

Hegel *contra* Hegel: Eurocentrism, Colonialism, and Progress

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate whether some of the Eurocentric and colonialist contents of Hegel's thought are open to criticism with elements of his own philosophy. First, I intend to show that some of these contents can be organized around the connection between 'spirit' and 'progress'. I then construct an interpretation of Hegel's notion of spirit, based upon which I discuss its possibly pro-colonialist tendencies, arguing that disconnected from the philosophy of history it establishes a connection of autonomy and critique crucial even for anti-colonialist thought. Furthermore, following Adorno's criticism of Hegel, I investigate the possibility of finding in the 'progress in the consciousness of freedom' an experiential dimension capable of capturing its regressive moments. This analysis then leads to a discussion of colonization in the reconstruction of capitalist society presented in the *Philosophy of Right*, which reveals an important discrepancy, so I argue, concerning the Eurocentrism of the *Philosophy of History*. Finally, I propose a comparison of Hegel's discussion of colonization with Marx's theory of 'primitive accumulation', and evaluate thereby the pertinence of Hegel's connection between imperialism and the critique of capitalism.

Part of the dialectic of progress is that historical setbacks, which themselves are instigated by the principle of progress [...] also provide the condition needed for humanity to find the means to avert them in the future. (Adorno 2005: 154)

Introduction

In this study, I intend to probe whether certain Eurocentric and colonialist contents of Hegel's thought allow themselves to be criticized by other elements of Hegel's own philosophy or from the critical tradition inspired by him. After systematically presenting some of these contents, my first step is to explore their associations with the connection between the developmentalist concept of spirit and the apologetic

notion of progress (I). Then, beginning with an interpretation of Hegel's concept of spirit, I approach the delicate issue of its pro-colonialist tendencies. I propose that the potentials inscribed in this concept should be separated from the specific tasks of the philosophy of history and, relying on Menke's interpretation, I argue that the concept of spirit in Hegel is not only compatible with a critique of Eurocentrism but establishes a connection between criticism and autonomy relevant to anti-colonialist thinking as well. Thus, there would be in Hegel a kind of 'self-transcendent' (Buchwalter 2009: 95) Eurocentrism (II). Next, I seek the conditions for interpreting Hegel's idea of 'progress in the consciousness of freedom' in a less apologetic way. This investigation into an experiential dimension of progress, under the inspiration of Adorno's dialectics, results in the thesis that an assessment of the 'dialectic of progress' in Hegel, that is, the awareness of its regressive moments, requires consideration of his social philosophy that might contribute to a 'critical-interruptive' interpretation of Hegel (Zambrana 2017: 258) (III). This discussion, then, affords us the opportunity to explore a certain discrepancy between the Eurocentrism of the philosophy of history and the historical contextualization offered by the approach to colonialism in the 'dialectic of civil society', which I interpret as a critical presentation of the dysfunctions of capitalism (IV). To conclude, I compare Hegel's discussion (IV) of colonization, both in the *Philosophy of Right* and in the *Vorlesungen*, with the 'genealogy' of capitalism in the colonial system (Marx's theory of primitive accumulation), and I evaluate the pertinence of the incipient connection proposed by Hegel between imperialism and capitalist dysfunctionalities (V).

I. Eurocentrism, racism, and progress in Hegel

At the end of *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel manifests his evident Eurocentrism (Kimmerle 2016: 105; Bernasconi 2000: 171, 186) by explaining the relationship—teleologically based on the progressive self-realization of spirit—between the 'spirit of the world', whose unfolding corresponds to 'world history', and the stages of this development, the spirits of the people (*Völkergeister*) (PR: §§341/346).¹ Only a particular nation should appear as 'the *dominant* one in world history for this epoch' (PR: 374). Therefore, 'in contrast with this absolute right which it possesses as bearer of the present stage of the world spirit's development, the spirits of other nations are without rights, and they, like those whose epoch has passed, no longer count in world history' (PR: 374). Consequently, only one civilization can embody the meaning of history at each epoch, which would justify its diachronic superiority over the others. Finally, the most advanced stage of this development corresponds to the reconciliation established by Protestant Europe in the post-Napoleonic era (PR: 379; PM: 256).

In the controversial §393 of the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel makes some of his racial statements that have received the most comment (Bernasconi 2000: 189), followed in the next paragraph by possibly incompatible positions:

[D]escent affords no ground for the entitlement or non-entitlement of human beings to freedom and to dominion. Man is implicitly rational; herein lies the possibility of equality of right for all men,—the futility of a rigid distinction between races that have rights and those that have none. (*PM*: 40)

Thus, as universal history concerns, according to Hegel, people organized into states and, therefore, institutional configurations of freedom and right (*PM*: 248; Zambrana 2017: 254), links between *race and history* could not be seen as significant (Zambrana 2017: 253). In fact, this seems to be Hegel's position in §394:² 'Philosophy of history [...] has as its object the world-historical significance of peoples' (*PM*: 44), whereas '[t]he difference between the races of mankind is still a natural difference, that is, a difference that initially concerns the natural soul' (*PM*: 40).

However, in contradiction with this observation, Hegel exposes racial elements as pertinent to his philosophy of history. It suffices to compare, for example, his characterization of African and Germanic people (*PR*: 374; Bernasconi 1998: 62). 'Negroes are to be regarded as a nation of children who remain immersed in their uninterested and indifferent naivete. They are sold, and let themselves be sold, without any reflection on whether this is right or not' (*PM*: 41). The key to considering African people is their exclusion from universal history and supposed irrelevance to the march of self-realization of the spirit (Bernasconi 1998: 54–55). Unconsciousness about what is right, an expedient capable of relativizing enslavement (Bernasconi 1998: 50–51), seems to exclude them from a historically relevant institutional existence. Hegel translates this characterization in terms of his developmental notion of spirit and the related comprehension of progress. 'In their native country the most shocking despotism prevails. There they do not attain to the feeling of man's personality,—their mind is entirely dormant, it remains sunk within itself, it makes no progress' (*PM*: 41).

While the exclusion of African people from history has racial connotations, European people are characterized as an extraordinary milestone in the history of the spirit that retrospectively creates world history:

It is in the Caucasian race that mind first attains to absolute unity with itself; here for the first time mind enters into complete opposition to naturalness, apprehends itself in its absolute independence, breaks free from the oscillation between one extreme and the other, achieves self-determination, self-development, and thereby produces world-history. (*PM*: 42)

In light of the developmentalist notion of spirit, the characteristic feature of Europeans consists in having manifested, in its crystalline purity, the principle of self-consciousness, opposing the world and dominating it, ‘which has the confidence in itself that for it nothing can be an insuperable barrier, and which therefore invades everything in order to become present to itself therein’ (*PM*: 43).

Hegel often discusses pure self-consciousness as the moment of authentic self-determination, as well as immanently criticizing its one-sidedness. This is the case with the principle of subjective idealism (*PM*: §424), reduced to the intolerance and destructiveness of desire (§§426–28), as the triggering moment of the ‘life and death struggle’ (*PM*: §§430–31)—the perspective whose ‘truth’ will be the affirmative knowledge of oneself in the other (*PM*: §436) as being-recognized (*PM*: §484). A similar gesture is found in the ‘fury of destruction’ of abstract freedom (*PR*: 38), constitutive of ‘formalism’, which causes terrible effects ‘in people’s mind and in the actual world’ (Hegel 1991: 58) and whose ‘truth’ will be the socio-historical comprehension of human agency as ethical life. Finally, there is also the logical principle of abstract identity, whose rectification constitutes the task of speculative dialectics (*PM*: 128–33) and its concrete conception of universality, which, welcoming alterity without mortifying it, ‘could also be called free love and boundless blessedness’ (*SL*: 532).

