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Article abstract

In his Outlines of a Philosophy of Right, Hegel contends that revenge is just in its content but wrong in its form. In other words, it is justified in its pursuit of recognition but wrong in resorting to acts of subjective will instead of mediation through state justice, which, he argues, is founded in a rational and objective expression of collective will. While Hegel's argument may hold in cases of conflicts between individual subjects, it is harder to sustain when the wrong is committed by supra-individual entities (States, financial institutions) particularly in (neo)colonial contexts. In light of this asymmetrical complication, I seek to revisit the conception of justice associated with the Hegelian idea of the State. I do so by looking at four contemporary francophone novels in which episodes of individual revenge are construed as provocative indices that allow me to uncover the wrong in its asymmetrical setting, that is, to see and analyze offense as the personal, individual and intimately lived effect of a (geo)political wrong inflicted by (neo)colonialism. Ultimately, the assumption of State rationality is significantly qualified due to the influence of capitalist market forces and national sentiment.

Revenge, Coloniality, and Hegelian Justice: Experiencing Geopolitics in Sub-Saharan Fiction

Christian Uwe

Je suis devenu sauvage par réflexion.

David Diop, *Frère d'âme*

Civilized peoples don't do revenge. Such is the self-satisfied belief of colonialist discourse on justice. It is also an idea one encounters on a few occasions in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. More precisely, one encounters the inverted version of it: uncivilized peoples mistake revenge for justice. Hegel cites, for example, "the Arabs" among whom the supposed failure to think revenge out of its *formal*[1] defects results in endless cycles of offenses and counter-offenses (Hegel 106). With the risk of unbounded escalation, the argument goes, the civilized State is our best resort as it solves such discords through a form of "justice freed from subjective interest […] and no longer contingent on power" (107). The rational State, in other words, is the fullest expression of our freedom.

While it may be unfair to equate Hegel's political proposition with a philosophical justification of the Prussian State, as Schopenhauer was among the first to do, it is safe to say that his concept of State was Western in its inspiration though imperfectly instantiated by those States (Prussia, France, Britain) to which he turns for positive examples. As it turns out, said examples are overwhelmingly matters of *civil* discord rather than institutional: they are examples of civilian *subjects* seeking recognition by other subjects. Hegel's State, acting as objective arbiter of justice for such cases, replaces revenge with punishment. Yet, one may ask, what of asymmetrical discords such as those opposing State—and parastatal—apparatuses to civil individuals, or nominally symmetric ones such as those opposing self-described Western 'civilized' States to their 'uncivilized' colonies? What *form* of justice is to resolve such conflicts, and who is to *think* it and carry it out? As the twentieth century was to show ad nauseam, not only do such asymmetries challenge models of justice based on alleged civilizational hierarchies, but in fact, as both World Wars attest, self-proclaimed civilized States are so disposed to revenge against one another that it may be worth revisiting the assumption of rationality behind the idea of the State.

I propose to pursue that end through a brief look at *indexical scenes* taken from contemporary sub-Saharan Francophone novels. I call these scenes 'indexical' because they function as Peircean indices of a colonial wrong at the scale of individual lives. Posing these indices as starting points allows me to capture the wrong in its asymmetrical setting, that is, to see and analyze it as the personal, individual and *intimately lived effect* of a (geo)political wrong inflicted by (neo)colonialism. Of course, any political system is implemented by actual individuals (colonialism needs colonists), but such individuals carry out State designs, and any action taken in their official capacity is imputable to the State. I will therefore read instances of individual revenge for what they reveal about an underlying systemic wrong, and for the challenge that such a wrong pose to the idea of State-run justice. In other words, I will articulate individual grievances (domestic squabbles, motherhood, trauma) to their geopolitical twins (debt, race, war) to uncover

1 Hegel allows that revenge is just in its *content*—i.e., in its pursuit of recognition—but not in its *form*, which he defines as an individual act of subjective will (106).

forms of grievances that cannot be easily referred to a theory of justice predicated on the opposition between subjective revenge and objective punishment.

Let us begin with Max Lobe's *39 rue de Berne* and, particularly, a depiction of the most common cause for revenge. The novel relates the life of clandestine migrants in Europe: Dipita, the narrator and main character, is a gay teenager raised in Geneva by a single mother who is a sex worker. Growing up in such conditions, he develops multiple insecurities around (i) the fact that his mother was forced into prostitution to pay off her smuggler debt, (ii) the fact that the smuggler in question fathered him by seducing his mother right before forcing her into sex work, and (iii) the teenager's struggle to accept a sexual orientation that his extended, Cameroonian family reproves. Against this backdrop, Dipita's life takes an unexpected turn when William, a boy he thinks is too handsome to care, does take an interest in him. The theme of revenge is introduced along with jealousy when Dipita finds out that William is unfaithful. As far as narrative plots go, heartache jealousy is the least original of all. That makes Lobe's novel an excellent starting point for a discussion of revenge: for, trite though it may look, Dipita's story adds a degree of (geo)political complication to what seems at first a mere domestic quarrel.

