Hegelian History Interrupted

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Abstract: Decades of scholarship within and beyond Hegel studies have detailed not only the Eurocentrism but also the racism of Hegel's philosophy of history. In what follows, I revisit Hegel's notion of *Weltgeschichte* in the *Philosophy of Right*, taking the broader category of modernity as point of critical exposition. The variations of right that Hegel examines in the *Philosophy of Right* comprise the normative/institutional infrastructure that articulates the modern itself. I aim to recalibrate the critique of Hegel by exploring once more the place of the Haitian Revolution in Hegel's philosophy of history. Haiti dislocates rather than consummates the project of modernity. Jean Casimir's *The Haitians: A Decolonial History* offers new grounds for considering the Haitian Revolution as a refusal of the project of modernity, a project founded on chattel slavery, one that installed a settler colonial and anti-black world.

Keywords: Hegel, world history, colonialism, race, Haiti

Know thyself – *γνῶθι σεαυτόν*. The first of three maxims inscribed in the pronaos of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, the Delphic oracle's injunction to Socrates, know thyself was to drive the world-historical movement of *Geist* in Hegel's philosophy centuries later.[1] Knowledge of the "truth of humanity" or, more precisely, "the true in and for itself," is a feat of the actualization (*Verwicklung*) of the idea of freedom (*Frieheit*) in *Weltgeschichte*.[2] Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* moves through variations of right that give, as he puts it, "determinate shape and existence" to the idea of freedom.[3] The book, however, culminates in the claim that "world history is the world's court of judgement" (*die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht*), as Hegel famously writes quoting Schiller.[4] World history is concerned with judgment, measuring the agents of history – specifically, nation-states – in relation to their realization of freedom. Hegel goes on to argue that this actualization travels east to west, beginning in Asia, arriving in Germany. Africa, as well as indigenous Americas, as is well known, remain in the realm of nature, posited as the non-historical past of world-historical unfolding. Know thyself in Hegel, then, is tantamount to the memory of the becoming of modernity – its normative commitments, its institutions, its contradictions. Know thyself guides the judgment of what has been that elevates modernity to the "truth of humanity."

Decades of scholarship within and beyond Hegel studies have detailed not only the Eurocentrism but also the racism of Hegel's

1 Hegel 1991, §343A.

2 Hegel 1991, §344n. The quote is from Hegel 1971, §377A.

3 Hegel 1991, §30.

4 Hegel 1991, §341.

philosophy of history, establishing that the basis for its assessment exceeds its teleology, theodicy, even eschatology.[5] In what follows, I revisit Hegel's notion of *Weltgeschichte* in the *Philosophy of Right*, taking the broader category of modernity as point of critical exposition.[6] The variations of right that Hegel examines in the *Philosophy of Right* represent the organization of existence that articulates modernity, a project consummated in Europe and that requires positing the non-European as its past as well as its limit-to-transgress in its progressive unfolding. The spheres of right are not merely subject to measure in light of the realization of freedom. They comprise the normative/institutional infrastructure that articulates the modern itself. I aim to recalibrate the critique of Hegel by exploring once more the place of the Haitian Revolution in Hegel's philosophy of history. Haiti dislocates rather than consummates the project of modernity.[7] Jean Casimir's *The Haitians: A Decolonial History* offers new grounds for rejecting the gesture that considers the Haitian Revolution either as the true consummation of the ideals of the Enlightenment or understanding it as an alternative modernity.[8] Both options fail to consider the Revolution as a refusal of a project founded on chattel slavery, one that installed a settler colonial and anti-black world. Such refusal does not posit the non-modern as a pure externality, however – an assessment that follows from the Hegelian relegation of the non-modern to a past to be surpassed.[9] Instead, it organizes life beyond the experience of the violence of the coming-to-be of modernity.

Before entering the viscous terrain of Hegel's not most conservative moment but most consistent indeed foundational gesture, allow me to orient myself. French-Congolese philosopher Nadia Yala Kisukidi's view of philosophy as "an anthropological object" is decisive. In her "Philosophizing in a Dominated Land," discussing the debates concerning the question concerning African philosophy, Kisukidi explores the Eurocentrism of philosophy, as a practice, as an institution, in Africa. She poses the question in terms of the desire for philosophy for those whose humanity has been denied. The desire for philosophy, Kisukidi maintains, "points to a history made for victors and vanquished. Not just

5 See, e.g., Bernasconi 1998, 2000, 2003); de Laurentiis 2014; McCarney 2003; Parekh 2003; Brennan 2013; Buchwalter 2009; Guha 2002; Serequeberhan 1989; Tibebu 2010; Harris 2021, forthcoming; Park 2013; Lloyd 2021; Zambrana 2017, 2020.

6 Cf. Truillot 2021. Cf. also the notion of disavowal in Fischer 2004.

7 Important literature here includes; e.g., Fischer 2004; Fick 1990; Gilroy 1995; Patterson 1985; Scott 2004; Laurent 2004; Nesbitt 2013, 2008; Vazquez-Arroyo 2008; Buck-Morss 2009; Ciccarello-Maher 2014, among others.

