4 Articulating the Physical Territory of the Land

On earlier pages, I noted that the first of two simultaneous aspects of pioneer desire is a kind of ecstatic-symbiosis. The second aspect is that which creates boundaries. This impetus constituted the Land of Israel by delineating its territory.

As we saw, Deleuze and Guattari define desire as an anarchic flow that knows no boundaries. But this flow also results in the creation of boundaries. We noted, for example, that the flow of sweat blurred the boundaries between the halutz and the Land. The halutzim wet the Land and thus became part of it. But by watering the soil with their sweat they transformed it from undifferentiated earth into cultivated soil, and from unowned soil into Jewish soil. Their act marked a boundary between Jewish soil and Arab earth. Deleuze and Guattari make little distinction between “territory” and “body.” Territory always has bodily form, and a body is always territorial; territory might better be called a “geo-body.” Thus, the boundary-blurring and boundary-creating effects of desire act not only on physical space—here, the Land—but also on the body of the individual halutz (see chapter 5) and on pioneer language (see chapter 6).

As Deleuze and Guattari describe the process, the flow of desire through the (undifferentiated) “body-without-organs” actually articulates the body’s organs. The body-without-organs is therefore a body that has not yet undergone socialization. It is, in fact, a no-body. Because it lacks organs, it does not exist. And it has no organs because it lacks any defining characteristic that would make it a separate, distinct entity and enable differentiated organs to develop. Deleuze and Guattari use the terms “deterioritization” for the boundary-blurring impetus and “reterritorialization” for the boundary-creating impetus. Thus, the ecstatic-symbiotic aspect of pioneer desire can be described as deterioritization, and pioneer desire’s boundary-creating impetus, which intersects with the ecstatic-symbiotic experience and establishes boundaries, as reterritorialization. As opposed to boundary-blurring, boundary-creating channels and disciplines the flow of desire, in effect fashioning the organs in the body-without-organs.

The mechanism of pioneer desire manifests itself visually in the ground plan of Nahalal, the first moshav audim (semicooperative farming village), established in 1921. A bird’s-eye view of the community shows desire scattering anarchically from the center in all directions, like a drop of water when it falls on a solid surface. This desire, in its anarchic flow, leaves in its wake a village, roads, and cultivated land.

This chapter focuses on the boundary-creating impetus in the physical territory of the Land of Israel. Before addressing the regeneration of the physical territory of the Land, we must take a look at the body-without-organs, the nonexistent space of the exile.

The Space of the Exile

The space of the exile is a space-without-organs, the space where the “eternal,” “wandering,” lafmenish, or alhead, Jew exists. It is a utopian space in the original meaning of the word—a nonexistent place (ou-topos) that does not allow the Jew “to be” within it. Just before his aliyah to the Land of Israel, Tzvi Nadav described the angst that overcame him in the endless space of the exile. On the eve of the Pesach holiday, in Shavli, Lithuania, Nadav went out into “a street of the Jewish...
city”: “I feel that the earth is being pulled out from under my feet and that I am falling into an abyss, as in a nightmare. . . . I am terrified by the thought of the ‘infinite.’ And this was not a thought, but rather a real intuition. . . . I sensed that a chill, an absolute, infinite chill, a cosmic chill, was penetrating my heart. I felt abandoned, alone, isolated, in this cosmos.”

The exile is a space of endless, purposeless movement. Yitzhak Ben-Zvi wrote that an existential state of migration and itinerancy sets the Jewish people apart from the existential condition of other nations, which live on and feel connected to their own soil. History teaches that many nations have wandered and continued to wander. But, in general, Ben-Zvi maintained, all the members of such nations pass their lives in the land where their people have settled. This is not the case with the Jews. Migration is not a lone or rare event in the Jewish people’s life; it is their permanent state. Since they were expelled from their land, Jews have passed their lives in different countries, each of which has been only a way station in their wandering.

Exile is a space that threatens Jewish existence. It is characterized, for example, by physical harm in the form of pogroms that cause “the earth to be pulled out from under the Jewish people’s feet.” To the halutzim, the exile was a space without stable ground on which to stand, where Jews were at risk of falling into the cracks. Oceanic metaphors also prevailed. “Our life in the exile is a stormy sea,” wrote one halutz, “a thundering, unending torrent of crashing and falling waves, of waves assaulting and exploding on boulders and again assaulting, over and over again.” David Ben-Gurion claimed that the Jews were mummified, sunk up to their necks in “the swamps of the exile.” “I feel myself in exile as if I were sinking in a mire,” confessed Eliezer Yaffe. “I must make one last move: to live or to die but not to suffocate.” Yehuda Goethef of HaShomer HaTza’ir said the Jew in the exile is like a man on the edge of a yawning abyss that seeks to swallow up its victims. The exile is the primordial chaos. “Shards of tablets, shreds of hearts, crumbs scattering and dividing, sinking in the depths, choking from loneliness and sinking into the abyss,” he wrote. The assimilation that occurred in the exile was also like a menacing tidal wave. If, in earlier times, assimilation had been a “creek” whose waters swept up only a few, now it was “a swift river, carrying off all it encounters on its path.”

The exile space was also inundated with currents and surges of blood; it was “engorged” with Jewish blood. The Jews of the exile were submerged in “rivers of blood,” “blood baths,” and “blood deluges.” When gentile nations fought against one another, both victors and losers assuaged their anger by drawing Jewish blood. In the entire contemptible exile, the Jew had no place he could walk securely. It was terribly sad and shocking to see people drowning in their own spilt blood, lamented Eliezer Yaffe in contemplating the exilic life of these “non-people with no-land.”

Yosef Aharonovich feared the exile and exile existence and hated the peoples of Europe, principally because of the huge amounts of Jewish blood they had spilled, the blood of millions of Jewish victims of all eras and in all lands. The Jews, and the individual Jew, were, as a result, a “non-people and no-body.”

During World War I, David Ben-Gurion called attention to a tidal wave of blood that threatened to drown Jewish existence everywhere. More than any other catastrophe, he maintained, this war had amplified the Jewish problem and cast it in the starkest, bitterest, most tragic light. The Zionist solution was meant to halt this threatening surge. “This huge, piercing, plummeting disaster of a depleted, disconnected, helpless nation, without a hold on life, without a place of its own on earth, without any resting point,” Ben-Gurion wrote, “is now revealed in all its awful nakedness. . . . Our catastrophe is that we are being destroyed, hemorrhaging, for no reason, without purpose, without intention.” Each day, Berl Katznelson argued, the world wrote the history of the Jews with their blood. The exile’s tide of foreign blood, wrote another halutz, “breaks through into our hearts and poisons our blood.”

A 1904 public appeal written by a group of young Jews living in Palestine combined several such images to describe exile Jewish existence as lacking in everything of value. The exile was the lack of a land and of a language. It killed national sentiments. The Jews of the exile stood with their feet “in the mouth of a volcano, a burning abyss” that threatened to swallow them up. The Jews were descending into this chaos and drowning in it. Ben-Gurion wrote his father that the exile was as dark as a graveyard. Berl Katznelson called it a desert. Mordechai Shenhavi of HaShomer HaTza’ir felt in the exile as if he were “hanging in the air between sky and earth.” The exile was “hell.”

Exile from the Land of Israel threw the Jew not only outside space but also outside time and history. Tzvi Shatz wrote that the Jews in the Land of Israel were awakening as from a bad dream, after thousands of years in the “mire of the exile.” They now strode, once again, on the hills and across the broad horizons of their land. At the same time, Shatz believed that even this secure place that granted them soil under their feet was no more than a single moment in their progress through the raging sea of Jewish history. The soil of the Land, Shatz wrote, was a respite between one storm and the next. No one could guarantee that the Jews would not again descend into exile and destination: “Here rise and fall the waves of war and revolution, rise and fall the breaking waves, bloom and wither wondrous moments of individual life, raising the soul to divine purity and, in an instant, sending it down to the nethermost hell.”
The fact that Jewish history was drenched in Jewish blood proved, said Yitzhak Elazar-Volcani, that with regard to time and Jewish history, "there is no chronological sequence in the chronicles of our blood." In his view, the year 1648 (most likely referring to riots in Poland led by Bohdan Khmelnytsky) could be interchanged with the date for the anti-Jewish riots of 1919, and the "bloody chapters" of modern Jewish history recorded by the historian Heinrich Graetz could be read as an account of ancient times. No historian would be able to discern that such an account would be mixing up incidents and dates. It would only be necessary to replace words like "machine gun" with "sword" and "spear." The exile arrested the "wheels of history," as Eliezer Riger of HaShomer HaTza'i put it.

Heading into exile, then, the Jewish nation was transformed from an entity positioned in concrete place and time into an "eternal people," an amorphous entity that exists in every space and every time, outside geography and outside history. Zionism "reterritorialized" the Jews, once again making them "the people of the Land" (the Hebrew term, Am Ha'aretz, also connotes "simple people," workaday people as opposed to intellectuals). Zionism is the "territorial turn" in Jewish history that returned the Jew to space (the Land of Israel) and time (history).

The Space of the Homeland

The Land of Israel is the "shore that calls over the stormy sea," as Haim Arlosoro put it.30 Berl Katznelson saw the Land as his "final shore."31 In a historical irony, the name "territorialism" was given to the idea of resolving the Jewish problem by evacuating all the Jews to a place other than the Land of Israel (such as Uganda).32 Yitzhak Ben-Zvi argued in this context that only the "Zionism of Zion" was worthy of being called territorialism. Zionism in the Land of Israel was not territorialism; any other "territorialism" was abstract and distant from reality. The Zionist aspiration was simply to establish Jewish identity on a territorial basis in the only land where such territorial existence had ever been realized.33 Ben-Zvi translated the concept of territorialism into Hebrew as "hit'artzut," the literal translation of which might be "becoming the land." To be a territorialist was thus to become part of the Land.34 While the Zionists defined themselves territorially by the term "Zion," after World War I Jewish settlers in Palestine began calling themselves "Eretz Israelis" (Eretz-Yisraelim) rather than "Jews."35 Returning to the Land after years of exile, they became part of it.

