

**SOCIAL SALVATION AS RE-EXISTENCE:  
THE RESISTANCE OF SURVIVORS,  
THEOLOGICAL IMAGINATION, AND  
THE *POTENTIA* OF SACRAMENTALITY**

CARLOS MENDOZA-ÁLVAREZ, O.P.  
*Boston College  
Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts*

Thank you, Professor Heyer, for the kind introduction. I thank Professor Pineda-Madrid for the invitation to share my theological reflection as a Mexican theologian in the United States.

A preliminary consideration: you will see a jaguar on the slides, symbolizing the near extinction of its species. In the Mesoamerican culture, the jaguar is associated with water: its roar is like the thunder before the storm that drenches the Earth. The jaguar represents the struggle of life as resistance and re-existence.

I trust that during this convention on Social Salvation, we will be able to continue opening ways of collaboration to serve God's creatures on the frontiers of life and death.

**THRESHOLD: LEARNING TO INHABIT THE RUBBLE**

The cries of women are heard around the world, as echoed in the past, with Rachel mourning her children in the Semitic world<sup>1</sup> or the *Coyolxauhqui* dismembered by her brother Huitzilopochtli<sup>2</sup> within the Mesoamerican world, both of which represent the life-giving force of women resisting violence.

---

<sup>1</sup> See, Enrique Domingo Dussel, *El humanismo Semita: Estructuras intencionales radicales del pueblo de Israel y otros Semitas* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria, 1969). On the Semitic interpretation of the political from the otherness, see Enrique Domingo Dussel, "'The Politics' by Levinas: Towards a 'Critical' Political Philosophy," in *Difficult Justice: Commentaries on Levinas and Politics*, ed. Asher Horowitz and Gad Horowitz (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 78-96.

<sup>2</sup> See, Nancy Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juarez* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011). A *descolonial* feminist analysis emphasizes the generative role of this Mesoamerican myth beyond the traditional interpretation of the dismembered woman, see Jennie Luna and Margarita Galeana, "Remembering Coyolxauhqui as a Birthing Text" *UCLA Raza Studies Journal* 2, no. 1 (2016): 7-32, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2dt752tn>.

In telling these stories, let us not forget those who were forgotten in the narratives of power. For example, in the biblical Abrahamic tale, let us not forget the cry of Hagar<sup>3</sup> that was hidden, already showing within those ancestral times the coloniality of hegemonic power that controls lives, territories, and narratives but never has the power to devastate the souls of the peoples who resist.

Let us remember here that the clamor of these women is not only of pain but also creative and life-generating during resistance,<sup>4</sup> like the “pagan” women of the Bible who give diverse faces to the people of God through their bodies, subjectivities, and symbols, coming from other peoples who God also blessed. Let us evoke the cry of Ruth,<sup>5</sup> the Moabite, who, after many vicissitudes, gave way in the descendants of her womb to David and his lineage. Let us also recall the story of the Canaanite woman in her encounter with Jesus,<sup>6</sup> whose name we, unfortunately, do not know, but whose rebelliousness in being treated like a dog by Jesus opened a crack in the conscience of the Galilean and his community to go deeper into the mystery of salvation.

And connecting those ancient stories with our time of the global civilizational collapse,<sup>7</sup> let us remember here—in the land of the Piscataway peoples colonized by Western Christian white communities, such as in Baltimore—the clamor of the searching Mothers (*Madres Buscadoras*)<sup>8</sup> of the disappeared who confront the

---

<sup>3</sup> See, Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (New York: Orbis Books, 1995).

<sup>4</sup> See, Carmenmargarita Sánchez de León, “Theologies from the Margins”, virtual lecture series, August 2, 2023, posted August 21, 2023, by Metropolitan Community Churches, YouTube, 1:07:12, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fsDDH8uYJ4s>.

<sup>5</sup> Along with feminist sorority, it is necessary to decolonize the reading of the Bible from the perspectives of transborder nation processes and gynocentrism. See, Maricel Mena López, “Hermenéuticas liberadoras frente al racismo,” *Seminario de lectura popular de la Biblia 2023: Disputa Hermenéuticas en América Latina*, Sesión 7, posted on January 17, 2024, YouTube, 55:09, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2UtfhoKK9-w>. For a postcolonial feminist reading of biblical women, see, Silvia Martínez-Cano & Mireia Vidal I Quintero, eds., *Miradas a todo color: Teologías feministas poscoloniales en un mundo en conflicto* (Estella: Editorial Verbo Divino, 2023).

<sup>6</sup> See, Ángel Méndez, *Festín del deseo: Hacia una teología alimentaria* (México: Alios Ventos, 2021), available open access at <https://aliosventos.com/index.php/aliosventos/catalog/view/70/371/1170>. For a queer reading of the passage of the Canaanite woman see the following interview: Ángel Méndez, “¿Qué hay detrás de la Teología Queer? TEDxIberoWomen, Mexico City, CDMX, November 2017, 15 min., 54 sec.: [https://www.ted.com/talks/angel\\_mendez\\_que\\_hay\\_detras\\_de\\_la\\_teologia\\_queer](https://www.ted.com/talks/angel_mendez_que_hay_detras_de_la_teologia_queer).

