

Hegel and the Antidialectic

This work, using the case study of the Haitian Revolution, positions Paul C. Mocombe's theory of antidialectic within Hegel's dialectical reasoning. Mocombe posits that the antidialectical position in Hegel's dialectic is the position of each self-consciousness when they initially encounter each other at the onset of the master/slave dialectic. Whereas, the master seeks to move to the dialectical position in order to dominate and eliminate the original (antidialectical) position of the slave, the slave remains in this antidialectical position so long as they seek to fight against their enslavement for the purpose of maintaining and reproducing their original, antidialectical, position, which is social, political, economic, and ideological. In any other instances, they (the slaves) are either in the dialectical, seeking to maintain the status quo, or negative dialectical, seeking to integrate the status quo on equal footing with the master, positions.

Keywords: *African-Americanization, phenomenological structuralism, Vodou, religiosity, black diaspora, dialectical, anti-dialectical, Haitian epistemology, Vilokan/Haitian idealism*

Introduction

This work, using the case of the Haitian Revolution, positions Paul C. Mocombe's (2019) theory of antidialectic within Hegel's dialectical reasoning. Mocombe posits that the antidialectical position in Hegel's dialectic is the position of each self-consciousness when they initially encounter each other at the onset of the master/slave dialectic. Whereas the master seeks to move from their antidialectical to the dialectical position in order to dominate and eliminate the original (antidialectical) position of the slave; the slave remains in this antidialectical position so long as they choose death and seek to fight against their enslavement for the purpose of maintaining and reproducing their original, antidialectical, position, which is social, political, ideological, and economic. In any other instances, they (the slaves) are either in the dialectical or negative dialectical positions. In the former position, dialectical, the slave seeks to maintain the status quo in order to stay alive; in the latter, negative dialectical position (which is itself still a dialectical position), made famous by the theorists of the Frankfurt School, the slave seeks to integrate the status quo by convicting the master for not identifying with their (antidialectical) values as it should be applied to not only the master but the slave, who has attained self-consciousness within the dialectic, as well.

1 Background of the Problem

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3 Hegel's master/slave dialectic highlights the initial encounter of two self-
4 consciousness and their unfolding interactions. As in the case of CLR James's
5 work, *Black Jacobins*, Susan Buck Morss (2009) in her work, *Hegel, Haiti, and*
6 *Universal History* attempts to understand the originating moments of the
7 Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) metaphorically through Hegel's master/slave
8 dialectic. Suggesting, in fact, that it is the case of Haiti that Hegel utilized to
9 constitute the metaphor:

10
11 Given the facility with which this dialectic of lordship and bondage lends itself to
12 such a reading, one wonders why the topic Hegel and Haiti has for so long been
13 ignored. Not only have Hegel scholars failed to answer this question; they have
14 failed, for the past two hundred years, even to ask it (2009, pg. 56).

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16 My position here is that James's and Morss's (dialectical) conclusions do
17 not hold true for the Africans who met at Bois Caïman, the originating
18 moments of the revolution, and only holds true for the case of the *Affranchis*,
19 mulatto elites and creole blacks, of Haiti—who usurped, following their
20 assassination of Jean-Jacques Dessalines (the leader of the Revolution who
21 declares Haiti an independent nation in 1804), the originating moments of the
22 Revolution from the Africans who met at Bois Caïman—who, in choosing to
23 rebel against their former masters, were not risking death to avoid subjugation,
24 but in rebelling were choosing life in order to be like the master and subjugate
25 the Africans (pejoratively referred to as *Bossales* by the *Affranchis*) by
26 recursively organizing and reproducing the (mercantilist and liberal) ideals of
27 their former white slavemasters. Hence, whereas the Africans (who constituted
28 sixty-seven percent of the population with the onset of the Revolution)
29 remained in what I am calling here the antidialectical position, which is the
30 original position of encountering in Hegel's master/slave dialectic, the
31 *Affranchis* and the white French masters would constitute Hegel's master/slave
32 dialectic, in the dialectical and negative dialectical positions, at the expense of
33 the Africans of Haiti, which they both have been seeking to subjugate since
34 slavery and the revolution. This work highlights the antidialectical position,
35 which scholars have ignored in favor of understanding the dialectical and
36 negative dialectical positions of the French and *Affranchis*.

