Religion of politics in Israel

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CIVIL RELIGION in Israel has undergone at least three phases of formation: the first one, which defined the cultural and political identity of the first settlement prior to the birth of the State (May 1948), took largely place under the sign of the political labor vocabulary, or, in any case, of the world of labor; the second one (still expressed by the labor government) is characterized by the definition of the primacy of the State as economic category, but also as cultural agent; the third one occurred in the course of the seventies, subsequent to the Six Day War, and heralds a cultural-political period in which the vocabulary of religious tradition came into conflict with the modernization and laicization processes of society;[1] this is the still predominant phase that marks, as it has not yet found stability, the general crisis of the Israeli society.

Religion of politics. A definition

As Emilio Gentile specifies, political religion and civil religion put themselves inside a modern phenomenon: the religion of politics. Religion of politics, as Gentile (2001, p. XI-XII) states more precisely, is a particular form of sacralization of politics

> that is expressed in the era of modernity and is verified when the political dimension, after having conquered its institutional autonomy with regard to traditional religion, acquires its own religious dimension, in the sense that it assumes a character of sacrality of itself, until claiming the prerogative of defining the meaning and the fundamental purpose of human existence, at least in this world, for the individual and collectivity.

And concludes:

> When this happens, we are experiencing the formation of a religion of politics, whereby religion is construed as a system of beliefs, myths, rites and symbols that interpret and define the meaning and the purpose of human existence, making the destiny of the individual and of the collectivity depend on their subordination under a supreme entity.

Therefrom, two currents of religions of politics stem - "civil religions" and "political religions". More precisely: civil religion is "the conceptual category in which we classify the sacralization forms of a political system that guarantees the plurality of ideas, free competition for the exercise of power and the revocability of the governors on the part of the governed by means of peaceful and constitutional methods ". Vice-versa, political religion is "the sacralization of a political system based on the irrevocable monopoly of power over the ideological

monism, over mandatory and unconditional subordination of the individual and collectivity under its code of commands". (ibidem, p. XIII-XIV)

Emilio Gentile underlines how, in the case of Israel, the transition from the dimension of the civil religion to the political religion corresponds to a transition to which may experiences of new post-colonial States are inherent: the fundament of collective identity around a charismatic figure (in the case of Israel, David Ben Gurion); the adoption of symbols and rites, beliefs and myths by means of which an idea of "pertinence" is built, but also the adherence to the process of national identity measured, the definition of a historical past through which prescriptive collective identity is granted also to those that subsequently adhere to the experience of the new State.[2] (cf. ibidem, p.185-8).

Such past coincided, for a long time, in the history of the Israeli society, with the social prehistory of the State and, thus, identified with the history of the settlement and production process that, mainly between the 1910s and the 1930s, laid the cultural premises and social and economic bases of the State. However, slowly, during the 1960s and mainly in the 1970s, the center of the identity profile of the country changed. It is the construction of the memory of the Shoah not only as a re-memorization process, but, mainly, as a representation that defines a new phase and, more generally, offers a face to a political religion that characterizes the Hebrew world, the Israeli world and the world of the diaspora. As a consequence, the intensification of a retrograde Hebraism is seen during the second half of the 1970s, which is consolidated from the 1980s on, with retrograde phenomena towards orthodoxy that superpose a memory of a Yiddischkeit annihilated or dissolved by the Shoah and that feed on the Shoah.

For now, we will limit ourselves to that first series of observations, even if I return to the relationship nature between civil religion e political religion in Israel successively with some observations.

The crisis of the current Israeli society

What kind of crisis crosses the Israeli society? According to historian Shlomo Sand (2006), who tried to examine the idea of nation and cultural debate in the civil and cultural history of Israel, the Israeli crisis is an identity crisis. Sand develops two different discussion levels: the first one concerns to the history of the intellectual groups and of the relation that the intellectuals had with the political class in Israel since the times of the Mandate until today; the second one concerns to the fact that, as basis for this research, a cultural analysis of a political crisis is possible not only when considering a sociology of the intellectuals, but also the history of the culture as a productive place of the historical identity of a collectivity in a place. The invitation is not generic. Sand accentuates the instruments that have allowed for the construction of a collective ethos in the reality of the Jews during the Mandate era and, then, after the foundation of the State of Israel: language, literature forms, archeology, relation with nature.
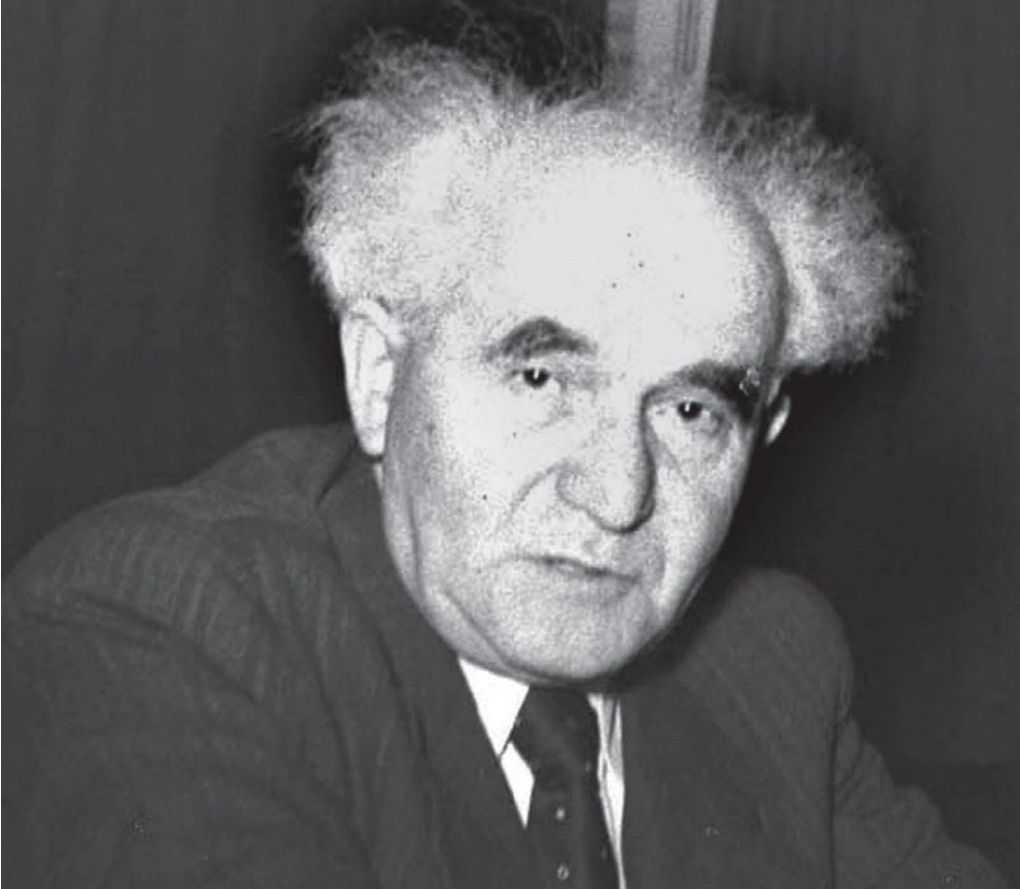
David Ben-Gurion (1886-1973), on December 1st, 1947, during the 28th anniversary of Histadrut – the first Union Central of Palestine -, in the city of Tel-Aviv, Israel.

