LACLAU'S REVOLUTIONARY POLITICAL THEOLOGY AND ITS BACKDROP

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ABSTRACT

One of the ways of thinking God in contemporary philosophy is reflecting on violence. In fact, reflecting on violence implies always at the same time to refer to the difficulty of thinking about the co-implication of law and violence, a typical prerogative of divine action. From this perspective, political theology is concerned with the status and the possibilities or impossibilities of representing violence in a given political order. Three are the classical texts in the backdrop of this reflection on the hiatus between law and violence: Walter Benjamin Critique of Violence of 1921, Carl Schmitt's Political Theology of 1922 and Derrida's Force of Law of 1989. The article examines another paradigm, that of Ernesto Laclau. The article concludes that only a non-presentable idea of God as a negative fundament allows for a non-authoritarian political idea. But this non-presentable character is only made possible by revolutionary politics.

Keywords: Political Theology; Anti-fundationalism; Revolutionary Politics; Violence; Laclau.

1. DIVINE VIOLENCE: THE BACKDROP OF REVOLUTIONARY POLITICAL THEOLOGY

One of the ways of thinking God in contemporary philosophy is reflecting on violence. In fact, reflecting on violence implies always at the same time to refer to the difficulty of thinking about the co-implication of law and violence, a typical prerogative of divine action. From this perspective, political theology is concerned with the status and the possibilities or impossibilities of representing violence in a given political order.

"Pure violence" is as impossible for a political community as an "unthreatened peace." Absolute order and pure violence relate to each other as a "coincidentia oppositorum," using an expression of Nicolas de Cusa. In fact, Nicolas de Cusa considered the complexion of the opposites as the most perfect definition of God.[1]

Given this opposition, every "representational violence" is nothing more than a "forced mediation," an impersonation of God in political reality, a way of occupying the "empty throne" -in Agamben's words[2]- or "empty place" -in Lefort's words[3]- or a way to exercise "fetishism" in Benjamin's perspective. Since God is non-presentable, he cannot be represented in the political community.

Three are the classical texts in the backdrop of this reflection on the hiatus between law and violence: Walter Benjamin *Critique of Violence* of 1921, Carl Schmitt's *Political Theology* of 1922 and Derrida's *Force of Law* of 1989. The reason for the sovereignty in Schmitt's discourse is precisely the mediation between violence and order. Schmitt himself recognizes the hiatus that exists between both moments and, consequently, the "decisionism" implicit in the passage

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[1] True opposites are never incommensurable. If they were, the relation of opposition could not unite them. His use of that expression implies that opposites always occur together; they can not be taken apart from each other and they define each other. About this expression in postmodernity see Greer 2003, 235-236. About this expression in relationship with negative theology see Franke 2014, 57: "The apophatic is the locus par excellence of complete contradiction and paradox, of *coincidentia oppositorum* in a language given currency by Cusanus. Might we, then, envisage an asymptotic point of "indiscretion" at which all such alternatives collapse together and cannot be dissevered or even discerned from one another? Meister Eckhart teaches that nothing can be compared to God because nothing is distinct from him. Absolute distance and no distance at all alike prevent any sort of articulation."

[2] Agamben 2011.

[3] Lefort 2006, 148-187.

of the exception to the norm. Precisely for this reason, the sovereign power becomes the true foundation of political reality. Benjamin and Derrida also show the need to preserve the hiatus between the two opposites. Derrida reveals, however, the unreason of any appearance of foundation. Benjamin criticizes the idolatry implicit in every imposition of a sovereign power.

In Schmitt's *Political Theology* violence first takes the form of an exception, an event characterized by anomia, absence of norm and absence of normal order, hence absence of law and presence of conflict –of an antagonism between "friends and enemies." In this situation, violence acquires the form of a decision on the exception to bring an end with it and to restore legal order. In this restoration lies the legitimacy of the political decision. Every legal order can be seen as institutionalized violence; that is, every juridical order is always sustained by violence. The decision on the exception that produces order is comparable to a miracle and the sovereign to God. Here begins the core of the Schmittian reflection on "political theology."[4]

