on anthropological fieldwork, identity and structural changes in one kibbutz are placed in the context of local tourism development. The core of the article is the description of two celebrations to which tourists were invited to celebrate the festivities together with the kibbutz members. These celebrations from different periods of kibbutz life and stages of development of the tourism project, shed light on the changes occurring in the local identity and boundaries.

Kibbutz, the tourism industry and local identity

Kibbutz society has received considerable theoretical and empirical attention by social scientists, including a good deal of recent sociological research examining kibbutz economic and social crises and the subsequent changes made in the kibbutz way of life. Despite intense research activity, there has been no study of tourism on kibbutzim (plural of kibbutz), although data indicates that tourism has greatly expanded in recent years. The omission is striking in light of sociological and anthropological studies showing wide ranging economic, social, cultural and organizational ramifications of tourism on the communities in which it occurs, and the association of tourist development with a wide range of community changes.

A central aspect in explaining the implications of tourism on host communities is the manner in which the tourist industry influences local identity formation (e.g., Abram and Waldren, 1997; Lanfant, 1995). While placing their focus on “the hosts”, those who satisfy the needs of the tourists become objects of tourist attention (Bois-

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1 For example, data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (2001) reveals a 26% growth in the number of rooms offered to tourists in the framework of “Rural Tourism in Kibbutzim and Collective Moshavim” between the years 1997-2000. In a survey by Pavin (2000) published by Yad Tabenkin there was a marked increase in the “guest and food services” business (between the years 1995-1998) and Pavin remarked that the tourist trade captured a notable segment of kibbutz business.
Bruner (1991) claims that in the tourist encounter, the “self” of the tourist undergoes a slight change while the implications on the host’s “self” is quite profound. Contrary to the usual tourist industry discourse that offers tourists a “total change” when encountering “natives” and “people from stone-age cultures”, here, the significant transformation takes place among the locals, who develop a unique awareness resulting from these tourist encounters. Bruner reveals how subsequent to encounters with western tourists, the people of New Guinea were exposed to their own economic inferiority, their classification as “natives”, and the understanding that their past characterizes them as “primitive”. Awareness of these comparisons arouse feelings of inferiority regarding the present and deep shame with respect to their past. The tourist encounter, Bruner asserts, provokes questions regarding their present status, causes renewed scrutinization of the past and molds their future.

The tourist encounter, however, needs not necessarily arouse feelings of inferiority among those who live in tourist areas and the process of commercializing culture needs not necessarily lead to community and cultural destruction. The encounter between locals and tourists can cause the former to rediscover their history, culture and traditions and even encourage appreciation for them. Thus, for example, in her study of responses to tourism in rural central France, Abram (1996) claims that the commercial process of the rural area was part of a very positive process characterized by the population’s renewed appreciation for their history and a repudiation of the shame of their being provincials. As mentioned, this process is associated with the essence of the encounter with “others” that encourages questions of identity, such as “Who are we?” and “How do we appear to others?”.

Among the salient characteristics of kibbutz society is a notably high awareness of their unique identity in the Israeli society. Various studies indicate a continual decline of kibbutz status within the Israeli society, beginning with the establishment of statehood. The economic and social crisis engulfing the kibbutzim in the mid 1980’s further injured the kibbutz image in the eyes of the surrounding society. There ensued an increase of criticism on kibbutz management and the high costs incurred by Israeli society to ensure its survival (Ya’ar, Ben-Rafael and Soker, 2000). To face the crisis, kibbutzim developed additional sources of business and income. As business in the field of tourism increased, a comprehensive heritage industry was cultivated, including the creation of settlement museums, guided tours on kibbutzim, and the development of archives (Soker, 1998). Settlement Museums established on kibbutzim opened windows to a past reflecting the kibbutz perspective, which became engraved into the collective Israeli memory. The museum framework made contact possible between the kibbutz and tourists, among them Israeli groups previously unfamiliar with the kibbutz ethos. Thus the museums were able to enhance

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2 According to data from the Central Bureau of Statistics, the population of kibbutz members at the end of 2000 numbered 115,300 individuals, residing in 268 kibbutzim. The kibbutz population constitutes 1.8% of the general Israeli population.
appreciation of kibbutz activities of the past, and associatively, to the present (Katriel, 1994). The development of tourism on kibbutzim breaches the boundaries of the museum. Guided tours along kibbutz paths, the presence of tourists in the dining rooms as well as in agricultural sectors, and the construction of guest houses adjacent to kibbutz members’ homes blur boundaries differentiating the museum from the community in which it is located.

Changes in the identity of kibbutzim and the degree of identification of the individual with the kibbutz, the kibbutz movement and the collective idea are well researched. Most of these studies focus on understanding the “rational” and “objective” practices confronting questions of identity of the kibbutz and the individuals living within this framework. Therefore, changes in identity are assessed according to their affinity to professed kibbutz values, and their linkage to changes in the reciprocal relations between kibbutzim and the Israeli society (e.g., Ben-Rafael, 1996; Rosner and Getz, 1996). I have no intention of claiming that the awareness of kibbutz members to their unique identity or their sensitivity to comparison in the eyes of non-kibbutz others are characteristics originating directly from encounters with tourists. Their uniqueness comes from the ideas inherent in the establishment of the kibbutz. Nevertheless, the tourist occupation within this framework sells “kibbutz culture”; the collective memory and identity constructs an inner discourse (within both the kibbutz and the kibbutz movement) regarding the product sold, and retrospectively observes the changes over the years. Assuming that the individual and collective identities are constructed vis à vis the “other”, the tourist industry challenges the local identity through the exposure to other cultures intruding into the community and the process of commercializing the local identity and memory.

