The Attitude toward Bereavement in Everyday Life in the Jewish Agricultural Settlements of *Eretz Israel*, from the First *Aliyah* to the 1920s

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Abstract

This article explores attitudes toward death and bereavement in the Jewish agricultural settlements of Eretz Israel (Land of Israel) from the First Aliyah (1881) to the 1920s, based primarily on newspapers of the period. The sources indicate that whereas members of the First Aliyah viewed death as a failure of the Zionist act and strived to conceal it to the best of their ability, the pioneers of the Second Aliyah effected a revolution in this realm, articulating a perspective that viewed death in the name of the Zionist act with pride and veneration as an attribute of the "new Jew." This positive attitude focused on the casualties of Jewish guarding who were killed during clashes with Arabs, but also went further. Overall, the Zionist pioneers perceived blood as a means of actualizing the relationship between the Jew and Eretz Israel and expressed a desire to saturate the Land with their blood. The height of this process was the well-known pre-death utterance of Yosef Trumpeldor – a defender of the Jewish settlements in the Upper Galilee in the 1920s – that "it is good to die for our homeland." This positive attitude toward sacrifice remained a prominent attribute of Zionism for many years to come.

Introduction

The initial decades of Zionist settlement in *Eretz Israe*l ("The Land of Israel") from 1881 and 1929 were characterized by a high mortality rate stemming primarily from illness. In this article, we survey the attitude within the Jewish public in *Eretz Israel* toward different kinds of death, as articulated in the newspapers and literature of the time. We do not delve into the major causes of death in the *Yishuv* during the period in question, as reflected in the archives of individual settlements and the *Chevra Kadisha* (the Jewish "Sacred Society" that prepared and guarded dead bodies prior to burial) but rather shed light on the public attitude toward the bereavement and death with which Jews in the country coped in their everyday lives. We excluded World War I and the violent events of 1920-21 and 1929 from our discussion, as these were exceptional occurrences and not part of everyday life in the *Yishuv*. Dying for the sake of a principle is an extreme act reflecting the attitude toward that principle. The attitude toward bereavement within the Jewish *Yishuv*, therefore, offers insight into attitudes toward the Zionist undertaking as a whole and the changes that occurred in the *Yishuv* during the period in question. In this way, exploring this attitude provides new insight not only into this historical period but also into Israeli bereavement, the roots of which reach back to it.[1]

For the sake of background, we begin by briefly discussing the Zionist aspiration to create a "new Jew," the need for myths in the establishment of nations, and the myth of the fallen soldiers that was commonplace in Europe at the time.

Background: The "New Jew," Myths, and Nation Building in Nineteenth Century Europe

The leaders of the Zionist movement sought a solution to the problems of the Jewish People, and in doing so they did not limit themselves to simply finding a piece of land. As an integral part of the Zionist ethos, they also identified a need for far-reaching change in Jewish life – change that would facilitate a reshaping of the individual Jew and Jewish society and the negation of the Diaspora. One manifestation of this approach was the call for a change in the way Jews treated

[1] On Israeli mourning see Rut Malkinson and Eliezer Witztum, *Loss and Bereavement in Israeli Society*, (Jerusalem: Kanna, 1993), 231-50 [in Hebrew].

their bodies. Nationalist movements in nineteenth century Europe, and most prominently the German and Austrian movements, placed great emphasis on the connection between national rebirth and physical rebirth. It was in this spirit that the nationalist sports clubs of the era were first established. Influenced by these ideas, Theodor Herzl and Max Nordau, the leaders of political Zionism, spoke repeatedly of the physical change the Jews would need to undergo as part of their nationalist rebirth. Nordau, a psychiatrist and writer, coined the term "muscular Judaism" (*Muskeljudentum*), reflecting a desire to create a strong, rooted, fighting Jew who was connected to nature and the soil and whose character would restore the Jewish heroism of ages past.[2] The cultivation and promotion of sports activity reflected a repudiation of Jewish tradition, which had always prioritized the spirit over the body.

From there, it was only a short distance to a change in attitude toward death. In the 1880s, while addressing the ill state of the Jewish People, Zionist leader Yehuda Leib Pinsker argued that the problem was that Jews were unable to die.[3] The ability to sacrifice life, to give death meaning, stemmed from the individual's belonging to a national community. In the absence of a Jewish national community, Jews were denied the possibility of dying a meaningful death, or, in the words of Uri Cohen, a "beautiful death." One innovation of Zionism was the possibility of "dying a beautiful death." At the second Zionist Congress in 1898, fiery speeches were delivered in support of a Jewish physical rebirth. "Our People's hope lies in blood and muscles," asserted Israel Zangwill, a leader of the Zionist movement in Britain, "not in bitter weeping." These words highlight the fact that Jewish physical development was not a goal in itself but rather a prelude to the willingness to spill blood in order to fulfill the hopes of the people. Nordau wrote in a similar spirit to the members of Bar-Kochba Berlin, the first all-Jewish sports club in Central Europe, which was established immediately following the congress: "Bar-Kochba was a hero who was not willing to accept defeat. When victory abandoned him, he knew how to die. Bar-Kochba is the last historical embodiment of the Jews who were knowledgeable in war and who laughed at the sound of the javelin." In his words to these athletes, Nordau articulated a vision of death as preferable to defeat in battle. After all, it was defeat, not death, that amounted to humiliation and failure, "for, to be a

[2] Michael Stanislawski, *Zionism and the Fin de Siècle: Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism from Nordau to Jabotinsky*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

[3] Uri Cohen, *Survival: The Concept of Death between the World Wars in Eretz Israel and Italy*, (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2007), 222-3, 240 [in Hebrew].

Zionist," he maintained elsewhere, "means doubly and triply to be a fighter."[4] To summarize, many Zionist leaders believed that physical education played an important role in Zionism and that the body needed to be trained to wage war for the future of the people. They also held that part of their physical rebirth was the possibility of dying a beautiful death, as well as the freedom from fear of such a death. Their statements do not define the enemy with which they needed to do battle. However, European experience reflected the fact that nations won independence through war.

This approach to the Jewish body helped shape Zionist myths and memory. Memory studies scholar Yael Zerubavel argues that new societies, like Zionism, have needed the creation of myths and memory to instill in the individual a sense of belonging to the community, to emphasize their shared past, and to legitimize their shared future. In many cases, the myths that have occupied the core of memory have dealt with physical phenomena requiring explanation – such as disasters – with the goal of enabling people to come to terms with the hardships of life.[5] Historian George Mosse has addressed "the myth of the fallen soldier" according to which the nation states in Europe transformed their fallen soldiers into mythical figures. This process proved to have some logic to it, as the creation of myths regarding young adults who lost their lives enabled many people to come to terms with their deaths, justified them, and gave them meaning. In this way, the myth succeeded not only in concealing from public consciousness the fact that war was a phenomenon of mass death but also transformed it, in memory, into an extolled and inspirational past. One example of this phenomenon was World War I, which was fought in horrifying conditions and caused casualties on an unprecedented scale, but which nonetheless is still perceived as a noble event. The fact that war was waged in the name of the nation lay at the heart of its conception as a positive event. A significant step in the ritual of the fallen soldier was the nationalization of death through the neutralization of its personal meaning and an emphasis on its national meaning.[6] The national communities, which aspired to class equality, were able to find it in the adulation

[4] Todd Presner, *Muscular Judaism*, (London-New York: Routledge, 2007), 56, 182-4, 217.

[5] Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 3-13.