Benjamin's main objective in *Critique of Violence* was to destruct the pervasive circle around means and ends, following which the ends are just if they can be achieved by just means; the means are just if they aim toward just ends. Violence is an unjustified mean. There is no reasonable justification for it, even not to construct an order. The distinction between sanctioned and unsanctioned violence shadows this idea. Benjamin insists through many examples -such as the right to conduct warfare, and the right to strike- on saying that *sanctioned violence is violence* and we must be critical of it.[5] In fact, representational violence as legal violence shadows the possibility of thinking radically about the legitimacy of violence. Judging the legitimacy or illegitimacy of violence belongs to a philosophy of history. The sphere of justice is related to violence as an end in a very different kind of reflection. Benjamin is fighting against the idolatries of power that seem to act in the name of God. However, the only way in which God make his appearance is through *divine violence*. For Benjamin, the only political violence that can be considered similar to divine violence is revolutionary violence, a revolutionary action that produces continually adjustments without a utopian end.[6]

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[4] Begins here but goes far beyond that. See Herrero 2015 and Herrero 2017, 23-43. Also, Vatter 2017, 245-269.

[5] In his view, there is a sphere of human agreement that is nonviolent to the extent that it is wholly inaccessible to violence: the sphere proper to "understanding," that is, language. Only of late, and in a peculiar process of decay, has legal violence penetrated it with the penalty placed on fraud. Like if we could distinguish between sanctioned and unsanctioned language. Benjamin 1986, 289.

[6] Martel 2012 puts the accent in anarchism not in revolution as for example makes Eagleton 1981. Anarchism is for Martel the kind of politics that emerges from Benjamin's negative theology consisting in a "Messianism in which the Messiah does virtually nothing except make

Derrida's reflection is in a way more focused on the performative aspect of violence. He introduces the idea that law is an authorized force. Violence then is at the core of the idea of law, even if justice can never be as such institutionally represented. Every law turns injustice into justice and, in this sense, can be considered violent. At their origin, violence and order are indistinguishable: primary violence is also primary justice. But justice is undecidable, absolute alterity, and not presentable. There is something mystical in that origin, while law preserves traces of it. Since justice is undecidable, each position of law violates justice (like a second violence).

In spite of that, a close reading of Derrida's *First Name of Benjamin* points to the necessary existence of a kind of coupling between foundational violence and representational violence. Foundational violence is somehow always within the law. The law is threatened from within[7] insofar as it cannot be more than a law to come. At first, this violence is exercised as a right to interpret the instituted law, that is, a right to establish guidelines for reading the state's rules. Following this argument, Derrida deconstructs Benjamin's text and suggests that foundational violence (*rechtssetzende Gewalt*) already implies conservative violence (*rechtserhaltende Gewalt*) and cannot break with it. It belongs to the structure of foundational violence, which grounds that which has to be preserved, that which has to be iterated in order to remain. The distinction between these two kinds of violence is complicated by the paradox of iterability (which is inextricable from the idea of time). Derrida speaks of a "différentielle contamination" instead of coincidentia oppositorum. There is always a constitutive "abnormality" within

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it possible for us not to be determined by its own fetishism (…) the idea of divine violence puts the entire onus of action and responsibility on human beings." Martel 2012, 132. Conversely, Eagleton says (Eagleton 1982, 115): "Benjamin's Messianism is at once the clearest evidence of his idealism and one of the most powerful sources of his revolutionary thought." Also Eagleton (1982, 132): "Social democracy and ultra-leftism (anarchism, adventurism, putschism and so on) are among other things antithetical responses to the failure or absence of a mass revolutionary movement." Eagleton 1982, 148: "Benjamin's negative theology, like much of the negativity of Western Marxism, has its historical roots in an absence rather more determinate than that of the Messiah: the absence of the revolutionary party." Eagleton 1982, 177: "The surrealists, Benjamin writes, perceived an ecstatic or anarchic component in every revolutionary act; but, he quickly adds, 'to place the accent exclusively on it would be to subordinate the methodical and disciplinary preparation for revolution entirely to a praxis oscillating between fitness exercises and celebration in advance' ("Surrealism") Precisely such a subordination scars Benjamin's own work, all the way from the spasmodic Sorelian violence espoused in his early ultra-leftist apocalypticism to the revolutionary Messianism and political poetry of the Theses themselves."

