

Hegelian heritage and anti-racist horizons

Exegesis and rewritings of dialectical thought

Introduction

A maxim of Hegelian thought states that philosophical activity lives in the capture of what is present and actual. (Hegel 1986, p.24) This does not simply mean that philosophy always has a possible application for each temporal circumstance; that conceptual knowledge is an intelligence that flies over the conjunctures shedding light into each historical age. Hegel's proposal is more radical, namely, that philosophical thought generates itself in the vicissitudes of the present moment, the only real dwelling of the eternal.

Following that premise – that some authors have characterized as Hegelian “presentism” (Renault, 2015) –, rethinking idealism today cannot be reduced to merely producing new interpretations of Hegel's system, although this analytic work is certainly indispensable. The task of confronting Hegel with the conflicts, crisis, and dilemmas of our present time is equally necessary. In a global context marked by the upsurge of a new wave of political movements that, in all their diversity, challenge the racist structures that inhabit our societies, the question of the contribution of idealism to an anti-racist horizon takes a significant relevance.

The fundamental hypothesis of the present article holds that it is possible to distinguish two *different philosophical operations* to approach anti-racist reflections with the resources of Hegelian dialectical thought. The first one consists of the identification, within Hegel's own conceptual system, of a speculative core that allows to definitely overcome all ethno-racial particularisms and to think about the normative horizon of a rational sociability. Under this interpretative perspective, it would be a matter of thinking how, despite the racial hierarchization that Hegel enunciates in certain texts, his concept of spirit is free of all conditioning from the natural particularity of race and, as a consequence, how his doctrine bares, in its deepest sense, the potential to draw an anti-racist ethical and juridical horizon. The first part of our work will develop on the arguments supporting our reading of this perspective as leading to a philosophical impasse, which prevents the understanding of the anti-racist movements that question today the oppressive foundations of modern societies.

The second philosophical horizon will be traced in the post-Hegelian resonances of the dialectic in certain reflections born within the resistance movements of racialized communities. In this section of our work, we will not address the *anti-racist potentialities* of the Hegelian text, but rather the critical *re-writing* of dialectic in *actual* anti-racism. The theoretical proposals of W.E.B. Du Bois and Frantz Fanon will provide us with two possible outlines of an epistemological embodiment of the dialectic that aims to understand the spiritual condition of oppressed Afro-diasporic communities and, more generally, to pre-figure the process of collective liberation of racialized subjects.

1. The cunning of Hegelian universalism

For some time now, Hegelian literature has echoed contemporary debates that place racism and coloniality at the center of social and political thought. In this context, many scholars have addressed the relationship between Hegel's work and the modern processes of colonization, racial oppression, and Euro-centric expansion. The Hegelian text is analyzed with the purpose of identifying, deciphering, relativizing, or criticizing the inferiorization of non-European subjects, and its correlation with racist and ethnocentric ideologies. These debates should not be understood only as a discussion of the Hegelian system, but as a broader approach to the bond between the universal aspiration of modern reason and its materialization in the colonial/racial world system.

As part of this intellectual controversy, a considerable number of Hegel interpreters have contributed to the creation of an argumentative trend that aims to demonstrate the *incompatibility* between Hegel's idealism and the theoretical postulates of racism¹. The arguments that support such readings are of different kinds: some comments focus on a conceptual analysis, while others examine the intellectual context of the production of Hegelian thought, or its link with certain currents of opinion. However, there is a common thread between the proposal of these authors, namely, the thesis that the Hegelian assertion of spiritual freedom necessarily implies the impossibility of founding the social order on a natural particularity, and therefore, in this case, the racial particularity of the subjects. According to this perspective, if the normative horizon of the human being arises from the pure free activity of its spirit then bodily and physiological differences – as well as those involved in geographical medium or gender identity – cannot determine the universal scope of rationality, whose essence relies on the reflexive overcoming of, and detachment from, any given natural determination.

From such an interpretative view, the universalistic purpose of idealism – the normative horizon of freedom’s self-determination – would survive *despite* Hegel’s claims about the a-historicity and barbarism of non-European peoples. No real conceptual connection would tie the systematic proposal of ethic-political normativity with such Eurocentric assertions. According to these readings, Hegel’s claims about Africans, Native Americans, and Indians, among other cultures, would simply be the reflection of the inherent prejudices of its time, of the philosopher’s ignorance as a consequence of the scarcity of information, or at most of a certain personal racial chauvinism that should not impact the theoretical heart of his philosophy. In this line, the deep meaning of the Hegelian thought, would neutralize the harshness of its most infamous lines, and thus the normative horizon of freedom would leave behind the violence that inhabits the modern project. By sublimating the true spirit from Hegel’s letter, Hegelianism would be able to absorb, through its own immanent dialectic, the eurocentrism of its effective enunciation.