[6] An extreme example of this notion could be seen in France in 1801, in the planning of a building in which the ashes of soldiers who fell in battle were to be mixed with the ashes of the great leaders of France. The plan's point of departure was that there would be no more need for cemeteries, and that from that point on, all members of the nation would be buried together.

of the death of the simple soldier.[7] In conclusion, Mosse observed that transforming the dead into myth led society to feel obligated to the nation and willing for sacrifice. This helps explain the central need for Zionist martyrs in the early days of Zionist settlement in *Eretz Israel*. The Jewish immigrants to the Land, created a new society, and were in need of myths on which to build it. In the context of our discussion, the myths in question were the myths of heroism and sacrifice.

The Attitude to Bereavement in the *Moshavot* of the First *Aliyah*: Death as Failure

Known in Hebrew as *moshavot* (colonies), the Jewish settlements that were established in *Eretz Israel* during the First *Aliyah* (1881-1903) suffered from many hardships, some of which took a toll in human life. The primary cause of death in the *moshavot*, however, was undoubtedly malaria.[8] Although we possess no systematic record of those who died of malaria during this period, evidence indicates that the illness resulted in death on an immense scale. In Hadera, a *moshava* established in 1881 in the northern Sharon region of *Eretz Israel* near the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, malaria took the lives of 240 of the settlement's 540 residents during its first two decades in existence.[9] In Yesud Hama`ala, a *moshava* established eight years earlier in the southern Huleh Valley, it was reported that during the settlement's first 28 years in existence, half of its inhabitants died of malaria.[10] Indeed, in 1913, it was asserted that the number of graves in the settlement's cemetery was double that of its inhabitants.[11] According to Rabbi Alter Ashkenazi, who was born in Yesud Hama`aleh in 1899: "There was not a home among us that was spared bereavement... Entire families were wiped out by the illness."[12] In a February 1884 letter written in response to a request for a report on the health situation in *Eretz Israel*, Dr. Hilel Yaffe, the well known physician of the *moshavot*, wrote as follows: "The most widespread

[7] George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 3-38.

[8] Yaffa Szekely, *Daily Life in the Hebrew Colonies in Palestine (Eretz Israel), 1882-1914*, Ph.D. dissertation, (University of Haifa, 1998), 23-33 [in Hebrew].

[9] Yaffa Szekely, "Courage or Madness? Why was Hadera not abandoned despite the terror of malaria?," *Hakhan* 1 (2004), 6 [in Hebrew].

[10] M. Amittai, "Yesud Hama`aleh," *Hapoel Hatzair*, November 8, 1912, 12 [in Hebrew].

[11] M. Amittai, "Yesud Hama`aleh," *Hapoel Hatzair*, March 14, 1913, 14 [in Hebrew].

[12] Shaul and Ruth Dagan, *On the First Road to Zion*, (Haifa: The Arison Foundation, 1998), 119 [in Hebrew].

illness in the country is malaria...I know of no place that is free of malaria."[13] Despite the high mortality rate, the newspapers of the period make almost no reference to the phenomenon. This is particularly surprising, as the *moshavot* were a topic of interest and as the Jewish press in *Eretz Israel* and abroad frequently contained news about them.

To understand the reason for this omission, we consider various references to the situation in Hadera. After the settlement's first year in existence, it came to be known as a settlement that was plagued by malaria. Moshe Smilansky, one of Hadera's first settlers, recounted the reactions of the surrounding area and the dilemma created by the understanding that Hadera was a place of death:

> We were helpless...Friends came...from all the *moshavot* bearing advice and a prayer: leave this place, save your lives...It became known in the Diaspora, and it impacted the entire country...A Land that bereaves its inhabitants. But no one left...And some of us said: we prefer to die in Hadera than to live without it.[14]

Smilansky's words reflect the fact that the dilemma had to do not only with personal risk but also, and in equal measure, with the fear of giving *Eretz Israel* a bad name and scaring off potential Jewish immigrants. An article published in the Warsaw-based Jewish newspaper *Hatzfira* in 1891 placed blame on the *moshava*: "The *moshava* Hadera has ruined the *Yishuv*. Most of its inhabitants have left it...Some have left the earth, and the *moshava* will be their grave"[15] In this way, the author explicitly charged the *moshava* with responsibility for tainting the *Yishuv*'s reputation.

In 1898, two young men died in Hadera during the same week: Shlomo Botakowsky and Reuven Goldberg. Their deaths left the settlement panicked and in shock. An article about the two in *Hatzfira* dealt not with their commemoration or the mourning of their deaths but rather with who was to blame for the settlement's very existence:

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[13] Hillel Yaffe, *Generation of Pioneers: Memoirs, Diaries, and Letters*, (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1983), 140-2 [in Hebrew].

[14] Moshe Smilansky, "The Founding of the Moshava Hadera," in *Memories of Eretz Israel* II, ed. Ehud Yaari, (Ramat Gan: Massade, 1974), 717-8 [in Hebrew].

[15] A Passerby (*Over Oreach*), "In Our Brothers' Colonies in the Holy Land," *Hatzfira*, October 16, 1891, 892 [Hebrew].

> Blame for the establishment of Hadera rests on the shoulders of Hovavei Zion [the name of the first Jewish national movement, which was established in the Pale of Settlement in 1881]. Their emissaries purchased this site from those who were selling it...After they did so, it was incumbent upon them to do everything in their power to save its farmers.[16]

The author then went on to blame the settlers who did not abandon the settlement, charging them with responsibility for the tragedy that befell them.

In an essay titled "The *Yishuv* and its Custodians," Zionist ideologue Ahad Ha`am, who was among the leaders of the movement in its early days, levelled serious charges of responsibility for the deaths, primarily at the leadership of *Hovavei Zion* and Baron Edmond de Rothschild (who financially supported the initial Jewish national colonies in *Eretz Israel*), but also at the inhabitants of the *moshavot* themselves. It was the support of the organization, he reasoned, that prevented the settlers from leaving, and for this reason responsibility for their deaths rested on its shoulders: "We are all custodians, lovers, and supporters of the *Yishuv*. It is a mistake for us to proclaim that this blood was not spilled by our hands." At the conclusion of the essay, he called for the immediate cessation of all support and for allowing the settlers to face their own fate; in this way, those who did not survive would be responsible for their own failure or death:

> And if there are some among them...who do not know how to use the means of existence at their disposal, fail, and fall – their blood shall be on their own head. They will fall and will not be an obstacle to their brothers who are better than them! This will not be doing a disservice to the *Yishuv*. On the contrary, the *Yishuv* will be strengthened by the fall of those who are faltering and who lack the skills to exist.[17]

Honing in on Ahad Ha`am's criticism of the inhabitants themselves, he clearly regarded the settlers, who found themselves in a place beleaguered by swamps and malaria, as individuals who had failed on a personal level and who were contributing to the failure of the *Yishuv* as a whole.