[7] Here is the difference not only with Benjamin, but also with Carl Schmitt. What threatens law does not belong already to law, because it is an exception, a rupture of law coming from "the real": the event in history. In this point Schmitt is closer to Benjamin; but differentiates from him in so far for Schmitt the decision taken in this exception is looking for an order to come that in a way is already prefigured in reality, while for Benjamin constitutive violence implies an absolute rupture thought as an absolute disorder. For an approach to Derrida reading of Benjamin on this topic see Biset 2013, 107-130.

the sphere of law that can be shown to constitute revolution— a menace that is not exterior to the law and that can only be thought of as a destiny.

He had already offered some thoughts on violence in *Of Grammatology*, when he referred to "the violence of the letter" in chapter one of the second part. He asks what links writing to violence and answers, "the present, living, conscious representation of a text within the experience of the person who writes or reads it, and if the text constantly goes beyond this representation by the entire system of its resources and its own laws, then the question of genealogy exceeds by far the possibilities that are at present given for its elaboration."[8] This discourse is an endless interweaving of roots, a "system of roots." In his commentary to Levi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques*, Derrida speaks of three aspects related to violence and language. In the Nambikwara language, proper names are forbidden. When the anthropologist reveals those names outside of the community, violence erupts.

To start, there is a first violence to be identified. It corresponds to the act of naming, which results in names that will on occasion be forbidden to pronounce. This is the original violence of language, which consists in inscribing with difference, in classifying, in conceptualizing what is unique within a system and inscribing it there. This is the gesture of "arche-writing."[9] A second kind of violence appears as reparatory, and prescribes the concealment of writing and the effacement of the so-called proper name. This violence urges the "moral." A third kind of violence can emerge as an empirical possibility and is commonly called war or evil. It consists in revealing by effraction the so-called proper name. This violence is more complex because it refers at the same time to the two inferior levels of arche-violence and of law.[10] In the very context of language, we find violence structured on three levels: (1) structural violence that is (2) violently suppressed through the institution of law, which is itself (3) broken by the emergence of empirical violence.

This characterization of violence follows in *Of Grammatology* from the exposition of Lévi-Strauss' analysis of the oppressive character of writing: for him, the passage from speech to writing is a leap, like the instantaneous crossing of a line of discontinuity. It is a passage from a fully oral language, free from all writing and pure and innocent, to a language that includes accessory graphic representation, which opens up a technique of oppression. Derrida criticizes the political idea underlying Lévi-Strauss' description by saying that his reflection is an

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[8] Derrida 1997, 101.
[9] Derrida, 1997, 112.
[10] Derrida, 1997, 112.

anarchism that deliberately confounds law and oppression. Lévi-Strauss describes the idea of law and positive right as constraint and enslavement. Hence, political power can only be the custodian of an unjust power.[11]

Derrida views things differently when he writes, "to recognize writing in speech, that is to say difference and the absence of speech, is to begin to think the lure. There is no ethics without the presence of the other but also, and consequently, without absence, dissimulation, detour, difference, writing. The arche-writing is the origin of morality as of immorality. The non-ethical opening of ethics. A violent opening. As in the case of the vulgar concept of writing, the ethical instance of violence must be rigorously suspended in order to repeat the genealogy of morals."[12]

In sum, every linguistic representation is already a violation, but this violation can only be thought of within morality and vice-versa. Again, there is a kind of contamination between speech and writing.

Laclau's approach seems to be a variation on this same idea, even if violence is not a signifier within his repertoire. As Julie Drew stresses, the radical democratic agenda of Laclau can't be advanced without "discursive force." In fact, she critically asserts that for Laclau violence is a necessary and not necessarily undesirable function of freedom within the social.[13]

2. LACLAU'S RHETORICAL FOUNDATION OF SOCIETY

Laclau completely assumes the linguistic turn that Wittgenstein and Saussure introduced while updating the Marxist and Gramscian tradition with some Lacanian elements. It is difficult to know how much of what I have called here the backdrop's authors influenced him, but it is safe to guess that at least Schmitt (never being quoted) had some influence, even though Laclau seems to be more attached to Lefort's theological -political approach.[14] In any case, Laclau is dealing with the same theo- political question we have already referred to: the non-appearance of God as the source of a post-foundational political thinking that installs violence in the center of political community. The empty space of power

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[11] Derrida, 1997, 131.

[12] Derrida, 1997, 140.

