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If God Were a Human Rights Activist: Human Rights and the Challenge of Political Theologies

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Abstract

Citing the inability of conventional human rights thinking to address the 'strong' questions raised by our times, this article pursues a twofold objective: to identify the major challenges that the rise of political theologies at the beginning of the twentieth-first century posed to human rights; and second, to select within a broad landscape of theological analysis the types of reflections and practices that might contribute to expand and deepen the canon of human rights politics. In order to achieve this double goal the article uses complexity as its main analytical guideline making distinctions from which significant consequences were drawn: on one side, distinctions among different types of political theologies (pluralist versus revelationist, traditionalist versus progressive); and, on the other, between two contrasting discourses and practices of human rights politics (hegemonic versus counter-hegemonic). Depending on the circumstances, even conventional or hegemonic human rights struggles may be a progressive tool against social practices and norms derived from traditionalist and revelationist theologies. Pluralist and progressive theologies, in turn, may be a source of radical energy toward more ambitious, counter-hegemonic human rights struggles.

Keywords

Human Rights; Religious Theology; Political Theology; Modernity; Globalization; Resistance.

1. Introduction: Strong Questions and Weak Answers

In this time and age, it is not easy to theorise about human rights. Human rights are supposed to be a strong answer to the problems of the world, so strong as to be universally valid. Now, it seems more and more obvious that our time is not one of strong answers. It is rather a time of strong questions and weak answers. This is so because our time is witnessing the final crisis of the hegemony of the socio-cultural paradigm of western modernity and, therefore, it is a time of paradigmatic transition.[1] It is characteristic of a transitional time to be a time of strong questions and weak answers. Given the global reach of this paradigm, brought about by colonialism and imperialism, this transition is present, under different forms, everywhere, even though the questions and answers vary from culture to culture, from world region to world region. But the discrepancy between the strength of the questions and the weakness of the answers seems to be the same everywhere. It is the consequence of the multiplication, in recent times, of contact zones among different cultures, economies, social and political systems, and ways of life, resulting from what is usually called globalization, the most recent version of global capitalism and western modernity. The power asymmetries in these contact zones are today as large, if not larger, as they were in the colonial period. But they are now broader and far more numerous. The contact experience is always an experience of limits and borders. In the current conditions, this experience facilitates the discrepancy between strong questions and weak answers.

Strong questions address not only our specific options for individual and collective life but also the societal and epistemological paradigm that has shaped the current horizon of possibilities within which we make our options. They are paradigmatic in nature and, therefore, they arouse a particular kind of perplexity. Weak answers are those that don't challenge the horizon of possibilities, the still dominant paradigm. They assume that the current paradigm provides answers for all the relevant questions. They, therefore, fail to abate the perplexity caused by the strong questions and may, in fact, increase it. But not all weak answers are the same; there are both weak-strong answers and weak-weak answers. Weak-strong answers represent the maximum possible consciousness of a given epoch.[2] They are strong enough to see the coming collapse of the dominant paradigm and call for the need to go beyond it, even if they have no clear picture of what will come after it. They transform the perplexity caused by the strong question into positive energy. They do this not by pretending that the perplexity is pointless or that it can be eliminated by a simple answer. Rather, they show the limits and the historical nature of the current horizon of possibilities, thereby opening space for social and political innovation. They transform the perplexity into an open field of contradictions in which a relatively unregulated competition among different paradigms or horizons of possibilities may unfold. They help people and movements to travel without tested maps in relatively uncharted territories where strong answers emerge in the form of an historical, cultural and political Not Yet. In other words, they emerge both as possibility and as risk.

Weak-weak answers, in contrast, take the current paradigm or horizon of possibilities as a given and refuse to admit its historical, political and cultural limits. Those unconvinced by the weak answers are invited to surrender.

My argument in this text is that the answers given by conventional human rights thinking and practice to the strong questions of our time are weak-weak answers and that only through a profound theoretical and political reconstruction could they become weak-strong answers.[3] I consider conventional understanding of human rights as having some of the following characteristics: they are universally valid irrespective of the social, political and cultural context in which they operate and of the different human rights regimes existing in different regions of the world; they are premised upon a conception of human nature as individual, self-sustaining and qualitatively different from the non-human nature; what counts as violation of human rights is defined by universal declarations, multilateral institutions (courts and commissions) and established, global (mostly North-based) non-governmental organisations; the recurrent phenomenon of double standards in evaluating compliance with human rights in no way compromises the universal validity of human rights; the respect for human rights is much more problematic in the global South than in the global North.

As a way of illustration I mention two strong questions. The first question can be formulated in this way: if humanity is one alone, why are there so many different principles concerning human dignity and a just society, all of them presumably unique, yet often contradictory among themselves? At the

root of the perplexity underlying this question is a recognition that much has been left out of the modern and western understanding of the world.

The conventional answer to this question is that such diversity is only to be recognised to the extent that it does not contradict universal human rights. It is a weak-weak answer because, by postulating the abstract universality of the conception of human dignity that underlies human rights, it dismisses the perplexity underlying the question. The fact that such a conception is western based is considered irrelevant, as the historicity of human rights discourse does not interfere with its ontological status. However fully embraced by hegemonic political thinking, particularly in the global North, this is a weak-weak answer because it reduces the understanding of the world to the western understanding of the world, thus ignoring or trivialising decisive cultural and political experiences and initiatives in the countries of the global South. This is the case of movements of resistance that have been emerging against oppression, marginalisation, and exclusion, whose ideological bases have often very little to do with the dominant western cultural and political references prevalent throughout the twentieth century. These movements do not formulate their struggles in terms of human rights, and, on the contrary, rather formulate them, often enough, according to principles that contradict the dominant principles of human rights. These movements are often grounded in multi-secular cultural and historical identities, often including religious militancy. Without trying to be exhaustive, I mention three such movements, of very distinct political meanings: the indigenous movements, particularly in Latin America; the "new" rise of traditionalism in Africa; and the Islamic insurgency. In spite of the huge differences among them, these movements all start out from cultural and political references that are non-western, even if constituted by the resistance to western domination.

Conventional human rights thinking lacks the theoretical and analytical tools to position itself in relation to such movements, and even worse, it does not understand the importance of doing so. It applies the same abstract recipe across the board, hoping that thereby the nature of alternative ideologies or symbolic universes will be reduced to local specificities with no impact on the universal canon of human rights.

The second strong question confronting our time is the following. What degree of coherence is to be required between the principles, whatever they may be, and the practices that take place in their name? This question gains a particular urgency in contact zones, because it is there that the discrepancy between principles and practices tends to be highest. The ideological investments to conceal such discrepancy are as massive as the brutality of practices. In this case, too, the answer of conventional human rights is a weak-weak one. It limits itself to accepting as natural or inevitable the fact that the affirmation of human rights principles does not lose credibility in spite of their increasingly more systematic and glaring violation in practice, both by state and non-state actors alike. We keep visiting the fairs of the industry of human rights with ever new products (*Global Compact*, *Millenium Goals, War on Poverty,* etc.), but, on the way, we have to go by an increasingly more ungraspable graveyard of betrayed promises.

My aim in this text is to start from a specific instance of conventional human rights as a weak-weak answer: I mean, the way conventional human rights confront the global rise of religion and political theology in our time[4]. I shall then proceed to indicate possible ways of transforming human rights into a weak-strong answer in light of the challenges posed by the rise of religion and political theology, in itself a very plural phenomenon. The latter phenomenon raises without any doubt one of the strongest questions of our time, at least when viewed from the West. Is the process of secularisation, considered to be one of the most distinctive achievements of western modernity, reversible at all? Is it an inherently good thing? What might be the contribution of religion to social emancipation, if any? Conventional human rights take secularisation for granted, including the secular nature of their own foundation. Religion belongs to the private sphere, the sphere of voluntary commitments and, therefore, from a human rights perspective, its relevance is that of a kind of human rights among others: the right to religious freedom. This is a weak-weak answer, because it assumes as a given what precisely is being questioned. Freedom of religion is only possible in a world free of religion. What then if that is not the case?

In section 2, I analyse some aspects of the development of political theologies in recent decades and their location in the processes of globalization. In section 3, I identify some of the challenges posed to human rights by the political theologies. In section 4, I map the transformation human rights must undergo in order to become a weak-strong answer to the strong questions of our time, particularly those

concerning the reproduction of oppression, domination, and social exclusion in a world supposedly run by universal principles of freedom and justice. Finally, in section 5 I identify the possible mutual enrichment that can derive from an intercultural exchange between counter-hegemonic human rights and progressive political theologies.

2. The Globalization of Political Theologies

2.1. The Hegemonic, the Counter-Hegemonic and the Non-Hegemonic

Elsewhere (Santos, 1995; 2002; 2006a; 2007a) I have been arguing that globalization is not a monolithic phenomenon and that transnational relations are a web of two opposite globalizations: on the one hand, hegemonic, neoliberal globalization, the new phase of global capitalism and the political and cultural norms that go with it; and, on the other, counter-hegemonic globalization or globalization from below, involving the movements and organisations which, through local, national and global articulations, fight against capitalist oppression and inequalities, the destruction of the environment and ways of life, and the imposition of western cultural norms and the destruction of non-western ones caused or worsened by hegemonic globalization. Hegemonic globalization has at its service a number of supposedly all-powerful institutions, from G-7 to the World Bank, from the International Monetary Fund to the World Trade Organization.[5] Counter-hegemonic globalization is only emerging through embryonic institutions such as the World Social Forum (WSF), the Global Assembly of the Social movements, which meets alongside the WSF, transnational advocacy networks, and the new post-neoliberal regionalism, particularly strong among progressive Latin American governments but also visible among African states.

The distinction between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic globalization, however straightforward in general terms, is more difficult to establish in practice than it may seem. First, it is not always easy to establish what is hegemonic and what is counter-hegemonic. What is considered counter-hegemonic in a given part of the world or by a certain social group may be considered hegemonic in another part of the world or by a different social group. In general, the distinction is based on the notion of capitalism as a multifaceted social relation made up of unequal economic, social, political, and cultural relations, and concomitantly on the notion that the struggles against it may be equally multifaceted. However, capitalist social relations are far more univocal on the economic than on the political and cultural level. As the case of China today shows, global capitalism can coexist with different political and cultural regimes, and may actually gather additional power of extended reproduction from such diversity.

Second, there are forms of social regulation that are neither hegemonic nor counter-hegemonic, as the struggles which, though fighting against some aspect of neo-liberal globalization, cannot be considered counter-hegemonic in the sense I am adopting here. I consider non-hegemonic every experience or principle which, in one way or another, deviates from the general regime of capitalist domination, without however putting in question the inevitability of domination (unequal relations of knowledge and power) as the basic structure of social organisation. By the same token, I consider counter-hegemonic every experience or principle that resists against capitalism in the name of values grounding equal relations of knowledge and power to which capitalism, even when it grants them formal recognition, prevents them from being substantively and meaningfully realised.

In light of this distinction, a form of regulation proposing the substitution of the religious state for the secular state is certainly not part of hegemonic social regulation, neither is it counter-hegemonic at all, since social emancipation as understood here is unthinkable under conditions of religious (or non-religious) authoritarianism. Likewise, a struggle that aims to replace capitalist forms of oppression, domination and exclusion by pre-capitalist ones cannot be considered counter-hegemonic. Political theologies that reject the distinction between the sacred and the profane, or between public and private space, can be seen as non-hegemonic, but not as counter-hegemonic, since they do not confront capitalism, rather crediting it oftentimes with divine justification.

2.2. The Western Resolution of the Religious Question

Claiming religion as a constitutive element of public life is a phenomenon that has been increasingly gaining relevance in the past few decades. It is a multifaceted phenomenon, both as regards the denominations involved and political and cultural orientations. But its presence is pervasive all over the world and the networks feeding it are transnational, which allows us to pronounce it a global phenomenon. As is the case concerning the globalization processes identified above, this is not a totally new phenomenon. Just think of the role played by Catholicism in the European colonial expansion, or that of Islam in the conquest of Persia (633-656) and in the Ottoman Empire (1299-1922). It is new only to the extent that is occurs after centuries of colonial and neo-colonial domination, as well as in the aftermath of the global imposition of the cultural and political paradigm of western modernity. The hard kernel of this paradigm lies in the specific resolution found for a no less specific religious conflict: the philosophical, i. e. "universal" recognition of Christian values as counterpart to relegating institutional Christianity to the management of the private space, the space of the individuals' autonomous and voluntary decisions.

This is not the place to analyse the equivocations of this resolution: the chosen and the rejected values (what are exactly the Christian values?), the distance between the terms of the resolution and its practice (was Aquinas right in criticising his contemporaries for paying tribute to principles while violating them in practice, an attitude he called the *habitus principiorum*?), the chaotic interpenetration of public and private space (to what extent are eschatological flights of this world subverted by social and political interferences?), and — the greatest equivocation of all — whether institutional Christianity (e. g. the Catholic Church) did indeed accept or merely tolerated such a resolution of the religious question. What is important, rather, is to insist that, without the distinction between public space and private space, and without relegating religion to the latter, the principles of modern western social regulation and social emancipation are not thinkable at all. The same is true of eighteenth century natural rights and their successors, the human rights of modern constitutionalism and Universal Declarations.

The modern western resolution of the religious question is a globalized localism, that is, a local solution which, by virtue of the economic, political and cultural power of its promoter, ends up extending its range to the entire globe. Western capitalist modernity generated many such globalized localisms and the resolution of the religious question is probably the most fragile of all, not only because it is not clear, even at the locale of origin, whether it is actually the result of agreements, rather than an unilateral imposition, but also because, in the places to which it was transplanted, the distinction between public and private space was strictly confined to the "little Europes" of the colonial territories and freely manipulated by the colonial power.

2.3. A Typology of Political Theologies

The contradictions and equivocations of the modern western solution of the religious question are variously present in the different ways in which, in recent times, religion has been claimed as one of the constitutive elements, if not the only one, of public space. Several distinctions are, therefore, in order. I am not concerned here with the religious experience of individuals or communities, but with the way in which such experience is conceived of by missionary agents and institutions. I designate as political theology the different modes of conceiving the intervention of religion, as divine message, in the social and political organisation of society.[6] In a more or less radical manner, all said agents and institutions question the modern distinction between the public and the private. The range and criterion or orientation of the intervention ground some of the fundamental distinctions to be made.[7]

2.3.1. Pluralist and Revelationist Theologies

As to range*, a distinction must be made between pluralist and revelationist* theologies,[8] of which there are different versions both in Christianity and Islam. Two major issues account for this distinction: the relation between reason and revelation; the relation between revelation and history. According to Moosa, with reference to one of the leading scholars of Islam in the twentieth century, Fazlur Rahman (2000), we may define the first issue as a tension that "lies in the fact that revelation emanated from a divine and transcendental source but occurs within history and is understood by the human mind" (2000:13). According to pluralist theologies, this tension can be managed by striking a balance between reason and revelation. However divine and incommensurable with human reason, revelation's sole purpose is to be accessible to human reason and to be fulfilled through human action, which would be impossible if humans were incapable of creative thinking and autonomous action. In sum, a humanistic

conception of religion. On the contrary, according to revelationist theologies, revelation is an eternal, uncreated divine speech and, as such, human creativity in relation to it cannot but be a sacrilegious reduction. In sum, a theocentric conception of religion.