<sup>7</sup> See, Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *How to Think about Catastrophe: Toward a Theory of Enlightened Doomsaying* (Chicago: Michigan State University, 2022). To explore the political ecology perspective, see: Víctor Manuel Toledo, *The Social Metabolism: A Socio-Ecological Theory of Historical Change* (New York: Springer, 2024).

<sup>8</sup> Today, there are more than one hundred and twenty collectives of relatives of missing persons in Mexico. One of the most important networks that organizes their search is the Search Brigades (Brigadas Nacionales de Búsqueda de Personas Desaparecidas México). For more information on current projects, please consult [https://www.facebook.com/brigadadebusqueda/?locale=es\\_LA](https://www.facebook.com/brigadadebusqueda/?locale=es_LA).

necropower<sup>9</sup> of the criminal gangs colluding with the narco-state in Mexico, the United States, Central America and in all the countries controlled by drug markets, arms, and human trafficking.<sup>10</sup> Nor should we forget in this account the women's clamor on the peaceful route for peace in Colombia<sup>11</sup> and Kurdistan,<sup>12</sup> building a "peace"<sup>13</sup> different from those negotiated between the power of governments, paramilitaries, and the armies of each country and region.

These cries are joined today by the cries of the women of South Sudan and Tchad<sup>14</sup> protecting their children amid forced migration, famine, and the humanitarian crisis produced by war.

And even more urgently, let us listen to and integrate today, as an ethical and epistemological priority in our theologies of social salvation, the cry of Palestinian women resisting the ongoing genocide in Gaza through the ancestral wisdom of *Sumoud*, analyzed by the Palestinian philosopher Rana Khoury.<sup>15</sup>

What theology of social salvation do we, "professional theologians" working in academic institutions of power in the global North, wish to explore? How can we subvert the hegemonic epistemologies within our personal, collective, and university work, making room for an inspiration sourced in the divine *Ruah* that accompanies people in their resistances and re-existences? How do we open our imagination to the symbols of survivors created to find meaning in meaninglessness? What sacramentality of new life emerges from the resistance of survivors? How do we get out of the vicious circle of a theology of salvation that is erudite but disconnected from historical realities and complicit in holocausts old and new? How can we promote a theology of social salvation arising from the cries of the people that contribute to defusing the bomb of

---

<sup>9</sup> See, Achille Mbembe and Libby Meintjes, "Necropolitics", *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11-40, [https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/postgraduate/masters/modules/theoryfromthemargins/mbembe\\_22necropolitics22.pdf](https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/postgraduate/masters/modules/theoryfromthemargins/mbembe_22necropolitics22.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> See, "Mexico. Events of 2023," Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/es/world-report/2024/country-chapters/mexico>.

<sup>11</sup> The *Ruta Pacífica de Mujeres Colombia* is a feminist civil society initiative that promotes the construction of peace from below in the bodies and territories of women. See <https://rutapacifico.org.co/wp/>.

<sup>12</sup> See, Frédérique Geerdink, "The inspiring 'arms of struggle' of Kurdish and Zapatista Women," *Medya News*, October 25, 2021, <https://medyanews.net/the-inspiring-arms-of-struggle-of-kurdish-and-zapatista-women-article/>.

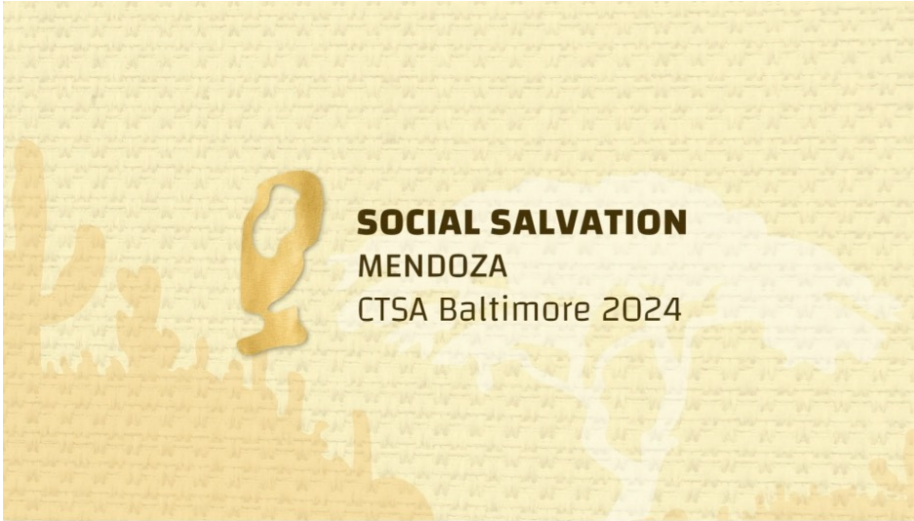
<sup>13</sup> See, Carmenmargarita Sánchez de León, *Transpaz(c)es y vulnerabilidad: sintiendo los latidos de las activistas antirracistas del colectivo Ilé y dos de la co-fundadoras de Black Lives Matter*, (PhD diss, Universidad iberoamericana, 2023), <https://ri.iberomx.handle/iberomx/6578>.

<sup>14</sup> See, Mumbi Kigutha, "Lament and Hope go hand in hand," *Global Sister Report*, June 26, 2021, <https://www.globalsistersreport.org/social-justice/lament-and-hope-go-hand-hand>.

