**Generational Pendulum: Three kibbutz women’s journey from individualism to collectivism and back again**

Abstract

This qualitative case study analyses the experiences of three women who arrived in the 1930s at Kibbutz Degania A, revealing a set of social and ideological transformations that took place in kibbutzim as the 20th century unfolded. An assessment of the discourse of the three female kibbutz members, among themselves and with the community, reflects a pendulum-like movement of generational change that they experienced, from individualism to collectivism and then back to individualism with the eventual changes that occurred in the kibbutz. Through a qualitative analysis of letters, archival documents, and interviews, the study reveals the women’s experiences and the strategies they developed to deal with the challenges of immigration and changes over time. The findings indicate that the friendship among the women served as a central mechanism of support and empowerment in dealing with age challenges and changes in the community. This study expands our understanding of the role of women as agents of change in intentional communities. It highlights the importance of support systems among women in dealing with life's challenges in an ideological framework.

Keywords: friendships, intentional communities, kibbutz, generational theory, letters

**Introduction**

Despite the growing interest in researching friendships between women as a process of empowerment and social change (Wenger, 2021; Duflo, 2012), there remains a lack of understanding and attention on how women are involved in the sociological and generational change process.

Despite their desire for gender equality, pioneer women in British Mandate Palestine (1920–1948) encountered an ambivalent attitude towards their integration into the collective, leaving the concept of equality largely rhetorical rather than practical (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989; Bernstein, 2006; Spiro, 2017). These women fought for their place and the right to combine motherhood with productive work in the kibbutz (Sinai, 2002). However, over generations, the kibbutz adopted more traditional divisions of labor, where many men worked in agriculture and women in service industries (Spiro, 2017). This contributed to differing experiences for women and men of the same generation (Woodman, 2020; Herzog, 2013).

Changes in community values and norms over time in intentional communities can serve as both a barometer and a catalyst for generational shifts (Rawlins, 2009). Friendships, particularly among older women, offer mutual emotional and practical support in everyday life and can enhance personal empowerment (Woodman, 2020). Generational change in intentional communities, alongside rising levels of education and feminist consciousness, contributes to challenging gender stereotypes and fostering active participation in the public sphere (Lane et al., 2021).

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the pendulum-like shift experienced by three female members of Kibbutz Degania A during the 20th century, moving from individualism to collectivism and back to individualism when the kibbutz was eventually privatized. The article examines how their discourse, both among themselves and with the community, reflected the broader generational changes of their time. These changes are analyzed using Karl Mannheim’s social generation theory (Mannheim, 1970), which considers cultural characteristics, value codes, and deep social structures that lead to social action and change.

**Intentional communities and generational and gender changes**

Intentional communities (ICs) are a global phenomenon that began at the end of the 19th century. They are defined as being formed by at least five individuals who are neither family members nor couples, choosing to live a shared economic and social life (Oved, 2017; Pitzer, 2014). Based on these criteria, kibbutzim qualify as ICs founded on socialist values, economic cooperation, voluntary membership, and equal status for all members (Oved, 2017). The kibbutz community consisted of adult kibbutz members, children, and non-member residents, but it was the kibbutz members who formed the core of kibbutz life (Dar & Getz, 2020). Today, however, the concept of membership in its simple, emotional, spontaneous, and intimate sense has almost disappeared from the kibbutz language, now referring only to the statutory aspect of community belonging.

Two processes of social change took place in the mid-1980s. The first was a conceptual and structural shift within the kibbutz framework, where the privatization of collective assets led to the formation of the “renewed kibbutz” (Ben-Raphael & Topel, 2020). This change was driven by external influences from Israeli society, which adopted a Western neoliberal culture, as well as internal kibbutz actions, such as the shift from agricultural to industrial production and the employment of non-member day laborers (Dar & Getz, 2020). The second change included two seemingly contradictory trends that occurred simultaneously: female-initiated reforms such as returning children from children’s homes––where they had always slept from the day they were born––to sleeping in their parents’ homes and centering the family’s meals at home rather than in the kibbutz dining room (Fogiel-Fogiel-Bijaoui & Palgi, 2020). This period was characterized by the breakthrough of leading women into key positions in the kibbutz industries and management (Dar & Getz. 2020).

These revolutionary measures were initiated by female members and supported by feminist awareness, higher education among women, and the motivation for self-realization and meaningful careers (Fogiel-Bijaoui & Palgi, 2020). Previous studies have shown (Ferree & Tripp, 2006) that women significantly influenced generational mindsets within community settings, challenged traditional gender roles, and drove social change. The generational changes in the kibbutz not only shaped the societal structure but also substantially impacted women’s personal identities, as they were required to balance the values of the collective with emerging individualism (Sinai, 2002).