37 38 39 Theory

40
41 In Hegel's master/slave dialectic as Morss explains in relation to the
42 Haitian Revolution,

43
44 Hegel understands the position of the master in both political and economic
45 terms. In the *System der Sittlichkeit* (1803): "The master is in possession of an
46 overabundance of physical necessities generally, and the other [the slave] in the
47 lack thereof." At first consideration the master's situation is "independent, and

1 its essential nature is to be for itself”; whereas “the other,” the slave’s position,
 2 “is dependent, and its essence is life or existence for another.” The slave is
 3 characterized by the lack of recognition he receives. He is viewed as “a thing”;
 4 “thinghood” is the essence of slave consciousness—as it was the essence of his
 5 legal status under the *Code Noir*. But as the dialectic develops, the apparent
 6 dominance of the master reverses itself with his awareness that he is in fact
 7 totally dependent on the slave. One has only to collectivize the figure of the
 8 master in order to see the descriptive pertinence of Hegel’s analysis: the
 9 slaveholding class is indeed totally dependent on the institution of slavery for the
 10 “overabundance” that constitutes its wealth. This class is thus incapable of being
 11 the agent of historical progress without annihilating its own existence. But then
 12 the slaves (again, collectivizing the figure) achieve self-consciousness by
 13 demonstrating that they are not things, not objects, but subjects who transform
 14 material nature. Hegel’s text becomes obscure and falls silent at this point of
 15 realization. But given the historical events that provided the context for *The*
 16 *Phenomenology of Mind*, the inference is clear. Those who once acquiesced to
 17 slavery demonstrate their humanity when they are willing to risk death rather
 18 than remain subjugated. The law (the *Code Noir*!) that acknowledges them
 19 merely as “a thing” can no longer be considered binding, although before,
 20 according to Hegel, it was the slave himself who was responsible for his lack of
 21 freedom by initially choosing life over liberty, mere self-preservation. In *The*
 22 *Phenomenology of mind*, Hegel insists that freedom cannot be granted to slaves
 23 from above. The self-liberation of the slave is required through a “trial by
 24 death”: “And it is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained...The individual,
 25 who has not staked his life, may, no doubt, be recognized as a Person [the agenda
 26 of the abolitionists!]; but he has not attained the truth of his recognition as an
 27 independent self-consciousness.” The goal of this liberation, out of slavery,
 28 cannot be subjugation of the master in turn, which would be merely to repeat the
 29 master’s “existential impasse,” but, rather, elimination of the institution of
 30 slavery altogether (53-56).

31
 32 The Africans at Bois Caïman, given that they were directly from Africa
 33 when they commenced the Revolution and already recursively reproducing
 34 their African practical consciousness (the libertarian communism of the Vodou
 35 Ethic and the spirit of communism) in the maroon community of Bois Caïman,
 36 and elsewhere, away from the master/slave dialectic of whites, neither cared
 37 for the master, nor his structuring metaphysics, but instead wanted to be free to
 38 exercise their African practical consciousness, their original antidialectical
 39 position of encountering, which would be precarious, given the possibility of
 40 their re-enslavement if captured, by whites and the *Affranchis*, who also
 41 practiced slavery, remained on the island. In essence, the events at Bois
 42 Caïman represented an attempt by the Africans to push for their already
 43 determining independent African self-consciousness (the antidialectical
 44 position of encountering of their Vodou Ethic and spirit of communism, which
 45 was social, political, economic, and ideological) against the whites and
 46 *Affranchis*’s dependent self-consciousness which sought to either repeat the
 47 masters’ “existential impasse,” the dialectical position; or convict it of its
 48 nonidentitarian logic, the negative dialectical position.

1 The African position, as such, represents the antidialectical position, and
 2 the Affranchis the dialectical and negative dialectical ones of Hegel's
 3 master/slave position and the Frankfurt school's, respectively. The former,
 4 antidialectical position, as highlighted by the lakouism of the Vodou Ethic and
 5 the spirit of communism of the participants of Bois Caiman, characterized by
 6 its Vodou religion and communal/subsistence living, is the original position of
 7 the Africans in their encountering with white French consciousness, and the
 8 latter two the subjugated consciousness of the mulatto elites and petit-
 9 bourgeois creole blacks on the island looking to either remain slaves (the
 10 dialectical position) or achieve master status (the antidialectical position) by
 11 convicting the white slavemasters for not recognizing the potentiality of the
 12 slave to become master according to their (liberal) rules of conduct, which are
 13 sanctioned.