<sup>15</sup> See, Rana Khoury, "Expressions of Sumoud as Indigenous Hope." For more information on this work, see "Palestinian Sumoud as Indigenous Hope: RCPI Fellow Rana Khoury's Civic Engagement Curriculum," *Religion and Public Life*, Harvard Divinity School, December 17, 2021, <https://rpl.hds.harvard.edu/news/palestinian-sumoud-indigenous-hope-rcpi-fellow-rana-khourys-civic-engagement-curriculum>. See also this interview: Rana Khoury, "Expressions of Sumoud in Palestinian Higher Education," *Religion and Public Life*, Harvard Divinity School, August 22, 2021, <https://rpl.hds.harvard.edu/news/2022/04/26/video-Expressions-of-Sumoud-in-Palestinian-Higher-Education>.

rivalry, hatred, and the sacrifice of the innocent for the sake of minority privilege in every time and place?

To be consistent with the *descolonial* and queer path we present here, let us first listen to some voices of wisdom from those who live on the peripheries of society and the churches as they describe what social salvation means to them.<sup>16</sup>



#### IN THE CONTEXT OF NEO-COLONIALITY

To think of salvation in our times marked by a neo-coloniality of power on a global scale implies locating ourselves as a place of enunciation in the ruins of civilization<sup>17</sup> where the clamor of the systemic victims of today as of yesterday emerges.

The Peruvian thinker Aníbal Quijano<sup>18</sup> proposed the coloniality of power-knowing-being a few decades ago, leaving behind the theory of dependency with which his generation tried to understand the oppression of Latin American peoples in the context of the Cold War. It was no longer enough to resort to a liberal economic theory in explaining the economic exploitation linked to the geopolitics of the time. It was necessary to make a qualitative leap, understanding the web of economic and political power relations linked to the control of knowledge, which was carried out by instrumental reason. Then, in connecting all this with an ontological depredation, he

---

<sup>16</sup> This video was made by Eduardo Velasco, with the participation of nine “*sabedoras y sabedores*” or wise persons, located in the interstices of hegemonic power. It can be viewed and downloaded from the following website of the Beyond Global Violence Initiative, a research project that I coordinate at Boston College, <https://re-existe.org/boston-college-bgvi-1>. E-readers may play the video within the document, print readers should visit the above the link.

<sup>17</sup> Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *The War that Must Not Occur* (Berkeley: Stanford University Press, 2023).

<sup>18</sup> Aníbal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America,” *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533-580, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/23906>.

designates the existential background<sup>19</sup> of hegemonic power. From there arises the idea of coloniality, in its trilogy of power-knowledge-being, that will make its way into *descolonial* thought.

In times of globalization and exclusion, as analyzed by Enrique Dussel<sup>20</sup> from Argentina and Mexico, the coloniality proposed by Aníbal Quijano as a theoretical framework for thinking resistance became more complex due to the appearance of new devices of control on a global scale, namely, digital media and criminal mafias. Both have been building transnational machinery that imposes new modes of enrichment through dispossession, as seen in various production sectors of goods and services, from agriculture to the cultural symbols that sustain a given culture.

### ON THE EPISTEMIC WARS IN PROGRESS

Given the above, thinking about social salvation in times of civilizational collapse is not an innocent task that can be done without the systemic violence that has a cognitive vector,<sup>21</sup> which is a part of the war strategy to deactivate the indignation of dominated peoples.

Indeed, we find ourselves amid epistemic wars directed against subaltern peoples, rendering their knowledge and ways of life invisible, dismantling their communal practices and subversive spiritualities that give them breath and sustenance. As Xóchitl Leyva<sup>22</sup> points out—a Mexican anthropologist, together with anti-systemic savants who accompany the diverse Indigenous resistances—extractivism is also epistemic because it usurps the capacity to generate knowledge from the victims themselves, manipulating their precariousness and thus strengthening the prevailing hegemony.

In this sense, epistemic extractivism has been denounced for decades by African and Asian decolonial thinkers<sup>23</sup> as “cultural pauperization,” giving way to policies of recognition linked to the recovery of the artistic and cultural heritage of colonized African peoples, as shown by the project of cultural repatriation of goods led by the

---

<sup>19</sup> Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being. Contributions to the development of a Concept,” *Cultural Studies* 21 (2007): 240-270.

<sup>20</sup> Enrique Domingo Dussel, *Politics of Liberation: A Critical Global History. Reclaiming Liberation Theology* (Norwich: Hymns Ancient & Modern, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> Boaventura de Sousa Santos, “Beyond Abyssal Thinking: From Global Lines to Ecologies of Knowledges,” *Review*, 30, no. 1 (2007): 45-89, <https://www.boaventuradesousasantos.pt/documentos/AbyssalThinking.PDF>; republished online at *Eurozine* as a similar version: Boaventura de Sousa Santos, “Beyond Abyssal Thinking: From Global Lines to Ecologies of Knowledges,” *Eurozine*, June 29, 2007, <https://carleton.ca/mds/wp-content/uploads/santos-Abyssal-thinking.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> Xóchitl Leyva, “Zapatista Knowledge: Theoretico-Political Ontoepistemic Alter-natives in Times of War and Civilizational Collapse,” *Global Tapestry of Alternatives* (May 18, 2023), <https://www.resilience.org/stories/2023-05-18/zapatista-knowledge-theoretico-political-ontoepistemic-alter-natives-in-times-of-war-and-civilisational-collapse/>.