8 Casimir 2020.

9 See Zambrana forthcoming.

any history but a colonial history understood as the history of the *Muntu's* attempts and vicissitudes in resembling his master and being recognized by him." As such, she adds, philosophy "appears as an attribute of power of which the vanquished is deprived." Kisukidi continues:

> The desire for philosophy has nothing to do with philosophy. It reveals a condition of violence, not an emancipatory hope where the term philosophy functions just as a metonymy. It means just humanity and civilization, nothing else. So the answer to the question: how to philosophize in a dominated land is not linked to problems of epistemic justice. It is just a reenactment. How to escape from philosophy to change the world even if it means remaining in a nameless place.[10]

As an anthropological object, philosophy is an archive of dispossession and colonial mimicry. This is hardly an argument against the study of philosophy, however. This is not an argument against exploring the Western canon and its actualizations, even in gestures that seek to decolonize philosophy yet follow the coordinates of the canon in its institutional location. On the contrary. Philosophy as an anthropological object stands in need of a deep dive especially if one comes to the conclusion that what is required is to escape it. To do philosophy is to know ourselves, but that means to track terms, gestures, grammars of thought, forms of perception, all in all, structures of intelligibility that seize. This is not a problem of epistemic justice.

Returning once more to the question of Hegel's philosophy of history is not for the sake of shifting the geography of reason, unearthing the modern from a different geographical location, an alternative modernity developed in other space-times. It is rather for the sake of tracking modernity's ongoing productivity: the continuing violence of the racial order it inaugurated and consistently adapts, the normative/institutional/material universe it persistently refounds. To orient oneself from the view of philosophy as an anthropological object, to see philosophy as an attribute of power, is to question the desire for modernity's promise even after having clarified its undeniable productivity. Hegel scholarship is prone to debating the status of Hegel's notes on colonialism, his in-passing discussions of slavery, his anthropological notion of race and its relation to history, his silence on the Haitian Revolution, aiming to clarify context, by and large seeking to recover the project of modernity reading Hegel against himself. Yet this reading practice can reinstall coordinates of sense inseparable from modernity's racial order.

10 Kisukidi 2019a, 2019b. This is my transcription of the English version Kisukidi read at "Critique, Decoloniality, Diaspora" (Berkeley).

The article is composed of two parts. Part one assesses Hegel's notion of *Weltgeschichte* in the *Philosophy of Right*. The nation-state is the key apparatus in modernity's organization of authority, producing the material and normative coordinates of sovereignty. The nation-state, hence its people (*Volk*), is the proper agent of history, according to Hegel. The modern nation-state provides the norm for world-historical judgment, measuring the actualization of freedom within and beyond the west. Part two takes George Ciccarello-Maher's critique of Susan Buck Morss' "Hegel and Haiti" as productive in specifying the operation of universality in politics, establishing the particularity of the Haitian Revolution as pivotal for a universal understanding of freedom. Yet to take up the question of Hegel and Haiti once more requires focusing on the discussion of *Weltgeschichte*, exploring the status of modernity in relation to its structuring apparatuses beyond the dialectic of the universal and the particular endemic to them. To this end, I turn to Casmir's study of Haiti, specifically in relation to the thesis that the Revolution constructed sovereignty beyond the nation-state. The analytic effectivity of Hegelian history is interrupted, then, when we pay attention to the Haitian Revolution, yet in relation to forms of ongoing refusal that turn inoperative modernity's signature apparatuses.

Weltgeschichte* is *Weltgericht

Quoting the penultimate stanza of Schiller's 1794 "Resignation," Hegel writes that "world history is the world's court of judgement." Hegel's exposition of spheres of right ends with this reflection on world history. Before considering the status of this ending in greater detail, it is important to recall the structure of the book. In his introductory remarks, Hegel provides a sketch of each sphere. The *Philosophy of Right* moves through three spheres in which the "will [*Wille*] that is free in and for itself" can be realized: *das Abstrakte Recht* (Abstract Right), *die Moralität* (Morality), and *die Sittlichkeit* (Ethical Life).[11] Consistent with his other important works, the specific failures of each sphere of right lead to the next normative/institutional shape. With every failure, we gain greater concreteness, hence determinacy. With every failure, we have greater comprehension of the truth of the matter at hand (*die Sache Selbst*) – the will that is free in and for itself.

In his introductory sketch, Hegel clarifies that, initially, the will is "immediate" and therefore "abstract."[12] Its "existence [*Dasein*]," he adds, is an "immediate external thing [*Sache*]." This realization of right operates

11 Hegel 1991, §33.

12 Hegel 1991, §33.

linking the person (*Person*), the contract, and property.[13] This sphere is abstract in insufficiently providing coordinates for interiority, which is necessary for conceiving of a form of subjectivity that is accountable for its actions. The will, initially in its utmost indeterminacy hence abstraction, gains its first determination thus concretion in the act of externalization as appropriation. Externalization (*Entaußerung*) is here a matter of self-extension in ownership, positing a world for the making through the taking.[14] It is crucial to point out from the get go that this mode of self-extension is not merely an act of appropriating land, subtending a settler colonial project. It is also a matter of appropriating laboring bodies, despite Hegel's own comments on slavery in this context.[15] "[S]lavery, serfdom, disqualification from owning property, restrictions on freedom of ownership," Hegel here argues, should be considered as the "alienation of personality."[16] With respect to, he says, the "Athenian slave," slavery is not only a matter of becoming a possession, but of the possibility of alienating his activity to his master.[17] The wrong here is the erosion of the inalienable right to possession, mineness being a necessary feature of the outward realization of the will. Although more would need to be said here, the conception of the will at hand is one that gains reality in the ownership of the earth *and* its living inhabitants, binding labor and the making of a modern world to chattel slavery.[18]

So understood, the will remains without sufficient determination. In a subsequent sphere or mode of externalization, the will is "reflected from its external existence *into itself*, determined as *subjective individuality* [*Einzelheit*] in opposition to the *universal*."[19] This universal, however, is something merely "internal." It manifests itself as the "good" that mediates the externality of the will in terms of "*right of the subjective will*." Hence, it "*has being* only *in itself*."[20] That is to say: the truth of the will is anchored in its subjectivity, here as a matter of the will that is good, as a matter of morality. Individuality is therefore not only confronted by but also in contestation with objective existence qualified by the normative terrain discussed under the banner of abstract right. The

13 Hegel 1991, §§41-47.

14 See Hegel 1991, §44.

15 See Harris forthcoming, for an account of slavery in Hegel distinguished from the lordship and bondage dialectic. See also Tibebu 2010 and Stone 2017.

