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Colonialism and the Sovereignty of Peoples: A Dialogue between Hegel and the French Revolution

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Abstract

This article discusses the relation between colonialism and the sovereignty of peoples through a dialogue between Hegel and the thought of the French Revolution. These two sides are relevant to each other not only because of their historical proximity, but also because of the connections that can be established when we approach the topic of colonialism through these two manifestations. Hegel is explicit that his philosophy of history and his philosophy of right are supposed to be philosophies of freedom. Yet despite the importance that he lends to freedom, Hegel also explicitly defends, in the very same text, colonial domination when he deals with the relation between peoples. A similar problem had arisen in the course of the French Revolution. Following the declarations of war, France is confronted on various occasions with the question of how to deal with other peoples and countries. With the foundation of the Republic in 1792, the relation with other peoples becomes central in the revolutionary debates. The topic of colonialism is part of the constituting debates, and not only because of the uprisings in then Saint Domingue leading to the Haitian Revolution. This article is a part of a larger research project that attempts to reassess the relations between Hegel and the French Revolution, and deals with the question of how we can re-read Hegel's interpretation of the French Revolution based on the evolving historiography of the Revolution. After an introduction of both sides of this dialogue, the paper discusses how Hegel's political philosophy can be applied to understand the debates about the emancipation of colonies that take place during the French Revolution. The next part further analyses some issues, such as the notion of sovereignty and, in the concluding remarks, I summarize my discussion and point to some avenues for further research.

I. Introduction

This article delves into the relationship between colonialism and the sovereignty of peoples by engaging Hegel's philosophy in a dialogue with the ideals of the French Revolution. These perspectives are not only historically proximate but also

interlinked in a way that stands to change contemporary understandings of so-called colonizing projects. To show this, I will map Hegel's thought in parallel with different interventions during the French revolutionary process, shedding new light on underdeveloped aspects of both *corpora*.[1] I will also demonstrate how even a literal reading of Hegel's work suggests that the philosopher supported the liberation of colonized peoples, albeit under specific conditions that this paper will explore. Finally, I will illustrate how this approach can contribute to the advancement of some of the more radical aspects of French revolutionary thought.

Regarding French revolutionary thought, my focus is on what Gauthier terms the philosophical development of modern natural law. This strand in revolutionary thought is rooted in the concept of freedom as non-domination.[2] Gauthier illustrates how a discernible trend emerges—one that seeks to articulate and realize the evolving potential of natural law and natural rights during this revolutionary epoch.

To facilitate this cross-dialogue between Hegel and the French Revolution, I will narrow my focus to the period leading up to Robespierre's death, with a particular emphasis on the constituent debates of 1792–93. Gauthier contends that it is during this period that the philosophy of natural law found its most comprehensive expression. Within the initial four to five years of the French Revolution, its radical democratic potential becomes discernible, if not entirely realized. According to the historian, the gains made by the people began to be reversed by late 1794 (Gauthier 2014: 68), culminating in the abortion of what the author terms the 'revolution of natural rights' in the subsequent year (Gauthier 2014: 300).[3]

As asserted by Baker (2022), an examination of the propositions and deliberations concerning the new Declaration of Rights and the new constitution provides us with valuable insights into the development of the radically democratic ideas developed during the revolutionary era. When one contrasts this period with the 1789 constituent debate, which upheld monarchical rule, and the post-1794 era, which was marked by a gradual narrowing of this discourse space inclusive of discussions relating to colonialism,[4] it becomes evident that the constituent debates of 1792–93 occurred during a time more receptive to democratic notions. This is not to negate the significance of post-1794 discussions on colonialism. However, as my objective is to explore the relationship between Hegel's political philosophy and the radical nature of French Revolutionary political thought, I have deliberately limited the scope of my analysis.[5]

This article is part of a broader research project that seeks to reevaluate the relationship between Hegel and the French Revolution. It addresses the question of how we might reexamine Hegel's interpretation of the French Revolution in light of the evolving historiography surrounding this pivotal period. An aspect that can elude many philosophers is that Hegel's interpretation of the French Revolution was based on limited source material. In this sense, it would be odd to disregard

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the cumulative interpretations of the revolutionary era that have since emerged, especially when endeavouring to undertake a contemporary analysis of the French Revolution through the lens of Hegelian philosophy.

An illustrative anecdote underscores this perspective. In a letter to Schelling dated December 1794, Hegel remarks, 'You probably know that Carrier has been guillotined. Do you still read French papers? If I remember correctly, someone mentioned to me that they are banned in Württemberg. This trial is very important and has revealed the complete ignominy of Robespierre's party' (*Briefe* 1: 29/12).[6] According to Le Chevanton (2006), Carrier's trial formed part of the justifications for Thermidorian discourses about the revolution, which ultimately linked all Jacobin actions to violence. One of the objectives of Thermidorianism was the purge of the remaining Jacobins.

While there has been limited critical examination of Hegel's historical accuracy concerning the French Revolution, the most closely related discussion is found in D'Hondt's exploration of Hegel's connection to the publication *Minerva*. D'Hondt asserts that Hegel's perspective on Carrier is drawn directly from the pages of this journal and suggests that the publication continued to influence Hegel's thinking until the end of his life.[7]

This observation indicates that Hegel utilized newspapers and magazines as his primary sources when engaging in philosophical discourse on contemporary politics. This interpretation gains support from Petry's (1976) analysis of Hegel's reliance on *The Morning Chronicle* as his source for discussing the English Reform Bill.

If it is true that *Minerva* served as Hegel's source for his analysis of the French Revolution, then Hegel would have had only cursory access to Jacobin positions, given D'Hondt's assertion that *Minerva*'s editorial stance aligned more with the Girondins.[8] However, it should be noted that Tautz's analysis of *Minerva* reveals that, despite its extensive coverage of France, only a relatively small number of essays were dedicated to the French Revolution (Tautz 2012: 76).

While there is a paucity of sources directly addressing Hegel's perspective on the French Revolution, the literature has made significant strides concerning the colonial question. One of the central contributions comes from Bernasconi's (1998) article, which delves into Hegel's sources on Africa. Bernasconi summarizes the way in which Hegel dealt with his sources as follows: 'An examination of Hegel's sources shows that they were more accurate than he was and that he cannot be so readily excused for using them as he did' (Bernasconi 1998: 63). The same conclusion could not be reached regarding Hegel's reading of the French Revolution, as his source may have been limited to *Minerva* and other newspapers.[9] But Bernasconi's conclusion at least cautions us not to equate the positions expressed in Hegel's sources with Hegel's position itself.

