

CRITICAL NOTES ON HEGEL'S TREATMENT OF AFRICA

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Abstract

This paper interrogates the adequacy of Hegel's cultural framework upon which he constructed a philosophy of history which excludes Africa from the scheme of things. In what follows, I argue that the Hegelian dialectic is a project aimed at the exclusion of Africa from the universal history, leading to certain problematic theses like the Hegelian thesis on slavery, which is connected to the problem of class formation and his concept of the state. This paper is therefore a refutation of the Hegelian position, drawing insights from Senghor's discussion of *Negritude* as a geo-climatic contextualized ideology.

Introduction

George W.F. Hegel presents an extraordinary interpretation of world history in *The Philosophy of History*.¹ For Hegel, History is the progression of the World Spirit (Absolute Mind, that which was before the world, God as He is in Himself) as it manifests itself in man while coming to exist in the world. Once in the world, spirit yearns for actualization and self-authentication – to make itself what it can become. This sort of spiritual thriving of the self involves some levels of entanglement of the stream of consciousness with the dialectical order.

Any entanglement with Hegel's axiomatic accentuations on the manifestation of the self must come to terms with his emphasis on the different stages of the manifestation of the Absolute spirit's consciousness. Thus, his discovery of the different stages in the developing consciousness of Spirit is a by-product of his studying the development of state. While theorizing on the conceptual planes of the dichotomy between East and West, Hegel identifies four historical worlds – Oriental, Greek, Roman and German. In each of these worlds, the progressive series of consciousnesses of spirit has

its manifestation while the rest of civilization looks on. For Hegel, therefore, any historical system should treat Africa as a land where consciousness has not yet attained to the realization of any objective existence. Our task in this paper is to delve into Hegel's philosophical system and examine his treatment of Africa within that system.

Hegel's Negation of Africa from History and Civilization

Africa is not among Hegel's four cultures or civilizations. From Hegel's perspective, Africa is said to be unhistorical; undeveloped spirit – still involved in the conditions of mere nature; devoid of morality, religions and political constitution.² Hence he holds that there is a justification for Europe's enslavement and colonization of Africa. For him, slavery causes the "increase of human feeling among the Negroes." Due to his theses on Africa, Hegel is rejected by many black scholars. His work on Africa is said to glorify Ancient Greece, while it ignominiously and grotesquely denigrates Africans, whom he sees as children in the forest, unaffected by the movement of history. Joseph Harris holds that Hegel's "ignominious pronouncements" on Africa are "a great contribution to the stereotypic image of Black people."³ However, Charles C. Verharen offers the keenest criticism in his essay "The New World and the Dream to Which It May Give Rise: An African and American Response to Hegel's Challenge."⁴ In this work, Verharen marks a pleasant display of erudition and a revenge for all Blacks who are offended by Hegel's denigration of their race.

Furthermore, it is important to bring to the fore Hegel's analysis on Africa, which entails three major distinctions; he divides Africa into three parts: i. Africa proper – the territory that lies south of the Sahara; ii. European Africa – that which lies north of the Sahara; and iii. Egypt – the territory that is connected to Asia. Hegel refers to "Africa Proper" as "the land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night."⁵ He also holds that "in Negro life the characteristic

point is the fact that consciousness has not yet attained to the realization of any substantial objective existence.”⁶ Therefore, the African has not reached the level of realizing his own being; he has not yet realized his person. In Hegel’s words, the African is “natural man in his completely wild and untamed state.”⁷

Hegel’s notion of anthropology offers a better insight into his conception of Africa. “Anthropology”, for Hegel, is the study of the soul, the lowest conceivable phase of mind, still trapped in nature, bonded to the body, and barely above the level of animality. Soul is that level at which Spirits sleeps, active only within itself, at one with the environment.⁸ He identifies a tripartite phases of the soul, namely, the natural soul, the feeling soul, and the actual soul. The natural soul is the absolute beginning of Spirit, although unconscious, it is completely influenced by its environment. The feeling soul is the all-inclusive outcome of the accumulation of sensations – sense experience, passion, and emotion. Lastly, the actual soul is the awakening of the “I.” Here the soul transcends the natural world, regarding it as objective and alien to itself. It has become thought and subject-for-itself. Thus consciousness is actualized only when the soul has moved through these stages.⁹ For this reason, Hegel begins his discussion of history with the Oriental World, characterized by substantiality, that which is determined by self, an independent being of its own. For him, Africa has not reached the level of the actual soul. From the Hegelian perspective, the African is still under the influence of nature. Hence Africa proper has no role in the world history. Until it attains the level where it can transcend the influence of the environment, at the minimal level of consciousness, Africa proper is unable to fit within Hegel’s philosophical scheme.