For Sand (2006, p. 248 et seqq.), the Israeli political, social and cultural scenario undergoes a radical constitutional crisis, and the discussion caused by the new historians on the birth of the State constitutes one of its significant traits.

In order to explain the sense of that discussion, it can be considered that the Israeli crisis is a consequence of the end or of the eclipse of the communitarian dream that should have represented the moment of salvation and that, however, proved incapable of fulfilling the promise. It is not like that, or, in any case, it is not only about a slow dissolution of the communitarian idea. If the current Israeli reality represented such parabola, it would be sufficient to become aware that the pauperism and communitarian dream of the "Judaic elites" of the first 25 years of the twentieth century metabolized the very dissolution in the light of success: i.e., the crisis of society itself would be caused not so much by a failed implementation, but by an implemented incarnation of the dream that would lead to the annulment of the austere assumptions of the model of social life.[3] The crisis is, therefore, a crisis of "implementation", and the problem is in name of what that bet with history – more frequently, this "anti-historic" or counter-historic act – can maintain its basis.

It would be possible to measure the macroscopic datum of the crisis by comparatively assessing the process of the entering and exiting migration flows, since at least a decade. In the moment in which the exit flows of a social and political reality with a high degree of involvement, based on conviction processes (as in the case of Israel), an important turnover process starts to express itself,[4] which indicates that the model has undergone metamorphoses inherent to its original pact and to its physiognomy. That is, what is being discussed are its very fundaments.

The entry and exit flows line out the cultural physiognomy of a society, but also indicate the appearance of socially differentiated questions. The entry flows occur still following a strongly motivated communitarian claim; the exit flows indicate a progressive behavior secularization process, but also a constant crisis of the "de-ideologizing" of the State.

Such social dynamics implies a transformation of the socially existing reality and, at the same time, leaves the successive adherence and deception process unchanged, or the decrease of the participative enthusiasm ratio. Such oscillating movement has a precise fundament that consists in the difference between the community of our dreams and the real existing community. As sociologist Sygmunt Bauman (2001, p. 6) observes:

> A collectivity that intends to be the incarnated community, the dream come true, and that in the name of the good that requires an unconditioned loyalty and considers any other behavior an unforgivable act of treason. The 'real existing community' would, if it achieved our participation, require absolute obedience in exchange for the services provided or that are promised to be provided. Do you want security? Give your freedom up, or at least a good share of it. Do you want tranquility? Do not trust anybody outside the community. Do you want reciprocal comprehension? Do not talk to strangers and do not use foreign languages. Do you want to try that convenient feeling of an intimate family environment? Install an alarm at the house-door and a camera system in the courtyard. Do you want to feel safe and sound? Do not let strangers enter and avoid, on your part, strange behavior and bizarre thoughts. Do you want warmth? Do not get close to the windows and do not dare open them.

However, Bauman continues: "The problem is that if that advice is followed and the windows are closed, the air of the inside soon becomes bad and eventually unbreathable". The exit flow indicates a profound innovation factor in Israeli society, in view of the fact that it is no longer the newcomers that predominantly leave – i.e. those that are not able to face and accept the requirements of extremely inclusive social cohesion capable of breaking the individual and private diaphragm in the name of a public ethos. Quite the contrary, in a great extent it is the children of the second or even third generation that leave. Therein, the structural data of the Israeli crisis is measured.[5] To understand it, the cultural profile from which such model originated, about a century ago, needs to be reconsidered.

In the origin of the modern Hebrew situation and of the secularization process that characterizes it – to which the Zionist project and the civil religion that such project rouses originally allude – is a new relation with the history and a volunteer challenge of the condition of diaspora. Both the version suggested by the Zionism and the version of the Hebrew political directions of central and Eastern Europe, as the one that characterizes the contemporary Hebrew religious radicalisms are based on a common aspect: the rejection of the history of the Jews of the diaspora – that is, a rejection of the history of the Jews. This is substituted and overlapped by a praxis that should found a new Hebrew history.[6] Its presupposition is the ex-novo rebirth of the identity itself.

The fundamental components of the Israeli "civil religion"

There are several symptoms that, in the last thirty years, question the structural elements of the original Israeli civil religion. One of them concerns to the organization of the civic calendar. The inclusion of a partition of the time structured or marked in the theological or religious calendar. This does not only cause an organization different from the weekly work rhythm, but a new translation, within the productive temporal cycle, of the religious or symbolical meaning of the rhythms of the holidays.

The Hebrew holidays included in a cycle with theological bases are translated or understood mainly as nature-related holidays (germination, fructification, harvest, sowing). Or interpreted as historical moments of the fight for freedom, that is, as events for a "national history".

This aspect begins to be in crisis at the moment in which not only the question of Israeli citizenship explodes with regard to traditional Hebrew culture, but also denounces an initial deficit in the civil religion of the times of the Mandate. Actually, originally, the identity model, defined around a socialist-type work ethics, regarded the theological question as marginal and, therefore, delegated the administration to a center of "priests" as a conservative datum.