Where the exilic-space-without-organs was quicksand, currents and tidal waves of blood, an abyss yawning amid an earthquake and threatening to swallow up the Jews, the Land of Israel was stable and safe, the place where the halutzim found earth under their feet. Yet at the same time, the Land was a body-without-organs that had to be articulated by pioneer desire, which would enable its organs to appear.

The halutzim saw the Land as a tabula rasa. It was "hollow," "ruined," "bare," "dead," "abandoned," "naked," "striped," "downfallen," "wild," "withered," "bald," "empty," "desolate," "virgin."36 Its climate and geographical conditions made it a "land of desert and desolation."37 The Land was also a body-without-organs because it was for them a "new world," unfamiliar, menacing, terra incognita.38 To them, the Land of Israel was a "land without a people" that awaited, yearned for, desired the "people without a land."39

The Land's intimidating human environment, with its threats of constant, concrete danger, was another reason that the halutzim perceived it as a continuation of the exilic-space-without-organs.40 HaShomer member Yitzhak Hox described an attack on Merhavia in May–June 1914, instigated by the killing of the nephew of a local Arab sheikh: "The mob streamed up the hill with gunfire and shrieks. . . . The assailants were already very close . . . our nerves were taut. One thought pursued another with lightning speed, the bullets of the assailants whis-
tled over our heads, and our eyes pressed into the darkness and made out a swaying black mass spitting fire and charging toward us."

Other aspects of the exile also persisted in the Land of Israel, leading the pioneer community to see itself as "sinking in its swamp, degenerating further and further." To the halutzim, Jaffa, the first city encountered by most halutzim when they arrived; the old moshav, with their dependence on Arab labor; and the old Jewish community supported by charity from abroad all represented the extension of exilic space into the Land. Some halutzim felt that even now, in the Land, they were still "always hanging in the air." They continued to feel "foreign" and "alien" in their own land. Many halutzim continued to wander, in this case around the Land. Arab labor was a "swamp" or "sea" threatening to drown them. A member of Kibbutz Kiyati Anavim wrote that daily life was nothing "but a simple swamp, a pool of water collected from a flowing river in some deserted corner. A pool without depth, covered in scum, with papyrus reeds growing around it. Quiet and silence always prevail there."

The halutzim also perceived the substantial emigration from Palestine (especially in the Second Aliya) of those for whom the difficulties proved too great as part of exilic existence. It was, Rachel Yanait lamented, as if heaven had decreed that the question of migration would always remain—even in the Land of Israel, "in the place in which we want to break free of exile life."

These preoccupations explain why the halutzim did not and could not perceive themselves as conquering the Land in the common sense of economic, colonial, violent conquest. A Land-without-organs could not be conquered because nothing yet existed to conquer. "The halutz came to settle a desolate land," wrote Labor Battalion member Y. Reznichenko, "Everything is being done from the beginning, there is not yet anything to destroy and there is no one to fight against."

They did describe themselves as conquerors, but in a very different sense. They saw all their acts as "construction," "creation," and "redemption." This explained the meaning of terms like "conquest of the soil," "conquest of labor," "conquest of defense," and "conquest of the self." David Ben-Gurion asserted that a people does not receive a land. A people conquers a land. But to him conquest was an act of creation. "We will conquer the Land," he wrote, "by our building of it." In contrast with the violent military or economic conquest that typified the history of other lands in other circumstances, Yosef Aharonovitch described the conquest of the Land of Israel as "a truly moral conquest," as a result of which human beings lived and created cultural values. These values, he maintained, could be created only by the farmer with his plow and hoe, the smith and his anvil, the teacher and his school. In other words, the values were produced by those millions of people who sowed with tears and sweat the seeds of their cultural life. The Land of Israel could be conquered again and forever, Franz Oppenheimer wrote, "not [with] the sword, but [with] the plough and the hoe."

Pioneer conquest in all its forms was the classic expression of the boundary-creating aspect of pioneer desire for the Land. Conquest meant the redemption of the body-of-the-Land-without-organs through creating its organs. In their desire for the Land the halutzim created the object of that desire.

With this notion of conquest in mind, we can understand the pioneer declaration: "We will be the first!" The halutzim desired primacy. When Rabbi Binyamin reached Kinneret, he was disappointed to find that his comrades had preceded him by ten days. He was jealous "since on arriving I found everything 'ready and waiting' for me ... but they found nothing when they arrived, no-thing in the strongest sense of the word." Mordechai Hadash, who was planning to go to Kinneret, felt that he was fulfilling the dream of creating a new settlement, because "there was a kind of craving, an almost physical desire, for primal life, for the hard beginning, the feeling of conquest, the plow piercing virgin soil." The novelist Yehuda Ya'ari expressed regret that "only once in his life can a person arrive in the Land of Israel for the first time."

The boundary-articulating impetus also created a map of the Land. A new settler at Kfar Uria described the view from the roof of a house: "To the west, the buildings of Hulda can be seen in the distance. To the east—the ridges of Judea; and there, behind those hills, on the Jerusalem side, Har Tov is concealed. But more than this, one's eyes are drawn northward, to another vanishing point that will fill in the third apex of the new triangle—to Tel Gezir.

The gaze created a Zionist geography.

Still another effect of pioneer desire was to constitute the Land of Israel as a place to which one "ascends" (the literal meaning of aliya) and from which one "descends" (yerida, denoting emigration from the Land). These terms did not come into use until after World War I, in the period between the Second and Third Aliyot. Before then, Jews did not "ascend" to the Land—they "migrated" or "immigrated." People who emigrated from the Land did not "descend"—they simply "left" or "departed." The term "Second Aliya" was not applied to that wave of immigration until the beginning of the Third Aliya. Those who participated in the Second Aliya identified themselves as belonging to the "youth movement" or to the "workers' wave of immigration."

The value judgments inherent in the terms aliya and yerida hardly need explication, but their topographic implication should be stressed. The Land of Israel is located at a higher position than the rest of the world. After World War I, the relatively indifferent attitude to the "leavers" and "departers" vanished. Now such individuals were called "abandoners," "deserters," "refugees," "irresolute weak-
lings," "slackers," "gypsies," "eternal wanderers," and other epithets. "Descent" from the Land of Israel became an act of "irresponsibility," "disobedience," "weakness," "frailty," "moral failure," "a stab in the heart" of the settlement and political enterprise." In 1908, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi and his wife, Rachel, spoke with an Arab carpenter who told them he wanted to immigrate to America. "Their heart is for immigration," Rachel later wrote in her memoirs, "our heart is for Aliya." 160

Pioneer desire thus transformed an Arab Land-without-organs into the Jewish Land of Israel. Some three years after the Arab village of Fula became the Hebrew Merhavia, one settler wrote: "Whoever still remembers the Arab huts... would not recognize Merhavia now. The Arab village has been almost completely eliminated; on the beautiful hill next to it, now rise the buildings of the cooperative moshav... the soil that the hand of culture had not yet touched has also shed its old appearance and taken on a new one, and is now cultivated in the best possible way." 161

Present Absentees

How did the local population, and the Arabs specifically, fit into the pioneers' Land-without-organs? How can an empty Land have an existing population?

I admit that neither the question "Where is the local population located in pioneer desire for the Land of Israel?" nor the answer--"Nowhere!"--is legitimate in the framework I have set forth for this discussion. This value-laden question assumes that pioneer desire ought to have contained a certain element or, to put it another way, should have been something that it was not. Making any accusatory or apologetic assumption about pioneer desire takes us back to precisely those approaches that I seek to avoid. Nevertheless, I pose the question because I believe that the disregard for the local population--Arab, for the most part—that characterized pioneer desire for the Land of Israel is too important morally to ignore.

True love, the historian Amos Elon has written, is always blind, 162 and the pioneers' desire for the Land of Israel indeed blinded them. They "were seen but did not see," to use an expression coined (in a different context) by Noah Naftulsky of Kinneret. 163 For them, in their state of boundary-blurring symbiosis with the Land, there could be no place for a foreign element. The totality of this experience left no living space for the Other, neither in consciousness nor in territory. Consequently, pioneer desire could not recognize any alternative desire for the Land.

When the halutzim settled on the soil and desired to penetrate it, when the pioneer eye sat itself on its landscapes, when the halutzim constituted the connection between themselves and their land with currents of blood, no room remained for the Other. When Others appeared, they were generally experienced as an interference, literally an ecological hazard. More than once, the halutzim described attacks by the local population, usually Arab, on Hebrew settlements in the same breath as public health dangers like malaria. 164

Likewise, the halutzim often described local inhabitants as blots on the environment. One halutz noted his regret that Arab workers were still employed in the old moshavot. To his chagrin, he found Arab laborers even at the new farms, which were supposed to be built purely by Jewish labor. Immediately after remarking on these phenomena, he described the beauty of the new farm at Ramat Daliuka, which sat on a hilltop overlooking a large area that encompassed Sejera, Bayjit Gan, Yavniel, Menahemiyya, Um Juni, and Kinneret. "The cultivated fields of the Jews astound the eye," he reflected. 166 The natural landscape of the Land of Israel, he claimed further, had a unique Jewish identity. As such, only Hebrew labor could maintain and act within it. The local Arabs were a foreign element in this Jewish ecology. "Healthy air, wide and rich Jewish nature. Will Jewish building also happen here?" 166

"And you gaze on the black tents pitched in this wasteland, and encounter the crafty gaze of the black Bedouin... and a sense of sadness overtakes you," wrote another halutz. He stressed the desolation of the place: "You see at this moment the great valley mourning the sparkle of splendor and the majesty of glory that has been denied it for generations. And you have a great desire to unite with these hills and to pour their prayer down into the heart of the turbulent Jordan, to intensify its anger at the lost man [Jew] whose steps were late in coming, who has not yet arrived to ascertain its huge spirit and to bestow something of its splendor on this wasteland."