The issue of the relation between revelation and history is also well formulated by Fazlur Rahman (1982) when he asks, in Moosas's formulation: "How do the norms and values of revelation have an enduring relevance to religious communities without becoming anachronistic?" (2000:15). According to pluralist theologies, revelation occurred in a given social and political context and its human value depends on its being open to new contexts, making itself relevant by the way it responds to the existential and social needs of a given time. In sum, a religion *in* history. According to revelationist theologies, on the contrary, revelation, being eternal, is a-contextual and thus contains in itself all possible historical needs and the accidents that give rise to them. In sum, history *in* religion.

Pluralist theologies conceive of religion as contributing to the public life and the political organisation of society but accept the autonomy of the latter.[9] Even while accepting the separation of State and civil society, they refuse the State's monopoly of social organisation and the notion of civil society as private sphere. On the contrary, they argue that civil society configures a non-state public space, in which religion must intervene — through the family, civil society institutions, nongovernamental organisations — with the aim of exerting some measure of control over the State. Revelationist theologies, on the other hand, conceive of religion as the only source of legitimation of political power and maintain, therefore, the unity of religion and the State, under the aegis of religion. In the case of the Christian version, scholars speak of an emergent political theology — opposed to the pluralist political theology considered to be the dominant one — in which the only legitimate community, the only true polity, is the Augustinian city of God centered on the Church, the latter being based on the Eucharist Sacrifice of redemptive reconciliation. Drawing on the followers of this theology (John Milbank, Stanley Hauerwas, Oliver O'Donovan, among others), Daniel M. Bell Jr. asserts that to say that the Church is the exemplary form of human community "is first and foremost a claim that the meaning of all politics and every community flows from participation in Christ" (2004: p. 435). Unlike dominant political theology, emergent political theology does not acknowledge the State as an agent of history. According to it, only God is active in history, a conviction, announces Bell Jr., "now bringing about a new age". Here is his rhetorical question: "What is the proper political correlate of the Christian mythos? Leviathan or the Body of Christ?" (2004: p. 437). The fundamental contestation of the modern State often has its expression in the idealisation of remote pasts: the medieval, pre-modern State, in the case of Christian theologies, or the caliphate, in the case of Islamic theologies.

2.3.2. Traditionalist and Progressive Theologies

As regards the criterion or orientation of the religious intervention, *we can distinguish traditionalist* [10] *and progressive theologies*, of which, too, as in the case of pluralist and revelationist theologies, there are different Christian and Islamic versions. Traditionalist theologies intervene in political society by defending, as the best solution for the present, social and political arrangements of the past. They make use of theological data in order to emphasise political ideas that trace political authority back to religious authority with the aim of giving politics the stability and immunity possessed by religion. The mass of people, considered insufficiently mature to hold political power, must be kept in a state of subjection (Metz, 1980: p. 21). The distinction between the religion of the oppressed and the religion of the oppressors is, therefore, not acknowledged; what from another perspective is viewed as the religion of the oppressor is said to be the standard and legitimate religious experience while the religion of the oppressed is either stigmatised or ignored. Progressive theologies, on the contrary, are grounded on the distinction between the religion of the oppressed and the religion of the oppressors, and severely criticise institutional religion as a religion of the oppressors. Since, according to them, it is not legitimate to separate the analysis of religion from the analysis of the relations of production, the religion of the oppressors is, in western modernity, a "religion of capitalism." In the case of liberation theology, the critique of capitalism, much influenced by Marxism, particularly in its Latin-American version, is at the core of a theological renewal that focuses on the poor and oppressed as a collective entity. It conceives of faith as being liberating only to the extent that it contributes to the collective liberation of the poor (Gutierrez, 2004: p. 37).

According to progressive theologies, the separation of public and private space has always been a way of domesticating or neutralising the emancipatory potential of religion, a process which has counted on the complicity and even active participation of conservative theologies.[11] In the Christian version, progressive theologies assumed a particularly relevant form among liberation theologies and many of

the feminist theologies (the non-essentialist ones, in particular). Such theologies insistently criticise any religion that complies with the capitalist State and society, denouncing it as bourgeois and politically "deactivated," because emptied out of the libertarian content of its founding message. As the victim of a political process in which he confronted the powerful of his time, Jesus Christ stands as foundation of the political struggles of liberation of the oppressed of all times.

The progressive Christian theologies insist mainly on the history of the sociological movement generated by Jesus. According to them, this movement shows that religion does not emerge from the private domain. For good or ill, religion never left the public domain: for ill, because it was an essential legitimating element of colonial order; for good, because it has always been an inspiring source for the social groups and movements that have struggled against injustice and oppression throughout history. According to Metz (1980: p. 63), while accepting the idea of the privatised individual (a male individual, I would add), theology established a contrast between the subject, on the one hand, and history and society, on the other, and with it lost any base for solidarity and hope. On the contrary, for political theology, "the faith of Christians is a praxis in history and society" (Metz, 1980: p. 73). In a similar vein, Soelle defends that the aim of political theology is "to bring faith and action together more satisfactorily" (1974: 2).

Pluralistic theologies can be progressive or traditionalist. In my definition, revelationist theologies cannot be progressive because they defend the totalitarianism of religion and usually of a single faith. It is therefore unthinkable to ground upon them the struggles for the historical values that constitute the counter-hegemonic globalization as defined above.

Distinguishing between different kinds of theology (pluralist and revelationist; progressive and traditionalist) shows that the relations among the rising religious phenomenon, forms of globalization, and human rights are not univocal or monolithic (see table 1). As regards globalization, all of them are non-hegemonic to the extent that they question either the all-encompassing efficacy of secular institutions or the secular nature of the struggles against it. Progressive theologies carry a strong counter-hegemonic potential. Indeed, many of the religious social movements that take part in the World Social Forum are inspired by progressive theologies, liberation theologies in particular.[12] On the other hand, traditionalist theologies, whether pluralist or revelationist, to the extent that they inform the processes of religious globalization, are non-hegemonic forms of globalization, but in no way are they counter-hegemonic in the sense used here.

Table 1

	Range	
	Pluralist	**Revelationist**
Orientation **Traditionalist**	non-hegemonic globalization; hostile to human rights	non-hegemonic globalization; hostile to human rights
Progressive	counter-hegemonic globalization; friendly to reconstructed human rights	

2.4. The Case of Revelationist Islam

The challenges to these distinctions and categorisations are huge when we are faced with non-western (and non-Christian), political theologies, particularly when they are militantly anti-western.[13] I am speaking of political theologies and not of religions.[14] Islam is as much (or even less) non-Christian than Judaism.[15] Moreover, Islam is more western than Buddhism, but the latter is more attractive to western intellectual elites than the former. However, even with reference to political theologies all these categories are very slippery. What does it mean to be anti-western? Does it mean the rejection of western modernity as a cultural project or the rejection of colonialism and capitalism? For instance,

although the Moslem Brotherhood in Egypt — which is not a monolithic movement, far from it (Saadawi and Hetata, 1999) — is viewed and views itself as anti-western, the relations of some of its members with western capitalism, including with its most predatory financial features, are well-known.[16] On the political level, what to think of Islamic organisations in Egypt, Algeria, Lebanon and Palestine participating in and sometimes winning electoral processes framed in western-based conceptions of liberal democracy? What about the Islamic Republic of Iran based on a popular revolution followed by parliamentary democracy? And in the case of fair and free electoral victories, is it equally western of western capitalist powers to accept them and to refuse or boycott them, as happened in Algeria and Palestine? On the other hand, being anti-western does not preclude the possibility of entering in tactic alliances with western political powers, as dramatically illustrated by the Taliban in Afghanistan being armed by the USA to fight the USSR (Achcar, 2006).

I actually think that there are no satisfactory, let alone univocal, conceptual solutions to these challenges. Dealing with political theologies has precisely the distinct merit of revealing the limits of the theoretical work in this domain. This can be observed through what might be the most difficult case: the globalization of Islam and its political theology. I speak of a conceptual greater difficulty, not of a greater political threat. Indeed, I think it is unwarranted to make general evaluations of political threat or dangerousness among certain versions of Jewish fundamentalism, Christian fundamentalism, combinations of both, as in the case of Christian Zionism,[17] or Islamic fundamentalism, to use expressions that are current in political discourse.[18]

As is the case with Christianity there is in Islam an immense variety of political theologies varying widely, whether as to their range, or criterion for intervention in society.[19] In this text, I focus on revelationist Islam, nowadays a powerful current within Islamic religion. But in no way should it be forgotten that the diversity of religious experiences inside Islam is greater than inside the other two Abrahamic religions.[20] The power of revelationist Islam has its own causes some of which I analyse in this text but it is highly amplified by its visibility in the western media and their obsession with the "war on terror". An analysis of Islam in Africa or in Indonesia, with the largest Islamic population in the world, provides us a much richer picture of Islamic experiences.[21] According to revelationist Islam, on the basis of the revealed law that grounds it, the *Shari'a*, religion permeates the whole society and the personal lives of the believers. By resorting to Islam's cultural and historical legacy and engaging in a radical critique of western imperialism, revelationist Islam proposes to change the living conditions of the believers, defrauded by the failure of the national and pro-western development projects of the Islamic States in the first four decades of the twentieth century. Whereas the more extremist tendencies focus on violence against what is considered to be western interests, the more moderate tendencies engage in voluntary work in education, health, and social welfare, in what amounts to something like an Islamic modernisation project. (Westerlund and Svanberg, 1999: p. 20).[22]

Revelationist Islam is definitely part of a larger process which I call here the globalization of political theologies. Revelationist Islam operates outside the boundaries of Islamic nationalism and feeds on its crisis[23]. Islamic nationalism was, in fact, a set of national political projects that came out of the struggle against colonialism. All these projects translated themselves into authoritarian States, some of them revolutionary, some of them traditionalist. All of them, however, were intent on instrumentalising or controlling Islam under the pretence of modernising it and, in fact, putting it at the service of the State. If the traditionalists found in Islam the glorious past that ratified them, the revolutionaries used Islam to give the future back to Islamic societies. In either case, the question was one of authoritarian legitimation processes, in which personalistic political power frequently resorted to religious references, in spite of alleged laicity and secularism.[24]

The revelationist political Islam of today feeds on the failure of these projects; rather than state-centric, it is society-centric and global in scope. It transfers the project of renovation to the transnational society of believers, subjecting the State to a radical critique and accusing it of complicity with or submission to western imperialism. The latter is the major enemy, in that it has been the source of all humiliation for the Islamic peoples. While some versions radically oppose all the constitutive dimensions of hegemonic, neoliberal globalization — economic, social, political and cultural — others distinguish among them and, while refusing the cultural and political dimensions, embrace the economic one.

Moreover, at least the most extremist versions of these theologies[25] have very little to do with the counter-hegemonic globalization as defined above and as it emerges, for instance, from the process of the WSF.[26] The counter-hegemonic globalization of the WSF welcomes and celebrates cultural and

political diversity; it is secular, even if including religion-inspired movements, which in any case must respect the large majority of nonreligious movements;[27] the project of future society it defends is open, since the designation of "another world is possible" includes many forms of social emancipation; it lies in very fluid, horizontal organisational models, with no central leadership, and whose fulfilment depends on voluntary convergences; lastly, while proposing a new politics and a new epistemology, many of the movements it embraces share the cultural, philosophical, and ethical paradigm of western modernity.

Regarding many of these aspects, the globalization of revelationist political Islam is at the antipodes of the counter-hegemonic globalization of the WSF.[28] Intriguingly enough, it seems, rather, to share some similarities both with the modernist utopias, which were closed models of future society, and with some characteristics of hegemonic neoliberal globalization: unique thought (whether neoliberalism or Islamism), juridical ecumene (be it the rule of law or the *Shari'a*), monolithic expansionism (be it the market or conversion), the critique of the State (be it of the Welfare State or of the secular State).

Specific mention is here in order of the relations between, on the one hand, Islam, and particularly revelationalist Islam, and, on the other, women's rights, the struggle against sexual discrimination, and feminism. This may well be the field in which it is more important to counter the monolithic conceptions of Islam prevalent in the West today. The struggles against global capitalism and in favour of counter-hegemonic globalization must take into account the different forms of power and oppression feeding the reproduction of inequality and discrimination – class, gender, race, caste, sexual orientation, religious choice – and fight against them all. In the context of Islam, and particularly in the context of revelationist Islam, the struggle against sexual discrimination appears to be one of the most difficult. In this regard, western modernity and Islam seem to be far apart. So much so that one of the positions supporting women's rights in Islam takes off from the fundamental opposition between Islam and western modernity, while drawing exclusively on the latter. This is not the place to analyse the alleged "elective affinities" between western modernity, especially in its liberal version (primacy of law and individual rights), and women's liberation, or, conversely, to assess the patriarchal nature of capitalism and the intrinsic limits of the struggles against sexual discrimination in capitalist societies.[29] I simply address here the debate concerning the compatibility or incompatibility between Islam and women's liberation, a debate that has divided the feminist movement. The compatibility thesis is based on the idea of Islamic feminism, i.e. that it is possible to create, in Islam itself, an emancipatory alternative to secular feminism. Two very distinct kinds of experiences of Islamic women ground this position. On the one hand, experiences warranted by Islamic theologies of pluralist and progressive orientation, often understood as Islamic reformism.[30] On the other, experiences of women based in countries where revelationist Islam dominates, as is the case of the Islamic Republic of Iran, who struggle for legal reform or interpretations of the *Shari'a* capable of granting full citizenship to women.[31] The incompatibility thesis, in turn, has as reference mainly the patterns of gender relations and the interpretations of the *Shari'a* prevailing in societies dominated by revelationist Islam. According to some authors, "Islamic feminism" is an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms, since, whatever its many forms may be, whether "fundamentalist or reformist," it can never challenge the traditional, patriarchal system (Mojab, 2001: p. 131).

It is highly probable that this topic will continue to divide the movements of Islamic women from those of their non-Islamic allies. One of the most productive facets of the debate and the political struggle is, to my mind, a critical feminism attempting to include in the same analytical horizon not only the limitations of Islamic feminism, but also the limitations of western, liberal feminism. Indeed, both conceptions of feminism lack a critique of the mechanisms that reproduce unequal power relations, and that is why the real inequalities between men and women are devalued under the legal fetishism of formal equality. Thus, critical feminism renders far more complex the relation between Islam and western modernity.

In light of the above discussion, it seems to me that the challenges posed by political theologies to human rights and the ways they relate to contradictory processes of globalization require a more specific and differentiating analysis. That is what I purport to do in the next sections.

3. Human Rights in the Contact Zones with Political Theologies

The rise of political theologies generates new contact zones among rival conceptions of social ordering and social transformation, with new forms of political, cultural and ideological turbulence deriving therefrom, which impact on human rights in a very particular way. Such turbulence brings a new light to the limits of human rights politics on a global scale. In the following, I mention the following dimensions and manifestations of this turbulence: the turbulence among rival principles; the turbulence between roots and options; the turbulence between the sacred and the profane, the religious and the secular, the transcendent and the immanent.

3.1. The Turbulence among Rival Principles

The turbulence among rival principles must be analysed in the context of an old tension inhabiting the human rights discourse and practice resulting from the discrepancy between principles and practices. This discrepancy is indeed much older than human rights. It is present in most cultures and social systems, but is particularly salient in societies inspired by Christianity. Thomas Aquinas (1948) identified it perfectly when he criticised the Christians of his time for what he called *habitus principiorum*: the habit of obsessively invoking Christian principles to allow themselves to fail to observe them in practice. Western modernity inherited this *habitus* and turned it into a principle of political action, consecrated by modern constitutionalism: the catalogues of human rights recognised by the modern constitutions became increasingly inclusive, but the prevailing political practices went on committing or tolerating violations, often mass violations, of human rights. This inconsistency reaches today unprecedented levels, particularly after neoliberal globalization grounded the legitimacy of social change on three principles, all of them most vulnerable to the discrepancy between principles and practices: rule of law, democracy, and human rights.