Africa: Beyond Hegel’s Anthropological Assumptions

Upon critical examination of Hegel’s thoughts on Africa, we can demonstrate contraHegel that Africa is part of the World Spirit on a higher level than Hegel presumes. Does it make any geographical, historical, or cultural sense to divide Africa into three parts? European ethnocentrism traps itself in contradictions by racially

implying “that the real Africa is south of the Sahara,”¹⁰ while geographically asserting that Africa is a continent. Africa is indeed a continent. In addition, the term “European Africa” is nonexistent. Europe and Africa are two distinct continents. Thus, as stressed by Cheikh Anta Diop, Egypt is neither connected to nor influenced by Asia. Since prehistoric times, Black Africans have been existent at the territory north of the Sahara.¹¹

These Hegelian theses, presenting Africa as the domain of the sensual and empiric, are also found in Senghor in a slightly modified form. The order of abstraction does not fall within Negroes’ province. Thus, following a maieutic thought, Senghor asks, “The Negroes?” “Do you think that we (Negroes) will ever be able to beat Europeans in mathematics?”¹² He adds even more clarifications: “To be precise, I have the impression that indigenous people in French West Africa, *exceptis excipiendis*, have more gifts for the arts and humanities than for the sciences.”¹³ According to Senghor, science requires abstract thought and rigorous logic. Negroes are more attached to concrete things. Indeed, Senghor, for the sake of validating Blackness by affirming its specificity, did not hesitate to reproduce the prejudices of an era when Egyptology was in its infancy and, thus, ignored the fact that Ancient Egypt, located in the northeast of the African continent, was peopled by Negroes and that its impressive civilization was the product of Negroes’ spirit.¹⁴

Senghor’s Negritude, Geo-Climatic Determinism and the Refutation of Hegel

Conceptually speaking, ideologies such as Négritude offer a general theory of the African, which can be explored to refute the Hegelian theses on Africa. By affirming a so-called absolute specificity of Africa, Hegel deduced a structural lethargy and a lack of civilization in Africa. Paradoxically, African intellectuals who opposed Hegel saw in his theses all the elements they needed to affirm and justify the existence of a specific African civilization that is irremediably opposed to the European one, hence Amadi A. Dieng’s (1975) term of

“Afro-Hegelianism.”¹⁵ The only difference here is that what Hegel proposes as an absolute lack is considered absolute asset by Negritude.

With Senghor, Negritude becomes a general theory of the African. It is a coherent and systematic ensemble of ideas that first reflects a reaction to the colonial past and, second, humanism that transcends racial particularisms to reach the Civilization of the Universal.¹⁶ However, Negritude is most often glimpsed through race and psychology. Senghor stresses the racial specificities peculiar to all people of African descent, the basic theme being the “Black soul,” only possessed by people of African descent. Senghor advocates the African’s unique culture, strong degree of emotion and sensuality, and the Negro’s natural inclination to art and rhythm. To defend his position, he introduces the idea of a geo-climatic determinism, which allows him to bring in a historical analysis, and shows that psychology and race developed in well-determined geo-climatic contexts that are not a temporal but historically situated.

The geo-climatic universe of the African Paleolithic explains the sensitivity possessed by Africans. The geography and climate that have produced the African type have been transformed over the years. Africans spread over various lands and climates. But for Senghor, they remain identical in cultural sentiments to the original Africans. The eternal Africans, thus, were born in an extremely favorable environment. In his *The Foundations of “Africanité” or “Négritude” and “Arabité,”* Senghor notes, in contrast to the science of Cheikh Anta Diop in *Civilization or Barbarism* that Africans appeared 40,000 years ago and evolved in a kind of terrestrial paradise. They were living in the kingdom of abundance, in permanent contact with beings and things, in a generous nature. They learned to love nature in which they were living. Their senses were all geared toward beings and things, in an outburst of love and sympathy.