In §393, however, the absolute rule over the other appears, so to speak, as a principle of imperialism, of colonization (Stone 2020: 9), whose legitimation is intertwined with the notion of progress. Thus, the link between race and history is based on the progressive concept of spirit. ‘This advance [*Fortschritt*] comes about only through the Caucasian race’ (*PM*: 43). Note that the idea that ‘Europeans [...] have for their principle and character the *concrete universal*, the self-determining thought’ (*PM*: 43; my emphasis), manifests itself, however, in the theoretical and practical dimensions of progress, which result in the intensification of control over otherness. ‘As in the theoretical, so too in the practical sphere, the European mind strives after the unity to be produced between itself and the external world. It subjects the external world to its ends with an energy which has secured for it the mastery of the world’ (*PM*: 43). Progress also refers to the figure of a non-despotic political organization that, however, paradoxically comes from despotism over the other (*PM*: 44).

It is frustrating that Hegel, the inventor of the ‘dialectic of enlightenment’ (Habermas 1990: 51), despite the alleged negativity of his thought, does not manifest the slightest tendency to reiterate in this context the immanent critique of self-determination as progress in the domain of the other—which was the basis for maritime expansion, colonization and the trafficking of slave labour—to recognize, as is expected of a critical philosophy,³ the absolutely disastrous and catastrophic effects, for example, of slavery and the Amerindian holocaust. On the contrary,

with regard to the original Americans, we have to remark that they are a vanishing, feeble breed. It is true that in some parts of America at the time of its discovery, a considerable culture was to be found; this, however, was not comparable with European culture and has disappeared with the original inhabitants. (*PM*: 44)

Hegel's philosophy, therefore, demands, by the standards that it sets itself, its immanent self-criticism. '[R]escuing Hegel [...]' means facing up to his philosophy where it is most painful and wresting truth from it where its untruth is obvious' (Adorno 1993: 83). In *Race and History*, written 121 years after Hegel's death, Lévi-Strauss finally dissolved the European ethnocentric attitude, 'the original sin of anthropology' (Lévi-Strauss 1952: 5). Interestingly, at its base was precisely the connection between race and history established by the abstract idea of progress, which ignores 'discontinuity' and 'intercultural appropriation' in historical processes, unfortunately fostering the distinction between 'stationary and cumulative history' and, at the limit, the idea of 'peoples without history'. The critique of ethnocentrism should not, however, argues Lévi-Strauss, make us give up on universalism (1952: 12), thus incurring the risk of social regression. It would be necessary to forge a more rigorous concept of progress based on the perception of its 'contradictory' character (1952: 48), considering a non-reductionist mediation fostered by intercultural dialogue between universalism and particularism (1952: 49). I would like to contribute to a broader debate by investigating whether Hegel *malgré lui* can still be a source of inspiration for this.

The critique of Hegel's Eurocentrism has the significant merit of connecting the relationship between race and history directly to a central aspect of Hegel's philosophy: the developmentalist conception of spirit (Bernasconi 1998: 63). Following Bernasconi, Tibebe reaches even more definitive conclusions (Bernasconi 1998: 62) about the link between Hegelian thought and colonialism, racism, and Eurocentrism (Tibebe 2011: 112, 324, 339). Important here are not only the links between the *Philosophy of History* and essential elements of Hegelian thought (Tibebe 2011: xxviii) but, above all, the fact that the type of social criticism⁴ to which his arguments point seems to have a theoretical design that goes back to the Hegelian critique of political and cultural modernity.⁵ As far as social criticism is concerned, Amy Allen recently showed in an investigation into the normative foundations of critical theory (Allen 2016: 8) the extent to which, under the influence of Hegel, the notion of progress remained a delicate topic, even in a post-metaphysical context, with the refusal of an objective teleology of history (Allen 2016: Ch. 2–3). Thus, Hegel's influence would have linked critical theory with a cumulative concept of progress (collective learning processes and social evolution), thereby representing an inevitable commitment to Eurocentric orientations and

the legitimation of the colonial system, imperialism and slavery. Decolonization would imply, therefore, decoupling critical theory from this concept of progress, breaking with the Hegelian legacy.

II. Spirit and Eurocentrism

[W]hatever is limited to a natural life is not on its own capable of going beyond its immediate existence; but it is driven out beyond its immediate existence by an other, and this being torn out of itself is its death. But consciousness is for its own self its *concept*; as a result it is immediately the going beyond the restricted, and, since this restriction belongs to consciousness, consciousness is the going beyond of its own self; with the singular, the beyond is, to consciousness, simultaneously posited. (*PS*: 54)

For Hegel, what distinguishes the spiritual from the merely natural life is the ability to transcend oneself, support being-other without a definitive loss of self, and, thus, possibly induce one's own transformation. Hegel calls this spiritual capacity for transcendence in immanence, the possibility of being-other intrinsic to immediate existence, *being its own concept*. The denial of a specific shape in this case, while the configuration manifests its own determination, is a *violence*, but which the spirit ultimately 'suffers [...] at its own hands and brings to ruin its own restricted satisfaction' (*PS*: 54). Here, we have a possible formulation for Hegel's understanding of the dynamic of spiritual life.

Hegel has an anti-dualist, processual or developmental view of spirit as 'second nature' (*PR*: 35, 191; *PM*: 131, 134), whose driving force is freedom, so to speak, the energy to transcend immediate existence without getting lost in this process (Pippin 2008: 54). Below, I limit myself to one of the dimensions of finite spirit that Hegel calls 'objective spirit', confined in 'a world produced and to be produced by it' (*PM*: 20). 'Objectivity' means that freedom, the essence of spirit (*PM*: 15), has already assumed, to some extent, social 'validity', the 'form of necessity' as 'recognition' (*PM*: 217). In this context, 'Spirit must be conceived [...] as some sort of collectively achieved, normative human mindedness' (Pippin 2008: 16).

The free self-relation of spirit is usually presented through the dialectic of true infinity. 'Spirit is therefore both infinite and finite, and neither only the one nor only the other; in making itself finite it remains infinite, for it sublates finitude within itself' (*PM*: 23–24). Such themes are by no means secondary but rather fundamental to the dialectical interpretation of self-determination and thereby associated with some of the most ambitious and profound innovations claimed by speculative

philosophy: an immanent solution to the issue of concrete freedom as practices of reciprocal recognition (*PR*: 40).

It is noteworthy that Hegel often connects his dialectical interpretation of self-determination, both logically (*SL*: 513) and ‘objectively’ (*PR*: 41), with spirit as reciprocal recognition (*PS*: 388), that is, ‘[t]he I that is we and the we that is I’ (*PS*: 108). Thus, Hegel converts Kant’s binomial, autonomy and criticism into the idea of an immanent process of self-actualization in which the spirit, a historically determined and socio-normative structure, runs the risk of losing its immediate existence but, at the same time, creates opportunities for a more autonomous and emancipated life. This general framework should serve for our discussion of Eurocentrism in Hegel’s thought.

On the shaky ground of the historicity of spirit, there is always the possibility of ‘conservative’ alternatives. When the restlessness of spirit is violently unleashed, ‘anxiety over the truth might well withdraw and strive to hold on to what it is in danger of losing’. However, the anguished attempt to keep what one thinks one has, leaving everything as it is, takes a heavy toll: ‘this anxiety can find no rest; even if it wants to remain in thoughtless indolence, thought spoils the thoughtlessness, and its unrest disturbs the indolence’. Neither is a self-congratulatory attitude left unscathed by the repression of the negativity intrinsic to a culture in turbulence:

even if it fortifies itself with a sensibility which assures that everything is to be found *good as the type it is*, this assurance likewise *suffers violence at the hands of reason* which straightaway finds that something is not good precisely because it is that type of thing. (*PS*: 54; my emphasis)

Hegel is undoubtedly a Eurocentric philosopher. His conception of spiritual life, however, is constituted by a negativity that must remain dissatisfied with postures of self-congratulation, such as those typical of Eurocentrism. I follow the basic intuition that Hegel resorted to the capacity for self-transformation as a criterion for constructing a Eurocentric philosophy of history; however, that does not mean that this structure, correctly understood, although born in the West, would be Eurocentric *per se*. Thus, Hegel’s concept of spirit implies foremost that cultural life is constituted by a permanently unstable restlessness and, possibly, by the impulse to change itself by normative criteria, in a process also profoundly dependent on its specific initial conditions.