Symptomatic of such complication is the thought process that leads to the tragic denouement of the lovers' faceoff. As William visits Dipita to make amends, the aggrieved teenager's first impulse is to forgive, both out of love and out of insecurity (fearing losing an undeserved lover). However, the scene takes a turn for the worst when Dipita's memories connect his personal grudge to his mother's subjugation:

> Je pensai à la relation entre Mbila [la mère] et Oyono, mon géniteur. […] Je ne voulais pas devenir comme elle. Je ne voulais pas me sentir dépendant d'un homme. Irrité, exaspéré, désorienté par l'envie, la répugnance mais surtout la vengeance, je me débarrassai de l'étreinte de William. […] Furieux, je le poussai violemment. Il trébucha, la tête la première sur le plan de travail de la cuisine. Un filet rouge sang s'échappa[2] (Lobe 216).

Dipita's act is, in a way, a textbook illustration of revenge as described—and condemned—by ethicists: a wronged person is overcome by grief and acts impulsively, that is, thoughtlessly. The alleged impulsive nature of revenge is precisely what disqualifies it to the benefit of third-party mediation. "Barbarians" Hegel contends, "are governed by impulses, customs, and feelings, but they have no consciousness of this" (200.) The assumption is that mediation can identify the offense, the offender, and the offended, along with appropriate reparations, averting escalation in the process. However, Lobe's novel ruins the easy course of such identification, which not only takes the scene beyond its domestic scope but also probes the limits of third-party adjudication.

We should indeed note that the offense that sparks the murderous rage is hardly imputable to William. At most, William's infidelity triggers the *memory* of the offense but not the avenged offense itself. Indeed, most critical in the scene is Dipita's awareness that *he*—his very existence—is the biological product of a procuring system; *he* is the son of a pimp who condemned the mother to a life of humiliation and subjugation. As a matter of fact, this awareness is such a sore spot that it has interfered with Dipita's sexual experience since his very first encounter with William (138-139). It is therefore fair to say that, as far as this particular insecurity is concerned, William may be a trigger but not an offender: he is the proverbial wrong man in the wrong place. The insecurity is the

2 "I thought of the relation between Mbila [the mother] and Oyono, my genitor. […] I didn't want to become like her. I didn't want to depend on a man. Angry, incensed, disoriented by envy, disgust and above all revenge, I broke away from William's embrace. […] Infuriated, I pushed him violently. He tripped and fell, head first, onto the kitchen counter. A stream of blood flowed." My translation.

main force behind Dipita's murderous fury. From this standpoint, revenge here is more of an index than the main event and, as such, it is less directed at the unfaithful boyfriend than it is against forces of subjugation that the boyfriend woefully and momentarily embodies. Suddenly, the question of offense—and offender's identification—becomes more complicated than it seemed: we need to clarify what exactly are these "forces of subjugation," and to what 'civilized' justice they answer.

In a revealing parallel, Lobe's narrator suggests an analogical kinship between debt as a procurer's tool for subjugating sex workers and debt as a geopolitical tool for keeping so-called developing nations under a neoliberal yoke. Just as the subjugated sex worker lives under the shadow—and at the mercy—of her procurer, so too postcolonial countries see their economic policies dictated by such institutions as the WTO, the IMF, the World Bank, not to mention governments of former colonial powers. In *A Feminist Reading of Debt*, Lucí Cavallero and Verónica Gago analyze in detail the many concrete ways in which debt affects everyday lives and thus connects ordinary subjugations to the larger neoliberal system that underwrites the prosperity of global finance. Through their analysis, debt emerges as, *inter alia*, a "mechanism of generalized dispossession of migrant" populations, and as a tool of "violence against feminized bodies" (6). In the case of Lobe's sex workers, the power of debt ripples across generations when children, like Dipita and William, born and raised under the procuring yoke, come to define entire dimensions of their existence through the daily humiliation of being, as it were, bodies-for-the-other. Thus, Dipita's story invites the question: what mediation avenues are there for the kind of (systemic) violation that drives him to murder? More importantly, if we follow the analogical link between domestic and public debt, who is to adjudicate offenses stemming from neocolonial actors when the latter have the economic power to legalize whatever serves their interests?