Michael Oved wrote that his kibbutz had settled in "Arab buildings" at the foot of Mount Carmel, across from the Zichron Ya'akov train station. On the right was a vast citrus orchard, grape arbors, and eucalyptus groves. Ahead and to the left were well-tended, impressive fields. On the horizon was the sea, sparkling blue under the sun and blending with the blue sky into a single, infinite expanse. On moonlit nights, he wrote, when you climb up a pile of moist, fragrant hay to rest a bit from the heat of the day, there is no greater pleasure than listening to the murmur of the waves blending with the whisper of the fields of grain. It was a wonderful harmony, magical music. "And it happens," he continued, "that [the baying of] jackals suddenly rips through the air, and this wonderful music halts for a moment. Or an Arab plods by on his ass, and suddenly he warbles and pours out his heart in melancholy fragments. . . . But then he, too, passes and the music resumes as it was before." 166

Many other halutzim had reactions similar to those of Oved. Generally they
thought, meditated, and envisioned one Land, and upon arriving at one of its 
ports—usually Jaffa—they encountered a different Land, typified by the Arab 
porters of Jaffa who carried them to the shore. Shlomo Kinnari arrived in Jaffa 
on August 10, 1920, with twenty-seven companions from Kevutzat Vilna, all scions 
of Zionist youth movements and members of HeHalutz. When their feet touched 
the paving stones of Jaffa, they raised the blue-and-white HeHalutz flag and sang 
the Zionist anthem, “HaTikva.” Kinnari’s eyes shone with tears of joy. “We 
searched out a tract of land [whose potential] we could actualize and unshackle,” 
his memoirs state, “but all around us were only filthy cobblestones, discarded watermelon 
rinds, and masses of Arab dock laborers and officials.”

Obviously the halutzim were aware of the local Arab population. Despite the 
newcomers’ conception of the Land of Israel as empty, the native population was 
present in their world—but at the same time, absent. Indeed, from the pioneer 
perspective, the emptiness of the Land, its status as a Land-without-organs, was 
magnified by the Arab presence within it. In the halutzim’s eyes, the local Arabs 
not only had failed to build, create, and redeem the Land but were incapable of 
doing so—because they lacked desire. Thus the Arabs had not conquered the 
Land of Israel and could not conquer it in the pioneer sense of the word, largely 
owing to character traits such as laziness and primitiveness, expressed in a lack 
of technological capability. This was the “Arab labor” so maligned by the Jews. 
“They [the Arabs] never cleared their fields of stones and never improved them, 
ever plowed with expensive, heavy European plows. . . .” wrote Melech Zago 
dsky, an agronomist who served as an envoy and consultant for the Land of Israel 
Office (the Zionist movement’s executive arm in Palestine). “In truth, he actually 
does not plow; instead he scratches or scrapes the surface of his soil with his 
plowshare.”

David Ben-Gurion was well aware that the great majority of the Land’s population 
was Arab. Yet this fact, as far as he was concerned, was irrelevant to the kind 
of relationship different populations had with the Land. “The Land of Israel,” he 
wrote in April 1915, “is now a desolate and half-ruined land—and the small Arab 
element is incapable of reviving it and rebuilding its ruins.” Ben-Gurion derived from this narrat 
ve the moral and human basis for the Jewish Yishuv’s aspirations and labor in 
the Land of Israel. The Jews, after all, had proven and continued to prove with 
their own hands that they were competent to fill the noble role of “original Jewish 
national creation,” which was at the same time a “human cultural enterprise of great 
value, a civilized enterprise.” The Jews brought sophisticated work tools and 
practices into the Land, enriched it with new farming settlements, improved the 
climate and made it healthier, improved sanitary conditions in its cities, created 
advanced farms, built exemplary urban neighborhoods, paved roads, established 

modern educational institutions, enhanced the Land’s value and increased its in 
come, raised wages, and crafted new forms of social life.

For these reasons the presence of a local population consisting principally of 
Arabs only amplified the halutzim’s conception of the Land of Israel as a Land-
without-organs. The Arab presence even amounted to a necessary condition for 
conceiving of the Land in this way: it was a Land-without-organs because the 
Arab population lacked all desire to create organs. The local Arabs lived an arbitrary, 
purposeless existence. Their very presence on the Land served only to make their “absence” more palpable, and actually intensified pioneer desire.

Recall that the pioneers experienced the Land of Israel as female, a virgin 
whose virginity the pioneers pierced, a lover whom they sought to marry, the 
Mother Earth to whose womb they sought to return. Their desire did not allow 
them to see that the Land had other lovers, husbands, and sons who desired it no 
less than they did.

As a virgin, the Land expected to be penetrated; the Arabs were impotent. As a 
bride, the Land demanded love; the Arabs did not love it, even neglected it. As 
Mother Earth, the Land demanded to be respected and cared for; the Arabs were 
not attuned to its requirements. The halutzim’s desire acted on the body-without-
organs because the Arab who made a pretense of penetrating, loving, respecting,
As the sun emerged from behind the mountains we plowed the soil with our plow-shares... Yes, there is something great about cutting through the ground with a plow! But there is something seventy-seven times greater about cutting through virgin land that no plow had touched for thousands of years! We felt that we were gathering in this soil’s ancient shame, that we were betrothing with this plow the fields of the valley...

The shepherds gathered on the mountains around us and gazed in wonder and astonishment and admiration, clapped their hands and cheered us from above: “Sah benahaq!” (“Health to your bodies!”). They watched and jeered us as we drained the swamp. They did not believe that it was possible to remove the divine curse imposed on it from days beyond their memory.”

—Yehuda Ya’ari, As a Glowing Light, 1937

and caring for it was only pretending. In the pioneers’ view, their desire would eventually result in Arab revival in the Land of Israel. According to Ben-Gurion, Zionism’s goals were in no way opposed to Arab goals. Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel was not aimed at destroying the Arab community. On the contrary, only Zionist action could “save (the Arab community) from its economic straits, raise it up from its social degradation, and extract it from its bodily and moral degeneration. Our revival in the Land of Israel will be accomplished through the revival of the Land of Israel—in other words, the revival of the Arabs who dwell in it.” Some halutzim believed that the Arab fellahs were the descendants of the ancient Hebrews who had remained in the Land after the exile, afterward converting to Islam. Pioneer desire for the Land of Israel thus even “knew how” to Judaize the non-Jews.

“A Hidden Question”: Arab Desire for the Land

As shown by the pioneers’ relationship to existing Arab residents, their desire for the Land of Israel blinded them to other desires for it. As chapter 2 noted, the pioneers’ desire for the Land was identical to the Land’s desire for them. Thus, no “space” remained for other desires. Not surprisingly, the few Jewish settlers who did discern other non-Jewish and mostly Arab desires for the Land were not halutzim.

“Among the difficult questions linked to the idea of the rebirth of our people on its soil, there is one question as weighty as all the others together: the question of our treatment of the Arabs. The reestablishment of our national hope depends on the correct answer to this question, which has not been forgotten, but has rather been entirely hidden from the Zionists, and there is virtually no reference to it, in its true form, in our movement’s literature.” This is how the educator Yitzhak Epstein (1863–1943) began his article “A Hidden Question,” first presented as a lecture to the Seventh Zionist Congress, convened in Basel in 1905. As a member of the First Aliya, Epstein could perhaps see the “Arab question” more clearly than those of subsequent immigration waves. His was one of the first Zionist voices to note the collision between the two desires for the Land of Israel. Epstein pointed out that more than half a million Arabs lived in the Land of Israel, as opposed to about 80,000 Jews. The Jews had indeed bought tracts in the Land completely legally. Yet, Epstein wondered, what were the fellahs who tilled this soil supposed to do after their fields passed into Hebrew hands? The fellah was a settled inhabitant, and in some cases his forefathers had been tenants on the same land. Even when the fellahs received monetary compensation for leaving their land, they had nevertheless been evicted. They lost their source of sustenance and had nowhere else to go. Even if the Jewish colony provided the fellah with work, he could not depend on this work in the long term. He could never see his employment as a wage laborer as a fair exchange for the land taken from him. He could never accept these new circumstances, in which strangers employed him on his own land.

Epstein maintained that a conflict between the Arabs and the new Jewish settlers was inescapable. While no Arab movement yet existed in the national and political sense, such a movement was not needed because the Arab nation, unlike the Jewish nation, was strong and numerous. It did not need to be reborn because it had never stopped living. Moreover, the Arabs were stronger and healthier than all the European nations. Epstein called on the Zionist settlers not to take Arab rights lightly: “We must not provoke a sleeping lion! We must not trust the ashes that cover the coals; a single spark will escape and there will be a conflagration that cannot be quenched.”

Beyond diagnosing the socioeconomic injustice inflicted and apt to be inflicted on the Arab fellahs, Epstein noted the Arabs’ physical presence on the soil of the Land of Israel and stressed their profound connection to that soil. The Arab did not only subsist on the land—he clung to it. “In our beloved Land there is an entire nation,” Epstein wrote, “that has held fast to it for hundreds of years and has no intention of leaving it.” This held on the Land was a direct product of that nation’s love for it. “While we feel love in all its potency for the Land of our Fathers,” continued Epstein, “we forget that the people living in it now has a feeling heart and a loving soul. The Arab, like all human beings, is tied by strong cords to his homeland. And the lower the level of a man’s development and the more narrow his outlook, the stronger will be the connection that links him to his land and territory and the harder it will be for him to part from his village and his field.”

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The Arab fellah is tied to his soil by virtue of the labor he and his forebears have invested in it. He is also tied to it by the graves of his ancestors. He kisses its stones and its earth. Arab desire for the Land is also channeled through bodily fluids. “If there are any farmers who water their fields with their perspiration and their vital fluids,” Epstein wrote, “they are the Arabs.”

Of course Epstein also acknowledged the Jewish people’s desire for the Land of Israel and their right to “renew their blood” on its soil. They had the right to reconquer, through their knowledge and sweat, what their forefathers had conquered by the sword and spear, and to redeem the Land from “drought, desolation, and neglect.” But he believed that this conquest should be undertaken intelligently. The Jews should not buy land on which Arab fellahs lived, even if the owners offered it for sale. Only take “what others have not coveted, hold fast to all places that others have not taken hold of, find in it everything that others have not found,” he asserted. In any case, the Zionists should check carefully to see who lived on the Land, who worked it, what rights its inhabitants and tillers possessed, and who would be hurt by the transfer of ownership. When buying inhabited, cultivated land, it was absolutely wrong—and should be absolutely forbidden—to evict the fellahs who worked it. Instead of exploiting their labor, the Jews should teach them modern scientific agricultural techniques. Then these fellahs would hold the Jews in high esteem, and some would agree or even ask to sell their land. In the end, Epstein believed in a common Jewish and Arab fate on the same land, based on common blood.