This perspective, whose focus is the implications of tourism on the identity of those living within the tourist space, inspired my study of Kibbutz “Gvanim” on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

Unlike the Kibbutzim that turned to tourism in the last decade, Kibbutz Gvanim (established 1937), had been engaged in tourism since the early 1960s. Its tourist industry, by the late 1990s included a hotel, bed and breakfast rooms, a beachfront swimming area, a restaurant, the settlement museum and a camel farm. In the late 1990s tourism became a main source of kibbutz employment (yielding over 60 percent of the community’s income).

The present account is based on local archive documents and anthropological fieldwork conducted over a three-and-a-half year period (1996-2000). As prior to and during fieldwork, I was myself a member of Gvanim, my ethnography is derived from participation on different levels.

The core of the present article is a descriptive account of two celebrations in which the hotel guests were invited by the members of Gvanim to join in the communal festivities. The first event was the Passover Seder of 1964, the year the hotel

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[3] Talk of tourist occupations began in the 1940s, although comprehensive tourist projects originated only in the 1960s.
opened its doors, and the second was the Independence Day festivities of 2000, marking 52 years of Israeli statehood. Aside from these two specific events, kibbutz members strictly celebrated holidays and other community events far from “tourist eyes”. Territorial and social separations were maintained between the “tourist areas” and “the kibbutz” until the beginning of the 1990s. Being exceptions to the norm, these celebrations from different periods of kibbutz life and stages of development of the tourism project, shed light on the changes occurring in the local identity and boundaries.

“Not like watching a play in the theatre”

The decision to develop a “comprehensive tourist industry” taken at a general kibbutz assembly in the beginning of the 1960s, dealing with the difficulties of surviving solely on agriculture, fostered an internal discussion regarding the characteristics of this tourism and its implications on kibbutz life. Analysis of the discourse on tourism development reveals the kibbutz members’ perspective regarding the world of tourism as well as their viewpoint regarding kibbutz life during this period.

Involvement in tourism was seen as conflicting with kibbutz life; however as initiators of the tourism development, there was a marked confidence among many kibbutz members in their abilities to design kibbutz tourism to be consistent with the characteristics of the kibbutz way of life. Nonetheless, tourism was perceived as a “luxury” that characterized “the rich”. These images were considered contrary to the kibbutz spirit, which sanctified manual labor – especially agriculture, and focused on materialistic modesty and frugality. Thus, for example, one of the members said at the general assembly meeting of May 16th, 1960: “We should develop the place as a hostel for tourist groups, vacation camps and hikers and not for hosting rich tourists (...)”. Another member expressed his view saying: “We should establish a popular tourist enterprise for the working class, and determine the kind of people who will come. The principle of a popular base that would also yield profit should be adopted (...)”. The opinions of committee members appointed to tend to tourism development were compatible with the above and their statements emphasized the kibbutz character planned for the tourism project: “This place is designed for tourism and a beach with kibbutz flavor. That’s what’s needed. We’re not talking about luxury tourism – rather mid-level tourism”. I learned about additional considerations regarding the characteristics of tourists for whom the tourist project was intended by talking to veteran kibbutz members. A number of members, holocaust survivors, claimed there would be no control over the kind of tourists to arrive and expressed their opposition to encounter German tourists.

Not all kibbutz members shared the view that it was possible to control the char-

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4 June 17th, 1961 general meeting.
5 Ibid.
acteristics of the “tourist enterprise” to make them compatible with kibbutz life. Members expressed their apprehension that tourists would disrupt community life since the hotel was adjacent to the kibbutz and they knew that kibbutz life stimulated the visitors’ curiosity. Thus one kibbutznik (member of a kibbutz) made a comment that “(…) the discussion should be about the location (…), (the hotel) isn’t as far from the courtyard (of the kibbutz). We must be separate from that place; let there be a permanent banana field there.” 6 A banana field indeed delineated the boundary separating the tourist area and the kibbutz for many years to come. This division of space created the “tourist bubble” – an area that stood out from its surroundings and was designed to suit the needs of the western tourist (e.g., Smith, 1989 [1978]). In the case of the kibbutz, the purpose of the Gvanim “tourist bubble” was to protect the life of the members from the tourist gaze, and to guard the unique socialistic values of the community.

