



## When his occultation comes to an end: Shiite Islamic messianism on the foundations of a religious-political identity

Quando a sua ocultação chegar ao fim: o messianismo islâmico xiita nos fundamentos de uma identidade religiosa-política

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### Abstract

The present article aims to analyze how the messianic idea presents itself and validates itself on one of the fastest growing religions in the world, Islam, based on the analysis of one of its strands that is responsible for one of the greatest political revolutions (*Iranian Revolution, 1979*), the Shiite strand. In order to accomplish this task, this work will be grounded on the following steps: 1) to briefly present the messianic idea in the three monotheistic religions, especially the Islamic messianism within the Duodeciman Shiite strand; 2) to search for the revolutionary elements present in Shiite Islam and to examine how these elements support the idea of messianism in this group; 3) to analyze the messianic idea as a form of identity among Shiites, and its implications in the socio-religious-political experience of this community today. Without the pretense of exhausting the subject matter, the work that follows is a succinct but great effort (*jiḥād*) in the search for the understanding of a complex element, namely, the messianism in the Islamic thought. The justification for such a goal lies in the desire to present a path of knowledge about this subject in order to encourage further discussion.

**Keywords:** Islamic messianism; Al-Mahdi; Shiite identity.

### Resumo

O presente artigo objetiva analisar como a ideia messiânica se apresenta e se fundamenta em uma das religiões que mais cresce no mundo, o Islã, a partir da análise de uma de suas vertentes responsável por uma das maiores revoluções políticas (Revolução Iraniana, 1979), a vertente xiita. Para tanto, o trabalho se fundamentará nos seguintes passos: 1) breve apresentação da ideia messiânica nas três religiões monoteístas, atendo-se ao messianismo islâmico dentro da vertente xiita duodecimana; 2) busca pelos elementos revolucionários presentes no Islã xiita e verificação de como esses elementos alimentam a ideia de messianismo nesse grupo; 3) análise da ideia messiânica como formadora de identidade, entre os xiitas, e suas implicações na vivência sócio-religiosa-política dessa comunidade na atualidade. Sem a pretensão de esgotar o assunto, o trabalho que se segue surge como um sucinto, mas *grande* esforço (*jiḥād*) na busca pela compreensão de um elemento complexo, a saber, o messianismo no pensamento islâmico. A justificativa para tal meta encontra-se no desejo de apresentar um caminho de conhecimento sobre esse a fim de suscitar novas discussões.

**Palavras-chave:** messianismo islâmico; Al-Mahdi; identidade xiita.

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## Introduction

I announce to you the 'Al-Mahdi' which will be sent from within my nation at a time when the nations are in disagreement and lapsed with each other; and then He will fill the earth with justice and fairness as it was filled with darkness and tyranny, and the inhabitants of heaven and earth will approve Him and they will be content with Him. (AHMED ibn HÂNBAL apud AL-KHAZRAJI, 2004, p. 218).

In the articulation of rites, symbols and myths there is the agglutination of a mass moving towards an ideology that strengthens and enables social cohesion (DURKHEIM, 1999). From this perspective, we could say that under the symbolic systems constructed by a given society, they are diluted in metaphorical language, motivations, aspirations and projects that, by establishing themselves within the imaginary of Faith, are capable of establishing powerful connections of engagement and actions.

In this articulation, religions manage to overlap the level of the private, standing side by side with the public, thus demarcating a field of dispute where aspects of mythic discourse versus the scientific-social military will seek to maintain power. The limits imposed by these social constructs, namely the public and the private, are becoming increasingly tense, tenuous and more combative.

The answers to this clash will also come from different fields: religion, basing on myth discourse, will reread its beliefs in an adaptation of yesterday as an answer for tomorrow; public life, in turn, will have rights and duties conquered and legitimized to impose limits that will allow the coexistence between these two worlds which are actually the same; after all, we are talking about constructions made by the same category of people: the religious man who is also the political man.

This potentiality of experiencing the multiple social roles within a community allows bricolages between the sacred and the profane to occur in order to generate a myriad of responses to the yearnings and challenges of that community. One of these ways will be through the use of religious discourse;

through this one, homo religious will enter the public sphere, placing his mythical ideology on the level of possible answers for that time.