From our perspective, the more relevant problem of this line of argument is that it rests on a simplification of the dialectic between natural condition and spiritual subjectivation present in Hegel’s anthropology and philosophy of history. The main object of debate is therefore the relationship between a given sensible configuration – racial, in the discussion addressed here – and the actual construction of freedom that is materialized in it. Indeed, in a first approach, historical action – the process of appropriation of the natural environment, the establishment of an objective spiritual reality – admits no other determination than that which emanates from the essence of the human will. The formation [*Bildung*] of the rational subject affirms its independence of nature in the same movement by which it constructs a social and cultural world. Those who try to “exonerate” Hegel’s work from any racist implication do have one valid argument: the essence, one and universal, of human action – and therefore the normative objectivity that governs it – is not determined by the racial nature of the subjects. Hegelianism thus in fact abandons and rejects all biological racism of the kind that postulates a different human nature for each race, and deduces from that division “a distinction between races that have rights and those that have none” (Hegel, 2007, p.40 [p.70-71, Glockner Edition])

And yet, in those same passages where the indetermination of the right with respect to provenance is asserted, Hegel declares: “the races differ in a spiritual respect” (Hegel, 2007, p.41 [p.73]). Once the possibility of biological determinism is closed, Hegel revives the racial difference, only now within the spiritual domain, therefore hierarchizing cultures and nations’

performances of self-determination. The Hegelian description of Africa as a social space that expresses a singular principle is one of the key passages where race resurfaces to degrade nations and justify relations of domination. The presentation of the African character as a limiting figure of historical consciousness can give us clues as to how Hegel's anthropological discourse establishes a particular type of racism to differentiate and undermine African subjectivity.

Thus, man as we find him in Africa has not progressed beyond his immediate existence. As soon as man emerges as a human being, he stands in opposition to nature, and it is this alone which makes him a human being. But if he has merely made a distinction between himself and nature, he is still at the first stage of his development: he is dominated by passion, and is nothing more than a savage. All our observations of African man show him as living in a state of savagery and barbarism, and he remains in this state to the present day. The negro is an example of natural man in all his savagery and lawlessness, and if we wish to understand him at all, we must put aside all our European attitudes. We must not think of a spiritual God or of moral laws; to comprehend him correctly, we must abstract from all reverence and morality, and from everything which we call feeling. All this is foreign to man in his immediate existence, and nothing consonant with humanity is to be found in his character. (Hegel 1975, p.177 [p.218 Hoffmeister edition])

How does this radical barbarization of the African character work then, if not based on a naturalistic determinism? How does race return to anthropological and political discourse, once the universalist discourse had stated its normative irrelevance? The complexity of the Hegelian text lies in the identification of a radical alterity that falls under the label of the “human” while at the same time being in a radical “dissonance” with what effectively defines true humanity. By setting into motion existing colonial narratives, Hegel constructs a knowledge of a spiritual formation that is already opposed to nature but is unable to unfold that autonomy in a rational way, to perform this independence in an objective self-awareness of freedom. Free will is not questioned as the absolute principle of action; the existence described by Hegel is not an animal life simply guided by instinct since no natural particularity can neutralize the self-activity of the free being: “Animal humanity is altogether different from animality proper” (Hegel 1975, p. 133 [p.161]). In human beings everywhere, regardless of their race, there is detachment from the natural, and yet *detachment is not everywhere the same*². Hegel identifies in Africa a

paradoxical *natural detachment of the spirit from nature* (Cf. Bourgeois 1992, p.244). The way in which the spirit dominates nature changes radically according to the natural condition that in each case is being negated. Race reappears to differentiate, not empirical natures, but spiritual existences that are affected by the inexorable racial condition of their realization³.

Therefore, the racial cleavage does not disappear with the affirmation of the essence of the human being, but instead comes to operate within the world of free subjectivity, to exclude certain free beings from a properly historical and rational existence, and to establish structures of domination that rest on such exclusion. Racism finds thus a new anthropological matrix at the intersection between freedom and nature. Hegel designates this mediating dimension as *Naturgeist*, where the spirit already acts freely, but is *affected* – and not determined – by the corporeal-phenotypical configuration of its instantiation. Racial differences are now hosted within the field of human freedom and define pathological psychosocial formations that are unable to reflect themselves in a spiritual reality. Of course, one should not search for the “cause” of this affectation in the simple organic-biological facticity, in a constitution that would condition “from the outside” the freedom of the will. Instead, it is a matter of an internal spiritual trouble manifested in a disturbed desiring activity that cannot be stabilized in a *consolidated social objectivity*.