**The contribution of friendship among women to life in ICs**

In kibbutzim, supportive social networks tend to play a central role in promoting personal well-being in daily endeavors involving work, family, and community (Spiro, 2017). Friendships among women in kibbutz communities are significant sources of emotional and practical support throughout life (Ferree & Tripp, 2006; Spiro, 2017). This close camaraderie can be especially welcome during turning points of personal change, such as retirement from work, losing a partner, and maintaining functional continuity (Ferree & Tripp, 2006; Moremen, 2008).

In the community, it is important to provide a safe space for authenticity and self-expression (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1982; Jarvis, 2017; Panchadhyayi, 2021). Following Rappaport’s (1987, p. 121) definition of empowerment as “enhancing the possibilities for people to control their own lives” through the quality of the relationship between a person and their community, friendship has the potential to serve as an empowerment mechanism. It encourages women to increase their control over their lives and influence their environment as a “change agency in the community” (Wenger, 2021; Farias, 2016).

**Mannheim’s theory of generations and social change**

Karl Mannheim’s (1970) generational theory encompasses the cultural characteristics, value codes, and deeply embedded social structures that drive social action, particularly actions aimed at social change. Social change refers to the continuous transformation of societal structures, norms, and institutions driven by human actions. Evolving environments necessitate challenging existing cultural norms and values to adapt to a changing world, resulting in cultural transformations (Popescu, 2019; Edmunds & Turner, 2005).

Contemporary generational researchers, including Mannheim’s successors, tend to prefer the term *generational unit* because it allows for investigating diverse types of small groups that create a movement for social change (Corsten, 1999; Herzog, 2013; Pilcher, 1994). Researchers who have examined social change throughout history have found that three components must be present for a generational unit to form and serve as a catalyst for social change. The first is social location, which refers to an attachment to a conceptual and emotional place and, in most cases, a physical place. The second is the attribution of meaning, based on a code of values and behavioral patterns that are meaningful for the group. The third is actualization or activities that help realize the group’s ideals (Edmunds & Turner, 2005; Dant, 2013; Watroba, 2018).

In ICs, such as those studied in Israel, Mannheim’s theory is applied to understand generational units within the community, reflecting on how different age groups interpret and respond to social change and environmental challenges (Aurthor, 2022; Herzog, 2013). These ICs serve as microcosms where Mannheim’s concept of ‘generational perspectives’ enduring over the life course can be observed, showcasing how shared experiences and memories within a community contribute to the formation of generational identities and responses to societal transformations (Aurthor, 2022).

Mannheim referred to the members of a generational unit cohort as one part of the generation and emphasized the partnership in the idea of the necessity for social change (Edmunds & Turner, 2005). Women were grouped into the same generational unit without separate reference. The current study examines generational changes in ICs from a gender perspective, focusing on women’s experiences and the contribution of friendship among women to processes of personal empowerment and social change.

**The story of three women in Kibbutz Degania A**

Degania, the first kibbutz, was founded in 1910 on the southern edge of the Sea of Galilee by ten male and two female pioneers who had immigrated from Russia. As of 2021, the kibbutz has 524 residents, 126 of whom are under the age of 14 (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021). The Degania collective was established on the values of partnership and productive work within the kibbutz.

Three women immigrated from Germany to Mandatory Palestine, arriving in Degania: Yehudit Gilad in 1920, Tsila Berkowitz in 1924–25, and Yael Frankel in 1936. For their immigration permits, they were registered as members of the Eretz-Israel Workers’ Party with designated professions: Yael as a sanitary worker, Yehudit as a farmer, and Tsila as an infant caregiver. In reality, Yael was a doctor of law and held a degree in gymnastics. She taught gymnastics in Germany but was forced to emigrate when the Nazis denied Jews teaching positions (Friedlander, 2014).

When they arrived in Kibbutz Degania, they had to adapt to the nature of the work and working hours, the weather, the living conditions, the food, and the cooperative lifestyle. Yehudit worked in the vineyard, in the orchards, and cooking for the children. Tsila worked in the children’s houses (where children lived for the entire day, allowing both parents to work full-time), mostly with infants. Yael did not integrate into the kibbutz work and took a job that no one wanted—cleaning the public toilets and communal showers. After a while, she began working in the cobbler’s shop as a shoemaker. In their later years, the three worked together for more than 20 years in the kibbutz sewing workshop. Yael remained single, while Tsila and Yehudit married and had children. The friendship among the three grew stronger after the death of their husbands when the women were in their fifties. They all remained in relatively good health until their deaths: Yael in 1986, Yehudit in 1989, and Tsila in 1992.