Given the potential for factual inaccuracies in Hegel's sources related to the French Revolution, one possible approach is to reevaluate Hegel's account through

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the lens of his philosophy of freedom. Stone (2017) explores this hypothesis, suggesting that it might be possible to 'filter' out a basic account of freedom in Hegel that 'tells against colonialism for denying freedom to many peoples' (Stone 2017: 248). Initially, this proposal may appear straightforward, as the utilization of Hegel's philosophy by thinkers engaged in anticolonial struggles has a longstanding tradition.[10] However, Stone's conclusion does not exonerate Hegel: 'Hegel's pro-colonialism cannot rightly be counted as necessary to his thought or system. Yet his pro-colonialism does have extensive and deep-seated connections with his other views' (Stone 2017: 265).[11]

There is no consensus in the present scholarship regarding the utility of Hegel's thought for addressing colonialism. Brennan (2014) presents a contrary perspective, opposing the viewpoints of Stone and Tibebu. He contends that colonization, emerging in response to flaws in the modern economic system, sets in motion a situation only resolved when the colonized people themselves bring an end to colonization.[12]

Although he does not explicitly mention this, Brennan seems to take his cue from the Addition to §248 in *the Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, in which Hegel suggests that 'colonial emancipation proves to be of the greatest advantage to the mother country [*Mutterstaat*], just as the emancipation of slaves turns out to the greatest advantage of the owners' (*PR*: §248Z). Despite the latter part of this statement, extensive secondary literature indicates that Hegel cannot be categorically classified as an anti-slavery thinker.[13]

While our focus is on the question of colonialism, not race, the picture presented here does not seem very favourable for the proposal that we turn to Hegel to think about colonialism. This dilemma is not helped by the fact that exegetical differences could be due at least in part to authors' use of different sources. That is, readings that are based in Hegel's political thought lend themselves more easily to less Eurocentric interpretations (as in Brennan's work), while recourse to Hegel's theory of history, especially his lectures on the history of philosophy as they are used by Bernasconi and Tibebu, tends to make more visible the racist and Eurocentric side of Hegel's positions. That said, this simple dichotomy is not the end of the story, as some of Hegel's defenders against accusations of Eurocentrism also make use of his philosophy of history (Buchwalter 2012: 236ff), while others, by contrast, claim his Eurocentrism is also anchored in his *Philosophy of Right* (Kimmerle 2016).

In light of these complexities, this paper takes a distinct approach from both sides of the debate regarding Hegel's stance on colonialism. Rather than solely condemning Hegel's colonialist leanings, as Stone and Tibebu do, or advocating for the emancipatory potential of Hegel's philosophy for colonized peoples, as Brennan does, I demonstrate how a contextualized reading of Hegel in conjunction with French revolutionary thought can offer fresh insights into Hegel's comparatively

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limited discussions on colonialism. This helps us to identify under which circumstances Hegel understands colonial emancipation to be legitimate.

The following two sections will discuss how we can apply Hegel's political philosophy in order to understand debates about the emancipation of colonies that took place during the French Revolution, especially during the period of democratic radicalization before Thermidor. These debates offer opportunities for reflection that can pass unperceived if one's focus is restricted to Hegel's theoretical debate.

II. Preliminary remarks on Hegel, freedom and the French Revolution

Hegel is explicit that his philosophy of history and his philosophy of right are philosophies of freedom. In the initial sections of his *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, he emphasizes freedom as the driving force behind the unfolding of the concept of Right.[14] In the concluding part of the text, he portrays History as the actualization of Spirit, and hence also of the freedom of Spirit.[15] However, despite the paramount significance Hegel attributes to freedom in his philosophical framework, he paradoxically and explicitly supports colonial domination.[16]

A similar problem had arisen during the French Revolution, during which France was confronted on various occasions with the question of how to deal with other peoples and countries. In the years following the Declaration of 1789 and its rupture with the previous regime, the revolutionaries tried to understand what kind of new regime was emerging. The establishment of the Republic in 1792 marked a significant turning point. Within this transformed landscape, interactions with other nations took on novel dimensions, triggering fresh considerations within revolutionary discourse. Notably, the subject of colonialism emerged as a central theme within these debates, and its prominence extended beyond the context of the uprisings in Saint Domingue ultimately culminating in the Haitian Revolution.

Unlike Hegel, the revolutionaries gave much weight to the notion of the sovereignty of peoples—a notion that was already polysemic. Some revolutionaries, such as Cloots, defended a kind of universal sovereignty of humanity in which the sovereignty of each people would be subordinated to this greater universal sovereignty of humanity. Others simply defended war and its expansionist side. Against both, there was also Grégoire and Robespierre's sovereignty of peoples in which natural law did not justify the subordination of other peoples to a higher sovereign but meant recognizing the sovereignty of each people to rule themselves.[17] All these authors claim to be concerned with ensuring freedom.

It is worth noting that Haiti is one of the colonies recognized by Hegel as having successfully developed into a proper State. Talking about Black persons in one of the Additions of the third part of the *Encyclopaedia*: 'in Haiti they have even

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formed a state on Christian principles' (*PM*: §393Z). However, the subsequent sentence shows that for Hegel this foundation of a State took place only thanks to Christian education. In fact, Hegel took Christianity to correct something he saw as a deficiency in peoples descended from Africa: 'But they do not show an inner impulse towards culture. In their native country the most shocking despotism prevails' (*PM*: §393Z).

This passage should not be understood as contradicting Hegel's handwritten notes in §57 of his *Philosophy of Right*, in which he describes the slave revolts in the Caribbean as insurrections and conspiracies.[18] From the latter half of the eighteenth century to the initial quarter of the nineteenth century, the Caribbean region witnessed a significant occurrence of unsuccessful slave revolts that, unlike Haiti, did not result in the establishment of a new state.[19]

In works by the commentators cited above, colonialism is treated as something monolithic. There is one single colonialism that is either rejected or defended by Hegel depending on who is commentating. The historiography of the French Revolution, by contrast, calls our attention to the coexistence of different models of colonialism.

Gainot (2005) shows how during this period the French debate was cast in terms of three different types of colonies: ancient, modern and new. The first group referred to the colonization of the past. The second, which included Saint Domingue during the period in question, is defined as: '[colonies that are] exploited on the basis of the system of plantation economy, which requires a constant renewal of servants' labour-power by the slave-trade' (Gainot 2005: 104). Finally, the new, third kind stands for a transition towards a model that does not depend on slave labour.[20]

To some extent, a distinction regarding modes of colonization can also be identified in Hegel's work. For example, in the principal reference in his *Philosophy of Right* to this topic, Hegel presents colonization as a consequence of the economic contradictions within civil society. More precisely, it 'is due in particular to the appearance of a number of people who cannot secure the satisfaction of their needs by their own labour once production exceeds the needs of consumers' (*PR*: §248Z).[21] In the same passage, Hegel distinguished sporadic colonization, as practised by Germany, from the systematic colonization of the Greeks in classical antiquity. Considering the dubious fidelity of the additions, we should also note that this same idea appears in the most recently discovered transcripts.[22]

In the Heidelberg lectures, Hegel seems to be making a further distinction, now between French or English colonization, wherein colonists maintain a link with their mother country, and German colonization, in which migrants 'go out as individuals, and instead of being of use to the home country as colonists, they become assimilated to other peoples since their own country does not care for them' (*LNR*: §120Z).