[16] Ever Hadani (Aharon Feldman), *Hadera*, (Tel Aviv: Massade, 1950/51), 139 [in Hebrew].
[17] Ahad Ha`am, "At the Parting of the Ways" II, *Yidisher Ferlag* (Berlin, 1921), 268-70 [Hebrew]

These were words written about Hadera by external sources. We now turn to the markedly different manner in which the issue was addressed by the settlers themselves, who appear to have regarded it as their responsibility to protect the reputation of *Eretz Israel* in general and the *moshava* in particular. For this reason, they fastidiously abided by a principle of external denial. Following the harsh words published about them in *Hatzfira*, a farmer from Hadera published a disavowal of the report and a denial of the presence of the disease within the *moshava*, complaining that the paper had been responsible for giving the *moshava* a bad name and asking why it did not publicize each instance of the ill dying in Jerusalem. "As a farmer of Hadera," he concluded, "I say that we are as strong now as we were in the past…that people die in all the *moshavot* and in all countries as they do throughout the country, for those who are born [ultimately] die."[18] Numerous letters written by settlers in Hadera contained requests for assistance from different figures within the *Hovavei Zion* movement, although none made any mention of malaria. Instead, they referred only to the economic situation. The only letters that explicitly described the health situation were sent to Rothschild, and subsequently to the JCA (Jewish Colonization Association), whose operations he funded, in request of assistance in draining the swamps.[19]

Internally, the settlers of Hadera expressed a different sentiment. Their justifications for holding on to the site reflected unwavering faith and complete acceptance of their fate. One settler, Chava Rotman, recounted that when she asked her husband why they had not left the settlement, he answered: "Here is where we will live, Chava, and here is where we will die. Whatever our fate is, we will bear it silently."[20] The residents of Hadera resolved not to leave their *moshava* for religious and ideological reasons, despite the high price they might pay. It was a decision that those around them did not understand, but this did not deter them. Settling in Hadera was an act that cannot be assessed using rational criteria. The settlers believed that the reestablishment of Jewish settlement in *Eretz Israel* was an essential stage of saving the Jewish people, and they saw themselves as the People's emissaries. In our opinion, this faith is the

[18] A farmer of Hadera, *Hamelitz*, November 10, 1898, 4 [Hebrew].
[19] Szekely, "Courage or Madness?" 29.
[20] Y.L. Schneerson, *In the Words of the Founders*, (Tel Aviv: Am Hasefer, 1963), 125 [Hebrew].

only convincing explanation for the settlers' decision to steadfastly remain in the settlement, in which people continued to die of malaria for four decades.[21]

Another much less common form of death during this period was being killed by Arabs in the course of a robbery. Aharon Feldman described the situation as follows: "The Galilee – which was then beyond the Sambation – was a forsaken place where everyone was ill with malaria and the Bedouin killed and butchered without mercy."[22] This description, which related to malaria and murder together, attests to the fact that murder was regarded as part of the misfortune of a neglected land lacking a concerned government and was not at all viewed in a nationalist context. For this reason, those who died from malaria were treated identically to those who were murdered.

Overall, the *moshavot* with high mortality rates were accused of tainting the reputation of the *Yishuv*, of intransigence and useless sacrifice, of being "an obstacle in the path of their brothers who are better than them," and of indifference and backwardness. It is also clear that the settlers internalized this criticism and therefore concealed their true situation.

But there was another reason they may have played concealed those who died of malaria. The settlers of the First *Aliyah* sought to establish settlements consisting of Jews who worked the land and enjoyed the fruits of their labor. Settlers who were pale and ill were ill-suited for this model, which is why they expressed no pride in or reverence for those who died from malaria in their settlements. Only years later, once the swamps and the disease were relegated to history, did the residents of the *moshavot* begin to take pride in the hardships they suffered and to commemorate those who had been lost in the process.[23]

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[21] Hadera was only one example of settlements in which death was viewed as proof of personal failure and harm to Zionism. See, for example, "A Letter from the Upper Galilee," *Ha'achdut*, March 21, 1913, 16-8 [in Hebrew].

[22] Aharon Feldman (Ever Hadani), *Settlement in the Lower Galilee: 50 Years of History*, (Ramat Gan: Massade, 1955), 208 [in Hebrew].

[23] Moshe Smilansky, a founder of Hadera and later of Rehovot, published a book of memoirs regarding the first settlers, but only in the 1950s. Moshe Smilansky, *Family of the Soil*, 4 vols, (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1954). In his memoirs, Shalom Rabinovitch, who worked in Hadera, recalled an encounter with a farmer who asked him whether the heavy price paid by those who lived there was worth it. He answered as follows: "The more difficult, bitter, and dangerous the conquest, the dearer, more pleasant, more important, and more beloved the accomplishment." Szekely, "Courage or Madness?" 30. This response is consistent with the myth that was common in the

Before moving on to the next historical period, we draw attention to a phenomenon that is not directly related to bereavement but that is undoubtedly related to it on an indirect level: Jewish emigration out of *Eretz Israel*, which was a common phenomenon during the period in question. The scope of the phenomenon remains unclear, and our understanding of it is based on wide-ranging estimates and conjectures of between 30% and 70%.[24] Nonetheless, it was clearly a widespread phenomenon that may be understood as reflecting the response to bereavement which was difficult to find in the written sources. Although emigration is a fact of life in all immigrant societies and consistently accounts for a percentage of those who fail to be absorbed into society, large-scale emigration may also be a response to the difficult realities of the society in question. In the present context, it appears to have been an outcome of a reality that, as a result of the factors described above, could not be expressed in words.

The Attitude toward Bereavement among the Pioneers of the Second and Third *Aliyot*: The "Beautiful Death" of the Guards

Zionism began with the First *Aliyah*. The immigrants of this period chose to settle in agricultural settlements and, in doing so, achieved an existential revolution in their own lives. This change was reflected in the term "the new Jew," which was prominent in many realms of Jewish life in the *moshavot*. Young residents related to their bodies differently than their elders (Herzl was deeply impressed by the sight of the youth of Rehovot exercising and riding horses), engaged in agriculture, and established new areas of settlement. Still, according to historian Boaz Neuman, Zionism as a movement calling for a revolutionary internal change in all realms of life did not come into existence until the pioneering Second *Aliyah:*[25] "The Pioneers were the first to identify

1930s, at the time it was written. In this way, it can be understood as reflecting a later view of the settlers.

[24] Yehoshua Kaniel, "Jewish Emigration from Palestine during the Period of the First and Second Aliyot," *Cathedra* 73 (1994): 115-28 [in Hebrew].

[25] Numerous historians have sought to undermine the image of the pioneering *Aliyah*, claiming that it was only an image, and perhaps even a myth. One of the major arguments in this context has been statistical, resting on the fact that the pioneers were actually negligible in number and accounted for only 16% of the Second and Third *Aliyot*. Neuman maintains that despite this fact, the pioneers were a minority that shaped the Zionist experience, and that as such, their words should be assigned a great deal of significance. Boaz Neuman, *Pioneering and Desire in Early Zionism,* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2009), 18-9 [in Hebrew].

existence in *Eretz Israel* with existence in general. From their perspective, being in *Eretz Israel* meant more than being in a defined, concrete place. As far as they were concerned, it meant being."[26] Even if we do not completely accept Neuman's analysis, we cannot ignore the heroism that accompanied every pioneering act – heroism that was not openly articulated during the First *Aliyah*. We suppose that the residents of the *moshavot* regarded their act of settlement as a revolution, for had this not been the case, they would never have been willing to make as many sacrifices as they did. This, however, was a sentiment that they did not express. This may have been because they were not confident enough in the correctness of their path to boast about it. It may have also stemmed from the fact they were endowed with less historical fluency and consciousness and kept their thoughts to themselves. In any event, the pioneers were the first to clearly, precisely, and directly formulate their ideology, which meant that they also shaped the Zionist attitude toward death. In this section, we focus on two aspects of this attitude: the struggle against the country's Arab inhabitants and the struggle against malaria.[27]

During the First *Aliyah*, the issue of security encompassed little more than the relations between the *moshavot* and neighboring localities. The causes of tension in this context included disputes over land and water and acts of robbery, and the weapons used – typically clubs, whips, and other such implements – were meant to frighten, not to kill. The *moshavot* suffered from incessant theft but nonetheless tried to avoid quarrels which they would have to pay for in blood. One of the major revolutions in Jewish life in *Eretz Israel* that took place during this period was the establishment of organizations that raised the banner of guarding as a national goal. The first such group was "Bar-Giora," which was founded in 1907 and expanded into "Hashomer" in 1909. The Jewish guarding organizations sought to advance the independence of the *Yishuv* by assuming

[26] Neuman offers numerous examples establishing the fact that Zionism as a fundamental revolution began during the Second *Aliyah*. In the realm of labor and guarding, most inhabitants of the *moshavot* did not work the soil and did not do their own guarding. The pioneers, in contrast, aspired to work with their own hands and to guard their own property. In the spiritual realm, the writings of many pioneers contain numerous expressions of a desire to be reborn in *Eretz Israel*, as well as references to a desire for the land. *Ibid.*, 12, 42-3.

