

Much of my youthful rebelliousness resulted from an early fascination with rock and roll music. Even as an six year old child, I understood that behind the rambunctious sounds was a call for the youth of the world to embody a certain spirit which I had every intention to obey. I knew early also the music was foreign to the group-spirit that mattered so much in my environment - that the two were intrinsically opposed, in fact - and thus that my musical enthusiasm presented a serious dilemma. I recall vividly thinking about the issue in summer 1968, listening late at night to the music charts on a radio transistor I smuggled into my room in a summer-house by the sea where we spent our holidays. (My father - a vice president of the electricity company in Jerusalem - exchanged his house every summer with his professional equivalent in Herzlia.) After a year of stealthily following the annals of pop, I was able at that point to detect the famous souring of the mood in the summer of 68 - when the flower children turned less optimistic and peaceful, the drugs, harder and the ghettos were set ablaze - and fancied myself a participant in the dramatic generational upheaval. Each song encoded a social position - either pro-change or against it. Elvis's *Suspicious Minds* reflected Neanderthal he-man voice; Aretha Franklin's *Little Prayer*, the pathos and passion of black America; *Honky-Tonk Women* by the Stones was interestingly dark and foreboding - the beginning of heavy rock - whereas Donovan, well, simplistic. I was aware of a drama, unfolding in front of my eyes - the fast pace musical development embodied the continual attempts of the youth of my times to redefine itself and its sensibilities and instal in its ranks a group spirit of a thoroughly different type.

*Israeli pop was dominated at the time by military bands: 'The Central-Command Troupe', 'The Southern-Command Troupe', 'The Navy Band' etc which were often at the top of the local hit-parade; even the sacred Friday night show on TV relied heavily on soldiers singing and dancing in uniform or former troupes who embarked on solo careers without as much as loosen their military bearings. Usually, they sang in unison, accompanied by an accordion, what Israelis called folk songs but Americans would not; Hebrew folk was too inauthentic and formulaic to share a designation reserved to Pete Seegar or Bob Dylan. There was some good local fare - mostly classically inspired music - but the lyrics were way too bloody and frightening for pop; I still remember the fear inspired by a ballad about a group of soldiers who die trying to reach a place called the Red Rock. Other songs were imports, re-equipped with Hebrew lyrics: Red flags from Russia, repainted white and blue, an anthem of the republicans of Spain retooled as love ballad and a Tango hit from the fifties, as a musing on the land. Those who immigrated from mid-eastern countries adapted what their European compatriots called oriental music to the new conditions. Their music however was not broadcasted on the radio during my childhood years; it did not pass the quality tests of the ashkenazim. The situation changed somewhat for the worse around 67 - after the six day war. The ideological role of popular songs became clearer then - singers were called upon to articulate the group-emotions and inner feeling of the nation. Consequently, the choice between Israeli and foreign music became politicized: Rejecting the former meant resisting the group-spirit they embodied which implied in turn removing yourself from the group. Judging by my experience, opting for pop inevitably tinged you with guilt.*

There was, to be sure, a certain awareness of rock and roll even earlier. I remember distinctly a graffiti war between Elvis and Cliff Richard fans unfolding on the walls of Jerusalem in the early 60's. At the time, rock'n'roll implied an asocial sensibility that educated middle class youth found difficult to espouse. My brother, for one, listened to classical music and jazz but considered r'n'r commercial junk. The Beatles were more sophisticated, less violence prone and thus worthy of some consideration but even that did not change the equation immediately for people like him. My high-school friends were probably among the first educated Israelis who accorded rock music the importance that older generations reserved to classical music or jazz.

One of the first manifestations of the new-found seriousness and high ambition of late 60's rock was the departure from the 2 minute format and the emergence of lengthy pop compositions like *Tommy* by the Who. An entire political program was encapsulated in the idea of a pop equivalent of opera.

„What if bourgeois operas were replaced with counter-operas, the Who asked implicitly, and what if the philharmonic orchestra was augmented with the heavy sound of Deep Purple and the *Star Spangled Banner* broadcasted to the nation in Hendrix's version? If, as Gramsci hoped, capitalist society will crumble one day under the weight of its contradictions, these counter-institutions might be the kernel of new social order!“

Having understood the power of the underlying strategy, my friend David Fox and I applied it further. The year was 1970. We were in the eighth grade of the Hebrew Gymnasium, a prestigious school in Jerusalem that followed the elitist program of its name-sakes in the German speaking world, combining first rate science education with excellent instruction in the humanities. Classical music was part of the curriculum; in music classes we listened to Beethoven symphonies and sang Schubert's Lieder in Hebrew. The innate respect to classical music gave David and I the idea of introducing Tommy to our eighth grade class: As an opera of a new type, it was worthy of discussion in a class-hour. We felt a great deal of pride that we managed to flood the halls of our school with thundering, shrieking sounds, infecting the student body with the viral ideas we believed they carried.

Around the same time, I read a sentence that reshaped my political thinking; it was attributed to Lenin and printed in bold face letters above the masthead of a Marxist magazine called Compass. „A nation oppressing another, it said, cannot be free.“ The magazine was given to me by the editor. Encouraged by the success de scandale of the Tommy presentation - we had to unpack the term ‚acid queen‘, for example - I embarked on another ambitious project - inviting a political subversive to lecture in my school.

My school was also known as Rehavia Gymnasium because of its location - a leafy residential area in the west part of Jerusalem. I was born on west side of Rehavia - where it bordered the Valley of the Cross, where the storied olive tree used for Jesus' cross had presumably grown. The Israeli Museum, where I took afternoon art classes during childhood and adolescence, was on the other side - not far from the Knesset. It would take me fifteen or twenty minutes to plow through the wild poppies of the spring or the yellow thorns in the summer on my way to the museum. Tamara, the legendary Georgian queen, built a monastery at the bottom of the valley in the seventh century. Tinny sounds emanating from the bell tower of the secretive fort echoed to my room, marking the passage of time every fifteen minutes for as long as I can remember.

The south side of the valley led to a hilly neighborhood which I traversed one day on the way to a friend when I chanced upon a surreal vision - a dilapidated house in the middle of a row of well appointed dwellings that was recently painted bright purple. Near the entrance stood three men with shoulder length hair - probably the first long haired male specimen I have seen in Jerusalem. I excitedly inquired about the purple house and found out it was the headquarters of a notoriously extreme group, ideologically affiliated with radical palestinian groups like Naif Khawatme's. I was not deterred in the least; a few days later, I came unannounced for a visit, knocked on their door and stated my intentions. My teacher agreed that „the students must be educated about every political point of view“ and reluctantly authorized me to ask them to pay us a visit.

The fiery editor with the trimmed black goatee came as he promised but never delivered the speech in my class. He was blocked in the corridor by a stout unfriendly school director who asked him unceremoniously to leave the school-grounds. „This guy is a virus!“ he admonished me later in his office, dubbing pearls of sweat off his forehead. „Inviting him over is to knowingly expose the students to disease!“ Afterwards, I was sent home for the day - by no means a harsh punishment; the director knew me and my family well and often played bridge with my mother. A day or two later, I borrowed *The Poverty of Philosophy* by Karl Marx from a public library housed in the basement of the special courtroom built for Eichmann's trial. I was determined to find out for myself what the big fuss about communism was about.