Opening the hotel to visitors in the summer of 1963, put the intentions of the tourism project designers to the test of creating a spatial and social separation between the “tourist area” and the “kibbutz”, while, at the same time introducing tourists to kibbutz life and the kibbutz idea. The hotel workers anticipated assistance from the entire kibbutz population in the realization of these ideas embodied in the intention to establish kibbutz tourism along with a commitment to the success of the project. The behavior of kibbutz members did not always meet these expectations. An example can be found in the following words of a kibbutznik as reported in the kibbutz newsletter: 7

6  Ibid.
7  October 8th, 1963, The kibbutz newsletter.

By chance, one night while talking with one of the kibbutz hotel workers, I greeted the guest sitting next to my friend, whom I had never met. I inquired how he was doing (he spoke English) (…). I was really curious to know what was going on. The hotel guest answered me thus: “I don’t understand how people pass right by each other without saying hello and in general, I feel like an unwanted foreigner. No one even answers my greetings”. “Listen,” I said to him, “if you would meet me in your city would you say hello?”. “What do you mean,” he replied, “How can you compare? I came here especially to see the kibbutz, the big family that is so talked about.” At that moment a friend passed by and said hello, inquired what I did on my vacation, while completely ignoring the guest. I found myself in a very unpleasant situation. Although I explained to the guest that due to the increase in tourism in recent years, we have become used to it, insensitive to the phenomenon; yet deep within me I could not accept it. I don’t blame anyone, and I, too, like others behave the same way, but, still, we have to think about this. There are two choices: to stop or at least limit the coming of guests, or arrange a suitable way to answer the problem. It’s clear that we, as kibbutzniks, are interested in demonstrating our achievements – but not like this (…)”.
Ignoring the existence of tourists to the extent of turning them into the social category of invisible is a frequent strategy for confronting the tourist gaze among host communities exposed to mass tourism (Smith, 1989 [1976]; Boissevain, 1996). Although this strategy undermines local attempts to establish kibbutz tourism, each member of the kibbutz attests to his own actions and words with regard to kibbutz life, “the great big family”.

The Passover Seder celebrations one year after the hotel’s opening tested the commitment of the Gvanim community to the tourist project; and in particular the commitment of those members working in the tourism field. In addition to their attempts to harness the general kibbutz membership’s involvement in the project as hosts, the hotel workers had to deal with the pace of life in the tourist world, which was different from the daily rhythm of kibbutz work schedules determined by the agricultural sectors. My talks with veteran kibbutz members of the hotel staff revealed that the separation from kibbutz life due to work shifts, was the central factor spoiling their enjoyment of tourism work. The following words of a worker in the tourist sector, published in the kibbutz newsletter, reflect this feeling:

I entered the cafeteria four years ago, after many years working in agriculture and fish ponds. It was very strange to adjust myself to service work. But after a few days I saw that the work was interesting, you formed relationships with tourists from all over the world, which is personally very satisfying. We try to give our cafeteria a kibbutz character; since the workers are kibbutz members (…) naturally we don’t lack problems. Working late at night cuts you off from friends, family life and the kibbutz society, which is the cause of a lack of permanence among cafeteria workers (…).8

The tendency to strengthen the community framework and increased investment in raising living standards of kibbutz members characterizes Kibbutz Gvanim, and other kibbutzim in the 1960s.9 Cultural activities, especially those celebrating Israeli holidays according to the unique kibbutz interpretation, symbolized the “kibbutz togetherness”; the participation of kibbutz members in these celebrations was an expression of belonging to the community. In this context one can understand the dilemma between “the needs of tourism” and the “needs of the kibbutz” which confronted the members about a year after the hotel was opened as the time for celebrating the “Passover Seder” approached. In the kibbutz newsletter from February 21st, 1964 under the title “This Year Passover”, the membership was informed of the decision to hold the first Passover Seder at the Kibbutz together with the hotel guests. From the manner in which the decision was explicated one can understand the

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8 March 21st, 1969, the kibbutz newsletter.
9 Among other things, this tendency is explained against a backdrop of the continual erosion of the status of kibbutzim within the Israeli society and the desire of the kibbutz to improve its image to others by presenting itself as an entity that offers a quality of life and society surpassing that outside its boundaries (Soker, 46:1998).
The (kibbutz) secretariat has decided to invite the hotel guests to celebrate our Passover Seder this year. This decision stems from the fact that it is impossible to close the guesthouse for this period because of the holidays and the need to host guests and it is impossible to have a Passover Seder in the guesthouse because that would require part of the community not to participate in the Seder at home – which is also impossible.” (Emphasis is mine). Therefore, the only solution is the inclusion of the guests to our Seder.

Thus the decision to invite the hotel guests to the kibbutz celebration originated from considering of the needs of the members only, and from the desire to safeguard community life. The celebration of the holiday in this manner did not necessarily contradict the motivation of the tourists who came to experience “kibbutz life”, and was even compatible with the idea embodied in “kibbutz tourism” – providing the opportunity for tourists and visitors to experience a close-up acquaintance with kibbutz life. Moreover, holding the festivities in this manner enabled a demonstration of the power of communal relations, and revealed the flourishing Gvanim community, although these possible factors were not relevant to the decision-making process of the secretariat. This decision actually expresses a lack of ability to combine tourism and kibbutz life more than anything else. Another salient factor is the preference of the needs of the members over those of the tourist sector. Evidence can be found in the “holiday staff” report regarding the manner of organization for the holiday:

Guests of the hotel will not come to the Seder in one group. Instead they will be paired with families with whom they will meet an hour before the Seder for hospitable hello over a cup of coffee. They will go to the Seder together with the kibbutz families for two reasons: the first is that we will not have to gather the visitors in the central dining room, thus being able to disperse them throughout, so preventing a feeling that they are watching us like at a theater play, rather enabling them to be integrated somehow within the community, so that the hosts will be able to explain what is going on to them.

As we see from these excerpts, the organizing staff did not ignore the tourists needs. The way the holiday was organized enabled generous hospitality and a desire to expose kibbutz life to the visitors as the strategy to confront a nuisance – the tourist gaze.