Revenge has been linked to states of humiliation: whatever the offense, what calls for revenge is the sense of existential devaluation, the idea that the offender does not recognize me for my human worth. For this reason, political regimes that resort to humiliation as a governing strategy tend to produce the kind of blend between personal and social shame that we observe in Dipita's case. While revenge may not necessarily be the right remedy for such shame, it does help locate the offense and its intricacy. In *Les Petits de la guenon*, Boubacar B. Diop also builds on spousal rivalry to expose the destructive work of colonial shame. Set in a small Senegalese village, the novel reads as a chronicle of everyday life written by an aging villager for his migrant grandson, Badou. The relevant episode for my current purpose opposes Badou's mother (Bigué Samb) and Badou's stepmother (Yacine Ndiaye) who, as a Senegalese who lived in France, fancies herself white but for the skin. As a would-be white, Yacine Ndiaye despises everyone else for their supposed uncivilized blackness. Bigué Samb who resents her late husband for having left her for another woman is all the more offended upon discovering that it was for *this* woman. Secretly, Bigué then plots a sophisticated revenge whose significance extends well beyond the co-spousal quarrel. After stealing her rival's passport (thus preventing her from returning to her much-celebrated France), Bigué convinces Yacine Ndiaye that she can help by taking her to a marabout who will transform her into a white woman. The spell scene—which reads as an animated version of Magritte's *Reproduction interdite,* wherein the black woman morphs into "her" white mirror reflection—is a success. The now white lady will go by the gentle name of Marie-Gabrielle von Bolkowski. That is, if she can go anywhere.

As it turns out, Bolkowski can no longer be the mother of Ndiaye's black children: the skin, the name, and the civil identity no longer match with the mother's public persona. No amount of Magrittean spell can allow that kind of ontological transmigration. The children belong to her former, now erased self. Analyzing Magritte's painting, Cesare Casarino stresses the refused representation of the face. "The face," as he notes,

"is always an interface—between the body and a subject of meaning as well as the body and the meaning of the subject" (203). Magritte's painting eliminates the subject and, in the process, orchestrates the breakdown of subjectification and of ideology (202). It is interesting then to note that in Diop's rendering of a similar specular structure, the focus is removed from the face and redirected toward skin color. With that permutation, ideology makes a comeback to exhibit the sheer dehumanizing power of race: what Yacine Ndiaye is looking for is not herself but rather her own negation under the internalized white gaze. Diop's genius is on full display when, upon completion of the magical process, Ndiaye, now Bolkowski, finds herself *objectively negated as a result of her prior, subjective negation of self*. She can no longer be the mother of her children because the *internalized* white gaze has succeeded in erasing the *external*, social existence of the mother. Bigué's revenge results then in cutting Yacine Ndiaye from everything she held dear in a such a way that her wildest fancy becomes her worst curse.

Clever though the revenge is, its most telling twist comes from a different actor, one who, prima facie, has no personal connection with Yacine. Camara, the marabout who managed to cast the transformation spell, requests as payment for his service that Ndiaye hand over one of her two children to be sacrificed to the spirits whose magic made the miracle possible. As the mother balks in horror, the reader understands that the marabout, too, had a vengeful motive of his own: he knew his spell to be double-edged and directed it against Ndiaye's mimicry of colonial arrogance, condescension and clichés. On my account, the marabout's motives for revenge are more telling, that is, more complicated, than Bigué's. Instead of a binary distinction between colonizer and colonized, Camara attacks a *mode of thinking* which, while colonial in its genealogy, can also extend to colonized minds like Ndiaye's. Yet, if colonial racialization is the offense, shouldn't Ndiaye be a victim to be pitied rather than an offender to punish? That too, it appears, would be simplistic. For if colonial subjugation extends to thought and ideas, then thought and ideas can be adversaries to fight no matter the identity of they who express them. The anticolonial struggle must be extended to minds and ideas.

