

HAITI: A (FORGOTTEN) PHILOSOPHICAL REVOLUTION*

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In August 1791, after a massive meeting of slaves in the Bois Cayman that ended up in an equally massive *vodú* ceremony, the first Latin-American independence revolution took place: it was that of Haiti, which back then was known as the French colony of Saint-Domingue, and was, by far, *the wealthiest colony* any colonial power had ever settled in America. Haiti declared its independence in 1804 (and, with the foreseeable exception of Cuba, no other country in the entire continent celebrated a 'bicentenary' in 2004, waiting instead for the 2010 bicentenaries of all the other 'bourgeois' and 'white' Latin-American revolutions). Needless to say why it is futile to try to account for the innumerable complexities of an entirely atypical and unprecedented revolution: the entire history of mankind does not provide us with any other example, neither before nor afterwards, of a scenario in which those that *take over power* and found a new republic are slaves. We can try to offer, nonetheless and at least in shorthand, some sort of grasp of the mayor relevance of what can be *thought* when (re)thinking the Haitian revolution:

1) African slavery in general (and Haiti's and the Caribbean's specifically) is an essential component of the process of *primitive accumulation* of capital such as it was described by Marx's famous chapter XXIV of *Das Kapital*. Thus, African slavery will be, inevitably, just as essential in the construction of the 'modern-bourgeois' *world-*

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economy (or, more widely, the capitalist *world-system*) such as Immanuel Wallerstein and others have thought it¹.

2) If this is so, then what we call *modernity* begins to include ‘uneven and combined developments’ that discredit, therefore, all those one-sided, homogenizing, ‘phase-based’ or ‘progressive’ evolutionist theories (including among them many ‘vulgar’ versions of Marxism) that, among other things, account for modern *slavery* and *racism* as simple ‘anachronisms’ or cultural hindrances (instead of placing them, on the contrary, as strict *needs* of the first stages of expansion of modern Capital). The dichotomy between ‘traditional society’ and ‘modern society’ is both theoretically and ideologically *false*; if we take as our ‘unit of analysis’ the *world-system* as a whole and not individual European nations, we will find out that there has been, instead and *from the very beginning*, an articulated and/or troubled co-existence of both ‘ancient’ elements (slavery, semi-slavery, ‘feudal’ remains, theological rationalization, etc.) and new ‘inventions’ (increasingly global Capital, ‘modern’ European Nation-State, ‘instrumental’ rationality, ‘scientifically-based’ racism, etc.).

3) There is not, hence, *one single* ‘modernity’. There is, on the contrary, a divided or *fractured* modernity whose tremendously violent origins cannot at all be an autonomous European phenomenon. Such violent origins entail, quite oppositely, a ‘clash of cultures’ (and a clash of ‘differential historicities’) between *three different continents* (Europe, America, and Africa) that questions, therefore, both the *eurocentrism* from which we usually think such developments, and the concept of *modernity* itself. Thus (and despite what Jürgen Habermas might state), *there is no* ‘unfinished project’ of modernity. There is, instead, a *primitive inner conflict* that is constituent of a ‘modernity’ that is itself fragmented. The project of Western capitalist modernity is fully *finished*: is what we call ‘globalization’ or, in Samir Amin’s words, ‘the law of worldwide value’. However, such a conclusion does not place us in any ‘post-modernity’ either (‘post-modernity’ being nothing but a plain ideological-discursive tag for labelling the last stage of Western-bourgeois modernity). It places us, on the contrary, in a leeway that might allow us to compose a *critical modernity* that, firstly, we will have to define, and, secondly, whose power-boost will come from

¹ Even though the concepts of world-economy and world-system come from Wallerstein’s both huge and pioneer work, it is absolutely necessary to take into account, in order to acknowledge all of their implications, at least the convergent works of Samir Amin, Giovanni Arrighi, André Gündler-Frank, Barry K. Gills, Janet Abu-Lughod, and, most generally, all of the researches grouped in Fernand Braudel Center’s journal.

what the *world-system's* vocabulary calls 'periphery' (formerly known as 'Third World').

4) Such 'inner' conflict has, therefore, an impact on 'modern' or 'bourgeois' *revolutions* too. Against euro-centrist common sense –or against what Aníbal Quijano calls the '*coloniality of power/knowledge*'–, such revolutions are not an *exclusive* product of European socio-economical, political, and cultural developments either. The Haitian revolution illustrates this outstandingly: it entails its own specificities, and it is not, in any case, just an *effect* of the French revolution (which is merely, at most, the historical *opportunity* for the uprising of Saint-Domingue's slaves). This does not mean, of course, that there is no *relationship* whatsoever between both revolutions; however, it does mean such a relationship needs to be much more complex than a simple linear *causality*. Furthermore: if we would still like to keep the cause/effect equation for explaining it, we should actually start thinking it, at least in what regards the 'universalist' reaches of the French revolution, *as the converse of* the euro-centrist way of thinking such cause/effect pattern: since the Haitian uprising bursts as a reaction to the 1789 'Universal' Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen for it *does not reach*, in its 'universality', colonial slaves, it is such uprising what ends up forcing the French revolution to declare the abolition of slavery *in 1794* (that is, after *three years* of bloody struggle in the colonies). Therefore, it is the *Haitian revolution* what forces the French revolution to be fully *consistent* with its own statements, and not the other way round².

5) The Haitian revolution has, thus and besides all its *political* by-products, an enormous *philosophical* relevance that has not been properly acknowledged yet. We could quite easily see in the *practical* questioning of the false European and modern-bourgeois 'universalism' by the 'particularism' posed by Haiti's African-American black slaves, for example, a fairly *avant-la-lettre* illustration of Adorno's theses in the *Negative Dialectics* and their *unsolvable* or 'tragic' conflict between the *general* Concept and the *singular* Object to which the concept should be 'applied to'. Or, if we care for Hegelian vocabulary, we could perhaps find that same conflict between

² Unnecessary to say such a 'consequence' runs out together with the French revolution itself. In 1802, Napoleon abolishes Robespierre's abolition decree and restores slavery in the colonies. It is interesting to notice, nonetheless, Saint-Domingue/Haiti remains the only exception: the French imperial troops will suffer there their biggest defeat until Waterloo (though they manage to capture Toussaint, who will soon die in one of Fort de Joux's dungeons). Slavery in the French colonies was not yet abolished again until 1848. France holds the dubious honour of being the only colonial power that had to abolish slavery *twice*.

the *Abstract Universal* and the *Concrete Particular*. In fact, Susan Buck-Morss has already meticulously proven the decisive influence the Haitian revolution has had on the well known ‘master-slave dialectics’ that the philosopher included in his *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (which, at the same time, turned out to be so dear to our subsequent political philosophy)³.

6) This ‘political-philosophical revolution’ is extremely *current*. Its own *praxis* discloses, perhaps for the first time, the intertwining between strictly political issues and what we would nowadays call *class* issues, *ethno-cultural and religious* ‘identity’ issues, conflictive ‘multicultural hybridity’ issues, etc. And it does so, furthermore (and this is one of the things we will try to show throughout the next pages), in a much more ‘engaged’ and critical way than what our own *cultural studies* or *postcolonial theories* are usually capable of. Thus, the possible ‘culturological’ consequences of the Haitian revolution become an amazingly *present* theoretical dilemma (and this, of course, specially in Latin-America): we could say, indeed, the Haitian revolution sets –in its own historical time and for us to reinterpret them– the premises of that *critical modernity* we should be looking for.

All of this can exceptionally be found in Haiti’s first independence Constitution, which was promulgated by Jean-Jacques Dessalines in 1805⁴, and, specially, in its famous (and amazing) article 14, which states as follows: “All acceptance (sic) of colour among the children of *one and the same family*, of whom the chief magistrate is the *father*, being necessarily to cease, the Haytians shall hence forward be known only by the generic appellation of *Black*”⁵.

It is to this outrageous constitutional statement, its context, and its implicit significations that we would like to devote the rest of this article.

³ See Buck-Morss, Susan, “Hegel and Haiti”, in *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh, PA, United States of America: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009). Hegel writes the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* between 1804 and 1806, that is, during the exact same years during which the Haitian revolution climaxes and, finally, the independence is declared. All Hegel’s biographers and commentators, on the other hand, agree on him being an eager daily reader of the world press (“My own daily realistic morning prayer”, said himself). Since it caused a real panic wave among the European dominant classes that were related to colonial exploitation, the European press of the time must have devoted a whole lot of pages to the Haitian revolution. For almost two centuries now, nonetheless, the mainstream of Hegelian criticism has assumed the necessary historical reference for the master-slave dialectics was the French, and not the Haitian, revolution: another clear example of the ‘coloniality of power/knowledge’.

⁴ Jean-Jacques Dessalines, former slave, was one of the leaders of the Haitian revolution and the first ruler of the country after its independence.

⁵ *Haitian Constitution of 1805*, available at <http://www.webster.edu/~corbetre/haiti/history/earlyhaiti/1805-const.htm> (last accessed 18th September 2010).

The *black* Lights: the Haitian ‘constitutional revolution’

Let us start by proposing a strong hypothesis: the first and *most radical* answer to all the false philosophical-political ‘universalisms’ entailed by Enlightenment thought (including, in advanced, Marx’s eventual ‘mistakes’ regarding the colonial issue) was given by the Haitian revolution⁶. Such an answer was given, moreover, both *in fact* – given the objective signification of its *praxis*, which questioned the *euro-ethno-centrist* ‘universalism’ of Enlightenment thought– and *in law* –for its *texts* and, in an spectacularly *inaugural* way and as we will now see, for its first constitutional documents.