Celebrating the holiday in this manner denies the ambivalent relationship of kibbutz members to tourism development. The unique nature of the event and the strict separation of kibbutz life from the tourist world in the years to come testify the lack of satisfaction from the blurring of social boundaries. With the consolidation of the
tourist sector, the distinction deepened between “the kibbutz” as a tourist attraction and the community life that was conducted far from the tourists’ eyes. This process is also connected with the professionalization of the tourist workers among kibbutz members, their being sent to study the field of tourism and the introduction of methods of management and hospitality standards to the tourist industry. The Passover Seder celebration could have been a realization of the idea embodied in the establishment of “kibbutz tourism” and the need of the community members to safeguard its boundaries, distinguishing socially and spatially between themselves and the tourism territory. In accordance with the community’s need to define the boundaries of exposure and hospitality, no other holidays were celebrated on the kibbutz with the participation of hotel guests. That is, until the Independence Day celebration commemorating 52 years of Statehood (2000).

“Who wants to be a millionaire?”

The growth of tourism in the 1990s is exhibited by the widening of established business and the development of new initiatives. The reassignment of “children’s houses” left vacant with the transition to “family lodging” arrangements in 1987 into bed and breakfast rooms, became the central tourist development in those years. A convenience store and restaurant were also added to the tourist sector. The kibbutz rented out an area next to the restaurant to an outside operator who established a camel farm. In addition, a swimming pool was built in the hotel area.

The tourist territory was labeled as such by a number of signs that were placed between the entrance to the tourist area and the entrance to the kibbutz. The signs labeled and defined the tourist area, supposedly guarding the territorial separation between “kibbutz” and “tourism”. However, despite the signs, distinctions became blurred in the 1990s in face of the increased tourist activities. This was especially noticeable regarding the functioning of “Gvanim Inn” (bed and breakfast rooms), located at the heart of the kibbutz residential area and whose guests dined in the kibbutz dining room. Tourism development also increased the number of visitors to the kibbutz. The activities had their own information department at the hotel, which included lectures on kibbutz life, guided tours and tractor tours on the kibbutz and in its agricultural fields, and additional activities on the camel farm. This farm offered camel ride excursions throughout the kibbutz making camel visitors a frequent sight on kibbutz grounds, especially near the main entrance gate. The camel farm also became an attraction for short family tours for kibbutzniks and their guests.

In view of the economic and social crises Kibbutz Gvanim found itself in, between 1996-2000, the kibbutz membership discussed changes in their lifestyle and a redefinition of the organizational structure of the kibbutz. The plan for change, which received the nickname of “the making a living model” was designed in a way that narrowed the degree of cooperation and equality in kibbutz life, to the point of non-
existence – even in essential areas like health and education. The plan revised and redefined the relationship of the individual and the collective in the area of livelihood by determining that the member is responsible for his own livelihood and introducing “differential salaries”. Moreover, the relationship between the community and the productive sectors was redefined as a process of the separation of the “community from the economy”. The plan for change referred to additional topics that were never carried out, such as “allocation of assets” (turning kibbutz property into the private property of the kibbutz members) and establishing “a neighborhood community”. In contrast to kibbutzim that chose to make focused changes in defined areas of activity, on Kibbutz Gvanim comprehensive rather than gradual changes were decided upon in reference to all areas of the social and economic activity – all within a period of a year and a half. Considering the scope as well as the pace of change, the classification of Gvanim’s revision warrants being called radical.¹⁰

Because of the dominance of tourism on Gvanim, all the kibbutz members were exposed (albeit with different degrees of intensity) to gaps between the image of the kibbutz in the eyes of visitors and the true reality of their life. The image of Gvanim as a rich kibbutz was revealed to me and to other members with whom I spoke, each time I said “I am a member of Gvanim”. Many people are familiar with the hotel, and draw conclusions regarding the kibbutz economic situation accordingly. The frequent response is: “You’re a rich kibbutz; you have a hotel”. The identification of the kibbutz with the hotel shows that the local tourism reached a stage that MacCannell (1989 [1976]) terms the stage of “social reproduction”. At this stage the tourist site defines the local identity due to blurred social distinctions between the tourist site and those who live nearby. The gap between the image of the rich kibbutz and kibbutz lifestyle of the quiet life and the economic pressures and feelings of economic and social distress expressed by various members,¹¹ was exposed each time I entertained my friends from the city. When they visited the kibbutz they expressed their enchantment with the “peace and quiet”, the “landscape” and the closeness to the Sea of Galilee, declaring that we were living in the Garden of Eden. While the tourists walked along the kibbutz paths praising the Sea of Galilee and the kibbutz gardens, I thought about the fact that the kibbutzniks were closed inside their homes and no-

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¹⁰ For example, along with the decision to apply the revision plan, members received information sheets One Week in July (1998) in preparation for the general kibbutz assembly meeting on the following subjects: On the 22nd of July, “a document of principles for the removal of the dairy farms from the kibbutz” (turning the establishment into a joint dairy farm with another kibbutz) and on the 23rd of July, “Allocation of apartments to kibbutz members”; and on the 24th of July “the establishment of a neighborhood community near Gvanim”. For an inter-kibbutz comparison with regard to change characteristics see Topel (1995); Getz (in Pavin, 2000:92-97).