Alison Stone investigates the possibly pro-colonialist (2020: 7, 11) character of Hegel’s conception of self-determination. This possibility resides in its ‘significant connections with his Eurocentrism’ (2020: 7, 15), as it involves the moment (for Hegel, originally Greek) ‘of overcoming through which they [the Greeks] became able to remake that heritage for themselves, to make themselves’ (Stone 2020: 7, 16). Moreover, this relates to the inferiorization of cultures that supposedly

do not allow self-criticism of participants, critical appropriation of their traditions, awareness and overcoming of internal contradictions (Stone 2020: 6), and, therefore, of elements of unfreedom and oppression, unconsciously reproduced as ‘second nature’. Thus, for Hegel, ‘non-Europeans lacked a critical motor to drive social change, hence lacked history proper—or indeed freedom as properly distinguished from unfreedom’ (Stone 2020: 7, 17). Eurocentrism intertwines with the transformation of the supposed inability to ‘becom[ing] self-critical, self-revising, and so historical’ (Stone 2020: 7, 18) into a comparative criterion.⁶

However, the negativity of spirit, rooted in determination and finitude, cannot be hypostatized as ‘negativity as such’, forcing us, despite what Hegel often does, contrariwise to adopt a more fallible and contextually sensitive notion of progress. Regarding the relationship between finitude and objective spirit, the *Logic* maintains that ‘[f]initude, properly conceived, is [...] contained in infinity’ (PM: 23). However, finitude ‘as a moment’ is a sign of ‘disproportion between concept and reality’ (PM: 22) and, as such, makes legible ‘stages in its liberation [*Befreiung*]’ (PM: 22), whose radicality Hegel categorically contrasts with the unfinishedness of ‘infinite progress’ (PM: 24). Owing to the dimension of finitude, the notion of self-determination is endowed with a moment of liberation similar to what Allen intends with the idea of ‘learning to unlearn’, ‘a critical problematization of our own, historically sedimented point of view that frees us up in relation to it’ (Allen 2016: 202).

Stone is right about the undeniable Eurocentrism of the *Philosophy of History* and its role in possibly legitimizing colonialism and even enslavement. However, the concepts of freedom and spirit are not in themselves Eurocentric for the following reasons: first is freedom’s irreducible connection with ‘finitude’ and, therefore, with the fallibility and contextual rootedness of progress. Second, the instability of spiritual life can always have non-progressive consequences. Finally, there is, in Hegel’s conception of spirit, the twofold ‘materialist’ moment that is lost in its transformation into an idealist philosophy of history: first, the moment, driven by self-criticism, of liberation from oppression and violence, which gives materiality to a negative that would otherwise be merely abstract; second, the unavoidable element of finitude, the inescapable specificity of the initial contextual conditions of criticism. This helps us, I argue, to maintain a difference between something Eurocentric and something of European origin.

Menke indicated that this materialist dimension is constitutive of the ‘critical concept of second nature’ (Menke 2018: 41). For him, the Hegelian concept of spirit cannot be anticipated completely *a priori*, as a generalized form of criticism or progress, a definitive standard of measurement—as Stone correctly sees in the *Philosophy of History*. This is the case because there is necessarily a moment of *Befreiung* in it. ‘The critical concept of second nature inscribes the other of autonomy within autonomy [, and] the social is, as the realization of autonomy, at the

same time its dissimulation and even its blocking' (Menke 2018: 48). Thus, such a concept of second nature makes up an amalgamation of criticism and affirmation (Menke 2018: 119), which constitutes Hegel's type of 'social criticism' (Menke 2018: 126–27). It is necessary to take seriously, perhaps more than Hegel did, the irreducible relation between the finite and infinite constitutive of the spirit. The second nature always carries with it the traces of its 'act of emergence', also enabling its genealogical criticism. However, absolute intransigence towards oppression, whatever its origin, is the moment of infinity, which inextricably integrates criticism and affirmation,⁷ the negative and the positive.

Moreover, the developmental concept of spirit is intrinsically linked to the idea of learning processes of producing more autonomy from autonomy, yet the Hegelian model does not hold that self-criticism is a necessary outcome. Restlessness is essential, but the way of dealing with it is contingent. Facing the violence that removes us from our immediate existence requires choosing between death and autonomy. However, without the Eurocentric philosophy of history, we do not run the risk of legitimizing the original act of oppression, alleging its supposed importance in triggering autonomy. To damaged life, only self-determination remains as a possibly critical reaction to Eurocentrism and colonialism.

Anti-colonialist thinking, in so far as it presupposes criticism and autonomy, can be seen as the result of intercultural 'appropriation' of self-determination, in the sense of which Lévi-Strauss speaks. On this point, there seems to be a certain compatibility between the view of Hegel and Dussel, who takes a similar direction in sustaining the non-coherentist origin of the European counter-discourse, which seeks to understand the pathologies and shortcomings of modernity:

[T]his counter-discourse, precisely this and no other, could emerge within the European critical reason that opened itself and co-constituted itself from the dominated, exploited alterity: the hidden Other of dominating Europe (that always will pretend to negate such counter-discourse). (Dussel 1996: 135–36)

For Dussel, it is the increase in autonomy among the oppressed that instills in Western philosophy its critical core, thus making it critical of modernity, forging its counter-discourse, from which all criticism of Eurocentrism emanates as a 'continuation of a critical labour that the periphery has already stamped in the counter-discourse produced in Europe and on its own peripheral discourse (in fact and almost integrally, when it is non-Eurocentric, it is already a counter-discourse)' (Dussel 2007: 137–38). I argue that we need *Hegel contra Hegel* because, despite his Eurocentrism, his idea of second nature involves not just comparing different degrees of autonomy but articulating self-determination with liberation from forms of oppression so structurally ingrained as Eurocentrism and racism.

Facing them precisely presupposes the capacity for ‘contextualized criticism’.⁸ Detection and immanent criticism of entrenched prejudices are impossible without the combination of criticism and affirmation that Hegel thinks of under the heading of spirit. If criticism is a Greco-European invention and a constitutive element of freedom, as Hegel suggests, oppressed and enslaved, colonized and dominated people cannot renounce it either.

III. Progress in the consciousness of freedom

After arguing for the compatibility of Hegel’s concept of spirit with a critique of Eurocentrism, I now intend, inspired by Adorno’s critique of universal history, to probe emancipatory elements in Hegel’s understanding of progress. Hodgson maintains that there are three levels for interpreting Hegel’s *Philosophy of History*: ‘historical-humanist, ethical-social, and onto-logical-theological’ (Hodgson 2012: 29). According to him, ‘[w]ithout the third level [...] we lack resources for confronting the tragic depth of history’ (Hodgson 2012: 30). He also argues that an immanent comprehension of history, without ‘appealing to external guidance from providence’, would lead at best to an interpretation of the progressive realization of freedom shaped by a theory of political modernity, although allowing its connection with a more pluralistic perspective (Stone 2020: 14). I also intend to recover the tragic in history from this pluralistic perspective, but precisely at the socio-philosophical level, which can yield, I argue, a different perception of the idea that ‘[w]orld history is the progress in the consciousness of freedom [...] whose necessity we have to recognize’ (*PWH*: 88). One way of characterizing such an intention would be to say that it is about qualitatively enriching through an experiential component, mediation by consciousness, the quantitative meaning attributed to this guideline (*PWH*: 88).

