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## The Forest As a National Icon: Literature, Politics, and the Archeology of Memory

### INTRODUCTION: ON TREES AND MEMORIES

THE ADMIRATION OF TREES AS symbolizing the beauty, purity, and magnitude of nature is a familiar theme in Romantic literature. In the emergent Hebrew culture of the pre-state Jewish society in Palestine, trees carried an even greater symbolic value: they became an icon of national revival, symbolizing the Zionist success in “striking roots” in the ancient homeland. Children were often named after trees and children’s literature described young trees as children.<sup>1</sup> The depiction of the Jewish nation as a tree provided a powerful visual representation of historical processes that were at the core of Zionist consciousness. The image of a chopped tree with a new branch sprouting from its side (**photo 1**) was used as the emblem of *La-No’ar*, a highly popular book series for young adults: the chopped tree symbolized the curtailed Jewish national life during centuries of life in exile, while the new branch represented the beginning of national renewal, a symbolic analogue to the Hebrew youth themselves. This tree image was later modified in a poster issued by the Zionist Federation (**photo 2**), reversing the relation between death and renewal. The poster shows a tall tree with an abundance of green leaves, and only one dead branch is sticking out on its side. The statement inscribed below this transformed image reinforces its message: “Branches of our people are chopped down and fall off, but the tree is alive and well. Give your hand to our national renewal. Be a member of the Zionist Federation.”

For the Zionist settlers, trees were more than a visual or a literary metaphor. The act of planting a tree was seen as a necessary ritual of connecting to the land. “The tree is the lifeline of nature, of mother-earth . . .,” writes a Zionist forester. “Those who have never planted a tree cannot



The emblem of the La-No'ar [For Youth] series, published for the Jewish National Fund, depicting a chopped tree with a new growth symbolic of Jewish national revival in Eretz Israel. Courtesy of the Aviezer Yellin Archives of Jewish Education in Israel and the Diaspora, Tel-Aviv University.

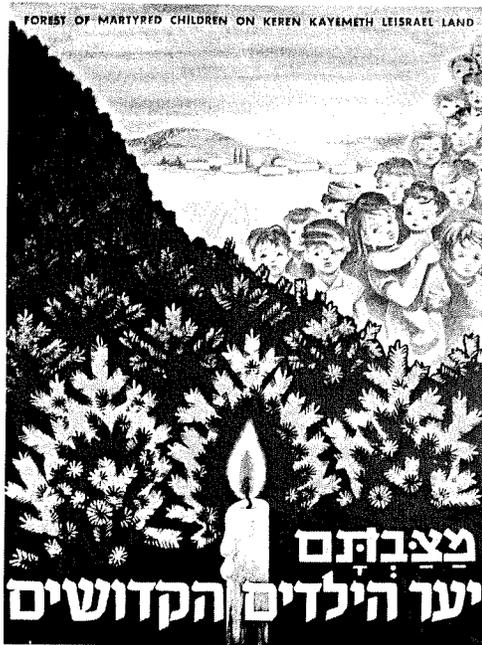


A poster of the Zionist Federation. The inscription reads: "Branches of our people are chopped down and fall off, but the tree is alive and well. Give your hand to our national renewal. Be a member of the Zionist Federation." Courtesy of the Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

feel the earth, and therefore will never know what homeland means.”<sup>2</sup> The Jewish National Fund [JNF], the Zionist agency entrusted with the mission of purchasing land and promoting the Jewish settlement of Palestine, regarded tree planting as a sacred activity that would lead to the “redemption of the land” [*ge’ulat ha’aretz*].<sup>3</sup> Hebrew educational institutions supported the JNF agenda and socialized children to give weekly donations to the JNF blue box, teaching them (in the words of a famous Hebrew song) that every penny counts and contributes to the redemption of the land. The annual festival of *Tu Bishvat* provided an excellent temporal locus for teaching about trees and the JNF’s mission of afforestation.<sup>4</sup> Tree-planting emerged as a central patriotic ritual of this holiday within the secular national Hebrew culture.

In many frontier cultures, the colonization of wilderness implies deforestation. But for the Zionist settlers, planting trees was a means of reintroducing nature—like the Hebrew nation—into its native landscape. Zionist memory portrayed the land as covered with forests during antiquity and as turned into a “wasteland” [*shemama*] or a “desert” [*midbar*] during centuries of Jewish exile. The “redemption of the land” was thus seen by the Jews who returned to the land of their forefathers as its liberation from a state of desolation.<sup>5</sup> Afforestation became an important colonizing tool supporting Zionist memory as well as Zionist ideology of developing the land and settling in it.<sup>6</sup>

Cultural symbolism and practical considerations contributed also to the emergence of another important function of forests as living memorials for the dead. The naming of a forest after an individual person or a group clearly draws on the importance of memory and the commemoration of the dead in Jewish tradition.<sup>7</sup> But this custom is also an effective tool for promoting the JNF’s fundraising campaign for its afforestation efforts. As monuments, the forests establish a symbolic continuity between the past and the future and accentuate the particular national bent of Zionist collective memory.<sup>8</sup> Named after major historical figures,<sup>9</sup> forests have become landmarks of Zionist historiography. Moreover, the establishment of forests as living memorials for soldiers who died during Israel’s wars, or for communities of Jews who perished in the Holocaust, demonstrates the tendency to represent their deaths within the Zionist master commemorative narrative, highlighting their contribution to national renewal.<sup>10</sup> This interpretive framework is visually displayed in the poster announcing the establishment of the “Forest of Martyred Children” who died during the Holocaust (**see photo 3**) where the growing trees symbolically replace the fading images of the dead children. This symbolism was even more explic-



The Jewish National Fund's poster announcing the planting of the "Forest of Martyred Children" to commemorate the children who died in the Holocaust. Courtesy of the Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

itly articulated to the Israeli children who participated in the tree-planting ceremony for the "Forest of Martyred Children." The representative of the JNF's teachers association is quoted as having told them: "Remember, children, that you do not plant trees, but people."<sup>11</sup> The depiction of an Israeli settlement in the background serves to tie the forest-memorial to the meaning of the forest as an icon of national survival. The forest thus has a double redemptive meaning: it redeems the memory of the dead from the pitfall of oblivion, and it redeems the land from the afflictions it suffered during centuries of Jewish exile.

The prototypical Zionist pioneering narrative focuses on the determined Zionist settler to highlight his struggle to colonize land and nature against all odds. The literature describing the settlement efforts shows how the Jewish settler overcomes the painful history of exile, the great desolation of the land of the forefathers, and the Arabs' hostility toward the Jews. The portrayal of the individual settler's trials and triumphs thus stand for the success of the nation as a whole; the story of a particular settlement serves as a microcosm representing the larger Jewish settlement in Palestine—i.e., the Yishuv.<sup>12</sup> This literature carried the burden of contributing to national goals by providing valid documentation of nation-building efforts, a mission that often came at the expense of its literary value.<sup>13</sup>

Yet one of the most popular “settlement novels” of the Zionist pioneering period, Eliezer Smolly’s *The Founders* [*Anshei b’Reshit*], published in 1933,<sup>14</sup> offers a somewhat different representation of the settlement process. The story follows the challenges of a Jewish guard who settles in a forest which he is hired to protect. The story ends when a fire set by Arabs causes a massive destruction of the forests and the guard’s farm. The fire thus appears to have undermined the guard’s official mission to protect the trees and his hard won achievements as a settler. In 1963, A.B. Yehoshua wrote a novella entitled *Facing the Forests* [*Mul haYe’arot*]<sup>15</sup> which revolves around a similar theme: a Jew, who is assigned the job of a guard of a large national forest, fails in his mission when the forest is set on fire by an Arab and is utterly destroyed.

*The Founders* enjoyed vast popularity among the Hebrew youth and was well-received by critics as an important achievement. The novel became an immediate “classic.” Smolly was awarded literary prizes for his work, including the most prestigious Israel Prize for Literature.<sup>16</sup> *Facing the Forests* was among the works that established Yehoshua’s status as an outstanding representative of a new generation of Hebrew writers whose literary talents were praised by such harsh critics of contemporary Israeli literature as Baruch Kurtzweil.<sup>17</sup> Although the novella also triggered negative reviews for political as well as literary issues,<sup>18</sup> it has continued to attract literary attention, and Yehoshua, who was recently awarded the Israel Prize for Literature, is now one of Israel’s best known writers.

In light of the symbolism of the forests, the status of these works within the Israeli literary canon raises the inevitable question: How are we to understand the literary focus on the deliberate destruction of national forests? How are we to interpret the meaning of burning trees in a culture that glorifies tree planting and celebrates their growth as a testimony of national redemption?

#### JEWISH GUARDS FACING NATIONAL FORESTS

The two works on which this essay focuses, *The Founders* and *Facing the Forests*, were written thirty years apart, yet the thematic resemblance between them is remarkable.<sup>19</sup> Both focus on the Jewish guards’ experiences in national forests located far from any Jewish settlement. For both protagonists, this assignment follows a period of wandering and is designed to provide them with a much needed opportunity to redirect their lives. The guards’ insular lives among the trees is interrupted by brief encounters with

Jewish visitors and superficial ties with local Arabs. Both works end with subversive acts by Arabs who see themselves entitled to the land now owned by the Jews and therefore set the forests on fire as an act of revenge.

In spite of the unusual thematic affinity between these two works, the differences between them supersede and indeed subvert this resemblance. Smolly's novel is inspired by the historical figure of Alexander Zeid, one of the founders of the prestigious HaShomer organization, who settled with his family as the guard of the JNF's forests in Sheikh Abreik in 1926.<sup>20</sup> Smolly recreated the Zeid family story as a fictional narrative, yet his novel clearly draws on the historical reality of the times and is imbued with the views and values of the socialist-Zionist settlers of the Second Aliya. Smolly writes in the preface to his novel that it developed from stories he had told his students as a school teacher and he explicitly acknowledges his didactic motivation in composing this work.<sup>21</sup> In contrast, Yehoshua's story is a highly allegorical and provocative text written for adult readers, and its focus on a controversial political issue was in many respects ahead of Israeli public discourse at the time.

The guards clearly play a pivotal role in the two works discussed here, and their characters are critical for understanding the meaning of their forest experience.<sup>22</sup> In spite of the structural similarity in their situation—the entrance to the forest symbolizes the hopes for a turning point in their lives—the guards differ in their approach to this change. Hermoni, Smolly's protagonist, is internally motivated to make a fundamental change in his life. He is a veteran guard who had roamed the country for 25 years doing his work, "being constantly on the move from place to place, and so his life seemed almost to have slipped by without this dream having been fulfilled" (7). Hermoni is portrayed as the prototypical embodiment of *ha'shomer*, the guard of the Second Aliya: highly individualistic, ideologically committed, strong-willed, courageous, and hard-working.