16 Hegel 1991, §66A.

17 Hegel 1991, §66A.

18 Cf. Hartman 1997, p. 21.

19 Hegel 1991, §33.

20 Hegel 1991, §33.

subjectivity of the will, its realization as morality in Protestant key, to be sure, is a manifestation of the moral orientation of the modern European understanding of the authority of intention and belief. Morality expresses normative coordinates that trade on the diremption between willing and the ethical totality in which the individual acts. The problem is, however, that one cannot divorce any insistence on the goodness of the individual will not from crime, as in the sphere of abstract right, when its actions do not conform with the ethical totality. There, punishment is more than legitimate; it is necessary if right is to be protected.[21] Here, in being anchored in mere individual disposition, the mere subjectivity of willing is but bad conscience, hypocrisy, subjectivism, or irony.[22] This is no concrete realization of freedom, according to Hegel.

Freedom is the being in *and* for itself of the will. Freedom exists as, the idea of the good realizes in "the internally reflected will and in the external world."[23] Ethical life actualizes the idea of freedom in its "universal existence in and for itself." *Sittlichkeit*, as is known, is itself structured by three spheres in which freedom is concrete, actual. The family, civil society, and the state are the three material/normative shapes of existence in which the person can realize itself not only as a willing possessing or moral being, but as an irreducibly social being. Relations of care within the nuclear family; modes of exchange in a market economy and, at best, a sense of belonging in the productive sphere in the corporation; the manifestation of belonging to a collective in the state (constitutional monarchy, to be exact) are the material/normative coordinates that organize existence. These make possible the living actuality rather than the mere existence of freedom. While the family figures as the unmediated, totality of nature, civil society is the division through which individuality is possible. Civil society, to be sure, produces a host of problems, most pressingly poverty and destitution resulting from overproduction.[24] Colonization is one among various solutions to the problem of poverty, according to Hegel.[25] Relocating a surplus population to distant lands in which "new markets and spheres of industrial activity" are available supplements the police and the corporation as forms of address.

Hegel discusses varieties of colonialism, noting contemporary independence movements motivated by lack of rights in the (American)

21 Hegel 1991, §§97ff.

22 Hegel 1991, §140.

23 Hegel 1991, §33.

24 See Hegel 1991, §§241ff., esp. 244.

25 Hegel 1991, §§246ff., esp. 248.

colonies.[26] As in the case of the "emancipation of slaves," Hegel argues, independence is of the greatest advantage to the "mother state."[27] In the *Philosophy of History*, recall, Hegel argues for the gradual abolition of slavery. Drawing from his view of Africa as outside of history, he posits that slavery is a "wrong (*Unrecht*), for the essence of humanity is freedom," but immediately qualifies the claim arguing that "for this man must first become mature."[28] European colonialism, more precisely, the European capture, commerce, and enslavement of Africans, is a qualified wrong, according to Hegel, insofar as it brings consciousness of freedom to captives. This consciousness, however, is gained in the state. In the 1822/23 courses on the *Philosophy of World History*, Hegel argues that "slavery . . . is necessary at those stages where the state [and its people] has not yet arrived at rationality. It is an element in the transition to a higher stage."[29] Hegel ties this supposed acquisition of freedom to the "sense of private property, of achieving independence through one's own activity, or of securing one's property through right."[30] As Allison Stone explains, "[b]y being forced to labor and being disciplined spiritually by agencies such as the Christian church, these people will eventually learn about their freedom. Until then, their subjection, while partially wrong insofar as it is subjection, is also partially right: it is, at least, an improvement on the natives remaining in their natural, wholly unfree, pre-colonial condition."[31] Abolition should be gradual, Hegel also maintains, otherwise "the most frightening consequences arise, as in the French colonies."[32]

In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel argues that it is only in the state that the will is free. The will is "equally universal and objective in the free self-sufficiency of the particular will," more precisely, in the figure of the monarch. In the particular execution of the universality of the people (*Volk*), as articulated in and by the state, here moving beyond his discussion of patriotism to the activity of the figurehead, the will is not merely external and internal but in and for itself free. World history becomes relevant at this juncture. The state, Hegel writes, is the "actual and organic" *Geist* of a people, which "actualizes and reveals itself through the relationship between the particular national spirits" and "in world history as the universal world spirit whose right

26 Hegel 1991, §248.

27 Hegel 1991, §248.

28 See my discussion on maturity in forthcoming. See also Hegel 1991, §57A.

29 Quoted in Stone 2017, p. 255.

30 Quoted in Stone 2017, p. 255.

31 Stone 2017, p. 255.

32 Quoted in Stone 2017, p. 255.

is supreme."[33] The agent of history is the state, in which a people is manifest. The actualization of freedom is measured between states from a world historical perspective in relation to "world spirit" in its self-comprehension. It is not established in light of the failures of each sphere of right discussed in the *Philosophy of Right*. The content of each failure of the three spheres drives the truth of freedom, yet freedom is to be comprehended in its truth through a final judgment in relation to other nation-states/peoples. In the last instance, it is not states but peoples who manifest the truth of freedom in its living actuality within the state. Such living actuality is a matter of "rationality." The state is "absolute end" because it is rational. Rationality is a matter of consciousness of freedom.

Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht closes the book. This mirrors the end of Hegel's central texts: *Phenomenology of Spirit*, *Science of Logic*, *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*. The end (*Ende*) rather than the beginning (*Anfang*) of Hegel's texts are privileged interpretive sites.[34] They announce the truth of what has been shown in methodological key – not only as a metatheoretical reflection on or comprehension of the movement of the text itself. In this case, the end provides a measure for world-historical judgment on the matter at hand, namely, the will that is free in and for itself. As Angelica Nuzzo argues, the court of judgment signals a shift away from the movement of recollection (*Erinnerung*) distinctive of Hegel's endings.[35] Historical memory gathers together moments through which the truth of the matter at hand has been shown. Memory gathers what is seemingly dispersed in the immanent development of its own content.[36] In contrast, here we face historical judgment or, better yet, judgment of history. In *Memory, History, Justice in Hegel*, Nuzzo writes:

> *Weltgeschichte* is *Weltgericht*, declares Hegel in Schiller's aftermath. While memory no longer does justice to history, it is now history that measures the justice and truthfulness of memory. History, whose subjects or agents are the nation-states, is introduced not by memory (and the concept or *Begriff* to which ethical memory leads) but by judgment, or *Urteil* – by the judgment to which memory (and the concept) as well as the states are ultimately subject.[37]

33 Hegel 1991, §33.

34 On *das Ende*, see especially Nuzzo 1999 and Zambrana 2015.

35 Nuzzo 2012, chap. 4.

36 Nuzzo 2012, pp. 45ff.

37 Nuzzo 2012, p. 109.

World history is not only perspective: historical memory of *Geist* in its unfolding, the backward-looking gaze that retrospectively reconstructs events and institutions necessary for the advent of freedom/modernity. Hegel writes that "the history of spirit is its own deed [*Tat*], for spirit is only what it does, and its deed is to make itself – in this case as spirit – the object of its own consciousness and to comprehend itself in its interpretation of itself to itself."[38] World history as comprehension is here norm: measure, judgment of the actuality rather than the becoming of freedom. Hegel accordingly glosses ethical life, that is, "the Penates, civil society, and the spirits of the nations [*Volkgeister*] in their multifarious actuality," as "ideal."[39] *Sittlichkeit* is not only demonstrated as a living actuality by the movement of *Geist*. It is binding for world-historical judgment.

World-historical judgment necessarily runs through anthropological existence, which develops the racial hierarchy endemic to Hegel's signature nature/spirit distinction.[40] Hegel's anthropology, in which Africa fares the worst, installs fundamentally anti-black coordinates of sense that remain consistent throughout his system. The state of maturity – rationality, that is, consciousness of freedom – achieved based on the nature/spirit distinction serves as norm for measuring nation-states. The state, recall, is the site of living actuality of a people, since in politico-juridical organization a people is able to leave nature behind. Closing the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel writes:

> its initial stage, a nation [*Volk*] is not a state, and the transition of a family, tribe, kinship group, mass [of people], etc. to the condition of a state constitutes the final realization of the Idea in general within it. If the nation, as ethical substance – and this is what it is in *itself* – does not have this form, it lacks the objectivity of possessing a universal and universally valid existence [*Dasein*] for itself and others in [the shape of] laws as determinations of thought, and is therefore not recognized; since its independence has no objective legality or firmly established rationality for itself, it is merely formal and does not amount to sovereignty.[41]

The distinction between a people and the state has served as point of appeal when arguing against the fact that Hegel holds Eurocentric or racist views. As I have discussed elsewhere, Joseph McCarney's

38 Hegel 1991, §343.

39 Hegel 1991, §341.

40 Hegel 1991, §347. See Zambrana 2017. See Jackson 2020, p. 30, who notes the circularity of Hegel's reasoning and argues that "his logic collapses against the weight of his percepts and method."

41 Hegel 1991, §349.

argument that Hegel's thought cannot be so charged, given that a world-historical perspective judges the rationality of formal institutions of a people rather than peoples themselves, cannot be maintained.[42] Consistent with the nature/spirit distinction, Hegel here establishes an equivalence between rationality (consciousness of freedom), politico-juridical institutionality, and sovereignty. The Idea of right appears in legal and objective institutions, giving form to relations even within the family ("marriage") and with respect to labor and a metabolic relation to nature ("agriculture").[43] Accordingly, Hegel sketches four shapes (*Gestalten*) through which self-consciousness of freedom is achieved. Immediate revelation, beautiful ethical individuality, abstract universality or mere self-absorption, return from infinite opposition producing and knowing "its own truth as thought and as world of legal actuality" manifest the coming-to-be of freedom.[44] While the first is the Oriental Realm, according to Hegel, it is superseded by the Greek Realm, the Roman Realm, culminating in *Geist* that knows itself as *Geist* in the Germanic Realm.

