



Spirit, Katechon and Civilization. The Structure of Orientalist Time

Amar Díaz M*

Eugenio Chahuán Arab Studies Center, University of Chile, Chile

***Corresponding author:** Mauricio Amar Díaz, Eugenio Chahuán Arab Studies Center, University of Chile, Av. José Pedro Alessandri 774, Ñuñoa, Región Metropolitana, Santiago de Chile, Chile, Tel: +56968469510; Email: mgamar@uchile.cl

Research article

Volume 5 Issue 2

Received Date: June 17, 2022

Published Date: June 29, 2022

DOI: [10.23880/phij-16000254](https://doi.org/10.23880/phij-16000254)

Abstract

This article seeks to demonstrate the link between the thought of Hegel, Schmitt and Huntington based on the temporal structure proposed by their theories, in which there is an opposition between the West and the East that has conditioned international political thought and order to the present day. In this Orientalist temporal structure, not only is the East defined, but the very idea of the West is produced.

Keywords: Hegel; Schmitt; Huntington; Orientalism; Time

Introduction

Time has always been a philosophical problem of enormous importance. There have been various forms of time that give meaning to the life of cultures, which means that our experience of time is also marked by certain models, structures of understanding that say little about time itself - if there is such a thing - and much about the way in which we understand tradition and project our personal and social experience. In this sense, if time is a decisive factor in understanding the community or society in which one lives, then it must also be relevant in attending to the relationship of that society with others. Not so much to discover what that *other* society is, but to account for how, behind the understanding of them, there is always a form of time of one's own. Two questions immediately arise. First, what is the structure - or structures - of time from which the self-image of the European and Anglo-American tradition, defined by its own modern tradition as the West, is configured? Secondly, how does such an understanding of time affect what has been defined by the language of these societies as the East?

The question of time, as formulated, obviously leads us to the problem of representations of the other, but also - and perhaps more importantly - to the power relations that are established between *one* and the *other*. The question: How has the East been imagined by the West? It goes hand in hand with these questions: How has power been exercised from the West towards the East? And how important is a particular understanding of time in the strategies and forms in which this power has been exercised? The first hypothesis put forward here is that the Western tradition has, since the 19th century, configured a binary understanding of time, which acquires a teleological structure in Hegel and then, through the thought of Carl Schmitt, a *katechontic* one. In it, the West would take the place of the *katechon*, the force that retains evil. The second hypothesis of the article is that the East and particularly Islam have been placed, within the *katechontic* temporal structure, in the place of the *anomos*, the figure with which Paul of Tarsus wrote the script of the temporal structure of the West and with which Schmitt confronts the power of the *katechon*, transforming it, as Giorgio Agamben says, into "the only possible foundation of a Christian doctrine of state power" [1].

With these hypotheses in play, our task will be first to understand the form of time - and its relation to space - in Hegel, considering its importance for the imaginary production of the East. We will trace some Western representations of Islam in modernity in order to identify the binomial roles of the different actors (West, Christianity, East, Islam) within this temporal structure. We are interested in understanding, in particular, the ambiguous representation of Islam as a timeless civilisation, anchored in the past, incapable of movement and therefore also of creating conditions for democracy and a liberal way of life, and at the same time, as a migratory horde that threatens to destroy "Western values". To this end, we will attempt to problematise the validity of a katechontic temporal structure in the light of the configuration of the current world order and the imagery with which Islam is understood within it.

Orientalism and Time

The first important question is to define the relationship between Orientalism and the modern temporal structure. The homologation of the Orient with the past forms a substantial part of the way in which certain hegemonic ideas in Europe have constructed an image of their own history during the eighteenth to the twenty-first centuries. This is of the utmost importance, namely that Orientalism is both a way of knowing and producing knowledge about the other, and a Western creation of identity. Edward W. Said tells us at the beginning of his masterpiece that "Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident" (p. 2) [2]. A style of thought, then, that presupposes a certain ontology that separates the world into two and by means of which knowledge is launched. "Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point - dide Said - Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient-dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (p. 3) [2]. In conjunction, then, with the sharp separation between East and West carried out by the eighteenth-century European imagination, there is, of course, the question of power. Europe not only thinks the East, creates it and fills it with imaginative forms, but dominates, colonises and subjugates it, just as the Enlightenment itself is a subjugation of the past to the lights of modern reason.