If, as Michel Erman suggests, revenge responds to ontological defeat (27), then Camara takes his counter-defeat to its last consequences and shows that adopting—instead of fighting—colonial racialization only leads, as it were, to spectral whiteness, *i.e.*, an ontological state in which one is no longer self even as one becomes an impossible other. Spectral whiteness makes you live for another, it transforms your existence into *a tribute you pay/owe* (much like a debt) to the valorized other. Camara's intervention can therefore be seen as falling somewhere between revenge and anticolonial activism. If revenge aims at reclaiming denied recognition, then Camara succeeds in forcing Ndiaye to see that the marabout—along with all other despised Africans—will not be trampled. But, to the extent that such revenge is aimed at dislodging a mode of thought that conceives of power and domination as a function of race, it works as the cognitive equivalent of attacking colonial outposts in contexts of anti-colonial struggles. However, there is a crucial difference between the two types of anti-colonial initiatives: it is possible to win the struggle against the physical presence of colonial rule (with institutional sovereignty as a result) without necessarily vanquishing the coloniality of thought. This is partly because, as Hegel rightly notes, institutions are an objective realization of thought (in this case, colonial thought) and, as such, they are easily identifiable targets. Personal thought, on the other hand, is intimate (if I may be allowed the tautology) and, as such, easy to fold in the intricate layers of personal-cum-colonial humiliation. As a result, it proves hard to untether from the lived fabric of the person's history. This explains why, in literature as in life, the seemingly *personal* matter of revenge can have implications that go far beyond the personal proper.

Whatever its relation to so-called 'civilized' ideals, revenge affords us insight into the parameters of offense. Just as Camara's revenge in *Les Petits* is not an analytical

piece of cake, neither are the acts of revenge at the heart of David Diop's *Frère d'âme*. The action takes place during World War II when Mademba Diop and Alfa Ndiaye, two initiation brothers[3], find themselves on some European frontline as *tirailleurs* (French colonial infantry). Ndiaye's idea of existence is forever altered when Diop is torn open by shrapnel and asks his friend to put a merciful end to his suffering. Ndiaye however cannot bring himself to euthanize his companion because their culture strictly forbids taking an innocent life. On the other hand, he cannot forgive himself for standing by, powerless, as Diop goes through a slow agony. The novel centers then around thought and its ability to shape one's existence and course of action. Thought, in this case, is the thinking that governs the cultural beliefs of his native Senegal, but it is also the colonial thought that tapped into myths of 'African savagery' to galvanize *tirailleurs* against the Germans on the battlefield (Diop 25). And underneath this second layer is yet another form of thought, an arguably barbarous one, the type of thought that creates not just deadly weapons but *dehumanizing* ones. This last aspect, more than a friend's death per se, is what provokes Ndiaye's revolt and sends him into a traumatic killing frenzy. Seeking to avenge his horribly dismembered friend, he develops the habit of catching isolated German soldiers, tying them up, and subjecting them to the same slow, dismembering death as his friend went through. Though his French commanders count on the supposed savagery of Africans as a war asset, they cannot stomach Ndiaye's acts of revenge once the thought materialized in *their* war weapons does succeed in making a savage out of him.

There is an eerily specular effect to a wounded soldier embarking on a vengeful spiral within a vengeful war of global proportions. Although it would be overly simplistic to trace World War II to mere vengeful motives, it remains the case that revenge considerably informed the 1919 Treaty of Versailles (France for instance seizing the opportunity to punish Prussia for France's loss in the 1870-1871 war). This in turn stoked feelings of resentment and humiliation that the German Reich was sure to exploit. Interestingly, part of the Treaty's terms included heavy reparation payments that Germans owed to the Allies. The payments which can be considered a form of war debt were both a financial and political burden which the Germans failed to shoulder as early as 1921 (Neiberg 90). What the traumatized Ndiaye is facing on that WWII frontline is thus an infinitesimal though deeply personal impact of a geopolitical calculus with a vengeful tilt. It is a reflection of what State decisions mean concretely for subjects who put their life on the line to carry them out. And while individuals like Diop will be judged for "war crimes" committed out of trauma, no comparable accountability is observed at the level of States as such. It appears then easy to speak of "uncivilized peoples" when such peoples are apprehended through the lens of individuals' relation to one another or to States, while States themselves—especially the ones harboring the noble theorizing—get to keep their supposed civility despite dehumanizing war inventions and practices, despite acts of geopolitical revenge, not to mention global exploitation of othered colonies.

By questioning the role of collective thought in his personal conduct on the frontline, Ndiaye confronts the wisdom of his own culture and the colonial myth of the masters he's fighting for or against. In the process, he faces a crisis at the original site of colonial agency: the mind. Indeed, Ndiaye's crisis can be characterized as a failure to channel his cultural episteme to make sense of the ontological defeat (Erman) resulting from the victory of inhuman weaponry. If, as in traditional warfare, the goal of modern western weapons were to defeat the enemy while limiting fatalities to the unavoidable minimum—both *numerically* and *qualitatively*—, one would expect said weapons to deal

3 As ones who went through the initiation ritual together, the two characters share a strong symbolic kinship by virtue of which they consider themselves more-than-brothers.