In this way, the public and the private become ever closer, challenging the ideals of total separation between them and increasingly requiring an understanding of this discourse that presents itself as sacred within a profane world. To understand this dynamic that defies the senses and actions, it is necessary to approach this sacred discourse, not only to understand it, but to conceptualize it within the space that until then denies it as a direct participant in the communal construction and vice versa. The way out of this, is Herz's words, would be:

The first facet of knowledge to be drawn about them is this: the life of the human being in political community cannot be set apart as a profane area that involves strictly questions of the organization of law and powers. The community is also a sphere of religious order, and our knowledge of a political condition is in a decisive point incomplete if it does not also capture the religious forces of the community and the symbols in which these are expressed—or if it captures them, but does not recognize them as such and translates them into a-religious categories instead. The human lives in political community with all elements of his being, from the bodily through to the intellectual and religious elements. (HERZ apud VOEGELIN, 1996, p. 159).

Within this perspective, the proposal is to discuss the relationship between public and private from one of the elements from which religion is constituted: Messianism. The paths to be followed towards this objectification will include the understanding of Messianic thinking. Such a course will reveal that Shiite thought is surrounded by elements of the revolution. From this data, we will seek such elements in order to verify how the messianic idea within Shiism forms a type of identity and leads to distinct actions.

The choice for this religious matrix and specific aspect lies in the desire to contribute to a field of study still under development in Brazil. Moreover, Shiism, within Islam, is the strand that best appropriates the messianic idea to constitute its identity and present itself in the world. Messianism in Shiism is not just an eschatological aspect within the group's narratives; it is first and foremost a

strengthening elemento that has enabled the minority group to resist categories and persecution within the community itself, while awaiting the final restoration where justice, law and equity will be established when the concealment of their messiah comes to an end.

## 1 Messianism in the Abrahamic religions

Some expected the arrival of a messiah, a descendant of King David, a descendant of King David who will come and bring restoration to Israel, as foretold by the Prophet Isaiah<sup>1</sup>; when He, the Messiah, arrives will usher in a new age of peace and restore the lost paradise. For others, the Messiah has already come among us, leaving a message of repentance. Now, they await his return in an apocalyptic vision of the end.

Take heed that ye be not led astray: for many shall come in my name, saying, I am [he] a

Watch out that you are not deceived for many will come in my name saying 'I am [he] and the time is at hand. Do not go after them. And when ye hear of wars and seditions, after them, be not afraid. Because it is necessary this to happen first, but the end will not be soon. Then He said to them: nation shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom; and there will be in several places great earthquakes, famines and pestilences; there will also be amazing things and great signs; there will also be amazing things and great signs from heaven. [...] And there shall be signs in the sun and in the moon and in the stars; and in the anguish land of nations, perplexed by the roar of the sea and the waves. Men fainting in terror, expecting the things to come upon the world; For the virtues of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud, with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, for your redemption is near. (LUCAS, 21: 8-28).

In a summarized way – since the purpose of this work is not to go into Judeo-Christian messianism – it can be said that the messianic thought that involves the two great monotheistic currents, Judaism and Christianity, is at an arrival (Judaism) and in a return (Christianity). Within these different waits, the figure of the Messiah also takes on changing shapes, not only the perspective of

<sup>1</sup> See Isaías 2:1-4; 60:18-22; 65:17-25 (among others).

God's anointed, but also the message it will carry: in the first he is a leader, an envoy of the One and Only God; in the second he is the Son of the Triune and One God. Besides that,

In Jewish Messianism, unlike Christian Messianism, redemption is an event that necessarily takes place on the scene of history, "publicly" as it were, in the visible world; it is not conceivable as a purely spiritual process, situated in the soul of each individual and resulting from an essentially internal transformation. For Jewish religious tradition the arrival of the Messiah is a catastrophic interruption. (SOUSA, 2013, p. 105).

This distinction of theological nature has direct impacts on the kind of restoration that the Messiah (s) of the Jewish and Christian narratives will bring, according to the possible readings made by movements within the traditions. The line of separation between the spiritual and the mundane levels drawn by such movements reveals the paradigmatic shift from a supramundane to intramundane narrative (VOEGELIN, 2002). To elucidate this change, a good example is found in the Zionist movement which,

[...] adopted much of the freighted apocalyptic language and symbols of traditional Jewish messianism, such as the return to the Land of Israel and the ingathering of the exiles, while rejecting the politically passive, transcendent, and eschatological dimensions of traditional messianic belief. Many saw its founder, the visionary Theodor Herzl (1860–1904), as a prophetic restorer of Jewish national pride. (CARBELACH, 2010).