<sup>23</sup> Kwok Pui-Lan, *Postcolonial Politics and Theology: Unraveling Empire for a Global World* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021).

French government of President Emmanuel Macron and criticized by Achille Mbembe.<sup>24</sup>

But what remains to be done is the re-construction of anti-colonial narratives and practices—no longer only decolonial, as Silvia Rivera-Cusicanqui<sup>25</sup> from Bolivia acutely points out—which give way to a reinvention of the subjectivities and collectives in resistance that confront global hegemonic power, whether in its version of the capitalist hydra analyzed by the Zapatistas<sup>26</sup> in Mayan territory, or the confrontation with the necro machine in western Mexico, or the dismantling of necropower in South Africa.

### THE FLASHES OF SOCIAL SALVATION IN THE CRACKS OF POWER: A MESSIANIC IMAGINATION

Who are these subjectivities in rebellion against systemic violence that make possible the birth of a world different from the one imposed by the Anthropocene-Capitalocene?<sup>27</sup> In what *descolonial*, queer, and epistemic coordinates are they sowing other possible worlds? What narratives of ethical and spiritual indignation with *combative hope* do they construct to inhabit the surrounding rubbles? What names of divinity and what healing rituals do they invent?

Let us examine the *messianic theology* that the subalterns write step by step when they say enough is enough.

---

<sup>24</sup> Achille Mbembe, “African Contemporary Art: Interview with Achille Mbembe” (September 2019), <http://katrinschulze.blogspot.com/2009/09/african-contemporary-art-interview-with.html>.

<sup>25</sup> “En tu reciente visita a México señalaste que en América Latina no se está en condiciones de hablar de pensamiento decolonial ni postcolonial. Afirmaste que lo decolonial es una moda, lo postcolonial un deseo y lo anticolonial una lucha. ¿Cómo seguir este camino anticolonial? / Yo creo que es una forma de poner en relieve que este proceso tiene larga data. Desde tiempos coloniales se han dado procesos de lucha anticolonial; en cambio, lo decolonial es una moda muy reciente que, de algún modo, usufructúa y reinterpreta esos procesos de lucha, pero creo que los despolitiza, puesto que lo decolonial es un estado o una situación, pero no es una actividad, no implica una agencia, ni una participación consciente. Llevo la lucha anticolonial a la práctica en los hechos, de algún modo, deslegitimizando todas las formas de cosificación y del uso ornamental de lo indígena que hace el Estado. Todo eso son procesos de colonización simbólica.” Kattalin Barner, “Silvia Rivera-Cusicanqui: ‘Tenemos que producir pensamiento a partir de lo cotidiano,’” *El Salto* (February 20, 2020), <https://alicenews.ces.uc.pt/?lang=1&id=23864>.

<sup>26</sup> EZLN (Zapatista Army for National Liberation), *Critical Thought in the Face of the Capitalist Hydra I: Contributions by the Sith Commission of the EZLN* (Brisbane: PaperBoat Press, 2016).

<sup>27</sup> It is an expression coined by Paul Krutzen, winner of the Nobel Prize in 2016, and taken up by ecologists, social scientists, and philosophers to explain the civilizational model produced by techno-scientific instrumental rationality since the Industrial Revolution. A theological conversation with Victor Manuel Toledo can be found in the online issue of Concilium: Victor Manuel Toledo, “Entrevista con Toledo,” conversation with Carlos Mendoza-Álvarez, in “Covid 19: Beyond the Anthropocene?” *Concilium* 2, online edition (2022): 28 min., 29sec., <https://concilium-vatican2.org/covid-19-2/>.

***Polarized Intersubjectivity?***

The modern dream of democracy and universal rights committed suicide in Gaza, as Munther Isaac pointed out last Christmas evening from Bethlehem in Palestine.<sup>28</sup> Neither the narratives of the international rule of law nor the Christian fundamentalist theological justifications of the North Atlantic powers that supported the state of Israel were able to prevent the collapse. Worst of all, as a phenomenon of collective cognitive dissonance<sup>29</sup>—analogous to what happened with Nazism and Fascism in Europe in the first half of the 20th century—it has led to justifying in the name of God the colonialism of the state of Israel against Arab and Christian Palestinians, as Mitri Raheb has forcefully shown.<sup>30</sup>

But modern democracies have also shown their internal contradictions when they forget the people from whom the real power flows. President Biden's administration speeches blatantly use the humanitarian tragedy created by the genocide in Gaza to win votes in his election campaign under the pretext of the global leadership role of the United States in preserving the "free world" in a perverse satire of geopolitics in times of neo-colonialism.<sup>31</sup>

Today, we speak of "social polarization" as a euphemism to deny the internal contradictions of the world system, which has already been rigorously analyzed in its economic and political dynamism by Aníbal Quijano in Peru and by Immanuel Wallerstein and Catherine Walsh in the United States.<sup>32</sup> Polarization presupposes symmetry of power relations, narratives, subjectivities, and epistemologies—something that does not occur in the world system of the coloniality of power-knowledge-being.