In contrast, Yehoshua's protagonist is portrayed as a weak, unstable, passive person, who consistently shrinks from undertaking any responsibility—a home, a family, or a job—and neglects his studies. A counter-image of the Second Aliya guard, he lacks commitment, willpower, morals, and even passion. The student accepts the position of a guard thoughtlessly, if not reluctantly. His friends are the ones who find out about this position and who determine what research topic he should pursue. Yehoshua refers to the student's role in the forest as *tsofe* [observer], thus emphasizing his passive character. Yet the use of the term *tsofe* (which also implies a prophet) is highly ironic: the student who wears thick glasses is marked by his blurred vision, both literally and figuratively. Yehoshua also accentuates the sense of

alienation and aimlessness that pervades his protagonist's life by leaving him and the other characters nameless. The use of generic references in *Facing the Forests* stands in marked contrast to the names chosen by Smolly for the Hermoni family which express the major precepts of Socialist Zionism: connection to land [*Hermoni*], hope [*Tikva*], labor [*Amalya*], and strength and courage [*Eitan* and *Uzi*].

Upon reaching their new posts, both men are overcome by surprise at the sight of the large forested areas. "Hermoni who had grown up in the forests of Russia, felt a thrill run through him—in the twenty five years of wandering through this country, he had never seen a forest like it. . ." (22). Similarly, when the student's friends tell him of the availability of a position as a fire watcher, he responds: "Forests. . . What forests? Since when do we have forests in this country?" (204). But when he reaches the site, he is surprised to discover five hills covered with pine trees, and this view "strikes him with awe" (208).

This is how the narrator of *The Founders* describes the forest: "It was an ancient forest of oaks, carobs, and birches, with glades of lush, green grass—perfect for grazing sheep and cattle" (8); "[it was] a forest of sturdy, upright oaks, spreading their thick, leafy boughs, and stretching away without numbers on all sides. Old, red carob trees abounded, laden with fruit, and on the floor of the forest grew bracken and bushes of all sorts, so profusely that they often barred their paths" (22). Hermoni is moved by the unexpected lushness of the site where he plans to settle down and build a farm. For an Eastern European pioneer like him, the sight of a forest is a moving reminder of the landscape he left behind even if it is different in its growth and its scope.<sup>23</sup> Although Smolly's description of an indigenous forest is grounded in the historical reality of the Sheikh Abreik region, it is possible that the description of the lushness of the forest is also influenced by his own vivid images of the Eastern European forests of his childhood.<sup>24</sup> Yet the antiquity and the lushness of the forest described in *The Founders* inevitably introduces tension within the vision of settlement. Given that the Zionist mission was commonly conceived as "making the desert bloom," what is Smolly's vision of settlement within the context of an old forest? The resolution of this tension is articulated by Hermoni: "This is the kind of life we'll make for ourselves. . . . We'll turn these barren valleys into gardens of Eden. They'll be covered with corn and barley, oats and hay, and we'll plant vineyards and orchards on the hillsides in place of these thorns and thistles" (20). At another point he tells his family: "If the soil in these hills is good enough to grow such fine forest trees, it will be good for fruit trees too. We'll

plant figs and vines here in the winter, and turn these barren hills into a Garden of Eden” (H17, modified translation). Despite his excitement over the lushness of the forest, Hermoni redefines the terrain within the framework of his vision as “barren valleys” [*amakim shomemim*] and “barren hills” [*geva’ot kerhot*]. It thus appears that the conceptual opposition between wilderness and settlement reshapes the natural landscape according to these socially constructed categories. As a symbolic landscape, the forest is now defined not only as wilderness but also as a desert. This view is later affirmed by other Jewish settlers who visit the Hermoni family.<sup>25</sup>

It is interesting to note that, within the framework of his vision, even when Hermoni acknowledges the existence of trees within the immediate landscape, he redefines them as “barren” [*atsei serak*], ignoring the existence of fruit trees such as carobs and figs in the ancient forest. Indeed, the ambiguous position of the fig tree in this novel demonstrates the power of cultural categories in creating symbolic landscapes. Even though the family gathers the delicious fruit and eats it with pleasure (20), Hermoni includes the fig among the trees he plans to plant in his future Garden of Eden, as if they did not already exist in that environment. Within this framework, the farm and the forest stand in opposition to each other as the embodiment of Culture and Nature, and the settlement process implies the imposition of social boundaries and a new social order on the world of nature.<sup>26</sup> This point is further illustrated by the borrowing of the first word in the biblical story of Creation [*b’reshit*; i.e., in the beginning] in the Hebrew title of the novel (*Anshei b’Reshit*). The act of establishing a single settlement in the Land of Israel thus mirrors God’s act of creating the world. In this instance, however, the people take charge of their own fate, assuming the right and the responsibility to create order out of chaos and become the guardians of this new order.<sup>27</sup>

From Smolly’s preface, it appears that the colonization of nature was the central theme of his earlier tales to his students, from which *The Founders* later developed. Like Robinson Crusoe, Hermoni wishes to reshape his environment according to his preconceived notions of a civilized “Garden of Eden.”<sup>28</sup> The opposition between the farm and the forest is further enhanced by the use of battle rhetoric to describe this process. The narrator remarks: “The forest did not easily yield to Hermoni’s supervision” (67), and Hermoni himself rejects the appeal that he should leave his isolated farm in the forest and join his friends settlement, saying: “I’m a soldier, and the battle doesn’t scare me. On the contrary, it adds to my courage—and [what’s more] we’ll win” (65, modified trans./Heb. version 57). In this

respect, Hermoni appears to follow more closely the model of the rugged individualist of the American frontier, who struggles on his own against man and nature.<sup>29</sup>

The twists that A. B. Yehoshua introduces into his later version of recounting a Jewish guard's experiences in the forest become evident in his portrayal of the relationship between the forest, the guard, and the Arab. In contrast to his earlier counterpart, who defines the forest from the start as his new home, Yehoshua's guard tells his friends that "he would have to enter a prison" in order to be able to do his research (204). Indeed, throughout the earlier phase of his stay in the forest, his experience is shaped by the metaphors of imprisonment and entrapment. Like a prison term, his stay there is set by clear temporal boundaries (six months), at the conclusion of which he expects to return to his home in the city. Upon reaching his outpost in the forest, "he suddenly imagines that all this has been set in motion just to get rid of him" (207), and he realizes that "the ring closes on him" (209). While Hermoni appreciates the forest for its inherent qualities and avoids the city as much as he can, the student can see only a negative value in the forest as the place that would hold him away from city life and its allure, and he feels out of place in nature.

From the start, the student's appearance marks his status as an outsider to the forest world: "The laborers . . . sense that he belongs to another world. The bald patch and the glasses are an indication, one of many" (207). In line with this outsider's position, the student's contact with nature is mediated through the instruments of culture: binoculars, telephone, a sheet with instructions. His research topic, the Crusades, thus becomes an allegory for his own situation. Like the crusaders, he appears as the carrier of Western civilization and an outsider to the territory over which he assumes control, and, like them, his stay there is destined to be temporary. His post at the observation building restricts him to watching the forest from a removed position, far and above the trees, creating a physical, as well as a psychological, distance from them. The symbolic significance of this position—facing the forests—is clearly indicated by its choice as the story title.

During the initial phases of his stay, the student continues this alienated state. He often appears to be dazed and unfocused, floating in and out of sleep, distant from the forest, the old Arab worker and his little girl who live there, and his books. But as time goes by, we begin to notice some signs of change in the guard's appearance and behavior that redefine his relations with his environment. The guard leaves his observation post and begins to explore the ground. His gradual adjustment to the forest world is manifested in his walk. While "his first steps in the forest proper are like a baby's"

(214), he later learns how to walk quietly and succeeds in surprising the Israeli hikers who camp there, though he is easily detected by the Arab and his daughter (215). With time, however, he improves his skills to the point that he manages to also surprise the Arabs. His earlier feeling of entrapment dissipates and he begins to discover the joy of life without cultural constraints. He becomes oblivious of calendrical time and sees it as a sign of freedom. "Prisoners score lines on the walls of their cell, but he is not in prison. He has come of his own free will, and so he will go" (222). The student thus transforms his view of the forest from a prison to a site of freedom, where the passage of time is marked by the natural cycles of the seasons and the days.

As the guard gets closer to the trees, he loses touch with the world of words. "The words have dropped away from him like husks" (216), the narrator notes, and the student later affirms this observation: "Trees have taken the place of words for me, forests the place of books" (227). Instead of reading books, he counts trees; instead of writing his thesis, he creates a map of the area; his beard grows wild, his clothes begin to unravel. All these changes may hint at a fundamental change in the guard: the distant, alienated scholar who was attached to, and constrained by, the symbols of civilization seems to be gradually transformed to a man of nature.

The literary guards begin by relating to their mission in the forest from two different points and their experiences appear to reshape both. Hermoni follows Robinson Crusoe's steps in trying to remold nature into a civilized environment, while the student becomes part of nature. Yet, lest we expect that the forest experience completes a romantic conversion of the scholarly city-person to a true nature-lover, the alienated and passive individual to an active man who finds his personal redemption, Yehoshua introduces two themes that subvert this romantic plot: the guard's anticipation of a fire in the forest, and his search for the hidden ruins of an old Arab village on that site.

#### NATURAL BONDS, NATIONAL ALLIANCES: JEWS, ARABS, AND THE FORESTS

In both *The Founders* and *Facing the Forests*, the relations between the Jewish guard and the forest are subject to changes when other elements are introduced into the story. Although Smolly portrays the settlement as a struggle against the wilderness in which it is being built, their relation is modified when others enter the scene: the forest and the farm are then grouped

together as “home territory” while others are portrayed as outsiders and potential or real invaders. Indeed, as the chapter headings indicate, the progress of the settlement process is constructed by the successive difficulties that the Hermoni family encounters in the forest. The novel is thus punctuated by descriptions of recurrent invasions of the farm and the forest, alternating between the forces of nature (thunder storm, wild animals, insects, etc.) and the Arabs.

During the first phases of settlement, the Arabs are divided into two groups. The more favorable one consists of the local shepherds with whom Hermoni develops friendly relationships, letting them use the spring water and the grazing land for free. The other group was primarily perceived as hostile to Hermoni and the forest—Abu Naomi, a Syrian Arab who took control of the forest before Hermoni’s arrival and who levied taxes from others for its use, and the charcoal burners, whom Hermoni expels because they carelessly and greedily destroy the forest trees. Although the terms “Arab” and “Beduin” are sometimes used interchangeably, the latter appears to have more favorable connotations and is more closely associated with the shepherds. Hermoni feels an affinity with the Beduin, and they display admiration for him and appreciate his role as the protector of nature. In contrast, the coal burners are identified as Arab farmers who were brought to the forest from afar and have no qualms about destroying it.

To understand Hermoni’s dual perception of the Arabs along these lines, it is important to point out how he is identified in the novel. Born and reared in Russia as a typical exilic Jewish child,<sup>30</sup> he appears a transformed person following his 25 years of experience in Palestine. Since the beginning of the narrative Hermoni relates to himself as a “Jewish Beduin,” and this definition is reaffirmed by his friends and by the narrator. Hermoni clearly feels more comfortable in nature and among the Arab shepherds than with Jewish city-dwellers or bureaucrats, and his own children appear to be more knowledgeable about Arab than Jewish customs. This is evident when the daughter, Amalya, reacts in amazement when she sees a Jewish visitor praying: “What’s he doing, Dad?” she asks her father, “Why does he need this *abaya*?” Not knowing what the Jewish prayer shawl is, she applies to it the Arabic term. “That’s how Jews pray,” her father responds, as if referring to another tribe’s custom. “And why don’t we have something like that?” Amalya persists. “Aren’t we Jews?” (92, modified trans./Heb. 78).<sup>31</sup> Throughout this novel, Hermoni’s concerns are centered around his transformation from a homeless guard to a farmer. In entering the forest and building a farm there, he has challenged himself to merge his already acquired Beduin identity with that of the *fellah*, the farmer who is attached to his piece of

land. His choice of Arabic terms to define this desired transformation indicates how far along he has progressed in achieving a “native” identity and distancing himself from the discredited exilic Jew.