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Hegel's not very systematic distinctions do not have a parallel in Gainot's reading of the French discourses on colonization during the French Revolution, but they serve to indicate that Hegel was aware that the phenomenon of colonization was not uniform.

Against this background, this article discusses a specific problem. The Revolution of Haiti takes place in a period of transition from modern colonization, beginning in the sixteenth century, to a model of colonization by partitioning, seen in the nineteenth century. The French revolutionaries discussed whether the emancipation of a colony, be it by its own action or through the initiative of the metropole, was legitimate or not.

III. Can the colony decolonize itself?

The question in the title of this section is meant literally. That is: Under which conditions can a determinate portion of a territory, which is treated as a colony by a formally constituted State, cease being considered as such and become an autonomous entity, either through an act of its own or through an act of the metropole? We do not find direct engagement with this question in Hegel's work, but, as I previously mentioned, he seems to think the emancipation of colonies is beneficial, both in general[23] and in the case of Saint Domingue, as per the addition to §393 of the *Encyclopaedia* quoted above and discussed below. I am going to analyse both passages, explore how they relate to Hegel's political philosophy, and analyse its parallels with the Revolutionaries' debates about the end of the colonies.

III.i. Hegel on why colonies are created: the economic argument

The passage from the *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right* is not very elucidating. §248 comes during Hegel's discussion of public authority (*Polizei*), right before the transition to discussing corporations. He claims that colonization arises from population excesses. In a definitive interpretation of Hegel's text, the phenomenon is described as follows: 'Hegel discusses the colonial export of civil society's surplus population, but only as an effect of poverty, not as a cure for it' (Wood 1990: 248).[24]

We are not concerned here with the accuracy of Hegel's economic analysis,[25] but it is notable that he abandons a moral explanation for colonization here. We will see later on that this abandonment is only relative. Wood's interpretation and others similar to it are based on this section of the text, for Hegel discusses the function of public authority from §230 onward and spends considerable time on the question of how to avoid or diminish the negative impact of the forms of production in modern civil society.

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Colonization is presented as a possible solution to the apparent inevitability of poverty and the formation of the rabble. To what extent Hegel or our interpretation of his text can affirm the efficacy of this means is debatable.[26] For our purposes, however, the passage is relevant even if its theoretical foundations are wrong. The passage proposes a justification for the emergence of colonies, but not for their maintenance. By contrast, it is precisely the economic argument that allows us to understand the final part of the Addition to §248 that I quoted earlier.

What significance can be ascribed to the parallel drawn by Hegel between the emancipation of the colony and the emancipation of the enslaved? One interpretation is advanced by Stone, who posits that Hegel's frame of reference is the independence of the United States of America,[27] and this emancipation is linked to the relation between colonialism and the advance of freedom. Nevertheless, even if this interpretation holds, the nature of any advantages conferred upon the metropole remains far from obvious.

There are two exegetical difficulties with this passage. The first difficulty has to do with terminology. In Nisbet's original translation, the last part of the sentence is rendered 'as the emancipation of slaves is of the greatest advantage to the master' (Hegel 1991: §248Z), while Knox's translation, revised by Houlgate, has 'as the emancipation of slaves is of the greatest advantage to the owners' (*PR*: §248Z). The first translation could suggest a parallel with the master-slave dialectic, as is implicit in Stone's argument. In the original text, the terms *Sklaven* and *Herrn* are used. While the latter term is the same as in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel uses Knecht in that text, which is better translated as 'servant' than as 'slave'.[28]

However, the terminological argument is not definitive. Even though the expressions are different, the parallel between the master-slave dialectic and the discussion in §248Z might still hold. But there is a further difficulty: the allegory of the master and the slave refers to the construction of individual subjectivity. The section opens the chapter on Self-Consciousness in the *Phenomenology*, meaning that there are no autonomous persons, let alone 'truth of self-certainty'. This is not the case with the metropole. Presumably, the metropole does not stand in need of alidation from the colony to affirm itself as a State. This is because from the Hegelian viewpoint, the metropole is already a State and would not become more certain of its status as such through the emancipation of the colony.

An alternative interpretation would be to link this passage to the economic explanation that Hegel gave for the emergence of colonies. Not only their foundation, but also the abolition of colonies as such, would then be justified for economic reasons. This interpretation is corroborated by the philosophy of right lecture transcripts.[29] Following Narváez Léon's (2019) interpretation, in the private relations of internal markets, free commerce is the mode of expression of particularity;[30] the development from colony to ex-colony would similarly be an articulation of the principle of particularity.[31]

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The independence of the colony creates a new autonomous agent on the market—that is to say, a new particularity arises. Just as particularity as the transition to the self-consciousness of individuals makes possible the functioning of the system of necessities at the internal level, particularity as the emergence of nation States makes possible the functioning of the international market. This position seems in line with the economists that have inspired Hegel, such as Smith, who criticized the mercantilist system and argued that the metropole ought to renounce its colonial domination.[32] While Hegel's views about the market can be understood as being more descriptive than prescriptive,[33] this specific interpretation is still relevant for our purposes, especially if one considers that Hegel uses the term 'advantage' (*Vorteil*) in reference to the emancipation of the colony.

The limitations of the economic explanation regarding the shift from colony to ex-colony are evident. It fails to elucidate the nature of this transformation. While the economic argument can make sense from the point of view of the formation of a free international market, the issue of the emergence of a State cannot be understood exclusively in economic terms. This is because, according to Hegel, '[i]f the state is confused with civil society […] then the interest of individuals as such becomes the ultimate end of their association, and it follows that membership of the state is something optional. But the state's relation to the individual is quite different from this' (*PR*: 258A).

III.ii. The economic argument and the constituent debate in the French revolutionary context

Within the context of the French Revolution, the economic argument does not consistently hold a subordinate position. Indeed, its significance is amplified after *Thermidor,*[34] when it is employed in defence of the new type of colonization mentioned previously. According to Dorigny (1993), the *Société des Amis des Noirs* defended colonization in Africa by arguing that new colonies would create 'commercial and industrial advantages in France' (Dorigny 1993: 425).[35]

The economic argument was employed even more prominently to a different end. On its basis, the colonists opposed the system of the *Exclusif*—the monopolist mercantilism of France. They argued that '[i]n order to regenerate, the colony needs commerce, and French commerce needs the commerce of the entire world' (Biancardini 2015: 68). But what was at stake here was not colonial independence, but the freedom of the colony to define its own rules.