The description of the non-European as pathological spiritual alterity – that constitutes the Hegelian concept of barbarism (Cf. Tangorra 2018) – is based on the intermittency, on the discontinuity of these individual’s drive, on the deviant way in which free – and not instinctive – desire is affected by its materialization into a concrete corporeality. Pathological spiritual existence means here not the exception to the norm of freedom (as a merely natural failure/impossibility) but a trouble, a perturbation, in the effective exercise of this normative capacity. This desiring disturbance of the self-actualization, identified in the spiritual existence of racialized groups, is of course intelligible (comprehended, measured) from the euro-centric norm of stable self-reflection. That is to say, the barbaric existence is grasped in contrast with the *telos* of freedom’s self-awareness in *rational objectivities*, such as the State, the individual personality, the moral and positive law, the transcendent and monotheist God, the monogamous family, among others substantial realisation of the spirit⁴.

We arrive then at the epistemological core of this idealist racialization. The exclusion of racialized groups does not rest on a natural constitution, and the rational capacity to self-determination is not denied. However, the inferiorization comes to operate on the existential

condition of certain racial groups⁵, in their desiring activities as *actual* spiritual beings. As Hegel states regarding African people:

They cannot be denied a capacity for education [*Fähigkeit zur Bildung*]; not only have they, here and there, adopted Christianity with the greatest gratitude and spoken with emotion of the freedom they have acquired through Christianity after a long spiritual servitude, but in Haiti they have even formed a state on Christian principles. But they do not show an inner drive [*Inneren Trieb*] towards culture. In their native land, the most shocking despotism prevails. There they do not attain to the feeling of man's personality, their mind is entirely dormant, it remains sunk within itself, it makes no progress, and thus corresponds to the compact, undifferentiated mass of the African land. (Hegel, 2007, p.41 [p.73]).

Therefore, if Hegel does not declare the discriminated races to be in a natural *incapacity* to develop rationally in a culture, he places them in a desiring condition where all the institutions of “civilized” life succumb under the inconstancy of an arbitrary, passionate will, of a social body without stable intersubjective recognition. The core of this dialectic between barbaric racialized existence and civilization relies on the adversative conjunction that organizes the citation above: the capacity of spiritual self-enactment is assured *but* the *autochthonous desire* – understood in terms of spiritual *drive*, not as natural instinct – prevents any realization of it. Therefore, even if the possibility itself of a historical existence remains open, the *transit* from that virtual possibility to the actuality of a civilized self-consciousness cannot be accomplished *autonomously* by those subjects that Hegel’s discourse targets. The universality of destiny, as long as its realization is codified according to a Euro-centric civilizing anthropology, is necessarily parameterized in a relationship of racial domination, as the prerequisite for an access to a cultural life.

Inferiority may be “provisional”, but the possibility for the a-historical nations to breaking out of their condition – and become peoples – does not reside in their native existence but in the external awakening of that aptitude; that is to say, in the colonial domination by Western powers – namely through Christian evangelization as stated above. In the eventual “access” to history, the colonial operation of racialization persists since the virtuality of self-development cannot be actualized by an autochthonous desiring activity. Consequently, the issue is not just “that only certain races produce (historical) peoples” (Bernasconi 2003 p.36) but further, that only certain races *autonomously* produce historical subjects.

Thus, within the anthropological framework of Hegelian idealism, the very overcoming of the racial cleavage relies on the same hierarchy that it should abolish. The transit between capacity and actuality ultimately depends on colonial or neo-colonial intervention, that is to say, on the civilizing activity that annihilates the autochthonous impulse, as a pre-condition for the rational objectivation of historical progress. The argument that seeks an anti-racism inherent to the universalism that animates Hegelian idealism finds itself in a dead-end road since the inferiorization is neither accidental nor contingent, but a part of the real operation by which Euro-centric universalism actualizes itself in world history. The position of a civilizing horizon based on freedom for the entire humankind, the fundamental horizon of Hegelian thought, is entangled with racial hierarchization by defining the non-European races' *procedures* of "becoming civilized".