The philosophical gesture that closes the *Philosophy of Right* allows Hegel to state that "the present has cast off its barbarism and unjust [*unrechtliche*] arbitrariness, and truth has cast off its otherworldliness and contingent force, so that the true reconciliation, which reveals the state as the image and actuality of reason, has become objective."[45] The state, along with the legal and moral order expounded in the *Philosophy of Right*, is an expression of sovereignty in giving shape (materially, institutionally) to freedom. The equivalence between rationality, politico-juridical institutionality, and sovereignty that yields the norm for world-historical judgment here establishes the consummation of the project of modernity in the Germanic Realm. I argue that it is the normative and material universe that we have seen supports this claim that is dislocated by the Haitian Revolution. Modernity itself, rather than its fulfillment, is sent into crisis by the Revolution. The status of the Haitian Revolution in Hegel's philosophy of history, for this reason, is best grasped in relation to but beyond the dialectics of universality and particularity established by that universe. Moving beyond Hegel's decision, consistent with his account of world-historical unfolding, to center the French Revolution instead of the Haitian Revolution as the world-historical event without which modernity would not have come to be is key. Considering instead the apparatuses that realize modernity and that he justifies in the *Philosophy of Right* is key.

42 See Zambrana 2017; McCarney and Bernasconi's exchange in 2003.

43 Hegel 1991, §350. The state as well as the legal order regulate social relations regarding kinship and economic exchange.

44 Hegel 1991, §353.

45 Hegel 1991, §360.

Hegel and Haiti Redux

Susan Buck-Morss' "Hegel and Haiti," the 2000 essay, and especially *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, the 2009 book, were heavily criticized. Especially in the book, Buck-Morss defends the idea of universal history, despite her own findings concerning Hegel's silence about the Haitian Revolution. As Buck-Morss states in the preface to her book, critics argue against the resurrection of the very idea of universal history from the "ashes" of Hegelian metaphysics.[46] They also question the decision to forgo a reflection on the alternative modernity that the Haitian Revolution could instead represent. Buck-Morss pursues her engagement with Hegel around the question of his knowledge of the Haitian Revolution. She investigates whether it was the source of inspiration for the master-slave dialectic most famously though not exclusively developed in the 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit*.[47] Hegel knew of the Revolution, as had been pointed out by Pierre-Franklin Tavarès.[48] Its suppression, however, should come as no surprise to any reader of Hegel. Hegel's equally famous engagement with the French Revolution and the revolution in thought of German critical philosophy, for reasons we have seen, centers the latter as the world-historical events without which modernity, as a project and as a historical reality, would not have come to be.

Surprise at Hegel's decision aside, Buck-Morss suggests that recovering this "unhistorical history" erodes the Eurocentrism of Hegel's thought, delivering a necessary universal historical perspective in reconfigured dialectical vein. Buck-Morss' claim is not merely that it is not the French but the Haitian Revolution that realizes the promise of liberty and equality.[49] She furthermore argues that centering Haiti makes possible building a world-historical perspective from our "inhumanity in common."[50] A universal history so conceived makes possible action rather than inscribing power.[51] "What happens when," Buck-Morss writes, "in the spirit of dialectics, we turn the tables and consider Haiti not as a victim of Europe, but as an agent in Europe's construction"?[52] Haiti is an agent in Europe's construction in providing content to the formality of the discourse of the Rights of Man. Haiti allows us to track the inhumanity from which such rights emerge or that such rights can in fact reproduce.

46 Buck-Morss 2009, p. ix.

47 Buck-Morss 2009, p. 48.

48 Buck-Morss 2009, p. 48.

49 Buck-Morss 2009, p. 42.

50 Buck-Morss 2009, pp. 138ff.

51 Buck-Morss 2009, p. 110.

52 Buck-Morss 2009, p. 80.

Forgoing an exposition of the alternative modernity that many have argued was generated from the experience of colonialism, indigenous genocide, the middle passage, and the plantation complex, Buck-Morss affirms the universal intent of a Hegelian conception of history albeit in this negativist key.

In "'So Much Worse for the Whites': Dialectics of the Haitian Revolution," Ciccarello-Maher launches a crucial criticism of Buck-Morss. Ciccarello-Maher understands Buck-Morss' intervention in terms of the need to recalibrate the relation between the universal and the particular. We escape the problem of "incommensurability" that undermines universal interests by thinking or building from the "edges."[53] The way Buck-Morss pursues her reconstruction of the Haitian Revolution is particularly troubling, however. Buck-Morss builds universality through the figure of Toussaint Loverture and in reference to the Constitution of 1801, silencing the contribution of Jean-Jacques Dessalines and the Declaration of Independence of 1804 along with the Constitution of 1805. Universal history is here not built by the real opposition of the Haitian Revolution's affirmation of Black identity, Ciccarello-Maher points out, but rather by the success then failure of an abstract notion of liberty, one that erases the racial ground of the Revolution. Buck-Morss writes that "[f]or almost a decade, before the violent elimination of whites signaled their deliberate retreat from universalist principles, the black Jacobins of Saint-Domingue surpassed the metropole in actively realizing the Enlightenment goal of human liberty, seeming to give proof that the French Revolution was not simply a European phenomenon but world-historical in its implications."[54] The colony surpasses the metropolis, Ciccarello-Maher argues, leaving the latter's ideal of liberty intact. This surpassing is a recentering of the interests of the metropolis and indeed whiteness.