These discussions culminated in the debates about the Declaration and Constitution of 1793—'the only French constitution which was not colonialist' (Gauthier 2014: 184). Gauthier's diagnosis refers only to the final text. In the debates that preceded its approval, we can get a better sense of what was at play. The background is provided by the Constitution of 1791.

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On that occasion, the issue of colonial independence was approached from the viewpoint of the white colonists' attempts at independence.[36] The debates started on 11 May 1791—a few months after the beginning of the Haitian Revolution. In practice, the question of independence was not directly raised, remaining implicit in the discussion about the limits of the decision power of white colonists regarding the laws governing the territory of Saint Domingue and the role that the 'hommes de couleur' and 'nègres libres' should take in this context.[37]

Grégoire tried to ban the discussion, arguing that to legislate based on these premises is already 'a very apt means to constitutionally sanctify tyranny and oppression' (*AP* 25: 638). Grégoire's speech went unanswered.

Within the span of two years, these debates underwent a profound transformation. During this period, the uprising in Saint Domingue had already erupted. Benot provides a meticulous account of the events spanning 1791–93, shedding light on the challenges faced by the French authorities in Europe when it came to comprehending the situation in Saint Domingue, as well as on the white colonists' attempts in seeking assurances for the preservation of their dominion over the territory.

The constitutional debates of 1792–93 took place in the context of an external war between France and the other European powers. The prevailing atmosphere of distrust towards the interests of these foreign nations contributed to the suppression of the uprisings in Saint Domingue.[38]

Neither the draft constitutions formulated by the committees of the Convention nor the final text of 1793 directly addressed colonies or employed the term 'colonies'. However, an examination of the submissions received by the Convention reveals that the topic appears in several documents. For our initial analysis, we will focus on the contributions made by Ragonneau and Lambert. In both proposals, a clear intention emerges: to exempt the colonies from the purview of the legislation established within metropolitan France.[39] We have already encountered the background to this position, i.e., attempts by white colonists to maintain their power over their slaves and to preserve their freedom to carry out commerce.

On the opposite side, against the maintenance of colonialism, three texts can be singled out for consideration—by Barlöw, Edwards and Ruault.[40] The first of them summarizes the application of the philosophy of modern natural law to the topic of colonialism:

> As your nation has been the first in the world to renounce solemnly the horrible love of conquests, you ought to go a step further and declare that you do not want colonies. This is merely a necessary consequence of your first renouncement: for the

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> colonies are a result of the conquests, and to pretend to have a right over the seas would be to pretend to have a perpetual right over everyone else. (Barlow 1793: 296)

According to the revolutionary, the emancipation of the colonies thus derives from the absence of a right to conquer. This justification does not seem compatible with Hegel's text, given his distinction between civilized nations and 'barbarians'.[41]

The other two texts pursue different paths. Edwards starts by affirming that the colony should remain connected with the mother country, but only 'in so far as it necessary to make them separate nations in virtue of their growth' (Edwards 1793: 493). Ruault limits himself to affirming that a colony empowered to create its own laws should be able to decide if it does or does not want to unite itself with 'its brothers in Europe' (Ruault n.d.: 169).

The only text that goes into greater detail is 'What right could France really have to master the colonies, and in particular that of Saint Domingue?'. The text denies the legitimacy of the proprietors who came to France to take part in the General Estates in the name of the colony, since the delegation would only have been legitimate if it derived from the 'almost unanimous will of the populace' (Demun 1792: 20). The text affirms the 'natural, not alienated and inalienable right that the colonies have to rule themselves' (Demun 1792: 23).

Demun's text points to a problem that might remain invisible to readers who are not familiar with the historiography of the French Revolution. As we already saw earlier, the self-rule of the colonies also served the colonists themselves as a model for how to maintain the system of slavery, as is evidenced by the history of the Committee of the Colonies described by Covo (2012).

In the specific case of Demun, when the author denies the representativity of the delegation from Saint Domingue because of the lack of 'almost unanimous' popular support, he inserts the discussion into the wider topic of external relations and sovereignty during the period of the Revolution.[42] The emancipation of the colonies is the direct consequence of the fact that the sovereignty of peoples gets recognized in the philosophy of modern natural law—hence the position formulated by Grégoire (1793) and adopted by Robespierre (1793) to the effect that the peoples can organize their government in the form that fits them best.[43]

III.iii. Connecting the two

As we have observed, economic factors did not assume a central role during the debates of the French Revolution in 1792–93. Hegel's work offers some potential insights into the mechanics of colony establishment but appears insufficient in elucidating the conditions and justifications for the cessation of colonial status. Meanwhile, the revolutionaries reframed the issue by emphasizing the concept

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of 'sovereignty of the peoples'. This shift in focus aligned with the view that the economic dimensions of colonialism were more intricately associated with the gradualist approach aimed at ending slavery. The term 'sovereignty of peoples' may cause problems here, given that Hegel does not show great appreciation for the term. Nevertheless, we need to bear in mind that the Revolutionaries who defended this position are not referring to peoples in the ethnic sense, but to a union based on the values of the philosophy of modern natural law.

We can connect this recognition of the legitimacy of emancipation based on shared values to Hegel's above-cited assertion that the inhabitants of Haiti had formed a State thanks to their absorption of Christian values. The quotation appears in the Addition to §383 in the *Encyclopaedia*, and as relevant as the fact that Hegel recognizes the existence of a State created by Black people is the way he represents those persons.

The creation of the Haitian State demonstrates, for Hegel, that they possess a 'capacity for education'; however, 'they do not show an inner impulse towards culture' and, in so far as they are captured from the African territory, 'they do not attain to the feeling of man's personality' (*PM*: §393Z). In other words, they are not free.[44] This means that without a process of education of Black people, this emancipation would not be possible. This interpretation seems corroborated by the recent edition of Hegel's course on the philosophy of history in 1830–31, where he states: 'If slavery was altogether wrong, then the Europeans should give the slaves their freedom immediately; but in that way the most frightening consequences arise, as in the French colonies. One must instil freedom in the negroes by taming their nature' (*Hei*: 70).

It is interesting to note the direct parallel between the position of Hegel and that of the opponents of the emancipation of the colony and of the slaves, as advocated in the terms above exposed. It bears emphasis that the colonial problem is in truth the problem of slavery, as Benot puts it: 'This is at the same time the whole issue of the colonial question in France, and the point at which different solutions and prospects for the future can depart from each other' (Benot 2004: 103).

The idea of a slow transition is proposed by the defenders of the colonial system.[45] On the other hand, the defence of gradualism points also to economic reasons, since the immediate emancipation of slaves would, for those defending this position, negatively impact the metropole and the colony itself.[46] Either way, as shown above, the economic argument has its limits and both Hegel and the French revolutionaries ended up tackling the colonial issue through other lenses. To understand how the colony can decolonize itself, be it in Hegel's philosophy or within the revolutionaries' worldview, we need to go beyond, but not disregard, the economic logic behind the colonial enterprise.