Progressive theologies have played an important role in reinforcing non-conformism before the hypocrisy of conventional human rights thinking and practice. Whenever they are part of counter-hegemonic struggles — whether for cancelling the debt of poor countries, agrarian reform, or the collective rights of indigenous peoples, etc. — human rights undergo a process of political and philosophical reconstruction that renders more visible and condemnable the discrepancy between principles and practices. The social and economic cleavage between the global North and the global South has its expression today mainly in the discrepancy between supposedly emancipatory principles and practices which, in their name, contribute to reproduce oppression and injustice.

The resilience of the discrepancy between principles and practices and the hypocrisy of conventional human rights in this regard have fuelled the current turbulence among rival principles in the contact zone. The historical failure of 'universal' human rights in bringing about social practice that is consonant with their principles has opened the space for the cultural and political emergence of alternative principles. For example, human rights principles, on the one hand, and other principles of human dignity underlying political theologies, both Christian and non-Christian, on the other: from Koran's *umma,* to Hindu *dharma,* to the *pachamama* of the indigenous peoples of the Americas.

The cleavage among rival principles is especially visible in the conflict between western based globalization, whether hegemonic or counter-hegemonic, and the rise of political theologies, especially non-Christian ones. This cleavage raises new questions of global justice, not only the older question of socio-economic injustice, but also the newer question of cognitive injustice, that is, the unequal relations among different kinds of knowledge and different worldviews. Cognitive justice has multiple dimensions: epistemological, sexual, racial, and religious.

Coming after a long succession of formulas — the "civilising mission", progress, development and modernization —, neoliberal globalization pursues a global imperial project, based on clearly western and Christian principles finely matched with conventional human rights: separation between immanence and transcendence and a specular conception of the relation between both of them; individual autonomy; individualism in economy and politics (common interest based on the pursuit of self interest); secularisation (separation of Church and State, and transference of divine omnipotence to the secular State); separation of nature and society, the former conceived of as the latter's ever available resource; progress and secular version of redemption; distinction between public and private space, religion belonging to the latter.

These conceptions have always clashed with other and rival conceptions. The peoples that entered the zone of contact with western modernity did so under conditions of inferiority, as typically in the case of

colonialism. Many were forced to abandon the conceptions that had guided them before they reached the contact zone; others adopted the new conceptions more or less willingly or appropriated them changing their meanings. The strength of the new conceptions seldom resided in the conceptions themselves, rather in the power of those wanting to impose them. Throughout a multi-secular history, there alternated periods of more or less violent imposition (between war and conversion, pillage and trade) and periods of more or less voluntary imitation/adoption (between assimilationism and selective adoptions on behalf of anti-colonial struggles; between the reactionary multiculturalism of tolerance and emancipatory interculturality).

The imposition of mono-cultural logics took many forms.[32] They produced a wide range of populations and ways of being, living and knowing that were demoted as ignorant, inferior, particular, residual or unproductive, whatever the case might be. Such classifications were established in an authoritarian way, always at the service of a project of economic, political, social and cultural domination. Among all the non-western peoples (cultures and sociabilities) that were subjected to this colonial and imperial project, the Islamic peoples, cultures and sociabilities have more than any others clearly defined their submission to such a project as a historical defeat. The memory of periods of great cultural, political and social flourishment, and even hegemony in large parts of the world, has no doubt a lot to do with this. The defeat and the memory must have contributed decisively to making the Islamic peoples feel their historical options in a more radical and dilemmatic way. They could either imitate western modernity, its principles and monocultures, thereby losing their identity, denying their glorious past, and becoming strangers to themselves (imitation, alienation, strangeness); or, on the contrary, radically reject modernity and take the costs of continuing to live in a time patterned centuries ago by adversary principles and monocultures, which not only dominate but humiliate them as well (rejection and alternative social project). The first option seems to have prevailed in the period of Arab nationalism, mentioned above (and which in fact spread far beyond the Arab world), when the slogan was "modernising Islam." The second option, in turn, seems to prevail today in political Islam, the slogan being "Islamising modernity", or, in the case of revelationist theologies, altogether to reject modernity. This is why, in the contact zone of human rights and Islamic theologies, this option contributes the most today to create turbulence among rival principles.[33]

The turbulence among rival principles derives from a politically organised non-conformism vis-à-vis the historical defeat of a given set of principles — be it the defeat of the medieval Church or the defeat of Islam by western imperialism — along with the refusal to accept it as irreversible. The issue is not to measure distances, since the rival principles are often viewed as incommensurable and all of them claiming to be ultimate. In a way, we are facing rival monocultures. In these conditions, the contact zone tends to assume a particularly confrontational character, and the negotiations and compositions can only be imagined on the basis of laborious procedures of intercultural mediation and translation.[34]

3.2. The Turbulence between Roots and Options

The second dimension of turbulence in the contact zone having an impact on human rights is the turbulence between roots and options.[35] This kind of turbulence traverses all the contact zones between human rights and political theologies, a turbulence that affects both the cleavage between the global North and the global South, and the cleavage between the global West and the global non-West. This particular turbulence raises a third issue of justice at the heart of the contact zone: historical, postcolonial justice. What follows applies in general to changes in the binary roots/option brought about by political theologies, particularly by the revelationist ones. However, I focus my argument on the changes brought about by revelationist political Islam.

The social construction of identity and change in western modernity is based on an equation of roots and options. Such an equation confers a dual character on modern thought: on the one hand, it is a thought of roots, on the other, a thought of options. The thought of roots concerns all that is profound, permanent, singular, and unique, all that provides reassurance and consistency; the thought of options concerns all that is variable, ephemeral, replaceable, and indeterminate from the viewpoint of roots. The major difference between roots and options is scale. Roots are large-scale entities. As in cartography, they cover vast symbolic territories and long historical durations, but fail to map the characteristics of the field in detail and without ambiguity. Theirs is, therefore, a map that guides as much as it misguides. On the contrary, options are small-scale entities. They cover confined territories and short durations, but do so in enough detail to allow for the assessment of the risk involved in the choice of alternative options. Because of this difference of scale, roots are unique, while options are

multiple. The root/option duality is a founding duality, that is to say, it is not subjected to the play it itself institutes between roots and options. In other words, one does not have the option not to think in terms of roots and options.

The efficacy of the equation lies in a double cunning. First, the cunning of equilibrium between the past and the future. The thought of roots presents itself as a thought of the past as opposed to the thought of the future, which the thought of options alone is supposed to be. I speak of cunning because, in fact, both the thought of roots and the thought of options are thoughts of the future. In this equation, the past remains largely underrepresented which does not mean oblivion. On the contrary, it may manifest itself as 'excessive memory', to use Charles Maier's expression (1993: p. 137). There is under-representation whenever memory becomes an exercise in melancholy which, rather than recovering the past, neutralizes its redemptive potential by substituting evocation for the struggle against failing expectations.

The second kind of cunning concerns equilibrium between roots and options. The equation presents itself as symmetry: equilibrium of roots and options, and equilibrium in the distribution of options. Indeed, it is not so. On the one hand, options are overwhelmingly predominant. Of course, certain historical moments or certain social groups consider roots predominant while others so consider options. But, as a matter of fact, it is always a question of options. While certain kinds of options imply the discursive primacy of roots, others imply their marginalization. The equilibrium is impossible. Depending on the historical moment or social group, roots precede options or, on the contrary, options precede roots. The play is always from roots to options and from options to roots; the only variable is the power of each term as a narrative of identity and change. On the other hand, there is no equilibrium or equity in the social distribution of options. Quite the opposite, roots are but constellations of determinations which, as they define the field of options, also define the social groups that have access to it and those that do not.

A few examples will help me to concretise this historical process. To begin with, it is in the light of this equation of roots and options that modern western society sees medieval society and distinguishes itself from it. Medieval society is seen as a society in which the primacy of roots is total, whether as regards religion, theology or the tradition. Medieval society is not necessarily a static society, but it evolves according to a logic of roots. On the contrary, modern society sees itself as a dynamic society that evolves according to a logic of options. This it proves by assuming as founding root the social contract and the general will sustaining it. The social contract is the founding metaphor of a radical option — the option to leave the state of nature and to inaugurate the civil society — which turns into a root that makes everything possible, except to go back to the state of nature. The contractuality of roots is irreversible, such being the limit of the reversibility of options. The paramountcy in western modernity of concepts such as individualism, citizenship, human rights, civil society, markets, civic nation, constitutional patriotism signals the priority given to the logic of options, which, in any case, and as we just saw, are options based on roots. This self-description of western modernity led it to conceive not just medieval society, but all the other cultures and societies as based on roots and accordingly on the paramountcy of primordialism, status, identity, community, ethnicity, ethnic nation, disregarding that in all societies the logic of roots operates in conjunction with a logic of options.

Whatever their previous experiences, the cultures that entered the contact zone with western modernity were forced to define themselves in terms of the equation between roots and options. They did so both to resist and adapt themselves to the modern equation. While defining the terms of the conflict, western modernity engaged in a brutal redistribution of the past, present, and future of the peoples and cultures in the contact zone. It reserved the future for itself and allowed various pasts to co-exist with it, as long as they all converged into the same future: its own. That is to say, it ascribed to the dominated peoples and cultures neutralised pasts, without the capacity to produce alternative futures vis-à-vis western modernity. Decolonization and the independences did not mean a break with this theory of history. To a large extent, they furthered it, and this is why the contact zone continued to be a colonial zone, in spite of the end of political colonialism.

3.2.1. Surprising affinities between neoliberal western modernity and revelationist Islam

The high turbulence that now affects the equation between roots and options is bound to have a broad impact on all social and cultural experiences and trajectories that meet or confront each other in the contact zone, even though such impact will reflect the asymmetries that ground the contact zone. On

the side of hegemonic western modernity, the radicalisation of options through loss of roots is observable. The social contract, conceived of as roots to start with, is being transformed into an option among many others: the movement away from the social contract and toward possessive individual contractualism. Thus, the foundational move from the state of nature to civil society inscribed in liberal political theory, at first thought to be irreversible, reveals itself to be reversible after all. The increasingly larger social groups that are banned from the social contract (post-contractualism) or do not even have access to it (pre-contractualism) become discardable populations. Without minimal citizenship rights, they are indeed cast into a new state of nature, what I call social fascism.[36] In such conditions, options may multiply themselves indefinitely, since they are freed from the constraints of roots. In reality –the reality of unemployed workers, low-paid job workers, immigrants, impoverished middle classes--the greater the abstract autonomy to select among options the smaller the concrete capacity of doing so.

On the part of cultures and societies which were historically colonised by western modern capitalism, particularly as regards Islamic cultures and societies, an apparently opposite process is occurring: the radicalisation of roots, the search for an originary identity, and a glorious past empowering enough to ground an alternative future. In this case, options stop having any meaning, to the extent that the only alternative consists in resorting to what has no alternative: the foundational root. The radicalism of this option is justified by the idea that something went profoundly wrong in history, in that such a glorious past was unable to prevent the abysmal humiliation of the present and the total blockage of the future.

Notwithstanding the many differences between the two processes of turbulence and destabilization of the equation between roots and options (in western societies and in Islamic societies), they have intriguing similarities. First, both processes share the same abysmal fear of the future. Revelationist Islam exorcises it through its radical and politicised recourse to the past, thereby converting it into an all-empowering past, an all-supporting root that does not allow for options. The West, on the contrary, unable to resort to the past, having neutralized it a long time ago, as Walter Benjamim has shown so well (1977), resorts to the radical repetition of the present (the end of history).

A second similarity resides in the polarisation between authoritarian processes of depoliticisation and repoliticisation, leading on to the extreme instrumentalisation of matters of principle. Regarding western modernity, the erosion of the social contract as a root renders possible the instrumental use of all the principles derived from it, namely the rule of law, democracy, and human rights. Symptoms of such instrumentalisation are multiple: the erosion of social and economic rights; a low intensity democracy with a double crisis of representation and participation; appalling double standards in evaluating human rights performances; the state of exception using the pretext of the war on terrorism to control citizens, erode civil and political rights and criminalize social protest. Given the radical instrumentalisation to which human rights are being subjected as a result of the turbulence between roots and options, human rights become foreign inside western modernity itself. It is more and more obvious that the superiority of western modernity only sustains itself on the basis of the negation of everything it has offered historically as justification of its superiority. In the case of revelationist Islamic theologies, the politicisation of the past also implies the instrumentalisation of attributes deemed to be a matter of principle and therefore unavailable, namely the *Shari'a.* In this instance as well, the utter unavailability of law as a root becomes a disguise for its free instrumentalisation as an option.

Both in hegemonic versions of western modernity and in revelationist political theologies, in general, authoritarianism feeds on the reduction of the public space and the crisis of the State, and reinforces both of them. Conversion rather than conversation becomes a priority. Again, in spite of the many differences separating them, hegemonic western modernity and Islamic revelationist theologies alike are revealing destructive dynamics that manifest themselves through new extremisms. Their names are, among others: war, jihad, terrorism, war on terror, State terrorism, neo-assimilationism, martyrs, suicide bombers, immigration laws, discardable populations, Guantánamo, anti-terrorism laws, unilateralism, preemptive war.[37] But the most disturbing form of extremism is what I designate as sacrificial violence. Sacrificial violence is the immolation of what is most precious allegedly in order to save it. In the case of hegemonic western modernity, life is destroyed to save life; human rights are violated in order to defend human rights; the conditions for democracy are destroyed in order to safeguard democracy.[38] The Middle East is currently the privileged ground for the exercise of sacrificial violence by western modernity and capitalism.

The turbulence to which the equation between roots and options in the contact zone is subjected shows that the drama of revelationist political Islam is the drama of hegemonic western modernity as well, notwithstanding the glaring differences, the most glaring one being the fact that modernity has on its side the brute force of global capitalism and war. What is tragic above all is that the dynamics proper to each of the two dramas prevents them from acknowledging their own disturbing similarities. In point of fact, only a profound social, political and cultural redistribution of the past and future would reveal that the two dramas are looking each other in the same mirror. Such redistribution would entail the fulfilment of historical and postcolonial justice, the third dimension of justice, alongside socio-economic and cognitive justice.

3.3. The Turbulence between the Sacred and the Profane, the Religious and the Secular, the Transcendent and the Immanent

This turbulence shows, more dramatically than any other, the cleavages between human rights and western modernity, on one side, and political theologies and, in particular, revelationist political theologies, on the other. In this regard, what is most evident at the outset is the number of radical differences among the conceptions that confront each other in the contact zone. Revelationist political theologies understand turbulence, in this regard, as resulting from the fact that as yet not all the profane has been reduced to the sacred, the secular to the religious, the immanent to the transcendent. Religion is omnipresent and permeates all dimensions of life equally. This understanding of religion, consensual in Islam, is converted by revelationist political Islam into the ultimate political rule. In other words, religion is converted into a political weapon against all vestiges of secularisation left over from the projects to modernise Arab nationalism, deemed to have failed.[39] Hence the frontal attack on the secular State, on the separation between public and private space, and on all the institutions that claim to be governed by rules foreign to the *Shari'a*. Revelationist political Islam is a geopolitical project that asserts itself as theopolitical. Its universalisation occurs by means of the universalisation of the religion of Islam. Given its territorial confinement, the State cannot serve the project of universalising Islam, unless it be governed by religious leaders, whose magisterium and power are extra-territorial. The resurgence of this type of Islamic political theology was made visible by the 1979 Iranian revolution and has consolidated itself in the last two decades.[40]

The contrast of this stance with the political assumptions underlying human rights and western modernity could not be greater. For the latter, religion was early on transferred from the public to the private space, an historical process known as secularisation. Its foundational moment may be dated from 1648, the date of the Treaty of Westphalia, which put an end to the religious wars known as the Thirty Years War. The separation between the spiritual power of the Church and the temporal power of the modern State was a very complex historical process that assumed different forms in different countries, regions of the world and historical periods. It did not prevent religion, for example, from being put at the service of colonialism as an integral part of the civilising mission.