Unlike the later pioneer view, which would seek to channel Jewish blood exclusively into the soil of the Land, Epstein concluded, “to our delight, this [Arab] nation occupies such a huge area of the globe that it can let us, an ancient nation so closely related to it by blood, language, and the inclinations of the soul, take hold, in the Land of Our Fathers, of all that part of it which it has not yet taken hold of.”

Voices like Epstein’s, raised on behalf of the Arabs’ connection with the Land, were extremely rare. Certainly the halutzim did not perceive the local Arab population as desiring the Land of Israel in the same way they themselves did. Although they did not say so directly, they saw the Arabs’ relation to the Land as one of need, or at best demand. The Land of Israel did not belong to non-Jews because only Jews desired it, which is to say—because the Land desired the Jews. Here, in the collision between the desire of the halutzim for the Land and the needs or demands of the Arabs, the seeds of conflict between the two peoples were sown. Zionist-pioneer desire was simply unable to tolerate anyone who merely “needed” or “demanded” the Land, and certainly not anyone who made a pretense of “desiring” it.

**The Conquest of Labor**

Pioneer desire for the Land articulated its body-without-organs vertically and horizontally, both penetrating and building on it. Pioneer desire left tracks through the Land—furrows, canals, dirt paths, roads, drained swamps, trenches, excavations, wells, and more. It turned the “earth” into “soil,” the “space” into “place,” the “land” into the “Land of Israel.”

Pioneer desire was channeled in the Land of Israel principally through the classic pioneer praxis: labor. The halutzim did not think of labor only instrumentally, as resulting from a need or as a means of achieving a given goal. Labor had an ontological dimension in that it created organs in the body of the Land-without-organs. For example, Yosef Aharonovich wrote that a people that lacked a broad backbone of laborers close to nature and the raw materials of creation would, in the end, degenerate in body and spirit. Such a people had no right to exist, even when they could successfully maintain their material existence. Labor was a condition for the “existence” of such existence. “If there is labor here, there is revival here,” Aharonovich concluded. “And if there is no labor here, there is nothing here.”

“All our pain, all the awful protests and sighs held back in our throats since we could not give them full vent, out of fear of the enemy [in the exile],” wrote several young people from Palestine in a public appeal published on the eve of the Second Aliya, “must now be poured out in a huge and unnatural [sic] national labor to save and revive us!” Thus David Kahana of Britania described how, on the “old giant,” Mount Carmel, “[the halutzim] disperse over your frozen body, operating on your dried wounds with sharp scalpels, striking and digging. . . . They dig out your kidneys (in Jewish tradition, this organ is the seat of the moral faculty)—stones—exhuming them one by one, shattering them and paving a road to redemption.”

Plowing, as noted earlier, was one type of work through which pioneer desire was channeled. The halutzim generally identified themselves as the first to labor on the surface of the body-of-the-Land-without-organs. “We are now the first to have thrust [into the ground] here a plow that will proceed to conquer this entire valley,” wrote a halutz who farmed the soil of Um Juni. This drive for primacy magnified desire for the Land. Yehudit E-N (probably Edelman), who worked near Karkur, said her desire to furrow the earth grew out of the depression she felt at seeing the body-of-the-Land-without-organs. Not only did the halutzim yearn to plow the land; the land and all nature yearned for them. “The horrible nakedness is very upsetting,” she wrote. “All around, the entire landscape that the eye takes in—is naked of trees. . . . You want to grab a weeder feverishly, cut through the
I will now know my border. The line of the furrow has been extended.
Go and trample the myriad stumbling stones! . . .
Ascend and dig in the blade! Arise and turn over the clod!
The flesh of the wretched soil is bared to the sun . . .
Ha, my Lord, when, with the fingers of your hand,
Will you appear to crumble the soil's wounds? 193
—Levi Ben-Amitai, "With the Furrow," 1934

earth, prepare it and plant it and cover it with green. The sun would certainly also
rejoice if it had something to nurture, on which to pour its heat. 199 The furrows
plowed by the halutzim sealed the connection between themselves and the soil.
"Today I made a covenant with our soil," wrote Ya'akov Pat of the moshav Ein Hai
to his parents. "For the first time, I plowed the soil of the Land of Israel. There is
no happiness like mine." 199 The furrow opened by the pioneer's plow was also
viewed as a boundary that in the end would determine the borders of the Land. 200

Once furrowed, the earth manifested itself not just as soil but as Jewish soil.
Shmuel Dayan described this phenomenon in a letter to his son, Moshe. He and
his comrades had begun to conquer the fields of Nahalal little by little, not by war,
he stressed, but by plowing. Their furrows established the boundary between
themselves and the Arabs of the village, and in this way the land would remain in
their hands, Jewish hands. "If all the Jews and their children did this all over the
country," Dayan concluded, "it would return to be ours. Securely and forever." 201
Pioneer plowing was always "conquest plowing," in the halutzim's terms, because
through it they conquered both the soil and labor itself. And as we will see in the
next chapter, they also conquered their own bodies.

Paving roads also had a horizontally constructive effect on the body-of-the
Land-without-organs. "There was always something intoxicating for me about a
white road extending into the distance, with trees or mountains around it," Ra-
chal Katznelson remarked. 202

Other types of labor penetrated the body-of-the-Land-without-organs—for
example, stone quarrying. 203 A member of the Labor Battalion from Migdal
described this process:

The Kinneret sends its quiet waters into distant spaces. Giant mountains cast
themselves around it like loyal brothers guarding their delicate and innocent sister.
The waters of the lake give off softness and warmth, the mountains lofty simplicity.
An infinitely deep blue sky stretches over them like a temple's majestic dome. And a
hush of sacred awe pervades all. The blue, bright lake waters are silent, the mountains

To you, road, giant's son, to you I sing
We have sent out your white back like an arrow
Through greenying fields,
Through the hills—to the valley—

Now declare across the Land
And a well-watered meadow will lie under you;
And imagine: Did you know that we paved you—

Proud youth—

And we—

Here we will stand before you, wondrous stones,
And we will marvel—

How were we able to overcome you?
And in you we found our very selves.

Freedom we desired—

And you we paved;

The bold command
That shows the way and on ways decrees—

Justice we sought—

And you we created:

Strong and sure

Scornful of byways—

And for love we left our souls

And an image of you we traced:

We quarried stones for you

From the womb of a boulder-cliff—

—Tzvi Lederer, "To the Road," 1922

stand quietly as if deep in thought, dreaming of the transparent blue sky overhead. Sit
here and relax, old wanderer, wash your dust-covered feet in the lake's living waters,
sit and say not a word. Here your weary soul can rest, you can unite and meld with the
majesty of creation, lose yourself in the concealing waves of stillness that reign all
around . . .

And in shaking off your sleep . . . rise up and approach the mountain and here
there is something that will make your soul marvel. Listen to the pounding sound of
hundreds of picks and hammers, and see blocks of stone rising in the air and rolling

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The body-of-the-Land-without-organs was a naked body, its earth, boulders, and mountains as bare as on the day they were born. The halutzim's desire clothed this body and covered its private parts. "Our land has dozens of mountains and hills, higher and more lofty than these [the mountains near our settlement], which still stand bald and bare," wrote A. Shapira of Kibbutz Mishmar HaEmek, "and there is no one to cover their nakedness and to remove their shame... And now every naked hill and every bare mountain stands yearning and awaiting the redeemer who will come and repair them... And here the hand of the guard of the Land has begun to cover the nakedness of this mountain [belonging to the Mishmar HaEmek settlers], which has become their inheritance." Yisrael Haderi of Mishmar HaEmek described the pioneer foothold in similar terms: "The tree-planting season is approaching... In a month's time the surface of one of the desolate and bare mountains of the Land of Israel will put on a new, fine garment."

The body-of-the-Land-without-organs was an aging, deteriorating body. Plowing revealed its original "face" once again. Planting trees also renewed its youth and restored "its former visage." The body-of-the-Land-without-organs was a sick body. Draining swamps "healed" it.

Finally, once labor was done, celebration through dance offered another way for the pioneers to sanctify the soil. The members of Ein Harod, for example, did...
The Conquest of Defense

The halutzim saw defense as a praxis complementary to labor. Without conquest of defense, they maintained, there could be no conquest of labor and therefore no conquest of the Land. Menachem Portugali asserted that it was pointless to conquer labor if defense was not also conquered. He warned his comrades, the laborers of Petah Tikva, that if they left guarding the fields to non-Jews, the laborers of the Second Aliya would be expelled from the Land along with the veteran Jewish settlers. The halutzim had to raise up a healthy, strong generation, because they had come to an untamed land where justice was in the hands that held the rifle and that had physical strength.191

Yitzhak Ben-Zvi also noted the fundamental link between labor and defense. When the Jewish people lived in its own land, the Land itself would serve as a foundation for developing the Jews’ physical and other capabilities. Only a person who cultivates his land could really be capable of defending it. The natural devotion of the farmer to his land, “the mother of all living,” his allegiance to his homeland, and his heroism were what made thousands and thousands of Jews willing to be killed and not surrender, to die with honor instead of delivering their land to their enemy with their own hands and facilitating their own exile. This was Ben-Zvi’s explanation of why the Jewish people, after not bearing arms for centuries, nonetheless held impressive military talents. In just a few years, this nation had produced a great army under the leadership of the Maccabees, which not only liberated its homeland from a foreign yoke but also served as an example for all the peoples around it. These ancient Jews had forced even great empires to take them seriously and seek their support and friendship. After the destruction of the Second Temple, the link between the people and their land had faded, and the soil was slowly appropriated from under the feet of the Jewish people, who were dispersed over the entire world.192

“When you walk through the vineyards of Rehovot,” wrote a visitor to the moshava in the period before defense of Jewish settlements was performed by Jews, “you can easily see the evidence of lawlessness and neglect.”193 The landscape was abandoned, derelict, a space without organs, open to incursions by strangers who uprooted saplings and trees and stole property. Sometimes, the same Arab laborers who worked for Jewish farmers and planted their seedlings during the day robbed them at night.194

Pioneer self-defense thus created a Hebrew ecology—that is, a purely Jewish space.195 The contracts between the moshavot and the Jewish defense organizations granted the Hebrew guards the right to evict any Arab from the territory of a moshava.196 In Hadera, where Arabs often stole from the granary, HaShomer men blocked the main road, forcing the Arabs to use a different route that skirted the silo.197 In Rehovot, the Hebrew guards removed the tents of the Bedouins who had previously served as guards. They also instituted a regime of ringing a bell each evening, after which time Arabs could not be present in the moshava. Arabs who lived in the barns had to lock themselves in. Most of the roads that led from the Jewish settlement to the nearby Arab villages and to Ramla were blocked.198 When the halutzim sought to prohibit Arabs from setting foot in Jewish settlements under their protection, they meant that literally—they wanted no Arab foot to tread there.199 The Hebrew ecology reached its apogee when the halutzim abandoned the old moshavot in favor of new collective settlements where labor, defense, and language were exclusively Hebrew.