[27] Also important in this context are two other aspects of loss which we do not address in this article. One of these is suicide, which became an issue during the Second and Third *Aliyah*, and which has been researched at length. See Gur Alroey, "Pioneers or Lost Souls? – The Issue of Suicide in the Second and the Third Aliya," *Yahadut Zmanenu* 13 (1999): 209-41 [in Hebrew]. Another is firearm accidents, which, according to Rogel, occurred frequently in Hashomer. See Nakdimon Rogel, "Who killed Abraham Joseph Baral?," *Cathedra* 69 (1993): 165-74 [in Hebrew].

responsibility for the guarding of Jewish settlements, including all the dangers this entailed. The idea of Jewish guarding was so revolutionary at the time that some have identified it as the initial nucleus of the IDF, and its members as the first soldiers of the state of Israel, decades before its establishment.[28] Other scholars, such as Gur Alroey, have played down these groups' actual contribution to the *Yishuv*.[29]

Neuman argues that the establishment of the guarding organizations endowed the Jews, for the first time in many years, with the possibility of dying a "beautiful death." During the First *Aliyah*, no one was characterized as having died a "beautiful death." It was a concept that emerged on a large scale later, in the semantics of the pioneers. Neuman described the pioneers' relationship with the land as a "desire" that could be actualized in various ways, including labor, guarding, studying the land, and watering the land with blood. The spilling of blood now appeared in pioneering texts as a desire and as something that constituted a bond to the land, with no explanation of the political context. Death on the soil of *Eretz Israel* was perceived as death with a sense of belonging, and therefore a beautiful death – a death that was not final and that conferred life in *Eretz Israel*. "In dying on the soil of the Land," Neuman explains,

> the *Halutzim* did not die, because a "beautiful death" replaced mortal life with immortality. And through their deaths they bestowed life: they bequeathed the Land of Israel. The pioneers' blood seeped into the ground and constituted it as Jewish soil. Even after death, their legacies continued to pulse among living *haluztim*. Their lives were recorded forever in the history of the renaissance and the redemption of the Land of Israel, through the trees and forests planted in their names, the memorials established to commemorate them, and a historiography that glorified their lives and acts.[30]

[28] Mordechai Naor, "Burly, Courageous, and Imbued with Zionist Awareness: The 100th Anniversary of the Establishment of Bar-Giora and Hashomer," *Et-Mol* 198 (Adar II 5768 / March-April 2008), 4 [in Hebrew].

[29] Gur Alroey," The Servants of the Settlement or Vulgar Tyrants? 100 Years of the Hashomer Association: A Historical Perspective," *Cathedra* 133 (2009): 77-104. [in Hebrew]

[30] Neuman, *Land and Desire in Early Zionism,* 114. The above quote is taken from the English edition of Neuman's book: *Land and Desire in Early Zionism*, (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2011), 95.

Perhaps the purest expression of the beautiful death of the Zionist pioneer was Trumpeldor's legendary pre-death utterance "it is good to die for our homeland," which, after his death, continued to reverberate throughout the Jewish pioneering world. Even earlier, Trumpeldor himself had written about the essence of the "beautiful death" in a letter to a friend: "I want to die a beautiful death, in joy, as befits a Jew dying for the Land of Israel."[31] It was in response to the events that occurred at the settlement of Tel-Hai in northern *Eretz Israel* on March 1, 1920 that the willingness to die in battle as opposed to retreating was made the object of praise after centuries of exile. This was why the reactions to the affair were so dramatic. According to historian Anita Shapira, after the events at Tel-Hai, it became common practice to refer to the Land as a "homeland" as opposed to an "ancestral land."[32]

The Zionist pioneers understood death in *Eretz Israel* as a central component of the Jews' return from exile – not as a tragedy but rather as a manifestation of the return to the living. Blood was the source of the rebirth of *Eretz Israel*, and the determined pioneers ensured the life of their comrades and the existence of the pioneering enterprise. Using the writings of the Zionist pioneers, we now turn to the question of why, in their view, blood needed to be spilled in *Eretz Israel*. *Hashomer*'s motto was a distinct expression of the belief that blood was what would revive the Jewish People.[33] For Israel Shochat, the leader of the organization, it was an iron-clad rule that victory could not be achieved without blood and sacrifices.[34] He explained the group's motto as follows: "*Hashomer* made its motto 'in blood and fire Judea fell and in blood and fire Judea shall rise,' as its approach was to not spare its blood when it could be used to buy freedom."[35] Indeed, evidence attests to the fact that guards did not spare their own blood.[36] Esther Becker spoke of her induction conversation when she joined Bar-Giora, in which she was told: "We are in need of men and women members who will be capable of giving their life for the sake of this goal...But know one thing: those who join the organization will not come out alive."[37] In 1914, Zionist

[31] Menachem Poznansky, *From the Life of Yosef Trumpeldor*, (Jaffa: Histadrut, 1922), 201 [in Hebrew].
[32] Anita Shapira, *The Sword of the Dove*, (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1993), 144 [in Hebrew].
[33] *Kovetz Hashomer*, (Tel Aviv: Labor Movement Archive, 1937), 58 [in Hebrew].
[34] *Ibid.*, 432-3.
[35] *Ibid.*, 434.
[36] "Meir Hazanovitch, of blessed memory," *Hapoel Hatzair*, May 30, 1913, 16 [in Hebrew].
[37] Esther Becker, "From the Life of the Hashomer Family," in *The Second Aliyah Book*, ed. Bracha Havas, (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1947), 511 [in Hebrew].

leader Chaim Weizmann proclaimed: "We Jews have not yet sacrificed enough, and this is why we currently hold only two percent of the land in the *Eretz Israel.*"[38] According to this statement, it was the intensity of the willingness to sacrifice that determined the scope of accomplishment. Based on the above, we can conclude that the Zionist pioneers clearly perceived the willingness to sacrifice as a necessary condition for the possibility of fulfilling their vision. Through sacrifice Jews made it to Israel, and through more sacrifice they would achieve more successes. This does not provide a rational answer to the question of why it was necessary to spill blood, but it does attest to the fact that the pioneers believed that it was.

In addition to this belief in its necessity, blood as perceived by the Zionist pioneers sealed the bond between the Land and the pioneer, and sealed the right to and ownership of land. "With his blood," said Yosef Salzman's comrades after his death, "we reestablished our covenant with Kinneret."[39] Blood was understood as sanctifying the land,[40] and Ya'akov Zerubavel, another *Yishuv* leader, expressed fear and humiliation at the possibility of "a foreigner stepping foot on land that was watered with the blood of Jewish fatalities, who fell while on guard."[41] And according to David Ben-Gurion, the leader of the Jewish *Yishuv* in *Eretz Israel* from the 1930s onward, "had we not watered the Land with our blood, we would not be standing on it today...We are spilling our blood and living here."[42] That is to say, the bond between pioneer and land was actualized after blood was spilled on it.