By the same token, if it is true that, with the Enlightenment, religion became an anachronism, its being consigned to the private space considered a transitional phase towards its total disappearance, it is no less true that the power of the State constituted itself through a complex play of mirrors with the sacred power of the Church, assuming many of latter's sacred and ritual characteristics (Marramao, 1994: p. 23). Not to mention the 'Christian values,' which, through the theories of natural law from the seventeenth century onwards, had a great impact on the conception of human rights. Moreover, and at a deeper level, seen from the 'outside', from a non-Christian, non-western perspective, secularism (which should be distinguished from secularity)[41] is as much part of Christianity as Christian religion. Secularism and Christian religion were part of the same colonial 'package'.[42] They were also close partners in the imposition of a monoculture of western scientific knowledge through which so much epistemicide (the suppression of peasant, indigenous and other rival knowledges) has been committed (Santos, 2004; 2007b).

One of the paradoxes of this conception is the fact that Christian influence coexists with the right to freedom of religion. Carl Schmitt even argues in his *Political Theology* that all the concepts pertaining to the power of the State are secularised versions of theological concepts.[43] This viewpoint, focused on the limits of secularisation in western societies, is being widely discussed once again due, in part, to the

challenges posed by Islam and, especially, political Islam. As Teresa Toldy says: "western societies seem to have awakened from the 'secularist dream'" (2007: p. 1).[44]

Be it as it may, claiming the autonomy of the power of the State vis-à-vis religion is one of the fundamental attributes of the separation between public and private space in western modernity. Perhaps for this very reason, however, the fate of religion in western modernity is closely linked to the distinction between public and private space. Indeed, secularisation never aimed to eliminate religion, merely to stabilise it in the private space. The stabilisation of religion was the correlate of the stabilisation, by means of religion, of the oppressions and fears of the private space as the feminist theologies and sociologies have forcefully shown. It so happens that this space has never been stabilised itself, if for nothing else because it is intimately linked to transformations undergoing in the public space. The amplitude of the public sphere, conceived of as the domain of the political, has always been conditioned by the intensity of democracy and the public policies (specially the social policies) of the democratic State. By enlarging the social fields of non-market relations (in education, health, and social welfare), the State developed strategies of legitimation and trust that met with the loyalty of the citizens towards the State,[45] at the same time, such strategies allowed for the institutionalisation of the social conflicts and the public debates they stirred.

For the past thirty years and from different and even opposing political perspectives, the modern distinction between the public and the private sphere has been questioned. On the one hand, it has been questioned by the social movements, particular by the feminist and gay and lesbian movements for which, against the liberal understanding, the private space is political as well, and therefore has to be the object of public debate and political decisions. Only in this way will it be possible to put an end to the oppressions and discriminations reproduced inside the private space. Thus, the private space stopped being the limit of the political and became one of the fields of the political. Paradoxically, this expansion of the public sphere occurred in tandem with the latter's contraction. Various factors contributed to the shrinking of the public space: the crisis of the national State, provoked or deepened by hegemonic globalization; the erosion of social policies; the deinstitutionalisation of the relations between labour and capital; the increase of authoritarianism on the part of state and non-state actors; the mediatisation of politics and the personalisation of political power; the privatisation of public services. As a result, the double binding relation between the public and the private sphere becomes apparent. As the public sphere shrinks — and, as a result, more and more dimensions of collective life get depoliticised — the private space — thereby turned into the foundation of the political autonomy of the individual — expands symbolically and materially. Religion emerges then as one of the central features of such an expansion. With the weakening of safety nets created by the Welfare State, the individual becomes vulnerable to fear, insecurity and loss of hope. As Feuerbach and Marx have shown long ago, religion has always fed on this vulnerability. It may also be argued that the excess of immanence, caused by the retreat of the secularised transcendence of the State, invites the need for an alternative transcendence.

These social and political conditions have been the breeding terrain for conservative political theologies and their radical attacks on the public/private distinction, particularly in the case of the revelationist political theologies for whom the sacred time and space has an absolute command over the profane time and space. This resurgence of conservative, traditionalist political theologies has actually been quite visible since the mid 1970s in the three Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. To the extent that they put an end to civic and democratic debate in their areas of intervention, traditionalist political theologies shrink the public space. Capitalising on the crisis of the legitimacy of the state and the consequent crisis of republican values, they are both the cause and the consequence of the crisis of the historical project of secularisation.

4. Are Other Human Rights Possible?

The preceding analysis shows the magnitude of the clashes that are occurring in the contact zone. Actually, it is rather a wide set of contact zones, and the asymmetries of power in the contact zone are obvious. Such asymmetries derive from the neo-imperial, neo-colonial nature of contemporary world disorder. The oldest ones are almost a thousand years old, if you date them from the Crusades; or more than five centuries, if you date them from the European expansion. What is new about them is, on the one hand, the range and intensity of the fluxes in the contact zone and the new forms of fear and

resistance, on the other. These new features are responsible for the discursive and practical fragility of human rights in contact zones. The stronger the questions raised, the more clearly the weakness of the answer given by human rights transpires.

This does not mean that human rights must be discarded. On the contrary, it has never been so important not to squander ideas and practices of resistance. It just means that only by recognising the current fragilities of human rights is it possible to construct, out of them, but also beyond them, strong ideas and practices of resistance. Such reconstruction will enable the human rights to become a weak-strong answer. As I said in the beginning, I don't think that our transitional time allows for strong answers. It does allow, however, for the radicalisation of whatever is available as an instrument of struggle, resistance and alternative, no matter how limited it may be. The weak-strong answers emerge in the process of such radicalisation.

The complexity of interactions, conflicts and commitments in the contact zone manifests itself in the three turbulences I have identified, and which are the result of as many disjunctions or discrepancies: between rival principles, between roots and options, and, finally, between the religious and the secular. These disjunctions intersect with unequal relations of economic, social, political, and cultural power and the turbulences derive from the intensification of the conflicts they stir. Seen from an ethical and political perspective, the different turbulences reflect different dimensions of the global injustice constitutive of the imperial order in its most recent phase: socio-economic injustice, cognitive injustice (including epistemological, sexual, racial and religious injustice) and historical injustice. What this means is that the different forms of social global injustice have no separate existence and that, therefore, each of them is present in all the others. Even so, it is important and possible to distinguish them in order to identify the different kinds of conflicts and the different types of actors and resistances.

The turbulence among rival principles reveals both socio-economic injustice and cognitive injustice. The former derives, on the one hand, from unfulfilled promises and, on the other, from the many inequalities and discriminations that are not considered violations of the human rights or are silenced by the dominant discourses and practices of human rights. The latter derives from the confrontational actions and interpretations between distinct cultural paradigms, ethical principles, and forms of rationality. Global cognitive justice claims a new relationalism capable of creating a vernacular cosmopolitanism bottom up.[46] A new relationalism, that is, between races, sexes, kinds of knowledge, ways of being. The fragility of human rights, as far as global cognitive injustice is concerned, derives from the fact that the dominant conceptions and practices of human rights themselves produce cognitive injustice. They do so, not because their assumptions are western, but because of the unilateral way in which, on their basis, they construct abstract universal claims. Here, the solution is not relativism, but rather a new relationalism.

The turbulence between roots and options raises a third dimension of social injustice, namely historical injustice. Historical injustice is closely related to cognitive injustice, but it may be distinguished from it because it focuses on the theories and practices of history that have produced an unfair distribution of the possibilities and potentialities of the past, the present, and the future. To readdress historical injustice means, therefore, reparation, alternatives to capitalist development, decolonisation of inter-states, as well as inter-peoples and inter-personal relations. As a result of historical injustice, many peoples, cultures and sociabilities were ascribed or imposed a past without a future by other peoples, cultures and sociabilities, which claimed for themselves a future unencumbered by the past. The former were forced to forget their past and the future in order to live the present; the latter turned the present into the instant ratification of the past and the fleeting moment at which the pathos of future social change is ignited.

This historical injustice can only be revealed in the light of a postcolonial, historical theory and practice. And herein lies the specific fragility of the answer of human rights in this domain. Conventional human rights thinking and practice conceives human rights as a-historical. Hence the difficulty in recognising the collective rights of peoples and social groups that were victims of historical oppressions and the impossibility of seeing in the violations of human rights, acknowledged as such, the symptom of other and much more serious violations, even if not acknowledged as such.[47] Hence, finally, the impossibility of seeing in the unequal relations between the global North and the global South, the global West and the global non-West, unfathomable violations of human rights.

Lastly, the turbulence concerning the relations between the sacred and the profane, the transcendent and the immanent, the religious and the profane is a turbulence in which the collision between conventional human rights and political theologies is most frontal. The weakness of the answer of human rights in this domain derives from three factors. On the one hand, human rights assume their secularisation as a *fait accompli*, rather than an unfinished historical process, full of contradictions. On the other hand, human rights ignore their own unfinished and contradictory character as they favour secularisation without questioning the Christian and western conceptions of human dignity underlying them. Finally, by reducing the issue of religion to religious freedom, human rights turn religion into a private resource, an object of consumption disengaged from its relations of production. They cannot, therefore, distinguish between the religion of the oppressors and the religion of the oppressed.

In light of the challenges posed by the political theologies, the reinvention of human rights and their transformation in a weak-strong answer demands an exercise of intercultural translation and diatopic hermeneutics through which the reciprocal limitations of alternative conceptions of human dignity can be identified, thus opening the possibility of new relations and dialogues among them. This is what I call the *ecology of knowledges*[48] whose aim is the expansion of the struggles for securing human dignity. The possibility and the success of such exercise calls for some specification here. According to traditionalist political theologies, be they pluralist or revelationist, human rights are a secular usurpation of the rights of God. These divine rights, as revealed to the Church and Church leaders, are the only legitimate source of rights and entail more duties than rights. I don't think that an ecology of knowledges is at all possible regarding human rights and traditionalist political theologies since it is unimaginable that an expansion of struggles for securing human dignity might result from such an exercise.

According to progressive pluralistic political theologies — whether Christian, Islamic or others —, conventional human rights politics is little else than institutionalised hypocrisy politics. In the case of Christian political theologies, the example of Jesus cannot but be an inspiration: didn't the Master affront the hypocritical, law-abiding Pharisees with his own practice of forgiveness and redemption?

Here I see a great potential for intercultural translation. The intercultural enrichment of the conceptions of human dignity will not only strengthen the legitimacy of the struggles conducted in the name of it, but it will also help to privilege the conceptions that most directly confront the dimensions of social injustice which I have identified in this text. I don't think that, within the ambit of progressive theologies, this task will be exceedingly difficult in the case of pluralist theologies. For instance, the fact that Islam does not accept a secularised conception of human dignity[49] is not an obstacle to find in its sacred books and law (*Shari'a*) conceptions of human dignity that are not incommensurable in practice with the conception of human dignity underlying human rights. In this spirit, An-Na'im (2006: p. 791) writes: "it is better to seek to transform the understanding of Muslims of those aspects of *Shari'a*, than to confront them with a stark choice between Islam and human rights. Such a choice is not only an offensive violation of freedom of religion or belief, but will also certainly result in the rejection of the human rights paradigm itself by most Muslims".

The rise of political theologies has at least had the historical merit of putting in a new light the limitations, peculiarities and fragilities of conventional human rights politics. The work of reconstruction, or even reinvention of human rights cannot but be enormous, if human rights are to face all the dimensions of global injustice analysed in this text and provide weak-strong answers to the strong questions raised by global injustice.[50] The dominant discourses and practices of human rights today are weak-weak answers, as I have tried to show. But, as I have also tried to point out, the fragility of hegemonic human rights does not merely lie in the fact that they are weak-weak answers to strong questions. It lies mainly in the fact that hegemonic human rights do not even acknowledge the pertinence let alone the seriousness of many of those strong questions. The struggle for a counter-hegemonic politics of human rights must start from such acknowledgement. Once the latter takes place, new possibilities open up for a mutually enriching exchange between counter-hegemonic human rights politics and progressive political theologies. In the next section, I will briefly mention some of such possibilities. Only the limitations of my knowledge are responsible for a privileged focus on progressive Christian theologies. All other progressive political theologies, be they Islamic, Jewish, African, Budhist, Hinduist, Shintoist, Indigenous peoples', Dalits' progressive theologies would be equally eligible for consideration.

5. Toward a Post-secularist Conception of Human Rights: Counter-Hegemonic Human Rights and Progressive Theologies

The kind of counter-hegemonic human rights I have been proposing in this text can only be imagined as a struggle against unjust human suffering, conceived in its broadest sense, and to encompass nature as an integral part of humanity. The twentieth century was an anti-humanist century, and for very good reasons. In many respects, it carried a progressive critique of the kind of abstract Enlightenment humanism which contributed to trivialise and silence so much human degradation under capitalist domination and other forms of domination flourishing in capitalist societies, such as sexism and racism.

Another, rarely acknowledged source of anti-humanism was the death of God. Once the capacity of human beings to transform reality seemed potentially infinite, western modernity made God superfluous. In a very personal and dramatic way, Pascal realised that without God such capacity was also potentially destructive (1966). According to Pascal, thinking of God is the highest form of human thinking. Depriving human beings of thinking of God was equivalent to depriving them of the highest regard for other human beings. This most pious formulation of the presence of God was centuries later fully (and perversely) confirmed by the most impious formulation of Nietzsche: the declaration of the "death of God" (1974). Nietzsche represents the full accomplishment of the modern project concerning God: from superfluity to utter non-existence. Contrary to the modern project, however, the death of God in Nietzsche, rather than meaning the final triumph of human beings, represents their final demise, the end of human beings with capacity to follow moral imperatives or to seek truth, the new possibilities being those of the *Übermensch*.

At the beginning of the twentieth-first century, religion and theology are back. It is not at all sure that God is back as well, at least, not Pascal's God, as the ultimate guarantor of concrete humanity. On the contrary, the ways religions and conservative and revelationist theologies proliferate today make God as superfluous as western modernity's God. God has become the label for a global political enterprise of god-products. But this is not the whole story. Since the 1960s, pluralist, progressive theologies and community-based religious practices have emerged, for which God is revealed in unjust human suffering, in the life experiences of all the victims of domination, oppression and discrimination. As a consequence, to bear witness of this God means to denounce such suffering and to struggle against it. Both revelation and redemption, or rather, liberation, take place in this world, in the form of a struggle for another world made possible. Herein lies the possibility of connecting the return of God to a trans-modern concrete humanism.