[13] She quotes an interview where Laclau affirms: "Making decisions and establishing relations of power necessarily go together. I would argue that this is not bad. This is violence, power, but it is not bad." Drew 1999, 292-97, 294.

[14] Andrew Arato affirms that Laclau's thesis are almost disguised Schmittian ones and not Lefort's ones. See Arato 2013, 156: "The stress on symbolic representation is a return to Schmitt. Above all, Laclau's populism involves the extrication of the people from the empirical people by an evidently plebiscitarian form of leadership." The same Laclau takes distance from Lefort's thesis. See Gold 2014 57-76.

let opened by God -a transcendence without transcendent body- enables the symbolic establishment of the division and contestation rather than absence of violence. Revolutionary violence is the core of the political.

Laclau tries to construct a political ontology able to respond to the challenges of the present time. He reflects on violence within the sphere of language. In Derrida's account, language is the sphere in which violence manifests in the first place; in Benjamin's approach the same sphere is originally free from violence. Laclau's post-structuralist position, underlies the impossibility of closing any linguistic context, and consequently any social context, as a unified whole. Society is ontologically impossible. In fact, this is the title of one of his first articles: "The impossibility of society."[15] This article was first published in 1983 and in Marchart's opinion, in it Laclau's whole enterprise is formulated in nuce.[16] What we can find are marginal processes, which constantly disrupt meaning and do not lead to the closure of society around a single matrix. Because of that he likes to speak of "the social" instead of "society." The impossibility of society is a productive one: since allows multiple ways of institutionalising it. In his ontology, "the political" is central in the process of instituting society.[17] Following Althusser, he thinks that no social system can be closed on itself. Moreover, precisely the idea of a complete closure represents the extreme idea of non-acknowledgement (just like representational violence does).[18] Political action consists mainly in achieving a totalizing meaning, actively constructed, based on heterogeneous elements. Political discourse is the main place where the whole of society is articulated. Every discourse is a "force mediation" in the sense we have already spoke about.

Contrary to the classical idea of emancipation, which depends upon the possibility of imagining a system for society in which acknowledgment cannot be absent, the political discursive construction is a process of *emancipation* insofar as it aims to always "reactivate" as necessary the sedimented meanings that society shares: emancipation is understood here as a transformation from necessity into contingency through re- signification of shared meanings. Re-signification is the active non-definitive-closure of a given discourse or a non-definitive-installation of every "representative violence." Hence, there must be a dialectical relationship between closure—that is, the auto-reproduction of social relations—

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[15] Laclau 1914a, 122–122.

[16] Marchart 2007, stresses this aspect in the theoretical enterprise of Laclau: the intention of reversing the order of priority between the social and the political against a real current coming from the Weberian rationalization process prophecy, following which society will be progressively bureaucratized. He is in the same side as Schmitt, from who comes the distinction from politics and the political in *The Concept of the Political*.

[17] Laclau, 2014b, 7: "privileged ontological place."

[18] Laclau's perspective is not compatible with politics of identity, since identities are always constructed, dislocated, contested.

and the necessary form of dis-closure or non-acknowledgement. This distortion is constitutive of every social relationship.

In any case, for instituting society, projecting the illusion of plenitude and self-transparency onto something that is essentially divided is necessary. In this sense, society cannot be otherwise than a symbolic space. Laclau, using the word "hegemony" and taking the expression from Gramsci, designates the process of instituting society by creating this always-distorted symbolic scenario.[19]

The principal tool for constructing hegemony is "discourse." Inspired by Wittgenstein's approach, Laclau describes a substantive link between word and agency. In fact, for him, there is no extra-discursive point of view. Discourse is constitutive of society because without a fictive fixation of meanings no meaning would exist at all. That is, there is no primary or original meaning. To create such meaning, discourse operates following the *logic of equivalence and substitution*. When dealing with an impossible object, the discourse that has to shape it cannot be an auto-transparent medium.

The logic of equivalence acts by destroying the meaning of a word by pro-liferating equivalent words. Laclau presented the example of welfare, which is understood as identical to nourishment, health, education, etc. The more the equivalence chain extends, the more meaning the main signifier loses, but, at the same time, in the political sphere, it gains a hegemonic capacity. In this case, Laclau speaks of "empty signifiers." When a noun that is not the main signifier is in an equivalence chain, every particular noun begins to mean something more than before, something related with a universal discourse.[20] Regarding this effect, Laclau speaks of "floating signifiers." It is impossible to achieve universality by any means other than starting from particularity.