There is no need to say this *textuality* –as it has happened with the revolution that made it possible– is in almost all cases *missing* from both the political and the legal historiography, as well as from our sophisticated *cultural studies*⁷. It is absolutely

⁶ Even though we have no intention herein to degrade that amazing heritage Enlightenment thought is still for us, we would be doing the critical theory we are intending to defend little good if we concealed its *failures* with regard to colonial slavery (failures that, on the other hand, will be almost exactly the same as those of the French revolution, which was, in the end, inspired by such ‘enlightened’ thought). *There is no* rigorous ‘materialist’ analysis whatsoever of colonial slavery (as there will be, on the contrary and despite its ‘romantic’ boundaries, in other fields) even in the most consciously ‘radical’ *philosophes* of the Enlightenment such as Voltaire, Montesquieu, Rousseau, or Diderot, who is the most consistent anti-colonialist in the bunch. When Enlightenment thought talks about ‘slavery’, we are always in front of an exclusively political-legal metaphor that has to do with the European landscape (i.e.: the *bourgeois*’ ‘slavery’ at the hands of monarchic despotism, for example), or, at the most, in front of an object that is *morally* denounced for it expresses the ‘excesses’ of ‘power’. The *structural* economic reasons for slavery are never brought under discussion (not even in Rousseau, who is however capable of reaching the ‘proto-Marxist’ questioning of *private property* as one of the possible origins of ‘inequality among mankind’).

⁷ The (more than ‘symptomatic’) *oblivion* –which David Viñas would rather call *intentional oversight*– of the Haitian revolution reaches places that cannot be merely ideologically attributed to ‘euro-centrism’. In *Memory of Fire*, for example, Eduardo Galeano makes sort of a ‘mistake’ of this kind when referring to the Haitian revolution: “[At the meeting in the Bois Cayman] the old slave woman, intimate of the gods, buries her machete in the throat of a black wild boar [*that is not a wild boar, it is a pig. The difference between one and the other is ethnologically huge: it is domestic and not wild animals the ones that are killed in ritual sacrifices. Sacrifices need, precisely, a ‘para-human’ expiatory victim*] (...) Under the protection of the gods of war and of fire, two hundred blacks [*though we cannot know their exact number, the most cautious estimates state they were at least two thousand*] sing and dance the oath of freedom [*freedom is not at stake yet. The uprising that bursts in the Bois Cayman is a reaction to the super-exploitation in the plantations; abolitionist ideas will take some time to develop*]. In the prohibited Voodoo ceremony aglow with lightning bolts [*though this sort of rituals was not formally allowed, these ‘Voodoo ceremonies’ were not exactly prohibited either: masters usually looked the other way for they considered them to be some sort of ‘outlet’ for releasing slavery’s strains*], two hundred slaves [*again!*] decide to turn this land of punishment into a fatherland [*‘fatherland’? We will have to wait ten more years for this issue to arise, and, in fact, it will still be quite blurry then. Toussaint himself did not take such decision, as we will now see, until 1801*]. Haiti is founded on the Creole language [*two major mistakes in seven words: Haiti is absolutely not ‘founded’ in the Bois Cayman: we are still missing thirteen years for the declaration of its independence. On the other hand, ‘Haiti’ is not Creole, is Aboriginal. And this is majorly relevant for it discloses the unheard-of will of Haiti’s African-American slaves to rescue the island’s brutally exterminated ‘originary peoples’ from oblivion*]. Like the drum, Creole is the common speech of those torn out of

amazing –though perfectly understandable– that even the most ‘critical’ legal philosophy, being as concerned as it seems to be with issues such as *differential rights* or so-called ‘*positive discriminations*’, has not paid the due attention to the ethno-legal matters the 1805 Constitution attempts to tackle. It is even more amazing, at the same time, that our ‘post-colonial’ era, which is clearly theoretically obsessed with issues such as ‘multiculturalism’, ‘cultural hybridity’, ‘identity policies’, ‘ethnic unspeakabilities’, ‘identitary *in-betweens*’, and so on, has not turned quite eagerly to the study of texts as outrageous as those included in the 1805 ‘Dessalinienne’ Constitution or its 1801 ‘Toussaintienne’ drafts⁸. Either of these texts displays, *in writing* and *two hundred years before* these matters became a ‘Western’ academic fashion, both the difficulties and the paradoxes all these so-called ‘post-colonial’ issues nonetheless entail. The initial (*re*)denial of the Haitian revolution continues, therefore, its triumphal march.

Either of these texts display, nonetheless and *in writing*, both the difficulties and the paradoxes that all these matters entail, and these texts did so *two hundred years before* these became a ‘Western’ academic fashion...

We have already pointed out the profound and almost *scandalous* signification of what can be read in the 14th article of the 1805 Constitution: there, it is said all Haitians will be called, from that moment on, *blacks*. We have also said such a statement was a loud and sarcastic slap in the face to Western ‘false universalism’ (including here the reluctant French revolution, which had to be persuaded by *another*

Africa into various Antillean islands. It blossomed inside the plantations, when the condemned needed to recognize one another and resist [*not at all: Creole is basically an ‘invention’ of colonial masters for ‘communicating’ with those slaves that, since they came from many diverse African cultures, spoke over twenty different languages. That is precisely what makes this case interesting: such ‘dominating’ tool was turned against colonial masters when the revolution burst and slaves started using it as a means for communicating with each other and organizing themselves. In any case, however, such ‘language’ (which is actually more of a somewhat artificial ‘idiolect’) is way earlier than the slaves’ need of “recognizing one another and resisting”: originally thought as a domination instrument, it became an emancipating weapon*]” (Galeano, Eduardo, “The Conspirators of Haiti”, in *Memory of Fire. Faces and Masks*, available at <http://haitiforever.com/windowsonhaiti/1791.shtml> [last accessed 18th September 2010]). It is certainly interesting, hence, these (undoubtedly unwitting) ways of ‘intentional oversight’ come from someone like Galeano, whose commitment to the best causes is beyond question.

⁸ Toussaint Louverture, who was an amazingly cultivated man for a former slave, had begun writing, in 1801, a future Constitution for Haiti that was nonetheless left unfinished due to Toussaint’s death at Fort de Joux in 1803. Jean-Jacques Dessalines, who spoke several languages but suffered from agraphia, asked his secretary to write, under his strict supervision, the definite version using Toussaint’s drafts as a starting point. The whole story shows us, this way, it is quite possible the leaders of those former slaves who had risen back in 1791 had already decided for independence in 1800. Up until that moment Toussaint was the General Governor of the island and, despite he formally occupied such position ‘in the name of’ the French Empire, he had already achieved (by means of force) a quite high degree of autonomy.

revolution –the Haitian– to accept the fact the ‘black’ *particularity* deserved to be included in the ‘universal’ rights of Man). Let us underline two things now: firstly, the mere fact that achieving such an inclusion needed a *violent* revolution says a lot about the –‘symbolic’, yet equally effective– *violence* held by a ‘universalist particular’ that aims to be *the* Universal itself. Secondly, article 14 also speaks both *against* and *in favour of* the French revolution: if, on the one hand, article 14 shows the French revolution its *inconsequence*, on the other hand it is absolutely *consequent* with all the premises from which both the Haitian and the French revolutions depart from.

Let us propose, hence, a concise and paradoxical formula: *the Haitian revolution is more ‘French’ than the French one*, but, ‘at the same time’, it can only be so because it is *Haitian*. It was only from that ‘periphery’ that was excluded, by definition, from the Universal, that what the ‘centre’ was missing to be *really* ‘universal’ (and this in a *triple* sense: not only ‘politically’, not only *also* (and inseparably) ‘socially’, but ‘ethnically’, ‘culturally’, and ‘racially’ too) could be spoken. Article 14, therefore, not only *denounces* the existence of an unsolvable conflict (the existence of a *negative* or ‘tragic’ *dialectics*) between the universal and the particular, between the (abstract) *concept* and the (concrete) *object*, but *reinstates*, at the same time, the parts of such conflict right in the ‘centre’ of the alleged universality. To put it differently: article 14 (which is some sort of a condensed formula for all the complexities involved in the Haitian revolution) answers to the French revolution’s ‘universalist particular’ with a ‘*particularist universal*’ that shows it is only the particular that *cannot* be fully led back to the universal the one that can reveal the ‘open’ *truth* of an assumed *totality* that is, in fact and to put it in Sartre’s words, a permanent process of *des-totalization* and *re-totalization*⁹. And, on top of it, it also shows that what allows to explain such an unsolvable conflict ‘in the last instance’ is not some kind of *thinking error* of the Enlightenment that could and should be corrected with *more* Enlightenment, but, instead, the *material base* (the *actual* and not the ‘metaphorical’ slavery) that ‘over-determines’ such thinking. The unsolvable conflict article 14 underlines has nothing to do with a *logical contradiction*; it answers to the structure of the *world-system* itself.

⁹ Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, two volumes (New York, NY, United States of America: Verso, 2006).

Hence, when Adorno and Horkheimer write, in “The Concept of Enlightenment”, about the need to ‘enlighten the enlightenment about itself’, we have to read such statement in at least three different (though complementary) ways:

a) There is no point in *abandoning* the Enlightenment, or in trying to deny it, or in placing oneself in some sort of an assumed *outside the Enlightenment*. Such attempts would also abandon or deny the Enlightenment’s emancipating potentialities, which would be left, therefore, to the ‘enemy’. The battle must be fought, thus, *inside* the Enlightenment itself.

b) Nonetheless, the own *logic* of Enlightenment thought has tended, from its very beginnings¹⁰, to favour the instrumental and *dominating* features of an ‘identitary’ way of thinking that tends to eliminate or dissolve the concrete particularity of the *material* object within the abstract generality of the *ideal* concept.

c) Such a tendency has only been made fully possible within the context of the capitalist mode of production, which, on the one hand, requires the complete domination of ‘Nature’, and, on the other, allows Knowledge and Enlightenment thought to become mere dominating *technique*. Even though it was capitalism’s needs what made it hegemonic, such ‘style’ of enlightenment (which *dissociates* its dominating side from its liberating one) has also been hegemonic within the ‘real socialisms’. Criticizing the Enlightenment as ‘incomplete’ (criticizing it as a *false* ‘totality’) inevitably becomes, thus, criticizing *modernity* as such, for such a critique will necessarily entail *another* idea of modernity –i.e.: the idea of a (*self*)critical *modernity*.