As a result of this significance, the spilling of blood was regarded not only as a necessity but also as a desire and as something to which to aspire. Yosef Nachmani, head of the Defense Committee for the Upper Galilee, expressed this sentiment with clarity: "We wish to die and to water it with our blood...Every inch of soil in our Land is dear to us, and we are willing to sacrifice our lives for

[38] Meir Hazan, "In their Death they Bequeathed: from Degania to Nahalal," *Alpayim* 26 (2004), 97 [in Hebrew].
[39] Shimon Kushnir, *Men of Nebo: From the Story of the Second Aliyah* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1968), p. 150 [in Hebrew]
[40] "Yaakov Feldman," *Ha'achdut*, December 12, 1913, 27 [in Hebrew].
[41] Ya`akov Zerubavel, "Guarding and Labor" (1910/11), in *In the Days of War and Revolution: Memories and Writings from the Path of Life, 1913-1921*, ed. Ben-Zion Dinur, (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1966), 300 [in Hebrew].
[42] David Ben-Gurion (December 14, 1917), *From a Class to a People* (Tel Aviv: Aynot, 1954/55), 38 [in Hebrew].

it."[43] Zerubavel identified watering the Land with blood, alongside agricultural settlement and labor, as a sign of redemption.[44] But it was not only a desire of the pioneers; as they saw it, their blood, along with their sweat, was also the desire of the Land itself. "After a respite of hundreds of years," wrote Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, "the Land of Canaan has once again set forth to taste the blood of its children."[45] In the aftermath of the murder of Moshe Barsky, Yosef Salzman, and Ya`akov Feldman, Shmuel Dayan, a prominent member of Kibbutz Degania, wrote as follows:

> O soil of our homeland: are you still thirsty for our blood? Were you not saturated by the blood of our ancestors, from the day you were placed in our hands?...We will soften it with blood and sweat and wet it with the dew of our adolescence, which will renew its youth. It will remember us...Our heroes have arisen and we will be redeemed.[46]

According to this view, the Land thirsted for the blood and sweat of Jews, for whom it had yearned during their years in exile.

The Zionist pioneers viewed blood spilled in *Eretz Israel* as fundamentally different from blood spilled in the Diaspora. In contrast to the positive attitude toward blood as a factor facilitating rebirth and a connection to the Land, blood in the Diaspora was perceived as drowning the Jews. Neuman explains that this attitude toward blood was linked to the pioneers' attitude toward the Diaspora in general. The pioneers viewed the Diaspora as a space without footholds in which the wandering Jew lived, detached and eternal. In this spirit, they depicted Diasporic space as saturated with blood. The Diaspora was drunk with Jewish blood, and the Jews were being washed away in rivers, torrents, and baths of blood.[47] "We are being destroyed and drinking blood – for no reason, with no purpose, without intention," wrote Ben-Gurion. "Just as there is no reason for our life, there is no reason for our death...and there is no benefit and no payment

[43] Letter from Nachmani to Kalvariski, February 1920, in Nakdimon Rogel, *The Tel-Hai Affair: Documents on the Defense of the Upper Galilee, 1919/20*, (Jerusalem: Hasifria Hatzionit, 1994), 206 [in Hebrew].
[44] Ya`akov Zerubavel, June 1911, in Israel Bartal, Zeev Tzahor, and Yehoshua Kaniel (eds.), *The Second Aliyah: Sources*, (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, 1997), 367 [in Hebrew].
[45] Avner (Yizhak Ben-Zvi), "די יפו- ער לעקציאן," *Yidisher Arbeter*, May 14, 1908, 3 [in Yiddish].
[46] Shmuel Dayan*, In Days of Vision and Seige*, (Tel Aviv: Massade, 1952/53), 230 [in Hebrew].
[47] Neuman, *Pioneering and Desire in Early Zionism*, 96-7.

for the stream of our blood."[48] These descriptions highlight the contrast between blood spilled in the Diaspora and blood spilled in Eretz Israel: in the Diaspora, it was an obstacle, drowning what Eliezer Joffe called "a non-people without a land,"[49] in reference to the Jew's lack of its own place and a national existence. In Eretz Israel, Jews were creating a place for themselves and forging a bond between Jews and Eretz Israel.[50]

Yizkor: The First Zionist Book of Remembrance

Within the overall attitude toward bereavement, we now turn our attention to what is considered to be the first Zionist book of commemoration: *Yizkor*. The idea of the book was proposed by Yehoshua Radler Feldman, a Hebrew language writer and Second *Aliyah* activist who wrote under the pseudonym "Rabbi Binyamin." The book's aim, as he understood it, was to commemorate a number of guards who had been killed. Historian Jonathan Frankel, however, maintains that the intentions of the book extended well beyond the realm of personal commemoration to include the creation of a pantheon of Jewish heroes aimed at educating a generation.[51]

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[48] Ben-Gurion, Nisan 20, 5675 (April 4, 1915), in *From a Class to a People*, 14. According to Uri Cohen, these words were evidence that Ben-Gurion possessed a deep understanding of the change in the view of Jewish death engendered by Zionism. Cohen, *Survival*, 234.

[49] Eliezer Joffe (1919/20), *The Writings of Eliezer Joffe I*, (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1947), 49 [in Hebrew].

[50] The perception of the Jewish blood being spilled in the Diaspora as a large wave threatening to drown the People as a whole was based on more than the notion of negation of the Diaspora; it was also an expression of a historical period that was replete with waves of pogroms. According to Anita Shapira, this had a profound psychological impact on Jewish youth: "The Jews' sense of security and survival continued to be undermined, and these anxieties were to remain persistent throughout the first half of the twentieth century. The feeling 'All the world is my gallows' was not a rhetorical flourish but rather a description of the psychological truth and state of mind of the contemporaries who experienced the violence firsthand, and whose psyches bore its scars. This fundamental fact is important for understanding the mentality of the generation that reached maturity at the turn of the century. People realized that pogroms were a permanent, recurring phenomenon and that Jewish blood could be spilled at will. They concluded that Jews would continue to be under ever-increasing threat. This became the dominant mood and somehow had to be dealt with, an answer had to be found." (Shapira, *The Sword of the Dove*, 61-2). The above English excerpt is taken from Shapira, *Land and Power: The Zionist Resort to Force*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 35-6.

[51] Jonathan Frankel, "The 'Yizkor' Book of 1911: A Note on National Myths in the Second Aliya," in *Religion, Ideology and Nationalism: Essays Presented in Honor of Yehoshua Arieli*, eds.

The task of editing the project was undertaken by Hebrew writer and Hovavei Zion activist Alexander Ziskind Rabinovich and Hebrew writer Yosef Haim Brenner. Rabinovich and Brenner published repeated requests in the workers' newspapers for others to take part in the writing, but, according to Feldman, they received no response.[52] The book, which was eventually published in 1911, contained few words of personal commemoration of the deceased and many essays and literary texts, primarily about death on the altar of the homeland. The book commemorated eight individuals, seven of whom were killed in clashes with Arabs, and one who died of illness.