He alludes to *mystical language* to found the idea of equivalence. It is proper to religious language. In fact, to speak about God, who is inexpressible, we can only enumerate some of his attributes. This enumeration does not really enrich our knowledge of God, but rather iterates God's same name referring to a

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[19] There are two different moments in Laclau's political analysis: hegemony and populism, which are related to each other in a way that can be intertwined with sanctioned violence and foundational violence. These two moments of "the political" exclude and depend upon one another. Strictly considered, for Laclau, the populist moment alone is political, while the hegemonic moment is properly apolitical. In a way, this distinction replicates the Husserlian distinction between "sedimentation" and "reactivation," as he recognizes. Laclau 2014b, 4: "For Husserl, the reactivating process leads to a transcendental subject that is the absolute source of meaning; for me, it leads to an instance of radical contingency in which many other decisions could have been taken." For him, even if he does not would say perhaps in this way, populism is in itself the only possible critique of violence and the only possible path to emancipation.

[20] He speaks of weakened universalization. Laclau is looking for a universalism that is compatible with difference, since he recognizes that universality is necessary in order to achieve some kind of unity without which hegemony would not be possible.

particular aspect.[21] Moreover, each term in the chain could be substituted by every other term because every part of the chain expresses the same meaning: ineffability. Language is distorted in order to express the ineffable. This is the case in authors like Gershom Sholem, Meister Eckhart and Dionysius the Areopagite.

The case of God's inefallibility has the same structure, as revolutionary will. Since it is inexpressible, every discourse aiming to construct it has to exhibit the same kind of negative approach. In fact, Laclau thinks that the metaphysics of the ineffable God underlays the ontology of the political on which his populist approach is based. This "discursive metaphysic" is one in which every absolute transcendence remains undetermined because a realm beyond differences and particularities that avoids particularity and difference does not exist. Hence, transcendence is always contaminated by finitude and immanence. There is no place beyond differences that is not "ancillary to an operation of reintroducing differences."[22] The only way of let God appear is to maintain the non-closure through re-signification.

Laclau's "hegemonical" operation is an expression of this ontological background. He defines it saying, "[I understand by hegemony] a relationship by which a particular content assumes, in a certain context, the function of incarnating an absent fullness."[23]

Marchart points out commenting this ontological aspect that Laclau do not propose an anti-foundationalist theory but a post-foundationalist one, "since the dimension of ground does not disappear without a trace, but rather serves, through its very absence, as 'negative' foundation which must remain present."[24]

The difference between mystical language and hegemony is found in that, while the content of the name of God remains empty, the "order" that hegemony represents – which from an ontological perspective cannot be determined, but, on the contrary, is the non-order– has to be determined: hegemonic practice makes for particular differential content in the name of plenitude. Here begins the representational violence produced through discourse. Laclau does not speak as such of violence, but he is clear that the hegemonic movement as such imposes "structural distortion" on society in a particular historical moment. Hegemony makes the same movement in Eckhart when he "deificates" the concrete, whose ground

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[21] Laclau 2014b, 26.

[22] Laclau 2014b, 48: "In this way mystical discourse reveals something belonging to the general structure of experience: not only the separation between the two extremes of radical finitude and absolute fullness, but also the complex language games that it is possible to play on the basis of the contamination of each of them by the other."

[23] Laclau 2014b, 48. For example in a society suffering deep social disorganization, order can be seen as the positive reverse of a situation of generalized *anomie*.

[24] Marchart 2007, 137.

is contingency itself.[25] The fact that there is no guide for imposing that particular content in its fullness is simply called finitude. The ethical perspective depends on keeping the two sides of the paradox alive: an absolute that can be realized in a lesser form of being, and a particularity that has to incarnate a plenitude that it does not have.[26]

3. THE SYMBOLIC APPROPRIATION OF "THE EMPTY SIGNIFIER"

The question of how to make hegemony possible is equivalent to the question of how to construct a unified discursive space. In this case, Laclau takes from Roman Jakobson's "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbance"[27] the idea that any linguistic sign presupposes its arrangement through two different operations: first of all, *combination and contexture*, whereby a sign acquires its location in an orderly succession with other signs and, secondly, *selection and substitution*, whereby a sign can be replaced by others in any given structural location. This corresponds with Saussurean's distinction between the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic. Combination and substitution are the two movements that regulate the relationship between signs.