Based upon these premises, then, to ‘enlighten the enlightenment’ from *within* the Enlightenment itself supposes the (*qualitative* and not merely quantitative) switch to a brand new ‘enlightenment’ logic that will be founded, this time, in the *respect* to the singular materiality of the ‘object’. That is to say: to ‘enlighten the enlightenment about itself’ means to place oneself exactly in that conflict area or in that *non-reconcilable tension* between concept and object. This is not something we could accomplish, nonetheless, through the *pure* concept: doing so would suppose relapsing on an ‘identitary’ thought that aims at the *identification* of the object with regard to the concept. But, at the same time, we cannot accomplish this *without* the concept either (in which case we would unavoidably fall within the most flagrant –and,

¹⁰ Beginnings Adorno and Horkheimer place, as we all know, in the very same origins of all Western thought, including herein its mythical or ‘pre-philosophical’ origins.

furthermore, impossible– irrationalism). That is why Adorno, in his *Negative Dialectics*, advocates for a philosophy that remains, no matter what, using the concept *against* itself or, to be even more accurate, that remains leading the concept *beyond itself* and towards that boundary that is endlessly posed by the material and resistant singularity of the object¹¹. Theory, therefore, is never some sort of entity that would be completely sutured or closed over its own pure abstract conceptuality, but, instead, an open ‘totality’ that is in a permanent both harsh and conflictive dialogue with *the real* (which always has to do with the *non-identity* between Idea and ‘Nature’, whereas we understand this last one simply as ‘materiality of the real’).

It is quite easy to see, finally, that a proposal of this kind takes up again, in its own register and with its own inflexions, Marx’s critique to Hegel’s ‘concept-centric’ and almost *des-materialized* idealism. It does so, nevertheless, shaped by ulterior thinkers (Weber, Nietzsche, Freud, and –in an unbelievably much more complicated way– Heidegger), and retaking (by means of making them more complex) the profoundly ‘philosophical’ implications of the *Theses on Feuerbach*: as Adorno puts it in the *Negative Dialectics*, the ‘transformation of the world’ that was supposed to take over its mere interpretation has failed. The time for the *realization* (and subsequent dissolution) of philosophy within the ‘kingdom of freedom’ has passed us by. Philosophy, thus, has been left ‘floating in the air’, in the *topos uranus* of the Concept’s pure ideality. We need to take it ‘down to earth’ again, so that its conflictive and non-identitary encounter with the Object (which is *both* Nature and History) can occur.

Therefore: that is *exactly* what article 14 does. Renouncing neither to Enlightenment thought nor to the French revolution’s ideas, article 14 supports itself in the concrete materiality of, on the one hand, its own revolution (i.e.: the ‘Haitian’), and, on the other, the specific place the ‘black’ colour of the slaves’ skin occupies. And, by doing so (and this is the main hypothesis we will thus try to argue), it denounces the ‘identitary’ character of the claims of abstract universality of the 1789 ‘Universal’ Declaration *from within*. Evidently, article 14 cannot (and neither can the Haitian revolution as a whole) produce, by itself and at its time, that metaphorical ‘realization’ of philosophy Adorno was advocating for. Nevertheless, it sure takes that potentiality one step *further* than the French revolution, and it is, in fact, actually

¹¹ Which probably is, in addition, the minimum definition for *any critical thinking* whatsoever. See Adorno, Theodor W., *Negative Dialectics* (London, England: Routledge, 1990).

closer to the *Theses on Feuerbach* –or even the *Negative Dialectics*– than any Enlightenment thought (including the Jacobin) has ever been.

Article 14 does not emerge, of course, out of nowhere, and it does not appear in some sort of *textual void* either. But let us move forward more slowly: as Sibylle Fischer states¹², the 1805 Haitian Constitution (together with, let us say it once more, its 1801 drafts) is an absolutely *extra-ordinary* document within the context of the post-independency American constitutions and political declarations of the XIXth century. Besides being the first one of its kind, no other text acknowledges more eloquently the truly *unprecedented* –both *unthinkable* and *unrepresentable*, to put it in Trouillot’s words¹³– nature of the revolution that made it possible. No other document articulates more clearly, in fact, the *revolutionary* nature of the new state, the *syncretic counter-modernity* (as Alvin Gouldner would put it¹⁴) of its *underling basic assumptions*, and the extraordinary challenges the Haitian revolution had to tackle within the framework of a *world-system* in which slavery was the rule, colonial expansion was already starting to move towards Asia and Africa, and ‘taxonomic’ racialism was mutating into an even opener biologically-based and ‘scientific’ *racism*. ‘Come hell or high water’, hence, the Haitian Constitution inverts the tendency and *politicizes* the meaning of ‘race’ and skin colour distinctions –and, once more, article 14 is just its clearest and most complex expression: as we will see next, being black, white, or mulatto is, for Haiti’s 1805 Constitution, a problematic *political* issue that has been *historically* inherited and has nothing to do with pseudo-scientific ‘naturalistic’ and/or biological fantasies. Any of such fantasies, thus, will be revealed as an attempt of ‘identitary’ thought and, therefore, as an attempt in which the Concept tries to restate its domination over the Object but nonetheless *fails* when faced up to its resistance. Evidently, we are not herein pretending to reduce the whole thing to a ‘philosophical’ dispute: we are merely stating the unprecedented material *violence* of Haiti’s revolutionary process is, as an effect of the multisecular violence of colonization and slavery, proportional to the ‘conceptual’ failure of an hegemony that was born, so to speak, already miscarried.

¹² Fischer, Sibylle, *Modernity Disavowed. Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Durham, NC, United States of America: Duke University Press, 2004).

¹³ Trouillot, Michel-Rolph, *Silencing the Past. Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA, United States of America: Beacon Press, 1995).

¹⁴ Gouldner, Alvin, *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* (New York, NY, United States of America: Basic Books, 1980).

It is quite clear, to begin with, “*all of us are black*” is an *inversion* of the classificatory delusions (of that sort of true ‘Cartesian’ madness, so to say) of French colonial officials, who had thought they could identify 126 different shades of ‘non-whiteness’. Nevertheless, such a statement does not necessarily imply a complete *homogenization* or, to put it differently, proposing a new *abstract universal* either. First of all, that could not have been the case: since –as it was above-mentioned– such statement assumes its subject *as if* its own excluded particularity was ‘universal’, then the *as if* can be turned into (according to that remarkable formula posed by Jacob Taubes in his analysis of Pablo de Tarso¹⁵) an *as if not*: a metaphor –or a *synecdoche*, as it were– of the incommensurable, the incomparable, and the *non-assimilable*. To the extent of our analysis, hence, such a ‘metaphor’ is fulfilled by *black* colour, which gains, thus, an entirely *political* (that is to say, *des-naturalized*) ‘shade’. It is important to mention, however, ‘des-naturalized’ does not at all mean *des-materialized* –in fact, it means exactly *the opposite*: it is ‘Nature’ understood as a ‘racialized’ condition what turns out to be an idealistic, metaphysical, and purely ‘spiritual’ abstraction. Article 14’s *black* colour, on the contrary, is *political* for (and not despite the fact that) it is the colour of a *skin* that comes attached to a *flesh*: it is, therefore, the recovery of a complete, irreducible *matter* right in the centre of the ‘spiritualized’ abstraction that rules the ideological self-perception of the white and bourgeois *world-system*. And, as such (and this is the exact meaning Adorno gives to the word too), it is *true* ‘Nature’: the *material concreteness* of the Object, of the Thing, whose ‘naturalization’ had been the effect of a *metaphysics* as well as, of course and as aforesaid, a *politics*.

This way, the Haitian revolution inserts itself into, to put it in Foucault’s terms¹⁶, a complex and labyrinthine *heterotopia* (which is exactly the opposite to the *rectilinear homogeneity* of the ‘official’ representations of modernity) in which the ‘universalist’ ideas of racial equality or the *identitary* claims for past injustices (as well as the longings for future redemption) have to be *re-founded* upon ‘*counter-modern*’ criteria –which means, ‘at the same time’, they *do not renounce* to their own ‘modernity’ but, instead, they *re-define* it. That is why we could call the nature of its character *utopic*

¹⁵ Taubes, Jacob, *The Political Theology of Paul* (Palo Alto, CA, United States of America: Stanford University Press, 2003).

¹⁶ Foucault, Michel, *The Order of Things* (New York, NY, United States of America: Routledge, 2002).

(as Ernst Bloch, for example, might say): it is precisely the *not-yet* that, through its own ‘impossibility’, strips the *iniquity* of the present.

Unnecessary to say the 1805 Constitution shows, for a ‘possibilistic’ conception of the suitability of the laws to the reality they are supposed to legislate (for a legal *Realpolitik*, so to speak), a serious *phase shift* between its discursive prescriptions and its actual possibilities of applying them to a social, political, and ethno-cultural reality as chaotic and unsolved as that the new state is facing after a devastating revolutionary process. But what such Constitution, as a *philosophical-political* text rather than as a strictly ‘realistic-legal’ one, attempts to do, in fact, is showing the *boundaries* of such ‘westernist’ legal realism in front of a reality that can be nothing but *unrepresentable* for euro-centrism’s universalisms. The Haitian revolution, at least in some of its features, did not resemble *anything else*. Its constitution, therefore, did not resemble anything else either. And, to tell the truth, it *still* does not resemble anything else, at least among the *existent* examples we might find already entering the XXIst century.

The *strangeness* of both the 1801 drafts and the 1805 version of the Haitian Constitution (the fact of them being *off-centre*; their *ec-centricity* with regard to Western constitutionalist conceptions and conventions) goes back to their very same origins: despite being signed by Toussaint (who also writes the 1801 Constitution) or Dessalines (who, as we have already said, asks his secretary to write it for him for he is an ‘illiterate’), they are both the result of *collective* ‘assembly-like’ discussions that gather enlightened *affranchis* (freed slaves) that have been educated in France, as well as ‘agraphia-suffering’ former slaves. However, regardless that the constitutional texts express, therefore, the tensions between the interests of these two sectors, they *do not* ‘synthesize’ them: they acknowledge, instead, their unsolved nature. Against the *unitary* attempts of most ‘bourgeois’ constitutions (including herein the *later* constitutions of the younger American independency processes –which are written under the ideological assumption that *there are no* class, ‘race’, gender, or whatsoever divisions within the Nation, as if such an assumption *was not*, and now pejoratively speaking, ‘utopic’), the Haitian texts accept some sort of a *conflictive dialogism* that takes *nothing* for ‘sublated’ beforehand.