At this point, it is already possible to see how the issue of colonialism in the dialogue between Hegel and the French Revolution puts us into a quandary involving gradualism, economic structures, freedom and the sovereignty of peoples.

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IV. Decolonization without race

IV.i. French revolution, coloniality, race and revolutionary values

If we revisit the revolutionary debates before Thermidor, we encounter two levels of discussion regarding the emancipation of the colonies. Firstly, there was the defence of the colonies' freedom to determine their own fate, championed by white colonists. This strand included the Committee of the Colonies and the initial delegation of representatives dispatched to France. Their primary objective was not the emancipation of the colony but rather the safeguarding of the colony against the influence of the Revolution unfolding in Europe. As articulated by Spieler, their aim was 'to keep colonial matters out of the assembly, and to ensure that the colonies might exist as a separate legal order beyond the reach of metropolitan decree' (Spieler 2009: 378).[47] The Jacobins, however, opposed the recognition of this presumed self-determination of the colony. In practice, such recognition would have entailed securing the continuation of slavery and insulating the colony from the laws enacted in metropolitan France.

A parallel debate addressed the political rights of *hommes de couleur*. In 1791, part of the Assembly defended the delayed recognition of active citizenship to this group of persons based on the gradualist argument. To sum up: There was, on the one hand, the white colonists' arguments for colonial autonomy and efforts to guarantee political rights only for themselves, to the exclusion of free black persons. And on the other hand, we find the negation of colonial autonomy and the defence of free black persons' political rights.

With the Republic and the Convention, the debate changed significantly. In the previous months, the Assembly had already conferred political and civil rights to the *hommes de couleur*. Shortly afterwards, slavery was abolished in Saint Domingue and, just prior to Thermidor, the Convention abolished slavery in all of France. In metropolitan France, abolition was greeted by the sans-culloterie.[48]

To put it another way: In 1791, the refusal to grant colonial autonomy and the movement to subordinate colonies to the metropole's policies was a way of preventing white colonists from keeping the principles of the Revolution outside of their territories in the new continent. In fact, despite historiographical debate about what the principles of the French Revolution contributed to the Revolution in Saint Domingue, it is the case that some of its leaders explicitly evoked the philosophy of modern natural law as motivating their revolt. Thus, Toussaint Louverture wrote in a letter to the Directory in 1797:

> before I cease to be faithful to France and to my duty, before the god of liberty is profaned and sullied by the liberticides, before they can snatch from my hands that sword, those arms, which France confided to me for the defence of its rights and those

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> of humanity, for the triumph of liberty and equality. (Louverture as cited by James 1989: 197)

Louverture's way of talking does not mean that the revolution that he led in part was a mere consequence of the one that occurred in metropolitan France.[49] Yet at the same time, it is not possible to discard the role that European thought played in the formulation that Toussaint gave to the revolution,[50] even if we recognize that the shared terminology does not necessarily mean sharing the same background notions.[51] It is precisely the way in which this thought is engaged with and articulated in Saint Domingue that allows Hegel to affirm that Haiti is a State based on Christian principles, that is, on the principle of freedom as a moving force of history.

IV.ii Hegel on Haiti, Christian values and freedom

Let us revisit the passage in which Hegel acknowledges the emergence of a legitimate State in Haiti. Hegel attributes the birth of this State to the assimilation of Christian values by the black population. The reference to Christianity aligns with Hegel's belief that this religion played a pivotal role in enabling European nations to be among the first to comprehend the concept of human freedom.[52]

It is worth noting that in the same passage, Hegel also delves into the consciousness of freedom among the Greeks and Romans, drawing connections between their incomplete grasp of freedom and the institution of slavery. While Christianity did not immediately bring about the abolition of slavery, Hegel underscores the profound contradiction between the two.

Therefore, the emergence of this State—that is, the transformation of Saint Domingue into Haiti—came about through the adoption of Christian principles. This cannot be isolated from the end of slavery, given the relation that Hegel establishes between the two in his philosophy of history. It also bears emphasizing that Hegel talks about the adoption of Christian principles and not about Christianity as such.

The colony stops being a colony at the moment in which it articulates its freedom in its own terms. In Hegel's thought, this affirmation is correct, at least in the case of the transformation of Saint Domingue into Haiti. The arguments that Hegel presents to justify colonial dominion over the peoples do not apply to the situation in Saint Domingue. What revolutionary thought can show us, if used as a vantage point for interpreting Hegel's views on colonialism, is the need to locate historically the (few) direct references made by Hegel concerning this topic.

The case of the transformation of Saint Domingue into Haiti and Hegel's recognition of its emancipation has to be read in light of the transformation of the discourses about colonization during the French and Haitian revolutions. This is not because Hegel would have been directly influenced or inspired by the latter,

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but because this allows us to discard some interpretations of Hegel that put undue emphasis on (for example, economic) reasons for colonization in discussions about colonial emancipation.

The revolutionary debates show that this is done by those who wish to maintain colonial domination and by those who wish to perpetuate slavery. However, this reading also has some limitations. While it is possible to affirm that the notion of the sovereignty of peoples as it is formulated by the philosophy of modern natural law defends the broad emancipation of dominated peoples,[53] we cannot apply this same conclusion with regard to Hegel, as the apparent explanatory dependence upon Christian principles seems to indicate—at least in a preliminary way.

I hope to have shown that in the case of some colonies, Hegel recognized their emancipation. But we have also seen that it does not seem possible to expand this recognition to a more general defence of the self-determination of peoples. This is not to say that it is not possible to formulate a Hegelian version of this discourse. The point is just that if one tries to keep close to Hegel's text, there are limits beyond which we would have to develop a reading of Hegel against Hegel—an approach that is legitimate and common in contemporary literature, but has not been my goal here.

If we wish to promote an 'interruptive' reading of Hegel, following the proposal of Zambrana (2017), we also have to recognize the limitations that the author imposes on their own thoughts. In Hegel's case, this effort has to involve an engagement with the historical material that underlies his philosophical discussion. The topic of colonization is one of these cases.

IV.iii. Rights, values, and Hegel and the French Revolution on colonization

In this section, I began by elucidating how the advocacy for Saint Domingue's autonomy from the metropolis during the initial years of the French Revolution actually constituted a defence of the perpetuation of slavery. This is a significant point, as contemporary observers, particularly those outside the realm of history, may often misinterpret appeals for colonial autonomy as endorsements of emancipation and increased liberty. In the context of the French Revolution, it signified the opposite: an endeavour to ensure that Black individuals would continue being exploited and commodified in Saint Domingue while a more expansive cry for freedom resonated in continental France. Colonial emancipation only assumes the mantle of a cause for freedom once Black individuals attain the right to vote and slavery is abolished. At that juncture, the ostensibly identical call for colonial emancipation from the central government's authority takes on an entirely distinct connotation.

