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The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Messianic Left

Abstract

This article examines some of the epistemological and socio-political issues that have emerged in the context of reflecting on the relationship between the Israeli left and messianic ideology. The old messianic vision finds its materialization in the revolutionary idea of establishing a new order, an order that includes all Jewish political, social, economic and religious spheres of life. The Israeli left tried to deal with and create coalitions with Jewish messianism even though its leaders pretended to be committed to a post-colonial ideology as well as to fundamental elements of classical Marxist ideology. The on-going crisis of the Israeli left demonstrates the need to reinvent socialism in the spirit of liberal democratic ideals as an old-new answer to the problems that torment Israeli society today.

Messianism plays a unique role in all contemporary ideologies. In Israel, it has polarized the socio-political scene and is fuelled with controversy that resonates culturally and historically. A cry for battles stands at one end of the ideological spectrum of messianism; at the other, lies an object of scorn. In any case, an understanding of the significance of messianism is necessary in forming a clear picture of the spiritual ambience of Israeli society today. All the way through revealing the socio-political facets of this phenomenon, the major argument of this study is that the idea of messianism, together with the idea of nationalism, was and continues to be a mechanism of solidarity and a means for building a society according to common vision. Although the left eradicates messianic nationalism as a destructive vision that leads towards catastrophic deeds, its destructive impact on every domain of Israeli reality is noticeable. On the other side, the left occasionally makes use of latent and sometimes observable messianic ideas in order to provide their young society of emigrants and sons of emigrants a safe feeling of being at home as a means of mutual identification and a way of creating an authentic need for the majority of society.

The left – understood both historically and politically – refers to the segment of the political spectrum typically associated with several strains of socialism, Marxism, social democracy and liberalism (in the American form) which oppose right-wing politics. Notwithstanding the different types leftist ideology in the western world, the subject matter of this article is the particular phenomena of the Israeli left and its distinctive ties to the messianic ideas.

One well-known feature of the Western left is its ambiguous attitude towards every type of majority. Conceiving the majority per se as being corrupt and destructive, in the last decades the left has not manifested an interest in achieving a majority. On the other hand, in spite of everything, a majority is a mandate for building a society, a mandate that includes messianic nationalism that, in certain aspects, binds the majority as a society. Without a majority, no political act is possible, and without wanting a majority,

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Key words:

Messianism, The Left, Marxism, Zionism, Israeli contemporary politics, Socio-democracy, The Oslo Agreement, Shimon Peres

no political thoughts and deeds are possible. The left loses its political character when it minimizes the importance of politics and social struggles and turns to the sphere of interests. In addition, it relinquishes hope of constituting a majority or, at least, being a major force in society. The left lost its bond with the majority when it became dominated by the concepts of Western Marxism (although not the concept of proletariat). Formally, this form of Marxism is associated with moral and political philosophy, aesthetics or arts, culture or fashion but not with the idea of changing the world, well popular among the first disciples of Marx.

Messianism has proven itself to be a vital powerful force in the history of modern Israeli society and also serves as a powerful tool for the Israeli left which made use of it in order to revive and reinforce degenerating classical Marxism. In the past, messianism was considered a means of oppression by the classical Marxist and anti-colonialist movement; a source of the false-consciousness in many societies. On the other hand, messianism was a latent force in the modern history of the Jewish people, but in the last thirty years, parallel to the awakening of national-religious ideology, it has become an essential factor of the left and social-democratic emergence in the Israeli society.

The crises of Marxist ideology in the last decades have given the impression that its theory has been unable to accommodate itself with the major contemporary social-cultural schools of thought, i.e. postmodernism, deconstructivism and poststructuralism. Such an assumption is echoed in the triumph of liberal democracy and the domination of globalization, thus bearing a resemblance with *The End of History* (Fukuyama, 1992). On the other hand, Marxist footprints are to be found in all modern and postmodern movements, either in a latent form or in the dialectics of minor versus major visible in recent times and in the last theories formulated. As far as the special status and the conditions and the requirements of the left are to be analyzed, it is quite obvious that the left has been empowered by Marxism; Marxism has been invested in it and the powerful resonance of its theories are to be found in all contemporary social-cultural trends and schools of thought.