My argument in this section is that a dialogue between human rights and progressive theologies is both possible and probably a good path to develop truly intercultural and more effective emancipatory practices. By mutually enriching themselves, human rights and political theologies may deepen the counter-hegemonic potential of both. The result will be an ecology of conceptions of human dignity, some secular some religious, achieved through what I called elsewhere a diatopical hermeneutics (Santos, 1995: pp. 273-278), a practice-oriented exercise of transformative interpretation between the *topos* of human rights and the *topoi* of revelation and liberation of progressive political theologies. In the following, I briefly mention some of the ways this might happen.

5.1. The Human Subject both as a Concrete Individual and as a Collective Being.

Progressive theologies can help to recover the "human" of human rights. Both on the conservative side and on the progressive side, the human has been under siege since the Enlightenment abstractions showed the social and historical vacuity of the concept. From opposite perspectives, the theories of the end of history and the theories of the death of the subject converge to discredit the collective and individual resistance against injustice and oppression. The critical skepticism of Theodor Adorno, who declares the death of the individual in the consumer society and fails to see an alternative, is particularly telling in this regard. As he says in *Prismen*: "The horror, however, is that the citizen has not found a successor" (1955: p. 267). Again, the solution propounded by Marxism — the class subject and the "new man" as the agents of history moving forward — is today equally questioned, due to its inability to combine equality and freedom, liberation and autonomy. Progressive theologies have been aware of these dilemmas, while forging historically concrete conceptions of human dignity in which God is the ultimate guarantor of freedom and autonomy in the struggles that subjects, both individual and collective subjects, carry out to became subjects of their own history.

It comes as no surprise that the theologian Johann Metz, for instance, should draw upon Herbert Marcuse to defend that "solidarity and community do not imply an abandonment of the individual, but are the result of autonomous individual decision and that this solidarity is a solidarity of individuals, not of masses" (Metz, 1980: p. 69). According to Metz, "the God of the Christian Gospel is, after all, not a God of conquerors, but a God of slaves" (1980: p. 71). Therefore, to be a subject in God's presence implies to be present in the struggle against oppression and hatred of the kind that make it impossible for the mass of the populations in many parts of the world to become subjects. The dialectics of the individual and the collective is well expressed by Metz, when he says: "Because of its eschatological proviso over against any abstract concept of progress and humanity, the Church protects the individual of the present moment from being used as material and means for the building up of a technological and totally rationalised future. It criticises the attempt to see individuality merely as a function of a technologically controlled social production" (1968: p. 13). Similarly, concerning theology, "it has always been very important to political theology to empower the subject in his or her historical social conditions, and not in an abstract subjectivity" (Schuster and Boschert-Kimmig, 1999: p. 24).

5.2. Multiple Dimensions of Unjust Human Suffering.

The God of progressive political theologies is a God involved in the history of oppressed peoples and their struggles for liberation. In the case of Christian theologies, the story of Jesus shows how God becomes poor and powerless so that the oppressed may liberate themselves from poverty and powerlessness. The resurrection of Jesus is just a metaphor for the freedom to struggle against oppression. Theologies differ according to the specific people, social group or type of suffering they privilege. Multiple dimensions of concrete unjust human suffering are thereby revealed opening up a broad and dense landscape of oppressive relations and struggles for justice that fly in the face of any reductionist theory of history or social emancipation. A few examples will suffice to illustrate this point.

The first generation of Latin-American liberation theologies were concerned with morally repugnant social inequality. They focused their attention on the poor and excluded, such as peasants and landless rural workers, unemployed or miserably paid industrial workers, miners, the new slave workers of neocolonial plantations laboring under the most sub-human conditions, or squatter settlers.[51] In the following years, other forms of oppression, such as sexual discrimination against women, were included in the theological reflection and practice, thus giving rise to a vibrant current of feminist theologies in Latin-American and elsewhere.[52] The importance of feminist liberation theologies cannot be overemphasised, since all major religions discriminate against women. Feminist liberation theologies developed areas of concern which had been neglected by male liberation theologians. According to Rosemary Ruether, those areas include: the question of culture and spirituality, the element of personal nurture and supportive community often ignored in favor of social action; a new conception of the human-nature relationship that interconnects ecological distortion and social injustice; the focus on women-church: small intentional communities, usually women, who gather for mutual support and consciousness-raising, and who collaborate with other social movements inside and outside the church; a comprehensive transformation of interpersonal and social relations that aims equally at the transformation of males and females; the recognition of the interconnection in social systems of various kinds of oppression—gender, social class, race, etc—leading to an inclusive vision of liberation, not simply a vision aimed at one group leaving some other oppression intact (1991: pp. 228-229).[53] In the 1980s and 1990s, the internal differentiation of feminist theologies followed a similar development occurring in secular feminism (white, black, middle class, Third World, *mujerista*, lesbian, indigenous, *mestiza/o* feminism). The fragmentation of feminist activism deriving from such sub-coding, has lead Margaret Kamitsuka, who calls herself a "white feminist theologian," to argue recently that "it would be valuable to be able to recuperate 'feminist theology'as an overtly neutral, noncoded term that can, at certain times, be used to refer to the diversity of these and other yet-to-be-named women's theological writings (with care always taken by hegemonic positionalities to self-name)" (2004: p. 179).

The awareness of persisting colonial relations in supposedly post-colonial states brought to the center of theological analysis the question of racism. Accordingly, the suffering and the struggles of indigenous peoples, the most distinctive victims of racist white Christianity, led to a new perspective in liberation theology, indigenous theology, anchored either in Christianity or in indigenous religions and

spirituality. A related perspective on Latin-American liberation theology developed from the historical experience of poverty and discrimination of the *chicanos*, *la Raza*, the *mestizos,* the children of the defeated indigenous women whom the Spanish conquistadores raped or took as wives. A Chicano liberation theology thus emerged, and, in some versions, the notion of *La Raza Cosmica* is articulated with the symbolic role of *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* (Guerrero, 1987).[54]

In the late 1960s, the civic rights and black power movement in the USA gained a theological component through the groundbreaking work of the African American theologian, James Cone (1969). According to Cone, the Jesus of white European and American Christianity had very little to say to the millions of African Americans deprived of basic rights, living in hunger and despair, only because a white supremacist society had declared them inferior and unworthy. For Cone, the central theological concept in the Black spirituals is the divine liberation of the oppressed from slavery (1972). The denunciation of racism as being incompatible with the idea of a righteous God gave rise to a new perspective in liberation theology: black theology.[55]

Ethnic and religious discrimination and oppression, as well as the unjust human suffering they have caused throughout history, constitute another major topic of progressive theologies. In Judaism, the historical Jewish suffering culminating in the horror of the holocaust is the central theme of theological reflection. Mark Ellis, one of the most eloquent expounders of Jewish liberation theology, has noted that contemporary Jewish theology displays an intriguing lack of interest in liberation theology, all the more intriguing, in fact, since the Exodus, as the narrative of the liberation of the Jewish people and the prophetic tradition that it started, is very much present in Christian liberation theologies. Here is Ellis's explanation for this phenomenon: "The recently empowered contemporary Jewish community… appears fearful—and perhaps threatened—by such a prophetic revival within Christianity, for, in its use of the Exodus and the prophets, Christian liberation theology speaks for those on the underside of history, the marginalised and the oppressed. The Jewish tradition is atrophying under the mantle of political empowerment" (2004: p. 145).

This explanation seems to be substantiated by the emergence of a Palestinian liberation theology, which, although speaking for a tiny religious minority in the region, represents an important theological reflection by Arab and Palestinian Christians on the oppression of the Palestinian people and on their oppressors, Zionism and the State of Israel. Recognising that the impetus for Zionism has been the history of violent western anti-Semitism, Palestinian liberation theologians speak of the transference of the sin from West to East: ascribing to the innocent population of Palestine the expiation of a crime committed by western Christians. "Because the Christians of Europe and America denied their responsibility for a million Jews who were their brothers, they threw one million Arabs out of their homeland of Palestine" (Ellis, 2004:p. 153). From the Balfour declaration of 1917 to the founding of the state of Israel, from the 1967 war to the subsequent tragic unfolding of the Israel/Palestine conflict ever since, an unjust suffering and humiliation has been imposed on the Palestinian people with the complicity of western Christianity. Herein lies the core of Palestinian liberation theology, of which one of the leading representatives is Naim Ateek. His book, *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation,* was published in 1989 in response to the first uprising. According to Ateek, the history of the suffering of the Jews in Europe is a prelude to Zionist colonisation and occupation of Palestine. Indeed, his personal account of the occupation by the Jewish soldiers of his hometown, Beisan, twenty miles south of the Sea of Galilee, bears disturbing similarities with what happened just two decades earlier to the Jews of Eastern and Central Europe (1989: pp. 7-13). Palestinian liberation theology has a specific interest in the biblical message and in finding there a path for Palestinians and Jews beyond opposition and destruction. Says Ateek: "God has something very relevant and very important to say to both the oppressed and the oppressors in the Middle East" (1989: p. 6).[56] On the question of the Holocaust, he formulates the principle that should ground the road to a mutually honorable peace: "We must understand the importance and significance of the Holocaust to the Jews, while insisting that the Jews understand the importance and significance of the tragedy of Palestine for the Palestinians" (1989:p. 168).

Christian Arabs and Palestinians are a minority, which constitutes in itself another factor of discrimination and unjust human suffering. This fact comes out very vividly in another perspective of liberation theology developed by Christians in Korea. A Korean word, "minjung", meaning people, has given its name to this theology. Minjung theology focus on the oppression of Korean Christians under the dictatorial regimes that ruled the country for more than three decades. In the words of one of its most distinguished representatives, Suh Kwang-Sun David, the "theology of minjung is a creation of

those Christians who were forced to reflect upon their Christian discipleship in basement interrogation rooms, in trials, facing court martial tribunals, hearing the allegation of prosecutors, … house arrest and twenty-four-hour watch over their activities… Korean Christians want to speak of what they have learned and reflected upon theologically and to share this with others who in their own social and political context are searching for a relevant theology in Asia" (1983: p. 16).[57]

Within Christianity, another form of unjust human suffering that has been the object of theological reflection and progressive religious activism is the caste system and, in particular, the plight of the Dalits, also called "untouchables", in India. The Dalits are around 20% of the population of India and, despite the laws that prohibit discriminatory practices on the basis of caste, they are still today denied the most basic human rights and are discriminated against in the access to jobs, education, public facilities, Hindu temples and, sometimes, even water. According to their leaders, they live in a situation of Apartheid. The theological reflection on their oppression and liberation has given rise to a Dalit liberation theology (Irudayaraj, 1990).

Without any pretension of being exhaustive,[58] I have briefly presented some perspectives on liberation theology as illustrations of the ways in which theological reflection and the religious practices it is associated with get involved in the struggles for progressive social transformation. Liberation theologies are socially and culturally contextualised in such a way as to contribute to raising the critical awareness of concrete people, oppressed by concrete forms of unequal power relations. In so doing, they may contribute to empower people to change existing values and relationships.

5.3. Suffering of the Flesh.

The trivialisation of human suffering in our time and the consequent indifference with which we face the other' suffering — even if its presence in our senses is overwhelming — has many causes. Relevant factors are, no doubt, the impact of the society of information and communication — the repetition of visibility without the visibility of repetition — and the aversion to suffering induced by its medicalisation. However, at a deeper level, the trivialisation of suffering resides in the categories we use to classify and organise it, whereas the truth is that suffering is, above all, a declassifying and disorganising of the body. The modern western cultural tradition, by separating the soul from the body, degraded the latter, particularly as being constituted by human flesh. As a consequence, the conceptualisation (and dignification) of human suffering was brought about by abstract categories, whether philosophical or ethical, which devalue the visceral dimension of suffering, its visible mark of experience lived in the flesh. The same is true of the body as a source of joy through the ideals of pleasure and beauty which domesticated visceral reactions and potentially explosive experiences. Far from producing inert bodies, the moral codes were founded on them.

This process of disembodying through classification and organisation is present even in the authors that most claimed the importance of the place of the body, from Nietzsche to Foucault and Levinas, to mention only a few. For the same reason, with the exception of sight — always privileged by modernity as an instrument of representation —, our senses were desensitised for the direct experience of the suffering of the others and even of one's own suffering. The flesh, both the flesh of pleasure and the flesh of suffering, was thus deprived of its bodily materiality, and hence of the instinctive and affective reactions that it can provoke, whose intensity lies in their being beyond words, beyond reasonable argument or reflective evaluation.

Religions and theologies were not immune to this biopolitical device. As they followed it, however, they revealed its limits and contradictions. On the one hand, they pushed to extremes the repulsion for the flesh as a site of pleasure, always associating it with sex and women. On the other, they incited the believers to succour the neighbour's body with no other mediation but compassion. They thus allowed for a direct, dense, and intense access to the suffering flesh, totally other than the access made possible by the medical science, an access made of epistemological (subject/object), categorical and professional distances. It is, moreover, a practical access which, unlike the medical access, does not seek a balance between understanding and intervention. It gives absolute priority to intervention, to the detriment of understanding.

Such are the reasons why religions have allowed for the creation of ethics of care and engagement based on visceral reactions of inter-subjectivity between self and neighbour, engagements that are pre-representational and even pre-ethical, made up of sensibilities and availabilities that need no arguments

or rules to be strong and self-evident. The underside of this immediacy of suffering is its depoliticisation. This is precisely what happened concerning the most emblematic case of suffering flesh in one of the monotheist religions, Catholicism: the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The highly political nature of this suffering was sequestered by the dogma of resurrection, that is to say, by a flight from the world, a flight which, unlike Allah's journey to heaven, had no return.[59]

The counter-hegemonic potential of progressive theologies resides in the articulation they strive for between the visceral engagement in a succouring gesture or non-conditioned care, and the political struggle against the causes of suffering as part of the unfinished task of divinity. In his critique of secularism as a veiled form of restrictive pluralism (for excluding religion as a legitimate way of being), William Connolly speaks of "visceral registers of subjectivity and inter-subjectivity" as an expression of very intense experiences, carrying unsuspected energies for existential fulfilment. As example, he gives the registers of religious subjectivity (1999: p. 27).

There is, thus, a connection between visceral inter-subjectivity and radical will, which I analyse in the next section.

5.4. An Insurgent Radical Will and a Post-Capitalist Horizon.

Institutionalised religion paid a high price to find a *modus vivendi* with western modernity and the Enlightenment: privatisation. But moving into the private sphere had a contradictory effect. On the one hand, religion was banished from the political system (which, however, as I mentioned above, didn't mean the incapacitation of the Church to interfere with politics), but, on the other, it was left on its own, more or less self-regulated in the private sphere. This means that within the private sphere religion could keep a kind of pre-modern or trans-modern radical engagement with the lives of people, both in terms of discourses and in terms of practices, an engagement that was free from the political, cultural, discursive, and institutional mediations which other (secular) social mobilisations in the public sphere went through in the last two centuries, most notably the labour movement and the feminist movement.

This explains, in part at least, why the religious mobilisations reclaiming the public sphere in our time are endowed with a kind of radicalness that we cannot find in most social movements. This radical energy is used by traditionalist, revelationist theologies to turn the clock back, to a time in which the Church controlled social and political hierarchies; but it has also been used by pluralist, progressive theologies to struggle against all such hierarchies and the oppressions and discriminations they generate. While the former theologies seek to conquer power over an unjust and oppressive public sphere, and will certainly end up making it even more unjust and oppressive, the latter fight against power, injustice and oppression, whether occurring in the public or in the private sphere, and regardless of its causes, including the religious ones.