If one of the pillars on which the idea of Messianism is founded is the conviction of a chosen representative of God to deliver human beings from oppression and injustice, it can be said that in Islam, the third religion that composes the monotheistic triad, messianism arises with its prophet, Muhammad. As spiritual and political leader of the ummah<sup>2</sup>, Muhammad is the personification of the “[...] preordained messianic deliverer leading a community to political and military triumph”. (SCHLEIFER, 2013, p. 337).

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<sup>2</sup> *Ummah*: comes from the Arabic term for community. In the context of Islam it would mean the community of believers. “According to Hourani (2006, p. 37) the idea of ‘community’ arises in Medina at a time of confrontation between political power and the defense of faith, a characteristic that will follow the history and development of Islam later. In this moment of ideological and pragmatic clash, the system (din) gained its final contours and the prophetic message acquired the tone of universality.” (PRADO, 2015, p. 343).

The category of a messianic personification, however, is born out of speculation, or rather, of the comparative reading between Islam and the aspects that make up messianism, for the messianic idea as it appears in Judaism or Christianity is foreign to Islam. In Islam, the messianic idea will be built on the facts surrounding the community rather than on the interpretation of the Holy Written from the Quran. For Riffat Hassan (1985), who makes an argument in the view of Sunni Islam

Though Islam shares many of the beliefs and characteristics of the two Semitic/Abrahamic monotheistic religions which preceded it, the idea of messianism which is of central importance in Judaism and Christianity is alien to Islam as represented in and by the Qur'an. In fact, the Qur'an repudiates the main components of the idea of messianism, namely, the concept of the Messiah as well as the notions of redemption, intercession, and a charismatic personality or community having more than human powers or "special" prerogatives. (HASSAN, 1985, p. 263).

Sachedina (1981), author of *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of the Mahdi in Twelver Shi'ism* has a more flexible thinking on this issue. For him, the use of the term "messianism" applied to Islam would not be incorrect if, and only if, the idea is linked to a person who should appear (zuhur), resurrect (qiyam), this idea is very clear in the islamic theology of Duodeccan Shi'ism, which believes that the 12th Imam, the Mahdi, which is hidden, will reappear in order to restore peace, justice and judgment.

Mahdi<sup>3</sup> is presented as one who comes to bring justice and righteousness. Qualities such as generosity, wisdom to judge and to lead and to conquer militarily make Mahdi able to judge both Muslims and non-Muslims on the basis of the Holy Book, namely the Quran. In addition to being universalistic, the messianic idea in Islam also presents itself as an event that will occur at this and for this time. That's a form of eschatology in which the end results will be felt in this life and not in the future

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<sup>3</sup> Lineal descendant of Prophet Muhammad, the Mahdi not only continues the mission of guiding and organizing the ummah, but also the mission of maintaining the integrity of the Quran. See Bartholo Júnior; Campos (1990, p. 124).

The term “messianism” in the Islamic context is frequently used to translate the important concept of an eschatological figure, the Mahdi, who as the foreordained leader “will rise” to launch a great social transformation in order to restore and adjust all things under divine guidance. The Islamic messiah, thus, embodies the aspirations of his followers in the restoration of the purity of the Faith which will bring true and uncorrupted guidance to all mankind, creating a just social order and a world free from oppression in which the Islamic revelation will be the norm for all nations. (SACHEDINA, 1981, p. 2).

The return of this Messiah also brings to Muslims the responsibility to participate in the reconstruction of this new world, since they will establish, together with the Mahdi, the religious-political community<sup>4</sup> “[...] the *umma*, with a worldwide membership of all those who believe in God and His revelation through Muhammad.” (SACHEDINA, 1981, p. 2).

Under this important idea, some dynasties, such as Abbasid 747-1258, and people, proclaimed themselves Mahdi, resulting in empire-building and even state-building through the ideological support of the purification message or anti-colonial jihads. One of the most emblematic cases is that of Muhammad Ahmad Al-Mahdi who proclaimed or revealed himself Mahdi in 1881. Under the title of Mahdi, Muhammad Ahmad conquered Khartoum (Sudan), inaugurating a state under his command which ended in 1898 (BERKEY, 2013).