Ciccarello-Maher tracks the undialectical character of Buck-Morss' text, arguing that her failure to do justice to particularity is tied to her failure to grasp the political rather than identitarian ("phenotypic") character of race in this context.[55] Restricting the Revolution to the period of Toussaint's leadership, and especially to the 1801 constitution, betrays the fact that she seeks to affirm the juncture where there is an extension of the "principle of liberty to all citizens regardless of race."[56] But the definition of citizenship in 1801 is precisely based on a declaration of all Haitian "'men [as] 'free and French'," "in which the very notion of

53 See Ciccarello-Maher 2014, p. 21.

54 Ciccarello-Maher 2014, p. 22; Buck-Morss 2009, p. 39.

55 Ciccarello-Maher 2014, p. 27.

56 Ciccarello-Maher 2014, p. 94.

freedom is bound as if by synonym to the mother country."[57] Buck-Morss' treatment of Toussaint's failures are most revealing, however. Toussaint's failure – "he did not defeat the French (which he never truly intended to do), could not guarantee the perpetual abolition of slavery (which he certainly intended to do), was captured in 1802, and died a prisoner at Fort de Joux in 1803 while his compatriots continued to struggle" – in her account represents a "retreat from the universal."[58] If one follows C.R.L. James' *The Black Jacobins*, Ciccarello-Maher argues, Toussaint's failures are a guide for understanding the significance of particularity for thinking universality, specifically concerning the racial coordinates of the Revolution.[59]

Ciccarello-Maher cites James' account of Toussaint's failures as anchored in his effort "to 'conciliate whites at home and abroad' by granting not only equality but even privileges, symbolic and material, to the local whites."[60] Black laborers, in James' words, did not approve out of a sharp awareness of the possibility of reenslavement.[61] Ciccarello-Maher quotes James to this effect, and extends James' analysis emphasizing the political content of the racial positions at hand: "'The blacks could see in the eyes of their former owners the regret for the old days and the hatred,' and as a result, the biological content of the category 'white' was displaced by its *political* content: 'the whites were whites of the old régime,' and the ostensibly 'anti-white feelings' of the Blacks 'meant only anti-slavery'."[62] He adds, again quoting James: "As though responding preemptively to her celebration of Toussaint's universality, James insists that: 'These anti-white feelings of the blacks were no infringement of liberty and equality, but were in reality the soundest revolutionary policy'."[63] Turning to the figure of Dessalines and, especially, to the 1804 Declaration of Independence as well as the 1805 Constitution allows the political content of the particular to construct the universal.

Dessalines not only grasped but also built the universal character of revolutionary policy in terms of these anti-white sentiments, which is to say, in terms of anti-slavery. Ciccarello-Maher stresses that Dessalines understood that it was Black laborers, in James' terms, who required reassurance. In understanding the "violent elimination of the whites," rather than the elimination of other Black, maroon or Vodou leaders, as a

57 Ciccarello-Maher 2014, p. 23.

58 Ciccarello-Maher 2014, pp. 23-24.

59 James 1989.

60 Ciccarello-Maher 2014, p. 24; James 1989, p. 262.

61 Ciccarello-Maher 2014, p. 24.

62 Ciccarello-Maher 2014, p. 24; see James 1989, pp. 261, 286, 174.

63 Ciccarello-Maher 2014, p. 25; James 1989, p. 261.

retreat from universality, Buck-Morss homogenizes the revolutionaries as well as affirms an identitarian politics that draws from rather than unsettles a sedimented racial hierarchy. She thereby "disavow[s] black identity."[64] Because Buck-Morss misses that the racial positions here are political positions, that what is under attack is slavery, she misses that Dessalines' advance and the 1805 declaration that "Haitians will henceforth be known by the generic denomination of blacks" in fact consummate the promise of liberty in racial terms other than those set by the metropolis.[65] The 1804 declaration opens with a critique not only of the formalism but of the violence of the abstract discourse of the Rights of Man.[66] Articles 12-14 of the Constitution build a "porous" and "expansive" racial category of citizenship.[67] The ground for "racial equality," racial particularity "includes all those who cast their lot in with the new nation." The Manicheanism of the 1804 and 1805 texts do not fix racial categories, but aims to "upend" them.[68]

Ciccarello-Maher further develops his intervention by engaging Fanon's reading of Hegel's master-slave dialectic.[69] Through an interpretation of Fanon, he argues that the Manicheanism of the colonial world is properly dialectical when it allows the force of the particular to change the nature of the universal. Fanon questions the very premise of reciprocity that conditions the dialectic, furthermore expressed in the supposed independence that the enslaved gains by working on the object.[70] The Revolution shows that there is rather a turning to the master, an abandonment of the object of labor, leading to revolutionary violence. There is no such internalization of mastery as discussed in the Freedom of Self-Consciousness section that follows the dialectic in the *Phenomenology*. Turning to the master is a form of disrupting the thinghood of the enslaved, as determined by the Code Noir. Fanon's point, on my view, is that for the Black man and for the colonized, recognition is not impossible as much as a trap.[71] Ciccarello-Maher's affirmation of universality would thus need to be

64 Ciccarello-Maher 2014, p. 31.

65 Ciccarello-Maher 2014, p. 29.

66 Ciccarello-Maher 2014, p. 28.

67 Ciccarello-Maher 2014, p. 29: "Whereas Article 12 bans whites from the status of master and from property ownership, Article 13 quickly exempts naturalized white women and their children, as well as the Poles and Germans who had joined the revolutionary cause, and this loosening of racial categories is then followed by the wrecking-blow of Article 14, which famously declares that 'Haitians will henceforth be known by the generic denomination of blacks'."