Senghor writes, “It is a joy to live, for all things are close by and easy, even all beings: air, water and wind, tree and bird, fish and animal. In the youthful vigor of his body, the elation of his senses,

Homo-sapiens is open to all objects, to all contacts, to all appeals, and even to the slightest whisper.”¹⁷ This Homo-sapiens, of course, is a Negro. More explicitly, he says, “Thus the Negro-African, Homo-sapiens, lived first in the terrestrial paradise of the high plateaus, where beings and things, especially the trees, were abundant, accessible, and friendly. So it is that good neighbourly and then links of friendship were sealed between nature and the Negro-African.”¹⁸

From this interpretation of Negritude, it is quite obvious that nature’s generosity, combined with the tropical climate, has shaped Negroes’ souls and, more particularly, their sensitivity, for “the Negro-African is a man of nature. The abundant environment gave him a heightened sensuality.”¹⁹ Therefore, Africa was this rich continent but shut up to external currents. Hegel has already expressed this position: “Africa proper is the gold-land compressed within itself – the land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of night. Its isolated character originates, not merely in its tropical nature, but essentially in its geographical conditions.”²⁰ For Hegel, Africa’s isolation resides not only in the African but mostly in an inaccessible geographical environment. Now this serves as the basis for further Hegelian denigration and description of Africa thus:

A griddle of marshland with the most luxuriant vegetation, the especial home of ravenous beasts, snakes of all kinds—a border whose atmosphere is poisonous to Europeans. This border constitutes the base of a cincture of high mountains, which are only at distant intervals traversed by streams, and where they are so, in such a way as to form no means of union with the interior.²¹

This isolation excludes Africa from the theater of history which in Hegel’s mind consists in the European world. Hegel affirms, “For [Africa] is no historical part of the world; it has no movement or

development to exhibit,"²² as a result of which Negroes cannot accede to the notion of objectivity. Even when they distinguish themselves from nature, they are still at an inferior level in the processes of humanization because they are overwhelmed with sensations, instincts, and passions. Hegel states,

In Negro life the characteristic point is that consciousness has not yet attained to the realization of any substantial objective existence—as for example, God, or Law—in which the interest of man's volition is involved and in which he realizes his own being. This distinction between himself as an individual and the universality of his essential being, the African in the uniform, undeveloped oneness of his existence has not yet attained; so that the knowledge of an absolute Being, an Other and a Higher than his individual self, is entirely wanting. The Negro, as already observed, exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state.²³

Hence, Africans are excluded from the philosophical sphere. They have not reached the ability to seize the concept in its objectivity and universality, because the concept is expression and reality of the essence. Negroes' consciousness cannot reach an abstract level because Africa is outside the idea that becomes consciousness. Rather, that idea is Europe and more precisely Greece, the cradle of sciences and philosophy and the beginning of reason and history. Hegel declares, "Greece presents to us the cheerful aspect of youthful freshness, of Spiritual vitality. It is here first that advancing Spirit makes *itself* the content of its volition and its knowledge."²⁴ It is pertinent to state that Hegel's thesis on Africa was not restricted to the subject matter of history; it extends to other areas of the African experience like moral understanding and the history of slavery in Africa. We shall look at these other areas in what follows.

Hegel on African Morality and Religion

Like the concept of Anthropology, Hegel does not express the concept of morality in its usual pattern. His perspective is purely subjective – excluding all positive duties in connection with the family, society and the state, all of which are objective institutions.²⁵ For him, morality, like the soul, passes through three dialectical phases, namely: purpose and intention, well-being and ill-condition, and goodness and wickedness. Purpose is the acceptance of known consequences for the individual's action and for which the individual assumes responsibility. Intention and well-being compose the special character of the action, that is, the particular end and its value for the individual. However, these first two phases do not constitute morality; morality comes into existence when these two phases coincide with the *universal will*. Hence the third face - goodness and wickedness. Goodness is rational action, universal reason; wickedness is unreasonable action in opposition to universal reason. Since the individual is a rational being, he finds within his own reason universal reason that is the good and that is the attitude of conscience. Therefore, morality is a conscious act of the will.²⁶

Since “Africa proper” has not attained the minimal level of consciousness – actual soul – and morality is a conscious act of the will, Hegel holds that “we must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality . . . if we would rightly comprehend him (the African).”²⁷ He adds, “among the Negroes moral sentiments are quite weak, or more strictly speaking, non-existent.”²⁸ Can we accept Hegel's statements at face value, considering that his conclusions are based on missionaries' accounts? Hegel believes that morality is born from consciousness, and the latter is the awakening of the “I.” Since “I” is universal, concurrently, morality is universal. In addition, morality is an act of the will that constitutes morality as action. Thus, as it is for Hegel, so it is for the African.