This study offers a unique look at the processes of change experienced by three women during their lifetime in Kibbutz Degania A. It is based on generational theory and the concept of the *generational unit*, as understood through social and gender dynamics in the intentional community in Israel.

**The research question**

How do the three women’s experiences reflect the twice-over-generational changes in the cooperative kibbutz community throughout their lives? The sub-questions explore how the three women’s friendship contributed to their ability to navigate social and ideological changes in the community.

**Research design**

This case study adopted a research triangulation approach (mixed-method approach) that combines archival research (Mollenkopf, 1997; Dror, 2021) and interviews suitable for research that seeks to retrospectively understand a phenomenon of social change in its historical and personal context (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Yin, 2018), despite the small sample size (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006).

**Data collection and participants**

The research focused on three women who lived in the kibbutz for over 50 years. Personal letters, diaries, and historical documents from the kibbutz archive and private family archives were collected and analyzed. The archival data concentrated mainly on the early years of the women’s arrival in Kibbutz Degania and their old age, with less emphasis on the period of marriage and parenthood.

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with seven participants, including family members and kibbutz veterans, in an effort to obtain complementary perspectives. Each interview lasted 90 to 120 minutes, continuing until the point of saturation (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). The age of the interviewees ranged from 60 to 90, allowing for a broad historical perspective (Seidman, 2019). The interview questionnaire was formulated based on preliminary findings from the archival research, with questions focused on (a) personal experiences over the years in the kibbutz, (b) perceptions and responses to social and ideological changes, and (c) personal contributions to the community and changes in the kibbutz. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

The women’s families approved the use of personal archival materials. The interviewees were explained the study’s aims and gave their consent to recording the interviews. The ethics committee of our academic institution initially approved the study.

**Data analysis**

After an in-depth and repeated reading of all archival documents and interviews, primary and secondary coding of the texts was conducted, applying the methodology of Charmaz and Thornberg (2021). The main codes that emerged were labeled and cataloged. Subsequently, a thematic analysis, as described by Locke et al. (2015), was conducted to identify key themes related to the research questions, historical periods, and personal and collective experiences, from which significant turning points and changes were identified. This process was repeated until the connections between the themes and the generational and social changes experienced by the women in the kibbutz community were systematically identified.

**Results**

Data analysis revealed two central themes focused on the process and experiences of the three women in the kibbutz. The first theme addresses the initial generational change experienced when they migrated to the kibbutz and embraced the socialist-collectivist ideology. The second generational change occurred in the 1980s when the kibbutz began the privatization process, embracing individualism and capitalism. Examining social change through the three components of the generational unit—the site, the meaning, and realization, along with a gender perspective—highlights the twice-over change that the three women experienced.

**Theme 1: Giving up individuality**

The migration process from European cities to the new rural kibbutzim is a clear example of the multidimensional change that the immigrants experienced as they committed to the intentional community in the Land of Israel (and later the State of Israel) in the early 20th century. They underwent a complex personal process that involved surrendering their identities in favor of complete identification with the community and putting aside personal needs to support the common good. The three women recounted the difficulty of reconciling their unmet expectations regarding support and assistance with their emotional needs.

The process of renouncing their individuality began with torturous physical labor that wreaked havoc on their bodies and minds, alongside the pioneers’ attempts to reconcile with physical and mental exertion. An example of this can be found in the words of three roommates:

“Rachel: I’m dying of fatigue. Miriam: I’m as hungry as a dog. Yehudit: The burden is heavy on my heart” (Yehudit Gilad, Rachel Bornstein [later a well-known Israeli poet] and Miriam Singer, ca. 1930).

Placement in a job necessary for the community to continue functioning, rather than one that matched a person’s prior training or ambitions, was part of relinquishing one’s individuality for the sake of the collective, which prioritized the community above personal needs. Women were often assigned to jobs that did not align with their skills and abilities, leading to frustration and illness. Yona Ben Ya’akov recounted at Yehudit’s graveside:

..the work [in the chicken coop] was grueling...and I often shed tears. Yehudit would encourage me and say: “You need to leave the chicken coop. You are destroying your family with all your suffering.” Yehudit remained working with the chickens until she became ill with pneumonia. She spent a long time in the hospital. When she returned home, she went to the kibbutz secretary and said that she was not going back to the coop. Yehudit [told me]: “I felt that this job was destroying me. I couldn’t do it anymore.

Yehudit was sent to a convalescent home, and when she returned, she joined her husband’s uncle in the vineyard but remarked, “..I couldn’t find satisfaction [from working in the vineyard] since it was beyond my physical ability. I would come home exhausted [from fatigue]; I was already 50 years old” (Yehudit, ca. 1950).