Even though the left has constantly looked for different social-cultural alliances and tried to broaden its socio-political scope, new members have appeared and taken to its worldview as well as in its praxis. At the end of 19th century and during the 20th century, when the left was at a crossroad, the decision had been taken to add another pillar to the great house of the left, to be precise: the pillar of messianism. At various times and at different occasions, the left adopted the ideas of messianism for the same reasons: (1) the lost of vision and its own distrust and disbelief in its own ideology and (2) the yearning for building a large socio-political consensus. In the case of Israeli society, it is not clear if socialism includes the messianic vision as one of its elements or if the messianic terminology and principles overcome the socialist ideology. Such a problematic approach of the left towards the messianic idea as well as the loss of its exclusive socio-political character in Israeli society should be analyzed carefully.

The Western left will never completely abandon Marxism, not for the reason that it could not adapt itself to the changing realities, but just the opposite: the left will never offer any reliable alternative to Marxism. Consequently, as soon as the left goes through a radical metamorphosis by allowing other ideologies or principles to attain a hold, there will be a strong effect on its Marxist fundamentals. In such a case, there is a loss of identity and goals. Such a challenging relationship as the one between Marxism and the messianic ideas should be closely examined by using synthesized sociological tools.

By using such tools, the goal of this study is to analyze this given phenomena,

namely the messianism and the Israeli socio-political left and the part they play in several trends of sociology and cultural criticism. In the course of this analysis (that makes use of various trends in sociology and cultural criticism), we examine and discuss the impact of the left and of the messianic ideas and their prima-facie dominance of contemporary development.

Every social-cultural analysis ought to start with the present and its dominating school of thought. Nowadays, every socio-cultural analysis should most certainly start with postmodernism. The fashionable methods of postmodernism bring about the dissolutive effects of deconstructionism and relativism. As a result, all contemporary cultural contexts, the socio-political included, cause a general historical obliviousness. At this juncture, revisionism flourishes; whole historical narratives feature a denial of the stability of the past, of its reality, apart from what the historian chooses to make of it, and thus of any objective truth about the past (Himmelfarb, 1993).

The assumptions of postmodernism draw our attention on the creation of the politics of identification along with the attacks on the subject itself. It also deconstructs the logic of domination. These suppositions evoke the new relativism so that, along with the Nietzschean extravagance, they have merely extended their exposure of the hollowness of the claims to objectivity to science, scientific thought and socio-political facts. Via this form of analysis, objectivity is seen as a mask for the exercise of power and thus provides a natural vehicle for the expression of class hatred. As a result, postmodernism's appeal comes from its being an other in the sequence of all unmasking strategies that offer a way to criticize the intellectual efforts of others not by engaging with them on the ground, but by diagnosing them from a superior vantage point and charging them with inadequate self-awareness.

For instance, the major postmodern attack on rationality launched against its Enlightenment's roots, lead to modernity, dehumanization and totalitarianism. This social-cultural critique of assistance facilitates the awakening and the instigation of the messianism in its modern and post-modern facets.

An additional sociological tradition that evokes the elucidation of the left messianism is of those believing that social systems have the need for some consensus story to link the historical bonds of their members and thereby provide a sense of collective identity. They have found a ground in the works of Emile Durkheim (1964). This tradition focuses on how social solidarity is obtained through cultural transmission of fundamental religious or political narratives, or through rituals and tradition. Typically, these narratives talk about ancestors who epitomized social ideals, legitimate contemporary causes or who provide benchmarks against which we understand ourselves, and our shared endeavors. In the case of the messianic left, ancient utopian prophetic visions together with modern socialist, prophetic foresight and socio-political analyses created the basis for a collective identify and collective cause.

Sociologists of the Marxist tradition approach false temporal consciousness as being one of the most powerful tools of oppression. Their methodology, in part, is designed to unmask the elites' uses of the past to legitimate their dominance and to create a false sense of historical progress in quality of life and social justice in the minds of the exploited. The explanation of all ostensibly rational forms of thought in terms of social influences is a generalization of the old Marxist of ideology, by which moral principles were all debunked as rationalizations of class interests.

One of the major fields of critique of the neo-Marxists versus postmodern tradition is reflected in the field of Cultural Studies. This very intellectual field of study con-

centrates itself on cultural issues as media, texts, metaphors, identities, art works, etc., but not with social-economical-political issues as inequality, poverty, political struggle, religious movements or ideologies or social solidarity. The postmodern culture praises the idea of freedom as a value in and of itself, based on its definition as a defense against any form of intervention. For the socialists, freedom cannot be conceived by a negative definition; on the contrary, freedom also means to be in control, to be free from history and not to be a slave to social context and an economic order.

