

One of the organisers of the trip, Michal Schwartz, translated into Hebrew.

'In 1948, following the fall of Lubia, I fled with my mother from village to village until we reached Ein-El-Hilwe refugee camp in Lebanon. I was seven years old at the time. My father stayed behind with his sister in Arrabeh, and would return to the village from time to time to tend his olive trees, hoping that the villagers would be able to return. He was in Arrabeh when the first Israeli census was taken and was thus able to obtain an Israeli identity card. Eventually, he was also able to obtain an identity card for my mother, and we returned to Israel in 1951.

'But no one was allowed to return to Hittin, and my family settled in Arrabeh. Over the years, the Israel Lands Authority applied continual pressure to my father to sell his land, but he repeatedly refused. When my brother applied to university in Israel, he was told that he would be unable to register unless my father sold the land. Rather than do so, he chose to study abroad.' Siham's parents died in a road accident while returning from the airport after saying goodbye to their son.

The lands that were once part of the village, and the olive trees that we passed on our way there, have now been taken over by the Israel Lands Authority. But the villagers still own the land and have ownership documents to prove it.

While Siham was talking, I became increasingly aware of a buzz of voices, and suddenly the other women (whom Siham had brought with her) began clamouring to speak. They were all born there and they all had a story to tell. One by one they stood up, middle-aged women, grandmothers, wearing coloured headscarves, and for the first time a group of Jewish Israeli women had taken the trouble to listen to them.

I listened, spellbound.

'I was eight years old when my father and mother took me from our village...'

'I was pregnant when we left and gave birth to

a baby girl on our journey to Ein El-Hilwe... I sat on the roadside, beneath a tree ... my mother helped me give birth. We called the child Hajjar.'

I thought of Hagar, the wife of Abraham, expelled from her home with her child, Ishmael, and left to die in the desert.

'We were bombed from an aeroplane...'

'We had nothing to eat ... we cried ... we were hungry...'

'We took our goats with us ... we drank their milk ... we had nothing else...'

'The Israeli government offered us monetary compensation in return for our land but we wouldn't take it. We want to return to our village, to our lands.'

We were joined by a group of men. They too were from the village. One man was carrying ownership documents and British Mandate maps of the village, drawn from aerial photographs in 1946. He pointed out the school, the mosque, the spring, the houses. Every villager, he said, knows exactly where their house used to stand. 'I studied in the school behind the mosque - I was in Grade 4 when we fled.'

On the way back to Jerusalem, we passed the site of Lubia, of which nothing at all remains. A forest has been planted over the site of the town; it's called 'Ya-ar Lavi'. How odd. Nine years ago, on one of those pre-university pick-oranges-and-pretend-you're-a-pioneer programmes, I lived on Kibbutz Lavi, which was established in 1949 on lands belonging to Lubia. I knew nothing about Lubia except its name, and didn't think to ask. Besides, I doubt that any of the Kibbutzniks would have told me any more.

We stopped at Umm El-Fahm, Kalansuwa, Ramle ... one by one the women left the bus, some with babies, saying 'Ma-i-salameh', 'Come and visit us', 'Hayah na'im ve-ta'im' (it was pleasant and tasty). I was left with a sense of great solidarity with the Palestinian women; a feeling that, despite past atrocities, there is hope for the future.

Learning to live without Zionism

David Rosenberg continues the debate on Jews and socialism in the 90s.

In *Reaching the Parts* (JS24), Adam Lent provides a thought-provoking way into the tactical and strategic debate with which Jewish socialists must engage if we are to expand our influence and meet our potential.

I have no argument with his overall perspective of targeting broader but well-defined sections of

our community through specific campaigning initiatives (democracy and pluralism in the community, support for a Labour electoral victory, support for Palestinian rights and anti-racism), but in some cases he underestimates the difficulties, while in others his answers are either undeveloped or extremely questionable.

These issues are, of course, linked. Adam perceives the need for the 're-creation of a progressive Jewish identity' but doesn't dwell on the form or content of this identity or the means by which it will be nurtured and maintained. He recognises that Jewish socialist values must be fought for in a war of position against current hegemonic ideologies (presumably political conservatism, religious orthodoxy and assumed Zionism), but he fails to define them precisely, and it shows.