It is very important to point out that this kind of self-proclamation in Shiism is rare, since the Mahdi, according to the duodeciman narrative, is hidden. For the vast majority, the return of the Mahdi will be in Mecca and will mark the end of the world and the establishment of the messianic kingdom. “In Shi’a Islam, expectation and eager anticipation of the Mahdi’s return is a central theme of piety and discourse.” (HERMANSEN, 2003, p. 421).

Although not present in the Quran and most hadiths, the idea of Mahdi is present in both the Sunni and Shiite currents. Thus, “There are, in effect, two Mahdis: (1) the idealized figure described in the hadith and apocalyptic traditions

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<sup>4</sup> One of the foundations of *umma* is *Tawhid* (oneness of God). In addition, the *umma* is formed by the masses (*Al-nas*), which bring about change (social level). Therefore, the *umma* can be understood as a social community that, based on certain values, organizes themselves as a group that thinks in and out of their faith community. “*Ummah* is made of the masses, but only faith (Iman) makes *Ummah*.” (EZZATI, 1989, p. 97).

and (2) the political and historical figure who is usually the leader of a revolutionary group or sect.” (BERKEY, 2013, p. 322).

The messianic idea thus nourishes hope, but above all it generates identity and resistance. The duality of visions within the faith community itself will provide the conducive environment for actions that will have direct impacts on how the community prepares for the return of its Messiah, and above all, how this community views itself against other communities. The result will be the pursuit of maintaining a socio-political-religious status that says about preserving a specific identity that is minority and stigmatized.

## 2 Messianism and Revolution

The internal struggles within the Islamic community contributed to the shaping of a messianic idea mainly within Shiism; For them, the Messianic idea had the function of unifying and strengthening the community in face of the martyrdoms experienced by the leaders of this current. Under the messianic idea, too, a system of legislation was erected, the system of the imamate<sup>5</sup>.

Shiite thought, in relation to the institution of the imamate, lies on two principles. The first of these is called Nass and means that the imamate is a prerogative granted directly by God to a person of the Prophet's family, who must transfer the designation before his death. The second principle, called I'lm, states that the imam holds the knowledge of religion, and that it can only be transferred to the next imam, which thus becomes the authoritative and exclusive source of the Quranic knowledge. (MONTENEGRO, 2000, p. 94).

The Imamate, an invaluable Shi'ite idea that gives the group identity, refers to the 12 infallible Imams chosen by God. Considered by Shiites as leaders of the

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<sup>5</sup> “In the Shiite view, the leader of the Muslim community is known as Imam who, besides ruling the community, holds the key to interpreting the holy text. [...] Sunnis, for their part, believe that the leader, the caliph, is a ruler who is subject to the law and may be stripped of his office if he goes against Islamic law. [...] In addition to the divisions between the party groups, within the groups there are other divisions. Shiism, for example, is divided into three strands: Twelfths, Ishmaelites, and Zaidites. Followers of the first one, the Twelfths, believe that there are twelve infallible Imams and these would be descendants of Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad. The second one, the Ishmaelites, who appear to have emerged as a secret movement, believe that there are seven Imams in a distinct succession from the Twelfth following Ism'ail ibn Já'far, son of the sixth Imam. The the last one, the Zaidites, in turn, follow the fifth Imam. The largest current is that one of the Twelfths. According to such group, from Ali ibn Abi Talib, twelve Imams came out of which eleven died martyred and the last one is hidden, but he will return at the end of time as mahdi. That will be the moment when a kingdom of universal justice and happiness will be inaugurated.” (PRADO, 2013, p. 52-53).



Islamic Nation and guardians of the Quran and Sunna, the belief is that there is one of these every period after the death of Prophet Muhammad. According to Shiite tradition, the Imam of this time is the 12th Imam, Imam Mohammad Ibn Al-Hassan, al-Mahdi. Narratives about its reappearance feed the wait and at the same time strengthen the revolutionary and resistance thinking, a mark on Shiite identity. “More than any of the imams before him, the twelfth Imam embodied the fears, disappointments and final fulfillment of all the hopes and aspirations of the *Shi'i* community.” (AYOUB, 1978, p. 221).