Critical theory offers a sociological method that shows the relationships between ideas and theoretical positions and their social environment. Thus, it attempts to contextualize or historicize ideas in terms of their roots and social processes. In accord with critical theory, social theories are thus forms of social practice, which reproduce dominant forms of social activity. Traditional theory reproduces uncritically the existing society, while critical theory articulates activity to transform society (Horkheimer, 1972).

The boundaries between the various realms of existence are just artificial and abstract right through their reproduction in the fragmentation of the disciplinary sciences. In order to pay particular attention to theoretical knowledge and political issues, a supradisciplinary research method is required. This dialectical method of presentation demonstrates in concrete detail the interconnections and conflicts between the primary areas of the socio-historical system that constitutes the context and framework for thought and action. Social theory involves construction of a model of current society and a demonstration of the fundamental connections, conflicts and contradictions among the various domains of the current socio-political system. In sum, critical theory provides analyses of a mediated social totality that describes various relations among spheres of reality, rather than reducing all of society to political ideology, fundamentalistic religiosity or dynamics of economy.

At a later stage of the growth of sociological methods, a new complete method appears - critical reflection. Critical thinking is stimulated by the use of contradiction; critical reflection is evoked through making use of contradiction as an intellectual challenge that frequently results in a new way of seeing things. As a consequence, the path of dialectical contradiction leads inevitably to truth. The social-epistemological challenge appears as a result of the exposure to the ability to stimulate others to become critically reflective.

Critical reflection takes on new objects of concern; explicitly it turns upon itself. In this study, the messianic encounter of history should be treated by a critically reflected method. Walter Benjamin gave a secular shape to messianism as well as to the apocalypse, through his reflections and illuminations. This offers us the possibility of reintroducing an emancipatory point of reference just like the possibility of instating a genuinely classless society. Through critical reflection "nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history". To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past - which is to say that only for a redeemed mankind is its past citable in all its moments. Each moment it has lived becomes a citation *à l'ordre du jour* - and that day is Judgment Day" (Benjamin, 1977, p. 256).

By means of critical reflection, the past is not put out of sight or buried, but stands in need of reawaking. This is precisely where the theological moment enters and converges with the modernist emphasis on montage and the unconscious. In this way, Ernst Bloch endows us with a systematic examination and critical reflection of culture and society while the Marxist critique of ideology illuminates our entire reality. Bloch's dialectical analysis offers us a method by which the past which illuminates the present

can guide us to a better future. History is not only just an arsenal of past events but it is a reservoir of possibilities for future action. Our momentary reality is thus constituted by latency and tendency: the unrealized potentialities that are latent in the present and the signs and foreshowing that indicate the tendency of the direction and movement of the present into future (Bloch, 1986).

Beyond everything else, Bloch's philosophy is built on the Principle of Hope, a philosophy oriented towards the future, a dreaming forward, a projection of a vision of a future kingdom of freedom. By projecting the future in the light of what is, what has been and what could be, people engage themselves in the creative practice that will produce a world in which all humans are at home and realize humanity's deepest dreams. Accordingly, culture ranges for Bloch from an ideal type of pure ideology to purely non-ideological emancipatory culture.

All these socio-cultural methodological tools should aid us in the analysis of the performance of the left on the Israeli scene, together with its vibrant companion, i.e. the messianic vision. Consequently, in order to understand the major role of the messianic vision as well as the socialist ideology in Jewish history, the historical background of each ideology and its historical development must be brought to light. Subsequently, the present study starts from the presupposition that almost every ideology created or adopted by the Jewish people in the 19th and 20th centuries was intrinsically messianic, seeking the complete rectification of all the perversities of the present and the realization of all the good it so eagerly desires. The old messianic vision finds its materialization in the revolutionary idea of establishing a new order, an order that includes all Jewish political, social, economic and religious spheres of life. The revolutionary messianic socialists try to convince themselves and their public that the existing order is rotten to the core and must be overthrown in favor of a more desirable order. In addition, the Jewish intellectuals in Europe were the main protagonists of historical messianism, emphasizing the development of neo-Romanticism as necessary for the rebirth of Jewish messianism in its restitutive, utopian version.