The lesson that this intricate coexistence leaves is that the "community of destiny" is not enough, the affirmation of the essential identity of human nature is not enough, the gaze that recognizes the "aptitude" or "capacity" for progress in the oppressed races, or the inexistence of the races as relevant differences, is not enough. Racism persists to define the *processes* of subjectivation, the times and the modalities of "civilizing" violence.

What we propose in what follows is to look for another type of philosophical operation with Hegelian dialectic, to seek beyond the potential self-absorption of euro-centric racialism in a universalistic teleology, which, as we have seen intimately coexist with the hierarchization of the desiring performances of the spirit. We will turn then to some (of the multiples), post-Hegelian resonances of the dialectic present in thinkers engaged in historical anti-racism.

2. Dialectical re-writings in anti-racist thinking: W.E.B. Du Bois and F. Fanon

Hegel's impact in the works of W.E.B Du Bois and Frantz Fanon has been long studied by commentators. Many scholars will find in Du Bois a patent Hegelianism⁶, while others will try to identify an original recovery of idealist topics⁷. Something similar occurs with Fanon. The Hegelian context of his formative path has been largely documented⁸, and whose critical recovery of Hegelian tropes were extensively studied⁹. However, our intention here is not focused on evaluating the "influence" – the more or less original reception of the Hegelian source – but on thinking about the way in which Du Bois and Fanon reinvented a dialectical of racial existence, in order to grasp the *processes of subjectivation* of oppressed and colonized individuals and communities. The aim is not thus to find another interpretation of Hegel's

thought – another Hegelianism, in the sense of another “spiritual meaning” abstracted from Hegel’s letter – but a *re-writing* of the dialectic logic in a subaltern experience that reflects on its own condition. The appropriation of the dialectic resource should be therefore understood in its *minimalistic* scope: if Du Bois and Fanon’s thinking can be characterized as dialectical – in the post-Hegelian way that we are here suggesting – is because they perform, by very different means, a philosophical exploration of the *non-identity that inhabits the self, that is to say, of the inherent negativity that constitutes the social experience of oppression*.

Such subaltern and anti-racist resonance of the dialectic is constructed, within Du Bois’ work, as a *dialectic of the splitting of the oppressed self*, as a hermeneutic key to understanding the African-American condition. If the structure of contradiction (Du Bois 2007, p.9), of unreconciliation (p.10), tints Du Bois’ early texts, it is because their spiritual reality cannot be captured from the transparent self-identity of the subject. The reflection stems from the fundamental “cleft” (Du Bois 2007, p.184) that shapes the personal and social existence of the African-American individual. That fracture, denoted by the famous concept of *double consciousness*, is not simply the sociological description of the segregationist regime oppression but, more profoundly, the identification of the subjectivation structure of the oppressed individuals. Du Bois’ critique targets the spiritual impact of structural racism, which engenders a non-identity that splits the marginalized subject in the intimacy of his self-consciousness. Therefore, *two-ness* (Du Bois 2007, p.8) implies not only a double identity, but two spiritual horizons hierarchized by the racist norm. The contradiction engenders a spiritual devastation – even hindering the social and cultural unity of the black community (Du Bois 2007, p.137-139) – since the internalized normative ideal of white America is founded on the brutal denial of the humanity of the African-descendants.

According to Du Bois, the tearing of the self is neither simply sociological – a factual fracture in the empirical structure of society – nor purely ideological – in the sense of two cultural formations. This fracture involves both the sensible and the ideal, both the materiality of existence and the symbolic horizons. This defines the “place” of the cleft in Du Bois, the duplicity is fundamentally a duplicity of the drive, or more precisely of the *striving* of the subject. Thus, a complex dialectic of alienation that involves the black condition and the white aspiration is established: the subject is not only divided in its desire, but the hegemonic aspiration in the social fabric represses the effective condition of the African-American individual. The introjection of the racist criterion is a prism through which conceiving oneself

sparks a self-repression of racialized people's existence. Anticipating the conceptions of the gaze developed by 20th century phenomenology, Du Bois identifies the structural character of the hegemonic social regard. The latter is not only reproduced here and there in the empirical interaction of certain individuals, but is instituted as a fundamental parameter of social evaluation. It constitutes, in short, the normative horizon that determines the subject and its surrounding world, which offers an aspirational model of the American life that dooms the Afro-descendants to a devastating contradiction.