Hermoni’s initial position toward the Beduin he encounters in the forest thus stems from his own identification with them. “It may be difficult for you to understand,” he explains to his friend Galili, “but I couldn’t part from my horse and my rifle, from a life of danger, to settle down as a property owner. Here I can combine the two . . . Perhaps that forest will tie me down at last, me, the eternal Beduin” (59, modified trans./Heb. 51). He also chooses to adopt the Arabic place name and call his farm *Ein Ro’im*; namely, the Shepherds’ Spring. Indeed, in portraying the *shomer* [guard] as a “Jewish Beduin,” Eliezer Smolly reflects a predominant view of that period that saw the Beduin as an available local model of the native for the Zionist settlers.<sup>32</sup>

As the settlement continues to develop, tensions mount among the shepherds about the use of the land for cattle. Moreover, with the rise of the national conflict throughout the country, the position of the shepherds *vis-à-vis* the farm further shifts toward other Arabs, who are hostile to the Jewish settlement. At the end, the novel constructs the Jews and the forest as one group and portrays all the Arabs as their common enemy. Abu Naomi and the other Arabs, on the other hand, are portrayed from the beginning as the enemy who attempts to bring destruction to both the forest and the farm. When Hermoni first enters the forest, he is shocked to see “branches [that] were cut off trees leaving scars, heaps of black ash, mutilation of bushes and twigs.” Pained by the sight of the injured trees, Hermoni remarks: “That is how our neighbors care for the treasure in their midst! . . . that’s how they respect the few trees left in the country!” (23). As the protector of trees, the guard thus positions himself against the Arabs. The forest becomes his home territory, while the destructive Arabs are portrayed as outsiders and invaders who finally destroy it. The positioning of the Arabs against both the forests and the Jews receives its most dramatic expression in the fire that threatens the survival of both.

The destruction of the forest by fire was preceded by an earlier attempt on the part of Abu Naomi to set the trees on fire. But while the settlers managed to divert the threat of the first fire, the larger scale of the second Arab attack, and the intervention of the British authorities, who force the family to abandon its home, leave the trees and the farm without any protection from their common enemy. When Hermoni escapes the British and returns to his home, he watches a hellish scene of roaring flames and plundering Arabs and, stricken by pain and despair, he keeps his last bullet

for himself. The destruction of the forest and his new home thus almost lead to his own death. The following morning when his eldest son, Eitan, finds him, they witness the total devastation that the fire caused:

In the place of the barn there was only a heap of charred ash; where the hut and the other buildings stood, only a few blackened beams and poles were left. The smell of singed flesh was all that remained of the poultry-run. A dreadful silence had settled over everything and the ground was littered with pieces of torn clothing and broken pots. Everything was destroyed. The stood there weeping inwardly at the scene. "Once again, Eitan we have nothing," Hermoni whispered. "Once again we have nothing!" (248)

The fire destroys both the forest and the farm. The destruction is the final proof of the natural alliance between the ancient forest and the Zionist settlers: the survival of the trees, the Jewish guard, and the Zionist settlement are thus interlinked as they face the Arabs who wished to obliterate them all.

In *Facing the Forests*, the Jewish guard's psychological and physical distance from the forest is paralleled by an initial attitude of indifference toward the Arab worker whose tongue was cut off. ("The Arab turned out to be old and mute. His tongue was cut out during the war. By one of them or one of us? Does it matter?" (210). In contrast to the guard's aloof position *vis-à-vis* the forest, the Arab man and his daughter are described as an integral part of the environment in which they live. When they enter the forest, the guard can no longer distinguish them among the trees; and they suddenly emerge out of the forest as if they were born out of its womb (219). Moreover, their description as dirty, smelly, and with no power of speech portrays them as animal-like, thus part of the world of nature. Whereas *The Founders* portrays the Jewish guard and the forest within one and the same category and the Arabs as confronting both, *Facing the Forests* inverts this classification: the forest and the Arabs are seen as part of nature, and the Jewish guard remains the civilized outsider to their world. Yet, as is the case with the earlier novel, the initial alliance within the triad of the forest, the Jewish guard, and the Arabs is bound to transform as the story unfolds.

The guard's growing intimacy with his immediate environment appears to suggest a linear progression away from the past toward a new future. Yet a growing obsession with the possibility of a forest fire and an intense curiosity about the ruins of an Arab village within the forest begin to take control of the student's experience and redirect the plot. As he acquires greater familiarity with the forest environment, the guard also

overcomes his earlier panic that a fire might occur if he falls asleep. He first displays a theoretical interest in “how long does it take for a forest to burn down” (210), which is later developed into an explicit wish that a fire would break out: “No longer does he trouble to caution [the hikers] against fire. On the contrary. He would welcome a little conflagration, a little local tumult” (219).

When the student learns about an Arab village that used to be on that site, his curiosity leads him to an active search for its remains. In sharp contrast to the passivity that characterized his earlier attitude toward his formal studies, he now becomes utterly absorbed in this “research project” and sees its outcome—a map of the entire forest region—as his true legacy for the future. The new information about the destroyed Arab village also provokes his interest in communicating with the mute Arab and serves as a turning point in their relations. A new bond is now fostered between them. When he finds the Arab’s hidden kerosene cans, it provides him with hope for a real fire (224). Instead of informing the firemen about this discovery, he attempts to communicate to the Arab his own fantasy by kindling a bonfire in the forest at night (227). Though this attempt is futile since the fire dies out, the student continues to inflame the Arab’s hatred. As he himself “has lost all hope of fire” (229), the Arab remains the only possibility of materializing this fantasy.

The initial alliance between the forest and the Arab on the one hand and the Jewish guard on the other hand changes as a new alliance is formed between the Jewish guard and the Arab against the forest. “Together, in silence, they return to the forest, their empire, theirs alone” (227). The Arab and his girl now cling to him desperately until gradually the three appear “like a family” (230). The student awaits the fire with growing anticipation and hope, and he smilingly welcomes the first “long, graceful flame.” His excitement intensifies as the fire spreads: “A great light out there. Five whole hills ablaze. Pines split and crash. Wild excitement sweeps him, rapture. He is happy” (231). He regards the fire as a new means of communication between him and the Arab, the two men who share no other language: “The Arab speaks to him out of the fire, wishes to say everything, everything at once. Will he understand?” (231). The allusion to God’s revelation to Moses in the burning bush hints at the possibility of national redemption, but inverts its mythical meaning.<sup>33</sup> The student is inspired not by a divine commandment, but rather by the Arab. The act implies a promise of redemption not to the Jews, but to the Arabs.

The appearance of an alliance between the Jewish guard and the Arab is short-lived. Although the Arab carries out their shared vision, the student

prefers to see himself, not as an active participant, but a spectator only, referring to the fire as a “midnight show” (230). The morning after, when the police investigation leads to the suspicion of arson, and after they question him for several hours, the student breaks down and points out the Arab as the suspect. The police arrest the Arab and take him away, and returns the student, whose time in the forest is up, back to the city (235). The student who betrayed the forest now betrays the Arab and the tacit understanding between them prior to the Arab’s action.

Following the fire, then, the student reverts to his initial position “facing the forests,” yet this time he faces a scene of ruin and destruction. His psychological distance from the forest is again marked by his appearance, emerging again as the detached, cynical “little scholar” (235) who does not belong to this place. The student remains unmoved even at the sight of five barren hills covered by smoking remains and the stench which they emit.

The two literary works thus present a fundamental difference in the guards’ attitude toward the forests, the Arabs, and the fire. Whereas Hermoni relates to the fire as an instrument of evil that ruins his dream, the student feels that the fire was the fulfillment of a dream that is now “turning from a vision into a fact” (231). Whereas Hermoni is devastated by the sight of destruction, the student reacts with indifference. His detachment from this scene of death is further accentuated by its contrast to the reaction of the old man in charge of the forests, who seems to be “near collapse with fury and pain” (233). The guard’s casual response to the hurting old man—observing that the trees must be insured and therefore the fire will not affect the old man’s budget—is highly inappropriate within the context of Zionist ideology. It deliberately ignores the significance of the forests as a national icon that would render the fire a national disaster far exceeding its financial cost.

The differences between the two literary guards and their attitudes toward the forests is also marked by their visions of calling. While Hermoni’s vision centers on fields and orchards in line with the national ideology of making the desert bloom, the student’s vision of the fire is further supported by his repeated dreams about a “yellow waste” [*shemama tsehuba*] (Heb. 92/203). Like the bald spot on his head that marks him visually as an outsider to the forest world, his dreams place him outside the forest, in a desert-like territory. When he feels “that he is being called insistently to an encounter,” it is in the “yellow waste” that is typically located “at the edge of the forest” (228), and again, it is there that he escapes when the forests are burning.<sup>34</sup> The yellow waste thus provides a visual counter-metaphor to the green forest, and its predominance in the student’s vision foreshadows the

fate of the forest. When the forest burns down, wilderness takes over. Indeed, the only trees spared by the fire are desert trees, the indigenous growth of this landscape (232). Like the biblical burning bush, the desert trees remain intact, thus providing the promise for the future that was earlier associated with the Zionist forest.

#### FORESTS, MONUMENTS, AND NATIONAL REDEMPTION

Given the Hebrew culture's glorification of the tree as a symbol of national renewal, how are we to interpret the destruction of forests as a literary theme? A further examination of the role of the forest as a site of nation memory may help shed light on this issue and illuminate the changing representation of the forest in these two literary works.

The difference in the description of the forests in the two works examined here is highly significant. Whereas Smolly describes a forest of ancient trees that the JNF acquired, Yehoshua alludes to new pine forests it planted. The two forests therefore serve as two different national monuments: The ancient forest of *The Founders* functions as a symbolic bridge between antiquity and the present. By settling in the forest Hermoni literally reconnects with the roots of the ancient Jewish past and his home becomes a symbolic representation of the Zionist revival. This symbolism is affirmed by the use of a common literary trope—the unearthing of relics of an ancient settlement while in the process of building a Zionist settlement.<sup>35</sup> The Hermoni family discovers a large piece of marble with engravings that are without doubt Jewish: a menorah, a shofar, grapes, and pomegranates (17). The forest thus reveals a monument of historical continuity of Jewish settlement of Palestine.

Interestingly enough, the settlement process also leads to the discovery of other relics from different pasts associated with that land. The comparison between these various monuments of the past helps construct the meaning of the forest as a national icon. While preparing a new field, Hermoni discovers “a wonderful treasure of ancient Arab manure” (57/ Heb. 50, modified trans.). In contrast to the refined ruins of the ancient Jewish civilization, then, the Arabic “antiquities” are part of nature and a degraded material at that. Hermoni nonetheless considers this finding of great value and he immediately puts it to use as a fertilizer for his fields. When a Christian relic is found—an ancient sword with a cross on it which they believe to have belonged to the crusaders—Hermoni gives it to the

children for play (69). Unlike the Jewish stones, it appears to have no sentimental or sacred value, and, unlike the manure, it has no functional value for the farm. The last treasure buried in the soil is a can full of golden coins which Hermoni uses to pay for his house. His friends justify this use by pointing out that this act demonstrates poetic justice: “The people to whom those coins belonged destroyed the country, and it’s only right that you should help to rebuild it with the same money” (119). The original Hebrew text is far more telling than this English translation allows: “*shalom yeshalem ha’mav’ir et ha’be’era*” (Heb. 101), which literally means that the one who sets a fire will have to pay for the damage. Though it appears in this context as a proverbial statement, it foreshadows the fate of Hermoni’s house, which is later destroyed by the fire, and the hope for revenge.