Modern messianism made a start together with the emergence of secular Judaism in the 19th and 20th century – a development triggered by a reaction to weaknesses in the Jewish existence in Diaspora. Its appearance marked a fundamentally new phase in Jewish history, prompting secular Jews to champion a new reference for Jewish identity. Swept into the vortex of change that suggested new options opened by the advent of modern times, Jews pushed for major changes based on old messianic yearnings. The same messianic longings that had propelled Jews into exile in the Diaspora in the wake of revolt served to draw Jews out from the Diaspora and provided a renewed sense of belonging and concrete longing for their homeland. Yet, transposed within a secular context, messianic hopes have always had a universal as well as a particular Jewish significance (Schweid, 1985).

The Zionist movement is not only a manifestation of Jewish nationalism: it represents the idea that only the Jewish community can preserve and carry on the unique character of the Land of Israel. For this reason, every Jew must take upon himself the holy mission of becoming a Zionist and join in the struggle to realize that ideology of a Jewish homeland. Indeed, the dream for a Jewish homeland and the birth of the State of Israel came from a messianic idea of turning back history to create a different future for the new Jew. The Jewish-Zionist left as the force of national revival was indeed messianic. But, this was a messianism that, like the right-wing one, concerned the national and not the human-social sphere, as it is required of leftist ideology. This was a kind of

reversed mirror image of rightist nationalism in liberal wrapping. At this point in the history of the Jewish-Zionism left, the seed of inner discrepancy was disseminated. This resulted in failure precisely because it invested all its energies in blurring the differences between itself and the right, instead of emphasizing them and fighting for them.

Zionist national identity glorified the concept of “normalization” of the Jewish people, expressly despising the life of the Diaspora, which was deemed an unhealthy anomaly - a parasitic existence and pathological state. The roots of the Jewish malady were to be found in the nature of Diaspora’s life: constant wandering and always being the unbidden guest, subject to harsh socioeconomic straights, exposed to the anti-Semitic sentiment of the gentiles and subject to hostile treatment (Avineri, 1981). The foundations of a radically different society emerged in the Land of Israel with the revival of Hebrew culture and Hebrew society. These served as a core element that linked the disintegrating life of the Diaspora with all its contradictions to the new society being crystallized in the old-new homeland of the Jews.

Aspirations to become a non-Jew, that is, one who did not bear any resemblance to the traditional image of a Jew, was woven into the fabric of prevailing Zionist ideology, part of the cultural identity and way of life of the individual and of collectivity. The socialist Zionists incorporate the ideology of traditional Marxism that tends to view every socio-political process from a transhistorical perspective - class struggle within the framework of economic determinism - and to deal with the bourgeoisie by creating its own Socialist Man. Disassociation from the image of the Wandering Jew was an integral part of rejection of the Diaspora. The act of wandering received a negative connotation, while the act of settlement in the Land of Israel became a positive move. The Wandering Jew was perceived as an “other” - a person of the past who would be replaced by another designation coined by Zionist ideology - Ha’Yehudi He’chadash (the New Jew) - a figure who would fight the “otherness” of the Wandering Jew through a search for self-recognition and adoption of a new identity that would make him “normal” or “a liken to all the nations” - in essence, a battle against the “otherness” of the Jew. The New Jew has qualities similar to Socialist Man and turns out to be an authentic person, except for the messianic constituent, as Y.D. Berkovitz described him in his novel *Days of the Messiah* (Berkovitz, 1964).

The socio-political worldview of the founding fathers of the State of Israel was mostly a pragmatic one, except that the vision of creating a new-old society and the establishment of the state of Israel after 2000 years had been publicly proclaimed as a messianic interference and a miracle phenomenon. Committed to the ideal of a Jewish homeland, the “Fathers of Nation” rejected the religious doctrine of a personal Messiah while seeing a Jewish state as the fulfillment of the messianic dream. The moment when State of Israel was founded, the messianic vision had been realized and its fervent declaration justified the established socio-political pragmatism. In any case, the founders did not even attempt to identify the foundation of the State of Israel with “the beginning of redemption”. To confuse the present state of Israeli society with the kingdom of God seems to be ridiculous. The construction of the Israeli society has been comprehended as a long course of action, a developmental process and a vital one. Both are far away from the theory of the messianic age which requires a divine summing-up of the whole human enterprise on a transmigrated earth.