If the Hegelian interpretation discussed above imagines the abstraction of the racial condition as a necessary step towards the universal realization of the spiritual, Du Bois warns about the possible alienating drift of such process. In the context of the American society, the abstract process of idealization – that is, of overcoming racial conflict in equality before the norm – leads to the adherence to a spiritual horizon that inherently denies Afro-descendant existence. Considering these ideas, it could be said that Du Bois is one of the first clear expressions of an anti-racist dialectic that distrusts the horizon of emancipation offered by modern Western societies, as an institutional objectivity that the racialized and colonized subject can only adapt to “from the outside”. That is, in a process of assimilation, that reproduces the racist fracture, and that prevents a true self-realization of freedom.

However, in Du Bois' texts, the African-American condition is not only informed by the experience of systemic dehumanization, but also the bearer of a “gifted” perspective (Du Bois 2007, p.8) on the social reality of the United States that pre-disposes a singular self-liberation path. Du Bois' political philosophy shapes a process of becoming-free, understood as creative political and cultural explorations of the *two-ness* condition of black subjectivity. What this “second sight” allows is to reveal the hidden nature of the ideal of American modernity, since the African-American subject undergoes the actual experience of violence on which this civilizing project is founded. It is at this point, we argue, where Du Bois reaches a dialectic understanding of subjectivation: the process of becoming subject stems from this irreducible negativity of the oppressed condition. The “second sight” is then an experience of a political *truth*, inherent to black liberation struggles that does not emerge from an openness to the universal imperatives of freedom, but from the journey into the deepest social negativity.

This subaltern rewriting of the dialectic is rooted in this rigorous philosophical concern with negativity that nevertheless distrusts the teleology that *sublates* the racial fracture into the self-transparency of a universal consciousness¹⁰. The projection of the ideal liberation horizon does

not require the annihilation of the spiritual reality of race. Instead, the anti-racist dialectic shapes a reflexive path of idealization – that is to say, of affirmation of freedom – consciously rooted in the racist and colonial trauma. Thus, what is important is not the ideal destination of an egalitarian sociability, but the autonomous process of the African-American people in developing it, the immanent education and politicization of the subjugated subjectivity. The very same logic stems in Du Bois's essay "The conservation of races", where the dialectic of black liberation is oriented by a *particular* "ideal" or "message" (Du Bois 1970, p. 78) constructed and imagined within the autonomous activity of communitarian learning and improvement. To prevent the "absorption" of black people's striving (Du Bois 1970, p. 79) does not mean to promote its "isolation" (Du Bois 1970, p. 80) and Du Bois considers the harmonious cohabitation between different communities as an advantage to "develop side by side the peculiar contribution" of each one (Du Bois 1970, p. 79). But Du Bois' main concern targets the subjectivation that serves as the condition for such eventual intercultural life. The imperative of self-liberation not only shapes the "telos" of political emancipation, but above all – as Du Bois sustains commenting on Douglas – the "trough" (Du Bois 2007, p.38), the process and mediation, of the oppressed becoming subject.

Instead of denying the spiritual importance of race, Du Bois emphasizes its social reality. Races are much more than natural entities and are shaped above all by a historical experience and a shared desire for "the accomplishment of certain more or less vividly conceived ideals of life" (Du Bois 1970, p.76). Thus, the process of becoming free is not understood as the induction of an ideal without a genetic link to the concrete life of the racialized subject; idealization is not understood as detachment from the historical experience of race. Following Du Bois, the particular condition of the African-American people is the concrete support for the construction of a true ideal of liberation. Therefore, Du Bois' anti-racism is not the mere *application* of a dialectic of the subject to a given context, but the reinvention of a dialectic that explicitly addresses the effective condition of its reflexive and practical process, and that embodies the achievement of freedom in the immanence of the fractured experience of the oppressed self.

Five decades after the publication of Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folks*, the Martinican thinker and psychiatrist Frantz Fanon would also suggest an engaged instantiation of the logic of self-liberation. Fanon's first published work, *Black Skin White Masks* (BSWM), inscribes the dialectic in the racialized (individual and collective) experience of Afro-Caribbean subjects. Thus Fanon's strategy towards Hegelian motifs is always associated with a deep re-figuration

of the very logic that inhabits psychic and social processes. By embodying the self-reflection in a discourse enounced from the oppressed existence, Fanon proposes a re-foundation of the fundamental dynamic of recognition under the idea of a radical, original and irreducible asymmetry, indispensable for thinking the psychosocial structures that alienate racialized and colonized populations.