In other words, the new reality did not consider that a new version of the religious identity itself was necessary. And this in the name of the fact that it was regarded as expression of an archaic survival. The sphere of the sacred connected to the environment of the ritual was, therefore, regarded as a residual element, in a tradition in which that last characteristic constitutes the imposition of the sacred and not a simple accident.

That view provides the continuity for two opposite, but functional aspects: the first one included the religious culture of the foundation group as a single culture of the Hebrew cultural history; the second one presumed that that identity could not be the subject matter of a contract.

The first form of the Israeli identity crisis is the result of a double phenomenon: on the one hand side, the purpose of the equalitarian-social political model of the worker as "New Jew", worker as opposed to the diaspora Jew engaged in distribution professions;[7] on the other hand, the crisis of a

cultural identity connected to the social ideal in which the religious element constitutes a plea of a mythogenic or ethic nature, but centralized in a determined sacerdotal hierarchy or in a hierarchy regarding the administration of the sacred.

The second example of the crisis has a character that only partly derives from the first aspect. Starting in the second half of the seventies, the balance between immigration and emigration in Israel starts to reverse - which implies that the State does not constitute a value by itself anymore, neither as hypothesis of conservation nor as political form of aggregation upon which a new identity is defined. (Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992, p. 271-5)

In the origin of that second phenomenon, there is a redefinition of the military ethic as part of the citizenship, that is, the conviction that not only the one that is not a citizen that has not served in the army, who has not provided "a service", but that, as basis for the military action, there is always an obligation. In modern Hebrew, this concept is called "Toar ha-nesheck" (literally: "purity of the weapons"), and indicates not only a human relation with the arms – that is, that a soldier-citizen is, above all, a citizen -, but also a function of the army as defense machine. (cf. Horowitz & Kimmerling, 1974, p. 262-76; Prior, 1999, p. 204-10)

But if those elements in any way can be received as de-structuring elements of a course of identity that is developed during at least three generations, it is also true that nowadays all elements that had been latent in the formation of the historically given civil religion need to be redesigned and need to be reconstructed.

About the concept of civil religion

A first evident form of the crisis of the Israeli civil religion explodes during the seventies and concretizes itself in the government shift from labor to nationalist ideas. With such shift, a change in the Israeli political and civil life is certainly expressed: cultural and political subjects and agents, marginalized for a long time or non-founders, start to occupy the center of the scene and, thus, remarkably modify the reference set.

Such shift was excessively emphasized by some as the birth of a second generation of the Israeli politics. A "second generation" recognizable by very distinctive traits: the refusal of some foundation values of the pioneer society, the rise of orthodox religious movements and their central position in the Israeli political scenario. I.e. the tendency towards a shift from a laical or secularized social model towards a model in which the question of orthodoxy assumes a relevant role, in which the anti-occidental element represents a non-marginal role.[8]

It is correct to accentuate that the orthodoxy question and, more particularly, the question of geopolitical redemption movements expresses a change and marks a radical transformation of many distinctive traits that are constitutive for the Israeli society.[9]

This aspect, however, even if radical, is not definitive. It marks a fracture, but does not determine a change of the genetic code. Actually, it puts itself inside

a cultural paradigm that is homologous to the one of the "founding fathers": the need of a cohesive and unified society, based on some political and cultural traits not only in common, but mainly homogenous.

And from the nineties we can date that new period, when a true crisis of the Israeli civil religion begins. A process within which, for example, the very perception of space and military defense of the territory implies a different relation with history itself and with the historical conscience of the own presence in that territory. (cf. Inbar, 1996)

The formation process of the civil religion in Israel was defined along two decades, corresponding to the period between the two world wars. Between the end of the 1910s e and the end of the thirties, the forms of Hebrew-Israeli identity constructions affirmed themselves: the myth of the pioneer in all its shapes (spatial, physical, bodily, aesthetic...), where the body cult, the ritual of celebration and memory of the dead and of the martyrs, the material and immaterial symbologies of such ideal are found.

Mainly, a geography within which those symbols are celebrated and recognized is defined. A geography that corresponds to the places of the primordial social performance (in other words, the historical steps of the Zionist settlement between the 80s of the nineteenth century and the 30s of the twentieth century), but that also considers that some among them represent a "pilgrimage" place exactly because of the emblematic value that they acquire with regard not to the steps of an expansion, but to the sacrifice and to the martyrdom that they required for their maintenance and consolidation. Martyrdom and sacrifice that have, in this case, if they are canonic ingredients of every sacralization of space, the function of representing a new version of the reconquest of the "promised land".

The construction of the civil religion in that period, as Liebman and Don Yehiya indicate, resents an ideal in which the sense of the renewal and the desire for revenge cross, while the tradition of the diaspora has little relevance. Other factors, in contrast, become highly significant in terms of value and symbology hierarchies: those that belong to the Hebrew world of Eastern Europe and, mainly, the currents of revolutionary thinking of the turn of the century, firstly, Russian and Polish and, then, of Central Europe.[10] (cf. Liebman & Don-Yehiya, 1983)

From this perspective, it is necessary to pay attention to the formation mechanism of two processes: those regarding the inclusions of social or cultural segments previously excluded within a construction of national identity; and those inherent to the reconversion of the identity codes as a consequence of those same inclusion processes.

In the interior of the Israeli civil religion, in its history – both in its constructive phase and in its inclusion processes -, many constitutive elements modify or undergo profound metamorphoses. Some, however, remain constant, at least because its symbolic power does not require any elaborate connections,

but only those that present themselves again. It is necessary to pay attention to those ones, as their crisis marks the nature of the crisis of the Israeli civil religion, while the others belong only to reconversion processes.

Many have been insisting on the modifications and the crisis induced by perception of the Shoah as an identity mechanism within the Israeli public conscience (cf. Friedländer, 1987; Zertal, 1990; Ofer, 1996; Porat, 1995). Certainly, many questions are connected to the Shoah, starting with the conflict on the statute of the Jews of the diaspora that refused the rescuing character of Zionism, and the Zionist Jews that choose Palestine currently as alternative to the live characterized by the "obliged" choices of the diaspora. Such questions change with the perception of the Shoah as part of the story itself and not only of those that did not have the courage or force to break with the past.