At a later stage, the messianic impulse was no longer needed to overthrow the existing order of the state and its society in order to build and shape new socio-political order. As a result, every ideology, including messianism, ought to be replaced by deeds,

by pragmatic decisions, by socio-political facts. It was agreed on by the establishment that historically, messianism, which is essentially a religious and spiritual phenomenon, ought to be removed out-of-the-way of the socialist/liberal systems of thought and their pragmatic implementations in the socio-political reality. The establishment preferred to eradicate the messianists gently: not to attack them head on, but mainly to ignore them and to ensure that they were kept away from any job within the establishment. The strong impact of Marxist ideology on Israeli society contributes to the condemnation of every religious value or impulse that takes the form of a myth and is designed to keep the masses enslaved or to blind them to their own enormous strength and their ability to take their dismal fate into their own hands and so to stave off the revolution.

The struggle between the religious versus socialist-secular ideology developed a certain dialectic that, in fact, imposes a common source to both counterparties: messianic thought and ground principles infiltrate the premises of both sides. Religious messianism carried on with its traditional beliefs while the socialist-secular counter partner developed certain beliefs such as “laws of history”, “progress”, “ultimate development” and “peace and prosperity for all forever”. In this way God’s laws and their total fulfillment at the end of days have been transformed, in the course of a certain ideological metamorphosis, in the course of history that ought to develop according to its own hidden principles. It was said that if the ways of God are unknown to humans so are historical processes; the course of history, just as the acts of God, follow their own inner logic. God’s ways are declared to be by secular prophets the laws of nature, but they have certain teleological ends.

Comprehending the laws of nature, of history or of society reveals a hidden reality in which every situation or historical moment is just a transition to a higher one. In this way history will reach its goals and the existing paradoxes, perversions and misery of the present will disappear. History’s goal is progressing, putting an end to social conflicts, exploitation, servitude, alienation and injustice, and to wars between peoples. All this will happen, of course, in the wake of a great revolutionary upheaval that will enable the oppressed to overcome their oppressors and lay down a just and harmonious new order. After that, mankind will be able to draw far more efficiently upon nature’s resources and use them to find solutions to all suffering, the source of which lies in want and in human arrogance. Messianism in this case is an infinite process of striving for an ideal, the ideal of progress. Such an ideal understood as *le fin de l’histoire* seems to be a kind of perfection that cannot come from human endeavor alone. For this reason God or any other supreme natural being must set the goal of progress and guarantee that man will reach it in the future.

The hegemony of the socialist Zionist ideology and its materialistic-dialectic myths, as we have seen, has had a great impact on the national religious messianism in the last thirty years. The most outstanding expression of this was the revival of the idea that people ought to take an independent, national, historical and social initiative by returning to Zion, settling all over the Land of Israel, and establishing a new legal, social and political infrastructure. All these deeds should be the first steps to be taken in order to greet the miraculous redemption which would come in response to this awakening. These changes in the prescribed means of hastening the redemption presuppose a transformation in the description of the messianic vision. The old religious messianic dream of the complete revival of the Jewish People was modified towards a national culture that would incorporate all elements of the social-cultural secular Marxist Zionism. So it happens that the common denominator of Marxist Zionism and National Zionism is the

same, that is to say the messianic inspiration and vision.

The combination of strong national feelings and religious orthodox extremisms results in two forms of modern Jewish messianism: the national-religious Zionism of the extreme Gush Emunim (Block of The Faithful) and the Lubavitch movement, which, although worlds apart and different in content, still fit the tradition or notion of messianism as a particular expression of extreme eschatological religiosity. The religious leaders of these movements have proclaimed that the messianic process of redemption of the Jewish people has begun and Jews have an essential role to play in this process. The most important religious imperative that every Jew must fulfill is the settling of the entire land of Israel. They have pointed to a number of signs of the messianic period that had been predicted in sacred writings: the fertility of the land, the ingathering of the Jews from all parts of the world, the foundation for an independent state, Israel, and the conquest of the city of Jerusalem. Disasters and catastrophes such as the Holocaust and the Arab-Israeli wars, as well as the continuous terror exercised by Palestine, are seen as the "birth pangs of the Messiah". What's more, they maintain that the Jewish people is able to reduce these "birth pangs" if they take their part in the act of redemption.