By conquering defense, Jews were able, for the first time since the beginning of the exile, to die a “beautiful death.”200 The death of Jews in the exile was a useless death, a death with no alternative. For a Jew to die in a pogrom was meaningless. But in dying on the soil of the Land, 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. Their blood watered, sanctified, fertilized the ground. Even after death, their legacies continued to pulse among living halutzim. Their lives were recorded forever in the history of the renaissance and 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. In 1921, an assembly of collective farm and road workers at Kinneret resolved to plant a grove of ten thousand trees in memory of the fallen defenders of the Upper Galilee.201 “The eucalyptuses of Hadera were planted on our graves,” wrote Ben-Eliah, “and they feed and flourish on the marrow of the laborers’ bones.”202 Halutzim who committed suicide, who according to Jewish religious law were to be buried outside the cemetery wall, were interred by the halutzim alongside comrades who had died of disease or who had been murdered. They were considered to have died a “beautiful death” and were accorded the same respect as those who had fallen in battle.203

Berl Katznelson claimed that the exile did not allow a Jew to die honorably—only a “scoundrel’s death” was possible there.204 The exile meant “contemptible life and ongoing death.” But in the Land of Israel, death was “death with honor.”205 A woman who had survived the Ukrainian pogroms asserted upon her arrival in Palestine on the deck of the Rosen that if no Land of Israel existed, Russia’s Jews
would be unable to simply die, since pogroms were occurring everywhere and the fate suffered in a pogrom was worse than death.138 Yitzhak Ben-Zvi wrote that dying for the Land was "a spring of life"—a metaphor traditionally applied to the Torah.139 Not surprisingly, when Ben-Zvi, then a soldier in the Jewish Legion, learned that the Galilee had been captured by the British, he was overjoyed by the liberation, but his enthusiasm was dampened by bitterness over not having taken part in the conquest himself.138

The "beautiful death" of the halutz found its purest expression in Yosef Trumpeldor's legendary last words after being mortally wounded in defending Tel Hai: "It is good to die for our land!" Trumpeldor's cry, whether apocryphal or not, whether he used precisely those words or not, reverberated through the pioneer world and beyond.139 He had earlier spoken himself of the "beautiful death." "A day will come," he wrote in his diary before his aliyah to the Land of Israel, "when I, weary and fatigued from hard labor, will happily and joyfully survey my fields, in my own Land. And no one will say: 'Get out of here, scum—you are a stranger in this land.' And if some person says this, I will defend my fields, my rights, with force and by the sword.... And if I fall in battle, I will be happy, knowing what I die for."140 On his way to Palestine, Trumpeldor imagined his ship sinking in an enemy submarine attack. "If such a thing were to happen to me," he declared, "I want to die a beautiful death, in joy, as befits a Jew dying for the Land of Israel."141 He feared that in his final moments, his heart would grow faint and that he would die in a cowardly and unseemly way, "not as a lion, but like a hatchling. If that were to happen—shame on me, son of the free Jewish people! I do not want such a disgraceful death."142

It was clear to the pioneers of Tel Hai under Trumpeldor's leadership that they would not abandon their settlement—they would defend it. In winter 1920, before the attack, Trumpeldor wrote in his diary that everyone at Tel Hai knew that the local Arabs were armed with rifles and on their way to the settlement. An assault by these "crazed" Arabs was unavoidable, and the question of whether to retreat to Metulla was in the air. But no one dared even mention such a possibility. A hastily called assembly decided "to remain where we are no matter what."143 "Members of a new generation, a generation of free natives of the Land of Israel, stand on the border and are prepared to give their lives to guard this border," Trumpeldor wrote in his diary.144 When the defenders of Tel Hai realized that no other settlers would come to their aid, they issued a manifesto to the young people of the Land: "We will resist the enemy surrounding us to the last man; we will not budge from here until our final breaths."145

Eliezer Lubrani, a member of the paramilitary organization Magen, eulogized the fallen defenders of Tel Hai: "Please make us proud and courageous.... Your glorious and heroic death has given us grounds for hope that our people will return to a new life, like that hero of alien lore who, on touching his land—his mother—was rejuvenated."146

Study of the Land

The body-of-the-Land-without-organs was unfamiliar and in reality unknown. So another way that the halutzim created its organs was by coming to know it through study, research, trips, and hikes. Melech Zagorodsky, the agronomist who served with the Land of Israel Office, asserted that the Land had been studied and researched even in ancient times, by the Greeks and Romans. They and those who followed them described it with the same precision as early twentieth-century scholars. But none of these latter scholars had pursued research for its own sake. Most of the studies sponsored by the research societies and associations active in Palestine were not aimed at gaining knowledge of the Land. Instead, they were designed to garner support for a particular theory—for example, proving the truth of Christian claims. While many fine scholars had studied the Land of Is-
rael, including its flora and fauna, Zagorodsky claimed, the Land still awaited its "redeemers." And these could come only from among the Jews. They would explore the Land of Israel and discover "its secrets with great fondness, with the love of a child for its mother. Only our children born and immersed in the Land can study it in every detail, with scientific precision, without rushing and without preconceptions." David Ben-Gurion and Yitzhak Ben-Zvi asserted that Jewish settlers should acquire intimate and thorough familiarity with the Land, which was still "virgin territory" for the Jews. The Jews could redeem it only if Jewish scholars reclaimed as their own—that is, redeemed—the study of the Land.144

The halutzim thirsted for knowledge of the Land.145 As suggested earlier, one way they slaked this thirst was by traveling and hiking its length and breadth.150 Ze'ev Vilnay, born in the pioneer era, formulated the categorical imperative of the pioneer traveler and hiker: "You will come to know the Land through the sweat of your feet."151 Ben-Gurion wrote his father that he and his comrades lived like their forefathers of three thousand years ago, because they walked much more than they rode.152 "Thus we learned to know and love the Land," wrote Moshe David Glicksman. "When you tread the roads alone on foot, you have the leisure to look at everything and to absorb the beauty of this great and wide land."153 Yitzhak Ben-Zvi wrote of the first time he ascended to Jerusalem by foot. The trek took eighteen hours. He felt profound spiritual satisfaction from his first encounter with the wild natural surroundings of his homeland. His soul was stirred. Absolutely no comparison could be made between riding and walking: "You descend and ascend each hill, feel each inch with the soles of your feet, look at each tree, tarry as you wish by every spring, cave, or holy tomb. It can hardly be surprising that the impressions of the countryside of the Land of Israel, etched in my heart in those days, never fade and are imprinted in my memory as alive and as fresh as when they were first experienced, when I first strode the length and breath of the Land."154

Some traveled the Land to see it, others to study it. Noah Nafulsky went on botanical expeditions, sometimes accompanied by Beel Katzenelson and Rachel Bllwein. He collected plants and flowers, dried them, and classified each by species and genus. On his trips, he would explain to his companions the plants' patterns of growth and means of reproduction.155 For Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, expeditions provided an opportunity to study the Land's past through its artifacts. He described, for example, his search for the remains of the stones on which Jacob laid his head the night after he fled from his brother, Esau, and the traces of the altar he built when fleeing from his father-in-law, Laban, as well as the ruins of the great altar built by Yerav'am, the first king of the biblical northern kingdom of Israel. When Ben-Zvi failed to find these sites, he expressed the hope that future excavators would dismantle the cairns, dig down into the tells, and uncover the mysteries beneath them.156 Rachel Yanait described the moment when she and Ben-Zvi found potsherds bearing names in ancient Hebrew script at the ruins of Sebastia: "For more than 2,500 years they lay silent, deep in the earth, hidden from the rays of the sun, and now they are redeemed and testify like a thousand witnesses to the magnificent Jewish life of old."117

Some halutzim left signs of their presence on their trips and hikes. Carving their names into the surface of the Land-without-organs, they signed, both actually and figuratively, the connection between themselves and the Land. Tehiya Lieberson visited the Horns of Hittin with some friends. Climbing the ruins of Arbel, the ancient fortress from the days of the Second Temple, they entered the structure's vast halls, where they found archaeological artifacts. They inscribed their names on the wall "for eternal memory."158 When Rachel Yanait and Yitzhak Ben-Zvi wandered through the territory of the ancient Israelite tribe of Benjamin, they encountered an acquaintance, Kalman Marmor, who was busy writing his name on every jutting stone on each wall of a ruin. With pencil ready, Yanait wrote, he observed this "precept" immediately each time he found a stone.159

The halutzim's experience was also marked by formal study, an endeavor tied to the boundary-creating impetus of pioneer desire. Ben-Gurion studied law. Knowledge of Ottoman law, in particular that relating to landownership, he reasoned, would make it easier to conquer the Land.160 Shlomo Tzemach studied agronomy and developed a number of innovations.161 His fellow HaPo'el HaTza'ir founder, Eliezer Shohat, studied botany and zoology.162 Members of the Labor Battalion studied plant physiology, political economy, geography, and other subjects. They also studied geology in the quarries where they worked.163 At one of the first pioneer exhibitions, held in 1912 at Kinneret, displays included grains, types of vegetables and fodder, homegrown farm animals, and fowl.164 Sejera put on an exhibition of stones, plants, and animals from the local area. A special section was devoted to historical artifacts.165

Water, Sweat, and Blood as Boundary Creators

We have seen the role played by water, sweat, and blood in the boundary-blurring aspect of pioneer desire. These fluids also had a boundary-creating effect.