The small amount of information that appeared in the book regarding the lives of the deceased emphasized the fact that they had not been afraid to sacrifice their lives in order to save Jewish lives, or even Jewish property or dignity. The most heroic image in this context was that of Yehezkel Nisanov, who was attacked by thieves attempting to steal his cart and, instead of fleeing, chose to put up a fight and was killed in the process. "It was of course better for him to be killed than to give the Arabs his mules," wrote Israel Giladi. "I am your example, Nisanov would say, that a Jewish worker should not allow his dignity to be disgraced, even if they take his life, for the dignity of his people and its future depends on it."[53]

Rabinovich and Rabbi Binyamin, who were considered moderate in outlook, began the book with a preface that amounted to a call for peaceful relations with the Arabs of *Eretz Israel*. They explained the difference between those who had died of malaria and those who had fallen in battle, whose deaths were tragic in that they were unnecessary and unnatural.[54] There was a contradiction between this call for peace and the idea of close relations between the two peoples on the one hand, and the rest of the book, which explicitly encouraged death in battle against them, on the other hand.[55] Later in the book, Rabbi Binyamin himself wrote as follows:

Hedva Ben-Israel et al.,(Jerusalem: Historical Society of Israel and Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 1986), 355-84.

[52] Yehoshua Radler Feldman (Rabbi Binyamin), "About Yizkor," *Hapoel Hatzair*, January 24, 1911, 12 [in Hebrew].

[53] Israel Giladi, "Memories," in *Yizkor*, ed. Alexander Ziskind Rabinovitch, (Jaffa, 1911), 16.

[54] *Ibid*, iv-v.

[55] Members of the Second *Aliyah* often spoke about the national collision between Jews and Arabs that was destined to occur in *Eretz Israel*. Although in practice consistent Arab activity

> It pained me to hear...about these new graves...But I must admit, the sorrow gradually dissipated...It is good for a man to have his kidneys pierced by an arrow in his youth...Happiness and beauty is not found in many days. Happiness belongs to he whose days are numbered.[56]

Later in the book, the glorification of death became even more explicit.[57] Writer and teacher Kadish Yehuda Silman wrote that one of his most powerful childhood memories was his mother's tears during the *Yizkor* prayer. These tears, he explained, stemmed not from sorrow but were rather tears of emotion. Memory of the dead, he maintained, arouses emotion in the People. The spilling of blood is what imbues a people with historical memory, and it is therefore what returns a People to their land. The concluding words of Silman's essay assert that the motivation to immigrate to *Eretz Israel* is actually the desire to be killed there: "You should know that we, the young, were brought to *Eretz Israel* by one old poem: Not fire and not sun, but rather our blood, Zion, will redden your mountains."[58]

Although the messages conveyed by *Yizkor* are identical to those that have already been discussed above, in *Yizkor* they were concentrated in one book and explicitly formulated: Death in *Eretz Israel* was among the signs of the renaissance of the People, and it should not be recoiled from; the bond to the Land was to be forged with blood, which means that there could be no future in the Land without the spilling of blood; The Land was in need of Hebrew blood, and Jews aspired to water the Land with their blood.

The book's publication sparked debates in the Hebrew-language press over whether there was a need for commemoration, and, if so, whom to commemorate. Ya`akov Zerubavel claimed that the book lacked a clear message and was skeptical of the call for peace voiced in its introduction. From his

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against Zionism had not yet emerged, relations between neighbors often boiled over into local clashes, which became increasingly frequent with the rising Arab antagonism resulting from the mounting Jewish immigration to the country. Shapira posits that their activist approach stemmed not only from the reality in the country but was also influenced by their lives in the Diaspora. The uprising against the dire conditions and defenselessness of Jews in Eastern Europe, in conjunction with Russian revolutionary principles that justified the use of force as a means of achieving historic change, made them militant. Shapira, *The Sword of the Dove*, 106, 147.

[56] Rabinovitch, *Yizkor*, 4.

[57] *Ibid.*, 20.

[58] *Ibid.*, 51.

perspective, such a message had no place in a book calling for sacrifice in war. He also maintained that death in war was nothing unusual and should therefore be taken for granted:

> If Jewish life and Jewish productivity begin here, there will also be Jewish heroes who will know how to die. To know how to die – this is something we still need to learn...New graves are a sign that new life is evolving in the Land, not a life of suffering but a life of healthy people...whose love for life will not ask why, who know how to fall in war.[59]

He then expressed opposition to the portrayal of the fallen as exceptional individuals. "Such people can be, and should be, every member of our People,"[60] Zerubavel wrote, and then offered his own explanation of why the book's statement was not sufficiently clear: because most of the potential dead are still alive.

> Perhaps the book is not yet necessary, as this is only the beginning...It is still too early to commemorate the individuals, as they will be followed by many more...Perhaps this is why the memory of the casualties in the book is so frail and pallid, because their most important part remain among the living.[61]

Because he saw the outcome of death in war as something that should be taken for granted, Zerubavel objected to the mythology of the fallen. His desire for the Jewish People to "learn how to die" is perhaps the most explicit expression possible of the notion of "the beautiful death" as a major part of the process of rebirth.

Additional criticism was levelled by Brenner, who, as we noted, initially served as one of the project's chief editors, along with Rabinovich, but soon abandoned the undertaking. Subsequent essays he authored expressed criticism of the book and rejected the criterion of a violent death at the hands of Arabs for the selection of the figures included in the book. They also rejected the notion that the guards were the heroes of Zionism. However, he was more critical of the attempt to turn

[59] Ya`akov Zerubavel, "Yizkor – Fragments of Ideas," *Ha'achdut*, January 2, 1912, 32 [in Hebrew].
[60] *Ibid.*
[61] *Ibid.*, 32.

the fallen into mythological figures. Every Zionist act in *Eretz Israel* was carried out based on never-ending conversation, he explained: "Have you ever seen a case in which people are climbing on a mountain cliff...bumping into something, and falling, while someone else will not stop talking about them during the act?" He believed that *Yizkor* reflected this kind of excessive dramatization, which he regarded as disproportionate in light of the small number of the fallen and the fact that they were not exceptional individuals but rather normal people: "Even this small handful is indicative of the extent to which we hasten to make history and to sanctify things."[62] Brenner disassociated himself from all efforts to attribute global historical importance to the death of the guards or to transform them into saints or heroes and refrained from creating myths in general. He had joined the editorial effort in order to commemorate young men who had been killed. When he realized that it was a project of mythologization, however, he stepped down on the grounds that such talk was premature in Zionism so few years after its inception.

The book's producers responded to Brenner's arguments. Rabbi Binyamin denied that an effort had been made to create a myth and held that the project had always been one of personal commemoration. However, because of the lack of cooperation on the part of the friends of the deceased, the majority of the book had indeed been written by writers.[63] Rabinovich published an angry response to Brenner's criticism. "The writer sighs at the fact that some writers hastened to tell the readers that the workers who were killed in *Eretz Israel* are sacred...In his opinion, we should have waited hundreds of years to do so," he countered. "Who dares to doubt the sanctity of the young men whose souls we commemorated in *Yizkor*, who died heroically for our sacred land and spilled their blood on it?"[64] Rabinovich objected to Brenner's criticism, arguing that the young men who had been killed were sacred and should be commemorated as such.