Fanon's proposal should be understood in all of its depth: it is not only a *dialectic of asymmetry* – a logic of discrimination as inequal distribution of social recognition – but also, above all, the ascertainment of an *asymmetry of dialectics*. In other words, the dynamic process of construction of the subject changes radically according to the position of the individual within the system of domination. “There is a substitution of dialectic when one goes from the psychology of the white man to that of the black” (Fanon 1952 p.123). Thus, the very *ontology* of subjectivation differs according to the effective psychosocial and political process in which it is rooted (Ibid, p.88). By embodying the dialectic in its condition of enunciation, Fanon prevents the absorption of the situationality of racialized people as the “minor time” [*temps faible*] of a totalizing path of universal realization of freedom (Fanon 1952 p.107). Instead, in order to grasp the structure of racism, the initial epistemological operation is to assume the oppression condition as a factor of de-universalization of euro-centric dialectic of development. Fanon thus introduces a fracture, a radical discontinuity that pluralizes the dialectics through the assumption of the singular logics immanent to the existence and the struggle of racialized and colonized subjects.

The entire project of *BSWM* is then an attempt to probe into the depth of alienation upon which the psychosocial reality of racism is built. In doing so, Fanon resorts to the Hegelian figure of the master and the slave, but radically transforming the logic of social recognition. Certainly, for Fanon, as for Hegel, the desiring consciousness of the individual is only constituted in the relationship with a communitarian entwining that gives social reality to individual consciousness. Human desire is not achieved in the consumption of the given, but in the encounter with the negative activity of other freedoms that constitute the objectivity of subjective will. However, Fanon introduces a discontinuity at the core of the dialectical process that follows the existential heterogeneity that constitutes the hierarchies within the colonial world. If for Hegel there is an initial elemental homogeneity in which two consciousnesses desire *in the same terms* the recognition of each other, Fanon makes asymmetry the original

foundation of the recognition norm: “The master laughs at the consciousness of the slave. What he wants from the slave is not recognition, but only his work.” (Ibid, p. 179)

Therefore, the master-slave relationship is not the derived result of the intersubjective encounter but the very normative structure that dictates the standards of recognition. When Fanon warns that there is no real “open conflict between black and white” (Ibid p.176) he means that the struggle for social valorization never takes place in the neutral arena of reciprocity. The symbolic order that commands the search for a social realization of desire is always mediated by the racist hierarchy of the colonial world. The latter is not the contingent absence of recognition of a given population, but the experience that forges the normative structure of social valorization.

Consequently, Fanon’s anti-racism is not based on the idea of the extension of a social recognition framework onto populations previously excluded. The real problem is not the provisory dissatisfaction of the racialized subject’s desire for recognition, it is the racist character of the very norm of recognition. The introjection into the Afro-descendant consciousness of this realization horizon can only unleash a devastating contradiction, a repression of their own existence in view of the ideal of the master becoming the universal norm: “The black man stops behaving as an *actional* person. The goal of his behavior will be the Other (in the guise of the White man), for The Other alone can give him worth” (Ibid p.125).

Following Norman Ajari’s reading: “The catastrophe of this loss of objectivity is that the criterion of emancipation is no longer the real situation of the existence of the slave but his phantasmagorical appreciation according to a reified criteriology”. (Ajari 2019, p. 259) The true heart of the dialectical process of liberation is not the access to the field of ethical and juridical intersubjectivity, but the possibility for the oppressed subject to question the parameters that determine such social interaction. The horizon of universal recognition of freedom is an abstract fantasy – not only useless but even *pathogenic* – without the autonomous desire that embodies that ideal in the here and now, in the materiality of the struggle against domination.

This attention to the dynamics of desire in the anti-racist struggle explains Fanon’s concern for the “means” used against colonialism and segregation. For example, the difference between the situation of the Afro-descendant communities in France and America (Cf. Fanon 1952 p. 179), does not respond to a fetishization of one methodology over another, but rather

accentuates the revolutionary scope of a political experience – such as the civil rights movement in the US – where the conquest of recognition (affective, ethical, legal) is the counterpart of a subjectivity that detaches itself from the imposed aspirational schemes. Fanon's dialectic thus presupposes an “alterity of rupture” (Ibid p.180) which does not simply aspire to an acceptance within the values of the society that excludes it, but rejects the dehumanizing foundations of such normative order.