14
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16 **Discussion and Conclusions**

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18 Traditional interpretations of the Haitian Revolution attempt to understand
 19 the sociohistorical phenomena within the negative dialectical and dialectical
 20 logic of Hegel's master/slave dialectic of the Affranchis (James, 1986; Du
 21 Bois, 2004; Buck-Morss, 2009). Concluding that the Revolution represents a
 22 dialectical and negative dialectical struggle by the enslaved Africans, who have
 23 internalized the (liberal) rules of their masters, for equality of opportunity,
 24 recognition, and distribution within and using the metaphysical discourse of
 25 their former white masters to either remain slaves (the dialectical position) or
 26 convict them (the antidialectical position) for not identifying with their norms,
 27 rules, and values as recursively organized and reproduced by blacks. This
 28 traditional liberal bourgeois interpretation of the Haitian revolution attempts to
 29 understand its denouement through the sociopolitical effects of the French
 30 Revolution when the National Constituent Assembly (*Assemblée Nationale*
 31 *Constituante*) of France passed *la Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du*
 32 *citoyen* or the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen in August of 1789.
 33 The understanding from this perspective is that the masses of enslaved
 34 Africans, many of whom could not read or write French, understood the
 35 principles, philosophical and political principles of the Age of Enlightenment,
 36 set forth in the declaration and therefore yearned to be like their white masters,
 37 i.e., freemen seeking liberty, equality, and fraternity, the rallying cry of the
 38 French Revolution.

39 Although, historically this dialectical, and its negative dialectical
 40 counterpart, understanding holds true for the mulattoes and free petit-bourgeois
 41 (creole) blacks or *Affranchis* who, interpellated and embourgeoisé by whites,
 42 used the language of the declaration to push forth their efforts to gain liberty,
 43 equality, fraternity with their white counterparts as slaveholders and masters as
 44 brilliantly highlighted by Du Bois (2004). This position, I posit here, is not an
 45 accurate representation for the Africans who met at Bois Caiman, the
 46 originating moments of the Haitian Revolution, who were and remained in

1 their original antidialectical position of their encountering with the white
2 French and Affranchis.

3 This purposive-rationality of the *Affranchis*, to adopt the ontological and
4 epistemological positions of whites by recursively organizing and reproducing
5 their language and ways of being-in-the-world, through a dialectical and
6 negative dialectical struggle between free-trade and mercantilism, is, however,
7 a Western liberal dialectical understanding of the events and their desire to be
8 like their white counterparts, which stands against the anti-dialectical purposive
9 rationality, which emerged out of the African/Haitian Epistemology,
10 Vilokan/Haitian Idealism, of Boukman Dutty, Cecile Fatiman, of the rest of the
11 maroon Africans who congregated for the Petwo Vodou ceremony at Bois
12 Caïman/ Bwa Kayiman. In fact, the dialectical and negative dialectical
13 approaches of the *Affranchis* have undermined the Revolution and turned Haiti
14 into a periphery state within the contemporary capitalist world-system where
15 the masses are exploited by the latter, who negative dialectically appeal to the
16 West for equality of opportunity, recognition, and distribution within the (neo)
17 liberal global order. Conversely, the Haitian Revolution as initiated on August
18 14th, 1791 at Bois Caïman by Boukman Dutty and Mambo Cecile Fatiman was
19 led by various representatives of African nations, who constituted sixty-seven
20 percent of the population at the onset of the Revolution, seeking to recursively
21 reorganize and reproduce their (antidialectical) African practical-
22 consciousness/thesis, the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism, which
23 emerges out of their African ontology and epistemology, Vilokan/Haitian
24 Idealism, in the world against the bourgeois liberalism of whites and the
25 mulatto or *Affranchis* class of Haiti, who would subsequently, with the
26 assassination of the *houngan*, Vodou priest, Jean-Jacques Dessalines in 1806,
27 undermine that attempt for a more liberal purposive-rationale, similarly to their
28 former slavemasters, which would reintroduce wage-slavery and peonage on
29 the island.

30 Future research must explore Haiti's history and its continuous
31 subjugation as a periphery state within the global capitalist world-system under
32 American hegemony within this continuous dialectical and negative dialectical
33 struggle of the *Affranchis*, now augmented with a Syrian minority, who,
34 contemporarily, are seeking to integrate Haiti in the capitalist world-system
35 through tourism, sports and entertainment, and industrial production against the
36 lakou system of the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism, their original
37 antidialectical position, of the majority of the Africans who are dominated and
38 led by a black professional managerial class seeking wealth through the control
39 of the latter process by securing authority and legitimation of the political
40 process and its ideological apparatuses.

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