Furthermore: the Haitian constitutional texts express at the same time a *tension* (which cannot appear to be more than an incomprehensible contradiction to ‘Western-universalist’ thought) between the very much ‘enlightened’ declarations for

promoting the *individual freedoms* that are so dear to the ‘liberal’ modernity (i.e.: equality before the law, inviolability of intimacy, right to work, etc.) and an equally strong *community ‘paternalism’* that imposes several restrictions to every individual action and grants the State the right to condition the individuals’ wills according to the economic needs of society. Such ‘contradiction’ can be (*partially*) explained by the hugely critical both economic and social situation of post-revolutionary Haiti, which asked in Toussaint’s or Dessalines’ visions (no matter what other sometimes major disagreements they might have had in other fields) a determined and strong-willed re-organization conducted by the State. But, at the same time, such ‘contradiction’ is also (and most likely *mainly*) the expression of an *involuntary syncretism* –or a *catastrophic transculturation*, to put it Fernando Ortiz’s words– between, on the one hand, the ‘modern’ ideas of a French Revolution or an Enlightenment thought that had sort of inspired, to some extent, the *opportunity* of the Haitian revolution, and, on the other, the ‘pre-modern’ *community* traditions (whether these are real or imaginary) of a mythical ‘African’ past, which was now trying to be *recovered* after ‘blacks’ had been *pulled up* from it in the most violent and violatory way.

The ‘Toussaintienne’ Constitution (deliberately) played with the *ambiguities* of the revolutionary situation already by 1801. Even though it did not explicitly declared Haiti’s independence (Toussaint had conquered the position of General Governor *by revolutionary force*, but he still exerted his power *in the name of* the French Empire), its first article established that, even though Saint-Domingue was part of the Empire, it was nonetheless “subject to *particular laws*”¹⁷. Therefore, the document acknowledged, from its very beginnings, a *sovereignty conflict* that was taking place right in the middle of the *Imperium*, so to say. In fact: how could the (French) *general* Law be effective in a case that reserved to itself an irreducible *particularity*, specially when article 19 will afterwards state the only laws that are valid all across Saint-Domingue’s territory are just those that have been approved by the *local* National Assembly?

The existence of an unsolvable *political* tension is, hence, suggested right from the start. And, departing from such an assumption, we will be next presented to all the ethnical, cultural, and social complexities involved. Article 3 had already declared the

¹⁷ *Haitian Constitution of 1801*, available at <http://www.marxists.org/history/haiti/1801/constitution.htm> (last accessed 18th September 2010).

abolition of both present and *future* slavery: “There can be no slaves on this territory; servitude has been forever abolished. All men are born, live and die there free and *French*”¹⁸. Citizenship –though still “French”– becomes immediately linked to the *concrete* freedom the abolition of *slavery* makes possible: it is not merely about some abstract legal freedom, but also about the *social* matter. The concepts of citizenship and freedom are absolutely dependent on the elimination of one *class*, namely: the slaves’. However, such elimination will necessarily entail *another* elimination, that is: that of the masters. Once more, Hegel has been radically *materialized* a few years before the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* was even conceived.

Together with slavery, thus, the 1801 Constitution also abolishes the liberal distinction between the ‘political’ and the ‘social’. On the other hand, the (‘a bit odd’, as Fischer points out) reference to the fact that men are born, live, and *die* free –if we have already said “are born and live”, why should we need to specify they *die* free too?– is extremely polysemic: if, on the one hand, we can understand it as a tranquilizing clause for the French Empire (meaning the revolutionaries would not be attempting to declare Haiti’s independence, for men die free and *French*), on the other hand we could also read it as a warning to that same imperial power (meaning –and taking into account Toussaint was already suspecting Napoleon was going to try and reinstate slavery in the colonies– the stated former slaves were absolutely willing to defend their newly gained (“French”) freedom *to the death*). There still is, indeed, a third –non-exclusive– possible interpretation: clarifying future ‘Haitians’ are *French* is also equivalent to show, once more, the *French* revolution’s ‘universality’ was missing a *piece*, which the Haitian revolution has now come to reinstate. Such ‘piece’, to cap it all, also has a particular *colour*: black becomes, in a manner of speaking, a ‘local colour’.

At least one of those multiple tensions is nonetheless ‘sublated’ on 1st January 1804. Dessalines declares Haiti’s independence. ‘Blacks’ are born, live, and die *free*, of course, but they do not longer do so as *French*: they are ‘Haitians’ now. A new *Black* republic with an *Aboriginal* name is born –another expression of crossed pluralities. Such an event shows, by itself and on the other hand though, *another* tension: the myth of the return to Africa is still present; ‘Hayti’ is the name of this land, which once belonged to the Arawak or the Tainos. Former slaves, even when many of them

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

were already born in America (and this, in many cases, already for several generations), *are not*, however, ‘Aborigines’; they have been ‘transplanted’ to America, and they have been transplanted to America against their wills. Nonetheless: may we say the choice of an ancient Taíno (or perhaps Arawak) name for the new *Black* state could be pointing out (wheatear this is ‘consciously’ or ‘unconsciously’) to a will to *take roots* or *integrate*, so to say? Yes, but only if we acknowledge we are in front of a *plural* ‘integration’, and this both in ethno-cultural terms (‘Africans’ *integrating with* ‘Aborigines’, at least through the symbolism of a name, for originary Aborigines have long been wiped out) and in *class* terms, so to speak: to put it in Benjamin’s words, it is the former ‘defeated of History’ those who are founding the new Nation.

If we would need extra evidence of the *philosophical density* of the political content of Haiti’s revolution, we would just have to quote the first paragraph of the Preliminary Declaration of Dessalines’ new Constitution, which was promulgated on 20th May 1805: “... in presence of the Supreme Being, before whom all mankind are *equal*, and who has scattered so many *different* species of creatures on the surface of the earth for the purpose of manifesting his glory and his power by the *diversity* of his works...”¹⁹.

This is clearly no longer about the mere *abstract homogeneity* of an equality before the (either human or divine) Law. The *universal equality* that is first stated is only there for asserting, at the exact same time, *difference* and *diversity*. Calling upon the peculiar rhetoric of the French revolution’s enlightened theology (“in presence of the Supreme Being...”) is just a way of providing it with *particular-concrete* determinations. ‘Being is said’, indeed and in Aristotle’s words, ‘in many ways’... But all of them are *simultaneous* here. It is not about *choosing* between the One and the Multiple (as if we were in front of, for example, a contemporary philosophical debate between Deleuze and Badiou). It is about maintaining *both of them* in their irreducible tension. On the other hand, this is not about some sort of plain acritical and liberal *pluralism* that would only try to superpose the differences underneath the false mask of a ‘pacific coexistence’ either. *One* of those differences –the ‘black’ one– cannot occupy the *same* place as all the others: such a difference is, we might say, the *semiotic-political analyzer* of the intelligibility of the ‘System’ as a whole –

¹⁹ *Haitian Constitution of 1805*, op. cit.

though, of course, a bloody revolution was nonetheless needed for this to become visible.

The next quote moves one step forward in this direction: “Before the *entire* creation, of whom we have so unfairly and for so long be its *dispossessed children...*”²⁰. Once again, it is through its excluded, ‘dispossessed’ part (through that *part-having-no-part*, would say Rancière) that the *totality* of ‘creation’ becomes ‘*specified*’: to the extent of our analysis, such a part is played by former *black slaves* (‘race’ and class are thus call upon yet again for defining a *non-place* within the totality). To use Adorno’s a-century-and-a-half-yet-to-come *Negative Dialectics* once more: it is the ‘detail’ that is irreducible to the totality what *specifies* such totality without allowing it to fully ‘close’ itself: the ‘object’, though not denying its relationship with the Concept, is at the same time some sort of autonomous *bonus* or ‘remainder’ that resists its *identity* with regard to the Concept.

It all comes together, as Fischer would put it, in the textual architecture of “the complicated and dialectical fashion in which universalism and particularism are framed”²¹. Universalism and particularism, in fact and though they do not realize any ‘sublation’, refer to each other mutually: *universal equality* could not be achieved without the *particular claim* of those black slaves that have been ‘expelled’ from such universality, and, backwardly, such particular claim would have no sense whatsoever if it did not refer itself to the universality to which it complains.

Such a structure becomes even more visible when we look at the constitutional articles that deal with ‘racial’ and ‘class’ issues specifically. Article 12, for instance, warns “No *whiteman* of whatever nation he may be, shall put his foot on this territory with the title of *master or proprietor*, neither shall he in future acquire any property therein”²². The next article, nonetheless, clarifies that “The preceding article cannot in the smallest degree affect *white woman* who have been naturalized Haytians by Government (...) The *Germans and Polanders* [?] naturalized by government are also comprized (sic) in the dispositions of the present article”²³. Here we are again, thus, in front of our famous article 14: “All acception (sic) of colour among the children of *one and the same family*, of whom the chief magistrate is the *father*, being necessarily

²⁰ Rancière, Jacques, *El desacuerdo* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Nueva Visión, 1998; the translation is ours).

²¹ Fischer, Sibylle, *Modernity Disavowed. Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, op. cit., p. 231.

²² *Haitian Constitution of 1805*, op. cit.

²³ *Ibid.*

to cease, the Haytians shall hence forward be known only by the generic appellation of *Blacks*”²⁴.

Regarding this last article, we have already said too much –which is not, on the other hand, mere coincidence: we could almost say this entire paper is just a *commentary* on article 14. We do not know why that strange specification regarding “Germans and Polanders” is made (were there in Saint-Domingue small groups of German and Polish immigrants, most likely working as craftsmen, small traders, or farmers? We do not have any information on this matter. What we do know, however, is that there *were no* German or Polish large farmers and/or masters of slaves in Saint-Domingue’s territory). Nonetheless, it is true mentioning them is *the last straw* of particularism, which becomes even more underlined for “Germans and Polanders” –who we tend to relate to the whitest skins and the blondest hairs we usually consider to be typical of Saxons and Slavs– are, now and according to article 14, *black* too (because if they have been “naturalized”, then they are also Haitians).