Hence, it is necessary to name these asymmetries and do everything possible to reverse these processes of systemic violence based on the praxis and agency of the victims themselves and not of those who pretend to speak on their behalf.

For this very reason, to think of social salvation simply as a spiritual healing of social polarization without dismantling the asymmetries of power would only maintain the objective conditions of evil in the world, disguising the strategies of social invisibilization of the other and thus perpetuating the structural injustice that maintains the world-system.

---

<sup>28</sup> Munther Isaac, "Christ in the Rubble: A Liturgy of Lament," 2023 Christmas Message, Bethlehem in Palestine, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qbHzqU3ZdTts>.

<sup>29</sup> See, João Cezar de Castro Rocha, *Bolsonarismo: Da guerra cultural ao terrorismo doméstico. Retórica do ódio e dissonância cognitiva colectiva* (São Paulo: Autentica Editora, 2019).

<sup>30</sup> See, Mitri Raheb, *Decolonizing Palestine: The Land, the People, the Bible* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2023).

<sup>31</sup> See, Pankaj Mishra, "The Shoah after Gaza," *London Review of Books* 46, no. 6 (2024), <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v46/n06/pankaj-mishra/the-shoah-after-gaza>.

<sup>32</sup> See, Immanuel Wallerstein, *World System Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2024). See also, Walter Dignolo and Catherine Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press 2018).

### ***The Change of Narratives: Conflict or Genocide?***

Therefore, a change of narratives is necessary as an expression of the clamor of the subalterns that makes it possible to summon other possible worlds. This is more than just a rhetoric of the World Social Forum<sup>33</sup> as an alternative to the Davos Forum. It is a strategy of globalization of solidarity from below, as the Zapatistas say, or solidarity of “the social poets,” as Pope Francis<sup>34</sup> calls the social movements that live in the peripheries of the world of white and capitalist privilege, particularly in the global South, who weave other modes of communality, governance, agroecological production and spiritualities of life.

The new narratives that the subalterns generate when they say enough is enough are expressed in many ways. Sometimes, their imagination creates art in the streets or an armed insurrection to defend their territories. Other times, they perform symbolic subversions in the face of patriarchy that is indifferent to femicides, as is the case of the MeToo# movement of women, feminists, and *anarcho-feminists* in the globalized world.

### ***The Spiritual Insurgency of the Subalterns***

Combative decoloniality has a *spiritual* background that animates it. It is necessary to think theologically to unravel the powers of experience that arise from indignation and mourning within a *politics of the affections*, as Rita Segato says,<sup>35</sup> and as *contractions of messianic time*—analyzed by Giorgio Agamben in contemporary political thought<sup>36</sup>—that give way to new ways of life or re-existence, as proposed by Nelson Maldonado-Torres.<sup>37</sup>

It is a matter of investigating the intimate force which is at once inter-subjective, political, and spiritual. Inter-subjective is a *relational ontology*<sup>38</sup> created by those who have lost everything but dignity and hope, deconstructing the *feminicidal* world where

<sup>33</sup> See, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *The World Social Forum: A User's Manual* (Madison: December 2004), [https://www.boaventuradesousasantos.pt/documentos/fsm\\_eng.pdf](https://www.boaventuradesousasantos.pt/documentos/fsm_eng.pdf). From its beginnings, the initiative for a world theological forum to gather the voice of the oppressed peoples has arisen in parallel: Luiz Carlos Suzin, *Teología para otro mundo posible* (Madrid: PPC, 2005).

<sup>34</sup> See, Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (October 3, 2020), [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201003\\_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html). A critical reception commentary can be found at William T. Cavanaugh, Carlos Mendoza-Álvarez, Ikenna Ugochukwu Okafor, and Daniel Pilarío (eds.), *Fratelli Tutti: A Global Commentary* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2024).

<sup>35</sup> See, Rita Laura Segato. *The War Against Women* (Birmingham: Polity Press, 2025).

<sup>36</sup> See, Giorgio Agamben. *The time that remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* (Stanford: Meridian Stanford University Press, 2005).

<sup>37</sup> See, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Atalia Omer, Joshua S. Lupo, “No peace without Decolonization: A Lecture and Interview with Nelson Maldonado-Torres,” *Contending Modernities*, April 9, 2024, <https://contendingmodernities.nd.edu/decoloniality/no-peace-without-decolonization/>.

<sup>38</sup> See, Barbara Andrade, *Gott mitten unter uns: Entwurf einer kerygmatischen Trinitätstheologie* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1988); Spanish version, Barbara Andrade *Dios en medio de nosotros: Esbozo de una teología trinitaria kerigmática* (Salamanca: Secretariado Trinitario, 2001).



the mafias that traffic people seem to have power over life and death. They certainly have control over the physical death of people and the territories they devastate, but not over life, with its strength of resilience, resistance, and re-existence of the survivors.

Something similar happens with the subjectivities of Afrodiasporic peoples who, in addition to facing the collective trauma of their ancestors' enslavement since the sixteenth century, have sought through their emancipation struggles ways to deconstruct the internal coloniality of the world-system that keeps many still trapped. Their spirituality of *Theo-quilombism* is, as shown by Cleusa Caldeira from Brazil,<sup>39</sup> for example, a mode of combative decolonial spirituality that challenges the world above and deconstructs its privilege, but above all that nourishes those living in the world below, be it in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro.