The portrayal of the forest as a site of national memories in *The Founders* draws on the historical reality of rising national tensions between the Jews and the Arabs, but Smolly clearly portrays it from the Zionist settlers’ perspective. Smolly elaborates the scope of the Arabs’ attack on Zeid’s farm in 1929 to further dramatize Hermoni’s determination to begin from the beginning.<sup>36</sup> He depicts the Arabs’ disregard for the trees as a means of foreshadowing their disregard for Jewish lives.<sup>37</sup> Coinciding with the killing of Jews by Arabs in Jerusalem and Hebron, the attack on the farm and the forest highlights the connecting tissue between the forest, the local settlement (Ein Ro’im), and the larger Settlement [the Yishuv]. *The Founders* thus constructs the burned forest as a monument of the destructiveness of the Arabs, who victimize the land in order to undermine the Jewish settlement. In this respect, the novel extends the memory of the burned forest beyond the scope of the event, identifying it with other attempts to destroy the Jews that likewise failed.<sup>38</sup> While the Jews are portrayed as directing their energies toward protecting the past and constructing the future, the Arabs are associated with invasion, vandalism, and death, causing the destruction of both the ancient forest and of the new Zionist settlement.

For Hermoni, whose earlier vision was to create his “Garden of Eden” in the ancient forest, the fire means the destruction of this budding dream. The novel, however, introduces a deliberate inversion of the biblical story on the Garden of Eden: unlike the first family of mankind, who were expelled from the Garden, the first Zionist family who settled in the forest remained in its place in spite of the Arabs’ attempts to expel them. Their heroism stems from their attachment to the place, and serves as proof of the bond between the Jew and the land. Conversely, the desertion of a settlement might have appeared subversive to the Zionist pioneering narrative, since it indicates the weakening of one’s ideological commitment and readi-

ness for patriotic sacrifice.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, the very conclusion of *The Founders* redefines the significance of the Arabs' act by establishing the fire as a limited setback within a continuing historical process of Jewish resettlement. Hermoni, first hard hit by despair, is then encouraged by the discovery of their plow which the Arabs left behind.<sup>40</sup> He tells his son to hitch the plow to their horse, and right there and then the two begin to plow a new field. "There, Eitan! We've opened a new furrow," Hermoni says. "We always have to start over, to begin from the beginning!" [*aleinu lebatil tamid m'be'reshit*] (modified trans., Heb. 215/249).

Faced with the burned forest and his burned crops, the Jewish settler finds solace in the possibility of planting new trees and plowing new fields. As the title of the novel indicates, Smolly puts the Zionist settler at the center of his work's universe. The settler is both the subject and the object of the settlement process; he reshapes his own identity as he revives his nation and its roots in the land. Because he, and not the forest, is at the center of the settlement process, the destruction of the forest does not imply a dead end. The settler has the power to "begin from the beginning" and ultimately renew both the forest and the nation.

Clearly, Eliezer Smolly—a committed Zionist writer and teacher—wanted to end the novel with a dramatic display of the settler's unshaken commitment to the settlement ideal, for the benefit of his students and other Hebrew youth. Drawing on the trope of "the first furrow" of the pioneering period, and the biblical allusions to a new beginning, the novel thus ends with the message of renewal. Hermoni's last words become his legacy to his son Eitan and the young readers of this novel: Never give up the struggle in the face of hardships, and when you suffer a setback, go back to the beginning, and start over. In ending with a return to the beginning, *The Founders* is similar to another work that was written in that period and became part of the Yishuv's literary canon; namely, Yitzhak Lamdan's *Masada*. Following the long description of setbacks and difficulties on the way to Masada, Lamdan concludes his poem in a section entitled "In the Beginning," which ends with the following verse: "... let us roar with a new and last roar of the beginning: Be strong, be strong, and we shall strengthen."<sup>41</sup> The return to the beginning reflects the essence of the Zionist commitment to continue the struggle and therefore provides a patriotic lesson of national resilience. The cyclical structure in these works of the pioneering era is subordinated to the larger Zionist narrative, which is linear in its thrust, moving from the past toward the future, from Jewish exile to Jewish national redemption, from a symbolic landscape of wilderness to resettlement.<sup>42</sup>

*Facing the Forests* presents a more complex representation of the archeology of memory and its implications for both individual and collective redemption. Unlike the ancient forest of *The Founders*, the forests in Yehoshua's story are new. Although they cover a large area (five hills), they consist of pine trees that are still relatively young.<sup>43</sup> "This isn't a forest yet, but a hope and a promise for the future" (214, modified trans./Heb. 103). The forests seem to have a future, but no past. When hikers ask the guard about that area, he responds: ". . . there is no account to give. Everything is still so artificial here. There is nothing here, not even some archeology for amateurs . . ." (217). What appears to be Nature—the forests—turns out to be a man-made product, a part of Culture. The forest is thus depicted as a synthetic Zionist monument whose value lies in the future but is devoid of past.

As time goes by, the guard actually discovers that the forests hide two other representations of the past. Copper plaques with the names of Jewish and non-Jewish donors from abroad (214) are posted on rocks among the trees and turn the forest into an official monument for those people whose donations helped support the JNF. Indeed, Yehoshua's remark that the forest is not just "some anonymous forest but one with a name, and not just one name either" but many donors' names (215), and his comic description of the JNF's ceremonies that flood the forest with tourists and bureaucrats, create a grotesque portrayal of the use of the forest as a monument.<sup>44</sup> In contrast to the deliberate promotion and display of the JNF's memorial plaques, the second representation of the past is characterized by its underground existence. This is an Arab village whose name appears on a map of this area, but the forested landscape hides any traces of its former life. Like the Arab whose voice was silenced (though we do not know by whom), the Arab village is covered by the forest. When the guard asks the old man in charge of the forests about this village, he answers him casually: "There used to be sort of a farmstead here. But this is a thing of the past" (222). The forest thus becomes a means to bury the Arab village in the past and suppress its memory in the present. In this way, Yehoshua presents the dual function of the forest within the competing national memories of Israeli Jews and Palestinians: while it is the symbol of roots and renewal for the former, it is a symbolic graveyard that represents death and destruction for the latter.

The fire that the Arab starts radically alters the relationship between the various monuments of the past. As the forest burns down, the two other representations of the past become prominently visible: the ruined Arab village is reintroduced into the open landscape, and the memorial copper plaques stand out in their brightness amongst the blackened remains of the

burnt forest. The fire thus destroys the site's primary identity as a Zionist monument and as a result redirects the site's orientation from the future to the past. Like the forest, the fire acquires a dual character within this context: it is an agent of destruction from the Zionist perspective, while it serves as an instrument of national liberation from the Palestinian perspective.<sup>45</sup>

The comparative analysis of *The Founders* and *Facing the Forests* reveals fundamental changes in the literary representation of the relations between settlement and nature, the past and the future, Palestinian Arabs and Jews. Written in the early 1930s, *The Founders* constructs these relations according to the national ideology that was predominant during the early pioneering period. *Facing the Forests* challenges these conceptions by presenting a more complex and ambiguous reality of the post-Independence era. Marking an emergent trend in Israeli literature in the 1960s, it is one of the early literary works that express the younger generation's reluctance or lack of ability to shape its life according to the idealistic constructs of the founders' generation or to accept them as given.<sup>46</sup> In *Facing the Forests*, Yehoshua deliberately creates symbolic inversions of a typical pioneering narrative. Whereas *The Founders* presents the ideology of the early settlement period of Israeli society, with its belief that individual and collective redemption go hand in hand, *Facing the Forests* challenges this premise. In fact, as the story develops, it appears that the alienated guard may find his personal redemption in supporting the cause of the Arab village and the liberation of its memory. If this were the case, one could have argued that Yehoshua created an anti-Zionist narrative that demonstrates the tension between individual and collective redemption. But Yehoshua does not push this idea to its extreme by letting his protagonist develop a genuine commitment to the Palestinian cause. In fact, the first indications of the student's secret desire for a fire in the forest are revealed before he learns about the ruined Arab village. References to "lunatic hope" (the Arab's, 227), a mind "that is slipping, becoming crazed" (the guard's; 228/ Heb. 115, modified trans.), associate a growing state of mental imbalance with the flames that finally burst out "as if in madness" (231, modified trans./ Heb. 118). The guard's interest in the fire, then, does not stem from the awakening of a dormant political conscience. Rather, he uses the political cause as a way of allowing room for his destructive urge and justifying his encouragement of the Arab. Consequently, his immediate euphoric response to the fire dissipates the following day, as does his short-lived support of the Arab.<sup>47</sup>

The conclusion of the story reveals that the forest experience fails to produce an inherent transformation within the guard and the destruction of the forest does not bring about a sense of fulfillment. Marked by his blurred

vision and feeble character, the student proceeds through a complex act of multiple betrayals on both individual and collective levels. He betrays his “true friends” by sleeping with their wives, his responsibilities as a guard, the ideology that elevates forests as a cherished national treasure, and the entire Jewish people whose donations support the afforestation projects. At the end, he also betrays what could have been a personal search for redemption, as well as the Arab who carried out his own fantasy of seeing the forest burning. Unlike Hermoni, he is portrayed as a passive and self-destructive person who suffers from lack of moral integrity. Unlike the admired settler of the Second Aliya who remains loyal to his cause, the pathetic guard of later years invokes neither respect nor sympathy on the part of the reader.

Indeed, when he returns to the city, the student quickly loses his “desert animal” looks and is described as “a wet dog begging for fire and light” (236). Forgotten by the younger urban crowd and banished by his friends who “have given him up in despair” (236) he becomes an outcast. The external freedom he has gained with his return to the city turns into aimless wandering that reflects an inner sense of entrapment. The student fails to find his personal redemption within the forest, as the cultural norms of the Yishuv period would lead us to expect, nor does he discover a personal redemption by supporting the Arab’s cause.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, he emerges from his journey into the forest world the same way as he entered it, and his inability to find his place and a sense of purpose portray him as the literary reincarnation of the uprooted Jew [*ba-talush*] of the turn of the century.

Whereas the potentially circular ending of *The Founders* is subordinated to the linear thrust of the Zionist master narrative, *Facing the Forests* ends in a circular motion, locked within the constraints of the present. The linear temporal ordering of the plot is thus subverted by a full return to an aimless circularity.<sup>49</sup> The story’s resistance to closure is clearly manifested by its conclusion with an open question. When the student appears at their doorsteps, his former friends greet him dismissively: “What is it now?” [*nu, ma yesb?*] (Heb. 122/236, modified trans.). This rhetorical question leaves the reader with no satisfactory account for the student’s course of action or grounds to believe that the future holds the promise of resolution.