nothing beyond the proverbial soldier's death. But, as Ndiaye's case shows, the weapon that kills Diop's body is also intended to do something else to his companion's mind: set it unhinged. If, as Clausewitz readily professes, war is the result of ideas, sentiments and rapports prevailing at the time of its start—a statement that amounts to viewing war as a sign of the times—then, by WWII, long are gone the "old fencing and ancient methods" (Clausewitz 28) of pre-Revolutionary times. Such methods prevailed in times when a general's first thought was to secure victory with as little bloodshed as possible, at the risk of making war a game of (humanist) conventions (Foch 26-27). Such a minimalist approach is dismissed by Clausewitz (and other strategists such as Foch and von der Goltz) in favor of Napoleon's more murderous, though efficient, methods. Note that the more brutal approach emerges with a literally imperial design. Sign of the time, the emperor's war seeks to stun the enemy by deploying a staggering amount of brutality. The thinking, which was doomed to follow a logic of perverse refinement, is that since courage is indispensable to victory, war is a conflict of minds more than it is of bodies, even though bodies are the matter through which one destroys minds. Consequently, as Western States develop more and more hegemonic ambitions, minds become gradually the main theater of war albeit through increasingly material apparatuses.

It is worth noting that what happens with minds on the battlefield is only a militarized version of a larger phenomenon that may be termed mind warfare. A version of the latter can be found in colonialism's attempts to shame indigenous minds into submitting to colonial mindsets. And just as the macro-logic of the French emperor stakes its success on the distributed injuries of individual bodies, so too is the overall logic of the colonial project staked on the impact of imperial policies (and imperial caprice) on bodies, minds, and thought. One novel that offers a precipitate of such dynamics *and* an aesthetic attempt to overcome them is Patrice Nganang's *Mont Plaisant*. Spanning much of the twentieth century, the narrative emerges from a conversation between two narrators, one of whom (Sara) has witnessed the fraught relation between colonial powers (German, then French) and leaders of the Bamum people. The novel unfolds along three main narrative arcs: (i) the anticolonial activism of Bamum sultan Njoya after he is overthrown and exiled by colonial authorities; (ii) the awakening of an artist-sculptor, Nebu, tormented by love and humiliated by a rival colonist; and, finally, (iii) the decades-long silence of Sara, who, to escape sexual subjugation, reinvents herself as the second coming of the male (and now deceased) sculptor Nebu. For the purposes of this essay, I will only touch on an episode opposing Nebu to lieutenant Prestat, a colonial officer.

Exploiting a trope with a well-established colonial pedigree, Nganang shows the officer coveting the same woman that Nebu is courting. Considering the woman as his personal property, Prestat fakes an investigation into a treason conspiracy in order to inflict a public whipping on Nebu, both as a way of punishing the rival and as a way of warning the public against anticolonial disobedience. The humiliating scene leaves Nebu bedridden for weeks unable to perform his sculpting work. Beyond the romantic rivalry, Prestat's conduct makes use of a certain colonial imaginary that sees the Bamum as a childish people whose submissiveness is reflected in the importance of aesthetic authority in Bamum's art. In an instance of unwitting irony, one colonial officer confidently opines that African art, if it is to be art at all, must follow the European example in jettisoning authority and giving expression to the struggles of the day (369)! There are thus two offenses here: the personal pain and humiliation inflicted on Nebu as well as the pervasive cultural disdain expressed by colonial officers toward the whole Bamum people.

Reacting to this affront, Nebu chooses a sublimated form of revenge. Rather than responding in kind through some form of physical retaliation or public shaming, Nebu sets out to offer a decisive rebuke to colonial thought by crafting a sculpture that unleashes the full potential of Bamum art. To do so, he decides to model his sculpture

after the woman he loved and whose evanescent presence he senses in every person, every living being and every aspect of his surroundings. Tellingly, he begins sculpting from his sick bed, before he can sit up, let alone stand: "Voilà pourquoi il s'attaqua d'abord aux pieds qu'il avait observés avec tant d'attention. Le sculpteur utilisa l'argile au lieu du bois ou du bronze ou de la pierre […] parce que la douceur de la terre est une pommade pour un corps meurtri[4]" (410). Whereas Prestat's weapon was a bruising whip, Nebu's choice is a healing soft matter, as if to signify the distance he intends to take from a colonial thought whose efficiency relies on breaking lives. Indeed, once completed, Nebu's statue comes to life, not in the literal-cum-mythical way of Pygmalion's, but through lit-up faces of the beholders, through freed tongues, awakened desires and enlightened consciousness of the Bamum (413-414). In other words, Nebu's art produces the opposite effect of Prestat's whip and, in the process, recasts the question of authority on the Bamum's own terms. Interestingly, Nebu does not bother bringing the work to the colonizers' attention, as if to state that his audience is indeed the artist himself along with the people whose relevant validation is their own. Nonetheless, the artist's assault on colonial thought is indirectly acknowledged when the same colonizers who advocated for imitating European art feel the need to dismiss Nebu's sculptural masterpiece as an imitation of a Swiss photographer or of European realist art (417).