And so, we could go on telling stories of the *spiritual insurrection* of the subalterns, not only of those half a century ago as Thurman did in the United States,<sup>40</sup> Desmond Tutu in South Africa,<sup>41</sup> or my brother Gustavo Gutiérrez in Peru,<sup>42</sup> but also of today's insurgent peoples as well. From those original peoples defending Mother Earth from the voracity of mining and extracting oil and gas by Canadian and Chinese companies around the planet to the queer collectives that "twist" any hegemonic narrative that makes invisible diverse bodies; or the organized civil society that accompanies people in forced mobility, resisting the beast of the undocumented labor market that nourishes the economies of the global North.

Their rituals of survival, their memorials of ancestors on the path of resistance, and their politics of affections that generate re-existences are intertwined as a *pedagogy of love* that confronts the pedagogy of terror analyzed by Rita Laura Segato from Argentina and Brazil in the war against women, as well as Rosanna Reguillo<sup>43</sup> from Mexico in the narco-machine that produces *juvenidicios* or the systematic murder of poor-racialized-young-men in the peripheries.

A theology of social salvation in these troubled times of civilizational catastrophe will have to listen humbly to these narratives and cries coming from below and then, as a second act, think about the messianic promise and its (*im*)possible fulfillment, with the symbolic mediations and institutions necessary to preserve life. Then, we will be able to invoke and worship again with relevance the names of God that emerge from the peoples in resistance to evil in this hour of global disgrace.

---

<sup>39</sup> See, Cleusa Caldeira, "Theoquilombism: Black Theology between Political Theology and Theology of Inculturation," *Perspectiva Teologica* 53 (2021): 137-159, <https://www.faje.edu.br/periodicos/index.php/perspectiva/article/download/4600/4606>.

<sup>40</sup> See, Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).

<sup>41</sup> See, Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 2000).

<sup>42</sup> See, Gustavo Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984).

<sup>43</sup> See, Rossana Reguillo, *Necromáquina: cuando morir no es suficiente* (Guadalajara: NED/ITESO, 2014).

## FOR AN ANTI-HEGEMONIC THEOLOGY OF SALVATION

Although we tend to use the term salvation in a univocal sense, designating divine intervention in human history based on a hegemonic Hebrew-Christian narrative, the ambiguity of the term leads us to the mistake of forgetting the abyssal line that separates the subaltern peoples from the hegemonic world. Therefore, it is necessary to characterize the *locus enuntiationis* from which we speak of “salvation” to locate its limits and its potentialities, for no critical reflection can continue to claim an abstract universality without being complicit in some violence.

The decolonial, intersectional, and queer theology of social salvation that we propose here entails an *epistemic option* for those excluded from global privilege by perceiving from their experiences of resistance another way of being “beyond the essence” –in the phenomenological terms proposed by Emmanuel Levinas<sup>44</sup>—in opposition to the essence of the market which is made possible by the supplanting of the divine. Salvation is, therefore, anti-hegemonic, denying an ideological interpretation that assigns to some peoples the role of being blessed by God and relegates others to the idolatrous pagan world because they threaten the hegemonic divine order. This mirrors a theological perversion that Marcela Althaus-Reid pointed out with acuity some decades ago as an epistemological critique of queering any hegemonic narrative.<sup>45</sup>

Following a close but different path, we propose here three *descolonial* and queer epistemological criteria to describe the anti-hegemonic theology of salvation:

### *The Praxis of God’s People or the “Agency” of the Survivors*

The liberation theologies<sup>46</sup> of half a century ago codified the transformative action of the “people of God” in terms of praxis, wanting to assume the original biblical experience of the *Go’el* or liberating God from modernity as a model of the rationality of the fulfillment of history. Above all, they read the transformative role of the experience of the liberation of the oppressed, expressed from the perspective of the redemption of the Hebrew slaves in Egypt, as the primary analog of salvation. From there, Jesus’ praxis in Galilee and his confrontation with the religion of the Temple were posited as the core of his preaching and realization of the Kingdom of God in intra-historical terms, all of which makes possible a co-creative reception of God’s action in the history of the oppressed as inspired by divine energy, promoting a just and peaceful society for all as the horizon of utopia.

---

<sup>44</sup> See, Emmanuel Levinas, *Autrement qu’être ou Au-delà de l’essence* (New York: Springer, 1974).

<sup>45</sup> See, Marcella Althaus-Reid. *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2000). See also, Joseph Drexler-Dreis, *Decolonial Love: Salvation in Colonial Modernity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019).

<sup>46</sup> An essential moment of a critical retrospective of Liberation Theology was the Continental Conference of Liberation Theology, held in Sao Leopoldo, Brazil, in 2012. See, Congreso Continental de Teología, *La teología de la liberación en perspectiva: São Leopoldo, October 7-11, 2012* (Montevideo, Uruguay: Fundación Amerindia, 2012), <https://www.scribd.com/doc/170315593/congreso-continental-de-teologia-pdf>.

However, the background of praxis perpetuated a modern conception of emancipation as a paradigm of salvation.