The passive and alienated Jewish guard never achieves a personal redemption, but the Arab emerges as the doer whose eyes reveal a true sense of fulfillment. We suspect that the Arab, though imprisoned, has achieved his personal liberation through his act of revenge. But Yehoshua does not allow the Arab to have an independent voice or presence beyond his relation to the Jewish guard, and so his inner experience remains outside of the scope of this work. Contrary to the view that Yehoshua provides the Arab a

central role in the story, it appears that his portrayal is rather limited and remains subservient to that of the guard and the issue of his relation to the forest.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, Yehoshua acknowledges that he introduced the figure of the Arab later because he thought that it is more credible than the depiction of a forest fire as a result of arson by a Jewish guard.<sup>51</sup>

In spite of the limited representation of the Arab's voice, *Facing the Forests* raises poignant issues that display the tensions underlying the relations of Israeli Jews and Palestinians who live in the same land but subscribe to competing memories and experiences. In fact, Yehoshua chose to highlight this message of the story when he used a quote from it as an epigraph for his polemic writing on the conflicting national claims to the land by the Palestinians and the Jews.<sup>52</sup> Thus, although he does not present the Palestinians' experience from their perspective, he nonetheless focuses on the suppression of their alternative memory and its impact upon Israeli culture.<sup>53</sup> *Facing the Forests* therefore constructs the destruction of the Zionist monument as an act of liberation for the Arab ruins. "There, out of the smoke and haze, the ruined village appears before his eyes, born anew in its basic outlines . . ." (233). The rebirth of the Arab village, however, remains constrained within the domain of symbolic representations. The village appears as "an abstract drawing, as all things past and buried." It is not the village that is brought back to life, but its memory, thus correcting the guard's ignorant comment earlier in the story about the lack of a local past.

Yehoshua thus examines the issues of memory and national redemption that are at the core of Zionist ideology, but deliberately shakes up the Zionist construction of historical progression from exile and destruction to national revival and construction. The association of the theme of national liberation with the Arab village provides an obvious example for this deliberate inversion of historical processes as constructed in Zionist memory. Moreover, this inversion is already suggested prior to the outbreak of the fire, when the guard discovers "small tins filled with kerosene" [*kupsao'ot pah ketanot*] (Heb. 111/224) from which the Arab ultimately produces "a great light" (231). These allusions to the Hanukka miracle of oil also disclose the symbolic inversion that *Facing the Forests* creates: the oil used to light the ancient temple in celebration of Jewish national redemption is now used by an Arab to liberate the ruins of his village and destroy the forest, the "living temple" that represents Jewish national redemption. Furthermore, as a result of the fire, an Israeli tree is transformed into a traditional Jewish martyr "wrapped in prayer . . . going through its hour of judgment and surrendering its spirit (231), and the Zionist forest is reduced to "smoking embers" [*udim ashenim*] (Heb. 119/232), a term often associated with Holo-

caust survivors. Thus, whereas the Zionist narrative depicts the period of exile and the Holocaust as leading to the foundation of the State, *Facing the Forests* associates contemporary Israeli symbols with exilic Jewish history, unsettling the historical sequence that Zionism constructed.<sup>54</sup> The same act that resulted in the display of the ruins that become a monument of a once thriving Arab village also leads to the creation of new ruins (the burned trees) that serve as a monument of the Zionist forest.<sup>55</sup> Yehoshua thus subverts the Zionist narrative that moves from destruction to construction by delineating a process that leads from one act of destruction to the next.<sup>56</sup> The individual act assumes a national significance within the broader political context: "There is a sadness in this sudden nudity, the sadness of wars lost, blood shed in vain" (232). Yehoshua thus creates an analogy between the student's destructiveness and the destruction caused by wars. The student's inner state of entrapment and aimless wandering becomes a mirror of the futility of a cycle of wars that continue to produce monuments of destroyed pasts. Within the broader scheme of meanings of *Facing the Forests*, the forest clearly continues to function as a national icon, yet its complex representation in this story reflects, and even predicts, the growing burden of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that would further escalate during the post-1967 era.

#### TREES, FORESTS, AND THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

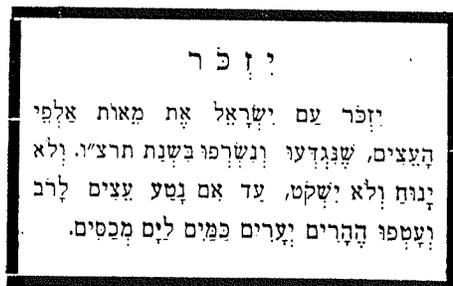
The intertextual analysis of *The Founders* and *Facing the Forests* offers an interesting opportunity to explore the meaning of the forests as a national symbol mediating between nature and culture, past and future, memory and oblivion. Yet history does not allow us to contain this exploration within the domain of literary analysis. Themes that these literary works explore are part of a volatile political reality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the literary imagery draws upon and feeds into this reality. That a national conflict is played out in this arena highlights the role of trees and forests as bearers of national memories, symbols of collective identities, and markers of ownership over a contested land.

Uprooting trees and burning forests have assumed the meaning of aggressive acts of war within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Such acts took place during the Yishuv period, most notably during the Arab revolt of 1936–39.<sup>57</sup> The setting of forests on fire and the public response to it seemed to evoke Smolly's literary depiction in *The Founders*. This affinity is mani-

fested in the rhetoric used in reference to the Balfour Forest. While the planting of this forest was celebrated by Yosef Weitz of the JNF as “the work of Creation” (drawing on the same biblical concept, *b’reshit*, that Smolly used in his title),<sup>58</sup> the communication regarding the loss of trees due to a fire in 1936 adopted mourning symbols usually preserved for human death, echoing Hermoni’s view that “trees are like human beings” (Heb. 48): a picture of the burned trees of the Balfour Forest was followed by an announcement entitled *Yizkor*, the name of the traditional Jewish prayer for the dead; the announcement was printed within a black frame, as is the custom in the case of a person’s death (see **photo no. 4**). The personification of the burned trees evokes traditional images of Jewish martyrs burned by fire for their faith, and the collective commemoration of the trees is similar in style to the commemoration of patriotic death in the contemporary Hebrew culture.<sup>59</sup>

During the 1980s and early 1990s, forests and orchards emerged again as a major domain of conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, stirring up deep emotions on both sides. Tree planting was used by Israel and by the Jewish settlers as a visible marker of ownership over land as well as by Palestinians who wished to prevent further confiscation of lands by Israeli

עצים שרופים ביער בלפור



A photograph of the Balfour Forest with trees that were burned by Arabs in 1936. The text under the photo is entitled *Yizkor* (the traditional Jewish prayer for the dead) commemorates the burned trees and articulates a national pledge to cover the land with trees in response to this act. Reproduced from Nehemia Aloni, ed., *Tu-Bishvat*, Jerusalem, 1937, 17. Courtesy of the Aviezer Yellin Archives of Jewish Education in Israel and the Diaspora, Tel-Aviv University.

authorities. Shaul Ephraim Cohen, who studied planting patterns in the Jerusalem periphery, made the following observation:

Where the agriculture of the [Palestinian] village ended, it was met by young pines planted by the JNF. . . . A short distance from the last furrow of plowed dirt or row of olive trees, and often immediately adjacent to or even intermingled with them, were the first trees of a future forest. Further examination revealed an additional pattern. Where the JNF trees were somewhat recently planted, or other forms of Israeli presence had been initiated or expanded, there were signs of new or renewed use by the Palestinians—such as plowed but not yet planted fields, new saplings of olive and other fruits, or fencing and land reclamation.<sup>60</sup>

The strategy of tree planting triggered the counter-response of destruction of trees. The methods in this “tree-war” ranged from uprooting new saplings and cutting down older trees<sup>61</sup> to setting forests and fields on fire. In the summers of 1988 and 1989, the use of arson was particularly heavy, as it was embraced by the Intifada leadership and encouraged through the use of popular media.<sup>62</sup> The JNF referred to the proliferation of arson cases in its forests as “the Intifada against trees,” and declared a new campaign entitled “A Tree for a Tree” [*etz tabat etz*], borrowing from the biblical phrase of “an eye for an eye.” The campaign called for the replacement of a million burned trees by planting three million saplings, and the JNF encouraged the public to participate in the tree-planting ritual of *Tu Bishvat* 1989 to promote this afforestation project.<sup>63</sup>

The fires, as well as the JNF planting campaign, drew public attention to the national significance of forests. A newspaper article based on interviews with forest guards highlighted their devotion to their work and their awareness of its patriotic dimension, since “the forests are at the forefront of an historical struggle over land ownership.”<sup>64</sup> Perhaps the largest and most damaging fire triggered by arson occurred in the Camrel forests in September 1989, drawing hundreds of volunteers to fight it and large crowds of visitors who came to see the destroyed forest.<sup>65</sup> Israelis responded to those arson cases that were classified as “nationalistically motivated” with tremendous anger and moral outrage, and there were reports about avenging fire by fire.<sup>66</sup>

The reactions to the fire that severely damaged the Camrel forests in 1989 raised themes that had appeared in Smolly’s and Yehoshua’s literary works, and seem to continue their dialogue about the symbolic meaning of burning forests. Consider, for example, two opposing views that were published side by side in the same Israeli newspaper:



Poster warning against fires that damage crops, fields and forests. Courtesy of the Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

The horrible arson of the largest nature-reserve in Israel not only provides another proof for the PLO's double-talk and its lack of moderation, but also an example of a hatred toward the land [displayed] by the arsonists and their supporters. The irreversible destruction of the Carmel is not a protest against a foreign ruler and is not a violent objection to an occupier's luxurious civilization, but is rather a manifestation of a desire for destructiveness for its own sake. The readiness to demolish a unique landscape such as this bluntly shatters the myth that the Arabs belong to the place and we are like new Crusaders.<sup>97</sup>

While this writer interprets the Palestinians' fire as a display of their disregard for the country and its nature, and denies the possibility of political motivation, the other writer criticizes Israelis for "overreacting" to the burning forests when Palestinians suffer from injuries and deaths as a result of Israeli occupation:

This week newspapers cried over the fires in the Carmel forests in terms preserved for the worst national disasters. . . . In spite of the sorrow and the rage over the loss of a piece of forest, it should be noted that these responses



Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion planting in 1959 a tree in a forest named after Asaf Simhoni in Kibbutz Nahal Oz. Courtesy of the Jewish National Fund.