68 Ciccarello-Maher 2014, p. 30.

69 Ciccarello-Maher 2014, p. 32. See Fanon 2008, p. 195n 10.

70 Ciccarello-Maher 2014, p. 32.

71 See the conclusion to Zambrana 2021 for some approximations to this claim.

carefully specified. Yet I want to forgo a full engagement with the question of the nature of dialectics and the status of the master-slave dialectic, precisely on Fanonian grounds.[72] I aim to reflect on the specific apparatuses that concretely – normatively and materially – produce the positions of power the dialectic explores. Although engagement with the dialectic is crucial in underscoring the agency of the enslaved or the place of slave revolt and revolution in world history, following Casimir's suggestion, I seek to consider forms of agency of the enslaved beyond the dialectic of the universal and the particular endemic to the normative and institutional universe of modernity.[73] I aim to consider the force of the particular away from its capacity to potentiate the universal so construed. I am interested in the dislocation rather than dialectical overcoming of such normative and material coordinates as the site of the agency indeed sovereignty of the Haitian revolutionaries.

The racial order endemic to *Weltgeschichte*, hence to the institutional order that realizes *Weltgeschichte*, is dislocated rather than dialectically corrected by the Haitian Revolution. Returning to the question of sovereignty discussed in section one above along these lines is one important point of entry. Casimir's decolonial reading of Haiti is here instructive. He raises the question concerning the site of sovereignty in the Revolution. The revolution is not to be found in the founding of the nation-state, given its continuation of the metropolis' political-juridical model inseparable from a plantation economy. A "counter-plantation" system manifest in largely African-descended rural peasantry in ongoing refusal of colonial and post-colonial power, Casimir argues, built sovereignty (indeed a "nation") traversed by but autonomous from the institutional and normative coordinates of modernity. In the counter-plantation system, Casimir maintains, a complex internal racial order that was not structured by the racial hierarchy of the west, by the fundamentally anti-black project of modernity, operated. It did so at a distance from the dialectic of racial particularity and universal humanity that considers the Revolution only in relation to the French Revolution, and that, according to Casimir, seeks resolution in "regenerating the black race by using the very principles and tools the West used to degrade them."[74]

Casimir's decolonial reading of the Haitian Revolution draws from Aníbal Quijano's concept of coloniality of power.[75] The coloniality of power

72 See Fanon 2004, p. 2: "Decolonization which sets out to change the order of the world is clearly an agenda for total disorder." See Harris forthcoming, for an important demonstration of the anti-blackness of Hegel's texts distinguishing the dialectic as developing feudal relations from Hegel's assessment of slavery in relation to his account of Africa.

73 In addition to Casimir, see Eddins 2021.

74 Casimir 2020, p. 19.

75 Quijano 2000, 2007, 2008.

names the reinstallation of the racial order articulated by colonization, that is, by indigenous genocide, the middle passage, and racial slavery, in processes of independence or decolonization. The centering of local elites negotiating with the metropolis, on the one hand, and subjecting or dispossessing racialized populations, on the other, within anti-colonial projects reproduces this racial hierarchy in a purportedly post-colonial context. The coloniality of power, according to Quijano, operates through the organization of existence in terms of labor, authority (the state and the legal order), knowledge and subjectivity, and social reproduction.[76] The organization of these areas of existence is at stake when assessing whether anti-colonial projects adapt hence replenish or instead turn inoperative the institutional thus material infrastructure of capitalist modernity. Documenting the heterogeneity of revolutionaries and local "oligarchs" (white planters and *petit blancs*, people of color and emancipated people, majority African-born enslaved people and maroons), tracking the complexity of internal interests that did not allow the "oligarchs" to "imagine a structure for governance distinct from that of the metropole," considering the racial coordinates reinscribed despite rupture with the metropolis, Casimir calls attention to autonomous forms of organizing existence pursued by the majority of revolutionaries and their descendants.[77]

Like James, Casimir notes that, given particularly cruel conditions, St Domingue's enslaved population could not reproduce itself.[78] As James notes, in 1789, Saint-Domingue was both the most lucrative colony in the Americas and the greatest individual market for the European slave trade.[79] "At the moment of rupture with empire," Casimir writes, "at least two thirds of the captives had been born in Africa," interrupting attempts

76 See Lugones 2007 and 2010, and Espinosa, ed., 2014 and 2018 for a critique of Quijano's notion of sex/gender and for an analysis of the modern colonial gender system. See Terrefe 2020 for an important critique of Lugones.

77 Casimir 2020, p. 39.

78 Casimir writes: "In order to situate the memory of the crossing of the Atlantic and the arrival of the *bossales* within the history of Haiti, it makes sense to start by clarifying exactly how and why my ancestors' odyssey has been erased from my own. The colonial working class gained consciousness of its own situation by articulating a response to three aspects that defined the behavior of the French: first, the colonist's need to produce and reproduce captives; second, their project of converting captives into slaves in order to reproduce their slavery and captivity; and finally, the need to annul their natural reproduction in order to intensify and maximize their exploitation. This final exigency led inevitably to a botched process of acculturation. The need to produce and reproduce the Pearl of the Antilles as quickly as possible required an intensification of the slave trade and the destruction of the processes of institutionalization that might have served to support natural reproduction among the population. This in turn meant the acceleration of the process of the absorption of the new arrivals and their required conversion into slaves. Community, family, and women themselves represented potential obstacles to the development of the modern economy within a plantation system in full expansion, because they obstructed the disaggregation of labor and reduced the fragility and vulnerability necessary for the smooth functioning of the labor market" (2020, p. 52).