Although he holds that art is an elixir for a wounded soul (409), Nebu cannot repair through art alone the damage and offense inflicted by the colonial rule. Art has its limits which are encapsulated by a new offense that takes place some time later: the sculptor is found dead amidst debris of his broken statue, and it is soon understood that he was killed by a bullet fired by the top colonial officer, captain Ripert (436-446). If the clay feet of the statue signified his rejection of colonial violence, they also come to signify the fragility of art. The statue's debris serve as a reminder that this violence (materialized by the bullet) is more than physical or military in nature. It speaks to the reason why the bullet is necessary in the first place: violence is intrinsic to the *possessive impulse* of colonial power, with its diversion of natural resources, its exploitation of the labor, the lives and, yes, the minds of colonized peoples. Through its institutionalized manifestations (culminating, per Merivale's phrase, in the 'odious resource' of slavery), violence—or the organized expenditure of (human) life as a means of generating goods—has been a key component of Western capitalism and its conception of property. If supra-individual actors such as institutions or States are involved in such violence, then the question of wrong—and affiliated notions of retribution and justice—need to take into account the asymmetrical nature of such a wrong.

Hegel considers political institutions as material and objective embodiments of thought in that they codify and give reality to a collective will. It is this objectivity that, in his view, makes State mediations superior to subjective revenge. Taking Hegel at his word, one might ask what justice we are to expect when State institutions, which indeed are material forms of a certain thought of the politic, serve hegemonic ambitions that can only be achieved through increasing disregard, and indeed violation of human dignity. For all their celebrated instrumentality in holding individual subjects accountable for their offenses, political institutions and, above all, States come with a heightened risk of irresponsibility. And this may be in some important part due to their de-personalized nature as material thought. In an essay that chronicles the evolution of the idea of war in the West, Denis de Rougemont has this to say about modernity: "gradually men serving [warfare] machines became themselves machines and felt neither anger nor pity while performing a few automatic movements intended to deal death at a distance" (254). Decoupling, through mechanical distancing, actions from evidence of their effects shifts

4 "That is why he tackled first the feet which he had observed with much care. The sculptor used clay rather than wood, bronze or stone […] because soft earth is ointment for a wounded body". My translation.

the burden of action—and thought—onto the receiving end: the firing soldier is only aware of performing "automatic movements" whose effect is de-realized by distance; the person he fires at, however, (say Mademba Diop in *Frère d'âme*), is the one who will suffer the carnal dismembering, just as the witness (say Alfa Ndiaye) will be the one to shoulder the mental weight of the now all-too real automatic movements. Similarly, if State apparatuses take passion out of the administration of justice (in replacement for revenge), they also become mighty instruments of remote (geo)political action in such a way that the two-ended deployment of political power disproportionately weighs on the receiving end, be it the colonized, the indebted State, or some other kind of subaltern subject.

Two related objections may be formulated here. First, that there is a difference between the State as Hegel conceives it and actual (Western) States which carried out the colonial project. Second, that there is, for Hegel, a further difference between 'State' and 'civil society'. At issue would be the risk of faulting the State for colonial initiatives of the civil society, or mistaking actual, colonial States with Hegel's ideal State. Examining Hegel's take on colonialism, Timothy Brennan judiciously observes that in *Philosophy of Right* civil society is, in relation to the State, "the parallel power and authority of the market" that generates a system of "dual power" through which the market gains the power to "undermine values and destroy lives" (101). Brennan also observes that the point of Hegel's idealist "methodology of proceeding from the abstract to the concrete (rather than the reverse)" is to empower political opposition in such a way that if the laws of a concrete State do not measure up to our "concept of right" then the laws, not the concept, must change (90). In other words, Hegel's State is seen as a standard against which to judge the ethicality of actual States and that of civil society. From this standpoint, one may argue that the historical shape that actual Western States took throughout their colonial ventures does not invalidate the ideal exigency of Hegel's rational State and its position as the best purveyor of justice (Guinle 152).