Given the above, some inferences about the approach of Shiism with the revolutionary idea will be outlined. Among such inferences is the one that states that the messianic idea feeds the revolutionary ideal and vice versa. Such a statement can be confirmed by thinking about the elements present in revolutionary thought. Maffesoli (2001), by analyzing Balandier's thinking about revolution, helps in this understanding: the relationship between the elements present in the revolutionary process and religious messianism.

From a very classical social anthropology perspective, G.Balandier, in an analysis of the various elements of social dynamics, shows how the term revolution refers to practices that are structured in relation to a 'coming social system' and whose outbreak must be provoked. As for us, we have said how it seems to us that the attraction (sic) of the future is but an element of the revolutionary process, as well as of the religious movement, which, by emphasizing the future, the authorization, the transfer of pleasure inscribes in its logic the self-negation of the desire that underlies it. (MAFFESOLI, 2001, p. 93).

The idea beyond now pervades the revolutionary construction as a key to explanation, legitimation and also as the foundation where the projects are built. This load of mythical elements inserts the revolutionary phenomenon in a construction that is very close to the religious one. In this construction, art emerges as “[...] detonator of supplementary crystallization [...] for discourse and revolutionary practice” (MAFFESOLI, 2001, p. 100). In Maffesoli's view, the revolution does not seek the new, but rather the restoration of a time or way of life considered ideal. “There is a concern about returning to the origins, which partly

believes the progressive (sic) character attributed to the revolutionary phenomenon". (MAFFESOLI, 2001, p. 107)<sup>6</sup>.

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It is interesting to point out that, according to Baechler's analysis, oppression, which enters as a motivating category of revolution, is "rarely a factor because, to be effective, it must be felt by elite opposed to the central power." (BAECHLER, 1975, p. 94). However, in Shiism, the oppression factor is one of the bases for the formulation of mobilizations. Thus, it can be interpreted that the Mahdi presents itself in the revolutionary context as the heir of this elite - which punctuates Baechler - who feels the ills of the people and opposes oppression.

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Al-Mahdi is not, then, just an idea from which we await his birth, nor a prediction of the realization of what we aspire to, but a reality we want to live and a flesh and blood man who lives among us, who sees us and in who we believe, who lives our joys, who watches with disquiet the plight of the oppressed and the misery of the wretched as well as the victims of

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<sup>6</sup> The revolutionary idea that runs through Shiism originates from the Prophet himself, who, as a religious and political leader, organized, politically and spiritually, a people who had their organizational mode in tribal life. "[...] the Prophet had the arduous task of re-educating pre-Islamic man (*Yahilila*) and shaping him into the image of Islam, making him bear a new light and eradicating all the roots and sequels of his past as *yahilila*" (AS-SADR, 1989, p. 9). For this reason, the Shiites believe that the Prophet's successor should be of his lineage, as he would already have all the necessary preparation to continue the organization that began with the Prophet: see As-Sadr (1989, p. 34).

injustice, impatiently awaiting the right moment to reach out to all the victims of the unjust, ending the injustices. (ASSAYED, 2006, p. 76).

According to Pasquino (1998, p. 1121), the elements of the revolution are presented as the use of violence, fall and substitution of political authorities, objectification of structural changes - “political relations, legal-constitutional order, and socio-economic sphere”. In Islam, the idea of Mahdi is linked to the first order of the concept, namely the return to order disturbed by injustice, oppression and apostasy through resistance. The application of this theory to the ideological organization of the Shiite community can be thought of as follows: revolution never occurs without resistance. The forces being challenged, namely the dominant forces, tend to organize themselves into counterrevolutionary movements where the use of force is legitimized.

In the case of Islamic messianism, combat is predicted in an apocalyptic war between the forces fighting oppression - the Mahdi, Jesus and their followers - and the oppressive forces of evil - the antichrist and his followers. The government that is expected to be implanted, in the revolutionary sense, is the Islamic one, which is based on an ideological theocratic basis (BAECHLER, 1975). With the end of the Mahdi concealment, the new order will be established. This will require the imposition of this order by force: the return of the Mahdi will begin a time of judgment in order to establish justice. Beside Jesus, the Mahdi will fight and overcome the antichrist, one of the emblematic figures of the apocalyptic writings. The Mahdi, through his authority legitimized by his followers, will call on the offensive jihad in a war against the forces of evil to bring about justice and peace.