This shift can reasonably be interpreted as part of Hegel's claim that Saint Domingue adopted Christian values and, because of that, became a State by itself.

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This *by itself* means not only that it became a separate State, but also that this effort was done by Saint Domingue and was not a gift bestowed upon the colony by a benevolent France. The adoption of Christian values, as described by Hegel, should be understood as the incorporation of the principle of freedom.

Considering Hegel's political philosophy, actualizing these values could not amount to the empty enunciation of a formal freedom. This formal and empty freedom is the freedom of the white colonial settlers who advance the freedom of the colony as a way to perpetuate the unfreedom of the Black people in Saint Domingue. Actualizing these values means promoting freedom in real lived experience and institutionalizing this endeavour. That is not done by the white settlers, but by Black revolutionaries such as Louverture.

This connection is made by Louverture himself, as an earlier quotation demonstrated. By articulating their own freedom through the language of natural rights and sovereignty advanced by the French Revolution, these revolutionaries articulated and institutionalized their, and Saint Domingue's, own freedom.

We should consider both the connection and disconnection between Hegel's economic explanation for the existence of colonies and his philosophical reasoning for why Saint Domingue transformed into Haiti through the exercise of freedom. Understanding how these two distinct aspects—economic considerations and values or rights—were deliberated upon and applied during the French revolutionary debates can help us avoid conflating them. Importing the economic justification for the establishment of colonies to validate their perpetuation was a tactic employed by proponents of colonial rule and white settlers, albeit with different objectives. They aimed to hinder the expression of freedom by Saint Domingue and its Black population.

Even without fully embracing (or actively rejecting it, contingent upon our interpretation of Hegel's text) the concept of the sovereignty of the peoples as conceived by the French Revolution, Hegel's philosophy provides us with a framework to comprehend why and how he could acknowledge the emergence of a legitimate State in Haiti. This realization simultaneously enhances our understanding of the limitations of Hegel's emancipatory philosophy when viewed through its own terms. Nonetheless, despite these reservations, certain issues persist, indicating potential avenues for further exploration.

V. (In)conclusion

Throughout this text, we have examined the limited instances in Hegel's works where he directly addresses the colonial question. We have made a clear distinction between discussion of the motives behind the colonizing impulse, particularly with respect to the initial phase of colonization, and subsequent considerations of

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whether to maintain the colonial regime. Our analysis has revealed that economic factors driving the initial phase do not directly factor into the philosophical reflection on the subsequent phase.

In our exploration of colonial emancipation as a distinct topic, we turned our attention to the French Revolution and its debates surrounding colonial issues, with a specific focus on the transformation of Saint Domingue into Haiti during the course of the Revolution. This examination of revolutionary discourse has allowed us to differentiate between various forms of colonization and to gain a deeper understanding of which forms Hegel's statements regarding the colonies were intended to address. Moreover, it has highlighted how these philosophical conditions for the emancipation of a colony were themselves sensitive to historical context. To affirm the freedom of Saint Domingue to govern itself in 1791 was not the same as in 1793.

This approach has enabled us to distinguish between two distinct aspects of Hegel's treatment of colonialism that are sometimes conflated. We have demonstrated that it is essential not to confuse Hegel's economic rationale for why a particular state initiates colonial ventures with the exploration of the conditions under which a colony could, or should, become or be recognized as a state. Although these two aspects may initially appear linked, our analysis has shown that they are conceptually separate issues. While the establishment of a colony may be economically justified within the framework of needs, emancipatory considerations reside in the political domain, representing a distinct sphere of inquiry.

By establishing this distinction, we gain a more effective means of utilizing the debates within the French Revolution concerning colonialism. The historical context offers valuable insights into the implications of the economic argument once colonization has already taken place, as well as the political and philosophical intricacies concealed within this specific context. It is worth noting that while this methodological approach is not entirely novel,[54] philosophical literature often does not engage directly with historiography, let alone historical research itself.[55]

Through my interpretation of Hegel's approach to colonialism within the framework of French revolutionary thought, I aim to offer an alternative perspective on reading Hegel. This does not imply that philosophers must become historians to grasp Hegel's philosophy better. Instead, I put forth two mutually complementary claims: first, that the French Revolution gave rise to a distinctive political philosophy that merits recognition by philosophers, and not merely as historical data; and second, that by engaging in historiographical or historical research ourselves, we can shed new light on certain aspects of Hegel's texts and explore fresh approaches to his philosophy.

Returning to Hegel himself, it is this approach that has made it possible to draw the aforementioned distinction between Hegel's different treatments of colonialism and identify the limitations of Hegel's endorsement of colonial

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emancipation. Instead of following the well-trodden path of explaining why Hegel's support for colonial rule contradicts his overarching political philosophy of freedom and moving on to argue that a truly Hegelian perspective would advocate for colonial emancipation, I have endeavoured to understand the philosopher on his own terms, even if those terms are not entirely consistent with his broader philosophical framework.

In this paper, I have demonstrated that Hegel, in a somewhat circumscribed manner, does indeed support colonial emancipation, and that his stance derives from his conception of freedom, where the state as an integral component of its realization. As I have elucidated in this paper, we can assert that while Hegel initially appears to justify colonial rule on economic grounds with some positive tutelary effects (e.g., the potential for the colonized to articulate their own freedom and the eventual emergence of freedom within the colony itself), colonial rule is fundamentally unsustainable from a philosophical vantage point. In the case of Hegel's paradigmatic example—Saint Domingue's transformation into Haiti—this implies that violent revolution becomes one of the pathways through which such a transformation can be achieved.

However, certain aspects have yet to be addressed, and doing so is crucial to achieving a more comprehensive understanding of the issue. The first point pertains to the concept of the sovereignty of peoples itself. The debate surrounding colonization during the revolutionary period witnessed significant shifts in the understanding of this sovereignty. In Hegel's case, it is imperative to ascertain whether a notion akin to the sovereignty of peoples as a distinct concept exists or if Hegel's conception of sovereignty can only be conceived within the framework of state sovereignty. To explore these connections, we could base our analysis on Hegel's positions regarding external relations and war.

Secondly, a conspicuous omission in this text is the matter of race. While the defence of the inferiority and immaturity of African peoples appears to be intertwined with geographic considerations, the mere fact that the colonial emancipation discussed here unfolds on a different continent does not, by itself, establish that the racial dimension does not influence Hegel's perspectives on emancipation. The case of Saint Domingue is particularly intriguing in this context due to the diverse social roles occupied by individuals of African descent.

Lastly, there is the question of extending the analysis in this article to other colonial contexts. Saint Domingue represented a unique case where the indigenous native population had been largely exterminated. In contrast, in South America, regions under Iberian rule still had significant indigenous populations. It is possible that the analytical framework presented in this article may not be readily applicable to such cases.