In African culture, the existence of the individual is the existence of the corporate. Therefore, “the individual is conscious of himself in terms of I am because we are, and because we are

therefore I am.”²⁹ It follows that the African is conscious of his existence, conscious of the I. “The essence of African morality is that it is societal,” – and based on what an individual does – “rather than that he does what he does because of what he is.”³⁰ Therefore, African morality is universal – societal – and the consequence of action – what a person does. This concept of African morality and consciousness is not just peculiar to an African society, but typical of African culture on a continental scale.³¹ Therefore, Hegel’s assertion that the African has not reached the necessary level of consciousness and thus devoid of morality is unattainable.

In the same vein like the soul and morality, Hegel discourses religion in three phases: i. natural religion, ii. the religion of spiritual individuality, and iii. absolute religion—Christianity. Hegel holds that “religion is the manifestation of the Absolute in the form of picture-thought”³²—art. Under natural religion, Spirit bonded to nature, existing first as a crude form of magic and then passing into objective reality – substance, in which religion is pantheistic, and finally, culminating in spiritual individuality where God is recognized as spirit and personal. The third and final phase—Christianity—is where God and humanity are reconciled, or in other words, the unity of God and humanity is established.

Based on Hegel’s conception of religion and his reference to religion in Africa, it follows that the African exists within the realm of natural religion. Hegel accuses Africans being sorcerers, not yet conscious of a Higher Power. The African religious practices are said to be characterized by fetishism; with the worship of the dead, and “death itself is looked upon by the Negroes as no universal natural law.”³³ For Hegel, “it follows that he (the African) has no respect for himself; for only with the consciousness of a higher being does he reach a point of view which inspires him with real reverence.”³⁴

It is of importance we note that European scholars have described African religion in terms as *dynamism*, *totemism*, *tetishism*, and *naturalism*. These terms display the misunderstanding by Europeans of African religion. African culture and civilization in general have been subjected to fragrant misinterpretation, blatant

misrepresentation, and total misunderstanding. As pointed out by Mbiti, African religions “have been despised, mocked, and dismissed as primitive and underdeveloped,”³⁵ disparaged and “condemned as superstition, satanic, devilish and hellish”³⁶ without the least recognition that African “traditional religions have survived, they dominate the background of African peoples, and must be reckoned with even the middle of modern changes.”³⁷

From the African view point, religion is an ontological experience; God – the Highest Power, force or energy – is the origin and sustenance of all things. Africans conceive God as the Supreme Being, which is elevated to an exceptionally philosophical level as rich as that of Hegel. All phenomena, for the African, had their origin in a living reality or consciousness that had no beginning and no end, existing from eternity to eternity—infinite. What Hegel refers to as fetishism and sorcery, the African perceives as a universal power or force emanating from God. Hence, as *miracles* are inseparable from Christianity, fetishism and sorcery are facets of African religion. However, sorcery stands as antisocial behaviour and intolerable within African communities.³⁸

Hegel’s reference to the worship of the death is in actuality a symbolic gesture made by the African. Rather than worship, it is a means by which the departed are remembered, just as communion and the veneration of the saints are symbolic gestures. Thus the dead are an integral part of African culture. Due to Hegel’s assumption that Africans have no respect for a Higher Being, he holds that they lack respect for themselves or humanity. “The undervaluing of humanity among them (the Africans) reaches an incredible degree of intensity.”³⁹ Rather, what Hegel fails to understand is the African’s attitude toward the person, deeply interwoven in his religion. He lacks the comprehensions of how the African translates into experience a given evaluation of the person and how this evaluation shapes the African’s behaviour or thought. The African begins with the premise that the person is a self-defining value, which is a mutual experience present in every person. Hence, the person does not and

cannot exist of himself, nor by himself; he originates from and exists in a social cluster.⁴⁰ As the person defines himself, so does the social cluster define itself. Therefore, the African “developed a dimension of consanguinity which enabled the person to regard his neighbor as the reverse side of a phenomenon to which he, the person, was the obverse.”⁴¹

Thus far, we can play the African attitude to the person within Hegel's conception of Right, which says, “Be a person and respect others as persons.”⁴² For Hegel, “What constitutes a person and gives him rights is not mere consciousness, but self-consciousness.”⁴³ Therefore, through the mutual respect for others as self-defining persons, the African see himself in others, his own reflected being; this is self-consciousness. It does follows that Hegel's assumption that the African lacks consciousness of a higher power and no respect for himself or humanity is not tenable. This brings us Hegel's consideration of slavery and class formation in Africa in his philosophy of history.