But the book's impact was not limited to the debate it sparked in *Eretz Israel* over how to relate to the fatalities of guarding. In 1916, *Yizkor* was published in Yiddish in the United States under the editorship of Alexander Cheshin, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, and Ya`akov Zerubavel, with the aim of increasing the public support

[62] Yosef Haim Brenner (Bar-Yochai), "Additional Sighs of a Writer," *Hapoel Hatzair*, June 21, 1912, 11-2 [in Hebrew].
[63] Feldman, "About Yizkor," 12.
[64] Alexander Ziskind Rabinovitch, "On the Sighers," *Hapoel Hatzair*, July 12, 1912, 11 [in Hebrew].

for Zionism.[65] Also incorporated into this edition were Ben-Gurion's memoirs from guarding at Sejera, which constituted the book's central and best formulated section. In these memoirs, Ben-Gurion clearly made a concerted effort to excite the imagination of the Jewish youth. The joyful accounts of a group of teenagers living together without adult supervision, entertaining themselves by bearing arms, and salvaging lost Jewish dignity *vis-à-vis* the Arabs gives the impression of Zionist propaganda aimed at Jewish youth around the world.[66] According to Uri Cohen, Ben-Gurion's memoirs emphasized not his past as a worker but his experience in *Hashomer*, based on his understanding that, as a Zionist leader, he needed to be part of the process of dying a Zionist death. In his memoirs, he highlighted the "beautiful death" of the guards:

> Those who died out of a stronger and nobler love of life…are the dead who are celebrated among those living the colorless, everyday life of the Jewish world. They gave death a goal and meaning that justifies the death of the sacred. In their own death, they learned that there is something to die for. May the lost gaze of the People come to rest on their silent graves…milestones of life…May it illuminate for [the People] the path to itself.[67]

In this manner, the fallen guards did not disappear; they remained among the living by illuminating the path for others, as opposed to those who were not willing to make the sacrifice, who lived but who were considered to be dead in their drab lives. On the other hand, guards were guards; their sacrifice was not made out of enthusiasm but rather out of a lack of choice, and this is what distinguished them from the Imperialists.[68]

Ben-Gurion wrote to Ben-Zvi and informed him that the book had made a great impression and that its publication had been followed by *Yizkor* evenings in cities throughout the United States. The *Hashomer* Fund had done good work, and the book's editors, and particularly Ben-Gurion himself, were now covered by the press and invited to lectures and poetry evenings devoted to the Jewish

[65] Alexander Cheshin, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, Ya`akov Zerubavel (eds.), *Yizkor* (New York, 1916) [in Yiddish].
[66] This edition, it should be noted, was never translated into Hebrew. We can assume that jovial accounts of malaria and adolescent elation from work appeared more believable from a distance, and not among the Jews of *Eretz Israel*.
[67] Cohen, *Survival*, 236.
[68] *Ibid.*, 235.

longing for *Eretz Israel*. The book sold out just a few weeks after its publication, and a new edition was released, this time reaching even beyond the borders of the United States. The stories of the Jews being killed in the war for their Land, during the World War, proved that Jews could also fight for their land and freedom and inspired supportive public opinion throughout the Jewish world.

Overall, those who assumed the task of producing the first edition of *Yizkor* – the task of creating a pantheon of national heroes for the Jewish People – had succeeded. Whereas the effort raised questions and debate among the Jews in *Eretz Israel*, it was received with great emotion elsewhere. The negligible number of dead among the Jewish guards during the period in question, and the national struggle that underlay the book – though not in an explicit manner in the reality of the time – gives the impression of the dedication of a memorial before there was anyone to commemorate. It was intended more for future fatalities than for those who had already died. But as a consciousness-shaping force it was a success: the members of *Hashomer* became heroes, the group became the aspiration of the Zionist pioneering youth and, for decades to come, death on the altar of the homeland would be perceived as the height of the pioneering act and a distinct symbol of the new Jew.

From the realm of mythology, we now return to reality. Though the message of sacrifice was clear and concise in *Yizkor*, in reality there were misgivings. The list of casualties from guarding continued to grow, raising the question of whether they were actually necessary. After a series of events resulting in the death of guards, a debate began in the Jewish press over whether or not the sacrifices being made for the protection of property were worthwhile and justified. In 1911, Ya`akov Rabinovitch felt that the price of Jewish guarding had become too heavy to bear. In a cautious article that reemphasized that he was not in favor of terminating Jewish guarding, he nonetheless called for an effort to reduce its casualties: "Are we truly so rich in forces that we can sacrifice Jewish life for the sake of a sheaf or a horse?...Just as the principle of Jewish guarding is dear to us, another principle should be dear to us as well: that of not increasing the sacrifices."[69]

In 1913, a Jewish guard by the name of Shmuel Friedman was knifed to death, and his body was mutilated near Rehovot. Following the murder, Yosef

[69] Ya`akov Rabinovich. "In the Cities and the *Moshavot*," *Hapoel Hatzair*, June 27, 1911, 4-5.

Aharonovitch wrote that the risk to the lives of the guards was too great and that they sometimes needed to know how to fall back and save themselves:

> In the current wild state of the Land, he [the guard] is not capable of distinguishing between the theft of a bunch of grapes and the murder of a person... We must remember this situation, and we must be cautious about executing our sons over a bunch of grapes... The continuous war of defense requires...an approach that recognizes the value of human life... The time has come to loudly proclaim this bitter truth: many of those who have fallen in the fields of our *Yishuv* in recent years have been injured by the approach of squandering as opposed to the approach of saving.[70]

The debate was present in the lives of the workers, and notices of the death of members reflected their views on the matter. For example, a notice regarding the death of Meir Hazanovitch asked: "Do we have the authority to accept these sacrifices? Is this not an unatonable loss to the world?"[71] In contrast, a notice regarding the death of a guard named Levitan contained the following pronouncement: "A casualty was killed over a sack of almonds, just as Yehezkel Nisanov was for a pair of mules, and here lies his greatness."[72] In his memoirs, Zvi Nadav penned a personal response to the charge that the guards did recognize the value of human life: "Deep in my heart, do I truly want blood? I see before me a picture of spilled blood...and without anyone to protest. No! In no way do I want blood...Nothing weighs heavier on a man's heart than the spilling of blood."[73] A broader consideration of the landscape, however, reveals that these were marginal voices. The more common responses to the death of guards were veneration of their willingness to sacrifice and education to follow their path.[74] This dynamic was reflected perhaps most distinctly in the widespread admiration of Yosef Trumpeldor.

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[70] Tmidi (Yosef Aharonovitch), "Matters of the Hour," *Hapoel Hatzair*, August 1, 1913, pp. 3-4 [in Hebrew].

[71] Alexander, "At the Grave of Meir Hazanovitch," *Ha'achdut*, May 30, 1913, 20 [in Hebrew].

[72] "Commemoration of Souls," *Ha'achdut*, August 7, 1914, 35 [in Hebrew].

[73] *Sefer Hashomer: Divrei Haverim*, (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1957), 92 [Hebrew]. This source was published decades after *Hashomer* was active, which raises questions about its reliability.

[74] In *Hashomer Hatzair* youth movement chapters, *Yizkor* was read again and again in an effort "to educate a generation of heroes." The name chosen for the movement was also explained in this spirit: "We called ourselves guards (*shomrim*). Most importantly, we wanted that name as an expression of our desire: to be like the guards who sacrificed their blood for their land and their

The Fatalities of Malaria in the Eyes of the Pioneers

As shown above, dying from malaria was viewed as a stinging failure and a hazard that threatened to give *Eretz Israel* a bad name. However, along with the changing attitude toward Zionist sacrifice, the attitude toward this kind of death also continued to evolve to the point of being considered heroic.[75] Zionism advocated healing the Jewish body, whereas malaria revealed its great vulnerability. It was an epidemic that sowed fear among the Jews in *Eretz Israel*, and efforts to "heal" *Eretz Israel* of malaria and to drain the swamps were symbolic of a general effort for change. Malaria was also linked to the issue of Jewish settlement: the elimination of malaria facilitated the expansion of Jewish settlement, and the expansion of settled land would decrease mosquito breeding grounds and, in turn, the areas plagued by malaria. In this way, Zionism played a role in defeating malaria; as the former expanded, the latter declined. *Yishuv* physicians characterized the success in eradicating the disease as a success in the building of "our national home" (in the words of Prof. Kligler, the leading expert on malaria during the Mandate period). In this sense, contracting and even dying from the disease was regarded as proof of Zionist patriotism and a stage in rebuilding the Jewish body.[76]

The workers' struggle for the ability to take part in the draining of the Kabbara swamps was a testament to both their attitude toward the fight against malaria and their understanding of sacrifice in general. The Kabbara swamps ran along the foothills of the Carmel Mountains, accounting for one of the largest marshlands in the country. The adjacent *moshava* of Zikhron Yaakov had suffered severely from malaria as a result of these marshlands and for many years had sought to take action to drain them. In 1924, the draining operations began under the direction of the PJCA (Palestine Jewish Colonization Association) and

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People." Yael Weiler, "The Fascinating World of *Hashomer Hatzair*," *Cathedra* 88 (1998), 91-2 [in Hebrew].