Yael, who came to Degania at the relatively older age of 30, did not fit into the workplaces in agriculture, the children’s houses, or the kitchen and dining room shared by the kibbutz members. As she said:

They placed me in the vegetable garden. It was winter, and there was a lot of mud—I was wearing shoes that I had brought with me from Europe, and they were completely covered in mud. I barely made any progress, and my productivity wasn’t like the other women’s. I knew that a tomato should be red, but what I picked was thrown away. Until I saw Miriam show one of the local girls, a tomato that was red on the upper part, and all the other parts were green. She said, ‘This is a beautiful tomato,’ and from that, I understood that the tomato should not be all red and that a tomato ripens after picking.

The quote demonstrates how learning the work was done through apprenticeship. However, many of the veterans and their children, who were experienced in the routine of kibbutz life, mocked the customs, language, and clothing of the newcomers and were unwilling to help them acclimate to village life.

Yael’s stubbornness and determination did not help either, and she insisted on negotiating her working conditions at the kibbutz’s cobbler workshop:

Only once did I complain that I couldn’t see a view!

But Tanhum consoled me: Hear the answer:

A shoemaker never sees a view.

But he moved me to the middle and arranged a window. How good!

Moreover, that’s how I enjoyed the Sea of ​​Galilee and the Golan Mountains.

The hardships and struggles of the pioneers did not end with the working day and continued in their free time:

The walls of my shack were constantly chafed by the rose bushes when an easterly wind blew until I roughly tied their branches with string so that they would not disturb my hours of rest. Although every spoken word and every rustle could be heard through the walls from the neighboring room, when I poured out my heart to Tanhum about the lack of peace and quiet in my living quarters, the answer I received was: A laborer should sleep even when he is being knocked on the head! I replied: “Then I am not a laborer!”

(Yael, 1974)

These frustrations expressed the disparity between the vision and the reality of working the land, highlighting the limitations of the body and the difficult conditions the pioneers faced. With the benefit of the passage of time, Gabi spoke about his mother, Tsila:

Looking back, one cannot help but admire the personal courage, strength, and ability to break away from conventions, the mood of assimilation, and the bourgeois way of life to join a strange sect of dreamers and idealists. You prepared yourself for the future in a new land... without language, family, or friends, tying your destiny to Degania.

(Gabi, 1987)

Tsila, described as a strong woman in both body and mind, responded that there was no need to make a big deal out of the existing conditions, as everyone was required to contribute to the community.

These words indicate that the collective difficulty makes it easier for the individual. However, the renunciation of personal individuality also reflected aspects of personal development, fulfillment, and self-actualization. A striking example of this can be found in the words of Yael Frankel:

Please meet the fancy-dressed girl - Dr. Yulia (Yael), Frankel, that’s her glory name.

She has a diploma in her pocket for law and justice and gymnastics as well.

She reached the gates of the collective and became a pioneer.

And from that point on, the character is different: Yael has learned how to serve—carrying a bed on her back and a mattress of spikes/thorns. In Degania during those early times, you would not have thought, not even in a dream, that there would be a place for such a German city girl here.

(Yael, ca. 1980)

The totality of the change that Yael was forced to adopt is illustrated when she refused the kibbutz pediatrician’s request, for the purpose of integrating her into the kibbutz community, that she help with a group of children from the nearby town of Tiberias:

Dr. Sheinfeld, our pediatrician, is very angry with me for not wanting to work with the 13 children from Tiberias who are sick with polio. Nothing. Do I need a more interesting job than my job (cleaning the public toilets)? I just look at my closet, at my sticks, which hang there in one row like soldiers

(Yael, 1950)

In retrospect, Yael’s priorities failed when she preferred Degania’s duty over her basic professional and human obligations. This sacrifice was painful, especially when the community did not appreciate her efforts. After an unusually long wait of one and a half years for the members of Degania to decide whether to accept her as a member, Yael decided to give up and move to her brother’s village, Kfar Yehezkel. After packing and on the verge of leaving, she was told that she had been accepted as a member of Degania. Years later, she wrote:

Today, I thank Degania for the honor and joy you brought me by registering me in the ‘Golden Book’ on the occasion of my 80th birthday... I always considered it a privilege to be a member of Degania... I tried to repay the trust you all had in me and to replace my lack of knowledge and talent with diligence and dedication.... [The people of Degania] always showed me goodwill and understanding, except for when they assigned me a different roommate each year.

(Yael, 1982)

In her way, Yael praised and criticized herself and her peers simultaneously; she was aware of being different and not always willing to compromise for the sake of the group. However, “lack of talent” as a self-description reflects an exaggeration of the low level of self-worth that she most likely internalized as a result of the community rhetoric.