Even with these gaps in our examination, we can affirm that Hegel does acknowledge the legitimacy of colonial emancipation, albeit under relatively

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circumscribed conditions. However, this recognition can only be fully grasped by taking into account the specific historical configuration that colonialism had assumed by the end of the eighteenth century.

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Notes

[1] This approach differs from traditional interpretations of Hegel and the French Revolution. The common approach is to analyse Hegel's assertions concerning the French Revolution itself, as demonstrated in Ritter's work (1984) and contemporary readings like Comay (2011). Such texts typically do not engage in historical or historiographical research. While such a detour is not essential for conducting philosophical research on Hegel and the French Revolution, I believe that by making better use of these materials, philosophers can explore less conventional perspectives. I will revisit this methodological proposal in my concluding remarks.

[2] Gauthier presents the principal lines of her interpretation in the first part of her *Triomphe et Mort* (Gauthier 2014: 27ff). Her approach was further explored by other historians, notably Bosc (2016: 54ff) and Belissa (1998: 221ff).

[3] The same can be said of Belissa and Bosc's analysis of the shift in the Revolution's direction after Thermidor, and their diagnosis that, after Thermidor, there was 'a brutal right-turn by the Assembly' (2018: 15).

[4] See Belissa and Bosc (2018: 187ff), and, for a more detailed view of the nuances of the debate after 1794, see Spieler (2009: 392ff).

[5] An analogous discussion centring on race, for example, probably could not be done within the same framing and would demand that one address the early 1800s.

[6] When applicable, following the paragraph number, 'A' (*Anmerkung*) is used to indicate an addition by Hegel himself and 'Z' (*Zusatz*) to indicate complementary notes by the editors, compiled from student notes. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

Abbreviations used for Hegel's writings:

Briefe = *Hegel: The Letters*, trans. C. Butler and C. Seiler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984)/*Briefe von und an Hegel,* 4 vols., ed. J. Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Meiner, 1969–81).

GW 26.2 = *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie des Rechts. Nachschriften zu den Kollegien der Jahre 1821/22 und 1822/23* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2015).

GW 26.3 = *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie des Rechts. Nachschriften zu den Kollegien der Jahre 1824/25 und 1831* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2015).

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Hei = *Die Philosophie der Geschichte: Vorlesungsmitschrift Heimann (Winter 1830/1831)*, ed. K. Vieweg (Berlin: Fink, 2005).

LNR = *Lectures on Natural Right and Political Science: The First Philosophy of Right: Heidelberg, 1817–1818*, trans. J. M. Stewart and P. C. Hodgson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

LPWH = *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction, Reason in History*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998)/*Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970).

PM = *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. W. Wallace and A. V. Miller, rev. M. Inwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

PR = *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox, rev. S. Houlgate (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

VPR2 = *Vorlesungen über Rechtsphilosophie 1818–1831. Zweiter Band. Die 'Rechtsphilosophie von 1820' mit Hegels Vorlesungsnotizen 1821–1825*, ed. K.-H. Ilting (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1974).

Other works used:

AP = Mavidel, M. J. and Laurent, M. E. (eds.) (1867–2021), Archives Parlementaires de 1787 à 1869 (First Series) (Paris: Paul Dupont).

[7] 'At Christmas 1794, Hegel expresses the opinion that "This trial is very important, and has revealed the complete ignominy of Robespierre's party". This opinion is directly borrowed from *Minerva* which, at the time, tried to confirm it by all available means, including some rather suspicious testimonies. We know that, later on, Hegel would come back to this summarily anti-Robespierriste judgment' (D'Hondt 1968: 39). For the quotation from Hegel's letters, I used the version from *Briefe*: 29.

[8] 'We would identify in it, and especially in the early publications, when we are sure Hegel was reading it, the expression of "moderate Girondism"' (D'Hondt 1968: 11).

[9] As Tautz's article is not focused on Hegel or political philosophy more broadly, further research on Minerva's approach to the revolutionary aspects discussed by Hegel would be relevant work on the topic. I thank the editors of this special issue for this point.

[10] Two well-known examples would be Frantz Fanon and Franklin Tavares—on this matter see Joseph (2016).

[11] A parallel point applies to Hegel's treatment of (the) Africa(s), as is argued by Tibebu's reading of Hegel's texts about that continent and its peoples—see Tibebu (2011: 229).

[12] See Brennan (2014: 97).

[13] Bernasconi contends that the emergence of Christianity acts as a limit to enslavement (2000:179). McCaskie, commenting on Hegel's treatment of the Ashanti, affirms that, according to Hegel, 'the Asante and other Africans had no consciousness of freedom, and so the difference

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between master and slave was a purely arbitrary construct mediated by force, and in consequence slaves might be better off in the Americas than in Africa' (McCaskie 2019: 183).

[14] '[…] the system of right is the realm of freedom made actual' (*PR*: §4).

[15] '[…] world history is the necessary development out of the concept of spirit's freedom alone' (*PR*: §342).

[16] 'The civilized nation is conscious that the rights of barbarians are unequal to its own and treats their independence as only a formality' (*PR*: §351).

[17] For a presentation of the positions of Cloots and Robespierre about sovereignty, see Belissa (1998: 223ff.). For a discussion about the relation between national interest, sovereignty and the right of peoples, see Gauthier (2014: 173ff.). For a similar discussion on race, see Covo and Maruschke (2021).

[18] 'Often in the West Indies the negroes have rebelled, and one still reads every year that in the islands there are conspiracies—however, they become victims of a universal condition—still, they die as free people; the state of individual conditioned through the universal—the conspiracies themselves [are] proof of merely partial cast of mind' (*VPR2*: 243 as translated in Pinkard 2012: 81).

[19] For a recent book on the matter, see Kars (2020).

[20] Regarding the debate about the colonization of Africa during the French Revolution and the Société des Amis des Noirs, see Dorigny (1993).

[21] The same logic is described in the Heidelberg lectures of 1817–18: 'If the population increases too much, the result is colonization. Where property is indivisible, only one of the family becomes a freeholder and the others become servants, and here population remains stagnant. But where farm property can be divided up and there is freedom, there is a marked increase in population, and land becomes insufficient' (*LNR*: §120Z).

[22] 'Civil society, pushed further, is driven to colonization. Agriculture started and civil society found in the colonies a new territory for its industriousness' (*GW 26.2*: 756).

[23] 'Colonial emancipation proves to be of the greatest advantage to the mother country [Mutterstaat], just as the emancipation of slaves turns out to the greatest advantage of the owners' (*PR*: §248Z).

[24] A similar position is found in Avineri: 'A further aspect of these drives by civil society to seek solutions to its problems outside itself is colonization, i.e., the export and emigration of superfluous members of society to overseas territories' (Avineri 1972: 154).