It was thus thought that the Eichmann process marked a reconversion and a differentiation in the Israeli identity process. It can be considered that the Eichmann process had also, perhaps mainly, another pedagogical value and that the question of justice per se – construed as judiciary administration – had little relation with those facts.

If, however, such event does not mark a change, but simply sanctions it, as described by Friedländer, then this happens because within that event the collective ideal is not rewritten, but it is placed at the mercy of the metamorphosis of a symbolic body and a body of values that appears, in its substance, confirmed.

As a matter of fact, such body of symbols and values confirms the rescuing character of the Zionist choice. That is, the fact that, at a given moment, in one place the possibility of salvation occurred that was not there in other places. Those who had chosen the rupture with the diaspora before 1939 were saved. Those who had not chosen such rupture were saved by a set of fortuitous elements. In addition, this was in line with what was already included in the Israeli civic calendar. Not by coincidence, the day dedicated to the Shoah and to its memory is not the day of the liberation of Auschwitz or any other extermination camp, but between Pesach (the event that marked the birth of the Hebrew people as an act of liberation)[11] and the proclamation of independence of the State of Israel.

In other words, the memory of the Shoah appears as indicator of an event that is symbolically opposed to the Shoah and that, therefore, assumes the meaning of a drug or remedy of an event not yet judged so much as mourning, but as defeat and, therefore, "shame".[12]

Such possibility of change and inclusion, however, took place within a precise condition that Liebman and Don Yehiya accentuate: the redefinition process of the nation by means of the figure of the State, and in the center of which the figure and work of Ben Gurion, as father of the nation, was placed.

The statism, that is, the policy that makes the public government action the strongest inclusion motor of a nation that always proves more heterogeneous

and heteroclite, and which needs to be provided with a unified state and national identity, and that constitutes the second formation phase of the Israeli civil religion, is the true answer to the opening of the crisis of the civil religion of the founding fathers. Essentially because it responded to a symbolical universe that did not foresee the presence of a Hebrew world different from the one of continental Europe. But that very world was missing in the formation phase of the State.

In 1960, Adolf Eichmann (1906-1962), one of the main responsible persons for the Nazi concentration camps, was taken to trial in Israel. His defense: he had not been more than an efficient bureaucrat that fulfilled orders. He was sentenced to death and executed.

The Zionist command had to record, at the moment in which the foundation of the State was started, two events of mourning: the first one is the assumption that the client that had received the most attention would have never reached Palestine for being scattered over Europe, or, for the smaller part of survivors, blocked inside the "cold war" game of the time; the second one is the fact that other unexpected guests came to the table that had been mainly prepared for the European Jews.[13] The assumption of a central role of the public action is not only the effect of a working class or labor social ideology. It is also the safest course through which some previous choices are confirmed, but also a "new start" becomes possible, the continuity of which is ensured by the persistence of the political group and the corresponding administrative

connection (in terms of instruction and acculturation models), but also of the administrative control (sanitary and social assistance, etc.). In other words, a modernization process that is also a nationalization process and a political and ideological (and social) inclusion.

The Eichmann process is the last phase of that metamorphosis. It allows that a history, seen with suspicion for a long time, enters the public memory, both of those that have physical relations with such history and of those not having any relations with it. In such metamorphosis change, also translations of high symbolic value occur. In my point of view, what has the highest relevance in the twenty following years is the question of Hebrew identity. It is the Hebrew, and not only the Israeli identity, that is focused on in the Eichmann process.

The concept of Hebrew identity that such event marks dispenses the Zionist dimension and obliges to calculate with a disappeared world, with its values, with its ideal, including the aspects that for a long time were considered residual. The cultural reality of Israel ceases to present itself as an autonomous process, as the history of a slow and difficult emancipation, and redemption of an "dishonorable" past, as culture of the contraposition and of the "in spite of", and starts to take possession of a past or to inherit it, but also, for the first time, not to run away from it.

The process of the Israeli civil religion between the sixties and the eighties is, therefore, a constant assumption of elements that enter into conflict with the symbolical construction of the civil religion of the founding fathers. The normative and pragmatic element of the orthodoxy always has a wider space, while those with an anti-religious scale of values and symbolic scale goes strongly downhill. (cf. Sprinzak, 1991; Aran, 1986, p. 116-43).

Certainly many of the constituting myths have undergone serious blows: the one of the "purity of weapons", in which one attacks to defend themselves, to the one of a disinterested and altruistic society that sleeps "with the doors open". The pioneering as symbolic body inherent to a political direction strongly leaning towards the left has transferred itself greatly to the extreme radical and fundamentalist right. A great portion of the inclusion apparatus - where a political philosophy of pioneering communitarianism and help could be read between the lines – has been dissolved. Society suffered violent and radical social and income differentiation processes.[14]

The civil religion, however, is in crisis due to those aspects, and not due to the other ones. The body of values and symbols that made it enter on the scene would be perfectly able to resist and cope with such profound modifications in the social web. What it cannot cope with – at least as symbolic set that restructures itself, but does not destroy itself – is the possibility that differentiated versions of the processes constituting of cultural identity occur.[15] That is, the fact that a symbolical and value body does not reenter the discussion, but that its net – that is, its logical construction and not only its evident symbolical forms – is actually devastated.

This process of identity reconstruction, decidedly problematic for any political formation, is particularly acute when the identity constitution processes do not pass through materialized and universal forms of identity (that is, general principles upon which loyalty pacts are built), but are defined according to symbols and places that refer to a code assumed as non-historical.

In this sense, more than an Israeli civil religion, it should be called more appropriately a hybrid body, partially corresponding to the concept of civil religion and partially corresponding to a set closer to political religion. Therefrom it derives that, if its symbolic, monumental, gestural, aesthetic construction is included in what led to the concept of civil religion, its crisis is expressed following the provisions and traumatic ruptures of what is called crisis of a political religion.