This generalization/particularization structure that seems quite *absurd* at first sight has nevertheless the hugest value as a *disruption* of the abovementioned biologicist or ‘naturalistic’ ‘racialism’: if even German and Polish immigrants can be decreed ‘black’, then the fact that *black* is a *political* (or political-cultural, as we say) and therefore *arbitrary* denomination (and not a *natural* or *necessary* one) becomes crystal clear. Moreover: if this is so, then ‘black’ *has always been* a political denomination (in a sort of ‘Saussurean’ manner of speaking, given the arbitrariness of the sign): just one discursive gesture is enough for article 14 to ‘de-construct’ both the racist fallacy that confers differential features upon Voltaire’s different human ‘species’ and the nonsense of the 126 different shades of black. Thus, we must insist on this: this ‘speech act’ –this true and powerful ‘*performative*’– expresses one extremely disturbing philosophical paradox: the *universal* is always derived from one of its *particulars*. And, of course, not from any of its particulars but, instead, exactly from that one that had been ‘materially’ *excluded* until then. As Fischer ironically states, “Calling all Haitians, regardless of skin color, *black* is a gesture like calling all people, regardless of their sex, *women*”²⁵. Such a gesture would also most certainly be, on the other hand, a *repairing* ‘performative’ for all the injustices committed

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Fischer, Sibylle, *Modernity Disavowed. Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, op. cit., p. 233.

against the discursively *excluded* portion of the human ‘gender’ by calling it ‘Man’ (though this is useful to mention, by the way, feminists do not seem to have paid the due attention to the Haitian case either: wouldn’t they be interested, at least, in that 13th article that grants women *specific* rights *back in 1805*? Wouldn’t the aporia of the *black particularism* ‘realizing’ the equalitarian universalism, for example, be useful to them when thinking ‘gender issues’?).

In any case, however, the *political-cultural* intention of the clause is unambiguous. Hence –and finally: why should it be necessary to *legally* include it, if it was first of all made perfectly clear that no kind of skin-colour distinction was going to be allowed in Haiti? Its meaning cannot be, therefore, merely *legal*: it has to do, mainly, with still preserving (and not hiding or disguising) the determinant place the *political* conflict between ‘races’ –blacks against whites, but also (as aforementioned) mulatos against blacks *and* whites during some periods– has had in what we can now start calling ‘Haitian’ history.

As aforesaid, thus, article 14 (and the 1805 Constitution as a whole) critiques *in fact* (and, furthermore, in advanced) a constitutional (*ideo*)logic that imagines the ‘modern’ Nation-State as an homogeneous *unity* that includes no class, ‘race’, gender, or any other kind of distinction whatsoever.

However, both the ‘Dessalinienne’ Constitution in general and its 14th article in particular *do include* at the same time (‘at the same time’) a *unitary* idea of the nation... Let us see, hence, which is its criterion: “All acception (sic) of colour among the children of *one and the same family*, of whom the chief magistrate is the *father*, being necessarily to cease...”²⁶. ‘Paternalism’ –and, of course, we could also add ‘patriarchalism’: the nation is conceived as a *great indivisible and united family* (all of whose members are, we have already been told so, ‘black’) that will be guided –as it suits the metaphor– by the ‘father’ as the Head of State (though *not only* the ‘father’: we have already said that, at least allegorically, there is also a return to the *Mat(t)er*, which is implicitly contained in that *black* flesh without which we cannot even start thinking Haitian *citizenship*). It is precisely against this analogy between the State and the family (which can be tracked, in the European political tradition, back to the Ancient Greece and its *polis/oikos* distinction, which is essential even as one of the motives for the tragic conflict such as we can find it, for instance, in Sophocles’

²⁶ *Haitian Constitution of 1805*, op. cit.

Antigone) that the first great thinkers of the ‘European-modern’ State have struggled: we can find this discussion in Machiavelli, in Hobbes, in Locke... Obviously, such a debate had mainly to do with a battle, on the one hand, against feudal ‘paternalism’ and ‘blood inheritance’, and, on the other, in favour of a more strictly *legal-political* (and no longer ‘familiaristic’) idea of Power. However (and, in fact, precisely because of that), those arguments turned out to be arguments that *also* tended to increase the distinctions between ‘political society’ and ‘civil society’ –or, broadly, between *State* and *society*. In any case, nonetheless, that is a purely ‘Western’, *European* issue.

Article 14 has nothing to do with such a debate: undoubtedly, the ‘*political*’ *unity* it states as part of the program for the future nation is that of ‘traditional’, ‘pre-modern’ social structures; nevertheless, it is also *African* and, therefore, it presupposes the logic of ‘political’ power is indistinguishable from what anthropologists have called *structures of kinship* and, as such, transforms (according, for instance, to Lévi-Strauss²⁷) *biological consanguinity* into *social and political alliance* –another example, thus, of *politicization* –of *materialization*, strictly speaking– of an abstract ‘nature’. If we can state the (Haitian) revolution ‘enlightens the enlightenment’, thus, we can also state that, by introducing within the French revolution’s *modernity* a ‘traditionality’ that, instead of entailing some sort of step backwards, involves a new *combination* that acknowledges *inequality* (for, as aforesaid, the Haitian revolution does not recuse the French revolution’s *modernity*, but it brands it *insufficient*), it *revolutionizes the (French) revolution*.

All the above stated configures what we could now call –by means of appealing to some sort of psychoanalytic metaphor– a Haitian *divided identity*. ‘Divided’, indeed, and precisely because of that all the more authentic and *real*, for it struggles for subtracting itself from the false homogenization of the ‘identitary’ illusion. Here we are in front of a *new nation* that has been founded ‘from the ground up’: oppositely to what will happen with the remaining American independency processes, there is, herein, a radical dis-continuity with regard to the colonial framework (dis-continuity that is, of course, legal, but also –and mainly– *ethno-cultural*: this is a ‘*black*’ nation). Its essential ‘novelty’, nonetheless, is the acknowledgement and *re-enactment* of the unsolvable conflicts that have been inherited from both such colonial framework and the *ethno-social-economical* logic of the plantations: the French revolution’s ideas

²⁷ Lévi-Strauss, Claude, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (Boston, MA, United States of America: Beacon Press, 1971).

are, at one time, kept and taken one step *beyond* themselves –that is, beyond their historical, political, and ideological boundaries. And, within such movement, the French revolution’s modernity encounters *black colour*: that ‘local colour’ forces it to a merely apparent *step backwards* towards the African mythical traditions (or, at least, that is what euro-centric ‘evolutionist’ and ‘progressive’ conceptions would think); but, in fact, such a forced gesture is actually more of a *jump forward* regarding that euro-centric modernity’s own boundaries.

To conclude, let us say Doris L. Garraway²⁸ has already pointed out at the great (ideologically ‘over-determined’, of course) difficulties euro-centric thought has had for conceiving the ‘philosophical-political’ *ec-centricity* of the Haitian revolution. This last one has been, apparently, systematically understood as a mere ‘reflection’ of the French revolution, which has been therefore assumed as the *originary signifier* for every ‘modern’ political value. What has not yet been acknowledged, thus, is the possibility of such a ‘signifier’ having been forced to expand and multiply its ‘signifieds’ precisely through the *boundaries* the Haitian revolution revealed in it.

The difficulties for ‘theorizing’ the (Haitian) revolution

We should not simply believe this euro-centric ‘impossibility’ is exclusively *European*. Quite on the contrary (and just to name a couple of names in a list that sure is much longer), none other than ‘ultra-post-colonial’ Homi Bhabha, for instance, succumbs to it too when, analyzing C. L. R. James’ work²⁹ (and not forgetting to rigorously point out at how the French revolution’s allegedly universalist values were initially subordinated to the interests of the *world-system*’s colonial capital), he nonetheless introduces Toussaint L’Ouvverture as a mere spectator of the tragic development of a modernity that has set off *somewhere else* (that is, in Europe)³⁰. Another renowned ‘post-colonial’, Robert Young, devotes almost half of his work *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* to the historical-ideological analysis of

²⁸ Garraway, Doris L., “Legitime Défense: Universalism and Nationalism in the discourse of the Haitian Revolution”, in Garraway, Doris L., ed., *Tree of Liberty. Cultural Legacies of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Charlottesville, VA, United States of America: University of Virginia Press, 2008).

²⁹ C. L. R. James is the greatest historian of the Haitian revolution. Even though his masterpiece, *The Black Jacobins*, has been ‘sublated’ in many details (it was originally published in 1936), its rigorous, engaged, and –above all– absolutely pioneering nature has made it an ‘unsurpassable’ classic in many ways.

³⁰ See Bhabha, Homi, *The Location of Culture* (New York, NY, United States of America: Routledge, 2005).

the ‘theoretical practices’ (a curiously Althusserian expression for a ‘post’ intellectual) of the anti-colonial liberation struggles in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, mentioning the Haitian revolution (which we do know was *the first one* of those struggles) *only once* and, on top of it, in a chapter dedicated to... *European anti-colonialism*³¹.

Both Bhabha and Young, thus and despite writing ‘with the best of intentions’, strip the Haitian revolution (which, as we have already said, had to sort of paradoxically oppose the French revolution in order to ‘realize’ its ideals) of every signification as an *autonomous anti-colonial struggle*, transforming it, instead, in a mere *colonial chapter* within the history of the French revolution: this last one is hence the *active ‘agent’*, while the former remains just a *passive receiver*. Such a ‘progressive euro-centrism’ becomes quite *symptomatic* when we remember that Aimé Césaire, who was a Martinican poet and essayist, had strongly refused, *already by the 1930’s*, the idea of Saint-Domingue’s revolution being just a ‘portion’ of the French Revolution: “It is absolutely necessary that we understand that *there is no* French Revolution in the French colonies. There is, instead and in *each* colony –and quite specially in Haiti–, a *specific* revolution that was born from the *occasion* of the French Revolution, that sure is *connected* to it, but that develops according to *its own laws* and *its own aims*”³².