The link between theology and a radical critique of capitalism is at the core of liberation theology. As Gutierrez says: "the potential of a liberating faith lies in the revolutionary capacity to change the concrete life of the poor and oppressed peoples… political radicalness and evangelical radicalness meet and reinforce each other" (2004: pp. 37-38). Another theologian, Jurgen Moltmann, asks: "how can I live with any decency at all as a member of the 'First World' in the face of the Third?" (1982: p. 155). In a different but related sense, Moltmann speaks of "progressive revelation" as the manifestation of a link between the Christian spirit and the spirit of modern age which "produces progressively better views of the world and of life" (1967: p. 225). The progress of human society is thus interpreted as the self-movement of revelation. Similarly, Ignacio Ellancuria states that the history of salvation is historical salvation, that is, historical fulfillment in society (1977: p. 130). Reclaiming the need for a theological Third World perspective informed by Marxism and the theory of dependence, Ellancuria affirms: "it is impossible to see the achievement of justice without a basic revolution in the social and economic order, or a true fulfillment of man without bringing an adequate economic structure into operation" (1977: p. 127).

For liberation theology, liberation rather than resistance or salvation grounds the radical will to struggle for a more just society. "Resistance", says Dorothee Soelle, "is how human beings who are members of the white bourgeoisie — those who normally participate in oppression and profit from exploitation — participate in liberation struggles…Whereas salvation is the deed of a totally other, who deals with unsaved people to save them, liberation is cooperation between Christ and the people…Nobody can

give liberation to someone else…The liberator is expression and part of the movement of liberation…To participate in the struggle is a necessary presupposition of the concept of liberation" (2006: p. 141).

5.5. The Impulse for Inter-Culturality in the Struggles for Human Dignity.

As I mentioned above, the conventional and by far dominant conceptions and practices of human rights are monocultural, and this constitutes one of the major obstacles to building a real, bottom up universal struggle for human rights. Religion, on the contrary, only exists as an immense diversity of religions, both as diversity among major religions and as diversity within each religion.[60] In the western metropolitan world and, to a certain extent, also in the colonial world (within the confines of the 'little Europes') this diversity is one of the unintended consequences of the privatisation of religion. Left outside the two major regulatory principles of modernity, the state and the market, both of them monocultural and monolithic, religion was free to diversify. As I argued elsewhere (1995), the third principle of modern regulation, the community, was the least developed principle, always conceived of as adjuvant to the state or the market. For that reason, it was less monocultural and monolithic and also the closest to the private sphere. It was here that religion flourished unencumbered by bureaucratic or market standardisation.

In spite of the setbacks and shortcomings (discretionary selectivity, temptation to claim a single revealed truth, lack of practical consequences) the ecumenical and inter-religious dialogues bear witness to a potential for inter-culturality within the domain of religion. If more coherently and actively pursued, such dialogues may be both a powerful memory and a tested training ground for broader dialogues involving both religious and non-religious conceptions of human dignity. In recent times, there have been some courageous attempts at such dialogues in the most intractable political conditions. Two examples among many: In the Middle-East, the contributions of Naim Ateek and Mark Ellis, the latter's "Four Elements of a Jewish Response" to Christian liberation theologies (2004: pp. 163-202), in particular. In India, the name of Asghar Ali Engineer (1998) comes to mind, the Islamic intellectual and movement leader, champion of a much needed dialogue between Islam and Hinduism. In some countries, such as Pakistan and Israel, intra-faith dialogues are as intractable and as full of consequences as the inter-faith dialogues. In the case of Pakistan, the work of Fazlur Rahman (1982, 2000) is particularly eloquent in this respect.

Much beyond inter-religious dialogues, I think that religious thinking, in general, has oscillated between strict dogmatism and orthodoxy, on one side, and vibrant questioning of texts, practices, rules and institutions, on the other. In the latter case they have often risked heresy and suffered drastic consequences, but what is remarkable is that, in their reflections, they went beyond familiar religious materials, drawing on strange cultures, kinds of knowledge and philosophies, or immersing themselves in the delights of everyday experiences by mingling with merchants, artisans, prostitutes, and deriving momentous theoretical consequences from such experiences. In other words, when they decided to go to the roots of established truths at their own risk, the religious thinkers tended to be more *bricoleurs* than any other thinkers, mixing in innovative and chaotic ways fragments from different provenances and on that basis offering new meanings and interpretations. In order to do so they adopted epistemologies that in contemporary terms we would consider positional or situated knowledge. They excelled in occupying the contact zones among different cultures and ways of knowing, borderlines, thresholds, *nepantlism*, the Aztec word for "torn between ways", twilight zones neither outside nor inside, neither familiar nor foreign, neither subject nor object, conditions of exile without ceasing to be an insider. In a sense they have anticipated the epistemological in-between-ness without which intercultural exchanges cannot be successfully accomplished.

In all religious traditions we find such thinkers. In the Christian tradition, Augustine and Nicolas of Cusa come to mind, as Mahatma Gandhi in Hinduism or Ghazali in Islam. The latter has recently come to our attention thanks to the masterful work of Ebrahim Moosa (2005). According to Moosa, Ghazali — a towering Islamic intellectual of Persian origin, that lived in the eleventh and twelfth century CE — drew on the most diverse Islamic and non-Islamic sources, from the Hebrew Bible to Greek philosophy, from experiences of travelling as well as mystic experiences. He saw himself in a threshold position, in the *dihiliz*, a word that designates the in-between space between the street and the inside of the house. When seen from the street, the *dihiliz* is an inside and, when viewed from the inside the house, it is an outside (2005: p. 45). This explains why, in such a space, Ghazali could feel simultaneously to be in exile and to be inside his own home.[61]

5.6. The Narratives of Suffering and Liberation.

The privileged language of intercultural exchanges is the narrative. Storytelling generates a sense of immediate and concrete co-presence through which social experiences existing in different times, spaces and cultures become more easily accessible and intelligible, a type of co-presence that cannot be achieved by conceptual language (whether technical, philosophical or scientific). The narrative, even when it is an historical narrative, works against time by producing an effect of synchronicity and contemporaneity that helps to convert the stranger into the familiar and the remote into the coeval. Moreover, the world's *memoria passionis* lies in remembrance and narratives which, by recounting exemplary struggles of life and death, suffering and liberation, loss and gain, reinforce sentiments of joy and fear, awe and wonder, revenge and compassion, from which a kind of bottom-up shared wisdom of the world emerges. Contrary to historical reconstruction, the *memoria passionis* collapses past, present and future together, sees strengths in weaknesses and alternative possibilities in defeats. The wisdom it gives rise to is as contemplative as it is active; it is a world stock of remembrance and vision which converts the past into an energy to empower the present and strengthen the not yet or the perhaps of the future. Moreover, narratives, stories and parables are open-ended. They offer themselves to reinterpretation and contextualisation, and in this sense, they allow for a continuous reinvention of authorship or co-authorship. Story tellers are always co-authors of the stories they heard from their predecessors.

I see here the possibility for another fruitful encounter between human rights and progressive political theologies. Narration and storytelling lie at the foundation of religious experience, be they based on sacred texts or sacred oral traditions. Moreover, even religious philosophy, dogmatics or exegesis are sustainable only if grounded on exemplary events, sayings, and concrete lives of concrete persons and peoples — whether extraordinary or ordinary, but never anonymous. They operate through an extremely extended case method, as we might call it, a method that allows for the establishment of a logical connection between the most localised, specific and even unique circumstances and the most far reaching, general, transpacial and transtemporal consequences and relevance. In parallel interviews, both Johann Metz and Elie Wiesel underline the central role of the narrative in religious thinking (Schuster and Boschert-Kimmig, 1999). As Elie Wiesel says: "Theology is nothing other than telling stories" (1999: p. 94). All the prophets spoke in parables with an eye on later believers and their reinterpretations in light of their own experiences and their own intellectual freedom.

The conventional nature of human rights discourse resides not only in a certain complicit promiscuity between the abstract proclamation of human rights and resignation before their systematic violations, but also and mainly in the trivialisation of the human suffering entailed by such violations. Such trivialisation results to a large extent from the normalised discourse (Foucault) of the organisations for the defence of human rights, its strong statistical component reducing to the anonymity of figures the horror of human degradation and unjust suffering. The destabilising presence of suffering is thus neutralised, and thereby lost the possibility of grounding the radical will and militancy to fight against the state of affairs that produces unjust suffering in a systematic way. By insisting on the concrete narrative of the victims' suffering and their struggle against oppression, progressive political theologies may contribute to turn unjust suffering into an intolerable presence dehumanising both the victims and the oppressors, as well as all those who, feeling neither victims nor oppressors, consider unjust suffering a problem that does not concern them.

5.7. The Presence of the World Before or Beyond Interpretation.

The intercultural conception of human rights I have been pleading for (Santos, 2007a: pp. 3-40) seeks both to strengthen the legitimacy of world-wide politics of human rights and to radicalise the struggles that can be undertaken in their name. The notion of interculturality is meant to convey the idea that the focus of intercultural exchanges is interpretation, the production and sharing of meaning. I have already suggested that meaning does not necessarily involve conceptual language and that narrative and storytelling may be even more powerful tools to make social experiences separated by time, space and culture mutually accessible, intelligible and relevant. It is however necessary to go beyond that and to show that, if an ecology of different conceptions of human dignity is to ground a more encompassing and radical struggle for human dignity, it will presuppose the creation of particularly intense moments of co-presence, moments in which presence precedes meaning.

Presence is the thingness or materiality upon which meanings are built. It refers to bodies, signs, sounds, materials in their non-semantic capacity, that is, in their direct or immediate access to our senses. It is a form of being which, as Gumbrecht rightly states, "refers to the things of the world before they become part of a culture" (2004: p. 70). It is through meaning that things become culturally specific and often also incommensurable or unintelligible to other cultures. In my view, such "things" are not outside a culture, they are rather inside but in a different non-cultural way. They have a pre-representational capacity of being outside thought and consciousness, while grounding thought and consciousness. They are material and operate at the level of instinct, emotion, affect. Probably having these "things" in mind, Nietzsche exhorted us to pay attention to the "thoughts behind your thoughts and thoughts behind those thoughts".

Of the authors that have drawn our attention to the non-semantic dimension of interaction and communication Gumbrecht is the most eloquent in counterposing cultures that are ridden by presence (presence-cultures) and cultures that are ridden by meaning (meaning-cultures) (2004: p. 79). Of course, in all cultures there is presence and meaning, but the emphasis on one or the other varies across cultures. Modern western culture is a meaning-culture, while medieval western culture was a presence-culture.[62] I suggest that some non-western cultures are best understood as presence-cultures.

Specifically in intercultural exchanges, the role of presence is to propitiate the generation of senses of commonality, of culturally indifferent diversity and of immediate evidence. A bundle of mutilated bodies in a killing field, the skinny body a child about to die of hunger, the cry of woman over the dead body of her young son, the vision of a naked body of a man or woman, an ecstatic movement or posture, the body movements, the smells, the instruments and the ingredients in the performance of a ritual, all these presences are endowed with a power that seems relatively autonomous in relation to the meanings that may be attributed to them.

This is not the place to discuss the possible role of a dialectics of interpretation and presence in the construction of new intercultural transformative thinking and practice. At this juncture, I just want to underline the fact that here, too, I see a possible contribution of progressive religious experience and theological reflexivity to strengthen, expand and radicalise human rights struggles. The presentification of the past or of the other through rites, rituals and sacraments (for instance, the Eucharist, particularly in Catholicism) plays a central role in religious experience (Asad, 1993). The same immediate evidence that overcomes strangeness, difference is present in particular types of religious experiences, mysticism in Christianity, Kabbalah in Judaism, Sufism in Islam, the Possession of the Pai-de-Santo or of the Mãe-de-Santo in *Umbanda* or *Candomblé*, etc. An intensified sense of sharing and of belonging is thereby generated that, if put at the service of struggles of resistance and liberation from oppression, may contribute to strengthen and radicalise the will for social transformation. It is not by proselitistic caprice or excessive zeal that all the meetings, rallies, protests, and land occupations organised by one of the most important social movements of our time — the Movement of the Landless Rural Workers, MST in Brazil — start by what they call the "mística", a moment of silence, prayer and singing, the militants hand in hand in a circle, individual physical bodies becoming a collective physical body.

Songs and chants have historically been a very strong presence in struggles of resistance and liberation as a way of gathering strength to overcome despair and gain courage to fight against formidable oppressors. Presence through songs and chants is a way of transcending the body without ever leaving it, of transcending differences for the sake of the harmony needed for a practical task at hand (which may be the singing itself or something beyond it), of constructing material strength out of symbolic strength. Here, again, the religions of the oppressed and the liberation theologies they have given rise to in recent times bear a precious historical experience through which human rights may gain new voices and new vitalities and new strengths. I have already mentioned the role of blues and spirituals in black theology. Another example may be found in the way Caribbean theology of decolonisation uses Bob Marley's redemptive songs (Erskine, 1998) or the way liberation theology of indigenous or tribal people of North-East India emphasises a specific doxology: the practice of praising God through singing and dancing (Thanzauva, 2002: p. 269).

5.8. The Pneumatikos of Insurgency: the Spirituality of/in Material Struggles for Social Transformation.[63]

Counter-hegemonic human rights struggles aim at changing the social structures that are accountable for systemically produced unjust human suffering. They are material struggles in the sense that their

political impetus must address the political economy underlying the production and reproduction of unequal social relations, even of those relations that are less directly or less linearly connected with capitalist exploitation and class-based hierarchy, such as those usually dealt with by conventional identity politics. They are also material in the sense they presuppose political, financial and human resources to build organisations and generate militancy. But beyond all that, counter-hegemonic human rights struggles are very often high-risk, sometimes life-threatening, struggles against very powerful and unscrupulous enemies. They have, therefore, to be grounded on strongly motivated political will, a will that has to be both collective and individual, since there is no collective activism without individual activists. Without non-conformist, rebellious, insurgent will no meaningful social struggles against institutionalised injustice and oppression can succeed.

No such will may be built without both radical and destabilising critical visions of current injustice and credible visions of an alternative better society. In the last two centuries, two very strong and credible visions of an alternative society dominated: socialism and liberation from colonialism. They were related to two equally strong critical visions of contemporary societies: the anti-capitalist critique and the anti-colonial critique. For reasons I cannot go into here, these visions entered in crisis in the last thirty years and such crisis is the other side of the current ideological and political interregnum in strong struggles for progressive social transformation. Modern secularism prevented religion from having any significant participation in these visions. At least in the Christian world, institutionalised religion made peace with the power structures of the day, no matter how unjust, hijacked the motivational strength contained in spirituality[64] and turned believers into individual seekers of individual salvation in afterlife worlds. It was this type of religion that Marx so rightly criticised.

In our time, and as I have been arguing in this section, progressive political theologies have used the critique of modern privatisation of religion to develop new conceptions of salvation and redemption that might ground the struggles for social transformation, justice and liberation. For such theologies, conversion to God amounts to conversion to the neighbour in need. In doing so, they opened the possibility of releasing in society a new energy, "infusing" social struggles with the motivational strength contained in spirituality. This explains in part why in the last forty years so many human rights activists that paid with their lives for their commitment to struggles for social justice were disciples of liberation theology in one of its many versions.

Pneuma is the Greek word for spirit — *pneumatikos* for spiritual — appears hundreds of times in the Bible, and it means literally wind, moving air, breath. It became the symbol of the kernel of religious experience: the intense animation that accrues to people's lives when in direct contact with God. Animation and directness are thus the key components of spirituality, and the intensity they reveal is intimately connected with the magnitude of the entity to which they relate. The disproportion in this relation elevates the human as the wind moves the sand.