Civil religion and political religion

In the origin of the distinction between civil religion and political religion, there are two concepts that are different from the concept of the individual. The first one is influenced by the reading of Rousseau – and to this one also Bellah refers in his research on the American reality. The second one owes its codification to Condorcet and implies a relation between political faith and forms of the religious about which, after Condorcet, may reflected again between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[16]

According to Rousseau (1762, p. 196-7), the civil religion features several characteristics: it is cultivated and "recognized" in one country only and is capable of providing protective geniuses. "It has its dogmas" – continues Rousseau -, "its rites, its external cult set forth by the laws; everything beyond the only Nation that follows it is faithless, foreign, barbarian; it extends the duties, and the rights of Man only as far as its altars". But mainly, specifies Rousseau, "it is good, as it combines the divine worship and the love of the laws, and making the fatherland the subject of adoration of the Citizens, it teaches them that serving the State is serving the religion under the protection of God".

From this perspective, the concept of civil religion is based on the principle of communitarian loyalty, but also on the fact that a symbolic body is produced, capable of being transmitted as a code of recognition. According to Rousseau, and according to those that studied the construction process of civil religion, in the civil religion there is no external codification, but its assembly system delays the adhesion and acceptance processes of the structural signals of that code. Discussing them again or modifying them enters in the possibilities of the game.

This is not the case if we consider the concept of political religion as Condorcet defines it. The text to which I refer is about the question of the public instruction and, particularly, about civic education and, therefore, is inherent to the cultural construction processes of the citizen, as it is necessary to understand it as loyalty concept in the political environment. Thus, Condorcet writes (1847, p. 211-2):

It was said that the teachings about the constitution of each country should be part of the national education. This is certainly true, if we talk about it as a fact; if we concentrate on explaining it and developing it; if, when teaching it, we limit ourselves to say: such is the constitution established in the State and all citizens shall subject themselves to it. But if we think that it is necessary to teach it as a doctrine according to the principles of universal reason, or rouse a blind enthusiasm in its favor that makes the citizens incapable of judging it, if we tell them: this is what you shall adore and in which you shall believe [...] The purpose of education is not making people admire a ready legislation, but make them able to appreciate it and correct it. This is not about subjecting each generation to the opinions such as to the will of what precedes it, but about clarifying them more and more, with the goal that each one becomes always more worthy of governing itself with their own reason.

For Condorcet, thus, the dimension of the political religion does not refer to a specific ideological form, or may not be referred to a given political form. This concerns the capacity and the possibility, as well as the legitimacy of discussing the forms of the political pact among individuals. But it also refers to an essential aspect in the relation with the past: the question of the definition of causal laws regarding traumatic moments of the history of the group to which those individuals refer to. This element regarding the relation with history, formerly on the part of the Hebrew group in the diaspora and later on the part of the Israeli reality, is extremely significant.

The question is not if, in this scope, the mnemonic codification of essential dates of the own history is also the construction not only of a collective memory, but also a symbolic universe that has normative and conceptual value. Without doubt, within the scope of Hebrew history, events occur that assume the value of rules of conduct, frequently without counterfactual reasoning structure. It is, however, also true that such construction of a common sense in time implies the definition of a theological relationship with history, in such a way that no rational explanation is sought in the events, and useful rules and principles of conduct are founded in the comparatism.

This defines in time a rule of conduct whose value consists of its possibility of repetition. What within a devotion cult is required by intercession of the saints, is codified in a symbolic value given by the sanctifying structure of the events. In this sense, the Israeli civil religion is built on a factual universe codified as constant. Some construction elements may be radically distant, and indeed a great part of the primary elements upon which the Zionist civil religion is built clearly contrasts with the common sense of the diaspora Jew. But those elements act and build an identical symbolic system, not so much due to the values to which they refer or that they want to evoke, as to the autopoietic function that they absorb. The construction is the construction of a rational-political universe within which history does neither allow choices nor grant second chances. That is, a paradigm

whose logic of approximation obliges to follow a course and assume it as the only present chance.

On this level, the myth and the complex of Masada are built in time.

The research on the formation of the Israeli "civil religion" has evidenced several aspects. Firstly, the dimension of the rupture with the temporal order and the calendar of the diaspora Hebraism. Secondly, the exaltation of manual labor in comparison to "intellectual" or socially "unproductive" labor, identified with the social condition of the diaspora experience.

Then the history of the Jewish settlement in Palestine opts, however, for other dates, accompanying those of the traditional Hebrew annual cycle. In the center, there are two places in which the conflict of the Hebrew world with the exterior is worked out and that represent the construction of the "myth of the killed for the nation" as founding act of national identity. The first place is Tel Hai, the second one is Masada. The problem that I want to deal with is which historic perspective and, thus, which historic explanation model is defined by the elevation of those two places as symbols of history itself.

Tel Hai is the name of the hill in Upper Galilee where, in March 1920, the first nucleus of Hebrew armed defense was attacked. The majority dies before giving up their position. Yosef Trumpeldor (1880-1920), a Russian Jew, ex-soldier in the Russian army, hurt and mutilated during the Russian-Japanese war, commander of the armed nucleus, dies during the attack. Tel Hai establishes itself in the memory as the will, on the part of the new settlers, to defend their own settlements, but also to reaffirm with such act the connection with the country itself, a country that does not yet have a border, but that expresses its border in the places where the settlements are expanding.

For a long time, Tel Hai remains, in the memory construction of socialist Zionism as the place where the will to work and the attachment to the own salvation hypotheses are expressed in the defense of what was possible to build and "create". It is the celebration of the pride of the primacy of manual over intellectual labor, of the sense of an identity found again that is expressed in the dimension of work as leverage of transformation of the own condition. In a certain way, the death in Tel Hai is the answer to the published image of the "pogrom": an event in which one is victim of the fury and manages to survive only as a result of the escape. Tel Hai has also a variant of the right, that is being appropriated by the revisionist Zionism of Jabotinski. It is the construction of the myth of the defense, of the construction of redemption for the sacrifice of the soldier, of the idea of the "political soldier", we could say, readopting some of the categories of the European radical rightists of the 20s of the twentieth century. (cf. Liebman & Dom-Yehiya, 1983, p. 44-7 and 74-5)

In the consolidation process of the State during the first ten years of life of the State of Israel (1948-1958), the two versions slowly tend to overlap and to converge. The myth of the defense and of the idea of the border remains, and

it is on the basis of that image that, in an initial phase, from 1949 on, the day that commemorates the death in Tel Hai (in the Hebrew calendar, 11 of Adar) is chosen as the day of heroism and of the armed forces.[17] But the idea of the defense group disappears. The scene in Tel Hai is too much marked by the figure of Trumpeldor to become a place of collective identification. In order to such change take place and, thus not so much an idea of a memorable singular act, but of a collective "style", of an identity idea is built, there must be at the same time an idea of remission and an image with which it is possible to find a regularity of the Hebrew situation during history. After all, that an archetype is built that is an "alternative model" to the archetype of the diaspora experience: the one of the defenseless death. (cf. Zerubavel, 1995, p. 19-21)

Yosef Trumpeldor (1880-1920).