Jewish National Fund poster celebrating in 1954 the “redemption of the land from its desolation” by a group of Zionist workers. Courtesy of the Jewish National Fund.

reflect a certain moral numbness. . . . One ought to remember that from September 1 to the 19th, nineteen persons were killed in the territories, including six children. One ought to remember that scores of people have been injured. One ought to remember that for the parents of wounded children, their families, and their people, crashed bodies outweigh all the forests in the world. And even if we believe that in spite of everything trees deserve immunity, we stand on shaky grounds. Since the beginning of the Intifada, the army uprooted tens of thousands of trees. These were not barren, but were fruit-bearing trees. Hundreds of dunams were poisoned by settlers as punitive actions [against the Palestinians]. And for the landscape, it makes no difference whether a tree is burned by fire or uprooted by a tractor's arm.<sup>68</sup>

The interplay of history, literature, and politics around the issue of the fires is manifest in other responses as well. Alexander Zeid's experience of witnessing his crops set on fire by Arabs in 1929—the climax of Smolly's novel—is quoted by a newspaper article as an example of the Arabs' recurrent use of fire as a political weapon.<sup>69</sup> Another article, borrowing Yehoshua's title "Facing the Forests," addressed the ways in which historical reality and literature intersect in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. After describing the public response and her own grief over the loss of trees and animals in the Carmel fire, the writer adds:

Therefore, I was shocked when a wrinkled old man from the [Palestinian] village of Batir showed to a television crew olive trees that had been cut down, and could not comprehend why anyone would conspire against his beautiful old trees that were cut down by the army to prevent their use as a cover by those who throw stones . . . It appears that here, too, literature preceded reality. I felt as if I lived in a nightmare; that here, in front of my eyes, A. B. Yehoshua's story, *Facing the Forests*, is being recreated. No longer a nightmarish, fictitious story but a reality. And I wondered, what did the writer, who lives on Mount Carmel, think and feel when the forests were burning.<sup>70</sup>

The interaction of literature and politics around the issue of arson was also brought to the limelight when an Israeli military censor charged an Israeli Palestinian writer for incitement against the State. The writer, Ednan Fa'our, published a story about cats who sacrifice their lives by spreading fires tied to their tails as a revenge against a wicked Sheikh who took over their master's land. The charge of incitement to arson was later dropped by the State.<sup>71</sup> Reporting on this case, a known Israeli journalist pointed out the resemblance of Fa'our's story to the biblical narrative about Samson's

vengeful act of setting the Philistines' fields on fire through the use of foxes (*Judges* 15:4–5), and added that the censor's logic should have prohibited the inclusion of this text in an Arabic-language bible.<sup>72</sup>

The “literary fires” depict a transformed landscape that changes—at least temporarily—the political reality that it symbolizes. Like the broader framework of the conflict of which they are a part, these fires replace death by death and create new monuments to represent both. *The Founders* articulates the Israeli belief in the power of renewal that was clearly most pronounced during the Yishuv period. But *Facing the Forests* reveals a greater awareness that the possibility of renewal does not obliterate the past and that the archeology of memory in the symbolic landscapes of the country represent multiple roots and multiple monuments. Thus, the memory of destruction will always be imprinted on the landscape underneath the signs of renewal, whether it points to the ruins of an Arab village, or to the scars that the forest fires have left.<sup>73</sup> Yet the liberation of memory in the acknowledgment of these ruins and scars may contribute to the possibility of a peaceful coexistence of Israeli Jews and Palestinians.<sup>74</sup>

## NOTES

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1. The analogy between trees and children is a central theme in a short story, “Yom Huledet HaShkediya” [The Almond-Tree's Birthday], written by the famous writer of children's literature, Levin Kipinis. First published in *Gilyonot* 1 (1930): 25–27, this story was often reprinted in Tu Bishvat anthologies or textbooks for the first grades. See, for example, *Mikraot Yisrael* for the second grade, Z. Ariel, M. Blich, and N. Persky (eds.), (Tel-Aviv, 1960), 231–32. See also the story “HaTe'omot” [The Twins], *Ibid.*, 237–38. For a fuller discussion of the children-trees analogy, see Tsili Doleve-Gandelman, “The Symbolic Inscription of Zionist Ideology in the Space of Eretz Yisrael: Why the Native Israeli is Called Tsabar,” in Harvey E. Goldberg (ed.), *Judaism Viewed from Within and from Without* (Albany, NY, 1987), 257–84.

2. The quote is taken from the first brochure issued by the Association of Jewish Foresters in Palestine [*Agudat haYa'ar be'Eretz Yisrael*] which was founded in 1945,

marking 25 years of afforestation efforts (Yosef Weitz (ed.), *Ha-Ya'ar* [The Forest] (1947), 12). The participants noted the emergence of afforestation as a Jewish profession as a significant historical change in its own right (*Ibid.*, 41).

3. The Jewish National Fund was founded by the Fifth Congress of the World Zionist Organization in 1901 and gradually assumed the tasks of purchasing land in Palestine, improving the terrain for settlement purposes and advancing afforestation projects. On the concept of “redemption” as alluding to national revival through land purchase, see Shmuel Almog, “HaGe’ula ba’Retorika haTsiyonit” [Redemption in Zionist Rhetoric], in Ruth Kark (ed.), *Ge’ulat haKarka be’Eretz Yisrael* [Redemption of the Land in Eretz Israel] (Jerusalem, 1990), 13–32.

4. On other rituals connecting schools and the JNF, see Doleve-Gandelman, “The Symbolic Inscription of Zionist Ideology,” 260, 265–77. It is important to note that the JNF created a teachers’ committee and played a significant role in sponsoring children’s literature that was educational in its thrust. In some cases, the JNF commissioned the writing of literature that highlighted its activities. See, for example, the correspondence with Anda Pinkerfeld, who was commissioned to write a play on the JNF’s afforestation efforts for *Tu Bishvat* (11 Nov. 1936 and 20 Dec. 1936; The Central Zionist Archives, file KKL5/7622, the *Tu Bishvat* Project).

5. This popular image of the country’s forested landscape during antiquity obviously supports Zionist collective memory and ideology, but may not be as well-grounded in historical evidence. Similarly, the claim that all modern afforestation efforts are the product of Zionist activity ignores other factors, such as the afforestation policy of the British Mandatory authorities. See Yehuda Felix, “Al ha’Etz ve’haYa’ar be’Nofa haKadum shel ha’Aretz” [On the Tree and on the Ancient Landscape of the Country], *Teva va’Aretz* 8 (1966): 71–74; Nurit Kliot, “Idiologia ve’Yi’ur be’Yisrael: Ya’ar Ma’ase Adam be’Emtsa’ut haKeren haKayemet le’Yisrael” [Ideology and Afforestation in Israel: Man-Made Forests of the JNF], *Mehkarim be’Ge’ographia shel Eretz Yisrael* [Studies in the Geography of Israel], a *festschrift* for Professor Dov Nir (The Society for the Exploration of Eretz Israel and its Antiquities, 1992), 88, 91; and Nili Lifshitz and Gideon Bigar, “Mediniyut haYi’ur shel haMimshal haBriti be’Eretz Yisrael,” *Ofakim be’Ge’ografia* [Horizons in Geography], no. 40–41 (1994): 5–16.

6. Trees were a sign that a land was indeed in use. Ottoman law concerning land ownership even recognized the entitlement over trees that were planted on someone else’s property, if the owner did not interfere for three years (Shaul Ephraim Cohen, *The Politics of Planting: Israeli-Palestinian Competition for Control of Land in the Jerusalem Periphery* (Chicago, IL, 1993), 36–37. On the range of Zionist goals of the JNF afforestation project, see Avraham Granott, “Mediniyut haYi’ur be’Eretz Yisrael” [Jewish Afforestation Policy in Palestine], in his *Bi’Sedot haBinyan* [In the Building Field] (Jerusalem, 1951), 162–78, and Kliot, “Idiologia ve’Yi’ur be’Yisrael,” 88–100.

7. See Yosef Haim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle, WA, 1982).

8. For a more extensive discussion of the Zionist collective memory, see Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago, IL, 1995), 13–36.

9. The practice of naming forests after important historical figures associated with the Zionist revival began soon after the JNF began planting trees in Palestine. For example, “Hertzl Forest” was established following Hertzl’s death, and the planting of “Balfour Forest” began in 1928 (*HaEntsiklopedia haIvrit* [The Hebrew Encyclopedia] (Jerusalem, 1978), v30, 265; Weitz, “Ya’ar Balfour—Ben Eshim Shana [Balfour Forest Twenty Years Old], in *HaYa’ar*, 43.

10. On the commemoration of the Holocaust within the national framework, see James Young, “When a Day Remembers: A Performative History of Yom Ha-Shoah,” *History and Memory* 2(3) (1990): 54–75; Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*, 70–76, 192–95. Ruth Firer, *Sokhnim shel haHinukh haTsiyoni* [The Agents of Zionist Education] (Tel-Aviv, 1985), 101.

11. Quoted in Nahum Vermel and Baruch Ben-Yehuda, (eds.), *Mesibot le’Arvei Shabat u’Mo’ed le’Vatei Sefer ve’Hevrot No’ar* [Youth’s Parties on Sabbath Eve and Holidays for Schools and Youth Movements] (Tel-Aviv, 1957), 140. Interestingly, the “Forest of Martyred Children” is presented there, not only as a living memorial for the dead children, but also for the European forest that had tried to protect them and then died with them (Anda Amir Pinkerfeld, *Be’Sod Hasdei haYa’ar* [The Secret of the Forest’s Grace], *Ibid.*, 142).

12. See also my analysis of the Tel-Hai myth as a paradigmatic text of the pioneering narrative and its representation of “the end” in line with this emphasis on the success of the Zionist settlement. On the centrality of the theme of struggle against all odds, see also Nurit Gertz, *Shevuya ba’haloma: Mitosim ha’Tarbut haYisra’elit* [Captive of a Dream: National Myths in Israeli Culture] (Tel-Aviv, 1995), 13–34.

13. Gershon Shaked, “Livnot u’Lehibanot Ba: Al Roman haHityashvut” [To Build and to Be Rebuilt in It: On the Settlement Novel], in *The Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress for Jewish Studies* (1973), 517–27.

14. *Anshei Be’Reshit* was originally published by Shtibel (Warsaw) in 1933 and has had successive editions and printings in Hebrew and has been translated to several languages. References to the Hebrew text refer to the 12th edition published by Am Oved in 1973. References to the English text draw on Murray Roston’s translation, *Frontiersmen of Israel* (Tel Aviv, 1964), although I chose to use the more current English translation of the title, *The Founders*, as suggested by the 1973 Am Oved edition. Quotes and page numbers refer to the above English edition, except for cases where an important nuance of the original Hebrew was lost and therefore required some alteration. In those cases, I note “modified translation” and provide page references to both Hebrew and English versions.

15. A.B. Yehoshua’s “*Mul haYe’arot*” [Facing the Forests] was written in 1963 and published in a volume of the same title by HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 1968. Page references for the Hebrew text refer to Yehoshua’s anthology *Ad Horef 1974* [Until

Winter 1974) (Jerusalem, 1975), 92–122. References to the English translation by Miriam Arad relate to the English anthology of Yehoshua's stories, *The Continuing Silence of a Poet* (London, 1988), 203–36.

16. *The Founders* was well-received by the Hebrew youth as well as critics. See the reviews by Nahum Ish Gamzu in *Ba'Ma'ale*, Feb. 24 (1933): 7; Y. Ori in *Bustenai*, Apr. 26 (1933); Y. Burla in *Moznaim* 4(33) (1933): 12; Sh.R.P. in *Ketubim* 7(13) (2 Feb. 1933): 3; Avraham Breudes in *Davar*, 26 Adar 1933, 4; Uriya Feldman, *Ha'Aretz*, 24 Feb. 1933, 5; Ezra Reichert, *Do'ar haYom*, 3 Feb. 1933, 4. Outstanding within this context is Raznitsky's critique of the lack of any psychological depth in Smolly's portrayal of characters and the inappropriateness of the Robinson Crusoe model for the pioneers, *HaPoel haTsair* 26(21) (10 Mar. 1933): 13–14. Smolly received the Bialik Prize for Children's Literature for *The Founders* in 1936 and was awarded the Israel Prize for Literature in 1957. On the impact of the book on generations of Hebrew youth, see a special issue devoted to Smolly, *Sifrut Yeladim va'No'ar* II(4) (1976), and Uriel Offek, *Sifrut haYeladim haIvrit 1900–1948* v2 [Hebrew Children's Literature, 1900–48] (Tel-Aviv, 1988), 467. As Offek points out, “*anshei be'reshit*” has become so popular as a term, that it appears as a concept in Even-Shoshan's *HaMilon beHadash* v3 [The New Dictionary] (Tel-Aviv, 1988), 1243.