Still, one may fault Hegel's crucial reliance on Reason for overestimating the State's abilities. That Hegel did not perceive, as Freud was to do later, the role of unconscious mechanisms in the workings of the mind is an important limit for which he may not be fairly blamed. However, to the extent that he perceived the capitalist role of the civil society in State affairs, it is puzzling that he did not read through the sleights of mind—and institutional loopholes—thanks to which the civil society shapes and vitiates the State. Marx spends swaths of his *Capital* showing how the market fashions State policies through repeated legislative lobbying (though he also acknowledges limited instances of labor winning legislative battles against the market). For an advocate of constitutional monarchy, it is surprising that Hegel does not address the theoretical challenges that England (the main source of Marx's examples, which also happens to be part of an actual constitutional monarchy) pose to his theory of State-mediated justice. As Jean-Philippe Guinle intimates, subverting Hegel's comment on Plato's State as "[a function of] cunning" (Hegel and Rauch 160), is it not likelier that the civil society is, in Hegel's political system, a function of (capitalist) cunning (Guinle 162)? For, given the relation between the State and civil society, there is a question to be faced here: are there circumstances, if merely theoretical, under which a capitalist State can be the best administrator of justice—if by justice we mean a form of Right that goes beyond individual actions to include wrongs of a (geo)political nature?

Pending the advent of such a miraculous State, one may find in actual history cause for more sobering conclusions. To take up again the depersonalized nature of States, we may note that among the many remote machines that States deploy in their material exercise of distanced power, debt has a long colonial genealogy. Indeed, if Prussia's sovereignty was restrained through, *inter alia*, mechanisms of debt, one may recall that weaponizing debt is at the root of capitalist hegemony as shaped by Western colonialism.

Articulating the Prussian case with that of Saint Domingue and Puerto Rico will suffice to make the argument plain. As C. L. R. James reminds us, on the eve of the Haitian Revolution, the colony—then known as Saint Domingue—"supplied two-thirds of the overseas trade of France and was the greatest individual market for the European slave trade. It was an integral part of the economic life of the age, the greatest colony in the world, the pride of France, and the envy of every other imperialist nation" (ix). Worth noting is that James' language suggests a merger of hefty economic interest and national pride, that is, a situation in which a French defeat would mean both financial loss and, for once, *humiliation* of the colonizer. And here we need to remember that humiliation is a core component of the mechanism of revenge. After its defeat, France, along with other colonial States such as Britain, greeted Saint-Domingue's new statehood with retribution and isolation. In 1825, under imperialist siege, Haiti's president agreed to a French ordinance promising "French diplomatic recognition in exchange for a 50% tariff reduction on French imports and a 150,000,000F indemnity, payable in five annual installments" (Phillips 4). The indemnity, supposed to compensate French lost property—that is, loss of the land, the economy and the slaves—went on to become a staggering debt heightened by accretion of interest over more than a century. To make matters worse, after the United States invaded the same island in 1915, part of the terms for American disengagement was that Haiti would pay the US for the 'protection' provided by the occupying power. In both instances, debt functions as "an apparatus of economic capture" (Zambrana 58) and of diverted accountability.

Elaborated during centuries of overt colonialism, the imperial instrumentality of debt has survived the decolonial season thanks to global finance institutions. If officially independent countries remain subject to its logic, it is no wonder that non independent ones such as that of Puerto Rico would suffer even more of the same economic capture. The coloniality of debt became clear during the 2016—and ongoing—Puerto-Rican debt crisis when a Washington-nominated Control Board annulled, as a matter of course, decisions made by the Puerto Rican government in an attempt to salvage the interests of the island's creditors. As Zambrana observes, this amounts to staking life itself, the concrete and everyday life of 'citizens' who cannot so much as vote for federal representation (60). Looking back, then, at Prussia, the loss of colonies as mandated by the 1919 Treaty underscores the vision behind the Haitian, Puerto-Rican, and other postcolonial debts: (neo)colonies are sources of financial gains that can be calculated and converted into debt owed by the impudent colony or extractable from the defeated would-be colonizer. In losing its colonies, Prussia loses great economic assets and thus adds to the debt it has incurred by virtue of the Versailles Treaty. This is not to express any sympathies whatsoever for the losing Prussian State no more than for the hegemonic ambitions of its rivals: the crucial point here is that debt under various forms was clearly—and remains—an important tool in the imperialist dispossessive apparatus since the early days of the colonial project.