Within the fantasy of the Orient produced by European literature, philosophy and art, the Orient will occupy the place of the past. Not necessarily a bad past, because it is even at the basis of the Western tradition itself, but a past that needs to be overcome, especially in the light of what

will be understood as the decline of Eastern civilisations. "Their great moments were in the past - Said thinks - ; they are useful in the modern world only because the powerful and up-to-date empires have effectively brought them out of the wretchedness of their decline and turned them into rehabilitated residents of productive colonies" (p. 35) [2]. What is at stake here is nothing less than the relegation of entire populations of the world to a space-time in which history has already played its role. The Orient is thus a geography that, while existing in the present time, is non-existent for history, i.e. it cannot be thought of in historical terms other than as a huge museum in which the West finds itself as the only truly historical geography, i.e. a space truly integrated into the flow of time.

The 19th century witnessed the emergence of new discourses vying for cultural hegemony. In the course of their unfolding, many of them will influence each other. It is therefore impossible to completely separate a philosophy of history from racism, colonialism, capitalism and the formation of European nation states. Martin Bernal, in a book that provoked much controversy, tried to show how nineteenth-century Europe began to give itself an identity that followed the straight line of a philosophy of history. A task that also implies a break with older models of understanding that placed Egypt as a fundamental source for the construction of the modern. Since the nineteenth century, the privileged place that Egypt had occupied for intellectuals has been displaced by the figuration of Greece as the place of origin of Europe. Anti-Semitism, which would ultimately justify the erasure of Egypt's role in the previous century, was forged both in the colonies - where Europeans constructed an image of the Oriental - and in Europe, where the Jew came to be understood as an Oriental presence in the West and European culture coincided with an ideal of purity inherited from the Greeks, the creators of philosophy and democracy. The conquered Egypt is also a timeless space that through the European filter is racialised, contrary to rational and authoritarian thinking (p. 239) [3].

Hegel and the Orientals without History

Hegel's importance in this understanding of the form of time is difficult to quantify. It is through his philosophical programme that much of the nineteenth century nourishes its perception of historical time. Unlike Immanuel Kant, in Hegel there is no such thing as pure time and space. Time and space are formed in the relation between necessity and contingency, so that both always need each other. Temporality is the objective determination of things, in which they produce time [4]. From this perspective, time does not lie in any individual subjective formation, but intertwines the contingent lives of humans with the unfolding necessity of the absolute. The *telos* of history appears in Hegel as a kind

of conductor of time, an unfolding of the eternal that is only possible in its contingent actualisation. Now, if contingency appears with time, it is a manifestation of the different. Time is destined by necessity, but it is in its development that the difference between things is possible. Otherwise, in the eternal, the same would always reign. It is in time that number arises, the countable as variable. So time in Hegel is fundamentally negativity, in that the now has negated the past, differs from it in order to be negated by the new now. And yet, in this infinite play, the now preserves the past as the future preserves the present. To deny while preserving [*Aufhebung*] is the main quality of time in its relation to the telos inflicted on it by the absolute spirit [5].

In the marginal notes to his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, the Jena thinker shows the limitations of the East in attaining self-consciousness, given the absence of philosophy in its thought. In this enormous plot which largely surpasses individuals and which ends up consummating as a synthesis the development of the absolute spirit, the Orientals have no place except as an object of historical analysis. Hegel tells us:

Given this abstract definition, we can say that world history is the record of the spirit's efforts to attain knowledge of what it is in itself. The Orientals do not know that the spirit or man as such are free in themselves. And because they do not know this, they are not themselves free. They only know that One is free; but for this very reason, such freedom is mere arbitrariness, savagery, and brutal passion, or a milder and tamer version of this which is itself only an accident of nature, and equally arbitrary. This One is therefore merely a despot, not a free man and a human being. The consciousness of freedom first awoke among the Greeks, and they were accordingly free [6].