One way to deal with the social struggles in the community was to find a partner who would be an anchor and support. As Hanna Levin said:

Everyone advocated ideals as exclusive motives. They didn’t talk about a woman’s deep desires – that was taboo. But when Yehudit was asked if she had found fulfillment of her ambitions here, she answered simply: ‘If I find someone who wants to marry me, I’ll stay.’ It happened when she found David.

Tsila added the importance of finding a female friend as a coping tool:

It [the relationship] was quite cold, even though they wanted friends, but they [the pioneers] were quite closed...I found a very good friend, Yehudit Gilad.

Another option for dealing with the difficulties was entrepreneurship and creativity. Yael, together with her friend Ada [Ganaton], initiated an educational exhibition:

I prepared an exhibit about my work in [cleaning public toilets]. Ada painted, and I was the model. I gave precise instructions on how to wash and wipe the floor, what size the pole should be, how to make the windows shine—everything in a drawing and written notes in rhyme...in detail.

(Yael, n.d.)

Yael hoped that the exhibit would promote caring for and maintaining clean public spaces in general, particularly the toilets. Her influence on the community was evident only years later, as indicated by what Hava Neter-Gadiel said at her grave:

Yael was not a member of committees. She did not conduct debates out of a desire to convince others, but nevertheless, she did convince. Her personality and actions spoke for her.

Yael set a personal example, and over time, the community learned to appreciate her. This theme shows the profound internal transformation that the pioneer women were required to undertake when moving from the cities of Europe to the rural kibbutz in Israel. The findings reflected the tension between the women’s individual identity and their adoption of a collective identity necessary for integration into the cooperative ethos of the kibbutz. The findings emphasized the struggle for an emotional anchor that would have helped them in the immigration process and in accepting the kibbutz lifestyle, and detailed the strategies they needed to develop to preserve part of their individuality within the collective framework.

**Theme 2 – Belonging to a group of friends**

While the social structure in the kibbutz shaped the general framework of life in the collective for the three women, the expressions and contents of their friendships defined their inner world in the community.

The three women lived as neighbors from the time they were in their 50s, each in her own apartment, without spouses or children. Their friendship gained public recognition, and various nicknames: Yonah Ben Ya’akov called them “The Trio,” describing how they went everywhere together. Fania Artzi dubbed them “The Three Musketeers,” characterizing their friendship as “one of a kind.” Gabi and Rachel, Tsila’s children, referred to them as “The Three Yekkes” [a colloquial term for German-born people]—who spent their time in conversations, walks, and afternoon coffee, walking arm in arm to the dining room as if going to a daily celebration. According to Fania Artzi, they created a private space in the kibbutz, representing a force of emotional commitment and belonging to their unique group. She described their relationship as one of mutual understanding, generosity, warmth, and good faith.

Their togetherness was visibly apparent and expressed the synergy between them, with each contributing her uniqueness and strengths to the others. As Sarah Hadar remarked, “They became a symbol for connection, help, support, and giving…a role model for me and others,” noting that people wanted to emulate their relationship in old age.

Togetherness gave them satisfaction and strength. As Yehudit wrote:

We always went arm in arm to eat and when we came back, the light of the streetlamps poured onto the green grass, and the silence and calm around us had an effect... [Yael] always remarked: “We live in heaven!” And Yehudit added: “We accept each other as we are––without criticism...wWe are already a group ourselves...We are together, and to the ones who are jealous of us, I said: “You should do the same.”

These words expressed the women’s satisfaction with their togetherness, their unique bond, and strength, as well as the community’s recognition of this friendship and the desire to adopt this example as a model for life.

This can be perceived also in the letters they wrote to each other. Yael wrote:

Dear Yehudit. [Thank you] for being with me in all my feelings, my fears, my anxieties, and in my real and imagined sins and mistakes, for feeling my pain, for your great help in times of distress, for your participation in my anticipation of my guests and your assistance in receiving them.

The gratitude was based on intimate acquaintance, as Yael described Tsila:

You are sensitive to noise and more to crowding; even before you sit down simply to eat, you begin to move things—surely it’s not for nothing, every piece of furniture around you must be at a certain distance.

Yael’s words indicated a familiarity with Tsila’s sensitivities and acknowledged her own patience with Tsila when teaching her to sew.

The messages were also authored by two women together for one recipient. In honor of her 75th birthday, Yehudit and Tsila wrote to Yael in the third person:

Yael Frankel’s graduate certificate for 75 years of life, all grades are awarded a score of 100. Devotion to family, friends, and those around her. Presented with love from her friends Yehudit and Tsila.