79 James 1989, pp. ix–x.

to transform "African ethnicities" into "colonial blacks."[80] African-born enslaved people, as well as maroon communities, refusing rather than resisting incorporation into the plantation complex and the interests of the metropolis, the colonial state, and post-colonial administration interrupt politico-juridical formalization into a nation-state.[81] What is to this day commonly understood as a failed state, Casimir argues, is a community in perpetual insurrection.[82] For Casimir, here is where a sovereign nation is born – not only at a distance from but out of reach of the state.[83] Casimir calls the modes of organizing existence that emerged in the Revolution and continued to thrive until US intervention in 1915 the "counter-plantation system." He writes:

> The Haitian peasantry—and those of the entire Caribbean—constituted themselves in opposition to the processes of integration and assimilation to the commodity-producing plantation. Their culture was and remains a response to slavery, a form of self-defense responding to the abuses inflicted by modern, colonial society. From the moment the captives took control of their gardens and provision grounds and demanded more free days in the wake of the general insurrection, the counter-plantation system and the institutions through which it was articulated were put into place. These included gender relations, family, the *lakou*, indivisible collective property, Vodou temples, rural markets, garden-towns, leisure, crafts, the arts. They were reproduced within and thanks to the local language the counter-plantation system appropriated. Taken together, all of these became specific tools for the class struggles of the Haitian peasantry.[84]

The counter-plantation system also thrived in the continued interruption of the relationship between capital and labor within the context of colonial and post-colonial administration, such as with criminalized "vagabonds" and "sharecroppers" "refusing to behave like a citizen attached to the land and imposing the breaking up of the plantations into small plots."[85]

80 Casimir 2020, p. 15.

81 See Casimir 2020, p. 262. Casimir clarifies that in "the eighteenth century, the Africans that slave ships deposited in Saint-Domingue came to be called *bossales*. In the Romance languages this term was extremely negative, a synonym for savages and barbarians. But we need to envision the experience of captivity from the perspective of the contingents of victims who crossed from Africa to the Americas" (2020, p. 40).

82 I thank Celenis Rodríguez Moreno for this formulation, and for the many conversations we have shared about Casimir's text.

83 Casimir 2020, e.g., pp. 343-344, 354.

84 Casimir 2020, p. 351.

85 Casimir 2020, p. 336.

In his book, Casimir documents the twists and turns of what he calls the counterrevolutionary force of state administration especially after 1806, one that built on colonial governance put in place even by revolutionaries in power.[86] In this context, he asses the relation between the French and the Haitian Revolutions. Casimir writes:

> The French and Haitian Revolutions were not part of the same family of events. To conceive of the first as having inspired the second does not do justice to France's contribution to human history: the enthroning of popular sovereignty within the political. The modern nation did not construct the Haitian nation. Nation building is just an imperialist illusion that camouflages administration building. The Haitian nation invented itself alone in the context of a European, modern, colonial state that was at war with its very conception, from the moment the first embryo of sovereignty hatched.[87]

The Haitian nation invented itself in a heterogenous indeed fraught terrain, however, given the scission between popular sovereignty built by those who fought in the Revolution refusing incorporation into slavery, and those who fought imagining freedom in light of the vision of the metropolis.[88] My aim here is not to adjudicate on the details of Haitian history, however. Rather, this counterhistory makes possible dislocating the Hegelian categories indeed narrative – its picture, its desire – that remain operative in philosophical and political imagination to this day. Casimir's reading does not concede to the narrative of modernity, tracking instead how its apparatuses operate, pointing out how they take hold of political imagination even at the most luminous of historical moments. The question of Hegel and Haiti within Hegel scholarship, accordingly, should consider counterhistories that locate the force of the Haitian Revolution beyond the normative coordinates of modernity, the modernity Hegel described in detail in the *Philosophy of Right*, grappling with the possibility that these counterhistories might send even the most revisionary readings of Hegel into crisis.

86 Casimir 2020, p. 343. See also p. 123, and note the exposition of revolution in Marxist key albeit transformed by decolonial commitments.

87 Casimir 2020, p. 342.

88 Casimir 2020, p. 343: "I emphasize the absence of a filiation between the French and Haitian Revolutions to highlight the fact that in the first case, the pursuit of well-being was defined by the collective of all citizens, while in the second, those who appropriated the leadership of the revolutionary movement constituted themselves into a group that relayed colonial, modern power. They granted themselves the right to define the well-being of the population and to evaluate the desiderata expressed by the sovereign people, selecting only those aspirations that met the approval of the imperial powers."

Concluding Remark

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon writes:

> The Third World is today facing Europe as one colossal mass whose project must be to try and solve the problems this Europe was incapable of finding the answers to. But what matters now is not a question of profitability, not a question of increased productivity, not a question of production rates. No, it is not a question of back to nature. It is the very basic question of not dragging man in directions which mutilate him, of not imposing on his brain tempos that rapidly obliterate and unhinge it. The notion of catching up must not be used as a pretext to brutalize man, to tear him from himself and his inner consciousness, to break him, to kill him.
>
> No, we do not want to catch up with anyone. But what we want is to walk in the company of man, every man, night and day, for all times. . . .
>
> . . . So comrades, let us not pay tribute to Europe by creating states, institutions, and societies that draw their inspiration from it."[89]

Many read this statement as one key passage supporting Fanon's distinctive humanism. But Fanon is rather inviting us to trace carefully the traps that projects of decolonization, independence, freedom might hold. We might end up in uncomfortable proximity to Hegel. And this is the point. Hegelian philosophy of history remains. Not in theory, but operative in how we think of sovereignty, territory, kinship. To treat philosophy as an anthropological object, then, an object to explore in order to know ourselves, is perhaps the least that can be done. To treat philosophy as an anthropological object seeking to interrupt the gesture not of a teleological understanding of history, but of a racial order that continues to produce reality today.

89 Fanon 2004, p. 239.

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