The Orientals have been able, for Hegel, to elaborate a sophisticated concept of religion, where the ruler is nothing less than a high priest or the god himself. Freedom, then, can only illusorily belong to a One which, if we look closely, is in reality not truly free because freedom, rather than being related to the possibility of arbitrary action, is associated with the historical development of the spirit, that motor which the East completely lacks, situated rather in prehistory [7]. A relevant point here is that for Hegel, the Orientals, insofar as they do not enter history and are anchored to a despotic understanding of freedom, would not even be properly human. The human is defined by a relation of *Dasein* to freedom, which may be consummated or in process, a relation that the Orient has not been able to establish. In Hegel, then, we find a teleological idea of human history, which does not include all those we now conceive of as human, but Europe (and specifically the Germanic peoples), where a dialectical

unfolding of reason is possible, which achieves freedom by leaping over obstacles in which the East has been trapped. The East, for Hegel, is pre-history and the human only exists in the unfolding of history.

Hegel's idea of history and freedom is not related to a real fact, but rather to an abstraction that shows the East as an absolute counterpoint to the West. In order for the West to exist, i.e. for freedom to be effectively thought, Hegel creates an absolutely despotic, irrational and bloodthirsty East, whose roots are already to be found in the views of the East at the beginning of the 17th century. This Hegelian orientalism is also to be found, as a legacy, in the thought of Marx and much of the European historicist tradition of the 19th and 20th centuries (p. 64) [8]. In this sense, we must also recognise the orientalism intrinsic to Hegel's own understanding of history, a question that the German philosopher Theodor W. Adorno illuminates, within the very exercise of dialectics, in his famous text *The Negative Dialectic*. The problem, according to Adorno, is to be found in the construction that the West has made of the very idea of the concept, closed in on itself, where the Hegelian dialectic plays an important role, because in the phase of synthesis, that is to say of negation of negation, the concept comes to show itself as a pure form, which finds itself with itself. Adorno tries to articulate a dialectic that is capable of seeing the conflict but does not move towards a closure of the concept upon itself, leaving it open to its own life and to the materiality that makes it possible and that always surpasses it [9]. The concept of time in Hegel is thus shown as a play of the absolute spirit which, unfolding itself, consummates the encounter with itself, as a concept. When this encounter takes place, the idea of the East produced by Europe - which Hegel himself has already defined as a-historical, despotic and non-human - is established as an immovable truth.

However, it should be noted that the Orient becomes a concept that is not conceptualised in the development of the absolute spirit, but in opposition to it. It is a remnant that comes into existence only to the extent that Europe achieves both humanity and freedom. The East is not a concept in its own right, but in opposition to the West. If in Europe there is freedom, in the East there is despotism. If Europe is enlightened, the East is irrational. If Europe is human, the East is by definition the space of the non-human. According to one version or the other, this non-human residue can be humanised or, as Agamben will say, stripped of a life with qualities and considered a mere life, or bare life, where it is possible to commit murder without the need for guilt or condemnation. But if for Agamben "The nude life is no longer confined to a particular place or a defined category, but inhabits the biological body of every living being" (p. 154) [10], we will say that as far as the representation of the East by the West is concerned, life is at least distributed in a de-

hierarchisation that culminates in the paradigmatic figure of the *homo sacer*, the terrorist, configured by oriental traits. In spatial terms, the Orientalist imaginary continues to situate the *nuda vida* in the East, and its categories continue to be sustained in the anthropological machine that makes some human beings (the Orientals) more punishable than others (the Europeans).

In this sense, the relevance of the Hegelian thesis of history in the production of the Western anthropological machine cannot be underestimated. The absolute spirit, the absolute purity of the concept, finds its place precisely in the consummation of a concrete time and space, which is European space-time. But we would say nothing of this space-time if we thought of it as a monad. This space-time that we call Europe has been constructed by the imaginary fracture with an other called the East. The internal synthesis of Europe is therefore forged in the definition of the Orient, or as Joseph A. Massad has so clearly put it:

Thus, the Eastern Question, against which this nascent Europe measured itself, was always the Western Question, the question of constituting the West as the West and repudiating the East, which it feared was the point of origin of this West, as its antithesis. This much we have already learned from Edward Said's *Orientalism*.⁹ That the Eastern Question would also become the Question of Islam and therefore the Question of (Protestant) Christianity would be germane to the European liberal project, which emerged from the Enlightenment, of presenting the West as a place with important characteristics that are always lacking in its Eastern and Islamic antitheses (p. 16-17) [11].