As predicted in the traditions, the end of Mahdi's concealment will come at a time of profound social and spiritual crisis, just as it was in the days of Jesus' birth. But without the subjective conditions, namely the revolutionary desire that awakens the masses, there will be no revolution, the revolution for which its followers await. In this way, it can be said that the maintenance of revolutionary thought through the continuous remembrance of Mahdi are essential elements in the revolutionary hope that manifests itself today, through resistance actions

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By entering in collective memory as a moment of rupture that contributed to the flourishing of two identities (Shiite and Sunni) within the same system (Islam), Hussein's martyrdom reveals that, religious identity by fragmenting within its constitutive space recreates itself in new manifestations that the first religious identity allows. For Montenegro (MONTENEGRO, 2000, p. 75).

### **3 The messianic idea in the construction of a specific identity**

The path taken reveals specific aspects presented in the constitution of the messianic idea. But to talk about Islamic messianism within Shiism one cannot go on without going back to history, in order to remember the events that occurred before and after the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, the 3rd Imam in the line of

succession. From the death of Imam Hussein will begin to significantly outline the ideology of Ali's Partisans, the Xias.

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unity and fragmentation appear as two sides of the same coin." In fact, Islam as a profoundly universal religion is one and oscillates in the tension of this oneness and its particular manifestations. To speak of diversity thus presupposes taking into consideration the unified aspect of this religion. (MONTENEGRO, 2000, p. 75).

In the Shiite tradition, the elements that identify them as a distinct group within the social are martyrdom and resistance, which mark the life of one of the most important characters in Shiite narratives, Imam Hussein. The narratives that make up Hussein's martyrdom speak of the life of a man who by leading a small entourage goes towards its destiny, a destiny linked to the struggle against injustice and oppression. Considered the Lord of the Martyrs (sayyed al shuhadaa) and / or Young Lord of Paradise, Imam Hussein, son of 'Ali and grandson of Prophet Muhammad, finds himself in the Shiite imagination as a propelling force which could keep the flame of resistance alive. By studying these facts, it is clear that the use of this type of narrative becomes important for maintaining a memory that takes shape in an identity that is not only religious but ideological, political:

The martyrdom of *Imam*: Husayn cannot be properly understood if considered merely as an isolated event in the early history of the Muslim community. Nor can we dismiss it as a melodrama caused by the stubbornness of an obdurate and politically naive man. It must rather be placed in the context of Islamic history from the beginning of the Prophet's career at Medina down to our own time. It has been repeatedly argued in this study that the death of Husayn, at least for the *Shi'i* community, provides a focal point from which prior, as well as subsequent, history must be viewed. (AYOUB, 1978, p. 93).

The memory of Hussein, which is remembered every year during the 10 days that make up the rite known as *Ashura*<sup>7</sup>, brings the memory of martyrdom, which is part not only of the group's identity construction, but also of the expectation of the return of Mahdi, the Imam, able to (re) organize the ummah by re-establishing the religious and political aspects of the community, thereby ending injustice by establishing equity. The last descendant of the prophetic family, Imam Mahdi connects to Imam Hussein's sacrifice for revenge.

As guardian of Hussein's blood, Imam Mahdi, upon reappearing to establish justice and equity, will avenge the blood of Imam Hussein. "The oppressed ones are Imam Husain (a.s.) and his successors. When our Qaem will reappear he will account for their blood. He will take revenge in such a way that people will say that he has gone to the extreme." (TAFSEER-E-BURHAAN apud AL MUTANZAR, 2017).

The importance of this eschatological expectation can be understood by looking at the history of Shiites. Since its inception, the processes of constitution and preservation of its identity have gone through periods of quietism and revival (BRUNNER, 2009; SACHEDINA, 1981). The actions brought by the group in these historical periods reveal that the ideological basis of Messianic and apocalyptic ideas gave the necessary hope for waiting time and action.