Slavery and Class Formation

Like many other continents, Africa has experienced its own share of human bondage. However, slavery as Hegel explains it has never existed in Africa. Hegel states,

Another characteristic fact in reference to Negroes is slavery... Among Negroes,... parents sell their children, and conversely children their parents, as either has the opportunity... The polygamy of the Negroes has frequently for its object the having many children, to be sold, every one of them, into slavery (the king of Dahomey had 3,333 wives). . . . Viewed in the light of such facts, we may conclude *slavery* to have been the occasion of the increase of human feeling among the Negroes.⁴⁴

The majority of sources agree on the total opposite of Hegel's theses. Slaves in Africa—and this without any value judgment—were, more than anywhere else, integrated into social life. They were neither pushed aside nor reduced to mere means of production as in a slave regime. As Pathé Diagne says, “Slaves are not, as in the Greco-Roman or Asian world, a pure relation of exploitation. For a long time, the institutionalization of slavery has met fierce opposition.”⁴⁵

According to Diop, Basil Davidson, Paul Bohannon, Philip Curtin, Colin Turnbull, and most Africanists, traditional African societies downplay isolation and individualism and emphasize communities based on strong family relationships. In these societies, all members are regarded as part of an extended family, making the selling of relatives unacceptable.⁴⁶ Human bondage did exist in Africa, but it was a local serfdom, very different from the large-scale monopolized commerce of human beings. The purpose of the Arab and European system of slavery was to provide plantations, mines, and factories with a forced and free labor.

According to Diagne, human bondage in Africa was primarily social and political not economical. “Political and economic rights are granted to all social categories no matter what order, cast or corporation they belong to.”⁴⁷ Thus slaves have the potentiality to move up into the ranks of free people. They were granted land (for life in many parts of Africa) to cultivate for their own use. They could marry other slaves, and their children would be free citizens. Slaves often occupied important positions in society. They were used in domestic and also in political and military activities. However, as Diagne stresses, it appears that it is only with the advent of the Triangular Commerce, better known as the Atlantic slave trade—connected to the expansion of capitalism—that a neat systematization of slavery started to take place in Africa. The historian J. D. Fage states,

There seems in fact to have been a close connection between economic development and the growth of

slavery within West African society...The commercial revolutions initiated in Guinea by the Atlantic slave trade, and in the Sudan by the trans-Saharan trade, seem undoubtedly to have influenced the formation in West Africa of a new way...which approximated more closely to the idea of chattel slavery.⁴⁸

Diagne explains that, in fact, pre-Islamic and pre-colonial Black Africa, especially less urbanized rural societies, was essentially based on “a horizontal and not vertical democracy, meaning under popular forms of power operating through legalistic, conservative and in egalitarian regimes and castes. It excludes anarchy and upholds order; this will be its strength and perhaps its weakness.”⁴⁹

For Diagne, this explains the relative nature of the imperial power because it could be subject to contestation or even sanctions at any time. The level of differentiation and structures of African societies can only explain such a sociopolitical order. The analysis of such processes leads us to the socioeconomic genesis of African States, more precisely, the centralized West African ones, for they are of great historical significance. They neatly indicate that traditional Africa never escaped from the reality of class antagonism, thus undermining the Négritudist position. Class antagonism is often understood as a violent conflict between social groups with fundamentally divergent economic interests. This could be a unilateral perspective. The conflict does not reside in the fact that these very classes do not have economic relations. On the contrary, they do. But those very relations are contradictory because they are based on exploitation and unequal interests. Therefore, social inequality is indicative of class antagonism.