As a result he says nothing about religious forces at a time when Jewish and other religious fundamentalists are rapidly expanding their outreach programmes and overlapping with part of our perceived constituencies. He responds to the Zionist agenda only within a narrow Middle Eastern context. And even in these narrow terms I take issue with his prescription. He argues that there is little room for anti-Zionism in the Jewish community and that our Middle East campaigning should focus instead on providing practical factual information on the Palestinian reality.

The relative isolation of vocal Jewish anti-Zionists in Britain, even since the Lebanon War, might appear to support Adam's view, although the ease with which some of them have been labelled 'self-haters', in truth, might tell us as much about the inadequacies of their brands of anti-Zionism as about the cynical manipulation of defence mechanisms by the powers-that-be in our community. But we should beware of generalising about the appropriateness of anti-Zionism as such.

I take the view that unless and until Jews release themselves from their dependence on Zionism for their overall sense of identity and security and hope for the future, they will continue to feel personally undermined by ideological attacks on Israel, however justifiable, and their response to information about the plight of Palestinians will be limited to a few twinges of conscience and expressions of anguish, rather than serious understanding and practical solidarity.

This does not mean that we should hold back our supply of information until people are ready to receive it. We must raise these matters now but in the context of a broader strategy aimed at breaking the stranglehold of Zionism over our community. However, given the hallowed status extended to the term 'Zionism' and by implication 'Zionists', Adam may be right to suggest that a bald appeal for the adoption of anti-Zionism will have little success. Adam suggests lowering the profile of such appeals. I believe on the contrary that such work should be high profile but take account of language and approach.

As a general rule I mistrust dramatic conversions, and all my political experience in the Jewish community tells me that people do not stop being Zionists overnight. It is a gradual process, full of

contradictions, in which they lose confidence in various tenets of Zionism, some aspects more quickly than others. In my experience people are more amenable to reflecting on the distorted relationship between the Israeli state and diaspora communities – the clash between Israel's warfare and diaspora welfare needs – than in confronting the abiding myth of 'Israel as refuge'. It also matters where and when. The last two years have seen a resurgence of Jewish involvement in anti-racist and anti-fascist activities, especially among Jewish youth, in many areas. The 'Israel as refuge' myth will loom increasingly as a contradiction in their fight for an end to racism in Britain and the creation of a society where all minorities can live in harmony. Our dispute with the refuge myth might be taken up with such people while they are mobilised. Raising it in the abstract, in a context when there are justifiable fears about the future of different Jewish communities around the world, will not cut much ice.

Perhaps the Jewish Socialists' Group has suffered for operating ideologically in advance of the context in which our arguments might be most sympathetically received. Again this is not an argument for diluting or jettisoning aspects of our ideology. Rather it should tell us to think back a step or two and imagine how our constituency might be mobilised into the areas of activity in which they can convincingly receive and respond to our ideas.

And so we return to the re-creation of a progressive Jewish identity. The JSG's work on reclaiming Yiddish culture has paid dividends in terms of encouraging a wider Yiddish renaissance in London, in strengthening the bonds between our members and Jewish labour movement history, and in solidifying their sense of ethnic identity. But now we must address a new generation who feel Jewish but are even further removed from their Yiddish roots and in many ways further detached from organised Jewish life, and who have also been the target of the most sustained campaigns by religious and Zionist ideologues trying to rescue and reinvigorate their anachronistic and backward world views. As a result of processes within society at large they have a keener sense of Britain as a multi-ethnic society but a cloudy perception of their position within it.

The strengthening of a modern, secular, humanistic Jewish cultural life in Britain can provide a bedrock upon which our identified but floating constituencies can touch base. Elements of this cultural life already exist both in remnant and embryo form, but atomised. It would be in the long-term interests of Jewish socialists if this goal was given concrete institutional meaning. Our narrow traditionalist opponents would have much to lose from such a development. How do we do it? I hope that the debate can now turn to address this question.



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