Progress presupposes experiences of historical rupture. Hegel seems to understand ‘crisis experiences’, the awareness of ethical conflicts to be overcome or reflexive reactions to normative ruptures (Pippin 2008: 74–75) and semantic collapses (Pippin 2005: 385)—therefore, collective experiences, historically determined, marked by ‘negativity’—as a constitutive part of spirit’s life, not in the sense that they necessarily must happen but that they are foreseen as a latent possibility. Thus, they are part of the essence of spirit as an ethical nature and, consequently, of its freedom. Progress in the consciousness of freedom could, therefore, also mean a sharpening in the perception of depth and abysses, of losses and sufferings, of risks and challenges—an alternative to which Hegel himself seems to point:

The Other, the negative, contradiction, rupture, thus belongs to the nature of spirit. In this rupture lies the possibility of *pain*. [...]

Therefore, even in this its extreme rupture, in this breaking loose from the root of its implicitly ethical nature, in this uttermost contradiction with itself, the spirit yet remains identical with itself and therefore free. (*PM*: 16)

I would like to investigate whether this hypothesis would be able to illuminate possibly non-apologetic dimensions in Hegel's conception of progress. This notion could then be understood as a process of accumulating experience, that is, in terms of a notion of 'learning processes' associated with the dialectical structure that Hegel attributes to the concept of spirit, but in which learning from catastrophes (Habermas 2001: 45–46, 119–20) and enhanced risk awareness are emphasized. A more 'negative' understanding of normative ruptures in the life of spirit may be inspired by Adorno's appropriation of determinate negation (Pinkard 2020: 465). He links the emancipatory content of progress to learning processes but without subordinating it to the objective teleology of history (Macdonald 2020: 198). Thus, the internal contradictions of a *Lebensform*, the constitutive negativity of spirit (Pinkard 2020: 466; Macdonald 2020: 197), would be the emancipatory opportunity to learn in the face of the risk of regression—something more compatible with Hegel's anti-essentialist concept of spirit than with his affirmative view of progress in the *Philosophy of History*. 'Spirit is not an inert entity but is rather what is absolutely restless, pure activity [...] not an essence that is already complete before its appearing' (*PM*: 5).

By exploring the negative dimension of normative crises and ruptures, I also follow an itinerary suggested by Menke, who recognizes in contemporary, 'analytic', 'left Hegelianism' (Menke 2018: 38), the merit of having perceived in Hegel's concept of ethical life a response to the paradoxes of Kant's concept of autonomy⁹ guided by the social and historical notion of spirit and agency (Menke 2018: 36). For Menke, however, to do justice to Hegel's social thought, a step is needed beyond the idea of learning processes that, under the assumption of autonomy, produce more autonomy: 'The step beyond Left Hegelianism consists of another concept of history. The history in which the spirit acquires its autonomous configuration is (and remains) its prehistory, and the becoming of the spirit towards autonomy is not a spiritual becoming' (Menke 2018: 38). This indication perhaps allows a glimpse into a dimension of history that remains hidden along the march of the self-realization of spirit.

The emphasis of the *Philosophy of History* is directed towards developing states as mediating elements of individual actions, as well as their synchronic and diachronic relationship. However, this perspective seems to impose a subtle reference to its *other*. The suggestion of duplicity of perspectives is insinuated in the philosopher's honest statement about how the philosophy of history must repress an extraordinary amount of possibly relevant information by appealing to an abstract

concept of ‘great events’ (*PM*: 248). This repressed field corresponds, I argue, to the viewpoint of historical experience, capable of clarifying history from what supposedly has obscured it. As much as Hegel cannot give himself over to a characterization of this *other* in the philosophy of history, his presence is still detectable:¹⁰

Justice and virtue, wrongdoing, violence [*Gewalt*], and vice, talents and their [expression in] deeds, the small passions and the great, guilt and innocence, the splendour of individual and national life [*Volksebens*], the independence, fortune, and misfortune of states and individuals [*der Einzelnen*]*—*all of these have their determinate significance and value in the sphere of conscious actuality, in which judgement and justice—albeit imperfect justice—are meted out to them. World history falls outside these points of view. (*PWH*: 373)

The scope of this viewpoint is not encompassed by world history; the dimension of the historical experience of individuals, who can be guided more or less by the plausible belief in the progress in the consciousness of freedom,¹¹ allows us a non-onto-theological access to the tragic character of history that in turn is articulated here in a historical-humanist and ethical-social way (Hodgson 2012: 29). I argue that the *Philosophy of History*, especially in its tragic depth, pushes towards another perspective that necessarily exceeds the triumphal march of the World Spirit. ‘But even as we look upon history as this slaughterhouse in which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of states, and the virtues of individuals are sacrificed, our thoughts are necessarily impelled to ask: *to whom, to what final purpose*, have these monstrous sacrifices been made?’ (*PM*: 90). One can certainly consider tragedy in history from the viewpoint of the absolute (*PWH*: 30; Hodgson 2012: 45).¹² However, the viewpoint of the absolute must *eo ipso* contain within itself as *aufgehoben*, integrated but not neutralized, the experience of those who live the tragedy of history. Moreover, in this case, under the guidance of a plausible belief in progress, individuals experience the gradual, fallible, but possible passage to justice through the overwhelming impacts of collective experiences of injustice. In this sense, there is a remarkable passage from the *Phenomenology* that concludes the ethical and socio-political experience of Attic tragedies—specifically of Sophocles’s *Antigone*—which paradigmatically thematizes the immanent processes of normative rupture of Greek ethical life.¹³ ‘[I]n bringing the universal back into equilibrium, a universal which is becoming ever more dominant over singular individuals, justice is likewise the simple spirit of he who has suffered wrong’ (*PS*: 266).

Here, we have a perception of progress guided by the transformation of injustice against the singular into a constitutive moment of justice. The critique of the category of progress in Adorno has some congruences, I argue, with this

gesture. For him, the fundamental problem of the idealist philosophy of history is that 'it regards suffering as metaphysically justified in the context of the progressive historical actualization of freedom' (Macdonald 2020: 198). However, that the spirit has learned from suffering does not mean that suffering is or should be justified if we can, by reconsidering the role of its negativity, think of 'progress in the consciousness of freedom' as connected, for example, to a critical sensitivity to the costs involved.

Adorno seeks to consider the reflection on history and progress from the viewpoint of the irreducibility of universal and particular (Adorno 2006: 21), that is, the general tendency of the development of spirit and the dimension of individual freedom (Sandkaulen 2006: 173ff²). For Adorno, it is a consequence of the 'dialectic of progress' (Adorno 2005: 150) that no truly progressive conception of history can be limited to the theological moment of redemption (2005: 150)—because it would be nothing more than the perennial legitimation of injustice; however, neither can it renounce that moment, risking thereby succumbing to the facticity of historical development (2005: 148).

The hypertrophy of the theological moment means, from the viewpoint of suffering that must be redeemed, simply its anticipated justification. 'Existing humanity is substituted for the unborn generations, and history immediately becomes salvation history. That was the prototype for the idea of progress until Hegel and Marx' (2005: 146), argues Adorno. Thus, the theological moment of redemption needs to be articulated with the experiential perspective of the agents and those concerned. 'Humanity can be thought only through this extreme form of differentiation, individuation, not as a comprehensive generic concept' (2005: 151). The unfinished connection with praxis, with the agents concerned, is essential for the emancipatory character of progress if it is indeed the case of not betraying them in the hope of reversing injustice (2005: 149).