By channeling the water of the Land into the earth, the halutzim turned it into soil. A haluz who worked at Jamama said that the Negev region had been neglected and deserted for centuries. Nature was sovereign and did as it wished without encountering any opposition or restraint from the nomadic inhabitants. "The rains beat down brutally on the hills and split them, and the earth filled with

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valleys and puddles,” wrote the Jamama settler. He and his comrades decided to channel the water so as to enable soil to emerge from the earth, soil that would support Jewish settlement and the establishment of a farm on the site: “The puddles that can be repaired are repaired, and those that cannot are subject to treatment to prevent the water from again destroying the earth. All the labor is performed by Jewish hands.”

When Tzvi Nadav settled in the Galilee, rains flooded the earth and swept away the soil. Only the construction of drainage canals enabled the settlers to prepare farmland. At Metulla, Nadav saw how water could destroy farmland in an instant. But then, he recorded, “with a single stroke of a hoe I opened a canal. The water broke through and flowed fiercely down the steep slope. . . . It is an art to open canals so that the current shows the lay of the land, and to let the soil absorb the water little by little.” Only when the flow was channeled could the soil soak up the water so that cultivation was possible. When the canal works were complete, Nadav saw fertile, well-watered soil transformed into a sunlit cornfield. On such soil the halutzim could for the first time stand “on their two feet.” And from such soil they could “suckle their strength.”

The most prominent aspect of articulating the body of the Land by controlling its water involved the draining of malarial swamps. “O, give us days and we will dry them up,” declared Ben-Eliav of the Labor Battalion, who took part in draining swamps in the Kinneret area. “Raise up the depths—and we will close them up!”

As we saw, channeling sweat into the Land also articulated organs in the body-of-the-Land-without-organs. Here we find the source of the pioneer obsession with labor performed by Jews rather than Arabs. This conquest of labor ensured that Jewish sweat exclusively would be channeled into the Land. The halutzim feared the moistening of the soil of the Land by gentile—especially Arab—perspiration. According to Shmuel Dayan, building the Land would be hopeless if it was done not with Jewish strength but with the strength “and sweat of strangers.” A Metulla pioneer wrote that the Arabs who served as virtual tenant farmers in his settlement, while the Jews farmed only in name, “watered the Land with their perspiration” and therefore had an “irrevocable spiritual connection” to it.

The belief in watering the soil with only Jewish sweat also underlies the meaning of communal pioneer settlement. According to Franz Oppenheimer, the existence of a collective Hebrew body was a necessary condition for channeling Jewish sweat exclusively into the soil of the Land of Israel. A new home could be found for the wandering Jew in just one way: “Only where the soil is manured with the sweat of the [Jewish] peasant will the land become nationalized. And

only where the cooperative association owns the land which it cultivates is there a guarantee that it is not Arab sweat that manures and wins the land.”

Wherever they saw work—worst of all, working the land—being accomplished by non-Jews, especially Arabs, halutzim responded with a range of feelings, from insult and shame, to anger, depression, and fear, to alarm, pain, and anxiety. Yitzhak Elazari-Volcani claimed that the Hebrew cannot find rest in the shade of trees planted by strangers, or slake his thirst with the water of wells sunk by other hands. For Eliezer Shohat, non-Jewish labor produced a fear of death. “When we enter a Hebrew moshava,” he wrote, “and begin to inhale the air of a Hebrew village, see the green trees and the crop-covered fields, and our hearts fill with endless pride and happiness at the sight of our national property, then it is sufficient for us to learn that it was not Jews who accomplished this, that it was all done by the hands of others, for our joy to be ruined. A bitter sense of disappointment and insult fills our hearts. Is this not our memento mori?” Therefore, Shohat continued, the only way to create the Land of Israel was by actualizing pioneer desire exclusively. And that could happen only through unmediated contact by the halutzim with everything in the Land. “Yes,” he wrote, “all that will be created in the Land must be created with our hands—every tree, every plant, every
house, every fence. All in which man becomes a partner of nature. . . . And we must water our soil only with our sweat. Only with our hands must we revitalize its soil.”

Anything the halutzim did not create with their own hands would be alien. It would engender an emptiness in their hearts, bitter offense, the same feeling that a barren mother has toward a child she has adopted: “She cannot forget that she did not bear him. So, despite all her love for him, he is a stranger to her always.”

Jewish labor and sweat signaled purity. Sending a crate of oranges to his brothers and sisters overseas, Berl Katznelson included a letter saying that these were “kosher” fruits—that is, they had been picked in a Hebrew orchard tended by Hebrew laborers. Others referred to the work of non-Jews in the Land of Israel—for example, the planting of trees—as a sacrilege, or an impurity. Trees planted by Arab laborers were considered “abominations.” Non-Jewish labor was a “sin,” even “the mother of all sins.” For this reason, halutzim actually uprooted trees planted by non-Jews.

One of the most notable such incidents occurred in Ben Shemen in May 1908, where the agronomist Moshe Berman had been appointed by the Keren Kayemet LeYisrael to direct the planting of the Herzl Forest. Berman wanted to economize and employed Arab laborers, who could be paid less than Jewish ones. The Jewish workers of Petah Tikva, who were unemployed at the time, protested. They walked to Jaffa, where they were joined by other laborers, and then proceeded to Ben Shemen. The protestors uprooted trees that had been planted by Arabs, whereupon shocked Jewish workers at Ben Shemen who saw the uprooted trees forced their comrades to replant them. Before complying with this demand, the protestors uprooted all the saplings—so that no tree planted by an Arab would be left—and replanted them the next day, ensuring that Jewish hands were responsible. Word of the action quickly spread. On the following Saturday, large groups of workers from Jaffa, Petah Tikva, Rehovot, and Rishon LeTzion streamed to the site to congratulate the uprooters. They celebrated the deed with song and dance.

The conquest of labor, or the sanctification of Jewish sweat, was the most important contribution made by the halutzim of the Second and Third Aliyot to the Zionist enterprise. The term “conquest of labor” was apparently coined by Shlomo Tzemach of the Second Aliya. Members of the First Aliya, who proclaimed the principle of conquest of the Land, considered labor simply a means for achieving this goal and therefore saw nothing wrong with employing natives, including Arabs. The desire among members of the First Aliya for the Land of Israel, if it can indeed be called “desire,” was thus channeled through the labor and sweat (and blood) of others. In contrast, the halutzim of the Second and Third Aliyot assumed that the ground of the Land of Israel would become soil, their

soil, only when it was infused with their desire through their labor, their sweat, and their blood.

The motto of the Bar Giora and HaShomer paramilitary defense organizations, “Judea fell in blood and fire and in blood and fire Judea will rise,” clearly expressed the role of blood in the two aspects of pioneer desire: boundary-blurring and boundary-creating. The same blood that had inundated and destroyed the Land of Israel and created the body-of-the-Land-without-organs would be channeled to recreate and reestablish the Land of Israel. According to Yisrael Shohat of Po’alei Tzion, the men of HaShomer understood that victory could not be achieved without blood and sacrifice. This was an iron law. It meant: “Have no hesitation about expending blood (of HaShomer) when it can be used to buy freedom.”

In response to a violent clash between members of the Po’alei Tzion party and Arab youths in Jaffa in 1908, Turkish soldiers raided the Spector Hotel, shooting indiscriminately and wounding more than a dozen young Jewish workers. Yitzhak Ben-Zvi noted that the Jews had always anticipated that a confrontation with the Turkish regime was inevitable, and never deluded themselves that becoming empowered would be a calm, placid process. Therefore, links had to be created among elements of the Yishuv so that the Jewish people’s problems could be resolved “not by paper rights but by blood and iron.” Calling himself a native of

The uprooters of the saplings in the Herzl Forest. Ben Shemen, 1908.
the Land, Ben-Zvi declared that, after a hiatus of hundreds of years, Canaan had again tasted “the warm blood of its children.” Nationalism demanded blood like a mother sacrificing her son.  

Like sweat, this blood channeled into the soil sealed the link between the halutz and the Land. National aspirations could not be realized, said Yehoshua Thon, unless some gave their lives; no national hope had ever been realized without a seal of blood. “Our hope has already been sealed in blood, warm blood, young blood,” he wrote. Pioneer blood sealed a relationship of right to and ownership of the soil. Yosef Saltzman was murdered in an ambush on his way back to Kinneret at the end of a day of plowing. His friends decided not to bury him near the settlement but rather at the place he was killed, where the soil had been “slaked” by his blood. “With his spilt blood, we have reestablished our covenant with Kinneret,” they declared.

Pioneer blood sanctified the soil. “The soil of Sejera has again been watered with youthful blood, the blood of its defenders...,” proclaimed a death notice for the murdered Ya’akov Feldman. “The place is sacred!” Ya’akov Zerubavel felt trepidation over the very idea, the shame and disgrace, of “a foreign foot treading on land watered with the blood of Jews fallen while on guard duty... In your blood, live!” Indeed the halutzim may have longed to water the Land with their blood even more than with their sweat. “We want to die and wet it with our blood,” declared Yosef Nahmani, chief of the Lower Galilee Defense Committee. “And every inch of the soil of our land will call us and we are prepared to lay down our lives for it.” Masses of Hebrews will settle on the Land, cultivate it, water it with their blood and the best of their vital fluids,” cried Ya’akov Zerubavel. “This is the essence of redemption.” Here, said Zerubavel, lay the fundamental difference between Jewish blood spilt in the exile and Jewish blood spilt on the soil of the Land. Quantitatively, more Jewish blood had been shed in the exile, while in the Land of Israel it had only begun to flow. But the way blood was spilt in the Land differed—here it was shed alongside the sweat of the workers. Jewish blood “kissed” the soil of the Land of Israel that the workers had furrowed, slaking its thirst.

The halutzim comprehended more powerfully the blood tie between themselves and the soil after the death of their comrades, in particular after murders committed by the native population. The brother of Sarah Chizik, who was killed in the attack on Tel Hai, wrote in a letter to his family that his sister would be remembered as a hero. They should neither mourn her death nor accuse anyone of causing it, he wrote, because they lived in the twentieth century, when
“only with the blood of our brothers and sisters can we take possession of the Land.”