17. Baruch Kurzweil refers to Yehoshua as “the authentic representative of the young generation”; *Hipus haSifrut haIvrit* [In search of Hebrew literature] (Ramat-Gan, 1982), 307. *Facing the Forests* has received much critical consideration. For examples, see Gershon Shaked, *Gal Hadash ba'Siporet haIvrit* [New Wave in Hebrew Literature], 2nd edn. (Tel-Aviv, 1974); Yosef Ofir, “HaYa'ar ve'haEtsim,” *Alei Si'ab* Dec. (1977): 53–57; Nili Sadan-Loebenstein, *A.B. Yehoshua* (Tel-Aviv, 1981), 175–188; Nurit Gertz, “Sifrut, Hevra, Historia” [Literature, Society, and History], *Moznaim* 9 (1979): 422–32, and her *Hirbat Hiz'a ve'haBoker shele'Mohorat* [Generation Shift in Literary History: Hebrew Narrative Fiction in the Sixties] (Tel-Aviv, 1983), *in passim*; Gila Ramras-Rauch, *The Arab in Israeli Literature*, (Bloomington, IN, 1989), 129–140; Hanan Hever, “Minority Discourse of a National Majority: Israeli Fiction of the Early Sixties,” *Prooftexts* 10 (1990): 129–47.

18. For more critical reviews of *Facing the Forests*, see Mordekhai Shalev, “HaAravim ke'Fitaron Sifrut” [The Arabs as a Literary Solution], *Ha'Aretz*, 30 Sept. 1970, 50–51; B.Y. Michali, “Alegoria Kefuya be'Mul haYe'arot” [Forced Allegory in *Facing the Forests*], *Moznaim* 46(5–6) (1978): 382–93; Moshe Steiner, “HaKivun haNihilisti ba'Siporet haYisra'elit [The Nihilistic Orientation in Hebrew Fiction], in *HaTehiya haLe'umit be'Sifrutenu* [National Revival in Our Literature] (Cherikover, 1982), 141–52.

19. The only comparison between these two works that I have found is suggested by Yedida Itzhaki, *HaPesukim haSemuyim min haAyin: Al Yetsirat A.B. Yehoshua* [The Concealed Verses: Source Material in the Works of A.B. Yehoshua] (Ramat-Gan, 1992), 101–105.

20. *The Founders* borrows heavily from Alexander Zeid's settlement experience, but is ultimately presented as a work of fiction. (*Sifrut Yeladim va'No'ar* II(4)

(1976): 8, 18). Alexander Zeid was hired by the JNF to guard the forests of Sheikh Abreik and built his own farm there. In 1929, the Zeid family refused to leave its home and all their crops were burned down by Arabs. In spite of this setback, they refused to join one of the nearby settlements and remained in Sheikh Abreik. Zeid was later killed by Arabs in 1938 (Yaacov Shorer and Uri Shefer (eds.), *Givat Alonim—Tivon: Nof va'Adam* [Tivon, the Hill of Oaks: Landscape and People] (Jerusalem, Ministry of Education and Culture, 1990), 116–20). Smolly also translated and edited Zeid's diaries and published a book based on these entries (*Mi'Hayei Rishonim [From The Founders' Lives]* (Tel-Aviv, 1941), as well as a book devoted to Zeid's "legend" *Shomer Yisrael* [The Guard of Israel] (Tel-Aviv, 1970).

21. Generations of Israeli students read *The Founders* during the Yishuv and the early state periods, and it was still included in the Ministry of Education's list of recommended reading in the 1960s (*Davar* 1 Jan. 1966, 24). A special conference for 8th graders devoted to *The Founders* was held in 1965 (*Hed haHinukh*, 18 Feb. 1965), and a special issue devoted to Smolly in *Sifrut Yeladim va'No'ar* also includes guidelines for teaching the novel (II(4) (1976): 28–31).

22. The guard of *Facing the Forests* enters the forest alone; although Smolly's protagonist settles down in the forest with his wife and three children, their characters are underdeveloped. When other characters are introduced into these narratives, they remain marginal and are represented in relation to the guards and the settlement process.

23. On natural forests in the Carmel region, see Arye Yitzhaki (ed.) *Madrikh Yisrael* [A Guide to Israel] (Jerusalem, 1978), the volume on the Carmel and the Northern Valleys. In an interview in 1978, Smolly recalls: "When I came to the country, I walked from Jaffa to Jerusalem and I didn't see on the way anything but barren land, rocks, and stones, and occasionally a single old tree near some sheikh's grave." And he contrasts it with the possibility of being lost in the forests today (Naomi Gotkind, *Eretz Ye'arot Avotim: Siha im haSofer Eliezer Smolly* [The Land of Dense Forests: A Conversation with the Writer Eliezer Smolly], *HaTsofe* Jan. 20 (1978): 4. It is interesting also to compare the Smolly's literary depiction of Hermoni's excitement with the entry in Alexander Zeid's diary about his first encounter with the forest while walking with a friend. Zeid refers to his friend's excitement at the sight of the hills and the forest and does not reveal his own feelings at the moment (Smolly, *Mi'Hayei Rishonim*, 210).

24. On Smolly's love for nature that was installed during his childhood in the Ukraine, see *Sifrut va'No'ar* II(4) (1976): 8; see also Gotkind, *Eretz Ye'arot Avotim*. On the impact of European landscape imagery on Hebrew writers who grew up in villages, see Benjamin Harshav, *Language in Time of Revolution* (Berkeley, CA, 1993), 65.

25. When Galili, an old friend of Hermoni, urges him to leave the isolated frontier farm, he argues: "It is a desert [*midbar*] here and you'll have to be on your guard for many years to come" (57). At another point, some other Jewish visitors comment: "A queer place and queer people; who could settle in such a desert

[*midbar shemama*]” (Heb. 184, modified trans.). The interchangeability of “forest” and “desert” is also expressed in the references to Hermoni as both a “desert dweller” (Heb. 148 /Eng. 170) and a “forest dweller” (Heb. 166/Eng. 191).

26. That settlement implies the introduction of social order into nature becomes clear when the Hermoni family plants trees for the first time: Hermoni who supervises this ceremonial planting takes particular care to ascertain that the new trees will form a straight line (123).

27. This idea is a familiar theme in the literature and popular culture of the early pioneering period. See Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*, 24–29, and *passim*.

28. The allusion to Defoe’s famous character is made in the text by Hermoni’s friend who exclaims in wonder, “Just like Robinson Crusoes!” (60).

29. The influence of the American West is evident in the opening scene depicting the family arriving at the forest with a horse and a wagon (8). Later, the narrator explicitly states that Hermoni’s idea of individual farm is modeled after the American ranch (9). Ehud Ben-Ezer ascribes Smolly’s description of life in the forest to Henry Thoreau’s influence (“Anshei Be’Reshit me’et Eliezer Smolly” [Eliezer Smolly’s *The Founders*], *Ha’Aretz*, 18 May 1972, 18). Nurit Gertz suggests that the recurrent image of the lone settler in the settlement literature of the 1930s may function as a means of highlighting the theme of the few against many (Gertz, *Shevuya ba’Haloma*, 23).

30. Hermoni remembers that in his childhood he conformed to the image of the exilic Jew and was the object of repeated teasing by Gentiles for being a “Jewish coward” [*yehudon pahdan*] (58). This may also explain Hermoni’s harsh response to his own son, Eitan, when the boy showed signs of fear while being attacked by barking dogs. Eitan’s fear violated the expectations from a “native Hebrew” and may have been alarmingly too close to Hermoni’s own behavior as a child in exile.

31. Later, a traditional Jew, who is about to perform a funeral rite for someone who died at Hermoni’s farm, asks the latter if he has a *talit* [prayer shawl] at home. Embarrassed, Hermoni admits he does not own one.

32. The wish of HaShomer members and other Second Aliya settlers to become “Jewish Beduin” is clearly manifested in posed photos of the period. See also Itamar Even Zohar, “HaTsemiha ve’haHitgabshut shel Tarbut Ivrit mekomit ve’Yelidit be’Erets Yisrael, 1882–1948” [The Emergence of Native Hebrew Culture in Palestine], *Cathedra* 16 (July 1980): 165–204; Pesach Bar-Adon, “Be’Oholei Midbar: Mi’Reshimotav shel Ro’e Tson Ivri Bein Shivtei haBedu’im” [In Desert Tents: Notes of a Hebrew Shepherd among the Beduin], first published by Shtibl (Warsaw, 1934), and reissued by Kiryat Sefer (Tel-Aviv, 1981).

33. The reference to the Arab as speaking to the student through the fire also echoes a line from a popular song in which a person asks a lover to speak through flowers. Here, too, Yehoshua introduces a grotesque twist by applying this line to this situation.

34. On the issue of the guard’s calling, see also, Shalev, “HaAravim ke’Fitaron Sifrut,” and Hever, *Minority Discourse of a National Majority*, 134.

35. Finding ancient relics during preparations for construction or while working in the fields is part of reality in Israel, but it is also used as a Zionist literary trope. It is interesting to note here that Alexander Zeid's son mentions the discovery of relics as an example of Smolly's embellishment of his family stories (relics were indeed found after the publication of the novel). See Giora Zeid, "Eliezer Smolly—haMoreh ve'haYadid" [Eliezer Smolly, Teacher and Friend], in *Sifrut Yeladim va'No'ar* II(4) (1976): 18. Meyer Levin's movie, *My Father's House*, based on his novel by this name, ends with the same trope while the foundations of a new Zionist settlement are being laid.

36. The rising tensions between Jews and Arabs indeed led to Zeid's assassination in 1938, but this happened a few years after the publication of *The Founders*.

37. Earlier in the novel, Hermoni rejects Abu Naomi's offer to share the revenues from the exploitation of the forest and defines his refusal in moral terms: "It is a sin to watch them destroy the forest and keep quiet, *because trees are like human beings*" (Heb. 48, my trans; emphasis added).

38. Given the allusion to the ancient forest as "the shiny, green temple" (Heb. 99), the devastation the fire caused to it is reminiscent of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, thus emphasizing the significance attached to the forest as a sacred site.

39. See my discussion of the Tel-Hai commemorative narrative and its strategies of highlighting the battle and Trumpeldor's heroic death while obscuring the settlers' withdrawal from the settlement at the end of that day (*Recovered Roots*, 161–63, 222–27). Gertz notes that the settlement literature of the 1930s often ends with the settler's death and that this ending ultimately serves to highlight the values for which the settler has sacrificed his life (Gertz, *Shevuya be'Haloma*, 24–26).