Such huge difficulties when dealing with the *eccentric* nature of the Haitian revolution can be explained through two major –and mutually related– issues that post-colonial theories do not seem to fully acknowledge³³. First of all, post-colonial theories have been thought *from* and *for* the scenery of the ‘late colonial period’ in Asia and Africa (and its corresponding ‘post-colonialism’), and not for the ‘early’ colonialisms/post-colonialisms of Latin America and the Caribbean. We should not assume, therefore, that we will be able to use the same kind of analysis for, on the one hand, the cultural productions of national societies –or the cultural productions of the metropolises that are related to such ‘external’ societies– that have conquered their formal political independence well into the XXth century (India, the Maghreb, most – if not all– African nations, and so on), and, on the other, that of the nations that have

³¹ See Young, Robert, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (London, England: Blackwell, 2001).

³² Césaire, Aimé, *Toussaint Louverture* (La Havana, Cuba: Instituto del Libro, 1967; the translation is ours).

³³ See Grüner, Eduardo, *El fin de las pequeñas historias. De los estudios culturales al retorno (imposible) de lo trágico* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Paidós, 2002).

achieved such independence during the XIXth century and way before the imperialist and neo-colonial *world-system* was strictly structured as such (all the American nations, for a start). Even though this is not the place for going into this matter in depth, we have to acknowledge there must be huge differences between the symbolic self-perception and/or the imaginary identity of a country such as, for example, Algeria (which was born within the framework of fully developed international dependencies, ‘cold war’ between conflictive economical and political ‘blocs’, a Western world already in its way to ‘late capitalism’ and, therefore, in the middle of major technological innovations, ‘arms race’ and nuclear menace, full hegemony of the cultural industry and the ideology of consumption, etc.), and that of a country such as, let us say, Argentina (which was instead born a century and a half earlier and when none of this existed or was even imaginable).

There is no doubt, hence, the cultural and symbolic production of societies that have such radically different histories has to be, at least, difficult to compare. Nonetheless, we should also take into account, at the same time, that other fundamental difference we have mentioned earlier: while the anti-colonial revolutions of the XIXth century (that is, all the Latin American ones, with the only exception of the Haitian case) were carried out by the (European) local *elites* that were in search of a greater ‘leeway’ for their businesses and, thus, also in search of a greater autonomy with regard to the guidelines of the metropolises (and who solely allowed some sort of popular ‘participation’ in the revolutionary processes under their firm leadership), the anti-colonial or post-colonial revolutions of the XXth century (from Algeria to Vietnam, Mexico to India, China to Grenada, Cuba to Angola, the *Mau-Mau* to Nicaragua, and so on) were (despite the fact such movements were afterwards absorbed (or openly betrayed) by the emerging *elites*) *fundamentally and directly undertaken* by the plebeian masses, by the concurrence of some sectors of both the working classes and the peasantry, or, in one word, by the ‘people’. This does not only imply this latter kind of movements is completely different to the first one in what regards its political *praxis*; it also entails, on a theoretical level, the need to reintroduce the disturbing (yet persistent) *class* issue in its relationship, intertwinement, or even open conflict with the ethno-cultural issue, the gender, the linguistic, and the religious issue. To this extent –and proving once more those ‘uneven and combined developments’ as some sort of *historical multi-synchronicity*–, the Haitian revolution resembles, indeed,

much more the XXth century ‘third-world’ revolutions than the XIXth century ‘bourgeois’ ones.

Secondly, as any other ‘*post*’ theory that aims for the critical ‘de-construction’ of every ‘textuality’ suspected of ‘enlightened modernity’, post-colonial theories need to be uncomfortable around the ‘enlightened’ statements we can certainly find in the declarations and constitutions of the Haitian revolution (which, on the other hand and as aforesaid, are nonetheless a magnificent example of the Frankfurtean leitmotif ‘*to enlighten the enlightenment about itself*’). We have already said such a ‘discomfort’ reveals, on the one hand, a paradoxical subjection of post-colonial theories to the *hegemonic* ‘grand narrative’ about modernity (which narrates it as an homogeneous and unilateral phenomenon), and, on the other, an equally paradoxical (for a ‘*post*’ theory) *binary* thought that unconsciously succumbs to ideological fetishism: if the Haitian revolution sometimes expresses itself in the same language than the French revolution, then *the entire* Haitian revolution is a mere *component* of the French one and has to be fully subjected to its logic. ‘Post-colonial’ theorists, hence, cancel the *other* aspect of both the discourses and practices involved in the Haitian revolution: those features that come into *conflict* with the *boundaries* of ‘euro-centrism’ and the image of ‘modernity’ entailed by the French revolution are simply left unattended. In short, what ‘post-colonial’ thinkers fail to see (though such short-sightedness is ironically contradictory to *their very own* ‘in-betweens’ theory) is that if the Haitian revolution is a component of the French revolution (and it sure is), *the contrary is nonetheless equally true* –the only thing we should take into account is, however, that such ‘components’ (as if they were Walter Benjamin’s ‘allegorical constellations’) articulate and ‘at the same time’ reject each other mutually.

Doris Garraway proposes, nevertheless, a *third* and quite sharp hypothesis for explaining this sort of ‘impotence’ of post-colonial theories regarding the Haitian phenomenon (hypothesis that, on the other hand, is still perfectly complementary to the other two we have already accounted for): the categories of *nationalism* with which ‘post-colonial’ scholars (though not only them) try to characterize modern anti-colonial movements are categories that *cannot* account for the Haitian revolution. One of the most influential recent works on the subject, Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (whose author, needless to say, does not mention Haiti *once*), suggests nationalism is not, as it is commonly assumed, a post-French Revolution European by-product but, instead, an ‘invention’ of the *colonial world* in its efforts for breaking

off its relationships with the imperial powers³⁴. Haiti, nonetheless, does not fit into any of the paradigms that Anderson so meticulously puts forward: it is not a ‘Creole’ nationalism such as those of most Latin American independencies (where the ‘bourgeois’ and mainly *white* minorities promoted what Garraway calls a *frontier nativism* that nevertheless preserved the European cultural values and a social order in which white supremacy was unquestionable), and it is neither –as abovementioned– quite exactly the same sort of anti-colonial movement we could find, for instance, in India or in Africa, where the claims of sovereignty have always been completely linked to a desire of defining the new nations by a *radical difference* regarding Europe and upon the *purity* of their ethno-cultural origins. As it has already been said, the Haitian revolution entailed a *conflictive* (or *catastrophic*) *transculturation* that was marked, instead, by an *un-solved tension* between such cultural references. Furthermore, such a tension had a lot to do with the fact that –though Garraway does not tackle this issue specifically– great part of the insurgent slaves (over one third of them, in fact) *were not*, by the time the independency movement burst, ‘African’ natives but, on the contrary, already ‘Antillean’ or ‘Caribbean’ descendants of *African* ancestors that had (*unwillingly*) came to this land.

The Haitian case shows, therefore, some sort of a ‘*tensional*’ *triangle* between Europe, America, and Africa (which is, moreover, sort of symmetrically inverse to the *transatlantic triangular slave trade* that peaks during the XVIIth century), and not a less complex *binary* lineal opposition (as it is the case of Africa and Europe, India and Europe, etc.) or a *cultural continuity* that would only be interrupted by a legal discontinuity (as it is the case of all the other Latin American independency movements). It is the presence of the *third* (‘African’) vertex, indeed, what tears apart –by introducing both the idea of a *mythical return* to ‘Guinea’ (which already supposes, thus, a whole new inner tension with regard to the ‘African-American’ *creolité*) and the issue of the *negritude*– every possibility of achieving any balance whatsoever between the other two vertexes (Europe/the colonies). And, last but not least, we must also remember the Haitian case involves all of this while subscribing, ‘at the same time’ and needless to say with how *major* and ‘heterotopic’ consequences, to the ideals embodied by ‘Modernity’ and the French Revolution.

³⁴ Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities* (New York, NY, United States of America: Verso, 2006).

However, we might be laying it on post-colonial theories quite thick... We do so, nonetheless, just because we believe it should have been exactly ‘post-colonial’ theorists (for the kind of concerns and issues they work on) who should have looked through the Haitian case more carefully; but, to tell the truth, post-colonial theories do nothing but inherit, in their own ways, the persistent (both intended and unintended) *silence* in which, as we have already mentioned following Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s approach, both the Haitian revolution and its theoretical-political or philosophical consequences have sunk into. This (re)denial, as abovementioned too, reaches places as unexpected as the more or less ‘Marxist’ left-wing historiography (and this, quite paradoxically, especially in France). In fact, Yves Benot has already undertaken the task of recording and analyzing all the grand narratives about the French Revolution in order to prove the reaches of such a ‘distraction’ and some of his conclusions are quite amazing: “Out of this (hi)story”, states Benot, “there is nothing more in the collective memory of France than what French historians have wanted to keep –that is, very little”³⁵. Let us see this in some detail...

The first great work we should be mentioning is Madame de Staël’s *Considerations on the Principal Events of the French Revolution* (1818). Since the book is expressly devoted to rescue Necker (who besides being the author’s father had also been a strong opponent to the slave trade) from oblivion, we could quite easily expect to find at least some sort of reference to the Haitian issue somewhere throughout its pages. Yet, there is not a word, not even about the certainly strange role played by this government official. In Mignet’s *History of the French Revolution from 1789 to 1814* (1824), we can find, on the other hand, harsh statements against both colonialism in general and Napoleonic colonialism specifically; nonetheless, there is still not a single mention to Robespierre’s 1794 abolition decree or to the role played by the Haitian revolution in such an event either.