In the name of the Association of Workers of the Galilee, Shmuel Dayan described what blood meant for the halutz following the murders of Moshe Bar- sky at Degania, Yosef Saltzman at Kinneret, and Ya’akov Feldman at Sejera:

Soil of our homeland, are you still thirsty for our blood? Have you not been enslaved by the blood of our fathers from the day they placed it in our hands? . . .

Our land does not remember us, because we have forgotten it. The blood of our fathers has long since congealed and scabbed. The blood and sweat of gentiles has washed the fields of Israel. . . . The memory in prayers and the outpourings in books, from that time until the previous generation, do nothing to redeem the soil. . . . The soil is parched, the soil is thirsty for the blood and sweat of its children!

We will soften it with blood and sweat; we will wet it with the dew of our youth and renew its youth, and it will remember us. We will renew that which flows with milk and honey—that which breeds giants—and heroes will rise among us and we will be redeemed.

In their death, with their blood, the murdered halutzim secured the lives of their pioneer comrades and the life of the pioneer enterprise. A short time after Ya’akov Feldman’s murder, his friend Ya’akov Meir arrived at Sejera and saw the silent jet of blood spurting from Feldman’s right eye, a stream that slowed drop by drop. A large puddle formed around the body, the blood was diluted with rain, and Feldman lay silent and tranquil. His comrades dug a pit on the spot where he had fallen and planted a pine tree there. “Here,” they promised him, “in the place where your blood was spilled, a tree of life will grow.”

As a fluid that flowed through and then from the individual pioneer body, spilt blood sealed the spatial connection between the halutz and the soil of the Land. As a fluid that flowed through the body of the Jewish people (see chapter 5), blood sealed the historical and genealogical connection between people and Land. Shimon Kushnir has argued that spilt pioneer blood was nothing less than a “transfusion of Jewish blood” offered by the halutz to the soil. In a letter to his friend Tzvi Shatz, Trumpeldor expounded on his desire for the Land of Israel. On the one hand, he could not help feeling bitter about every Jew who came to Israel, because such a person had abandoned his homeland, Russia. Trumpeldor confessed that he still loved Russia because “my blood was shed on it.” But the concept of a free life for his people, the Jewish people, in the Land of Israel was immeasurably dearer to him, “because the blood of Jews courses through my veins.” Blood could be spilled anywhere. But Jewish blood should fall only on the soil of the Land.

Just as communal settlements allowed the soil to receive exclusively Jewish perspiration, these settlements also allowed the soil to receive only Jewish blood. Yizhak Elazar-Volcani said that the Jewish religion was a racial religion because it had been founded on national creativity and had protected itself from foreign influences over many generations. But the racial purity of the Jewish religion did not necessarily require Jews to continue to “live a purely religious life.” This was because nationalism was also racial. And race was always determined by blood. “And pure blood,” argued Elazar-Volcani, “depends on the nation living a common life and on the extent to which it maintains its distinctiveness.”

Therefore, Zionist-Jewish settlement was the best way of preserving the race—that is, Jewish blood. Elazar-Volcani saw blood as a “vital substance” that persists through the generations. The blood of the forefathers always flows in the veins of their descendants, and the blood of the descendants fuses into that of their own children. But it ceases to be a “vital substance” in a “foreign organism”—meaning, of course, the Jew in the exile. The Jews sought to achieve full expression of themselves, both in body and in spirit. This could happen only in their homeland, the Land of their forefathers—“A Land where we can rest our tired heads in the bosom of its soil, where our thoughts will find their expression.”

At the same time that they exalted the spilling of pioneer blood, the halutzim feared bloodshed resulting from Arab revenge and blood feuds. From Sejera, David Ben-Gurion wrote to his father about a fight in Jaffa between a young Jew and a young Arab. Usually such incidents ended in a good beating for both parties. But this particular fight was more serious because the Arab wielded a pole.
against the Jew and, in response, the Jew drew a knife and stabbed his assailant to death. Ben-Gurion feared the vendetta that the Arabs, “like all primitives,” would feel honor-bound to pursue. He conceived of such blood feuds in their broadest sense, and saw them as a very real threat to the Jewish people’s existence in the Land of Israel. The blood feud, he wrote, “applies not only to the murderer himself, but also to his family, his tribe, and his entire nation.” The members of HaShomer learned to defend their settlements without killing their attackers, so as to avert vendettas that could well endanger the entire Yishuv. In practice, HaShomer guards avoided inflicting any physical harm on Arab attackers unless they entered the settlements themselves.

Fears of vendettas also derived from Arab threats to drown the entire Yishuv in the pioneers’ blood. While the halutzim perceived the spilling of their blood on the soil of the Land as an imperative, they also feared the physical destruction of the Yishuv. “Our comrades fall . . .” wrote one pioneer, “and the scent of their blood wafts over the Lower Galilee and spreads to every corner of the Yishuv.” Two Jewish spots in the heart of a raging sea of insurgents, was how Yosef Trumpeldor described Tel Hai and Kfar Giladi on the eve of the Arab attack. “A sea that threatens to swallow them up in an instant.”

The conquest of Hebrew defense, or the sanctification of Jewish blood, was the second important contribution—after the conquest of labor—that the halutzim of the Second and Third Aliyot made to the Zionist enterprise. Yet even as this conquest of self-defense was meant to rectify the balance of blood in favor of the Jews, to ensure that the Land would be Jewish and Hebrew, the halutzim also felt they could not tolerate Jewish blood being spilt “like water” on the soil of the Land of Israel.

Some halutzim reasoned that menacing threats from Arabs should be met not with Jewish blood but with Jewish sweat. One of the severest attacks on Merhavia, in May and June of 1915, caused great trepidation among the settlers, one of whom concluded that blood was not the right response to blood. “Maybe all these blood-lettings have actually come,” he declared, “to teach the builders of our settlement that the foundation of all construction is work and the foundation of national construction is the labor and sweat of the members of that nation.”

Sweat or blood? The debate between the advocates of each ran through the pioneer period and found expression in the two central values of the conquest of labor and the conquest of self-defense. Supporters of the former advocated conquering the Land with perspiration. The latter’s backers, while recognizing the importance of sweat, held that it was not sufficient and that blood, too, was necessary. The conflict between these camps reached a climax during World War I, when the halutzim had to choose whether to join the war effort, and if so on which side. During this fierce dispute, Eliezer Yaffe maintained that the Jews must not be swept off their feet by the awful idea of purchasing rights to land not based on who cultivated it but on “the spillers of human blood upon it.” The moment the Jewish people based their demand for rights to the Land on wars and bloodshed rather than on labor and peace, they would for all intents and purposes be acknowledging that might makes right, and that justice lies with the most violent acts. Such an acknowledgment would doom Zionism to failure. Yaffe attacked those who advocated participation in the war on the grounds that the Jews must do their part “with blood spilt for the conquest of the Land, lest the Land be conquered for us by the blood of others [i.e., British soldiers].” He argued that the Land of Israel would be acquired through the sweat of its laborers, not their blood. A nation rises and is built only by its sons who plow its soil and who do not abandon their work even in wartime. Yaffe was prepared to accept the first half of the HaShomer motto. Judea had indeed fallen in blood and fire. But he rejected the second half and maintained: “Only and solely with the shovel and the plow will it rise again.”

On October 18, 1918, following the British army’s conquest of the Galilee, the Association of Workers of the Galilee convened to discuss whether its members should volunteer for the Jewish Legion, a British unit composed of Zionist Jews, many of whom lived in Palestine. Those who supported joining the British
war effort argued that even if the British liberated the Land, the Jews would not be the rightful inheritors if they did not shed their own blood for it. The Jewish people could not be saved with gifts, only through their own strength, maintained Shmuel Apter. The Jews, he said, could not purchase their right to the Land through labor, because no one would recognize that title. He supported the liberation of the Land with Jewish—rather than, say, Indian or Australian—blood. 231 “Emblazoned on our flag is ‘in blood and fire Jews will rise,’ and that is the motto we work by always,” declared Yisachar Sitkov, a member of HaShomer, during the same debate. He also argued that the Land should not be conquered by foreigners, only by Jews. If Jews could not redeem the Land with their labor, they should at least be capable of spilling their blood for it.232 Yosef Elkin declared that, as a native of Degania, whose inhabitants had faced and overcome so many troubles, he might be expected to believe that the Land should not be purchased with blood. But Elkin supported enlistment in the Jewish Legion precisely because of the blood equation. The Jews must pay their debt to the British forces who had spilled blood for them, and they could only do so by now spilling their own blood.233 Another participant argued that the blood shed by Jews on all fronts of the World War had in essence been for naught, because it was shed by Jews but not the Jewish people. If the Jews did not want to give their blood in vain, they must channel it into the soil of the Land of Israel. Only by participating in the war could they sanctify the Land with their blood and, more important, reveal the “life-will” that beat within the Hebrew nation. 234

One of the few halutzim who objected to redeeming the Land with blood was A. D. Gordon, the zealot of Jewish labor and sweat. The “primitive truth” that a people gained its right to its land through bloodshed was widely believed, he said, but it was in fact a gross falsehood. Were it possible to win a country with blood, then the conquered nation would receive it, because it had spilt more blood. A land, Gordon insisted, was not purchased with blood but by living in it. The Land of Israel also belonged to its Arab residents, who cultivated its soil, and the Jews would gain title to it by settling and working it. “Because the Land is mine, said the Lord—it only belongs to those who work it,” Gordon maintained.235

Some halutzim advocated both courses of action. They argued that the Land of Israel could be built only with pioneer sweat and blood.27 In the manifesto “Our Program,” Menachem Ussishkin declared that before the Land of Israel could come into the possession of the Jewish people de jure, it must become theirs de facto. The Jewish people had to be loyal and devoted to their land, and their soul intimately tied to its soul. The Jews had to “saturate the soil with their blood and the sweat of their labors.”236 Rabbi Binyamin agreed that the Land had to be watered with both fluids: “The dunam [a thousand square meters] is all we speak of, we dream of it each day. The existence of this piece of land requires one more condition: that, respectfully asking its indulgence, it be worked with our own limbs and watered with drops of our sweat, our tears, and our blood—there must be an inner spiritual link between the Land and man.”237

In 1916, David Ben-Gurion and Alexander Heskin had written that “the sweat of those working the fields and the blood of those killed on guard mix together in the bloodstream of new Jewish life.”238 The men and women of Tel Hai held fast to their place and did not leave it because the fields, homes, and mountains were “saturated with the sweet” and “soaked with the blood” of their comrades.239 One advocate of volunteering for the Jewish Legion stated that each fluid played a designated role in the process of establishing ties with the Land: “Sweat—this is the evolutionary process; blood—this is the revolutionary process. What sweat cannot do for generations will be done by the blood spilt for years.”240 In the end, the Association of Workers of the Galilee decided that both those who volunteered for the Jewish Legion and those who remained to labor on the Land could be considered loyal to the ideal of creating a free and working Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel.