The beneficial self-reflection of reason, however, would be its transition to praxis: reason would see through itself as a moment of praxis and would recognize, instead of mistaking itself for the absolute, that it is a mode of behavior. The anti-mythological element in progress cannot be conceived without the practical act that reins in the delusion of spirit's autarky. (Adorno 2005: 153)

Therefore, Adorno is, in fact, an opponent of the tendency to mystify and hypostasize progress,¹⁴ which legitimizes suffering in the name of the historical march of the universal. Adorno's effort inspires the strategy I have been calling *Hegel contra Hegel*, namely, subtracting the ideological character of progress and thereby restoring its emancipatory potential through the emphatic appeal to the irreducibility between philosophy and praxis and between the dynamics of

historical development and experiences of what might constitute regression (Adorno 2005: 160). Taking progress as continuous resistance to injustice and the hope of emancipation (Adorno 2005: 160) thus makes it necessary to consider the inflexion between the philosophy of history and social philosophy (Adorno 2005: 148), which I will pursue in the next part. The loss of critical force by determinate negation, when subordinated to an apologetic perspective, results in the legitimation of the suffering inflicted on individuals, ‘a problematic indifference to lived suffering [...] to the endemic suffering caused by the structural social tensions and contradictions of spiritual life’ (Macdonald 2020: 198). From now on, I would like to show that something of this dialectical conception of progress, which integrates the practical moment, the experience of regression, exists in the critique of the pathologies of modernity present in the ‘dialectic of civil society’. Especially in the case of colonization, what is the story told in practice by Hegel’s dialectic? To appreciate some aspects of Hegel’s notion of progress, it is paradoxically necessary to step outside his idealist philosophy of history. ‘It may be more than mere coincidence that Hegel, despite his famous definition of history has no detailed theory of progress’ (Adorno 2005: 160).

IV. Colonization and the dialectic of modern society

I have tried so far to highlight, despite the strongly Eurocentric bias of Hegel’s thought (I), the compatibility of the concept of spirit with a critique of Eurocentrism (II). I then sought to present a non-apologetic interpretation of the ‘progress in the consciousness of freedom’, potentially sensible to experiences of regression (III). Henceforth (IV and V), I will indicate how this dimension might find expression in the relationship between Hegel’s social philosophy and colonization.

Bernasconi expresses a widespread perception of this relationship. ‘In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel presents colonization as a solution to the problems of civil society, specifically the destabilising effects of excessive poverty and the creation of a rabble’ (Bernasconi 2000: 190). Kimmerle corroborates this view, sustaining the exposition of civil society as deriving from the Eurocentrism of Hegel’s ‘first philosophy’ (Kimmerle 2016: 113–14). We could, however, ask whether it might be possible to infer a different lesson from this discussion. By exposing the self-destructive dynamics of capitalist societies and relating their insoluble character to the colonialist alternative, Hegel could be interpreted *malgré lui* as contributing to the critique of imperialism and colonialism. This is because Hegel not only maintains that expansionism and colonization are incapable of correcting the economic dysfunctions that trigger them but also

understands them as incompatible with the normativity of the *Philosophy of Right*. There seems to be an ambivalence in Hegel's work (Harvey 2000: 26ff; Habib 2017: 141, 156), a certain discrepancy between the *Philosophy of Right* and the *Philosophy of History*, which might indicate directions for the self-criticism of his dialectic. Thus, the 'materialism' of civil society theory, which historically and economically contextualizes imperialism and colonialism, can provide, unlike the idealist philosophy of history, a different view of the relationship between dialectics and Eurocentrism (Pradella 2014: 442).¹⁵

In fact, the specificity of capitalist society was one of the fundamental themes that Hegel, since his youth, sought to understand with dialectics (Lukács 1977). 'The Hegelian concept of the dialectic [...] arises from the experience of an antagonistic society; it does not originate in some mere conceptual schema' (Adorno 1993: 82). The concreteness to which dialectics is led by the exposition of civil society in the *Philosophy of Right* must then be considered in any evaluation of Hegel's thought. On the one hand, 'civil society' is an unfolding based on the concept of freedom, according to which the emancipatory content of modernity only becomes effective in practices in which agents carry out their self-determination. On the other hand, Hegel seems to have anticipated traces of Marx's thesis that capitalist society structurally distorts modern emancipatory potentials because human self-determination tends to be systematically sacrificed to the self-determination of capital, to the self-valorisation of value. (Marx 1982: 255; see also: Thompson 2015: 122). 'The Hegelian critique of capitalism [...] begins with the thesis that it is an economic-institutional arrangement that distorts this structure of social relations in specific ways that make the realization of Hegel's own theory of modernity as rational freedom impossible' (Thompson 2015: 120). Thus, I argue that Hegel's exposition is not a simple description, possibly apologetic, of modern society but presents a critical understanding of capitalism as fostering, under the guise of the potential for self-determination, a deficient configuration of political modernity riddled with pathologies (Thompson 2015: 123).¹⁶

Hegel's theory of civil society is also historically deeply rooted, as shown by the reference to 'political economy', a modern *Verstandeswissenschaft* (*ENC 1*: 34–36) that constitutes the unavoidable starting point for understanding capitalist dynamics (*PR*: 225, §189). Since Hegel often presents speculative dialectics as a self-criticism of understanding or *Verstand* (*ENC 1*: 126–34, §§80–82), his theory of capitalist society should also contain a critique of classical political economy (Herzog 2015: 148–15; Pradella 2014: 428–33), intertwined with the negativity of diagnoses such as 'ethical life lost in its extremes' (*PR*: 221, §184) or the 'dialectic of civil society' (*PR*: 267, §246). Let us examine whether this specificity affords Hegel the possibility of an immanent critique of his own Eurocentrism (Jaeggi and Celikates 2017: 28ff).

To contextualize the problem of imperialism and colonization, I would like to reconstruct Hegel's argument first. Civil society is a typically modern historical creation. According to our hypothesis, an interpretation of the 'progress in the consciousness of freedom', linked to Hegel's social philosophy, can benefit from the discussion of civil society precisely because the determinations of concrete freedom are here manifested in an extreme way (PR: §182A), which thus make up a 'system of omnilateral dependence' that Hegel calls the '*external state*—the *state of necessity and understanding*' (PR: §183), as it is based on an external relationship between universal and particular, dictated in turn by the reciprocal satisfaction of private and individual interests, as well as by the coercion of wills to the collective interest.

In this *Darstellung*, which is intended to conceptually reconstruct the modern market society as a sphere of depoliticized economic activity made possible by free wage labour, Hegel *also* adopts a normative perspective, seeing in modern society nothing less than the 'dissolution of the concept' (PR: §184A). It is 'the system of ethical life lost in its extremes' (PR: §184). Therefore, unsurprisingly, in this dialectical articulation of descriptive and normative axes, Hegel characterizes the external relation, this 'self-sufficiency of its liberated and existent moments' (PR: §184A), in strongly (and negatively) normative terms. 'In these opposites and their complexity, civil society affords a spectacle of extravagance and misery as well as of the physical and ethical corruption common to both' (PR: §185). The negativity intrinsic to modern society is the result of the pressures provoked by its historically specific principle, the 'self-sufficient development of particularity' (PR: §185), which constitutes its self-contradictory character. 'Particularity in itself is boundless extravagance, and the forms of this extravagance are themselves boundless', but 'deprivation and want are likewise boundless' (PR: §185A).

However, this 'contradiction in itself' becomes a 'posited contradiction' in specific socio-economic circumstances. 'When the activity of civil society is unrestricted, it is occupied internally with expanding its population and industry'. It is in the historical context (as we will see) of a capitalist society operating according to its most exacerbated dynamics that, despite its emancipatory potential, in parallel with the greater '*accumulation of wealth*', some tendencies are intensified, which later 'left Hegelianism' investigates in terms of alienated work, pauperization and the atrophy of experience (PR: §243). The context of intensification of income concentration (PR: §244) induces 'the creation of the *rabble*' (PR: §244), which Hegel treats as a systemic effect provoked by the economic and population dynamics of capitalist societies. The emergence of the rabble constitutes a profound antinomy that either forces the sacrifice of the core of the liberal and meritocratic pretensions of civil society or simply perpetuates itself in terms of impoverishment, overproduction, and unemployment (PR: §245). Thus, the Hegelian diagnosis of modern capitalist society—which, while sharpening the normative component of the 'lost ethical

life’, is nourished by descriptive elements collected in the ‘example of England’ (PR: §245)—concretizes the understanding of civil society as the sphere of the *Zweigung* (PR: §§157, 184–86): ‘This shows that, *despite an excess of wealth*, civil society is *not wealthy enough* [...] to prevent an excess of poverty and the formation of a rabble’ (PR: §245).