The identification with the suffering of Karbala combatants through contextualization led to the construction of an identity, which is based on suffering, and at the same time an action: that of resisting, not retreating. In making this statement, it is not essentializing xia identity as an identity of resistance, but rather that in the foundations of xia identity there are elements that once chiseled can

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<sup>7</sup> *Ashura* comes from Arabic *asharah* and means "ten" (MEGUID, 2013). "For Sunnis, *Ashura* is a time of joy where the Red Sea crossing of Moses is celebrated. For Shiites, *Ashura* is a time of joy where the Red Sea crossing of Moses is celebrated. For Shiites, *Ashura* is a time of mourning where the memory is fraught with pain and suffering because of Imam Hussein's martyrdom, but *Ashura* is also a time of renewing hope and commitment to the cause that led Imam Hussein to surrender his own life for the sake of justice and against oppression. [...] In this context, it would be the 10th day of the month of Muharram, the day of Imam Hussein's death (martyrdom)." (PRADO, 2018, p. 31, note 16; p. 19, note 5).

develop an identity of resistance. The development of a passive (quietist) or resistant identity will depend on at least one factor: the context.

It follows that the events that affected this community and which are part of the mythical tradition are fundamental milestones in the construction of messianic thought which, from hard thinking, becomes a defensive quietism that awaits the return of its 12th Imam in order to proclaim the offensive jihad.

Participation in the jihad is obligatory for all able-bodied male Muslims. However, since it is only the Imam who can call for offensive jihad against the non-Muslim world, this obligation has effectively lapsed with the occultation of the Imam though defensive jihad is still obligatory". (MOMEN, 1985, p. 180).

During the period of *Mahdi's* occultation, the mujtahidin<sup>8</sup> play the role of leading the ummah. One of the most prominent mutjahdins was the well-known Ayatollah Khomeini who, using Imam Hussein's discourse on martyrdom, led one of the largest and most successful revolutions of recent times from which:

The way was paved for a political doctrine that put the leading '*ulamâ*' in place of the Mahdi and vested them with far-reaching secular authority as well. This process that more or less turned the initial Shiite tenets upside down and transformed an esoteric religion into a political ideology came to a (preliminary) end in Ayatollah Khomeini's doctrine of the 'guardianship of the juriconsult' (*welâyat-e faqih*) that forms the basis of the political system in today's Iran. (BRUNNER, 2009, p. 139).

This ability to transform a narrative of suffering and pain into distinct actions of the masses gave the group an identity and created elements of organization and unity. Thus, since the death of Hussein, the idea of martyrdom has prefigured as destiny, and it is up to the followers of the Ahlul Bayt (house of the prophet) not a resigned spirit but rather a spirit awaiting the return of its liberator, the Mahdi, who will avenge the blood of all the martyrs who gave their lives for the message of Islam.

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<sup>8</sup> The word Mujtahid (singular), means in Arabic, "diligent". It indicates the one who dominates the Ijtihad (interpretation) which can be understood, in general, as the effort to reflect on new issues that arise within the community in order to find or reach the common good. As someone prepared to exercise Ijtihad, Mujtahid needs to exercise an in-depth knowledge of Arabic, the Koran, Sunna and Fiqh (jurisprudence).

He will avenge the blood and injustices of all who have been martyred or persecuted in God's way since the beginning of the world. In this great mission of the descendant of Hussein, the Prophet and the first three imams will participate. The return of Mahdi, therefore, will provide the natural conclusion of this long cosmic drama. (AYOUB, 1978, p. 19).

## Concluding remarks

Present in monotheistic religions, the messianic idea takes different forms and directions, generating sometimes revolutionary, sometimes quietist mobilizations. In the utopia of a society free from oppression and injustice, communities build, from their myths, an ideology capable of generating resistance and hope in the context of struggle and pain.

Grounded in a desire for community restoration, Messianism is one of the elements that generate resistance, unity, identity. More than an idea restricted to living in the religious realm, the messianic idea goes beyond the limits of the private and finds in public life the space to proclaim an ideology that aggregates masses around universalistic goals.

As impulse-generating matrices capable of leading to revolutions, the messianic discourse reveals that it is necessary to meet the understanding of this phenomenon (s), not only as a search for what religion says, but rather to meet how this phenomenon uses the discourse of religion to implement actions, also outside the field of religion.

The points raised so far could serve as a signal for the urgency of the study of such elements, since on them, often relegated to private issues, actions are being formulated, actions that can often change the direction not only of a community, but an entire international political system.

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