Their friendship created a family bond without blood ties, joined by their relatives and children. As Yehudit said:

Yael’s devotion to her family was above all else. The family relations were so warm that they warmed my heart, and I adopted Yael’s family for my own. I had a feeling of belonging to the family... Osher’ke [Yehudit’s son], in his letters to me, never forgot to send a warm greeting to Yael and her family members, and they did the same to me and Tsila.

Over the years, they were required to adapt to changes, as Tsila said:

When a person gets old, these are some qualities he should exercise, to walk upright without stumbling and to be satisfied with fulfilling his obligations. He should determine not to demand too much from himself: like removing unnecessary burdens from yourself––to control a little less and sometimes surrender to the spirit of the times; to the style in fashion; to accept the unfinished.

These words highlighted the need to become flexible with time and to be less strict and rigid with oneself and with others. These features, according to her friends, characterized Tsila. They also became somewhat disillusioned with the collective totality of the past and turned their priority to their family and themselves.

For Yehudit, the change came when her daughter-in-law was denied kibbutz membership, and she and Yehudit’s son had to leave the kibbutz. First, Yehudit tried to convince the community:

Before my mind’s eye, almost all the friends I have lived with for many years have passed, and I don’t know who to approach and open my bitter heart to, who would be my protector and comforter and would ease my distress. In my day-to-day life, I remain at a distance—but in this case, I am calling for urgent help—don’t be late. And what can I do but cry for my fate, for my life’s dream, and that my friends are standing on the other side, from afar, and after the fact, they will quietly say to themselves, ‘My hand was not in it,’ while others did the job... Both jealousy and unwarranted hatred exist here in Degania, and to a large extent—I take responsibility for what I say. In our innocence, we believed that the group was a family...That is why I am calling out to you, my friends, for life, and I hope you won’t let me collapse. My trust is in you.

(Yehudit, 1960)

Yehudit experienced a crisis of trust in the kibbutz community as a family. Consequently, when the community refused her request to reconsider, she moved to another village, Kibbutz Yagur, to live there for about a year with her grandchildren and their parents. She prioritized her family over the community and shared with her friends the pleasure of her close relationship with her grandchildren.

Over the years, the three women were critical of some changes in the community, expressing this with a profound sense of belonging to and caring for the place. They conveyed their criticism in missives sent to the kibbutz officials or in letters to the kibbutz bulletin, which was published monthly and distributed to all members.

One topic of criticism involved the inefficient organization of waste in the community, particularly the lack of separation of organic garbage that could be repurposed. Yael Frankel highlighted this issue in the bulletin, writing:

Even though the values ​​that I learned to appreciate when I came here have changed (mainly making do with little and being faithful to our work), I still love the collective as my home.

The women’s choice to express their thoughts in the kibbutz newsletter was characteristic of that period, facilitating open communication and fostering interaction within the kibbutz public space.

Another example came from Tsila’s (from Tel Aviv) appeal to her children’s caretakers:

Hadassa and Esther, dear caretakers of my beloved children,... a meeting on the topic of education is long-awaited, and I for one have prodded the members of the education committee for this. I am seriously requesting that you not call this meeting during my absence from home because I want very much to participate in the discussion. I would like to tell you something here that I can’t say verbally: I am so happy that you are taking care of my children. Hadass’ke [nickname], you’re the only one of the girls in our group who received an education to my liking, one that I wish for our children as well. Since you are well-loved by my children, there is hope that you will set an example for them, even without many words. And Esther, you are the kind of mother that I love, which is why I wanted you to be an educator at the children’s home. I am sure that you will both be successful, and I have one request: let us parents be involved in all matters of education. We will work together and always be in close contact—for the benefit of the children...Yours, Tsila.

We understand Tsila’s desire as a mother to influence her children’s education, which contrasts with the prevailing practice on the kibbutz, where education professionals dominate all decisions involving the children.

The women also expressed their opinions about the future generation of the kibbutz. Yael wrote:

..and I think the development is going towards individuality. I don’t know exactly if it will be a cooperative *moshav* [a different type of collective where work life is communal but family life is more private], but I see that one’s private life is taking up more space. The ‘whole’ is shrinking to an alarming extent and raises many concerns. And this is a disappointment... I don’t want to say that I have lost faith in the great creation that inspires respect and admiration [the collective]; I do not fear that they will abandon the land and this whole enterprise... let the land here be destroyed... [but] the group [will not] remain as I saw it 25 years ago. I’m afraid it won’t stay like this... [there may be a] lack of responsibility towards the general public both at work and in life after work, as far as [volunteering for jobs and positions in kibbutz committees] is concerned. I think it’s a very serious matter.