¹¹ In 1999, following the introduction of differential wages, over 30% of the kibbutz membership were earning minimum wages according to the standard of the Israeli economy that year. Resulting from personnel reductions in the service sector of the kibbutz and a lack of employment opportunities outside the kibbutz, apprehension regarding future employment became the norm in many families.
ticed the phenomenon of fencing the houses with bushes. The gap between the image of a place as seen by “others” and the feelings of the kibbutz membership was referred to by the editor of the kibbutz newsletter, who tried to reflect the local mood in her “editorial”.

People who come to visit us from the outside always remind us what a beautiful place we live in and only we – most of us – who live here, do not know how to value the pearl that nature has blessed us with, and the founders who blessed us by building this beautiful place. Yet we, with our own hands, cause it to be a place that isn’t always pleasant to live. For the coming New Year, I bless every home that in spite of the changes we undergo it (Gvanim) will be a nice place to live; and that the relationships between members will improve and we will successfully endure the changes in the best possible way (...).

All attempts by various members, especially the old-timers, to provoke a straight discussion of the question “are we going to remain a kibbutz at the end of this transformation process?” were nipped at the bud while the revision plan and the implementation process were being designed. Along with the feeling of many kibbutz members that “the kibbutz is over”, other voices were heard that called for the continuation of the cultural activities – expressing that the Gvanim community was still a “kibbutz”. Members chose to continue the upkeep of institutions like the kibbutz newsletter, the members’ clubhouse, and archives “as community taxed obligations”. Moreover, some were sorry that the members of Gvanim would no longer celebrate holidays communally. As part of the revision plan and implementation process design, the dining room ceased to be the center of social life; a glaring expression of which is seen by the choice of many members to celebrate holidays in their homes. The holidays passed without any marker, with the exception of a holiday dinner, which many members avoided, choosing to celebrate their holidays within the

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12 In the past, kibbutz fences were characteristic only for houses adjacent to the tourist territory. However, from the outset of the “asset and dwelling allocation” discussion, the fencing phenomenon turned into a marked occurrence in all residential areas. Har Gil (1994) claims that the changes in the landscape gardening of the kibbutz reflect all essential changes in the social condition of the kibbutz, giving it an expression of form. With regard to kibbutzim in the 1990s, he notes that kibbutz gardens became increasingly similar to private gardens of private homes of the city’s suburbs. In Gvanim, besides nurturing private gardens, a process began where members took control over territories considered of the public domain by enlarging gardens and fencing them in.

13 October 1st, 1997, the kibbutz newsletter.

14 In the revision plan it was decided to establish “municipal taxes” from the incomes of the members to finance community activities. When the subject of the “community budget” was brought before the General Kibbutz Assembly, members were to decide if they wished to continue supporting cultural institutions or to lower the taxes by reducing the activities or closing these institutions.
family circle in their homes. The editor of the kibbutz newsletter referred to this change in the membership’s behavior: 15

With giant steps we’re ceasing to be a kibbutz society. There are almost no common activities. Members barely meet; almost no one comes to the general assemblies; in recent years holidays were held only by a few who cared and lately this has also stopped, and we pass over the holidays without even commemorating them (…).

About a year after commencing the implementation of the revision plan, Gvanim decided to celebrate “Independence Day” commemorating 52 years of the State of Israel (2000) in a communal celebration. This celebration, as I will show, represented the changes in the local identity and enabled the experience of a new identity. At the same time it facilitated the experience of feelings of “communitas”, ephemeral as they may be, among members of Kibbutz Gvanim.

Before the change process, Independence Day was celebrated in Gvanim according to the “Independence Day Seder” model. 16 A holiday dinner was conducted in accordance with the kibbutz Independence Day “Hagadah” (book of tales). Similar to the Passover Seder, Independence Day in this model included the gathering of families and their guests in the dining room. Independence Day 2000 was celebrated in a different way than in the past with regards to two central aspects: First, the Independence Day Seder was cancelled and taken out of the program by the organizers of the event; second, in contrast to the many years of conducting holidays as Closed Events, i.e., for kibbutz members only – this celebration opened its doors not only to friends, relatives and the Gvanim paying residents 17, but also invited families from the nearby city and surrounding settlements whose children attended the same local educational system. In addition, and for the first time since the 1964 Passover Seder, the members invited the tourists from the Gvanim Inn and the hotel to join them in the festivities. This framework enabled the examination of what story the members of the kibbutz told themselves, about themselves and to others.

A four person team aged 30–35, third generation Gvanim members, planned and organized the holiday. Announcements were posted on the bulletin board in the dining room and screened on the kibbutz television channel. The title that flashed on the screen was Who wants to be a millionaire? 18, and members interested in participating in the game were asked to apply to the holiday committee.