However, this inequality, at least at the beginning, does not necessarily lead to obvious conflicts. Initially, it remains latent and can only be perceived in the will of concerned groups and in their efforts to organize themselves in order to avoid anarchy. At that time appear orders, castes, and finally classes as so many organic

expressions of social inequality. The concerned groups try to institutionalize them (that is, to give a legal form and therefore make them acceptable for the entire society). However, this organization, because it necessarily stems from the initiative of groups in high positions and who want to preserve their own social benefits, cannot but reflect the interests of such groups. Even if such organization shows some form of harmony and collaboration among groups, it still expresses class antagonism—not yet visible—in its very principle. Pierre Fougeyrollas tells us,

Under the co-existence of ethnic shepherds and peasants, under their hierarchized co-existence of orders and castes, Sahelo-Sudanese societies have experienced the latent or obvious, repressed or exacerbated process of class struggle; the fact has been that sacerdotal or warlike noble families have controlled peasant and pastoral production... Even when traditional African law in general did not consider lands and cattle private properties, they have remained, in fact, at the disposal of some people who set themselves up as masters of the majority.⁵⁰

What happens is that those very few whose official functions are to divide the economic resources have, every time, seized on the surplus production, thus progressively detaching themselves from the productive mass. They gradually become a layer of privileged non producers and, consequently, make up the state apparatus in Africa. As well explained by Dieng, this economic surplus—which is the state's objective foundation—is linked to the exploitation of the vast resources offered by the great rivers of Senegal and Niger. Dieng shows how, in Africa,

the alluvial valleys of Sénégal and Niger have favored, in certain areas, the existence of a double crop, which creates an economic surplus likely to engender social differentiations. . . . Their valleys are favorable zones for cattle breeding, agriculture, fishing, hunting and the practice of craftsmanship. . . . They have been contact zones between populations of various ways of life. The commercial cities of Gao, Timbuktu, Djenne, and Tekrur grew out of those very locations.⁵¹

Thus appears, maybe partially, African reality in its authenticity. What is proven is that Africa is not and has never been a static continent, impervious to historic movement. Like other societies, it has experienced upward historical processes as explained by Diop's *Precolonial Black Africa* (1987) and *Antériorité des Civilizations Nègres* (1967/1974).⁵² Another important aspect of Hegel's thought to consider is its implications for the state and social structures especially the relation of the substructure to the human consciousness.

Africa in Hegel's Discourse of State and Social Structures

Here, we shall bring to the fore some of the implications of Hegel's treatment of Africa in his idea of history. For Hegel, in its general form, the state is not "an embodiment of rational freedom, realizing and recognizing itself in an objective form."⁵³ Its particular form in Africa is not "the idea of the Spirit in the external manifestation of human will and its Freedom."⁵⁴ Contrary to Hegel's views, Karl Marx sees that the existence of the state—no matter what level—necessarily indicates differentiated or protagonist social classes. Marx's perspective is to study the state issue in its historic relations with the economic mode of production and forms of propriety. He says, "The State exists only for the sake of private property."⁵⁵ Because the state is the form in which the concerned groups assert their common interests, "it follows that the State

mediates in the formation of all common institutions and that the institutions receive a political form.”⁵⁶

Therefore, the state is only the expression and reflection of the socioeconomic reality at the political level, hence, the role of the state as the political instrument of economic domination. Its structure and function are comprehensible only when related to socioeconomic structures, which it aims at consolidating. For Marx, the state is only the organic expression of the contradictory process of production and reproduction of the means of existence, proper to all class societies. The state is explicable only in reference to a society’s internal movement. According to Frederick Engels,

The State is, therefore, by no means a power forced on society from without; just as little is it “the reality of the ethical idea,” “the image and reality of reason,” as Hegel maintains. Rather it is a product of society at a certain stage of development; it is the admission that a society has become entangled in an insoluble contradiction with itself, that it is cleft into reconcilable antagonism which it is powerless to dispel. But in order that these antagonist classes with conflicting economic interests, might not consume themselves and society in sterile struggle, a power seemingly standing above society became necessary for the purpose of moderating the conflict, of keeping it within the bounds of “order”; and this power, arisen out of society, placing itself above it, and increasingly alienating itself from it, is the State.⁵⁷

However, as far as Africa is concerned—although the definition applies—the determination of the process of state emergence is even more complex. Two positions present themselves, both agreeing with Engels but conflicting with each other. The first group sees the

emergence of the state in Africa as endogenous and proper to Africa; the second explains the state in Africa from exogenous factors, the endogenous being secondary. The first position is a reaction to the second.