In this way, Fanon anticipates the critique that finds a “reactive” movement in the dialectic of recognition (Cf. Deleuze 1962). The true process of liberation does not pursue a *given* norm, value, or ideal, but rather generates in its own procedure the horizon that will orient the desires and drives of the subject in struggle. By highlighting the *performative* scope of anti-racist resistance, Fanon's dialectic does not over-determine the process of liberation with an *a priori* codified horizon for rational sociability. The desire for liberation taking place within the struggle against racism is not defined by a destination pre-determined by a rational teleology, but discovers its radicalism in the adherence to “values that arise from its own action” (Cf. Fanon 1952 p.180).

If with Du Bois we could conceive the dialectic of the immanent politicization of the African-American condition as an *educational* path, Fanon, on his part, conceives the anti-racist practice fundamentally as a collective *therapeutic* activity. The material and symbolic alienation of structural racism is conceived by the psychiatrist as a pathology that blocks the self-construction of the personality of the oppressed, since it splits the subject between his attachment to white ideals of humanity and his concrete existential reality. It is for this reason that the political awareness of the colonized communities has a fundamental *healing* potential, since it allows them to re-take their own condition, reconstruct a collective identity, and project a dignified future. It is not simply a matter of re-socialization of an excluded subject, but a work of re-personalization that cannot be separated, as Fanon's later clinical work in Algeria will establish (Fanon 2015, p.366-367), from the politicization of social suffering.

This therapeutic dimension of the political has a dialectical logic since the negativity of the experience enables the emergence of a spiritual horizon for freedom. The purpose is to open up, through political struggle, a practical and reflective space that allows the autonomous thematization of the racialized condition, and thus to enable the possibility for creative work with trauma and suffering. The very sense of dialectics is reconfigured in this “overcoming” of the negativity of the racial experience, which does not mean leaving the trauma behind by

definitely enclosing it, but turning the negative into an opportunity to create paths of emancipation that only become a reality in the effective struggle against structural racism.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this article was to analyze the potentials and limitations of modern philosophical rationality to address its own contradictions and to break free from the ethnocentrism and racism that inhabits it. The issue, in short, is whether there is or is not a possibility for self-criticism by Western thought relying on its own epistemological resources. Is there an immanent potential of Hegel's philosophy – of Spinoza's, Locke's, Kant's, or of any other theoretical modern reference – to overcome the racist and ethnocentric inferiorization of alterity that tints their own discourses? Is it possible that, within the very logic of the texts and without transforming the epistemological heart of their reflections, such systems can absorb the violence that inhabits them? The question, in the end, is if there is a self-sufficiency of Western reason in its self-critical capacity, whether the theories that found our juridical, ethical order are sufficient in themselves to neutralize the violence that has been co-substantive of their own historical path.

We have analyzed possible answers to these questions in the case of Hegel's philosophical discourse, by studying the potential dialogues between dialectical reflection and the current challenges posed by anti-racist movements and decolonial criticism. We have shown the limitations of the attempts to overcome the racialization of existence by following the internal thread of the Hegelian logic. That is, in short, the possibility of a post-racist horizon of modern societies based on the rational universality of the human being. But if according to Hegel, race is not a natural determining element, it nevertheless becomes crucial when thinking about the procedure, the process, of that very same universality effectively realizing itself in the world. We must be clear in this respect: the euro-centric and racist parameters function not *in spite* of the universal horizon of freedom, but rather *because* of the very nature of that universalism, mobilized as the principle of world history. The *actuality* of such universality – that, by the way, does not exist outside of such objective realization – implies the racist hierarchization of existences, desires, and behaviors. The Hegelian affirmation of the spiritual unity of humankind, the minimization of biology in the determination of the *in-itself* capacity of peoples, does not temper the hierarchization, since the passage from this potentiality to the historical and civilized *for-itself* must be actualized *from outside* that subordinated culture.

Thus, the updating of the Hegelian dialectics that seeks to rid it of its racist implications does not seem sufficient. A deeper epistemological gesture is needed, one that does not rely on the inherent potential of modern reason to exercise self-criticism on its own contradiction. Is not the fantasy of a dialectical self-absorption by Western modernity of its own violence the ultimate ethnocentric gesture?

The alternatives that we examined in the second section of our paper are subaltern writings that defect from the intra-Hegelianism exegesis. They do not pursue the “depuration” of idealism from the euro-centric and racist traces of its letter. It is a completely different philosophical operation, which re-embodies the dialectic in a political thought irreducible to the universalistic teleology of euro-centered modernity. This gesture – even when it uses, in a non-Hegelian way, Hegelian resources – invokes a *point of exteriority* as the place of a discourse that revitalizes the dialectic in the concreteness of a political anti-racism, articulating practices and reflections emerging from the real experience of oppression. A genuine reading of the reiterations of the dialectic coming from the margins of the colonial world – genuine in the sense that it does not seek to assimilate it to the already constructed schemes of modernity – can offer an alternative way to revitalize idealism, widely understood as a philosophical affirmation of the creative power of freedom.