Jakobson moves from the syntactical field to the rhetorical one and identifies a similar relationship between metonymy, which corresponds to combination, and metaphor, which corresponds to substitution.

Laclau finds that they are not completely different from one another. Moreover, he thinks of contiguity and analogy as opposite poles on a continuum. Both are transgressions of the differential logic associated with the syntagmatic axis of the signifying system. In fact, we commonly substitute (metaphorically, analogically) meanings that we normally see close together (metonymically, contextually).

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[25] Laclau 2014b, 50.

[26] Laclau 2014b, 51: "If there was an aprioristic logic linking the experience of the absolute to particular contexts, the link between the incarnated absolute and its incarnating contents would have become a necessary one, and the absolute would have lost its dimension of beyond. In that case we would be able to name God in a direct way, or at least to claim to have a discursive mastery of His essence, as Hegel did in his Logic. To claim the opposite does not mean that any content, at any moment, can be an equal candidate for the incarnation of the absolute. This is only true *sub species aeternitatis*. But historical life takes place in a terrain that is less than eternity. If the experience of what I have referred to in terms of the dual movement 'materialization of God'/'deification of the concrete' is going to live up to its two sides, neither the absolute nor the particular can find a final peace with the other. This means that the construction of an ethical life will depend on keeping open the two sides of this paradox: an absolute that can only be actualized by being something less than itself, and a particularity whose only destiny is to be the incarnation of a 'sublimity' transcending its own body."

[27] Jakobson 1958.

These two tropes are the matrix and all the rest can be reduced to them. They are instruments for creating meaning. There are no rules for construction since a rhetorical zero degree does not exist where we can affirm that rhetoricity is inherent in signification; or, what is the same, "without a tropological displacement, signification could not find its own ground."[28] Laclau affirms that discourse "is equivalent to the social production of meaning –that is, to the very fabric of social life."[29]

In order to achieve unified signification, these two strategies have to be combined with the strategic movement of discursive closure. Following the ontology described above, closure implies being able to name beyond the discursive space. This is the role of the "empty signifier" (for example, Sorel's general strike). This empty signifier is not a name that actually comes from beyond, but rather a particular name that acts at the same time as particular and as universal. It is a particular signifier that, in being displaced, signifies a totality and it constitutes the dual role that is at the root of every tropological displacement.

If hegemony consists in constructing representational violence, the only possible critique of violence is another movement, which is complementary to the hegemonic one. De-politization and re-politization characterize the dual aspects of the political sphere: decision and violence, representational violence and foundational violence.

The only way to redefine a political position that subverts a given hegemonic space is through a new rhetorical intervention. In fact, hegemony supposes a peaceful order in which meanings are sedimented. Once established, hegemony becomes an institutionalized order that functions in an un-politicized and administrative way. The prevalent discourse therein corresponds to a syntagmatic discourse organized around differential positions (differential logic); this kind of social order is referred to as pluralism.

But, since distortion is original, every hegemonic order is in some way oppressive insofar as it shadows the constitutive non-presence of God by its presence. It follows that every hegemonic order is destined to be subverted. Rhetorical intervention consists then in creating a unified discursive space that is capable of dividing differential pluralist space into two discursive positions: us and them. To achieve this polarization, discourse has to locate all social elements around one of these two poles in order to construct an identity. The internal components of this discourse are related through equivalence, which is constructed at the system's suture point. Laclau explains the construction of discourse as follows:

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[28] Laclau 2014b, 63.
[29] Laclau 2014b, 65.

"Given that the equivalential chain establishes paratactic succession between its component links, none of them can have a position of centrality founded in a combinatorial logic of a hypotactic nature. So, if the unity of the equivalential chain is going to be organized around a privileged signifier, such a privileged cannot be derived from a differential structural position, but only from a cathectic investment of a radical kind."[30]

Since 1789, this rhetorical intervention has been made in the name of "the people." In fact, "the political operation par excellence is always going to be the construction of a people."[31] The people seem to be the political subject in Laclau's view.