Starting with the second position, for authors such as Samir Amin or Coquery-Vidrovitch, external or international commerce gave birth to the state in Africa or more precisely to the centralized Sudanese empires of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai. Their position is based on the fact that these empires have had solid trade relations with mostly Arabs and partly with Europeans through trans-Saharan commerce. Theoretically, this stand corresponds to Marx's stressing the civilizing effect of external trade and its importance in the generalization of capitalist relationships in Europe. In this sense, Maurice Godelier affirms that "in West Africa, the emergence of the Ghana, Mali and Songhai empires seems to be linked to the tribal aristocrats' control on the exchange of precious products, gold, ivory, skins and so on, between Black and White Africa."⁵⁸

The refutation of this position is now the goal of the second group. The advocates of endogenous causes (Dieng, Diagne, and particular African philosophers) see the positing of commerce, circulation, exchange, and merchant relationships as being unable to found any social structure whatsoever. Unless one espouses a clear empiricist position, these elements are only simple effects, certainly dynamic and therefore influential at a secondary level, but are nonetheless external forms of more fundamental structures. Their argument is that production is the basis of all social and economic formation as explained in the principles of Marxism.⁵⁹ Production is the basic economic nucleus, which in its internal dynamic shapes circulation, exchanges, and consumption, which are only derivatives.

Thus, they formulate two critiques: i. Theoretically, it is erroneous to believe that exogenous forms of activity can generate an internal social process. From a Marxist point of view, asserting external phenomena to be determinant with respect to any social or natural reality would be ignoring dialectic and materialism. In such a view, each society necessarily has its own auto-dynamic internal

structures. Thus, explaining the internal dynamism by external phenomena reveals a deliberate ignorance of the notion of internal dynamism itself and, in so doing, rooting it to the spot and rejecting its real history; and, ii, theories stipulating that the law of supply and demand is a fundamental dynamic in Africa are risky, for they lead to the justification of exploitation in developing countries by capitalist powers.⁶⁰

Their mistake is to explain obvious relations of exploitation, established by the capitalist powers with underdeveloped countries, as “the deterioration of the terms of exchange.” Such socioeconomic theory of international relationships is mercantilist and assumes that rich and poor countries are equal partners and that only the terms need reworking. As Amin does, to affirm that external commerce gave birth to African states, is to deny any proper historical initiative to Africa. Such a perspective, considered from the political angle, is the justification needed by foreign powers to intervene in Africa, supposedly either to free African people or to get them out of underdevelopment. For Dieng, the exogenous position is just another form of Afro-Hegelianism:

Many scholars professing the most contradictory ideas agree to give international commerce an important role in the formation of the great Sudanese empires. This thesis, at the end, denies all historical initiatives of great importance to black people and is hinged with racism that does not always appear frankly.⁶¹

Hence we stand in close relation to Claude Lévi-Strauss when he warns against the temptation for “a piece-meal study of the diversity of human cultures, for that diversity depends less on the isolation of the various groups than on the relations between them”⁶² Both trends may be Marxist, but they seem to forget the flexibility and inclusive aspect of dialectic. If one is solely looking at Africa, endogenous

elements are the source of the state in Africa. But the continent is not some kind of self-sufficient island without connection with the rest of the world. If Africa is an integral part of the world, then its truth resides not only in itself, or in its proper history, but also in the historical system that contains it. Therefore, the advocates of exogenous factors see one historic process and not several, because capitalism—its movement in time and space—is the process that universalizes the particularity of its multiple contents and establishes a worldwide, unified historic process.

Conclusion

From all we have discovered so far, it appears Hegel is not aware of the implications of his theses on Africa. Hegel denies rationality to Africans, implying inferior racial considerations, with numerous damaging effects on the African milieu and social structures. The position of this paper is that such denigrating understanding of humanity as it relates to Africa must be refuted everywhere. Thus, we have been able to show, drawing insights from Senghor's negritude, a sort of geo-climatic determinism that refutes and challenges fundamentally Hegel's racially induced historic treatment of Africa.

As a philosophical treatise, Hegel's *Philosophy of History* disrespects Africa's contribution to civilization. His interpretation of Africa's place in world history is a gross misinterpretation. Traditional African culture is very complex, and Hegel's use of facts is not only questionable but shallow. His understanding of African culture is tainted, and his assumption – that the cultural characteristics of African people could only reach a significant level by contact with the outside world (Europe) – is a misconception that does not qualify as being historically valid, scientifically adequate, or culturally sound.