Difficulty and Despair: Back to Oedipus

We saw that the Land of Israel, especially its soil, was usually experienced as female—virgin, beloved, Mother Earth, submissive and yielding or motherly and welcoming. But the boundary-creating aspect of pioneer desire reveals the Land as hard and treacherous, refusing to submit, respond, receive.

In contrast with the soft, passive attitude that characterizes the boundary-blurring aspect of pioneer desire, boundary-creation is active and determined. The articulation of organs involves a struggle between the halutzim and the Land—its soil, its landscapes, its spaces, and its local population. The process is difficult, painful, violent. The body-without-organs does not easily surrender to the articulation of its limbs.

Shimon Wolf of Beitania described to his friends a day when he felt a huge desire to work. Suddenly, hidden powers revealed themselves, a flame flared under the earth, and a great upheaving burst out of him. On that day he shattered rocks in an entirely different way. He dealt them blows and penetrated the heart of each stone: “The stone could not defend itself, it could not withstand me, so it took its revenge on me, spaying chips in my face, scoring my bare chest.”241

While the ecstatic-symbiotic experience unites the halutz with the Land, the articulation of the body-of-the-Land-without-organs entails a dialectical relation between the halutz and the Land. This latter process placed the pioneers between...
the Land's beauty and its ugliness, between its inherently good and bad qualities, between life and death. Articulation was ultimately a surgical act. Deleuze and Guattari (discussed in chapter 2) argue that the body-without-organs is self-sufficient and needs no organs. Organs are the body's enemy because the process of creating organs requires their being torn out of the body. They grant the "organness" of the body an intense experience of life but are also the source of all its suffering. In chapter 5, we will see how truly painful this articulation process was for the individual body-without-organs of each halutz.

Not surprisingly, the articulation process was accompanied by doubts, difficulties, despair, and failures. "Light and shadow alternate within it," Berl Katznelson said about the Land of Israel in a letter.246 He wrote his brother Yisrael, who lived in the exile, that the Land was no paradise, and that he would face many difficulties and obstacles were he to decide on aliya. "There is no escaping agonies, illnesses, and heartbreak in any place," he maintained.247 Articulating the Land confronted the pioneers with the melancholy associated with action and the small details of life—existential melancholy.248 A member of the Labor Battalion described the difficult emotions that overcame him precisely as he was actualizing his desire for the Land: "There are times when my muscles stretch and my strength tenses as my soul immerses itself in a life of creativity and labor, and at such times in the intoxication of this creation I celebrate my joy, the joy of our victory here. Yes. But: I do hurt... Because I create—and there is no creation without sorrow and without pain... the sorrow of creation, an awful sorrow, a sorrow on the edge of madness and divine joy, the joy of victory, the victory of existence over nothingness—this is our great destiny."249

Many halutzim overcame the harshness and betrayal with which, it was sometimes felt, the Land of Israel responded to their arrival. But quite a few left the Land. During the Second Aliya, about 40 percent of those who came on aliya ended up as yordim—descenders, those who abandoned the Land. During the Third Aliya, about 24 percent left.250 Those who left—who did not perceive the Land as Mother Earth—"returned" to the same "oedipal" genealogy from which they had so wanted to break free. Many halutzim who "descended" back to their countries of origin returned to the homes of their parents, to religious tradition, to Judaism, to the exile.

Some halutzim killed themselves.251 Gur Arloey has tallied fifty-nine suicides in the years 1910–1923.252 In the summer of 1916, Yoske Michaelt shot himself at Degania. His friend Haya Kastelanitz explained the act by saying that suicide was part of the course of nature in the Land of Israel. The same currents that awakened the ecstatic-symbiotic experience in the halutzim also bore a few of them into oblivion. "The life force impelled us to die," Kastelanitz wrote. "Do not the Jordan’s living waters, in their massive flow, seek the Dead Sea?... The current was too strong, and life was like a small toy in its hands."253 "And at times the power to live is depleted, and death is still far off," wrote Mordechai Sinir. "And at times a huge wave rolls by and in the veins the magical blood of youth flows and eradicates the senses, and why? And from time to time a member of the band goes missing, and leaves the world... we are in mid-sea, surrounded by waves upon waves. A wave lifts up, and a wave brings down."254 Many of the halutzim who put an end to their lives drowned themselves in one of the Land's bodies of water—the Mediterranean Sea, Lake Kinneret, the Jordan River.255

In contrast with the halutzim who articulated the Land-without-organs into soil on which they could stand, those who committed suicide could not find their footing. Eulogizing Rachel Meizel, who drowned herself at the Jaffa beach, Yosef Aharonovich related that "she was suddenly uprooted from the earth and she found no other earth to stand on... Loneliness and hunger, hunger for life in all its senses, hunger for work that did not find her, hunger for ideals—loneliness and hunger, these two, followed her to her eternal repose."256 In contrast with pioneers who articulated the Land and gave expression to its beauty, the suicides felt too strongly its bitter ugliness. "May all those close to me forgive me," Rachel Meizel apologized in the note she left behind. "One should make no step without God. Life is beautiful from a distance, but I lost the distance; up close life is coarse and not beautiful; I am going on my way. I am at peace and feel good. Farewell, Rachel."257 Those who committed suicide did so because they were unsuccessful at articulating either their bodies or the Land. In a eulogy for Mordechai Vachberg of Mevasha, one of his friends explained that the dead man had sought a revolution in his private life that was beyond his physical capabilities: "Once his body weakened... he saw no possibility of living in the company of the strong, and he chose death. He did not have the strength to live and girded up all his strength to die a romantic death, and he deposited his final sigh at the insult of life in the depths of the Jordan."258 As opposed to the halutzim who through the articulation process were born again, the suicides were unable to be reborn. "I so much wanted to find here a man who could penetrate my soul," wrote a pioneer woman of Migdal, "who could touch my pains and with his expertise operate on me. After such surgery I would feel as if I were born again... My comrade Moshe has recently died. He shot himself. I frequently think of suicide."

Yosef Fried was a halutz who ascended to the Land and then descended a short time later. He confessed in his diary from his time there that those who remained desired the Land and were not motivated by concrete needs or demands. Nothing else could explain their decision to stay. Their desire was unconditional.259 Fried describes a process of disillusionment with Mother Earth and the Land of the
Fathers. In a letter to his wife a year after his aliyah, quoted in his diary, he wrote that the year was decisive in his biography because his aliyah had enabled him, for the first time, to deviate from the road paved by his ancestors, from the way of his brothers and sisters who would not budge from within the boundaries imposed by their forebears. Unlike them, he had replaced his forefathers with the land of his fathers. But he quickly sobered up. All his dreams and hopes melted away. He began to ask himself why he had come to the Land. He had expected no Arabs or old people who wither and grow weak. Suddenly he saw the blackest of shadows.

In the end, Fried left the Land because he was unable to connect with Mother Earth. Neither did she respond to him. She turned out to be a bad mother who was unresponsive to her son and did not provide him with the sustenance he needed. “I came to her to bring about an utter change in my life values,” he wrote, “for me and for my children after me; to return to Mother Earth, to cultivate her and to revile her so that she could revile me... I thought that here, only in the Land, my Land, could I realize my idea. And then came the riots, and these deeds gave me a slap in the face.” Fried accused his exilic forebears of having “seen to it” that he lacked physical strength. He still felt great fondness for the Land of Israel, its language, and its people. But fondness was not enough. He needed strength as well. He needed desire.

In a letter of Fried’s to a female friend shortly before leaving, we can discern remnants of his ecstatic-symbiotic relationship with the Land. He wrote that he could see his feelings mirrored in the Land’s natural surroundings. “The rains do not end,” Fried wrote. “They poured and poured all night, my window was open, and my pencils, books, and paper all got soaked from the rain that seeped through the window onto my desk... It looked as if the skies of the Land of Israel are crying over its departing children, and neither can the sea cease its fury.” Fried, despite his aspiration to be reborn in the Land of Israel, went back to his old “oedipal” genealogy. He returned to his mother and father: “Yes, there were times when I aspired to destroy, mercilessly to destroy the entire old structure, to uproot all that my parents and my previous surroundings had planted in me, and now how have I changed!”

It is true that the pioneers who remained also saw Mother Earth betray them at times. The halutzim sought to suckle on Mother Earth, but she did not always respond by providing for their needs. At plowing time, Shmuel Dayan wrote, the large, heavy clods of earth turned over, exposing dead soil to wind, sun, and life. But the soil was very poor and pale in color. It was overgrown with brush and full of stalks of wild grain and onions that had been planted but failed to grow. The shoots froze in place. “The land was fatigued, like a weak mother with shriveled breasts that have no power to suckle the fruit of her womb.”

Nevertheless, the halutzim who remained were able to see past such barren periods. In a letter from Nahalal, Eliezer Shohat reported to his wife on the end of the threshing season, saying that Mother Earth had been miserly this time. He apologized for not yet being able to support her, but said he was still happy for the little given them because “it was given to us by our Mother Earth.”

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Soil
I but listened to the wine song in your veins—
But it came not to my lips... Why did your wine not numble me.
So I could not rise from kneeling at your side?
Why have you not bared your breast to my mouth,
When, like a tender puppy, blind,
My head groped among your clods,
And with a whimper of thirst I searched for it?...
—Yitzhak Landah, “Bridge,” 1924

Articulating the Physical Territory of the Land