East as lack, absence, remainder and antithesis. Hegel's temporal structure, seen from this point of view, leaves an unconsummated antithesis, which always reaffirms the partial synthesis produced by the Western anthropological machine, producing an image of solidity and instability. Agamben himself, in his book, argues that the process of realisation of the Hegelian spirit is always a tendency towards realisation that turns out to be defective. The absolute as knowledge is never a reality, but the contemplation of an "incessant realisation", which for him is necessarily the negation of reality, since when something is realised, in reality its own fulfilment is transformed into something insufficient, which again must be overcome. This leads Agamben to say that 'the real, as such, is by definition unrealisable' [12].

Now, the unrealisability of the real prevents any monadic formulation of the West, not only in terms of its imaginary construction as such, but also in terms of its very possibility of existing, a question that would go hand in hand with the non-

existence of the East, insofar as the latter has been superseded. Beyond the evident pretension of world capitalism to achieve what Derrida called *mondialatinisation*, which in turn implies the expansion of a Christian-secular European way of life throughout the world (p. 48) [13], what is certain is that such an enterprise, up to the present day, shows itself, if not in retreat, at least as an incomplete adventure. So the East may move further (Chinese communism, Muslim countries) or further (Muslim immigrants in Europe) in space, but it is always present, somewhere, to define the West itself and to delineate the enemy of the West, the danger that lurks in any incomplete or, worse, unrealisable task. For while the unrealisable is precisely the conjunction of the thing and the concept, modernity has deployed an unrealisable that always shows itself as permanent postponement or difference. That which Benjamin called progress (p. 697) [14] which, turning against the very union of the real and the intellectual, ends up being a force that holds back.

If, as Arshin Adib-Moghaddam says, at least since Hegel a discourse concerning the end of history has developed within and about the West (p. 169) [15] and this end is always postponed, we must look into one of the main discourses of European thought, capable of giving new meaning to this plot, especially to the need for such a postponement.

Schmitt and the *Katéchon*. The Apocalyptic East

Schmitt intervenes in the history of modern thought by introducing a metahistorical analytical device: the *katéchon*. This enigmatic word appears in Paul of Tarsus' famous *Letter to the Thessalonians* to refer to a force that holds back the coming of the kingdom of God, within a messianic temporal structure, which does not only indicate the end of time, but lives it as such. To actually indicate what the Pauline *katechon* holds back is not an easy matter. Throughout the history of the Catholic Church there have been enormous debates about this question [16], attributing it to the Church itself and to the Roman Empire. The *katéchon* participates in a plot of time in which the mystery of *anomie* is played out. In this story the *katéchon* is supposed to be removed by the one who will be revealed as the *anomos* [lawless one] who will finally be defeated by the Lord with his presence alone.

As Massimo Cacciari rightly says, "the *katéchon* cannot but participate intimately in the principle that seeks to restrain, to retard, if not to hold back. It is impossible not to have in oneself that which one wants to contain" [16]. So this obscure "character" in the story acquires an ambiguity not only because of his identity, but also because of his role. In fact, as the messianic plot is pre-established beforehand, the *katéchon* cannot not know and identify the danger that inevitably comes. It must give way to its opposite, the

anomos, in order to finally make way for the messiah. But to do so means to destroy the existing order of things, to make room for the absolute other in order to bring about what in Hegel would be synthesis (and here the coming of the Kingdom of God).

It is for this reason that Tertullian already at an early stage attempts to identify the *katéchon* with the Roman Empire and does so in a laudatory way, insofar as the Empire is the order of the world that holds back the coming of the end. It is this tradition that Carl Schmitt draws on to create a metahistorical conceptual apparatus (p. 103) [1] in which the Empire is the force capable of holding back the coming of the antichrist and the end of the present aeon. For Schmitt, the *katéchon* plays a fundamental role in preserving the existing order, and it is a role played by different actors throughout history. While it has been the Church and the Empire, in reality, for the German jurist, there is no such thing as a *katéchon* given once and for all. It can even appear in the historical fabric in a disintegrated form, a force that waits in latency for its moment to confront the destroyer of order. When the Roman Empire fell, Schmitt will say, the forces retaining order had to adapt to decadent circumstances and dispersed scenarios, waiting to reappear in modernity (p. 211) [17].