It is in the context of this questioning of the necessary outbreak of inequality, unavoidable for capitalist societies (PR: §244A),¹⁷ that Hegel connects the unimpeded dynamics of market society to its expansionist, imperialist and colonialist impulses. Such tendencies are not legitimized but diagnosed as a product of the exacerbation of capitalist dynamics. ‘This inner dialectic of society drives it—or in the first instance this *specific* society—to go beyond its own confines and look for consumers, and hence the means it requires for subsistence’ (PR: §246). From this, Hegel thematizes the maritime expansion of European nations and, consequently, the already perceptible trend towards the globalization of commerce (PR: §247).

Thus, Hegel seeks to explore the explanatory capacity of his idea, impregnated with critical-normative content, of the dialectic of civil society, which goes back to the notion of ‘ethical life lost at the extremes’ and manifests itself as the systemic exclusion of individuals from the system of production and consumption (Žižek 2011: xiv). This is where the discussion of the colonialist tendency comes in. ‘This extended link also supplies the means necessary for *colonization* to which the fully developed civil society is driven’ (PR: §248). It seems premature to say that it is a question of justifying or legitimizing colonization. According to my hypothesis, intertwining descriptive and normative factors, Hegel collects contemporaneous observable trends that can be understood as a confirmation of his disruptive diagnosis of capitalist dynamics.¹⁸ ‘Civil society is driven to establish colonies. The increase in population alone has this effect, but a particular factor is the emergence of a mass of people who cannot gain satisfaction for their needs through their work when production exceeds the needs of consumers’ (PR: §248A).

The discussion of colonization is restricted to the *Polizei*, which corresponds to an external order for containing the dissolutive dialectic of market society. Thus, *Polizei* strictly belongs to the framework of ‘ethical life lost at its extremes’, as well as the palliative measures that society is impelled to adopt, such as colonization.¹⁹ However, civil society itself presents in a counterfactual way²⁰ (whose first expression is the discussion of *Korporation*) the type of intrinsic mediation between universal and particular to which it points, though without being able to carry it out, as a context of strictly market economic relations. Exposing colonization as a systemic tendency of market economies in the mid-nineteenth century that is incompatible with the coordinates of an emancipatory ethical life could be considered not a legitimation of colonialism but perhaps a critique of this way of dealing with insoluble dilemmas. Consequently, the dissolutive tendencies of the market economy, as well

as the palliative (Žižek 2011: xv) devices aimed at appeasing them, are necessarily below the socio-political standards consistent with the Hegelian understanding of concrete freedom as being-recognized. If we resort to the distinction between economic and sociological approaches (Herzog 2015: 152–56), we could see here rather the formulation of a normative basis for the immanent critique of capitalist society, which makes us recognize at least some of *Polizei's* palliative expedients as inconsistent with a (not just functional) reconciliation between universal and particular.

Thus, expansion, trade globalization, imperialism and colonization would be, in the context of Hegel's social philosophy, trends whose observable character could be interpreted from a diagnosis of the time centred on the notion of 'dialectic of civil society'. However, from an ethical perspective, that is, the concrete concept of freedom as self-determination, the colonial relationship is not found in the 'point of view of rationality and right', still constituting the 'non-true point of view' of the '*struggle for recognition*' (PR: §57). 'The liberation of colonies itself proves to be of the greatest advantage to the mother state, just as the emancipation of slaves is of the greatest advantage to the master' (PR: §248A). I believe that in the *Philosophy of Right*, a combination of the theory of justice and social philosophy is at work and, with that, an articulation, somewhat difficult to unravel, between normative and descriptive aspects (Honneth 2009; 2015). This seems to be the case precisely in discussions of capitalist tendencies towards expansionism, imperialism and colonization because, discussed under the topic of *Polizei*, they will always remain an 'external order' (PR: §249) with respect to the structural vicissitudes of capitalist societies (Pradella 2014: 441). Moreover, from the perspective of the conceptual exposition of civil society, the scope of necessity and exteriority between universal and particular must be apprehended against the background in which '*the ethical returns* to civil society as an immanent principle' (PR: §249). I argue, therefore, that there is something similar here to the availability of a normative basis, historically rooted, for the critique of pathological tendencies of capitalism, such as imperialism and colonization.

Some interpreters do not see in this discussion about colonization an attempt to legitimize it. According to Weil, Hegel's statements would have in mind the specific situation of a capitalist society quite developed at the time and, in addition, with the massive spread of unemployment, colonization would intensify crises and conflicts that would threaten the very ethical existence of the state (Weil 1970: 99). Avineri sees in Hegel's attitude not only perspicacity in perceiving such a pathology sprouting from the bowels of capitalist society but also intellectual probity in registering it as an insoluble problem (Avineri 1974: 154). This perception is taken up in a double aspect. On the one hand, Harvey argues that, even before Marx articulated the critique of political economy, Hegel had already attached to the capitalist dialectic an imperialist and colonialist dimension that

remains incipient in Marx himself (Harvey 2001: 300). On the other hand, Ruda underlines Hegel's awareness that colonization, due to its internal logic, is not even a solution to the dilemmas that triggered it, as it only perpetuates them in the form of a bad infinity (Ruda 2011: 20).

Thus, as an attempt to contain crises in which capitalist society necessarily entangles itself (Avineri 1974: 154), colonization does not resolve dysfunctions but rather radicalizes and perpetuates them. Moreover, from the normative viewpoint, it must always fall short of the concrete universal that Hegel thinks of as overcoming this dialectic. It is therefore necessary to do justice to the claim of Hegel's dialectic to understand capitalist society as contradictory (Adorno 2017: 80 ff). The colonialist alternative has as its context the contradictions in which capitalism is entangled by its own dynamics. This problematic double connection, both between the formation of the rabble and the colonialist impulse and between these factors and the insoluble character of instability, is mentioned in *On the English Reform Bill*:

The proposal to reduce the surplus numbers of poor by establishing colonies would have to remove at least one million inhabitants to have any chance of success. But how could this be effected? – not to mention the fact that the empty space thereby created would soon be filled in the same way as before if laws and circumstances remained otherwise unchanged

Hegel has a strictly societal perception of the origin of inequality and the accumulation of wealth, the generation of poverty and the rabble. Moreover, in his social philosophy, colonialist tendencies are reconstructed as administrative alternatives to systemic dysfunctions, such as poverty and the generation of the rabble. Therefore, despite the 'world-historical significance' (PR: 268, §247) of commerce, the *Philosophy of Right* exposes expansionism and colonialism in their material rootedness in the dialectic of civil society as a symptom of the dysfunctionality of capitalism and thus as something historical. It is not primarily a question of legitimizing colonialism but of perceiving trends triggered by inequality, impoverishment, overproduction and income concentration. Such gestures, in light of the constitutive negativity of his diagnosis of capitalism, could be considered rather critically, that is, as an immanent critique of imperialism: the attempt at an imperialist resolution of systemic dysfunctions is doomed to failure, as it only perpetuates the problem.

The 'materialist' interpretation of civil society can thus function, despite Hegel's Eurocentrism, as a critique of imperialism and colonialism. In this case, the Eurocentric primacy gives way to the priority of the object: the contradictions of modern society. In a movement inspired by Marx, who even later still recognized the decisive importance of Hegel's theory of civil society for his critique of political

economy (Marx 1977: 5), Adorno maintains that Hegel fails to show even the state as an ethical unit intrinsic to the self-destructive dynamics of capitalist society (Adorno 1993: 29). Thus, the state would not represent a real overcoming of disruptive and insoluble trends but a merely abstract or mystified attempt to stanch this dialectic (Adorno 1993: 30). Strictly speaking, such an overcoming would still have to be produced practically (Pradella 2014: 449). The dialectic of civil society, therefore, poses a challenge to modernity that could only be overcome by an immanent and non-reductionist mediation of universal and particular (Habermas 1990: 62).