Thiers, who was a close friend of Mignet, reconstructs Saint-Domingue’s history in the first volume of his *History of the Consulate and the Empire of France Under Napoleon* (1845). There, he seems unable to avoid some sort of a careful admiration (though let us not mislead ourselves: always as a ‘statesman’ and never as a *révolutionnaire*) for Toussaint Louverture, who he characterizes, not without amaze,

³⁵ Benot, Yves, *La Révolution Française et la Fin des Colonies 1789-1794* (Paris, France: La Découverte, 2004, pp. 205 *et seq.*; the translation is ours).

as a “black of genius”³⁶. Nevertheless, we must also point out at the fact that he only does so, indeed, to *oppose* to such a figure “the spectacle of ignoble and barbaric laziness blacks in general offer when they are left to their own in the newly freed colonies”³⁷ (all of which has to necessarily be a reference to the *English* colonies, for the French ‘second abolition’ of slavery was not to take place until 1848, that is, three years after Thiers’ book was first published). Having said that, nonetheless, Toussaint still remains “hideously ugly” and fond of “surrounding himself with sycophants”, and that is not to mention the “horrendous” and “vicious” Dessalines³⁸. Notwithstanding the obvious ideological and racist slant of Thiers’ descriptions, what matters to the extent of our analysis is that, throughout a work that includes several volumes and thousands of pages covering the exact same historical period in which Napoleon is defeated at Saint-Domingue and the Haitian independence is declared, the issue does not get more than... a score of pages. *Not a word* is said across the entire rest of the book about the French abolitionists.

Already in 1847, we have great Lamartine’s *History of the Girondins*. Lamartine, who had been by then elected ‘*député*’, fights for the second abolition of slavery in the colonies. Despite being as reluctant as he is to popular uprisings, he nonetheless admits that, taking into account the “neglect” to which the matter has been subjected by the Parisian assemblies, the insurrections of the French colonial slaves are both “unavoidable” and “fair”³⁹. However, Lamartine also points out such uprisings have been, at the same time, instigated and commanded by “a few mulatos” that have led the savage masses “not to combat but to the slaughterhouse”...⁴⁰ That is that for abolitionist Lamartine’s ‘analysis’ of the revolution (or the ‘revolutions’: Haiti is not once specifically referred to).

Also in 1847, Michelet starts publishing his *History of the French Revolution*, a true masterpiece that, as Benot states, “will only be matched by Victor Hugo’s *Ninety-Three*”⁴¹, and a text that, despite the many mistakes subsequent historians will later point out at, is built upon a great political consciousness (though, sadly, that is

³⁶ Quoted in Benot, Yves, *La Révolution Française et la Fin des Colonies 1789-1794*, op. cit.; the translation is ours.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, the translation is ours.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, the translation is ours.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, the translation is ours.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, the translation is ours.

⁴¹ Benot, Yves, *La Révolution Française et la Fin des Colonies 1789-1794*, op. cit.; the translation is ours.

nevertheless not the case for the issue herein concerned). The 1794 abolition of slavery is, once more, ‘forgotten’. The first chapter of Volume VI, nonetheless, does mention the Haitian insurrection. Let us see how brilliantly it begins: “A terrifying column of fire rose over the ocean. Saint-Domingue was in flames. A worthy creation of the misrepresentations of the Constituent Assembly, which, amidst this terrible matter and fluctuating between law and utility, seemed to have shown those miserable Blacks freedom just to take it back from them straight after and leave them to despair”⁴². A remarkable synthesis of the problem, indeed, that will nonetheless be immediately followed by just a few lines about the revolution itself: “One night, sixty thousand blacks rise up, thus starting the slaughter and the fires and the most dreadful war of savages no human eye has ever seen”...⁴³ So dreadful, in fact, Michelet (probably mute with horror) will have nothing more to say about it.

And what about socialist Louis Blanc? Though there are exactly twenty-eight pages devoted to the uprisings of colonial slaves (including those taking place in Saint-Domingue) in the sixth volume of his own *History of the French Revolution of 1789* (1854), the story this time finds its ending in the death of revolutionary leader Boukman, which occurred during the very first days of the revolution. *C’est tout*. It is true, nonetheless, he also criticizes quite harshly the “criminal arguments” of the *Amis des Noirs*, who attempt to instigate the mulattos to revolt only for securing the continuity of slavery⁴⁴; but, at the same time, it is also true that he fails to mention, once again, anything at all about the 1794 abolition decree and that, furthermore, he does not bring up again the events that took place in Martinique on 22nd May 1848 but to regret the “unfortunate incident” (Blanc was apparently not quite fond of riots either)⁴⁵. Such events, nonetheless, ultimately turned out to be the ‘efficient cause’ of the second abolition of slavery in France, which was decreed that same year and among whose undersigned we can actually find, oddly enough, Louis Blanc himself.

Top-notch authors such as Tocqueville, Quinet, or Hypolitte Taine do not engage themselves in the analysis of this issue at all. Therefore, we can move straight forward to Jean Jaurès and his *Socialist History of the French Revolution* (1901), where the whole ‘story’ will be, undoubtedly, rather different. Nevertheless, let us firstly say we

⁴² Quoted in Benot, Yves, *La Révolution Française et la Fin des Colonies 1789-1794*, op. cit.; the translation is ours.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, the translation is ours.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, the translation is ours.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, the translation is ours.

will not be able herein to find, despite the fact that Jaurès follows quite thoroughly the debates of both the Constituent and Legislative assemblies of the French Revolution, *anything* about the 1794 abolition of slavery *either*. However, Jaurès is the only one that actually attempts to write a *socialist* history of the revolutionary process, thus incorporating to the analysis of the constitutional and legislative debates the class issue, which is therefore placed right in the middle of the French Revolution with the author's explicit intention of drawing out conclusions regarding his very own *present*: Jaurès is an active opponent of the French colonial policies, and especially of those being carried out in Morocco. Quite pertinently, he writes: "It is precisely in this colonial matter where the Constituent Assembly, having to choose between the rights of man and the narrow-minded selfishness of a bourgeois faction, finally chooses this narrow-minded selfishness (...) And the means that were brought into play were devious, and the pace was oblique. Up until that point, the Revolution had been bourgeois, yet honest; it was when placed in front of the colonial matter that it gained, for the first time, a sort of 'census-suffrage regime' aftertaste, a smell of Orléanist corruption, of capitalist financial oligarchy. The debates will oppose, thus, the pride of a race to the idea of equality"⁴⁶. Herein, Jaurès uncovers the fact that the colonial issue –and the racial issue too– is no longer some sort of merely lateral feature of the French Revolution but, instead, what discloses the Revolution's very own *class* contradictions and boundaries or, at least, its hesitations. Why, then, would Jean Jaurès avoid talking about the 1794 abolition decree and barely mention the bloody struggles that allowed it? We do not know that, but we will next allow ourselves to pose some hypotheses on the matter.

The seriousness of the issue lies in the fact that *no one*, not even the most relevant later historians (including herein those that classify themselves as 'left-wingers' and criticize Jaurès' moderate 'social-democracy'), takes up again the theoretical pathway he seems to have opened. The colonial and/or race issue in general and the Haitian revolution specifically remain thus poorly accounted for. Let us surreptitiously introduce, hence, a suspicion: let us ascertain, for instance, the huge *History of Contemporary France* that was edited by Ernest Lavisse publishes the volume it devotes to the French Revolution in 1920, that is, after the Treaty of Versailles and whilst *the French colonial power is at its pinnacle*. Well then: the 'national pride' of

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, the translation is ours.

the *Imperium* seems to continue to be stronger than any ideological or political commitment whatsoever: as long as we make sure we are properly criticizing the ‘excesses and mistakes’ of colonial capitalism, it is absolutely possible to be a ‘socialist’ while being at the same time a *colonialist*. The first volume that was dedicated to the Revolution, Paul Sagnac’s, compares the uprisings of the colonial slaves to... the counterrevolution!: “The counter-revolution was being orchestrated in the departments. The revolt was becoming massive back in the colonies, where the mulattos, who were enraged because of the abolition of their political rights, looted the properties of white colonists and threatened their lives”⁴⁷. We could hardly find a better example of the *lack of understanding* (we would like to believe this is not, on the contrary, plain old simple bad faith) regarding the colonial revolutionary process. By preventing us from perceiving the complexities of what we have called ‘uneven and combined developments’ (anyone who rises up against the ‘revolutionary’ France has to be, by definition, a ‘counter-revolutionary’) and succumbing to the reductionism of the involved agents (purely and simply ‘the mulattos’: there is not a word about ‘the blacks’), the interpretation’s schematic linearity hides the actual *cultural, socio-historical and political density* of an event that could quite certainly be unsettling for colonial France’s own *present time*. ‘Amateur’ Jean Jaurès (who surely was moved by political concerns rather than by any sort of ‘scientific’ consideration) was definitely much more (and much better) informed than this professional historian. Almost immediately after (in 1922, 1924, and 1927), Mathiez, a ‘left-winger’ and fervent Robespierriest that used to be a regular contributor to the French Communist Party’s journal, *l’Humanité*, publishes his three-volume *History of France*. It is indeed no longer that surprising to learn that the 1794 abolition of slavery is herein once more... forgotten. And the insurgent slaves? They will get just *one line* after Mathiez’s explanation of the commercial and financial difficulties caused by Saint-Domingue’s “war of races”⁴⁸. Attempting to avoid any sort of sarcastic gibe whatsoever, there is nothing left to say, then, in front of an analysis that reduces the Haitian revolution to an abstract “war of races” and, on top of it, insinuates such an abstract war would have been one of the main causes of the French Revolution’s economical hindrances.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, the translation is ours.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, the translation is ours.