In a scene of the novel Exodus, maybe the literary text that defines, with the highest effectiveness, the mythogenic body of Zionism and of the historical experience of Yishuv, one of the protagonists - David Ben Ami – is questioned about the sense and the opportunity of the hunger strike of the three hundred refugees aboard the ship. Leon Uris describes it like that: "David was a man of culture, had studied the Torah in depth, was closer to God than all those present that felt and respected his authority"; and then, he put the following words into the mouth of his character:

> Six million men have died in the gas chambers without knowing why they died. If three hundred of us will die in the Exodus, at least they will know why they die, and also the world will know why. Two thousand years ago, we were still a nation and revolted against the rule of the Greeks and Romans, we established the tradition of resistance until the last man. We did so in Arbela and in Jerusalem. We did so in Bethar, in Herodium and in Maqueronte. In Masada we resisted the Romans for four years and when they entered the fortress, they found us all dead. No people in any country of the world fought for freedom as much as we did. And we expelled the Greeks and the Romans until we dispersed over the whole world. Since antiquity, we have not had many occasions to fight

as a nation. However, when the occasion appeared again in the Warsaw ghetto, we honored such tradition. I state that leaving the ship and voluntarily returning inside the fence is equivalent to breaking our pact with God. (Uris, 1958)[18]

The paradigm is defined on those pages. It is not so much the defense until the last man that this is about, but the fact that such defense is defined as a habit and establishes thus an archetype whose connection is expressed by the pact with God. The parabola of Masada, as it is built throughout the entire twentieth century in the Zionist experience, firstly in the times of the Mandate, then as foundation place of public memory, consists exactly in that dimension that is built with time.

A double process may be attributed to it, founding the Israeli reality and, at the same time, constituting its cultural and political construction. On one hand, the myth of exemplary action, of the heroic act of few upon which the continuity of the Hebrew group in history is based, as momentum of identity, but also constituting act. The permanence in history – the possibility of existing, yet seriously at stake, would be consented by a long series of heroic acts. On the other hand, the valuation of the sacrifice act allows to reconsider and reassess, or "recover", a choice, the choice of suicide, yet problematic in the environment of the level of observance. Such choice, valued and reconsidered by Rav Shlomo Goren, chief rabbi of the army between the sixties and the early eighties, constitutes a significant indicator of the value system that founds a new identity relation with the past, but also consents to the construction of an "ethic of conviction".

In the beginning, Masada is not a place of identity of Yishuv; it becomes such place during the forties and mainly after the Shoah when it presents itself as an authentic answer to the dynamics of the Holocaust. The representation of the Holocaust as "Jews that let themselves be killed like sheep" has its counterpoint in Masada.

Masada represents, however, the same function also from another point of view. Yad Vashem (that is, the museum dedicated to the extermination) is not only and not so much built as an act of memory and the preservation of it (the acquisition of memory only on a second level), but also as a public act of reunion, favored by a part of the public opinion and of Israeli intellectuals, but also with a great international participation with the collaboration of many Non-Jews.[19]

Masada is slowly perceived with another presumption. In the years of the British Mandate, for the Hebrew settlement Masada presents itself as a symbolic set of myths: it is in the desert, at an isolated place not only with regard to the enemies, but also to its own people, with regard to which a position of contraposition and exemplification is assumed (the dimension inherent to the Zionist pioneers with regard to the mass of diaspora Jews); it represents the will to participate in history and not to stay outside history or at its margins (in the "interstices of history"). This in addition to the obvious myth of the longing for freedom.

Masada, however, also presents itself – according to the Zionist reason – as the last shelter, the only option. There is no possible future after Masada, and there is no alternative possibility to escape from Masada.

It is the militarist / militant aspect of Masada that constitutes the myth of the resistance until the last man, but also the absolute absence of alternatives. One aspect, the last one, accentuated by the Six Day War in 1967, and then again by the new period of the Masada myth inaugurated by the Yom Kippur War, which is summarized in the slogan: "Masada shall not fall again".

In the eyes of the Israeli, for a long time, the events of the Holocaust found, in the Warsaw Ghetto, an exemplary and virtual place of the history of the diaspora. Which does not only stem from the conviction that "revolting is just", or that in that episode a style inherent to the "New Jew" was inaugurated and confirmed. The episode of the revolt has value because of the internal contraposition that characterizes the history of that revolt. It is the issue of the minorities that make history, that contribute to build history and that imprint a different dimension of history and of the constitutive phases of the historical memory of a human group.

There is a Masada complex that is built on the idea not more of the sacrifice and collective myth of the valuable fight for freedom, that is, from death through testimony – as Uris also synthesizes, in the words that he attributes to David Ben Ami -, but due to the image of the fortress that wins because it is related to a missionary model for history.

It is the strategy that makes the settlement – of being in that place - the structural basis of the new form of the myth that inherits several symbols of the experience of the unbelieving, predominantly atheist socialist Zionism and, nowadays, structurally modifies its founding elements.

If in socialist Zionism being in place is defined by the form of the colony that was being built, now the basis of the spatiality of the sacred goes beyond the organization form of the settlement. It is the political philosophy of Gush Emunim, of the religious radical party of militant Zionism, to absorb and to restructure a great portion of the symbology of the socialist Zionism, as well as founding a new "civil religion" that could be referred to as "spatial messianism".

The mystic element lies in the value of the resistance until the last man, and this is the basis in which the Zionist civil religion insists around the war of 1948, functional for the events that were going on then. The element with regard to the community refers, quite the opposite, to solitariness, to the need not to be in the condition to isolate oneself in Masada.