Once this model showed its perverse side by affirming a privileged way of life at the expense of the invisibilization of many other subjectivities and epistemologies, it was then necessary to deconstruct this model of hegemonic salvation so as to explore different ways of life that emerge from the victims themselves in their multiple resistances. Thus, for example, amid the ongoing civilizational crisis, the social movements of victims have become a source of meaning in meaninglessness, making it possible to understand their political “agency”<sup>47</sup> as a criterion of salvation as a site where the human-divine happens as a deconstruction of hegemonic power and establishment of other ways of life centered on the intersubjective, the communal, and the symbolic as *messianic anticipation* of divine blessing.

### ***The Symbolic and Political Mediations of Anti-Hegemonic Salvation.***

The narratives of resistance<sup>48</sup> reveal the symbolic power of the victims in recreating the world from below, where only death seems to predominate.

These practices of performativity that emerge as a negation of hegemony—a hydra that has many heads, among them patriarchy, capitalism, racism, and ableism—have an ethical meaning that needs to be unraveled alongside an alternative political meaning to the hegemonic model that needs to be explored.

And in the depths of these subjectivities dismantled by systemic violence, there appears a *theological* dimension of human existence—as my brother Thomas Aquinas used to call it<sup>49</sup>—that makes them capable of facing the impossible by dint of eschatological imagination. It is about another mode of temporality that we can call alongside the Hebrew grammar, a messianic time that becomes “kairological time,” according to the Christian metaphor since it breaks “once and for all” —as The Letter to the Hebrews 9:12 says of the work of salvation accomplished by Jesus on the cross—the sacrificial logic analyzed by René Girard<sup>50</sup> that gives cohesion to the hegemonic world. This redemptive event occurs in the messianic bodies and establishes *another temporality* pregnant with the meaning of life in the face of death.

---

<sup>47</sup> This term is associated with performativity as an ability to transform subjectivity from its vulnerability. Among several contemporary authors, Judith Butler is a frequent reference. See, Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Judith Butler, “Performative Agency,” *Journal of Cultural Economy* 3, no. 2 (2010): 147-161.

<sup>48</sup> Since 2019, a group of *descolonial* scholars in Mexico from different continents has promoted a reflection amidst intimate relationships with social movements facing diverse forms of violence. We seek to think critically about their resistances and new ways of living (re-existences), with particular attention to the spiritualities that animate them. A graphic memory of this process can be seen on the following website: <https://re-existe.org/re-exist-english>.

<sup>49</sup> Although for Aquinas, the “theological life” (*vita theologalis*) is the exclusive gift of divine superabundant love, it requires the dynamism of human passions to bear fruit (*gratia supponit naturam ac elevans*). From a phenomenological and *descolonial*, and queer perspective, we propose re-signifying “the theological” from the denied subjectivities that experience grace as love without condition or measure that they receive in their bodies and territories in resistance and re-existence. See, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II.62.1.

<sup>50</sup> See, René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001).

In that nourishing soil of the *performativity* of the subalterns, the seeds of other possible worlds are planted. There is regenerated the capacity of the forgotten of the earth to pronounce life from their ethical-political indignation, opening the way to the whole world that is a promise fulfilled on the contrary.

A clear example of these symbolic and political mediations of anti-hegemonic salvation is the anti-memorials of women murdered by femicide or the anti-memorials of forced disappearances, where survivors change the hegemonic narrative that seeks to domesticate these different forms of violence by subsuming them in circles of re-victimization and manipulation of memory. The objective of such performativity of the victims is, on the contrary, to keep the wound open until the conditions of memory, alongside justice, truth, and reparation that this process of recognition requires, are fulfilled.

In this way, the anti-hegemonic salvation proceeds as the unfolding of memory through narrative actions, healing rituals, and ethical-political performances in public squares and in the intimacy of the community, which the victims weave in their struggles for mutual recognition as a critique of the world above and salvation that emerges from the world-below.

Therefore, the ultimate goal of this symbolic performativity is the recreation of the world of the dead or, literally, a “post-mortem politics” as proposed by Sayak Valencia,<sup>51</sup> the philosopher from Tijuana, to affirm life in the interstices of power as constructed by the collective survivors of ongoing massacres.

### ***The Messianic Instant as Ongoing Subversion and Eschatological Anticipation from the Reverse of Hegemonic History***

This whole process of anti-hegemonic social salvation is only possible if a *new temporality*<sup>52</sup> gives existential ground, spiritual sustenance, and humus of life to all these resistances. It is about a “messianic contraction” (1 Cor 7: 29) in the proper sense, as Paul of Tarsus captured it as the source of the new creation, given that it stops the spiral of violence in the bodies and territories themselves on the one hand, and on the other, it sows seeds of other life precisely where it is denied. From there springs grace as a gift of loving overabundance that saves the wounded social body of humanity and the whole of creation.

If we read these struggles from the perspective of messianic temporality, we do not reify them as sacraments of the divine, but we do recognize them as sources of meaning amid meaninglessness and, by the same token, as a window to the divine world that happens as grace. Within this experience of dismantling nonmeaning, an apophatic deep spiritual experience emerges that re-signifies the classical apophatism of my brother Meister Eckhart,<sup>53</sup> sourced from the spiritualities of those who inhabit

---

<sup>51</sup> See, Sayak Valencia, *Gore Capitalism* (Boston: MIT Press, 2018).