These religious messianic movements belong to the extreme right wing of Israeli society and their followers practice various rituals that, according to their worldview, will help the Messiah proclaim his appearance in the Land of Israel. In spite of this phenomenon of national religious messianism, this study maintains that the left wing followers (many of whom are secular liberals in every domain of life, with the exception of their belief in the end days vision and teleology) are different from their right wing Israeli counterparts. Interestingly, their structural vision also includes the messianic component. The endeavor to create a new reality in the Middle East, to develop new relationships with the entire Islamic World and Arab countries, i.e. a new Middle East – all these could be characterized as a messianic vision in a very secular socio-political and economic outward manner.

In the last thirty years, in Israel the left was and still is preoccupied mostly with its identity, vision and perspectives and to a lesser extent with deeds of gaining the majority. These problems to preoccupy the left resemble what goes on in national-religious opponents: the harder it is, the more absurd it is, the more people believe in it. Accordingly, for instance, it happened that peace has been transformed from a reasonable arrangement that is supposed to prevent violence between nations, into a concept of messianic deliverance. Such quests for salvation have readily recognized their socio-political power, so that these whole epistemological formations and its social implementations turn out to be at the heart of the left's ideology and its genuine operational program.

The left has always proposed programs of final settlement, programs that their counter-partners could neither accept nor comprehend, for how can the end of days be realized here and now. As a result, the left finds itself in a tragic-comic position of contemplating and anticipating messianic expectations regarding peace, and after facing reality, is experiencing either messianic disappointment or messianic reinforcement. In the last thirty years, the left has awoken from its nationalist aspirations. By examining its own colonial state of affairs, the left looks back in anger towards its own chauvinism, racism and abhorrence of the Other. So, the intellectual Jewish messianism and libertarian utopianism has replaced classical socialism and Marxism.

The unique and the impossible situation of the left in Israel has been exposed by many of its socialist leaders. Yossi Beilin, a key figure in the Oslo Agreements and the

present leader of a left-wing party proclaims loudly and clearly that socialism and Zionism cannot share the same abode. "This is a rare case in which a Jewish society arose out of practically nothing. These were ideal laboratory conditions for the socialist movement. Some of the socialists who came to Palestine hesitated between realizing socialism in Europe, immigrating to the United States or coming to the Land of Israel. They wanted to integrate in this country, bringing to it the socialist perception that spoke of a normal Jewish life in a country with a Jewish majority. Zionism and socialism interwoven - is that all possible? It would appear that these are two contradictory directions. It is very difficult to lead a national struggle against an enemy and to believe in class solidarity at the same time. This means that the working class in both peoples must evince solidarity in face of capitalism in the two nations. In this respect, and in many other respects, the story of Zionist socialism in the Land of Israel is the story of the impossible." (Beilin, 1999, p. 87)

The Israeli left did try to deal with, and create coalitions with Jewish messianism even though its leaders pretended to be committed to Post-Colonial ideology as well as to major elements of classical Marxist ideology. The hopelessness and unfeasibility of the left that does not rest on a closed ideology but on involvement, respect for the confusing nature of reality, the integration of ways of thinking and feeling and a desire for good ideas that do not necessarily go together, create a new platform for the postmodern left. This postmodern left revitalizes (in a latent form) certain anarchist tendencies such as those exhibited by Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig and Gerhard Scholem together with anarchist anti-authoritarian Marxists and Utopists such as Ernst Bloch and Erich Fromm.

Another faction of the messianic left was and still is celebrating the difficulties of true reality because they are unable to separate the wheat from the chaff: at certain moments they repeatedly declare that it has been discovered what the "real" left consists of. At that stage, the left is not preoccupied with doing new deeds or proposing new initiatives, but is engaged instead in setting moral ambushes for every follower and supporter per se: whose spirit has fallen and whose has not; who is still a part of the "authentic" left and was always known to be weak? The metaphor that is used to describe this typical situation of the left is also a Biblical one: it gives the people of the left the Job-like pleasure of sitting around the tribal fire, rolling around in the dust, scratching their sores, for the reason that their reality is so miserable and totally hopeless.