15 May 3rd, 1998, the kibbutz newsletter.
16 See the article of Katz and Handelman, in Handelman (1990), for a discussion on the influence of the Passover holiday on the formulation of the Independence Day festivities in Israel.
17 The status marking people who rent apartments on the kibbutz and who pay for the use of some of the services offered to members, but are not kibbutz members. In 1999 Gvanim’s population numbered 520 members and 145 paying residents.
18 In Israel that year, a television trivia game with that name was one of the most popular programs on the air.
The holiday program advertised to members included a *bazaar* (sales stands and activities for children managed by Gvanim members, as well as sales booths run by outside operators), a *competitive trivia game* (“Who wants to be a millionaire?”) and a dancing party. The holiday committee announced that the operation of the sales booths involves a participation charge and they elaborated the means of payment on the same page with the program: “The bazaar consists mainly of commercial booths set up by members (of Gvanim), although some of the booths are not attributed to members. Monetary exchange for purchasing purposes will be in *coupons*. The coupons will be sold at the central cash register to be located on the clubhouse dance floor on the night of the holiday and will be open from 19:00 to the bazaar closing (...). It is advised to stock up on a measure of coupons in advance to avoid stress and needless waiting in line at the beginning of the evening.”

The dining room, which was central to every community event in the past, was separated from the event and not mentioned in the holiday program. The existence of food stands and the holiday committee’s recommendation “not to eat in the dining room” before the celebrations, emphasized the lack of relevance of the dining room for the success of the event. The festivities included a happening in the courtyard in front of the dining room and the lawn facing it. In contrast to the recommendations of the organizers, many members and their guests and resident families chose to dine in the dining room for the holiday.

After the revision plan’s decision to charge the kibbutz members for their meals, the dining room stood empty on most days of the week. The choice of many members to turn up with their guests at the dining room before the celebrations raised a smile on the faces of the dining room staff and comments like “The dining room is full like it used to be”, were made. The friend, with whom I came to the event and who usually dined in the dining room on Friday nights only, said in amazement: “I haven’t seen so many people in the dining room for a long time.” Dinner was served until 8 p.m. Afterwards, members and guests went down to the members’ club and gathered in the dining room courtyard waiting for the festivities to begin. At 7:45 p.m., when the dining room was almost empty, a group of 30 tourists from Germany arrived. They were staying in Gvanim Inn and were invited to join the festivities. The prevention of an encounter between members and tourists at the holiday dinner was not by chance. The policy of the dining room staff, from the perspective of the “tourists’ needs”, had separate dining times for tourists and members, with the intention of providing “professional and efficient service” for the tourist guests.

The courtyard and lawn filled with kibbutz members and guests. Many children played on the grass and the members sat around tables that were set out near the clubhouse entrance. I noticed that members sat together with residents who lived nearby. After about half an hour the tourists came down from the dining room and

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19 I was informed of the tourist’s identity by the dining room workers. Guests are frequently categorized according to their country of origin by tourist industry workers as well as by kibbutz members, except when other social characteristics are dominant, for example “pilgrims” or “archeologists”.
stood in the courtyard as a group. I saw that a veteran kibbutznik, holocaust survivor, spoke with them. This also caught the attention of a veteran kibbutz woman who was sitting next to me, and when he came near our table she asked how he was and said: “I saw you speaking to the tourists. What were you talking about?” He replied cheerfully: “They asked me what we were celebrating here. And I told them that we are celebrating a very special day (…) saying that we need not fear them (the Germans) or the Syrians”. He started to laugh and left us speechless.

The tourists stood out as a noticeable group, and aside from the above interaction, no other members of the kibbutz had any contact with them. There was not even a representative from the tourist sector to accompany them. Then they wandered around for some minutes among the bazaar stands and finally bought some beer and moved on without participating in the rest of the festivities.

Most of the participants and primarily the children wandered about the 17 bazaar booths. Fourteen of the booths were operated by kibbutz members and 3 managed by outside operators. While inviting the members sitting at the tables to walk around the bazaar, one of the members of the holiday committee advertised the booths saying: “Druze Pita with Lebane (soft, sour, white cheese spread) is in the Druze tent! It’s highly recommended!”

Among the 17 sales stands that were at the Bazaar, two counters were free of charge: the “Coffee House” and the “train ride” for the children. The “Coffee House” was financed by the community and was active on Friday nights and holidays all year round. The “train ride” consisting of a tractor pulling banana carts that held the children was familiar from various past communal holiday festivities and was very popular among the children. However this time, unlike in past celebrations, it had competition – the “camel rides”. Camels were brought to the bazaar by the operators of the “camel farm”.

In addition to the “Coffee House” activities five other sales booths were set up for food and drinks. A beer stand was operated by a young kibbutznik in charge of the kibbutz youth clubhouse; next to it two teens in the 12th grade worked a hotdog stand; and two kibbutz girls, who were cousins and third generation Gvanim kibbutzniks sold cakes, at a cake counter. One of the cake counter operators was a present member of the kibbutz whereas the other had left Gvanim. A fourth food concession was barbecued meat on skewers, run by a kibbutz couple and their elder children, which was very popular. Near the camel camp a Bedouin tent was erected by a resident of a nearby Arab village and owner of a local restaurant near the gas station. His relationship with Gvanim began when the membership decided to order food for family events, like birthdays, from his restaurant. The tent was strewn with mattresses and nargilahs, and sold “Druze pita bread”, lebane, humus and herb tea.

Other bazaar attractions for the children besides the “train” and “camel rides” included a plaster of a Paris creativity corner run by two female kibbutz members who specialized in arts and crafts for kids. The biggest attraction in the eyes of the children was a stand run by the person in charge of kibbutz security – “shooting with paint rifles”. Another category of bazaar booths promoted the sale of kibbutz mem-
Works of kibbutz artists usually exhibited in the hotel and sold in the hotel souvenir shop were now being sold at the bazaar directly by the artists themselves at wholesale prices to the participants of the festivities. A veteran kibbutz couple exhibited their paintings and drawings in the clubhouse; each work labeled with the purchase price. Also located in the clubhouse, another kibbutz woman operated a booth selling jewelry, while on the lawn a kibbutznik sold ceramic vessels of his own creation. The manager of the “old age home” (which prepares arts and crafts throughout the year and sells them to tourists of the hotel), set up a stand selling these articles.