The fact is significant that in the two versions one fact is forgotten: the Hebrew group survived in history not because of the example of Masada, but because of the "astuteness" of Johannan ben Zakkay, the man that asks the imperial power of Rome for authorization to, if obtained, found a yeshiva in Yavne, and, thus, to end the confrontation and, at the same time, reopen it

based on a new reflection and organization of its own system of values.[20] But accentuating the importance and the relevance of that episode implies to consider the fact not only that in that circumstance a different choice could be made and if possible followed, but also that such choice is not destined for defeat.

The topic of choice constitutes the subliminal question upon which, in the last decade, a solution of the canonic civil religion and the possibility to define a new political pact were produced.

The historiographic debate on the birth of the State and the "unfinished construction site" of collective identity

The question of the original physiognomy – political, social and cultural – of the State of Israel, which, since a long time, involves the Israeli intellectual world, has definitely left the restricted environment of a historiographic and methodological discussion.[21] The question, however, does not seem to be restricted to a divergence of interpretations. Quite the opposite, it refers to a research methodology, in which the communication systems, the language and content analyses have an important weight. But at the same time the effects of those researches profoundly re-discuss the self-narrative systems of the national collectivity, as well as the public and political use of history.

It is on this level that the research propounded by Zeev Sternhell (1998) in his last book is placed.[22] Is a national movement, whose target is a cultural, moral and political revolution and whose values are private, capable of co-existing with the universal values of socialism? To which cultural matrix of the nation idea does Hebrew nationalism, that is, Zionism refer: to the illuminist-Jacobinical one that is based on the principle of citizenship or to the Herderian romantic-political one that is based on the concept of Volk? Those are the two questions that Sternhell poses and that he answers precisely.

He answers the first question: the coexistence between socialism and nationalism is an instable alchemistic product. In any case, it produces a balance that cannot last forever. In the case of the Zionist historical experience, its fundamental agency – the workers' movement -, by means of the labor socialism, only apparently chose the first element of the interface; actually it constantly subordinated it under the second one until annulling it.

The answer of Sternhell to the second question is: the principle of the nation adopted by Zionism is the principle of a Herderian matrix. In that case, the hypothesis that is affirmed not only to the one of a nationalistic view of socialism, but also to the one of a political society that tends to expel the internal conflicts of a political community that it wants to found.

Birth of Israel is a book that has a long genesis and that, mainly, originates from a profound inquietude. It is not the result of a sudden illumination or of an ideological disappointment. Sternhell more than once propounded the idea that the Israeli society should be assessed in its ideological-political components from the beginning on and that in that matrix one of its causes, if not the truest one,

for the political and cultural difficulties of the Israeli political society of today resides.[23]

The problem, however, does not appear to only concern the material history of the State, the slow decomposition of the institution of a kibbutz as a symbolic cell of the Israeli reality as State in itinere (cf. Near, 1992 and 1997), that is, the construction of the set of values, symbols and events, the "places of the memory" where the Israeli civil and political society acknowledges and celebrates itself.

During the eighties, following a general crisis, the forms of the political pact that had given the Israeli society stability for over forty years slowly disappeared.[24] The political and cultural history of the Hebrew society of the times of the Mandate and of the times of the State of Israel is in those years subjected to a cultural revision, as a consequence of a double process within the country: on one hand, the discussion about the structural nodes of the Israeli society; on the other hand, the re-discussion of the Shoah as event with regard to the political sensibility of Yishuv and not anymore as effect on the public conscience of the country. (cf. Dieckhoff, 1993)

If, firstly, the reflection focuses on the question of the nationalization of the Shoah between the fifties and the seventies, and of the effects that such inclusion determines not only on the civil calendar, but on the national self-consciousness, even on the political language, that is, on the public use of the Shoah as an argument for the conviction and construction of a relevant segment of the Weltanschauung of the average Israeli, the question would then be the legitimacy with which such heritage can be claimed.

The set of those topics, which is no longer restricted to the academic world or the world of scientific research, but open to the entire public opinion, lines out a completed change in the Israeli political and civil society, a change that in some way defines the formation of a birth of a second generation of that society.

By the term "second generation" not only a fact linked to the cycle of life is construed, even if such fact constitutes a relevant aspect and involves various protagonists of this debate, but also the process that slowly leads to re-discuss more than some singular historical theories, but the entire conceptual framework in which, in the center, the crisis of a foundation and constitutive myth of the Israeli civil religion is placed: the one of "purity of the weapons", that is, the action of the army as defensive measure and never as "dirty war". In Lebanon, since 1982, and still during the summer of 2006, the Israeli army was not only incapable of putting into action its most effective means – the "blitzkrieg" -, but also lost the "innocence". Then, regardless whether the defeat was presumed or real, nothing was as before. (cf. Helman, 1999)

Conclusion

The question of the discussion brought forward by "second generation" historians transcends the completely political horizon of the history of the State

of Israel, of its foundation dates, and represents the question on the bases or lack of them of a history of the Jewish people and of the experiences of the Jews in history or of the Jewish societies in a mutual relationship.

In other words, the problem is represented by the slow corrosion of the interpretative paradigm that, during the twentieth century, led to judaica as founding discipline and discipline of identity: generating historical self-consciousness on one hand; organizing a past on the other hand that is not only discovered, but also "constructed". (cf. Ram, 1995b)

Israeli prime-minister Yitzhak Rabin (1922-1995).

It is not, however, just one single datum that may be reverted to the higher or sophisticated side of cultural elaboration. In the construction process of the Israeli civil religion, an idea and an image of sacrificing individuality in the name of the public good in which a passion for impossible challenges was found, for solitariness and intrepidity of the hero, so much more significant to the extent in which he had a background of a valuable history and biography, in which, however, the character should be above the acquired merits.

The myth of Cincinatus in Israeli civil religion occurred in the beginning of the Zionist experience and was represented by the person of Joseph Trumpeldor, the Russian military hero, mutilated in the Russian-Japanese War and deceased in Tel Hai. The fact that a character in many aspects similar, that is, Yitzhak Rabin was not destined to occupy the same place in the symbolic construction of the current Israeli civil religion, in any case, to be included in the Pantheon of national heroes with difficulties only, (cf. Zerubavel, 1998, p. 167-

79) is maybe the most evident symptom of the irreversible Israeli crisis and of the need for a new identity code.