[25] For an introductory account of the various motives that have driven the colonizing movement throughout Western Europe, I recommend Ferro (1997: Chapter 1).

[26] Wood asserts that colonization has to be seen 'only as an effect of poverty, not as a cure for it' (Wood 1990: 248). In a detailed analysis of the economic aspects of Hegel's treatment of colonialism, Narváez León argues that, according to the economic logic defended by Hegel, colonialism only transfers to the global scene the internal paradox that has brought about the flight of persons from the territory of the metropole: 'That is—and to use methodologically the Aristotelian language that was sometimes so dear to Hegel—the efficient and formal causes of the processes of colonization—which, as we now understand, are always by definition

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economic processes—can differ; nevertheless, the material and final causes are always structural: the principle of particularity' (Narváez León 2019: 182).

[27] 'Hegel's paradigm here is American independence: i.e., the independence of what, he is explicit and adamant, is colonial European America, not Native America' (*N*: 165–66)—N is how Stone abbreviates LPWH. That is, America merits independence once its native populace is reduced or placed securely under European tutelage' (Stone 2017: 257).

[28] This is the case even if we consider the aforementioned question about the reliability of the Additions. We can also find the same general idea in the transcripts for the 1821–23 lectures on philosophy of right. Considering the importance of the English translation in contemporary scholarship, it seemed to me to be unwise to simply skip this brief discussion.

[29] 'North America, for example, has been made free and this has been shown to have been to the greatest advantage for England. [This is] because North America has formed itself into a state and it still has many needs—it is still an agricultural State that cannot satisfy its own needs' (*GW 26.2*: 996). We can also find the same reasoning in the lectures from 1824–25: 'Now, the general understanding is that not only was it no shame for England that its colonies made themselves free, but that England obtained the greatest benefit from this. Despite the fact that they carried out the most violent hostilities against each other, immediately after peace was established, trade started between them in an extraordinary manner' (*GW 26.3*: 1395).

[30] 'The aim here is the satisfaction of subjective particularity, but the universal asserts itself in the relation which this satisfaction has to the needs of others and their free arbitrary wills' (*PR*: §189).

[31] 'England, according to Hegel's conceptualization, introduces into a new territory the principle of particularity which expresses itself in the expansion of industry and of the population […] South America, by contrast, represents historically not the principle of particularity limited to the universality of the wills transformed by the State and the recognition of right, but rather the principle of the immediate universal will of the bad infinity characterized by Jacobin and Napoleonic politics' (Narváez León 2019: 181).

[32] Smith included the topic of the colonies in his discussion of mercantilism, which he condemns as a general system. Smith affirms regarding the companies that benefitted from the *Exclusif*—see Smith (1904: 140).

[33] Herzog, for example, states: 'Unlike Smith, Hegel cannot—and indeed never attempts to—argue for the market from its beneficial consequences. History, for Hegel, is not the "progress of opulence", but the "progress of the consciousness of Freedom"; and this is also the light in which he sees the market' (Herzog 2013: 59).

[34] That is, after the fall of Robespierre, in the context of the Constitution of 1795. That having been said, Boissy d'Anglas defends the maintenance of the colonies from an economic standpoint as a means of guaranteeing France's power (see Belissa and Bosc 2018: 215).

[35] The *Société des Amis des Noirs* was founded in in 1788 by Brissot Grégoire and others and had as one of its goals the equality between Whites and freed Blacks in the colonies, as well as the gradual end of slavery. It was the first abolitionist organization in France.

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[36] This is the interpretation offered by Gauthier (1992: 174) regarding Delâtre's presentation, on 7 May 1791, of the preparatory committee's report. Delâtre's presentation can be consulted in the *Archives Parlementaires* (*AP* 25: 636ff).

[37] This distinction, dating from the beginning of the eighteenth century, refers, respectively, to Black persons born of free parents and to freed black slaves. According to Gauthier, it marks the beginnings of a segregationist strand (Gauthier 2008: 31).

[38] Commenting on the reception of Page and Brulley by the Jacobins, Benot explains: 'By a remarkable coincidence, that same day, other colonists of Saint Domingue signed the secret treaty by which they offered the colony to England' (Benot 2004: 164).

[39] Cf. Ragonneau (1793: 260) and Lambert (1793: 457).

[40] There is a fourth, anonymous text, which puts forward a similar position (Plan n.d.).

[41] 'The civilized nation is conscious that the rights of barbarians are unequal to its own and treats their independence as only a formality' (*PR*: §351). On the other hand, at least in the case of Haiti, Hegel's quote on its state and the 'Christian principles' underlying it seem to indicate the country would not be considered 'barbaric'. As a general rule, however the incompatibility holds.

[42] As fundamental reading on this topic, I recommend Belissa (1998).

[43] The background to Grégoire's and Robespierre's positions is the opposition to the war of conquest which is defended by a large part of the parliamentarians in this period, be it explicitly or implicitly.

[44] For an analysis that inserts the discussion of this passage in the wider context of colonialism in Hegel, but with an approach different from mine, cf. Stone (2017).

[45] 'The immediate liberation of back people would not only be a fatal operation for the colonies; it would even be a sad gift for the black people, in the state of abjection and nullity to which greed has reduced them. It would mean to abandon on their own and without help children in the cradle or useless and powerless creatures' (*AP* 11: 274).

[46] See Benot (2004: 110ff).

[47] Spieler concludes that 'Revolutionaries furnished Bonaparte with a template of colonial rule that he raised to the status of a new norm' (Spieler 2009:408). I do not dispute her claim, but I hope to have shown how there were other discourses on colonial rule circulating during the French Revolution.

[48] See Crouin (2008).

[49] For some examples of the resistance in Sainte Domingue before 1789, see Geggus (2014).

[50] This is also the position of Nesbitt (see 2008:154). Following a parallel line, see Ghachem's argument that the Haitian Revolution should not be seen as a clear break from the Old Regime period, but as reflecting 'the unintended legacies of these colonial conflicts and collaborations' (2012: 5).

[51] As pointed out by Covo and Maruschke, people in the metropole and in the colonies made use of these notions 'to address different grievances and social realities' (2021: 387). I do not believe this weakens my argument, but, on the contrary, it highlights the plurality of appropriations within revolutionary discourses and practices as well as the possibility, for us, of exploring and expanding on those that were actually committed to freedom.

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[52] 'The Germanic nations, with the rise of Christianity, were the first to realise that man is by nature free, and that freedom of the spirit is his very essence' (*LPWH*: 54/31).
[53] This is the interpretation that Gauthier (2014) and Belissa (1998) offer for the political thought of this current in the Revolution.
[54] See Hallward (2009; 2022).
[55] For a critique of this philosophical disengagement, see Baker (2022).

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