As a concrete experience of religiosity, spirituality has many different forms, and in any major religion different forms have predominated in different historical and geographical contexts. For instance, in Christianity, in the context of persecution before the Roman emperor Constantine was converted, martyrdom was considered the ideal or highest form of spirituality. Many Christians viewed their death as the "baptismal of blood" or as a "second baptism" and was celebrated as their heavenly birthday. It was also regarded as an imitation of Jesus Christ who laid down his life (Thanzauva, 2002: p. 256).[65] Martyrdom is not a thing of the past, as illustrated by the deaths of Martin Luther King Jr. or D. Oscar Romero, archbishop of El Salvador, as well as by the deaths of so many anonymous believers whose sacrifice never hits the news. As Thanzauva says: "Today in India, many Christians have lost their lives, properties and suffered persecution for no other sin except they are Christians" (2002: p. 256). Moreover, martyrdom is present in all major religions. For many Islamic believers, what the Judeo-Christian West calls "suicide bombers" are in fact martyrs.[66]

Besides martyrdom there are many other forms of spirituality. In Christian theology, for instance, Thanzauva identifies, besides martyrdom, the following types of spirituality: monastic, ecclesiastical, reformation, pietistic, evangelical, ecumenical, liberation, feminist, dialogical, indigenous/tribal, communitarian, doxological, praxiological spirituality (2002: pp. 249-272). Some of them are favoured by traditionalist or revelationist theologies, as defined above, and are therefore of little use for the kind of counter-hegemonic human rights struggles I have been arguing for in this text, while others are favoured by pluralist and progressive theologies and have therefore the potential to contribute to such struggles. The intensity of the spiritual experience matters but what matters most is its existential

orientation. Is it experienced as an individual achievement without any relevant connection to the affairs of this world or, on the contrary, is it experienced as a way of sharing with others a transcendental vision of a suffering God that is manifest in the suffering peoples of this unjust world?[67] In the first case, we may find highly intense forms of spirituality, but their intensity is precisely measured by their capacity to withdraw from this world. This is, in general, the case of the mystics.

The strong potential of mysticism for presence, referred to above, is neutralised by the possessive individualism of the "mystic union" with the Absolute.[68] In the second case, spirituality generates a powerful motivational energy which, if channelled to progressive struggles for social justice, will reinforce the credibility of the visions that guide the activists and strengthen their will. This has been most prominently the case of the base ecclesial communities in Latin America inspired by liberation theology (Boff, 1986).

6. Conclusion

In this text, I pursued a twofold objective: to identify the major challenges that the rise of political theologies at the beginning of the twentieth-first century posed to human rights; to select within a broad landscape of theological analysis the types of reflections and practices that might contribute to expand and deepen the canon of human rights politics. In order to achieve this double goal I used complexity as my main analytical guideline. This led me to make distinctions from which significant consequences were drawn: on one side, distinctions among different types of political theologies (pluralist versus revelationist, traditionalist versus progressive); and, on the other, between two contrasting discourses and practices of human rights politics (hegemonic versus counter-hegemonic). Depending on the circumstances, even conventional or hegemonic human rights struggles may be a progressive tool against social practices and norms derived from traditionalist and revelationist theologies. Pluralist and progressive theologies, in turn, may be a source of radical energy toward more ambitious, counter-hegemonic human rights struggles.

I am assuming that the distinctions among theologies apply, with certain nuances, to all major religions, be they Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism. This is an assumption whose warranty I cannot fully vouch for. It derives less from theological hermeneutics than from witnessing how religious people and practices position themselves in social struggles. Which side are they on? This is my basic criterion. On the side of the oppressors or on the side of the oppressed? On the side of fundamentalism or on the side of pluralism? On the side of reactionary traditionalism or on the side of progressive social transformation (which does not exclude recourse to tradition, as indigenous liberation theology illustrates)?

I am aware of the fact that it may be difficult in many circumstances to answer these questions unequivocally. But I also think that the last decades of the past century and the first decade of the new one have offered us a variety of social experiences providing some clues for tentative answers in concrete situations. For instance, in the World Social Forum, whose unfolding I have been analysing (2006a), I have witnessed the presence of activists in social struggles for socio-economic, historical, sexual, racial, cultural and post-colonial justice basing their activism and their claims on Christian, Islamic, Judaic, Hindu, Buddhist, Indigenous religious beliefs and spiritualities. In a sense, they bear witness to a political inter-subjectivity that seems to have deserted the conventional secular critical thinking and political action: the combination of creative effervescence and intense and passionate energy, on one side, with a pluralistic, open-ended and non-violent conception of struggle, on the other.

As I have said, I take for granted in this text that all religions have, in principle, the same potential to develop progressive, liberationist versions of theologies, capable of inserting themselves in counter-hegemonic struggles against neoliberal globalisation. Conversely, all religions have an impressive record of executions, persecutions, pogroms, and burned books. A related issue, which I do not treat in this text, concerns the reasons why economic, social, political, and cultural conditions prevailing in the world are today particularly effective in preventing the emergence of liberation theologies and in promoting the emergence of conservative or reactionary ones.

The main idea behind this inquiry is that we live in a time in which the most appalling social injustices and unjust human sufferings no longer seem to generate the moral indignation and the political will to combat them effectively and create a more just and fair society. Under such circumstances, it seems evident to me that we cannot afford to waste any genuine social experience that we might resort to in

order to strengthen the organisation and the determination of all those who have not given up the struggle for a better society, and specifically those that have done so under the banner of human rights. Not to waste social experience means also to recycle and transform it in light of the objectives at hand. Such work of transformation was undertaken in section 5.

If God were a human rights activist is, of course, a metaphorical issue, which can only be answered metaphorically. In the logic of this paper, if God were a human rights activist, He or She would definitely be pursuing a counter-hegemonic conception of human rights and a practice fully coherent with it. In so doing, this God would sooner or later confront the God invoked by the oppressors and would find no affinity with this other God. In other words, He or She would come to the conclusion that the God of the subalterns cannot but be a subaltern God. The logical consequence of such a conclusion would be rather illogical from a human point of view, at least as regards the monotheistic religions that provided the background of my inquiry: a monotheistic God making a plea for polytheism as the only solution, if the invocation of God in social and political struggles for progressive social transformation is not to lead to perverse results. The subaltern's God idea would be that only polytheism allows for an unequivocal answer to the crucial question: which side are you on? I recognise that a monotheistic God pleading for a polytheistic set of Gods and thus for His or Her own sacrificial suicide for the sake of humankind is a complete absurdity. But I wonder if the role of most theologies has not been to prevent us to from confronting this absurdity and drawing the conclusions therefrom. As if the logos of God has been all along a human exercise to prevent God from speaking Her or His plurality.

Endnotes:

[1] This position is a direct critique of Habermas, 1990.. See Santos, 1995, 2002.
[2] This is paraphrasing Lucien Goldman, 1966, 1970. I develop this concept in Santos, 2008.
[3] There are obvious affinities between this conception and what Upendra Baxi calls the sustainable thought of human rights (2006).
[4] In this text I don't analyze the causes of the rise of religions and political theologies in our time. In my view, Marx and Engels's explanations are to this day the most powerful ones. See Löwy, 1996 and Achcar, 2008 among many others.
[5] The crisis of global financial capital that irrupted in the Summer of 2008 showed the structural contradictions of the current model of neo-liberal globalization. The way the crisis will be "solved" will signal the profile of a new, emergent model.
[6] Within Christianity, there is a long historical debate on the nature of political theology. See, for instance, Scott and Cavanaugh (eds.) (2004). For a broader view, see Arjomand (1993). In Germany, the debate around it in the 1920s and 1930s was particularly intense, involving many participants, the best known of which is, of course, Carl Schmitt (1922). Historically, political theology has been identified with a theological metaphysics that gave religious sanction to existing social and political structures. In the 1960s, a new political theology emerged, a critical theology, aimed at questioning the existing social order. Its roots lie in the Enlightenment, which in fact put an end to the old political theology. The new political theology, however, criticizes the Enlightenment's social and political processes that led to the privatization of the individual, in fact the middle-class male individual. Conventional theology took this specific subject as a general subject — humankind — and grounded thereon the illusion of its apolitical character. This criticism underlies the conception of political theology put forward, among others, by Johann Metz (1968, 1980) and Dorothee Soelle (1974), as well as by liberation theologians in Latin America. See, most prominently, Gustavo Gutierrez (1971, 2004) and Boff (1973, 1986, 1997). A good bibliography of the debate in Germany in Metz (1980: 77-78). See also Moltmann (1984). More recently, Tamayo offers the most solid foundation for a liberation theology (1993, 1996, 1999, 2003a, 2003b, 2004a, 2004b ,2006a, 2006b). An Islamic liberation theology can be read in Asghar Ali Engineer's work (1990, 1998).
[7] The elaboration of categorical classifications is always susceptible to the trap of extending to a general group of realities characteristics that only fit adequately one given sub-group. I am aware that I, too, may be falling into this trap. For instance, this classifications are probably more adequate to religions that suffer from the doctrinaire syndrome, that is, religions that rely on dogmas demanding universal acceptance, and thus invest in heresy, persecution and excommunication to guarantee the reproduction of such an acceptance. In this sense, the classifications will apply more easily to the Semitic religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—than to non-Semitic religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. There are many ways of distinguishing the different models of relationship

between religion and sociopolitical and cultural institutions. For instance, Rosemary Ruether, restricting her analysis to Christianity, distinguishes the following models: various kinds of separatism: prophetic, apocalyptic, mystical, or utopian; amalgamation into sacral nations and empires; various efforts to coexist with and transform society (1991: 218).

[8] I am aware of the fact that the designation "revelationist" is problematic since all theologies are founded on the idea of revelation. But, in the conception used here, they only become revelationist whenever revelation, usually linked to scripturalism — the organization of social and political life according to a literal interpretation of the sacred books whenever they exist — is conceived of as the all-encompassing principle of organisation of society in all its dimensions. In the way I use the term, revelationism is very similar to fundamentalism. The reason why I don't use the latter term is because in dominant political discourse, fundamentalism is exclusively used in relation to Islam and not in relation to Christianity or Hinduism.

[9] In Islam, plurality has less to do with the autonomy of the social fields than with the recognition of diversity inside the unity that encompasses all of them. Islamic revelationist theologies are those which do not recognize such diversity or reduce it to the minimum. The opposite view is taken by the Islamic liberation theology. See, for instance, Engineer (1990, 1998).

[10] On the history of traditionalism as related to Christian theology, see Metz 1980: pp. 20-22.

[11] As Moltmann says: "The product of organized religion is an institutionalized absence of commitment. Faith becomes a private affair, and the articles of the creed can be replaced at will. This, then, is a religion that demands nothing; so it ceases to console anyone either...This is the justification of what exists, but without judgment" (1982: p. 159).

[12] Ulrich Duchrow, for instance, raises the issue of the need for a theology capable of helping to "construct an interdisciplinary theoretical work on alternatives to a neoliberal hegemony" (2006: p. 203). More on this in section 5.

[13] Etymologically, theology means a reasoned discourse about God. All major religions have a long tradition of theological reflection. Under western colonialism, many non-western and non-Christian religions were the object of Christian-based theological reflection which, in general, reproduced the western colonialist prejudices about the "other". An illustration of this is the orientalist conception of Islamic theology by Duncan MacDonald (1903). For a critique, see Moosa (2005: p. 14). For a very profound analysis (even if saturated with a western Enlightenment conception of rationalism), see the monumental work of Josef van Ess on the Islamic theology of the classical period, the second and third centuries of Hidschra (1991-1997, 2006). On orientalism and "orientalism in reverse" concerning the study of Islam in France, see the polemical and very convincing analysis by Achcar (2007).

[14] I am aware that the notion of political theology applied to Islam, as in "political Islam", is a mine field which has been used in recent (and not so recent) years to demonize Islam and to reinforce the century-old Orientalist view that Muslim societies, besides being retrograde, non-democratic and violent, are monolithic in terms of their belief systems. Two of the most insightful critical analyses of this phenomenon are Modood (2003) and Sayyid (2005). I fully share their concerns and I also subscribe to the cautionary note proposed by Sadowsky that the analysis of political Islam should not obscure the following facts: Muslim societies tend to be at least as diverse as they are similar; there is a large gap between Islamic doctrine and Muslim practice; the aspirations of Muslims do not differ markedly from those of other cultures, although the means they deploy to pursue them may differ; despite the criticisms made during the Enlightenment, religion neither prevents people from behaving rationally nor from innovating; the great struggles in which Muslims are caught are structured by history but not determined by it. Their outcomes may still be uncertain (2006:p. 234). It goes without saying that this applies as well to Hindu, Jewish or Christian societies. The political and intellectual difference, of course, is that today there is much more talk about political Islam than about political Hinduism, political Judaism or political Christianity. See also Hussein Solomon (2005). Roy distinguishes between political Islam or Islamism and neo-fundamentalism, tracing their differences in three major issues: state power, shari'a, and women (1994: pp. 34-47). According to him, while Islamism aims at revolutionary state power (illustrated by the case of Iran), ne-fundamentalism privileges a bottom-up, society-based transformation..For a radical critique of Oliver Roy and the erratic evolution of his analysis of Islam, see Achcar (2007).

[15] See, among many, on the Christian side, Gorder (2003) and, on the Islamic side, Aasi (1999). See also Haddad and Haddad (1995).

[16] Hassan al-Banna, founder of the Moslem Brotherhood (1924), claimed that ideas and institutions in Islamic societies should come from Islam and not from the West. He admitted importation from the West in the following areas: administrative systems; applied sciences; communications; services; hospitals and drug stores; industry, animal husbandry and agriculture; nuclear energy for peaceful

purposes; urban planning, construction, housing and traffic flow; energy. "Apart from this we do not need anything. Islam includes all things" (Saadawi and Hetata, 1999: p. 5). The relationship between political Islam and western modernity is analyzed by Roy (1994), who also raises the problems of comparativism in this area: "Why does western Orientalism study Islam *sub specie aeternitatis,* while approaching western civilization as a "socio-historical configuration"? (1994: p. 11).

[17] If such general evaluations were warranted, I would consider Christian Zionism the most dangerous of all, given its role in the non-solution of the Israel-Palestine conflict (Attek, Duaybis and Tobin, 2005).

[18] Almond, Appleby and Sivan offered the following definition of fundamentalism: "it refers to a discernible pattern of religious militancy by which self-styled 'true believers' attempt to arrest the erosion of religious identity, fortify the borders of the religious community, and create viable alternatives to secular institutions and behaviors" (2003: p. 17).

[19] Gilbert Achcar disputes this equation between Christianity and Islam. In a recent Marxist comparative analysis of Christian theology of liberation and Islamic fundamentalism or Orthodox Islam, as he also calls it, he contrasts the "elective affinity" between Orthodox Islam and Medieval-reactionary utopianism with the 'elective affinity' between original Christianity and communistic utopianism from which liberation theology draws its inspiration (2008). The problem with this comparison is that liberation theology is a pluralist theology rather than a revelationist one. If the comparison were between Islamic fundamentalism and Christian fundamentalism, today on the rise, we would easily see two "combative ideologies contesting the prevailing social and/or political conditions" (2008:p. 56) both backward looking and thus equally reactionary.