The idea of the reactivation of the sedimented meanings can only be thought with two conditions: a temporization of the discursive space in which there is a de-fixation of meanings, and someone or something that can re-articulate new meanings. Event is the name of an occurrence from "outside" that disturbs, dislocates or interrupts the discursive space. This event is thought politically as an antagonism. The subject that carries out the antagonisms and that is at the same time constructed by them is the people. Populism is the name of the process of the constitution of the political subject.

In fact, the construction of a people would be impossible without the operation of mechanisms of representation.[32] Identification with an empty signifier is the necessary condition for the emergence of a people: from represented to representative. The empty signifier cannot be totally autonomous from the equivalential chain; it can, however, function as a point of identification because it *represents* an equivalential chain, meaning that the signifier then constitutes the totality: from representative to represented. This dual movement is always in tension.

The ontological character of the "representational system" conditions the possibility of populism. There is always something completely heterogeneous present in any iteration of a system of political signification that does not permit its closure[33] or, what it is the same, that does not permit its complete "representation." Representation will always be figurative or rhetorical— and literal terms

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[30] Laclau 2014b, 68.

[31] Laclau 2005, 153.

[32] Laclau 2005, 161. This idea can only be understood if we take account of the "heterogeneity" as primordial and irreducible. Heterogeneity shows in excess. This excess cannot be mastered. Heterogeneity means "deficient being" or "failed unicity." Unicity show itself through its very absence (Laclau 2005, 223). "The heterogeneous is what lacks any differential location within the symbolic order." (Laclau 2005, 108).

[33] Laclau 2014b, 84: "The systemacity of a system, its closure –which is the condition of signification in a system, such as Saussures's, whose identities are merely differential –coincides with the determination of its limits. These limits however, can only be dictated by something

can never substitute figurative ones.[34] The people has the same characteristics as God: is not presentable, is always ab- sent.

This representation can only be constructed through the articulation of particular *demands*.[35] A group's unity is simply the result of social demands, which can be crystallized in sedimented social practices. For Laclau, the smallest unity of analysis is not the group or class, but rather the demand. "Populist reason" is a kind of rhetorical intervention that can project a partial demand by embodying the absent fullness of the community through a potentially endless chain of equivalences, which constitutes from the *plebs* (the multitude) the *populus* (the totality). The "logic" of equivalence is fundamentally related to affective bonds, making for an inextricable relationship between signification and affect.[36]

The populus/plebs relationship becomes the locus of permanent tension in which each term at once absorbs and expels the other, a kind of *complexio oppositorum*. Precisely this tension constitutes the character of the political because the plurality of the populus' embodiments does not lead to any ultimate reconciliation (that is, overlapping) of the two poles. This is why all partiality contains traces of the universal.[37] This tension must remain, it must not be solved. The gap between non- presence and presence should be kept open.

Populism is not a movement, but rather a kind of logic that allows for a rhetorical intervention that constitutes antagonisms and liberates discursive violence found in representational hegemony.[38] Antagonisms are not objective relationships, but rather reveal the limits that society encounters in constituting itself as an objective order.[39] All antagonism is essentially political.[40] Naming is the

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beyond them. But, as the system is a system of differences –of all actual differences- that 'beyond', which should be heterogeneous with the system in order to fulfil its function of truly closing it, lacks the condition of a true heterogeneity if it consists in one more difference. The latter would be, in some way undecided, suspended between being internal and external to the system." Laclau 2005, 163: "Constructing a people is not simply the application to a particular case of a general theory of representation which could be formalized at a more abstract level; it is, on the contrary, a paradigmatic case, because it is the one which reveals representation for what it is: the primary terrain of constitution of social objectivity."

[34] Laclau 2014b, 123: "This mean that the representation of the presence of an absence which, as we have seen, is a requirement for the apprehension of social antagonisms, will be essentially catachrestical." 123.

[35] He distinguishes between democratic demands and populist demands. A democratic demand is a demand that remains isolated. A popular demand is a demand that immediately enters in connection with all the equivalential chain.

[36] Laclau 2005, 228.

[37] Laclau 2005, 225.

[38] Laclau 2005, 117.

[39] Laclau 2014, 113.

[40] Laclau 2005, 231.

key moment in the constitution of a people.[41] Derrida would say that it is a society's foundational violence.