Israeli contemporary socio-cultural history is full of examples about the ideological coalition between socialist, globalization and messianists' ideas. Walter Benjamin's reflections and illuminations on messianism as well as apocalypse, in the course of their secular shape, found their best example in one of the major leaders of the Israeli left, Shimon Peres. Consider some quotations by Shimon Peres (former Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, Defense Minister and at the moment the Minister of Kadima Party), after the Oslo Agreement exposed certain prophetic visions and messianic secular temptations that the end of days are here and now:

"The Trojan Horse of war is obsolete."

"War, as a method of conducting human affairs, is in its death throes."

"The hunting season has ended in history."

"The conflicts shaping up as our century nears its close will be over the content of civilization, not of territory."

"We are at the watershed. Our region is going through a period of transition. The dark days are at an end; the shadows of its path are lengthening. The twilight of wars is still red with blood, yet its sunset is inevitable and imminent" (Peres, 1993).

"Israelis and Palestinians must live side by side as good neighbors. I feel we have to help the Palestinians to build a state of their own. If Israel wants to have a hundred percent security, then we have to provide them with a hundred percent freedom. To make that possible, Palestine must be a modern, educated, prosperous, and democratic state." (Peres, 1998).

It is quite clear that the concept of time employed in these sentences is secular-messianic. It is a transcendental time that sets up the vision of eternal peace, prosperity and well-being. Reality is not any given authenticity but a visionary future which contradicts the present misery. Such statements which intended to shape public opinion in favor of supporting the Oslo Peace Accord and later peace talks with the Palestinians and other Arab countries seem to be closer to the words of the Prophet Isaiah than to typical socialist leaders. The vision of friendly cooperation on economic, technological, scientific and social base, a new brave reality that will bring a period of harmony between the Arab Nations and Israel, seems to be a part of messianic visions that can be found in the Middle East.

These examples expose the ideology of the messianic left. Because these ideas were the leading ones during the last years, the collapse of the Oslo Agreements, the despair of the Israeli public, the continuous bloodshed and terror, all created a general atmosphere that blames the Israeli left for the crashing down to earth of its visionary reality. The high expectations that the left leaders deliver to the general public, as the slogan of "Peace Now!" i.e. peace under any circumstances in its immature and pitiable form, has caused serious damage to the left. Naming those murdered by various acts of "peace offerings" to terror was a misuse of mystical terminology by the leaders of the left to such an extent that the peace process that had collapsed at the time was not in vain.

The leaders of the left decided that the goal of both sides, Israeli and Palestinians was to create a New World Order on the ashes of the old one. The descriptions of the New World Order as realized in the Middle East are visionary and include messianic components. The Middle East is a region where the first glimmerings of harmony for a religion whose bloody, intractable conflicts between Arab and Jew had outlived hot and cold wars alike to become an inescapable, insoluble fact of life in our modern age. Shimon Peres has called for nothing less than a total transvaluation of our thinking about the future of the Middle East. Peres gives us a compelling vision of the future of his religion in the Middle East. He sees a reconstructed Middle East, free of the conflicts that plagued it in the past. In his view, it is a new Middle East ready and willing to take its place in a new era - an era that will not tolerate backwardness or ignorance. He sees a social and economic revival fueled by the billions and billions of dollars wasted for decades on defense. And he offers a no less cogent analysis of how peace can be achieved. He seeks nothing short of an historic new chapter between two peoples to end hundreds of years of hostility and to begin hundred of years of peace and understanding. The New Middle East is a blueprint for the dawning of a New Age. Peres' books are a visionary manifesto of current events (Peres, 1998).

But the totality of such visionary descriptions of the Middle East is limited to theoretical implications and thus is just a utopian plan. The socio-political terminology of peace agreements includes certain messianic components that are far away from any Real Politic or pragmatic compromises. The demand for an end to the conflict and finality of claims are terms that do not impose any clear practical implementations but only the end of the day's arrangements in our time. Such terminology reflects the left's hidden worldview premises because through its usage aspects of the colonial ideology and colo-

nial ambitions of the right wing are included in its visions of changing the whole reality of the Middle East. The whole Middle East must be adopted by the Arab states and societies. The leaders of the left have developed the promises of wonderful plans based on pie-in-the-sky assumptions in a messianic ideological milieu. Unfortunately, it is far away from any real politic philosophy and distances itself even farther from Marxist systematic thought.