For Schmitt, it is human forces themselves that play the katechontic role in the face of dangers that are equally human. This is why the figure of the sovereign, who is capable of establishing the state of exception, is so important in his thought (p. 13) [18]. The exceptional character of sovereignty makes it a fundamentally conservative force, a kind of synthesis that makes the continuity of the world possible. Sovereignty suspends the norm, it exceeds it, yet its only destiny is the configuration of a time that rejects anomie and any possibility of chaos. So, although the sovereign gesture is to decide the state of exception, it is not truly sovereign if it is not capable of creating an epoch, a time frame in which power reasserts itself in imperial form. By becoming part of the Hegelian fabric of time, Schmitt inserts into it a device, the *katéchon*, which will suspend the movement of dialectics in order to configure a homogeneous time, an aeon of order and stability that finds its incarnation in the Grand Inquisitor [19]. Not for nothing did Schmitt himself consider Hegel, in himself, a *katéchon*, who tried to keep world history within the Christian aeon by retarding the progress of nihilism and atheism [20].

For Agamben, in this sense, what makes the *katéchon* appear is the force of constituted power that strives to maintain the fiction of an operative law, which at its heart holds the great mystery of its machinism, its constitutive inoperativity. The inoperability of the law would be the great mystery behind the maintenance of all constituted

power, both the point from which the law itself functions and the place of its dissolution, between the two, between constituent power and constituted power, the Christian temporal plot unfolds in which the *katéchon* has the function of guarding its non-compliance. The sovereign, in this sense, embodies precisely the limit figure of politics, because in him both constituted power and constituent power converge. It is the figure that hides the true inoperativeness, the absence of purpose inscribed in the unfolding of time. In this sense," says Agamben, "the *anomos* represents nothing other than the unveiling of the anomie that today defines every constituted power, within which state and terrorism form a single system" (p. 35) [21].

Agamben raises, then, a fundamental issue. If inoperosity, the absence of *telos*, is inscribed in the very operability of sovereign power, and in fact is what allows it to overflow constituted power and set itself up as the limit figure of politics, the historicity in which both the Hegelian dialectic and the katechontic device that suspends it are inscribed, would be nothing more than appropriations, captures of the indeterminacy of time. That is to say, time, as such, would be nothing other than the staging of a form that has always been captured, which not only erases the flow of what we call the past, but makes it appear as *cultural heritage*. The *katéchon*, then, is nothing other than the device that makes dialectical thought itself possible, insofar as it allows it to exist as historical representation without the need for fulfilment. And it is here that it is essential to discover that otherness, that antithesis, which, trapped in linear time, cannot but show itself to be the fundamental danger of the katechontic order. The *otherness* that for this representation of time, which we call the West, can only be the East.

This is where we must make it clear that if the sovereign gesture par excellence is the power of the state of exception, we must think about what the exception is and how the West-East relation is integrated into it. A first important point is that for Schmitt the suspension that the exception operates is analogous to the significance of the miracle [*Wunder*] in theology (p. 43) [18]. At the same time, however, Schmitt argues that the exception is rooted in the decision. If this is the case, the decision would be the ultimate operator of the miracle and the exception. God's decision and the sovereign's decision. This means that *theomos* is arrested theologically by the miracle and politically by the exception, both katechontic figures that suspend the dialectics of movement. Schmitt's metahistorical plot thus refers exclusively to the West and, even more so, to the Christian West that celebrates the defeat of the Islamic *anomos* by the Byzantine katechon. It acted as a rampart," says Schmitt, "a *katechon*, as it is called in Greek. However weak, it held several centuries against the onslaughts of Islam, preventing the Arabs from conquering the whole of Italy. In its absence, Italy would have become

part of the Moslem world, like Northern Africa, and all of the Ancient and Christian civilization would have been destroyed" [20]. Although this last passage is marginal with respect to the possible uses of the concept of *katéchon* (an ambiguous and polysemic concept in Schmitt's own texts), it reveals that in the German jurist's analysis, Western civilisation appears as a fact given by Christianity, which was threatened at a singular moment in history by Islam. In the face of this fact, the miracle and the exception appear as the sovereign gesture of the imperial *katéchon*.