However, especially in the face of social instability, the state appears as an external device capable of ‘forcible intervention’ (PR: §185A), as is the case with imperialist and colonialist states. In the modern context, the political-economic or systematic type of colonization is observed as ‘initiated by the state, which is aware of the proper way of carrying it out and regulates it accordingly’ (PR: §248A). If the dialectic of civil society can be read as a critique of an extrinsic state in the service of private interests, the imperialist state is *a fortiori*, a target of the same critique. A critique of Hegel’s Eurocentrism, which appeals to the negativity of modern society against its own imperialist tendencies, may still attest that the spirit of ‘Hegel’s philosophy is indeed essentially negative: a critique’ (Adorno 1993: 30).

V. Concluding remarks

I argued above that even with the Eurocentrism of his philosophy of history, Hegel provides means for a critique of the Eurocentric apology of progress, as well as suggesting a potentially critical connection between social dialectics and the phenomenon of colonization.²¹ This relationship was intensified by the Marxian theory of commercial capitalism (Marx 1991: 446), which emphasizes violent aspects of capitalist development²² and the role of colonialism in the gradual destruction of traditional forms of life (Marx 1991: 450).²³ As for Hegel, however, this critical potential was considerably inhibited, as a chronology of the relationship between capitalism and colonization reveals.

Piketty proposed a differentiation which Marx only envisioned²⁴ of phases in the relationship between European colonialism and capitalism.²⁵ In this context, Hegel would have been a contemporary of the inflexion in the ideological support of inequality, which moves from the model of ‘trifunctional societies’ of the *Ancien Régime* to an ideological framework typical of ‘proprietary societies’ (Piketty 2020: 199). I argue that Hegel’s thought expresses at least an incipient sensitivity to the challenge that, according to Piketty, will be imposed through the legitimation of

inequality to the proprietary ideology of market society due to its relationship with colonialism.²⁶

With this, one might perhaps distinguish ‘genealogical’ and ‘diagnostic’ attitudes in the critique of the relationship between capitalism and colonialism. I indicated above that a critical but ‘genealogical’ awareness of this relationship seems wholly lacking in Hegel—something normatively incompatible with his notion of recognition. Marx, in turn, in addition to undertaking a genealogical critique of capitalism that denounces colonial violence, deepens Hegel’s diagnosis of the intensification of market society’s recourse to colonialist strategies by virtue of its own contradictions.

[C]apital comes dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt’ (Marx 1982: 926). For Marx, the colonial system was a decisive factor in the consolidation of industrial capitalism, and Marx discusses it in the context of the processes of mass expropriation constituting the ‘primitive accumulation of capital’, which forms ‘its historical genesis’ (Marx 1982: 927), that is, ‘the prehistory of capital’ (Marx 1982: 927):

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of blackskins, are all things which characterize the dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation. (Marx 1982: 915)

Marx sees in England the paradigmatic combination of factors constituting primitive accumulation (Marx 1982: 915–16), underlining their contradictory tendencies (1982: 922). ‘Liverpool grew fat on the basis of the slave trade. This was its method of primitive accumulation’ (1982: 924). The genealogical consideration of industrial capitalism allows us to oppose the violence and oppression of the colonial system to the ideals advocated by European modernity,²⁷ further revealing colonialism not only as a capitalist strategy against overproduction but as even bearing a direct relationship with the formation of monopolies.²⁸

Hegel’s view of the relationship between the dialectic of civil society and the colonialist alternative underwent an interesting inflexion.²⁹ In the so-called *First Philosophy of Right*, in addition to the search for consumer markets,³⁰ the colonialist strategy responds to, so to speak, the Malthusian motive (*FPR*: 217) of reversing overpopulation,³¹ differing from less organized experiences in which settlers are assimilated to the new homeland, as in Germany (*FPR*: 217). Incidentally, Marx will prove to be a scathing critic of the Malthusian understanding of overpopulation as a cause of impoverishment and unemployment and, therefore, of

colonization as a solution.³² This strategy would have entailed the rather dire situation of the working classes in less wealthy countries of Europe (Marx 1982: 862ff).

Hegel's tone changes in the context of the *Grundlinien*, as the *Vorlesungen* of 1824–25 reveal. There, the perception of the social dialectic³³ is sharpened as a process that potentially goes beyond the colonialist strategy. Hegel's reflections are often based on the English case³⁴ and are generally more sensitive to the social consequences of the dialectic, which is shown in the tendency to evaluate them from the perspective of legitimacy,³⁵ also pointing to normative deficits of colonization.³⁶ It is in this context that Hegel foresees the development of the modern social dialectic towards the formation of monopolies that 'arise precisely through the freedom of trade (*Gewerbefreiheit*)' (R[1824–25] 26.3: 1402.1.23). Based on a clearer perception of *Polizei's* extra-ethical contours,³⁷ such developments manifest not only legitimation deficits but also a certain inevitability. 'In England the big capitalists oppress the others, this is how a branch of industry falls into the hands of a few, they have no justifiable monopoly, but they have it through their large capital, and this is the worst of all monopolies' (R[182–25] 26.3: 1402.1.24).

In criticizing the 'modern theory of colonization' (1982: 928), Marx had in mind Wakefield's influential doctrine of 'systematic colonization', published in 'A Letter from Sydney' (2022). Marx's critique corroborates a position to which Hegel also seems to point. Colonization cannot overcome the dialectic of market society because it is nothing but the expansion of the capitalist model. Wakefield discovered 'in the colonies the truth about capitalist relations in the mother country' (Marx 1982: 932), that is, that the development of industrial capitalism connects with a radical process of expropriation (Marx 1982: 939). Colonization was intimately related to slavery—here is a corollary—precisely because the separation between capital and labour did not spontaneously subsist in the colonies, triggered in the metropolises precisely with the expropriation of the poorer sections of the population. This is why, for Marx, colonization is all the more successful where capitalist conditions of production already have considerable prevalence (Marx 1982: 934). English colonization strategies, 'the secret discovered in the New World by the political economy of the Old World' (Marx 1982: 940), attest that expropriation, which colonization was supposed to solve, is paradoxically a condition for the success of colonialism.

Discussions of colonialism and imperialism, from the perspective of their tense relationship with capitalist society (Cain 2002: 79ff), returned to the debate only with 'Imperialism: a study', by Hobson (2016)—an influential work in the first half of the twentieth century, both for post-Marxist interpretations of imperialism as an advanced stage of capitalism, as in Lenin, Hilferding, Sweezy, and for non-Marxist orientations. Hegel certainly does not have an apologetic theory of colonization, as with Wakefield. He could, in fact, even be seen as a forerunner

of positions that, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, have explored the ‘negativity’ inherent in the relationship between capitalism and imperialism. In the *Philosophy of Right*, at least, the colonialist tendencies of market society spring from its dialectic and are, therefore, ‘structural’ or ‘systemic’, and it is not exactly clear how such subterfuges can—if they can—resolve such contradictions.

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Notes

¹ Abbreviations used for texts by Hegel:

- ENC 1* = *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline. Part I: Science of Logic*, trans. K. Brinkmann and D. O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
- ERB* = *On the English Reform Bill*, in *Political Writings*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
- FPR* = *The First Philosophy of Right*, trans. J. M. Stewart and P. C. Hodgson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
- TWA* = *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, ed. E. Moldenhauer and K. M. Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970).
- GW* = *Gesammelte Werke* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1989–).
- PS* = *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. T. Pinkard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).
- PM* = *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. W. Wallace and A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- PR* = *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
- PWH* = *Lectures on The Philosophy of World History*, trans. R. F. Brown and P. C. Hodgson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
- R[1824–25] = *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie des Rechts* (1824/25), *Gesammelte Werke* Band 26.3 (Hamburg: Meiner, 2015).
- SL* = *The Science of Logic*, trans. G. di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

² This is McCarney’s proposal in the debate with Bernasconi. See McCarney (2000: 140; 2003: 33) and (Bernasconi 2003: 36).