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NOTES

¹ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. H. Clarke (New York: Dover, 1956).

²Ronald Kuykendall, “Hegel and Africa: An Evaluation of the Treatment of Africa in the Philosophy of History” *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 4,(1993), p. 572.

³Joseph E. Harris, *Africans and their History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Mentor, 1987), p.19.

⁴Charles C. Verharen, “The New World and the Dreams to which it May Give Rise: An African and American Response to Hegel’s Challenge” in *Journal of Black Studies*, 27(4), 456-493, 1997.

⁵Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, p. 91.

⁶Ibid., p. 93.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Kuykendall, “Hegel and Africa,” p. 573.

⁹W.T. Stace, *The Philosophy of Hegel: A Systematic Exposition* (New York: Dover, 1955), p. 438. 1955.

¹⁰Ali A. Mazrui, *The African: A Triple Heritage* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1986), p. 25.

¹¹Cheikh A. Diop, 1974, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*, trans. M. Cook (Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill). pp. 101-102.

¹²L. S. Senghor, The Foundations of “Africanite” or “Negritude” and “Arabite,” trans. M. Cook, (Paris: PrésenceAfricaine, 1971), p. 12.

¹³Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁴Senghor was well aware of the anteriority of Black African civilizations. He says, “Egypt founded the first of the historical civilization. Europe have tried in vain to refuse it this honour. In any event, it is the first of African civilizations” (L. S. Senghor, 1971, p. 88).

¹⁵Cf. A. A. Dieng, *Hegel, Marx, Engels et les problèmes de l’Afrique noire (Hegel, Marx, Engels and the Problematic of Black Africa)*, Dakar, Senegal: Sankoré, 1975.

¹⁶*Civiliastion de l’Universal* is the universal civilization: the ultimate civilization that incorporates the special and unique aspects of all the cultures because it springs from the content and dialogue between cultures.

¹⁷Senghor, The Foundations of “Africanite” or “Negritude” and “Arabite”, p.50.

¹⁸Ibid. p. 51.

¹⁹Ibid.p. 202.

²⁰Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, p. 91.

²¹Ibid., p. 92.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid., p. 93.

²⁴Ibid., p. 223.

²⁵Stance, *The Philosophy of Hegel*, p. 395.

²⁶Ibid. p. 396.

²⁷Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, p. 93.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (New York: Anchor Books, 1970), p. 279.

³⁰Ibid., p. 279.

³¹Ibid.

³²Stace, *The Philosophy of Hegel*, p. 488.

³³Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, p. 95.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p. 13.

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⁴⁷Diagne, “*De la Démocratietraditionnelle*”, p. 24.

⁴⁸J. D. Fage, *A History of West Africa: An Introductory Survey* (4th ed.), (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 93.

⁴⁹Diagne, “*De la Démocratietraditionnelle*”, p. 93.

⁵⁰Pierre Fougeyrollas, “The Drought Challenge and the Struggle in Sudano-Sahelian Africa”, Seminar on Environment and Economy in Arid and Semi Arid Zones, Niamey (February 15-March 6, 1974), p. 5.

⁵¹A. A. Dieng, *Hegel, Marx, Engels et les problèmes de l’Afrique noire (Hegel, Marx, Engels and the Problematic of Black Africa)* (Dakar, Senegal: Sankoré, 1975), pp. 43-44.

⁵²BabacarCamara, “The Falsity of Hegel’s Theses on Africa,”p. 90.

⁵³Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, p. 155.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Karl Marx, “The German Ideology”, in *The Marx-Engel’s Reader*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1978, p. 178.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Frederick Engels, *The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State*, (New York: Pathfinder, 1979), pp. 158-159.

⁵⁸Maurice Godelier, "The Notion of 'Asain Mode of Production' and the Marxist Mode of Societal Evolution", Notebook for the Center for Marxist Studies and Research, (Paris: CERM: 1975), p.30.

⁵⁹Camara, "The Falsity of Hegel's Theses on Africa," p. 92.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Dieng, *Hegel, Marx, Engels et les problèmes de l'Afrique noire*, p. 30.

⁶²Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Race and History*, (Paris: UNESCO, 1968), p. 20.