The *katéchon*, however, fundamentally refers to an internal crisis. The temporal structure and the actors involved belong to the same system of relations. This means that from a certain point of view, as Schmitt does with regard to Islam and Byzantium, Islam can eventually be understood as *anomos*, but most of the time when a historical figure or institution embodies *anomos*, it refers to an internal form of Europe itself. Now, Islam has become the fundamental animus of an epoch in which the idea of the West has become a global paradigm. It is within planetary capitalism that - once the Cold War is over - Islam can fully occupy the place of the anti-Christ, while the West does not operate as a geopolitical place, but as an expanding force, a *katéchontic* order whose existence depends on the functioning of financial capitalism, which we can call neoliberalism. In this framework, Samuel Huntington's theory of the clash of civilisations merely reinforces the Hegelian-Schmittian temporal structure at the very moment when Islam has been incorporated into the Western fabric.

Clash of Civilisations and Stopping Time

One could say that Huntington's thesis is the symmetrical reverse of Marxism. Faced with the idea of a history in motion, marked by class struggle, the American political scientist will say "Human history is the history of civilizations" [22], reaffirming a fundamental *stasis* of time founded on a watertight principle. Let us look at an opening paragraph of *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, which pretty much sums up the fundamental thesis of the whole book:

In the late 1980s the communist world collapsed, and the Cold War international system became history. In the post-Cold War world, the most important distinctions among peoples are not ideological, political, or economic. They are cultural. Peoples and nations are attempting to answer the most basic question humans can face: Who are we? And they are answering that question in the traditional way human beings have answered it, by reference to the things that mean most to them. People define themselves in terms of

ancestry, religion, language, history, values, customs, and institutions. They identify with cultural groups: tribes, ethnic groups, religious communities, nations, and, at the broadest level, civilizations. People use politics not just to advance their interests but also to define their identity. We know who we are only when we know who we are not and often only when we know whom we are against (Ibid).

Huntington shows us several elements that should be highlighted in the light of the temporality of Orientalism. The first of these is that after the Cold War there was a kind of restructuring of the meaning of the political. A Hegelian structure, by the way, which sees in the end of USSR-USA dualism a reordering in which the truth behind all ideological disputes emerges. After the dialectical phase, the world appears in its true essence, as a conflict between cultures. This occurs as peoples' own search for the existential question of *who we are*, so that the answer to identity appears as part of an internal conflict for definition. Also, such answers come from those elements that really matter to them, so that the previous political ideology would only be a layer that veils the real meanings of things. In responding to their identities on the basis of these elements, there is a gradation of complexity from tribe to civilisation, but at that point Huntington establishes a point of definition that is not in the people themselves, nor in the elements that are meaningful to them, but the reverse, i.e. ultimately, the Schmittian thesis that defines politics on the basis of the friend-enemy relationship finds its civilisational formulation here. A civilisation is defined much more by those elements it does not share with others than by internal forms of meaning. Not being like the other would be the central element that defines a civilisation, but this not only defines an identity, but, as the paragraph concludes, also a fundamental enmity. When identity is found, what remains is a confrontation.

Civilisations for Huntington, however, are not equal. Some are better than others and it is logical that it is they who appear to be the protectors of the current international order. While some civilisations tend to adapt successfully to the post-Cold War US-led order, "Islamic culture", he says, "explains in large part the failure of democracy to emerge in much of the Muslim world". And this raises a fundamental question that must be read in the light of the *katéchon-anomos* relationship:

The West is and will remain for years to come the most powerful civilisation. Yet its power relative to that of other civilizations is declining. As the West attempts to assert its values and to protect its interests, non-Western societies confront a choice. Some

attempt to emulate the West and to join or to “bandwagon” with the West. Other Confucian and Islamic societies attempt to expand their own economic and military power to resist and to “balance” against the West. A central axis of post-Cold War world politics is thus the interaction of Western power and culture with the power and culture of non-Western civilizations.