[75] Exceptional in this context was the death of children from malaria, which was common in a number of settlements during the Second and Third *Aliyot*. These young fatalities were hidden in an extreme manner and buried without a gravestone in order to prevent the emergence of doubts regarding the righteousness of their path and the arousal of fear among potential immigrants. Muki Tzur, "The Culture of Memory and Commemoration in the Early Days of Settlement," *Ariel* 171-172 (2005), 14 [in Hebrew].

[76] Sandra Sufian, *Healing the Land and the Nation*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 21-36.

based on the funding of Baron Edmond de Rothschild. Approximately 600 workers were brought in for the draining operations, from Egypt and from throughout *Eretz Israel*. When a group of Jewish workers requested to join the effort, the foreman refused on the grounds that "the Baron truly loves his fellow Jews and is not interested in turning Kabbara into a Jewish cemetery."[77] The workers were furious and embarked on a struggle for their right to work draining the swamps. A worker from Nahalal explained the reason for the struggle as follows:

> When I passed the Kabbara swamps...and I saw the Egyptians...standing there and digging in them...I said that a miracle had occurred here – the same miracle that occurred at the Dead Sea: the Jews crossing on dry land and the Egyptians walking behind them and drowning in the water. But we do not want miracles. We want to enter the Land not through a miracle. And if we need to traverse oceans and lakes, we will traverse them ourselves. And if, heaven forbid, we need to drown, it would be best for one of our own to drown than for an Egyptian or some other non-Jew to drown on our behalf...It is important for us that this work, the work of conquering the land in Eretz Israel, will be done with our own hands. The work of draining the Kabbara swamps is a historic undertaking, and we must play at least a part at the forefront of our historic act...We wish to stand up to our necks in water in the Kabbara swamps and to feel the pangs of creation. This is not difficult work, and we have no fear of death...We defeated the swamps of Nahalal and Nuris...And we must also be first and on the front lines of the swamps of Kabbara. And if sacrifices are required of us, we will make them. Then, we will feel more healthy and heartened than if we simply heard that someone else died on our front. It is our obligation and our right to die there, as this will safeguard our right to live here.[78]

The workers, therefore, viewed it as both their right and obligation to drain the swamps themselves, based on their desire for complete independence and to be those who "healed" the land. They were not deterred by the danger. On the contrary, the draining of the swamps was a right they wished to safeguard for the

[77] Yosef Yudelevitch, *The Memoirs and Impressions of a Man of the Second Aliyah*, (Tel Aviv: A Moses, 1974/75), 54-6 [in Hebrew].

[78] . Ben-Barak, "At the Swamps of Kabbara," *Hapoel Hatzair*, November 13, 1924, 15 [in Hebrew]. See also Y.S., "The Right to Conquer," *Hapoel Hatzair*, November 13, 1924, 3 [in Hebrew]

Jewish People and to not share with other peoples. In their view, only someone who died on his land could live on it.[79] Kligler attempted to combat this approach, repeatedly telling the pioneers that there was no reason to die in order to be patriots. Although death by malaria was romantic, he argued, it was unnecessary. Moreover, if they learned to protect themselves from the disease they would also prevent others from dying from it. Heroism, he believed, meant not dying from malaria but rather fighting it. In the course of the 1920s, his approach gradually gained credence, and the indifference toward the disease continued to decline.[80]

Nonetheless, during the period in question, the belief that watering the Land with Jewish blood was a positive act spread and came to apply not only to guarding but to death by malaria, which also came to be seen as a beautiful death in the name of the homeland.

Conclusion

In this article, we considered the attitude toward bereavement in the Jewish agricultural settlements in *Eretz Israel* between 1881 and the 1920s. Zionism, we observed, called for extensive wide-ranging changes in the life of the Jewish People – including changes in attitudes toward death in the context of Zionism – which, it was believed, would help create a "new Jew."

The *moshavot* of the First *Aliyah* suffered from high mortality rates, primarily as a result of malaria, although these fatalities received almost no mention in the newspapers and literature of the period. We reviewed the criticism that was leveled against the malaria-plagued settlements for tarnishing the reputation of the *Yishuv*, and against the settlers as failures. The inhabitants of the *moshavot* internalized this criticism and came to view death as a failure that needed to be concealed for the sake of the success of the *Yishuv.* Internally, the settlers remained steadfast in their *moshavot* based on their belief in the importance of the act, despite the risks involved, but took no pride in the sacrifices. A broader view reveals that the First *Aliyah* placed less of an emphasis on the values of the

[79] Indeed, malaria took a heavy toll on those who were engaged in draining the swamp: each day, 30-40 laborers were absent from work due to illness. There were also many instances of death. Shmuel Avitzur, "The Swamps of Kabbara and Dov Kublanov, Exterminator," *Ariel* 55-56 (1988), 52-4 [in Hebrew].
[80] Sufian, *Healing the Land and the Nation*, 35-7.

"new Jew" than those who came after them. This, we hold, was one attribute of this wave of immigration, which brought about a meaningful revolution in *Eretz Israel* but did little to explain its values.

The pioneers among the immigrants of the Second and Third *Aliyot*, on the other hand, tended to formulate the values of the "new Jew" with characteristic frankness. A prominent element of this notion was the assertion that, in *Eretz Israel,* Jews could die a "beautiful death." This meant a death for the sake of the nation and the homeland, which preserved the bond between the deceased and the nation, provided the living with an example of a willingness for sacrifice, and encouraged the continuation of the national undertaking. For the pioneers, the notion of "watering the Land with blood" was an expression of the bond between the pioneer and the Land. It was an essential stage, they maintained, as national hopes could be fulfilled only after blood was spilled. Blood, they argued, constituted the basis of an alliance between the People and the Land and, like sweat, would determine the borders of the country. They also claimed that the Land, from its part, also longed for Jewish blood. For all these reasons, the Zionist pioneers regarded the spilling of blood not only as a necessity but as something to strive for.

These notions found distinct expression in the publication the *Yizkor* book in commemoration of the fallen guards of *Hashomer* in Jaffa in 1911, and in other parts of the world in the years that followed. The book waged a Zionist campaign, based on the veneration of the fallen, to transform the casualties of *Hashomer* into a myth. In addition to this approach, there were other voices in *Eretz Israel* that called for the guarding organizations to make a more concerted effort to protect the lives of their members. These voices attested to concerns that the mythological approach to sacrifice went too far and could lead to belittling of the value of the protection of human life.

The change in attitude toward sacrifice in the Jewish settlements in *Eretz Israel* also resulted in a change in the attitude toward malaria. This lethal disease, which the settlers attempted to conceal during the First *Aliyah*, subsequently became a heroic symbol of the Jewish People's healing of the Land. The Pioneers' struggle to take part in the draining of the swamps was indicative of the fact that they perceived this work, and the dangers it involved, as an important aspect of the renaissance of the Jewish People.

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