[20] The cautionary note on the internal diversity of major religions is today more necessary with reference to Islam than to any other religion, as the western media tend to portray Islam as a monolithic religion. In fact, it is one of the most internally diverse. An overview of such diversity can be read in Donohue and Esposito (1982).

[21] Just as an illustration, see for the case of Mozambique, Bonate (2006, 2007a, 2007b). See more generally Eickelman and Piscatori (2004).

[22] On the basis of criteria such as these, the well-known leftist Egyptian writer, Sherif Hetata, says about the Moslem Brotherhood in Egypt: "If we consider as fundamentalists those people that have a narrow, orthodox, fanatical doctrinaire interpretation of Islam, then they are a minority. They are a very active minority. They are sometimes a powerful minority. But In Egypt…I don't think the really fundamentalist movements include the Moslem brothers. I am not sympathetic to the Moslem Brothers, in particular to their leadership… you cannot have progress in a country like Egypt if you do not deal with Islam if you do not give an enlightened interpretation of Islam. Islam is the life of the people, it is our tradition and our cultural heritage. We must work with the Moslem Brothers, but not with their leadership" (1989: pp. 23, 25). For a different view on Moslem brotherhood, see Roy (1994). Achcar also draws our attention to the need to distinguish between varying and contrasting brands of Islamic fundamentalism: "Thus there is a huge difference, for instance, between, on the one hand, an organization like the most reactionary al-Queda, which is waging in Iraq a bloody war of sectarian extermination along with its fight against US occupation, and holds a truly totalitarian conception of society and polity; and, on the other hand, a movement such as Lebanese Hezbollah which condemns 'political sectarianism' in the name of its fight against Israeli occupation and aggression and, even while considering the 'Islamic Republic' of Iran as its supreme earthly model, acknowledges the religious plurality of Lebanon and consequently upholds the principles of parliamentary democracy" (2008: p. 73).

[23] For an early view of the shift from nationalism to "revolutionary Islam," see Arjomand (1984). A different analysis in Achcar (2008).

[24] We should not forget that in Muslim societies the modern experience of secularism is also an experience of dictatorship. This means that the democratic value attributed to secularism in the global North, is absent in or cannot be transposed mechanically to the global South.

[25] See note 22 and the distinction between two contrasting conceptions of Islamic revelationism: al-Queda and Hezbollah.

[26] On the WSF, see Santos, 2006a.

[27] The secular nature of the WSF refers to the principle of the separation of state and religion. But, in light of the Charter of Principles, it cannot be said to be secularist (the reduction of pluralism in the public sphere to non-religious stances), since faith-based progressive movements have been part of it since the beginning. In apparent contradiction with this, however, there are two situations to be addressed critically. First, since the 9/11 the Islamic movements and organizations have been victims of a politics of suspicion deeply entrenched in the Orientalist view of Islam as a monolithic entity. This

has happened in the organization of some regional meetings of the WSF and should be denounced vigorously. Second, in some areas of social struggle, such as feminism, secularist conceptions are by far paramount, and the dominant movements and discourses may at time exclude religious feminist perspective, particularly in the case of Islam. For a very thoughtful critical analysis of the secularism of the WSF held in Mumbai in 2004, see Daulatzai (2004).

[28] Throughout this text, I emphasise that, in the case of Islam, as well as in the case of all the other major religions, the opposition to counter-hegemonic globalization is restricted to the conceptions and practices expounded by the revelationist political theologies. Unfortunately, in the case of Islam, this restriction has not always been born in mind by organisers or supporters of counter-hegemonic struggles. Suffice it to mention the controversy that surrounded the participation of Tariq Ramadan in the European Social Forum of 2003. Ramadan is one of the Islamic intellectuals that has most forcefully argued for the congruence between Islam and progressive, counter-hegemonic struggles, while criticising the dominant protagonists of such struggles for lack of openness to the world of Islam (2004). One of the most disgraceful dimensions of the controversy was the accusation of Ramadan of anti-Semitism (Mannot and Ternisien, 2003).

[29] For a good overall view of these themes, see Weisberg (1993).

[30] I address this position and its potential for an intercultural dialogue with human rights in Santos, 2007a. Some authors suggest that there are possible articulations between Islamic feminism and liberation theology (Tohidi, 1997 and Mojab, 2001).

[31] The debate on Islamic feminism is immense. See, among others, Ahmed (1992), Yamani (ed.) (1996), Karam (1998), Afsaruddin (ed.) (1999), Mojab (2001), Abbas-Gholizadeh (2001), Shahidian (2002), Moghadam (2002), Barlas (2002), Gresh (2004), Ramadan (2005), Ziba Mir-Hosseini (2006), Wadud (2006), Edwin (2006).

[32] I deal with western monocultures and their alternatives in detail in Santos, 2004.

[33] The complexity of relations between Islam and western modernity is well illustrated by Ebrahim Moosa when he writes: "Like the well-intentioned labours of Muslim modernists a century ago, progressive Muslims run the risk of becoming servants of power. The state-driven modernizing of Islam has turned Muslim modernists into partners and servants of the most brutal authoritarian regimes from Egypt to Pakistan and from Tunisia to Indonesia. Muslim progressives might have to consider the value of entering the democratic base of their societies rather than placating elites" (2006: p. 127).

[34] In Santos 2007a, I propose an intercultural translation between human rights principles and non-western principles of human dignity.

[35] I analyze the binary roots/options in greater detail in Santos, 1998.

[36] On the question of social fascism, see Santos, 2002: pp. 453-457.

[37] Using a language from which I distance myself, O. Roy sees a parallelism between what he calls evangelical fundamentalism and Islamic fundamentalism. He writes: "Today's religious revival among Europe's Muslims is no importation of religious traditions born in the Middle East or the wider Muslim world. Rather, it reflects many of the dynamics of contemporary American evangelical movements. No surprise then that, instead of being tolerant and liberal, it is a movement based on dogmatism, communitarianism, and scripturalism" (2006). See also Almond, Appleby and Sivan, 2003.

[38] On this issue, see Santos, 2007b.

[39] On different perspectives about the roots of Arab nationalism see, for instance, Hopwood (ed.) (1999).

[40] See, among others, Fischer (1980) and Dabashi (1993).

[41] Secularity is a philosophical and political stance that defends the separation of state and religion but admits the presence of non-secular stances in the public sphere, whereas secularism is the embodiment of the public sphere itself and the sole authoritative source of public reason, thus leaving no room for non-secular stances in the public space.

[42] This is forcefully argued by Nandy (1985, 1998), even if I don't share the consequences he draws from this argument. In my view, as in the case of human rights and globalization, there is room for a decolonizing, counter-hegemonic, radically democratic secularity. To argue for this in detail is beyond the scope of this paper. The religious positions vis-à-vis secularism are both theologically and politically motivated. Above all, they are contextual, both in historical and sociological terms. For instance, Muslims in India, feeling threatened by the rise of Hindu extremism, tend to have a nuanced view of secularism. According to Mushir Ul-Haq: "If secularism places worldly life outside the control of religion, this is an innovation without precedent in Islamic history; hence, it is unacceptable for the faithful. But if secularism denotes only that the state does not favour any particular community in matters of religion, it is believed to be in accord with Islamic tradition which gives religious freedom to

every citizen. This concept of secularism is not alien to a Muslim and therefore he sees no conflict between his religion, Islam and secularism" (1982: 177).

[43] Here, I cannot dwell in detail on the different conceptions of secularization and secularism. See Toldy, 2007. Cf. Archer: "Even if we look only at one small subset of western societies — those rooted in English cultural, political and economic traditions — we find a full range of possible outcomes. The United States has a secular state, but not a secularized society. Britain has a secularized society, but not a secular state. And only Australia has both a secular state, and a secularized society. Moreover, even where similar outcomes have been achieved in different western societies, these outcomes have often been reached by very different paths. Both the United States and France have established secular states. But in France this was achieved by mobilizing militant anti-religious movements, while in the United States it was achieved without any such mobilization. Likewise, both Britain and France have largely secularized societies. But in France secularization was accompanied by massive conflicts between church and state, while in Britain such conflicts were limited." (2001: p. 204). See also Casanova, 1994. In the past decade, the most innovative analyses of secularism have come from the global South. See, for instance, Bhargava (1998), with a specific focus on India. But see also Connolly, 1999, and, most recently, the monumental treatise of Charles Taylor, 2007.

[44] One other issue I do not treat here is the current debate in the West concerning the future of secularism. In recent years, several authors have taken issue with secularism for its incapacity to account for the "plurivocity of being", to use William Connolly's phrase (1999), that is to say, for preventing other beliefs than the secularist belief from expressing themselves in the public sphere. See also Taylor (2007). For a specific focus on law, see Fitzpatrick (2007). Whether explicitly recognized or not, this debate is being fueled by the increasing visibility of "the other" inside the West. See Asad (2003).

[45] I deal with this topic in detail in Santos, 2002.

[46] On subaltern cosmopolitanism, see Santos, 2002: pp. 465-470.

[47] In Iraq a telling example was the way in which the violations of prisoners' human rights in Abu Graihb were worldwide trumpeted in order to occult a really mass violation of human rights: the invasion and occupation of Iraq.

[48] I develop this topic in Santos, 2006b: pp. 401-436 and 2007b: pp. 3-40.

[49] See Moosa "God is the one who confers rights on persons, via revealed authority although human authority mediates these rights" (2004: p. 6).

[50] Such a work of reconstruction and reinvention of human rights is no utopia or too remote an objective. It is actually happening right now and assuming surprising forms. For example, until recently it would be unthinkable to imagine the Constitution of a country adopting a new relation between human nature and nature, the latter considered to be non-human by western modernity, and consequently guaranteeing the rights of nature. Now this is precisely what is established by articles 71 and following of the Constitution of Ecuador, approved by national referendum in 2008. Here is what article 71 states: "Nature, or Pacha Mama, has the right to have its existence fully respected, together with the maintenance and regeneration of its vital cycles, structure and evolutionary processes". In this conception of nature as Mother Earth, the impact of indigenous cosmogony and ontology is clearly reflected.

[51] The bibliography on Latin-American liberation theology is immense. In my view, Gustavo Gutierrez (1971, 2004) and Leonardo Boff (1973, 1986, 1997) represent the most eloquent formulation of the first generation of liberation theology. Leonardo Boff illustrates better than anyone else the capacity of liberation theologians to include new issues of social justice, be they the liberation of indigenous peoples and of women and, more recently, the ecological issues and the question of a new environmental ethics (1997). An excellent Marxist analysis of Latin-American liberation theology can be found in Löwy (1996). See also the important work by Tamayo (1993, 1996, 1999, 2003a, 2003b, 2004a, 2004b 2006a, 2006b).

[52] In order to capture the diversity of approaches that fit under the name of feminist theology I refer the reader, beyond the work of Dorothee Soelle (1974, 2006), to Loades (ed.), 1990; King (ed.), 1994; Kumari (ed.), 1999; Feminist Theology Workshop, 2002; Aquino, 1988;Vuola, 2002.

[53] Based on the same broad conception of feminist liberation theology, Sharon Welch (2000) develops a "feminist ethic of risk".

[54] Starting with the seminal work of Virgilio Elizondo (1975), there is also an Hispanic/Latino theology focusing on the social struggles of Hispanic/Latino people living in the US. See Valentin (2002) for a convincing plea to move beyond identity politics and address the broader issues of political economy, classism and racism, a move towards what he designates as "public theology". In this regard it is also

important to have in mind the specific traits of an Islamic liberation theology as spelled out by Engineer (1990).

[55] On black theology, see, among many others, Evans, 1987; Kunnie 1994. With a specific focus on the Caribbean see, for instance, Erskine, 1998 and Gonzalez, 2006. Caribbean perspectives on liberation theology put a specific emphasis on colonialism, which is still very present in institutions and social practices, as well as in the everyday life and our own minds. Hence the conceptions of "decolonizing theology" or "theology of decolonization" (Erskine, 1998). Nelson Maldonado Torres cautions us against conflating the "colonial difference" with the "theological difference" and defends the priority of decolonizing knowledge and politics in the construction of a truly liberation theology (2006).

[56] Gottwald's masterful work (1979), on the history of early, pre-monarchical Israel and specifically on the ways the Israelite community settled in Canaan offers a vivid historical analysis of the coexistence among different peoples in Palestine. Upon this long history a common Jewish and Palestinian liberation theology might be developed.

[57] For a Jesuit perspective on liberation theology in Asia, see Arokiasamy, S. and Gispert-Sauch, G., (eds.) 1987.

[58] For an overview of different liberation theologies in different regions of the world, see Tamayo (1993).

[59] Obviously, the Jesus Christ of the Christian Gospels is different from the Jesus Christ of the Qur'an and Islamic tradition. See Khalidi (ed.) (2001). The difference has much to do with the suffering of the flesh. While for the Christians what really matters is Jesus's own flesh and its suffering, since he is the "Word made flesh", for the Islamic faith Jesus is an example of piety because of his proximity to the suffering of the flesh of others, feeding the hungry, healing the sick, restoring life. As Ayoub says: " Jesus the 'Christ', the 'eternal logos', the 'Word made flesh', the 'Only Begotten Son of God' and second person of trinity has been the barrier separating the two communities and long obscuring the meaning and significance of Jesus, the 'Word of God' to Muslim faith and theology" (1995: p. 65).

[60]Theologians of different denominations and orientations have been questioning why the age-old religious diversity is today being experienced in novel "new age" ways, giving rise to a new kind of theological reflection, the "theology of religious pluralism". See Hick and Knitter (1987), Dupuis (1997) and Knitter (2002).

[61] As it happens in general with great religious leaders, Ghazali is a controversial figure and some make him responsible for the reduction of pluralism inside Islam.

[62] The same argument is made by Asad (1993: p. 63).

[63] We should be aware that the distinction material/spiritual is a western-based distinction. In their analyses of epistemology and religion in Africa, .Ellis and Haar forcefully argue that the existing models of the relationship between religion and politics are based on the assumption of a structural distinction between the visible or material world and the invisible world, whereas such a rigid distinction does not reflect ideas about the nature of reality that are prevalent in Africa. According to them among the most salient features of African epistemologies is a conviction that the material and immaterial aspects of life cannot be separated, although they can be distinguished from each other, much as the two sides of a coin can be discerned but not parted… a belief in the existence of an invisible world, distinct but not separate from the visible one, that is home to spiritual beings with effective powers over the material world (2007: p. 387).

[64] Pannikar: "By spirituality I understand a set o basic attitudes prior to their manifestation in theories, or their unfolding in praxis" (1988: p. 91).

[65] Pannikar describes the early Christians in this way; "They were not living exclusively in history. Eschatology was an ever-present factor. They could fearlessly face death. They were martyrs, witnesses to an event. Fidelity was paramount. This conviction was dominant roughly until the fall of Rome under Alaric in 410, or the death of St.Augustine in 430. The true Christian was a martyr" (1988: p. 93).

[66] What is said about the religious experience of the early Christians in the preceding footnote can easily be applied to the religious experiences of the suicide bombers of our time.

[67] Is the suffering God a subaltern God? Is the God of the oppressors the same as the God of the oppressed? Haven't the Gods of the colonized populations been despised and suppressed as magic and idolatrous practices by the God of colonial Christianity? Can the suffering God be the God of the whole Christianity without contradicting Himself or Herself?

[68] See, for instance, Reza Shah-Kazemi (2006) in which he compares the "paths to transcendence" of three great mystics in three major religions: Shankara in Hinduism, Ibn Arabi in Islam and Meister Eckhart in Christianity.

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