In 1938, Georges Lefebvre, Raymond Guyot, and Philippe Sagnac publish *La Révolution Française* within the framework of the collection *Peuples et Civilizations*, which was edited by Louis Halphen and Philippe Sagnac himself. Toussaint is barely mentioned, and the abolition of slavery is almost accidentally referred to and with regard to... Guadeloupe. Be that as it may, we will have to wait until the Liberation years for the most amazing example of this ‘generalized’ oblivion to come out: in 1946, Marxist Daniel Guérin publishes *Class Struggle in the First French Republic*, which is a thick two-volume book that covers the history of the French revolutionary process from June 1793 to Thermidor. Two words about colonial trade in the introduction of the first volume are *all* we will get this time on the Haitian issue. Despite Guérin analyzes quite meticulously Robespierre’s report on foreign affairs dated 18th November 1793, he nonetheless inexplicably overlooks the thoughts about slavery and black men Robespierre himself included in it. Guérin, the same as Jaurès almost *half a century* before him, is a committed anti-colonialist. Nevertheless, he is *far beneath* his predecessor. Why? Who knows. In any case, many *other* Marxist historians (who do not deprive themselves of harshly criticizing Guérin every chance they get) do not *ever* account for this issue. For instance, a renowned Marxist such as Albert Soboul only mentions the Haitian issue three times in his *Histoire de la Révolution Française* (1962) and, by the time he is done, Mathiez’s enigmatic “war of races” has become the “uprising of Saint-Domingue’s blacks held in slavery”⁴⁹. And that is it; Soboul moves on to something else. Finally, the series *New History of Contemporary France* publishes, already in 1972 (that is, after ‘May ‘68’ and all its implications), the three volumes it devotes to the French Revolution: the abolition of slavery is only mentioned in the *chronology* that is included in Volume II and, on top of it, next to the following outrageous remark: “The abolition of slavery incited the colonized slaves to revolt”⁵⁰. Being Marc Bouloiseau (who is the author of such an incomprehensible remark) a ‘professional’ historian, the distortion of the facts is, at least, scandalous: not only does he seriously alter the chronology (he dates the Haitian uprising *three years after* it had actually started), but he also *inverts* the cause/effect patten of the relationship between both phenomena (it is not the revolt what causes the abolition of slavery, but the abolition of slavery what causes the revolt). Once again: no comments.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, the translation is ours.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, the translation is ours.

All in all, the thing is that, with the exception of Jaurès (in 1901!), the devaluation –or even straightforward omission– of the anti-slavery/anti-colonial struggle both in the colonies *and in the very same France* is systematic. The picture has only started to (timidly) change during the last two decades. And, regarding the Haitian revolution specifically, things have developed, if possible, even more timidly. Not even a book as relevant as Aimé Césaire’s *Toussaint Louverture* (1960), which was published right in the middle of the Algerian War and almost together with Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* and its explosive foreword by Sartre, or a whole decade and a half of both scholarly debates about the concept of *negritude* and continuous and majorly significant work by *Présence Africaine* magazine, have, apparently, managed to substantially modify this shameful situation.

What is going on here? Benot’s thesis, which combines some sort of a ‘sociology of the academic field’ (professional scholars try to deny the “righteous path” Jaurès opened for he is considered to be an *amateur*) together with an alleged “national pride” that would be, so to speak, turning a blind eye to the horrors of *present* colonialism, is insufficient –as, on the other hand, Benot himself acknowledges⁵¹. Needless to say those two elements sure do exist and, moreover, sure have their own explanatory weight in this issue. Nevertheless, we should not forget the huge *difficulty* (which we have indeed intended to disclose throughout these pages) usual Western ‘conceptual catalogues’ face when trying to account for the Haitian *singular-universal*. In fact, that is the case for the over-consented ‘faculty’ Marxism that swarms around too, for it does not actually seem able to fit in its previous classificatory schemes a process that, despite answering to them too, certainly *exceeds* its rigid conceptualizations (linear evolution of the modes of production, contradiction between relations of production and social productive forces, class struggle between ‘pure’ categories such as ‘bourgeoisie’ and ‘proletariat’, etc.). Once more, the *thing* is too rich and too complex, too *concrete-particular* for the *concept* to fully absorb it. The Haitian revolution would be, quite indeed, a perfect phenomenon for someone like Adorno to tackle it with his negative dialectics of the *identity/non-identity*... Regrettably (and perhaps due to his own and unavoidable (if not exactly ‘euro-centric’, at least) ‘euro-centred’ perspective), he did not embark himself in this venture either.

⁵¹ Benot, Yves, *La Révolution Française et la Fin des Colonies 1789-1794*, op. cit.; the translation is ours.

To conclude, let us say that neither the classical theories of nationalism (which, as we have already said, tend to account for the Haitian case as a by-product of the *European* modernity), nor Benedict Anderson's theory (which, despite its attempts to avoid such euro-centric perspective, builds a series of models that do not fit the Haitian revolution), nor the mainstream of post-colonial theory (which, notwithstanding its 'rhizomes', 'hybridities', 'in-betweens', and so on, continues – quite paradoxically, indeed– to think the metropolis/colony relationship in a *binary* fashion), nor former or present 'orthodox' Marxism (which in the end remains euro-centric itself, for it too curiously thinks history as if it was an export from the 'developed' societies to the 'undeveloped' ones), can thus fully and adequately account for what we have herein called the *tripartite bifurcation* of the Haitian revolution.

By saying 'tripartite bifurcation', on the other hand, we are only coining a concept that is in fact a pleonasm: despite the misunderstanding the root 'bi' might trigger, *every* bifurcation (as it can be easily noticed in a *crossroads*) opens up *three* possible directions: to the left, to the right, or simply *back* (back to 'Guinea', so to say). The bifurcation, as we all know, is a central figure in René Thom's *catastrophe theory*, which uses it exactly for accounting for that absolutely *singular* point in which forces bump into each other and, by doing so, transform the 'structure' that was up until then developing into *something radically else* (the crest of a wave that is bound to break is a paradigmatic example of this). It is, too, the place where Oedipus meets its destiny: that *crossroads of three* (which in Latin is said *Trivium*, which is from where we have inherited the adjective 'tri-vial') is where Oedipus, precisely not to go back, murders his father Laius and plunges into the tragedy (and, by the way, let us say all of this tinges the title of Smart-Bell's *Master of the Crossroads* –whose main character is Toussaint Louverture– with brand new shades⁵²). It is clear, hence, why we choose to talk about the Haitian revolution as if we were talking about a *tragedy*, and why we need to characterize its philosophical-political 'options' as a *catastrophic bifurcation*. Well then: at the beginning of this article we have stated it is possible to think Haitian slaves as if they were sort of acknowledging themselves as the *part* that projects itself towards the *whole* and, by doing so, points its finger out at such whole's 'universality' and reveals it as *incomplete* and, therefore, as *false* (hence reverting, at the same time,

⁵² Smart-Bell, Madison, *Master of the Crossroads* (New York, NY, United States of America: Vintage Books, 2000).

the euro-centric colonial logic that ‘universalizes’ the particular). We have called this procedure *particularist universalism*, for it *reinstates* the unsolvable conflict between the universal and the excluded particular right in the middle of the ‘universal’ (thus fulfilling the premise of any authentic critical thought). This is, indeed, the profound meaning of article 14 and its ironic –and *politicized*– universalization of *black* colour; but through such a procedure black colour will also become, in fact, the *privileged signifier* –or, as we have already said too, the fundamental *semiotic-political analyzer*– of a *critical materiality* or *catastrophic bifurcation* that will go all the way through the (philosophical, essayistical, fictional, narrative, poetical, and aesthetical) discursive productivity of the Antillean culture.

Since *conflictive crossroads* and *tragic intertextuality* are processes that can be found all throughout the Latin American culture (and, furthermore, in any neo-post-colonial culture in general), ‘black colour’ should certainly be considered within such a framework. Nevertheless, the issue of the *negritude* introduces, in the Caribbean and (though partly and with other nuances) Brazil, a specificity or, moreover, an *extremeness*, that tinges it with its peculiar (and, as aforesaid, majorly *denied*) singularity. The differences with regard to the ‘*Indigenous*’ issue are quite easy to notice: ‘Aboriginal’ communities (the ‘Amerindians’) are the originary and ‘legitimate’ proprietors of *Abya Yala*; they did not need, therefore, to *build* their own ‘title deeds’. They did not have, besides, *another* land that forced them to decide whether to ‘return’ to it or not; the plundering of their very own *material soil* –besides that, of course, of their very own *workforce*– makes the struggle for *recovering* it an unambiguous objective. Nonetheless, ‘aboriginal’ communities have never managed to carry out a *triumphant* revolution by themselves: *sharing* power (such as it is currently happening in Evo Morales’ Bolivia) is the closest they have got to it (and this, furthermore, two centuries *after* the ‘independency’). They certainly can, however, nourish the memory of hundreds of heroic revolts such as that of Tupac Amaru... ‘African Americans’, on the other hand, have (at least virtually) the memory of having been able to *take over power* and, moreover, of having done so *before* the ‘white bourgeois’ independentists could. Finally, they did not do so in order to return to ‘Guinea’ (despite ‘Guinea’ continues to be some sort of *regulatory horizon* of the African American cultural memory): they did so in order to *cross* ‘Guinea’ with their ‘own’ blackened *Abya Yala* –and, as aforesaid, the name *Hayti* stands for this. It is precisely that *crossroads* (which is nothing else than a

condensation of the modern *world-system*'s very own crossroads) what pushes the Haitian experience towards an (unbearable and 'incomprehensible', as we have been able to see in the insistence of its oblivion) oxymoronic *extreme centrality*.

Such 'extremeness' (such specificity) is most certainly critically *universalizable* to the issues that both affect and define the modern *world-system*. Following article 14's logic, it is in fact possible to disclose the unsolved (and most likely unsolvable) paradoxes that any *concrete-particular* might find in its relationship with 'modernity'. We must thank the Haitian revolution and its 'philosophical-political' effects for such an opportunity. We believe it is a (though always necessarily incomplete and in the middle of a process of *des-totalization* and *re-totalization*) perfectly suitable way to get around the *impasse* of the binary opposition between 'modernity' and 'post-modernity' in which our cultural studies and post-colonial theories seem to remain locked up. And we believe, as well, such a pathway has already started being covered, *and for a long time now*, in Latin America and the Caribbean (whether it is consciously following the trace left by the Haitian revolution or not). Recovering such a pathway in the midst of these 'times of danger' that define the very own nature of our own Latin America and all its 'catastrophic bifurcations', thus, is *the least* we are being asked to in order to (re)construct a truly Latin-American *critical thought*.

Translated by Agostina Marchi

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