Yael’s wise words foretold the changes that were yet to occur—the transition from agricultural work to industry, the establishment of factories, the hiring of salaried laborers from outside the kibbutz to work in the kibbutz, and the transition of many of the kibbutz members to management and administrative positions. All of these, as she pointed out, were the result of the strengthening individuality that stood in contrast to life on the collective.

More than a decade later, Tsila Berkowitz wrote a piece of administrative criticism in the Degania newsletter, and as in the case of Yael, this criticism was later proven to be correct:

I’m not an economist, but I understand one thing: when a person is in debt and has no immediate prospects of bringing in high income, he must not make non-essential investments. The same goes for our community. I am talking about [the plan to] enclose the open balconies [to create an extra room in the homes]. Ever since we built the houses, we have raised generations of children and we have not felt that we are short of space. … I’m not saying that it’s unnecessary to give the older child optimal conditions for his development, but when for the next two years we don’t expect any income from our branches of the economy, we’ll wait until the industry starts bringing in profits and then we’ll build.

Although she did not have a formal management role in the community, Tsila raised allegations of public indiscretion in the investments of funds. She revealed a basic understanding of the community’s difficulty in being profitable and even offered an alternative. Through Tsila’s words, we perceive the feeling that the resources and assets of the collective were also her resources and assets, as is customary in a cooperative society. Therefore, she regarded herself as a person who had the right to an opinion and the social power to share in the decision of what would be done with those funds, proposing to act according to what she felt was common sense.

This theme showed that the friendship among the three women was a major source of strength that helped them deal with the daily challenges in the kibbutz and served as a central tool for maintaining their personal identity within the framework of collective life.

**Discussion** - Between the personal and the public: friendship as a force for empowering the individual in the community in the perspective of the passage of generations

The analysis of the experiences of the three friends reveals a complex process of twice-over generational change that reflected the broad transformations in the kibbutz and in Israeli society (Dar & Getz, 2020).

The women’s friendship played a central role in shaping their identities and navigating the challenges of life in the kibbutz. It served as a source of support and empowerment, as described in articles by Eichenbaum and Orbach (1982), Jarvis (2017), Panchadhyayi (2021), and Wenger (2021). This bond enabled them to make personal adjustments and influence the community’s evolution despite the limitations imposed by its social structure (Ferree & Tripp, 2006). Analysis of the findings indicates three key points that signify changes in the three women’s relationship with the cooperative community. The first is observation for the sake of learning, the second is active involvement and action, and the third reflects a perspective shaped by time and experience in advanced age.

At first, they watched from the sidelines, not yet belonging, digesting the new reality and slowly adapting to it. They experienced difficulty in being absorbed into the community, the austere conditions, the physical and emotional struggles at work, and the lack of support or training. They coped with the dichotomy between self-realization and solidarity with the community, which sometimes led to compromising their desires for the sake of meeting social expectations but still contributed to the formation of their personal identity.

Second, through their daily activities and involvement in community life, the three friends were able to influence the shaping of collective reality, even if sometimes covertly. This finding parallels Eichenbaum and Orbach’s (1982) study on the potential for change that women hold in communities, as well as Fogiel-Bijaoui and Palgi’s (2020) work on women’s roles in the kibbutz. Contrary to the findings of researchers such as Sinai (2002), the women in our study did not insist on productive work in agriculture; they were placed in gender-accepted positions and worked for many years with dedication. As was expected of them, they volunteered to visit the sick, entertaining guests and making toys for the kibbutz children. They initiated and managed projects such as the establishment of ‘Beit Yael’ in 1982 named for Yael Frankel - a nursing home for the infirm elderly in Degania. This project, which began with conversations among the three and was led by Tsila, illustrated how the women contributed to change in the area of welfare and the culture of remembrance by creating an innovative response to the aging kibbutz community.

Analysis of the process that the women underwent illuminated the paradox that their unwillingness to give up kibbutz life actually changed the community’s attitude towards them and changed their outlook, negating the vision of merging individual and community that was prevalent upon their arrival in Degania. Yael, for example, contrary to the norm, went on strike from work in an effort to obtain a wheelbarrow to help her with her work. The idea of ​​leaving the kibbutz took shape for Yael when her acceptance for membership was repeatedly delayed; only when it became clear that she was ready to leave did they accept her as a member. Yehudit also decided to leave the kibbutz for a year to help her son and daughter-in-law in another kibbutz after the Degania general assembly refused to accept them as members. However, on the other hand, their deep commitment to the kibbutz ideal and the collective caused them to develop various strategies to deal with the pressures created by the discrepancy between the needs of the individual and the demands of the collective. Yael originally gave up her profession and refused to help the local doctor with the nearby city children. Despite the kibbutz construct, Tsila allowed her motherly instincts to surface when she begged her children’s teacher to support her educational path. Examples such as these expose the dilemmas experienced by the women and echo the tension between the individual and the cooperative society, as did the difficulty of forming a separate personal identity within a group with dominant practices (Butler, 1990; Risman, 2018).