School children also participated in the bazaar as salespersons. A week before the holiday the children collected old toys from their and other members’ homes and bought a few new toys out of their activities budget. These toys were placed on sale with the revenue earmarked for the purchase of new toys for their clubhouse. (This explanation was given to me by their counselors). Three children from the 9-11 age group sold toys at this stand. Although there were announcements made to catch the attention of the other children, most of the time this booth remained deserted – and the young salespersons entreated their friends to take turns with them to enable them to participate in the other activities. There was a booth selling cosmetics run by two female members who were cosmeticians, and a “treatment tent” was set up where people could receive treatments from a member, who is an “alternative treatment professional”.

The sale of a variety of products by kibbutz members at the bazaar, was previously condemned socially and now was made public. The open bazaar and sales initiatives of members from all age groups promoting various products for the sellers’ personal gain served as an endorsement of the “community management”. Thus the bazaar gave a stamp of legitimacy to activities that were heretofore not deemed legitimate, even if they were not specifically denounced during the period of discussions surrounding the revision plan and its implementation. The bazaar manifested the essential idea of the “responsibility of the member for his own livelihood. As I described, most of the members set up booths related to commercial efforts that were similar to their occupations”. It was different in the case of the family who set up the “barbeque skewers” counter. This couple worked for many years in a non-food service field, at a job that was now insecure due to intentions to increase the service sector’s efficiency by cutting personnel and closing some of the sector’s activities. The success of this booth during the Independence Day festivities led this family to think about creating an additional source of income. During my visit to Gvanim a few months after the Independence Day festivities, I was told that these members were now offering a meat preparation service for interested members.

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20 In the past the “private enterprises” of these members were brought before the kibbutz committee of inquiry and were reprimanded. Nonetheless, the activities continued. With the new emphasis on individual responsibility of members for their and their family’s livelihood as part of the revision program, these initiatives increased among various members.
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The economic success of the bazaar was dependent on the number of participants in the event and their willingness to participate in this kind of exchange. This was different than in previous years, when a large number of participants meant high economic expenses for the kibbutz. One of the organization team referred to this aspect when he summarized the event in the following manner:21 “the atmosphere at the bazaar was excellent and all the food booths sold all their produce. The other booths also sold well (…). It was a very good idea to invite people from outside the kibbutz. This idea can be expanded in the future when we can invite the families of our salaried workers and perhaps also just residents from the surrounding area (…)

The existence of booths operated by members, kibbutz drop-outs and wholly kibbutz outsiders and the lack of differentiation between sales to members and sales to paying residents, guests and tourists represent the blurring of boundaries between the kibbutz and its surroundings. Moreover, the internal community boundaries blur between “kibbutz members” and “paying residents”.

In contrast to the bazaar activity, which represented the social openness of the kibbutz to its surroundings and the economic advantages of said openness, the game Who Wants to Be a Millionaire? notably differentiated between “members” and “others”. The rules of the game were determined according to the rules of the television game show. In this game, only individuals living on the kibbutz could participate because in the pre-game classification process the interested parties had to contact one of the organizers and answer questions days before the celebration. To the tones of the dramatic opening music of the television program, individuals chosen from those interested were called in groups of five to the stage. During the first phase all five contestants were required to answer an identical question. The first to answer correctly moved to phase two, which includes individuals contending to answer questions and reap a financial reward. The kibbutznik Master of Ceremonies (MC) announced the prize values, noting their sources and the audience applauded with great enthusiasm: 400 New Israeli Shekels (NIS) from the community budget. 500 NIS contributed from tourism. 800 NIS from Gvanim agriculture! The disparity between the money prize standard on the television program and those offered on the kibbutz program, made it clear that in the end of the game, no one would become a millionaire and aroused much laughter from the audience, along with the applause. With the announcement of the highest sum allocated by the agricultural corporation, the applause heightened and the CEO of the corporation smiled with visible pleasure. The announcement of the prize values was an articulation of the long time competition between the agricultural sectors and the tourist industry regarding their respective contributions to the economy of the kibbutz. However, in contrast to past years when the different branches of the kibbutz economy were parts of one social-organizational body, these announcements epitomized the new organizational structure in which the community is separated from its productive branches.

The name of the game – “Who wants to be a millionaire?”, and the strict adher-

21 The holiday summary was placed in the kibbutz archives.
ence to the rules of the television game, constituted a direct continuation of the values inherent in establishing the bazaar. In an amusing manner, not without self-criticism, the message presented was similar to that of the larger society in which everyone “wants to become a millionaire”, including the members of the kibbutz. The rules of the game, which included early classification phases, selected the quickest and the best from among the various contestants to contend with the questions that granted the financial reward. However, unlike the messages transmitted with the rules of the TV game, which emphasize the individual and his achievements, in our case the content of the questions placed the collective at the center by focusing on local and national history. Among the five opening contestants was a new member of the community, the husband of a kibbutz member. For me, as well as for other members of the kibbutz, this was the first time I saw him. He was the one who reached phase two and the opportunity to answer the trivia questions. As long as he was asked questions connected to national history he knew how to answer appropriately. However, he did not know the answer to the question “when did the export of bananas begin?”; and required assistance from the audience. A young kibbutznik near me commented “Ah, that’s an easy question!”.