Every disagreement or contradiction to such visionary plans would receive answers such as, "It's a changed world and like many of us, you are thinking in the past." In these cases, the left confuses a final victory with a temporary respite, and it makes a mistake if it assumes that the current moratorium on force will last. Therefore, it is far less clear up to now whether Israel's doves (left wing) will be able to transform the momentary resuscitation of legitimacy by the general public into lasting political support that will sweep them back into power. The blemish of the failed Oslo process and the blame for the outbreak of the first and the second Intifada is an albatross for Israeli peaceniks and there is no indication that they will be able to make it go away.

The messianic visions of the Israeli left did not incorporate the moral force of Marxism and the insights of socialist movements, both intellectual and political, that could constitute a gradual socio-political change in the Middle East. The left is driven by a messianic impulse and tries to achieve too much under its theoretical umbrella. The new approaches towards creating a global liberal democracy, in particular, do not fit the socio-political and religious traditions of this area. Furthermore, the messianic vision of the left gives rise to the inevitable crucial question: is the left able to identify with what is called the peace camp? In other words, can they relate to what the rest of the world considers a leftist ideology, or should they integrate the liberal and national-messianic ideologies in order to get hold of the general public? Being a leftist, exactly like being a rightist, means holding a complete worldview that relates to broad aspects of human life and cannot be reduced to or discussed only in a Marxist perspective, even one so critical to our existence in the immediate range.

Indeed, the left should not be detached from the social-economic view, which entails at its base the Marxist decisive vision of the victory, one way or another, in the battle between socialism and capitalism. On the other hand, the high influence of the bourgeoisie and the intellectuals on the left ideology and praxis continue to be the major factor of the left's socio-economic policy. For this reason, in Israeli reality, the left is destined to get caught up in errors such as adopting messianic visions and ignoring the necessity for continuing the battle on the ideological plane.

The Israeli left - or more precisely, the Jewish-Zionist left - derives precisely from the fact that it has ignored the necessity to continue the battle in the ideological realm, because, most regrettably, it is not a left at all but rather a social-democratic reflection of a bourgeois-liberal worldview. In other words, it is impossible to understand the situation of the Jewish-Zionist left in Israel without pointing out the inherent internal historical contradiction. This paralyzes it a priori and neutralizes any of its possibilities to become a true left, as long as there is not an end to national-colonial phase that has gradually become nationalistic in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Messianism could have a positive manifestation as a utopian surplus that has the potential to project long-term goals for the individual or the entire society, or a political practice that provides alternatives to the miserable status quo. As a far seeing and future oriented ideology, as Ernst Bloch points out, Marxism as well as the contemporary left ought to include certain utopian elements in its ideology. Authentic Marxist issues such

as social-economical-political inequality, poverty, social justice, political struggle, social solidarity, etc, however, must balance these elements. Every ideology and utopia is often permeated with ideological mystifications but they should not dominate their agenda and lose sight of reality. This would allow the socialist idea to flourish in a similar structural form as the messianic vision, in the same way as Gustav Landauer envisioned it at the beginning of the 20th century: "Everyone who believes in socialism must see it as is an attempt to create a new reality by virtue of a certain ideal. Socialism is a cultural movement, a war for beauty, for greatness, for the spiritual plenty of nations. Anyone who does not see socialism as having evolved over hundreds and thousands of years, as the continuation of the movement of a long and difficult history, does not know what its nature is. The politicians who act in the spirit of the times cannot be socialists. The socialist perceives the completeness of society and the past; he feels and knows where we have come from and in accordance with this, determines where we are going. What we call socialism in this context is not socialism at all" (Landauer, 1978, p. 37).

The crisis of the Israeli left demonstrates the need to reinvent socialism in the spirit of liberal democratic ideals as an old-new answer to the problems that torment Israeli and Jewish society today. This does not require the invention of an entirely new form of socialism or Marxism for there are early strands of socialistic thought that can be revived. In view of this, messianism can also turn into a kind of corrective messianism when it is consolidated into a socialist ideology and takes on the urgency of an effort to stave off disaster. Messianism could then be a general consent to relinquish absolute ideals as the greatest good and finality as it points to an ideal whose achievement means redemption from apocalyptic visions and application towards a pragmatic attitude. But, this will not be easy because as Israelis increasingly question the moral validity of their national enterprise, new ideas justifying the continued existence of the Jewish state and the ideals of the Israeli society are strikingly absent in public debate.

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