Notes

1 For a general reconstruction, resort to Liebman & Don-Yehiya (1983).

2 This aspect is, for example, underlined by Segev (1986), with regard to the conflict between the culture of the founding nuclei and the new immigrants in the growth process of the Hebrew population and the Palestine under British Mandate and the first twenty years of existence of the State.

3 This is the topic of the crisis of the kibbutz as crisis of success already noted by Barrington Moore Jr. (1987) in the mid eighties.

4 The socio-cultural transformations of a political reality strongly associated to the compact and homogenous migratory flows are measured since a long time on the entry and exit flows. Therefore, the physiognomy of the flows tends to significantly condition the processes of acculturation and collective behavior of a reality that seems more an overlapping of immigration waves than a true construction of a national cultural model ex-novo.

5 To return to the scale of values propounded by Barman, in the light of the requirement of safety, the requirement of freedom prevails. For a political reality born as an answer to the uncertainties due to anti-Semitism, and, therefore, based on the conviction that the society had ensured a balance and safety, it could be said that such fact already constitutes a political "defeat".

6 The root of Zionism is, actually, not the return of a specific ethnical conscience, inherent to many other modern nationalist movements – in a certain way, this seems to be the final result of the long centennial parabola of Zionism -, but the opposite. The problem is not to have a "memory" and, therefore, consider that only by affirming it the condition that gives access and legitimacy to the requirement of the own persistence in history is determined. For the Zionists and for a great portion of the Hebrew political and cultural movements towards a neo-hebraization, it is not true that the future can be mortgaged under the condition that there has been a past. The opposite is true: one can only have a future if one can free oneself from the past and as of the past.

7 On the mythogenic elements that found the image of the "New Jew" as "Anti-Jew of the diaspora", see Zohar (1981, p. 167-84) and Schweid (1984, p. 207-23).

8 By the term "anti-occidental", not Anti-Americanism is understood, but the refusal - or, at least, the radical critique – of the occidental Jewish cultural model – with regard to which it may be asked what biggest space and longest continuity with the Hebrew cultural history the oriental Hebrew tradition has (cf. Shohat, 1988). On the concept of "second generation" in the cultural and political context of Israel, see Gutmann (1988, p. 299-312).

9 See, particularly, Greilsammer (1991).

10 For an analysis of the messianic-utopian components of the cultural network of Zionism, see Jonas (1962).

11 I would like to state that the date of the first night of Pesach is also the date on which the insurrection of the Warsaw ghetto started, to which implicitly the Shoah commemoration day is dedicated.

12 In this regard, see Friedländer (1987), Liebman & Don-Yehiya (1983, p. 107 et seqq.) and Young (1993, p. 265 et seqq).

13 It is the question of the Sephardic Jews and of the immigration from the Middle East. On the destabilization or partial integration processes that can be verified between the forties and the fifties, as well as on the social hierarchies established by the construction of the state machine and of social rules with strong Central and Eastern European characters the traits of which have a longue durée effect, see Yiftachel (1998).

14 In that environment, the electorate of the two biggest parties substantially represents the new professions and informal labor, the representation of the social margins and of the "new poverty" and of any kind of illness starts being captured by religious political agents in the name of "ethnic" informal solidarity and welfare (cf. Peled, 1998).

15 The number of requests is exemplary that originated from "conflictive" immigrations – theologically, foremost – between the eighties and the nineties: the new immigration of Soviet Jews and mainly Ethiopian immigration. On the cultural problems, the problems of identity and also theological problems caused by that second immigration wave, see Lazin (1997).

16 See for example Tocqueville (1989, p. 59 et seqq); Voegelin (1939), with a brilliant synthesis of Hertz (1996, p. 191-210); and Varga (1937, p. 529-46).

17 Only in 1963 the memory day for the war dead was definitely fixed in the civil calendar, that is, the day before the declaration of independence (cf. Ben-Amos & Bet-El, 1999).

18 In this scope, we could observe that the rhetoric of defense until the last man is based on the image of heroic action as a replica of the condition to undergo history, instead of making it. The mythology of Masada is, in this sense – and the rhetoric that Leon Uris equips his character with illustrates that logic precisely -, a radical replica of the equally radical dimension of the Shoah. The events of the Holocaust go beyond the mythicizing of Masada as a place of legitimacy basis for having a State due to the disposition for sacrifice.

19 It would be possible to conclude that Yad Vashem is seen as a place dedicated to the memory of the violated right from a "cosmopolitan" point of view. This, in addition to other things, does not impede the existence of homologies and points of convergence between Yad Vashem and Masada. On the plan of the symbolical construction of the place Yad Vashem, but also on the symbology that Masada assumes in the didactical offer proposed by Yad Vashem and where Masada enters in a symbolic place of the events that stressed the long sequence of the Shoah, cf. <www.yadvashem.org/education/structure.html>.

20 That is., from the fact of reflecting and reasoning again about the cultural baggage not only in the light of a defeat, but that such defeat is also a source for a new view on history (cf. Vidal-Naquet, 1977).

21 For a synthesis dedicated to the historiographic debate in Israel in the past decade, see Ram (1995a), and the essay of History and Memory (1995), titled "Israeli Historiography Revisited".

22 For a critical reading of the essay of Sternhell, see Penslar (1998, p. 117 et seqq).

23 But this also originates from reading Sternhell (1976, p. 315-76), who sees fascism not so much as political movement, but more as a coagulation of some concepts and ideas extremely disperse in the divers political market of the twentieth century.

24 Crisis only apparently solved by the formula of the government of national unity (cf. Greilsammer, 1989).

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ABSTRACT - Israeli society constitutes an interesting example of the religion of politics, that is, an example of how the political dimension of a society may acquire a religious aspect of its own and assume a sacred character. In the beginning of the Zionist experience, the religion of labor, the construction of a civic calendar and of a new national identity gained importance. From the mid 1970s on, other factors have prevailed. They are: memories from the Ha-Shoah, the construction of national martyrdom sites, and the myth of resistance until the last man. In this essay, the tracks taken by a civil society that feels the necessity of redefining the contours of its identity and remodeling its public memory, considering itself a national community, are emphasized.

KEYWORDS - Zionism, Civil religion, Collective memory, Ha-Shoah, Massada.

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