Like Schmitt, albeit with different actors, Huntington sees the time in which he lives as a time of decline, of attrition of the forces that have shaped his culture. The threats are Confucianism (the way he reduces China as a civilisation) and, of course, Islam. In fact, Islam occupies a central place when thinking about scenarios of future conflicts between civilisations. Yet some intercivilization relations,” says Huntington, “are more conflict-prone than others. At the micro level, the most violent fault lines are between Islam and its Orthodox, Hindu, African, and Western Christian neighbours. At the macro level, the dominant division is between “the West and the rest,” with the most intense conflicts occurring between Muslim and Asian societies on the one hand, and the West on the other” (Ibid).

Everything seems to point to a confrontation, which, however, is delayed as long as the hegemony of the West over the East lasts. But this analogue of the *anomos*, the East, is always on the prowl. Huntington asks for this century: “Will the global institutions, the distribution of power, and the politics and economies of nations in the twenty-first century primarily reflect Western values and interests or will they be shaped primarily by those of Islam and China? This is the question that has ultimately organised US policy since the end of the Cold War, but with greater intensity since the attacks of 11 September 2001. From that question - hence Huntington’s importance as a strategist of a katechontic temporal structure - the US has sought to reorganise the Middle East, which is the preferred nomenclature for designating the East by incorporating Israel into the West.

The West, as a good *katéchon*, has an agenda in the face of the Western threat:

“(1) to maintain its military superiority through policies of nonproliferation and counterproliferation with respect to nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons and the means to deliver them; (2) to promote Western political values and institutions by pressing other societies to respect human rights as conceived in the West and to adopt democracy on Western lines; and (3) to protect the cultural, social, and ethnic integrity of Western societies by restricting

the number of non-Westerners admitted as immigrants or refugees. In all three areas the West has had and is likely to continue to have difficulties defending its interests against those of non-Western societies.

Let us concentrate for a moment on what these guidelines mean. First, Western military superiority ensuring control of weapons of mass destruction; second, expansion of the Western way of life to ensure civilisational alignment based on Western hegemony; third, protecting the West from the obvious threats posed by others - often called *the rest* - especially when these threats are directed at demography, which implies the transformation and mixing of civilisations. Under this paradigm, the wave of Arab and African refugees at the end of the last decade can be interpreted as a fundamental danger to Western civilisation itself. In Schmittian terms, the *katéchon* would have lost its battle against the *anomos*.

At the root of this temporal representation of the world is a governing principle, an original conflict that would make coexistence impossible except through subjugation, colonisation and conversion. Arshin Adib-Moghaddam has put it clearly when he says:

It is this notion of the perennial existence and threat of the enemy that continues to have an impact on the mindset of decision-makers, not because war is a fact of nature, but because it has been represented as such throughout the centuries. In this way aggression is normalised. Killing the other continues to be accepted, nay, deemed necessary in order to secure our polis. And so war remains an irresistible consequence of the clash regime and the clash regime remains an irresistible consequence of war (p. 189) [15].

In 2001, Edward W. Said published an article in the US newspaper *The Nation* entitled *The Clash of Ignorance* in open confrontation with Huntington’s thesis. Said accuses such a paradigm of being reductionist and of failing to understand that at the basis of any relationship there are not only subjectivations that end in identities, but also - and fundamentally - flow and exchange.

Huntington is an ideologist - says Said -, someone who wants to make “civilizations” and “identities” into what they are not: shut-down, sealed-off entities that have been purged of the myriad currents and countercurrents that animate human history, and that over centuries have made it possible for that history not only to contain wars of religion and imperial conquest but also to be one of exchange, cross-fertilization and

sharing. This far less visible history is ignored in the rush to highlight the ludicrously compressed and constricted warfare that “the clash of civilizations” argues is the reality [23].