³ '[T]he demand was made that thinking justify its results, and it is the examination of the nature of thinking, and what it is entitled to, that has in large measure constituted the interest of philosophy in more recent times' (*ENC 1*: 50).

⁴ I refer to the centrality of the critique of the concept of progress, anticipated by critical theory and post-structuralism (Tibebu 2011: XXIV).

⁵ About the conception of modernity as self-contradictory (Tibebu 2011: XVI), see Habermas (1995: 51); about the denunciation of false and oppressive conceptions of universality (330), see Habermas (2001: 167).

⁶ 'Hegel is interested in defending freedom as a norm and he evaluates institutions and historical progress by appeal to degrees of the realization of this ideal' (Pippin 2008: 43).

⁷ Menke points to the articulation between the struggle for recognition and the struggle for liberation (2018: 49), which constitutes a 'materialist revision of the theory of the spirit' (2018: 140).

⁸ We should somewhat paradoxically appeal to Hegel's proposal to determine whether it is still justified. '[I]n view of their [Hegel's Ideas] connections with colonialism, we need to think carefully and critically about how far to take these inherited ideas forward' (Stone 2020).

⁹ See Pippin (2008: 65–91), Khurana (2011: 25–60), Lima (2020: 282 ff), Pinkard (2002: 227–229), and Honneth and Koch (2014).

¹⁰ On the relationship of this argument to Buck-Morss's attempt to rehabilitate 'marginalised events', see Zambrana (2017: 257).

¹¹ Without due philosophical justification (*PM*: 246), the historical glimpse that reveals a teleology of freedom can only constitute 'a plausible belief' (*PM*: 249).

¹² '[T]he deep tragedy of history is that in the process many are sacrificed and a terrible price is paid for human freedom' (Hodgson 2012: 45).

¹³ See Thibodeau (2013: 99–116) and Dudley (2009: Ch. 7–8).

¹⁴ This is 'the standpoint of its multiple "surplus" possibilities [...] of eliminating senseless suffering that have been glimpsed and lost in the process of the expression of a "single spirit"' (Macdonald 2020: 201).

¹⁵ Pradella also relies on Bernasconi's reading (2014: 444).

¹⁶ See also Honneth (2010) and Ruda (2011: 68–74).

¹⁷ Concerning the deep meaning of this negative experience: 'Poverty would not agitate and torment us unless we saw reflected in it the possibility that the promise of modernity has not yet been fulfilled' (Di Salvo 2015: 114).

¹⁸ 'It is likely that these last three paragraphs (§§247–249), which describe English colonial expansion [...] are the result of reading Colquhoun's work (*Über den Wohlstand, die Macht und Hilfsquellen des britischen Reichs in jedem Theile der Welt, Ostindien eingeschlossen*, Nuremberg, 1815), of which Hegel had a copy in his library' (Müller 2022: 521).

¹⁹ 'Colonisation was thus a means of maintaining some degree of equality among the citizens; but this remedy is only a palliative, in that the original inequality, which is based on the difference in wealth, immediately reappears' (*TWZ A* 12: 286).

²⁰ The presented hypothesis does not depend on a discussion of the *Korporation*, but only on the non-ethical contours of *Polizei*.

²¹ ‘The dialectic of overproduction drives civil society to other continents, where it looks for new markets in colonies—but this only underlines the fact that it does not have a solution for the problem of poverty within its own boundaries’ (Herzog 2013: 107).

²² ‘Commercial capital, when it holds a dominant position, is thus in all cases a system of plunder [...] directly bound up with violent plunder, piracy, the taking of slaves and subjugation of colonies’ (Marx 1991: 449–50).

²³ While dissolving traditional forms of production, one can speak of a ‘revolutionary effect [of trade] on the mode of production’ (Marx 1991: 452). ‘Force is the midwife of every old society which is pregnant with a new one. It is itself an economic power’ (Marx 1982: 915–16). The denunciation of colonial oppression in the dark genealogy of capitalism would help drain the apologetic tenor here.

²⁴ Implicit is a change in the relationship between capitalism and colonialism (Marx 1991: 455), articulated by the theoretical transition from mercantilism to political economy (Marx 1991: 452)—which in turn reflects the consolidation of industrial capitalism from its commercial beginnings (Marx 1982: 918).

²⁵ Piketty differentiates, despite the continuities, the first age of European colonization, between 1500 and 1800–50, from the second colonial age, from 1800–50 until 1960 (Piketty 2020: 236).

²⁶ Mentioned is the ‘external challenge of colonialism [...] The West’s mission civilisatrice was long justified on moral and institutional grounds, but its fragility became increasingly apparent to many of the colonizers and above all to the colonized, who mobilized to get rid of it. The counter-discourse of social-democratic and communist counter-regimes also fueled the denunciation of the colonial [...] dimension of the proprietary order’ (Piketty 2020: 199).

²⁷ ‘With the development of capitalist production during the period of manufacture, the public opinion of Europe lost its last remnant of shame and conscience. The nations bragged cynically of every infamy that served them as a means to the accumulation of capital’ (Marx 1982: 924).

²⁸ ‘The colonies provided a market for the budding manufactures, and a vast increase in accumulation which was guaranteed by the mother country’s monopoly of the market. The treasures captured outside Europe by undisguised looting, enslavement and murder flowed back to the mother-country and were turned into capital there’ (Marx 1982: 918).

²⁹ I would like to thank the first blind reviewer of this paper for suggestions in this regard.

³⁰ For Hegel, competition between different branches of national and international industry ‘calls for a general system of care and oversight [that] includes [...] ultimately colonization, which becomes necessary with a people whose industry is continuing to progress’ (FPR: 214).

³¹ ‘The state must look abroad, to obtain benefits for its subjects by trade negotiations’ (FPR: 216).

³² Marx refers to the dogma of ‘orthodox economics’, celebrated by the Malthusians, ‘that misery springs from an absolute surplus of population, and that equilibrium is re-established by depopulation’ (Marx 1982: 861).

³³ ‘The state of poverty leaves people with the needs of civil society, these many-sided needs, and at the same time deprives them of natural acquisition, everything is already owned’ (R[1824–25] 26.3: 1388 l. 27).

³⁴ R[1824–25] 26.3: 1391 l.35 ‘There is no country where so much is produced, no country which has such a market, and yet poverty and vulgarity are nowhere present in a greater and more dreadful degree than in England’ (R[1824–25] 26.3: 1392 l.8).

³⁵ ‘Through this means of connection, civil society also goes beyond its principle on the inner, moral side. The principle of gain is subsistence or augmented subsistence, with selfishness at the root’ (R[1824–25] 26.3: 1393 l.17). Thus, the effects on the ‘class bound to this work’ (R[1824–25] 26.3: 1390 l.3) are interpreted as experiences of injustice. ‘[W]hen society is dependent on it, on people, the lack immediately takes the form of an injustice done to this or that class’ (R[1824–25] 26.3: 1391 l.13).

³⁶ ‘The English [...] did not regard the citizens of the colonies as having the same rights as the English citizens’ (R[1824–25] 26.3: 1395 l.12).

³⁷ This connects with a strong normative meaning of the ethical element immanent in modern society, absent in the ‘state of understanding’. ‘[T]he ethical moment (*das Sittliche*) returns to civil society as something immanent [...] With this point of view we step out of the state of understanding (*Verstandesstaat*) that grasps the external order’ (R[1824–25] 26.3: 1396 l. 1).

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