Finally, there was the women’s reflective point of view, nourished by their friendship and by age-related separation from the daily goings-on in the community, as well as the fact that none of them had a familial ‘next generation’ in the kibbutz. Their conversations contributed to disillusionment regarding changes that were not beneficial to them as they ruminated over the ideology of the collective and its future in the kibbutz.

The ability to mobilize one’s resources for daily life was realized through a holistic and continuous focus on awareness and control of one’s relationships with the environment and one’s relationships with the community, which both Rappaport (1987) and Kieffer (1984) defined as empowerment.

Their friendship, strengthened when they were in their 50s, revolved around the inner world of the three women. They were part of the whole but not giving up the self, being present in both the public sphere of the community and the private space of their friendship - together and separately. They established a joint midday routine of strolling from their homes to the meal in the common dining room while maintaining the dress and manners of their previous European culture, comparable to Elfving-Hwang and Shu’s study (2024) of immigrants who, in their later years, adhered precisely to the culture of their country of origin. This framework existed as a social and ideological bubble amidst the goings-on in the kibbutz and, in fact, turned their private homes into the center of activity for them. Internalizing the importance of support networks, similar to what was written by Ferree and Tripp (2006), Farias (2016), and Spiro (2017), was the strategic turning point for these women; understanding that their connection to each other and their family members, and their common stance on personal principles and desires changed the balance of power for them vis-a-vis the community.

The allied front they formed was also expressed in their critical discourse on the changes in the kibbutz through letters to the kibbutz bulletin and kibbutz administrators. They referred to the change in values ​​over time and the efficiency of economic management. This type of criticism reflects what Mannheim termed ‘generational awareness,’ where, with the benefit of time, the ‘generational unit’ recognizes and responds to the growing gap between the original ideals of the kibbutz and the changing reality (Edmunds & Turner, 2005). Thus, Yael’s criticism of the growing emphasis on the place of the individual in the community demonstrated the tension in attributing meaning between the senior generational unit that upheld the collective values ​​of the original kibbutz and the younger generations who were leading the conversion to a more individualistic direction. This realization of a second generational change has turned the kibbutz community into what it is today - a ‘generational unit’ with a variety of people, as denoted by Dant (1991) and Oberg et al. (2004), who are partners to a mutual commitment that is far from the totality of this commitment in past generations.

The personal stories of the three women demonstrated how Mannheim’s theory of generations (Mannheim, 1970) is practically realized in the lives of individuals. The changes they experienced in the kibbutz reflected the interaction between their physical and social circumstances. Their interpretation of the community values ​​and efforts to realize that ideal, and afterward reconcile with the realization of individual needs despite those of the community correspond with previous studies – those of Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1989) and Bernstein (2006) on the discomfort that typified gender relations in the early settlement years, the work of Herzog (2013) on the social change promoted by ‘generational units’ and that of Woodman (2020) on the role of women in the generational process.

The current study expands the existing knowledge about women as agents of generational change in the collective, even when their actions are at times almost covert, and emphasizes the importance of support systems among women in dealing with the challenges of life in an ideological community. The findings provide empirical insights into Mannheim’s theory of generations by demonstrating the impact of social and ideological changes on women’s personal and community identity, emphasizing the connection between the individual and the collective and women’s impact on the processes of social change in the community.

This study has a number of limitations. First, it focuses on the story of only three women from a single community. Collecting comparative information about women in other kibbutz communities would contribute to a comparison with other communities then and now. Second, the current discussion pays little attention to broader external influences, such as the political and economic transformations that took place in the country and the world at the same time on the generational changes; this can be expanded upon in the future.

**Conclusions**

This study revealed the importance of female friendship in dealing with the challenges of life in an ideological community during a period when its members underwent a twice-over-generational change. The three women, motivated by Zionism and the need to escape anti-Semitism in Europe, developed strategies through their dialogue to bridge the gap between communal ideals and emotional challenges.

The research findings revealed that the women discovered their real anchor over time, not in the ideology or the community itself but in the friendship among them. This friendship created a significant space of support within the community, gave them a unique status, and became a role model. Their social connections empowered them as individuals and allowed them to realize their ambitions, even when these did not wholly conform to community norms or were not endorsed by the kibbutz administration.

**Data availability**: Data are available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author.

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