Such is the fundamental lesson outlined by Du Bois and Fanon, two particular manifestations to which many subaltern, anti-racist thinkers could be added. Their works are examples of how the critical force of dialectics can be reconfigured by oppressed subjects who build the frameworks to understand and transform their condition. Their emphasis on freedom as a performance, on the autonomous becoming-free of the oppressed, is the key to the peripheral resurgence of dialectics as a *situational* reflection on the processes of liberation. It is in the praxis of the concrete subjects where these movements come to life, to explain the educational, therapeutic, or revolutionary pathways that are projected out of the ravaged freedom.

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¹ Amongst others, Cf. Walsh 1971 p.172; Houlgate 1991 p. 36; Bourgeois, 1992 p. 253-269 ; Mollendorf 1992 p.243; Pinkard, 2000, p.493; McCarney 2003 p.33 ; Bonneto 2006 p. 52; Dieng 2006, Buchwalter 2009 p. 93, Mowad 2013 p.157, 169.

² As Frank Kirkland argues, every natural-spirit reflects an "ever decreasing reliance" of its agency on nature, and an "ever increasing reliance" on rational self-enactment (Kirkland 2017, 46), therefore the degrees of detachment – the "development stages" (Ibid, 49) – must be variable for any racial group. Nevertheless, our reading points out the racial asymmetry, not between degrees or stages (which is a variable hierarchy), but in the *access to progressive variability* itself. That is, as we will state further, a cleavage between an inherent and autonomous drive towards variability and an externally inducted one. The hierarchy re-appears then in the *passage* between the capacity of self-variation (universally conceded to all *Naturgeister*, to all racial groups), and the self-actualization, the becoming-effective of this capacity by their own *autochthonous* desire.

³ The discussion between Joseph McCarney and Robert Bernasconi, published in *Radical Philosophy* in 2003, can provide elements to clarify the dialectic between race and history that is being analyzed here. The fact that for Hegel the agents of history are collective self-consciousnesses – the spirit of peoples [*Volkgeist*] – and not races does not distance him from racism since he deprives embodied consciousnesses from certain races of a historical existence. If McCarney is right when he states: "As is to be expected, it is peoples and not nations, spiritual and not natural entities, who are the vehicles of this process. Indeed, groups whose principle is a natural one, such as nations, tribes, castes and races, cannot as such figure as historical subjects," (McCarney 2003, p.33) the conclusion is debatable: "It follows that, for Hegel, there literally cannot be a racist interpretation of history." (Ibid.) On this point we can only agree with Bernasconi when he replies that the problematic point is that "only certain races produce peoples" (Bernasconi 2003 p.36), that is, race does not determine the spirit, but the spirit determines itself in a radically different way according to its racial condition.

⁴ "Their consciousness has not yet reached an awareness of any substantial objectivity – for example, of God or the law - in which the will of man could participate and in which he could become aware of his own being." (Hegel 1975, p.177 [p.218 Hoffmeister edition])

⁵ In this manner is formed what could be called a spiritual racism – or, following A. Hutchinson, a metaphysical racism (Hutchinson 2008, p.5) – that targets the type of subjectivation that is activated nevertheless on occasion of certain corporealities.

⁶ Cf. Adell 1994; Reed 1999.

⁷ For instance, Cf. Gilroy 1993 p.111-146, L. Lewis 1993, Zamir 1995, Meer 2019.

⁸ This not only due to Fanon's dialogue with French phenomenology and existentialism (Sartre, Merleau Ponty, Wahl, Kojève), but also because of Hegel's reception by a certain psychiatric and psychoanalytic tradition – in figures such as Henry Ey, François Tosquelles or Jacques Lacan – which was very important for the formation of Fanon's clinical-social perspective. (Cf. J. Khalfa 2015).

⁹ As a non-exhaustive overview, Cf. Buhlan 1985 pp.101-131; Turner 1989,1996; Sekyi-otu 1996; Gibson 1999, 2002; Honenberger 2007; Bird-Pollan 2011.

¹⁰ Winfried Siemerling (2001, 330-331) accurately exposes this concept of “non-transparency” in Du Bois' dialectical thought.