<sup>52</sup> See, Carlos Mendoza-Álvarez, *Resurrection as a Messianic Anticipation: Grieving, Memory, and Hope from the Survivor's Perspective* (Mexico & UK: Alios Ventos, 2024).

<sup>53</sup> “Thus, God cannot work except in the ground of humility, for the deeper we are in humility, the more receptive to God.” Meister Eckhart, “Sermon Thirty-Four (Pf 34, Q 55) *Maria Magdalena venit ad monumentum etc* (John 20:1),” in *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart* (New York: Crossroad, 1979), 204-205.

the region of non-being, as we are exploring in recent research with colleagues from different countries and disciplines.<sup>54</sup>

That is why messianic temporality is proleptic: anticipatory of the divine world in the cracks of the human world as it occurs as resistance to systemic evil. It is a mode of being where the human-divine is realized as the grace of forgiveness that overcomes rivalry and resentment, thus stopping the spiral of hatred as the power of the victims communicates social salvation, a performativity never possible for the executioners as executioners.

But this temporality is also analectical, that is to say, the creator of a past that wanted to be hidden by the trauma or by the victimizers, but that is re-created by the survivors. Therefore, the experience of contracted time brings back the experience of mourning as a perspective of life here and now for those who survived the collapse.

An emblematic case of this messianic temporality is the confession of the resurrection of the missing persons as a "fulfilled promise," according to the testimony of the searching mothers in Argentina and Mexico. When they manage to identify individual and human remains through DNA, after recovering them in life and clandestine graves, they can return them to their families. When this happens, the experience is narrated as a "promise fulfilled," thanks to this act of political love, where they expand their motherhood by placing their newly recovered children in their collective memory. They do not affirm the resurrection as an afterlife event but as a sacrament of the fulfillment of life in the hereafter amid the chiaroscuro.

## CONCLUSION

Let us summarize the foundational elements of social salvation we have explored.

### *The Social Salvation from the Reverse Side of Hegemonic History*

Throughout this *descolonial* theological journey, we have sought to go to the social peripheries and existences, listening to the cries of indignation and love for the lives of the victims of various forms of violence and their survivors. There, we have found some criteria of truth to deconstruct the hegemonic idea of redemption, delineating an outline for a *descolonial* theology of social salvation that emerges from the knowledge and spiritualities of the subalterns who say enough is enough; no more, this is it.

From the reverse side of hegemonic history and in the interstices of its earthly power, glimmers of divine Glory emerge as the agency of the survivors to weave other ways of living in common. What is paradoxical and consoling about this idea of *anti-hegemonic social salvation* is that it includes the perpetrators in a call to ethical, epistemic, and spiritual conversion. Above all, it strengthens the power of the victims as knowers of other ways of life and experts in humanity who are open to the gift of otherness, bearers of a relational ontology that goes beyond the logic of violent and sacrificial reciprocity.

---

<sup>54</sup> The videos of the series of colloquia on Political Theology from the *descolonial*, mimetic, and apophatic perspectives can be viewed on the BGVI portal: <https://re-existe.org/boston-college-bgvi-1>.

### ***The spirituality of Resistance***

Social salvation in a *descolonial* perspective is a combative spirituality that emerges as an anticipation of a world to come, literally as labor pains, in the bodies of women and all the collectives of diverse resistances that celebrate the gift of being co-creators of these territories of life, as *Theoquilombism* explores it in the Afrodiasporic subjectivities all over the world.

It is a spirituality of life amid a “stark” civilization, which recovers the theological background of the divine kenosis experienced by the Logos of God made flesh in Jesus of Nazareth, a lowering that is also expressed in the just people of history who live that proximity that redeems, precisely by deconstructing in their bodies and territories, the world system of oppression that is the hidden face of the globalization of the market.

A spirituality, after all, that celebrates life amid death. Or, as the searching mothers say, they learn to “cry while dancing” because the love for their missing children is not sublimated but transfigured into dance when the pain is shared with other mothers, strengthening the sisterhood amid their (*im*)possible mourning.

Performativity of symbols of *post-mortem life*, not in the afterlife outside space-time, which will be a gift according to the hope born of faith in the living God. But post-mortem life in the hereafter of necropower is confronted by the tenacity of those who bet on the change of this world.

### ***Re-Existence as a Way of Life***

Finally, social salvation in an anti-hegemonic perspective can only be perceived as re-existence from below the scale of privilege, from the non-place of the disinherited of the Earth, from the cracks of the necro-power that controls bodies and territories but has also become the poison of instances of power, including the modern state and religions.

Re-existence is a precarious way of life redeemed from its desire for power. A vulnerability assumed as a meeting point with other wounded subjectivities, to walk in the mutual accompaniment that empowers the subaltern, heals the wounds produced by systemic violence, and, above all, celebrates the life that is stronger than death.

Forms of life that emerge in the peoples who resist the depredation of trans-criminal powers in the Amazon and the extractivist war in the Congo, in the resistance to forced migration in Tijuana and Lampedusa, in the sisterhood between Hindu, Christian, and Muslim women in Kerala, India, and in the strength of mothers who care for their children and the refugee children they adopt in Kibera in the suburbs of Nairobi, Kenya.

In short, social salvation is possible when we inhabit the interstices of hegemonic power with combative hope, welcoming God’s unconditional love as revealed in the Galilean Jesus as the superabundant gift of the Divine Sophia.