Another question the contestant could not answer was “What year was the hotel opened?”. In the spirit of the game, the bulk of the questions presented were directed at different periods in the life of the kibbutz, the different areas of activities and questions referring to personal biographies of the veteran members. These questions received rounds of laughter from the kibbutzniks (for example “What was the name of Dina’s bull?”), leaving all the non-kibbutznik participants in a position of being observers of an event that turned intimately nostalgic. Although the middle-aged members tried to reach phase two and face the trivia questions, the winners were soldiers and younger kibbutz members.

After one hour and no “new millionaire”, the audience began to lose interest in the game and left the event. At this stage the MC announced the end of the game and invited the members to stay for the dance party at the clubhouse organized by two young kibbutzniks. Since this party didn’t interest either the older or middle-aged membership, the “younger generation” decided to move the party to the Kibbutz shelter where the young people’s parties were generally held. This end to the evening emphasized the different needs of the different membership age groups; needs that frequently caused open struggles regarding the appropriation of general resources in the revision plan.

The Independence Day festivities exposed the basic conflicts facing the Gvanim community. The decision to celebrate the holiday after a long period in which holidays were not commemorated and the participation of many members from different age groups, aroused feelings of “the kibbutz of days gone by” during the celebrations, which was noted by many members. For some of them, the continuation of celebrating community ceremonies constituted the expression of kibbutz continuity. The game, whose content emphasized the common past of the members added to and

\[22\] A cow bearing this name.
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strengthened this feeling of continuity. Alongside these elements, the bazaar activity emphasized the characteristics of the community after the implementation of the revision plan. However, these characteristics are not consistent with the definition of the “kibbutz of the older days”.

The bazaar presented a kibbutz that went through a “total revolution”; that gives a central place to the personal ability of the individual to make a living according to his/her talents, and aspires to open its boundaries to its surroundings and to others interested in joining a rural community without the burdens of membership. Publicly enabling members as individuals to earn money from the direct sales of tourist products with no intermediary obligations to the local tourist industry is an additional aspect of the transformation of the entire kibbutz territory into a tourist territory. The meaning of these new possibilities is the existence of tourism without the kibbutz, without the “great big family” that perhaps exists in the minds of some of the tourists, but not in the social reality of the Gvanim community.

Afterwards and Afterthought

The Independence Day Celebration was the last community event I observed. About a month later, I decided to leave Kibbutz Gvanim, although my social connections continue. Thus I was notified that since Independence Day (2000) no additional community celebrations have taken place to date (January 2003). The drastic decrease in tourists entering Israel during the last two years due to the security situation of the region, hit all of those making a living from tourism, including members of Gvanim. In contrast to other problematic periods in which members of Gvanim met with economic difficulties at the community level, at present, after the implementation of the revision plan, the challenge is confronted at the individual – family level. The absence of community festivities, the closing of the dining room, and the gathering of members in their homes are prominent manifestations of the disintegration of the kibbutz unit at Gvanim.

The decision to develop tourism at Gvanim at the beginning of the 1960s due to economic difficulties and the inability to make a living from agriculture can be seen as an example of how to confront the economic crisis collectively. However, as I described, the attempt to create kibbutz tourism did not succeed in reflecting kibbutz life and becoming a “display window” of the kibbutz and the ideas that gave rise to its establishment. The tourist initiative at Gvanim teaches that the world of contents of the kibbutz and of tourism did not combine. Despite the confidence of most of the members in the early 1960s in their ability to design kibbutz tourism, even the Passover Celebrations a year after the guest house opened its doors placed doubts on this ability. The tourists were not invited because of a desire to enable them to peek at kibbutz life, but as an attempt to safeguard the completeness of the community celebration. The resulting message was that the attainment of such an aim was
incompatible with the project of tourism in the kibbutz.

The principle strategy chosen by the kibbutz to save their unique identity was an attempt at spatial and social separation between the world of tourism and kibbutz life, while at the same time attempting to subordinate the tourist world to kibbutz values, which failed. Borders between “tourism” and “kibbutz” blurred as member initiated the expansion of the tourist sector and chose to make changes in their lifestyle. It was the tourist space that turned into the display place of the outer world, to which many kibbutz members aspired. The Independence Day celebrations at Gvanim manifested this process. In contrast to the Passover celebration of 1964 to which tourists were invited and celebrated together with the kibbutz members, who were proud of their kibbutz culture and values; at the 2000 festivities the marginality of the tourists and the commercial approach of the kibbutzniks to the event were blatantly evident. There was no effort made to present “kibbutz life” to the tourists, since many kibbutzniks were tired of it and were trying to make changes. By breaking with the traditional way of celebrating the holiday and specifying the title “Who wants to be a millionaire”, the festivities demonstrated, primarily for the kibbutz members, the radical change in their lives. With the depletion of the original content from the festivities and the emphasis placed on economic values through the bazaar and the trivia game, only the physical gathering remained a latent echo of “the kibbutz of days gone by”.

References