40. When he sees the deserted plow, Eitan cries out, "They have no use for a plow . . . They don't know how to plow—they only know how to destroy!" [Heb. 213/Eng. 249]. Smolly used the same theme in his story about Trumpeldor, who saves a plow overlooked by Arabs who looted a deserted Jewish settlement (*HaMahresha* [The Plow], in Hayim Harari (ed.), *Mo'adim le'Simha* [Festivals and Holidays] (Jerusalem, 1941) 188–90).

41. Yitzhak Lamdan, "Masada," *Hedim* (1927), reprinted by Dvir (Tel-Aviv, 1972); English translation by Leon I. Yudkin in *Issac Lamdan: A Study in Twentieth Century Hebrew Poetry* (Ithaca, NY, 1971), 199–234.

42. Without this subordination to the master Zionist narrative, one can also interpret Hermoni's last statement as quite discouraging, pointing out an essentially cyclical pattern that undermines any historical progress, forcing the Jews to always return to the point of beginning. Clearly, Smolly did not intend his readers to interpret Hermoni's message in this way.

43. The "Jerusalemite Pine" [*pinus halepnesis*] is indigenous to the land, whereas the taller pine [*pinus pinea*] is not. Most pine forests in Israel, however, are the product of the JNF's massive afforestation efforts (Yosef Weitz, *HaYa'ar ve'haYi'ur be'Yisrael* (Tel-Aviv, 1970), 1–3, 7–11; Azarya Alon, *Etz va'si'ab* [Trees, Bushes and Creepers of Israel] (The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, 1991), 14–15).

44. In this respect, *Facing the Forests* reminds one of the comic scene in the movie “Sallah,” where the JNF repeats naming ceremonies for the same forest, leading tourists to believe that the forest is named according to their choice.

45. The coercive role of the forest and the liberating function of the fire are evident in the observation that “the earth is casting its shackles” (232). On the dual roles of the forest and the fire in the story, see Shaked, *Gal Hadash ba’Siporet haIvrit*, 138–39; Gertz, “Sifrut, Hevra, Historia,” 423.

46. See Shalev’s interpretation of *Facing the Forests* as an Oedipal struggle embodying the figure of the Jewish Father (Shalev, “HaAravim ke’Fitaron Sifrut”).

47. On the guard’s desire for the fire as a product his inner state of confusion, see Sadan-Loebenstein, *A.B. Yehoshua*, 175–88. On the student’s lack of moral sensitivity or real cooperation with the Arab, see also Hever, “Minority Discourse of a National Majority,” 133. It would be interesting to compare Yehoshua’s portrayal of the guard’s fantasy about fire with Binyamin Tamuz’s story “HaPardes” [The Orchard] and its depiction of the Jewish brother’s fantasy to burn the orchard.

48. I disagree with those critics who see the guard as being transformed as a result of the fire experience, highlighting his memory gain (Ofir, “HaYa’ar ve’haEtsim,” 54–55; Ramras-Rauch, *The Arab in Israeli Literature*, 130, 138–39). The guard already displays an historical memory in the forest prior to the fire, as his stories to the Arab about the Crusades demonstrate (229).

49. See also Gertz, *Hirbat Hiz’a*, 78, 91–92.

50. For the argument that Yehoshua gave the Arab a central role in his fiction, see Michali, “Alegoria Kefuya be’Mul haYe’arot,” 386–91. Other critics point out that the Arab’s character is not fully developed, but, rather, is introduced into the story to mirror some aspects of the Israeli Jew’s identity. See Shalev, “HaAravim ke’Fitaron Sifrut”; Shimon Levi, “Shevuyim be’Vidayon,” *Moznaim* 57(5–6) (1983), 73; and Ehud Ben-Ezer, *Be’Moledet haGa’agu’im haMenugadim: HaAravi ba’Sifrut haIvrit* [The Arab in Israeli Fiction: An Anthology] (Tel-Aviv, 1992), 33.

51. Quoted in Ramras-Rauch, *The Arab in Israeli Fiction*, 140.

52. A.B. Yehoshua, *Bizechut HaNormaliyut* [Between Right and Right] (Tel-Aviv, 1980), 75.

53. For a more elaborate discussion of the fictional representation of a minority’s view, see Hever, “Minority Discourse of a National Majority.” Hever sees the arson, as well as the shedding of words (i.e., Hebrew), as aggressive acts of deterritorialization of Zionist ideology and politics. Yehoshua himself explained the aggressive nature of his fiction as manifestations of repressed guilt toward the Palestinians. See Shabtai Tevet, “Tehushat haAshma Poretset be’Agresiviyut” [Guilt Feelings Expressed through Aggression], *Ha’Aretz*, 24 May 1968, 18, 23. See also Mordekhai Shilgi, “HaAravi hallem ve’haStudent haAlim ke’Hasrei Pitaron [The Mute Arab and the Violent Student without a Solution], *Gazit* 30(5–8) (1973), 19.

54. The symbolic association of the fate of the Israeli trees with the suffering of Jews in exile is also manifested in the description of the first tree burning as “a tree wrapped in prayer . . . going through its hour of judgment and surrendering its spirit” (231), thus recreating it in the traditional image of an exilic Jewish martyr.

55. In contrast to the scene of destroyed trees, the guard fantasizes that the forest “had never burnt down but had simply pulled up its roots and gone off on a journey, far off on a journey, far off to the sea . . .” (232). This fantasy does not even allow the forest to have a monument within the landscape, and creates an analogy between it and the medieval Crusaders, who came and then went away on a long journey overseas.

56. Gertz, *Hirbat Hizma*, 92. Gertz also provides other examples of circular temporal ordering of the narrative in Yehoshua’s and Amos Oz’s fiction.

57. A JNF circular states that 54,000 trees were destroyed in JNF forests during 1936 (circular no. 20/97 of Dec. 15, 1936, file KKL5/7622, the *Tu-Bishvat Project*, in the Central Zionist Archives). See also Weitz, *HaYa’ar*, 593.

58. Weitz, “Ya’ar Balfour—Ben Esrim Shana” [Balfour Forest is Twenty Years Old], in *HaYa’ar*, 43.

59. For the announcement on the death of the trees in the Balfour Forest, see Nehemia Aloni (ed.), *Tu-Bishvat* (Jerusalem, 1937), 17 (The Aviezer Yellin Archives of Jewish Education in Israel and the Diaspora, Tel-Aviv University). On the Israeli patterns of anonymous or numerical commemorations, see Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*, 45.

60. Cohen, *The Politics of Planting*, 11.

61. In the “tree wars” between Israelis and Palestinians, Palestinian Human Rights Information Center of Jerusalem quotes 92,000 uprooted trees between 8 December 1987 and 30 September 1990 (a flyer entitled “Israeli Violations of Palestinian Rights,” n.d.). A study quoted by *Ha’Aretz* estimates the number of trees uprooted by Israelis in the West Bank to be around 170,000 from the outbreak of the Intifada in December 1987 until December 1994. In the Galilee, 5,000 of the JNF’s eucalyptus saplings planted on land in dispute between the JNF and Kfar Kanna were uprooted during one night. The uprooting of about 3,000 olive trees that once belonged to the village of Ktannah (many of them replanted in other sites) made Ktannah emerge as a Palestinian symbol for Israeli destruction of Palestinian trees (Cohen, *The Politics of Planting*, 122–29).

62. See *Yediot Abronot*, 12 June 1988, 1, 13; Nurit Kliot and Gideon Kedar, “Srefot Ya’ar ve’Hatsatot ve’Gormeihen haEnoshiyim be’Yisrael [Forest Fires and their Human Factors in Israel], *Ofakim be’Ge’ografya* [Horizons in Geography] nos. 35–36 (1992): 29–30. An Israeli paper announced that arson was one of the tests of candidates for Palestinian “terrorist organizations” (*Ha’Aretz*, 21 July 1988, 3). See also Cohen, *The Politics of Planting*, 5, 123–26.

63. Moshe Rivlin of the JNF was quoted in *HaDo’ar*, 17 June 1988, 3. For the JNF campaign, see its public announcements in *Ha’Aretz*, 18 January 1989, 7, and *Davar*, 20 January 1989, 3.

64. See “*Shomrei haYemarot*” [The Forest Guards], *Davar*, 19 January 1989, 10. Cohen notes that this campaign revived earlier patterns of the Yishuv period to increase afforestation efforts in response to the deliberate destruction of forests by Arabs. The campaign resulted also in an increase in donations to the JNF (*The Politics of Planting*, 124–25).

65. *Yediot Ahronot*, 21 September 1989, 1–6; Heda Boshes, “Mul haYe’arot” [Facing the Forests], *Ha’Aretz*, 26 September 1989, 13. The campaign to rehabilitate the Carmel Forests was called the “Carmel Fund” (*Davar*, 24 September 1989, 1–2). It was reported to have collected 6 million Israeli shekels (*Yediot Ahronot*, 24 May 1990, 24–25).

66. Cohen gives the example of arson fires in lands belonging to the village of Anabta in the West Bank, where settlers prevented fire fighters from putting the fire out (*The Politics of Planting*, 123, 126).

67. Amos Carmel, “HaYeladim ve’haYa’ar” [The Children and the Forest], *Yediot Ahronot*, 25 September 1989, 19.

68. Yaron London, “Adam—ve’Lo Etz haSade” [A Person and not a Tree], *Yediot Ahronot*, 25 September 1989, 19.

69. Ron Ben-Yishai, “Hatsatot: Shita Yedu’a u’Mukeret ba’Aretz Me’az Reshit haHityashvut haYehudit be’Eretz Yisrael” [Arson: A Known and Familiar Method since the Beginning of Jewish Settlement in Palestine], *Yediot Ahronot*, 14 June 1988, 2.

70. Heda Boshes, “Mul haYe’arot,” 13.

71. Michael Handelsaltz, “Orekh Yarkhon Aravi le’Din al’i’haGashat Sipur le’Tsenzura” [Editor of an Arabic Magazine Sued for Failing to Submit a Children’s Story to the Censor], *Ha’Aretz*, 13 July 1992. The State later dropped this charge (*Ha’Aretz*, 30 November 1992). I would like to thank Michael Handelsaltz for these references.

72. Tom Segev “Ma’ase ba’Aravi she’Lo Anas Yalda” [The Story of an Arab Who Did not Rape a Girl], *Ha’Aretz*, 11 December 1992.

73. The scar, the result of the “searing burn in the guts of the land” that the fire creates, also appears in Zali Gurevitch’s poem No. 2 in *Yabasha* [Land] (Tel-Aviv, 1989), 11–12. The following excerpt has been translated by Gabriel Levin:

“The JNF  
will replant saplings  
  
will grow hair  
a new forest will rise  
on the scar  
  
a new forest will cover  
the baldness of the scorched  
land  
  
consumed by fire . . .

74. It is interesting to quote at this juncture Azmi Bishara’s statement about the issue of memory: “The [Israeli Palestinian] villages that are no longer in existence were pushed out of the domain of public space, out of the signs of memory. They

received new names of Hebrew settlements, yet they have left some traces in these settlements, such as cactus plants or stone-fences, or bricks of ruined houses. . . . The Arab villages have no monuments or memorials. There will be no equality and no historical compromise until they will receive a tombstone.” (“Bein Makom le’Merhav “[Between Place and Space], *Studio* 37 (1992): 6). See also Jonathan Boyarin’s article, “Horvot ba’aliya li’Yerushalayim” [Ruins, Mounting toward Jerusalem], in the same issue.