Following this perspective, political history is a "discontinuous succession of hegemonic formations that cannot be ordered by a script transcending their contingent historicity. 'Peoples' are real social formations, but they resist inscription into any kind of Hegelian teleology."[42] In fact, a people's boundaries are just equivalential components that fluctuate permanently.[43]

In any case, it seems that Laclau's rhetorical operation remains necessary for weakly constituted identities whose constitution precisely requires representation in the first place. In a situation of radical disorder, some kind of order is needed, and the more generalized the disorder is, the less important the ontic content of that which restores order becomes. That ontic content is invested with the ontological value of representing order as such.[44] Laclau in fact recognizes historical conditions that make the emergence of constructed popular identities possible, pointing specifically to the multiplication of social demands, the radical heterogeneity of population, and, finally, globalized capitalism.

4. CONCLUSION: THE NON-PRESENTABLE GOD AND REVOLUTIONARY POLITICAL THEOLOGY

In the post-structuralist and post-foundational paradigm, violence is not an epiphenomenon of politics. Moreover, the most oppressive political practice would be to avoid violence definitively through the construction of a complete closed system of society. And this is so, in Laclau's opinion, not only for empirical reasons, but for ontological and theological reasons.

Laclau's theory of discourse is a general theory of the production of meaning. In fact, what develops in Laclau is a transcendental argument as regards the possibility of meaning as such, namely: for a certain degree of meaning to emerge a certain degree of systematicity is necessary. But the systematicity that can be achieved is always the result of the position of an exclusionary limit. Therefore, antagonism serves as the basis of the system, while subverting the identity of the system. If, together with this, we accept that the category of antagonism is the specific category of the political, we can think of the ontology of the meaning of Laclau as a political ontology.

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[41] Laclau 2005, 119.

[42] Laclau 2005, 226.

[43] Laclau 2005, 227: "Whether nationalism, for instance, is going to become a central signifier in the constitution of popular identities depends on a contingent history impossible to determine though a priori means."

[44] Laclau 2005, 160.

Several statements can be derived from this argument, but two are relevant: (1) Since there is no social reality beyond meaning, a theory of signification amounts to a theory of all possible being. All being is discursively constructed and discourse constitutes the horizon of all being. (2) Since his ontology of meaning is a political ontology, being and power are the same: without power there would not be objectivity. Power is productive of being.

This "political ontology" is a political theology insofar as it is post-foundationalist. It depends on a view of God in which God is not-presentable, and hence not-representable. Foundation is negative and because of that every foundational movement of the political is violent. One of Schmitt's main thesis concerning political theology says that: "The metaphysical image that a definite epoch forges of the world has the same structure as what the world immediately understands to be appropriate as a form of its political organization".[45]

We can then accept that a non-presentable idea of God as a negative ground corresponds with a revolutionary political theology as we have seen for the case of Laclau' revolutionary populism. But we can say the same for Derrida's "democracy to come" or for Benjamin's revolutionary politics. In a way, these political theologies aim to keep the "throne empty" in every concrete institutionalization of a political representation. But for achieving that operation they need the revolutionary movement consisting in continually constructing and deconstructing.[46] Only then the true non-presentable God makes his "negative appearance."

In the case of Schmitt, however, the possibilities for a political theology of revolution do not depend on this non-presentable idea of God, but on a particular interpretation of the trinitarian dogma.[47] It is another kind of revolutionary political theology. There are even other revolutionary political theologies based on radical immanence, such as those of Slavoj Zizek and Antonio Negri, but they are of another kind and their image of God is also different.[48]

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[45] Schmitt 2005, 46.

[46] It is in this aspect that my interpretation of Laclau differs from that of Arato. Arato 2013, 158: "Laclau abandons the definition of Lefort concerning democracy as the emptiness of the place of power and the process of institutionally securing its emptiness. The political space can be and even must be filled, at least "partially" (whatever that means), and emptiness reappears only on the ideological level as the "empty signifier" that only superficially—on the level of naming—keeps something of Lefort's conception. The empty signifier's stress is on unity rather than plurality. In all versions it refers to the unification of heterogeneous demands around admittedly vague, symbolic contents that obliquely refer to an utopian condition of total social unity, homogeneity, and reconciliation."

[47] For an account of this possibility see Herrero 2015, 170-171; and Vatter 2019..

[48] And criticized by the same Laclau. See Laclau 2005, 239 ff. and 242 ff.

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