The orientalism that underlies the structuring of the temporal experience of what has been called the West. It is a constant effort to stop the constitutive movement of the world, paradoxically, in order to *make the world*. Each historical moment is singled out as the last or the one that must prevail in the face of chaos. The Hegelian temporal structure has been reinterpreted by Schmitt and Huntington. Transformed to prevent the threat posed by the East and in particular by Islam. And this is because in a context where it is impossible to separate a world ruled by the circulation of capital, the last hope of Westernist conservatism is the game of constantly fictionalising an economic union and a cultural separation, both led by the West, the frightened katechon.

Conclusion

What we call the West is a modern production. The production of a temporal structure that imaginatively conditions space. It is from the conformation of this structure that an opposite form emerges, point by point, to the unfolding of what within this imaginary configuration has been understood as History. This opposite is the Orient, the timeless place necessary for history to exist. In this imaginative unfolding of time, three key figures have been planned here that in different contexts reinforce both the very idea of a Western history and the relegation of the Eastern to the margins. These concepts are Hegel's Spirit, Schmitt's katechon and Huntington's Civilization. In all of them what is relevant, for this text, is the construction of a time that generates opposites and allows for the hegemony of the West over the East. Late capitalism, however, poses a fundamental challenge, in that it involves the extensive and intensive embracing of the East within the flow of capital, with the consequent shaping of Eastern economic and political powers. If capitalism implies both the formation and the destruction of this temporal imaginary on which the West has been sustained, it is clear that we must arrive at a political thought capable of offering a new temporal horizon. This is the fundamental question of the world to come.

References

1. Agamben G (2000) *Il tempo che resta. Un commento alla Lettera ai Romani*. Torino: Bollati Boringhieri.
2. Said EW (2003) *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Books.
3. Bernal M (1987) *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization. Volume I: The Fabrication of Ancient Greece, 1785-1985*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
4. Safatle V (2015) *Temporality, ontology, dialectics: Hegel against a formal concept of time*. *Filozofski Vestnik* 36.
5. Trawny P, Mitchell A (2000) *The future of time: Reflections on the concept of time in Hegel and Heidegger*. *Research in Phenomenology* 30(1): 12-39.
6. Hegel GWF (1975) *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History. Introduction: Reason in History*. London: Cambridge University Press.
7. Stone A (2021) *Hegel and colonialism*. In: *Civilization - Nature - Subjugation: Variations of (De-) Colonization*.
8. Conversano E (2019) *Marx, Hegel and the Orient World History and Historical Milieus*. *Philosophica: International Journal for the History of Philosophy* 27(54): 61-80.
9. Adorno TW (2007) *Negative Dialectics*. New York: Continuum.
10. Agamben G (1997) *Homo sacer. Il potere sovrano e la nuda vita*. Torino: Einaudi.
11. Massad JA (2015) *Islam in Liberalism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
12. Agamben G (2022) *L'irrealizzabile. Per una politica dell'ontologia*. Torino: Einaudi.
13. Derrida J (2000) *Foi et savoir. Suivi de Le Siècle et le Pardon*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.
14. Benjamin W (1974) *Gesammelte Schriften, Bd. I-I*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.
15. Adib-Moghaddam A (2014) *A Metahistory of the Clash of Civilisations: Us and Them Beyond Orientalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
16. Cacciari M (2013) *Il potere che frena*. Milano: Adelphi. Kindle Edition.
17. Schmitt C (1974) *Der Nomos der Erde im Völkerrecht des Jus Publicum Europaeum*. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot.
18. Schmitt C (2015) *Politische Theologie. Vier Kapitel zur Lehre von der Souveränität*. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot.
19. Agamben G (2007) *Il Regno e la Gloria. Per una genealogia teologica dell'economia. Homo sacer, II, 2*. Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore.

20. Nicoletti M (2017) Religion and Empire Carl Schmitt's Katechon between International Relations and the Philosophy of History. In: Koskenniemi M, García-Salmones Rovira M, et al. (Eds.), *International Law and Religion: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
21. Agamben G (2013) *Il mistero del male*. Benedetto XVI e la fine dei tempi. Roma-Bari: Editori Laterza.
22. Huntington SP (2011) *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
23. Said EW (2011) *The Clash of Ignorance*. The Nation website.