Discussing what he terms the "debt state", Wolfgang Streeck shows how, in recent decades, debt has become a potent mechanism that shifts State political accountability, with governments being more and more accountable to financial institutions to the detriment of citizens. It may be that, in Western societies, this trend constitutes a new experience and a new development for *their* democracies, but for (formerly) colonized countries it is not. Indeed, the whole colonial enterprise can arguably be characterized as subjugation through debt mechanisms encompassing resources, taxes, and even human lives that colonized ecosystems *owe* to the colonizer and through which colonial subjects are accountable to metropolitan States. That system is what Dipita has in mind when, recalling his uncle's words, he refers to the Cameroonian president as a "barbie

directement manipulée depuis l'Elysée[5]" (26). It is also what Cavallero and Gago indict in a long litany linking debt to imposing agro-toxins on farmers, to transforming prison sentences into debt accretion, to abortion criminalization, to healthcare costs, to gig economy, to migration, etc. (5-6).

Recalling Brennan's description of the "dual power" through which the civil society faces the State, one may add a third factor, far less structured and yet potent: national sentiment. It is indeed worth noting that Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* theorizes the 'State' and not the 'Nation', despite the emergence of national sentiment in the previous century. As Pierre-Clément Timbal notes, opposition to the monarchy in the lead-up to the French Revolution was fueled in part by a "national sentiment […] linked to the rise of the bourgeoisie, representing the middle class, which want[ed] to take a more active part in the political life of the nation." And this national sentiment was to play an important role in the passion of war starting with Napoleon's campaigns. For "a Nation requires that passion shall be translated to the level of the people as a whole" and, in return, "passion requires that the *self* [in this case, the nation] shall become greater than all things" (Rougemont 260). Little wonder then that the same sentiment was also a potent tool in the craft of colonial myths and hierarchies, that is, in the development of discourses that enabled global expansion of colonial greed in the nineteenth century. And these myths help explain why France's defeat in Saint Domingue is such a *national humiliation*. This side of the colonial phenomenon could not of course be convincingly construed as a manifestation of a "rational" State. If anything, it would have shed some light onto the political *passions* of the Hegelian *rational* State, and on the latter's capacity to wreak tremendous injustice when steered by its darker, interested side.

The other side of the debt coin is of course credit. Engraved in its very name is the idea that 'credit' is a token of trust, and trust is ultimately a form of recognition among equals. In credit lies that cunning of the market that Guinle observes as he discusses Hegel's State. For as soon as 'credit' becomes an 'investment', trust gives way to wealth generation. From there, debtors, much like Marxian workers, must dedicate some of their life force to generating the necessary wealth to pay back the debt. Credit becomes then a means of converting workforce into alienated wealth. There are of course degrees of exploitation to this process. For Dipita's mother—and, by psychological ripple effect, for Dipita himself—credit means *spending* one's own body, one's health, and one's worth in order to pay up a debt that verges on the ontological: one almost owes one's self *to* the creditor. If debt is an apparatus of capture in this case, it is worth stressing the target of capture: bodies in *39 rue de Berne*, courage in *Frère d'âme*, identity in *Les Petits*, culture in *Mont Plaisant*. But the ultimate target, in all cases, is the mind: it is the idea that one has of oneself, it is what allows one to affirm one's worth and to expect recognition from others. By breaking this idea, colonialism hopes to objectify the other, to treat the other as a thing without a will, and thus legitimize ownership of the other. For, "that which has no will is owned" (Brennan 101). And if what is owned is a (negated) person, then the person becomes a wealth for the owner, *a thing that keeps on giving* much like a credit, through interest rates, is a gift that keeps on giving back to the giver.

Such a condition contradicts of course the Hegelian idea of Right in its triple meaning: human right, law, and the moral right thing. There are good theoretical odds that Hegel's State can be an efficient resort when such abuse occurs *within* its borders. The question I sought to raise here is: what of comparable (and more-than-comparable) abuses carried out beyond the State's metropolitan borders by citizens/corporations from that same State, or by the State itself? Hegel makes clear that freedom is fought for, and that this is a good thing. In fact, the struggle is part of the process of thought: "collisions [in the process of applying the law] are also intrinsic to thought, to conscious thinking

5 "a barbie doll directly manipulated from the Elysée." My translation.

and its dialectic, while the mere decision of a judge would be arbitrary" (200). The argument assumes that there be already *laws* to struggle over: in other words, it assumes a juridical equality of the parties. With colonialism, however, that equality disappears. In fact, the whole success of the colonial enterprise is predicated on the State negating this juridical premise. As Guinle puts it: "c'est précisément ici, c'est-a-dire au moment où l'État hégélien entre dans l'histoire mondiale, qu'apparait en pleine lumière l'ambiguïté de la théorie hégélienne de l'État, et, par là même, celle de la théorie hégélienne du droit tout entière[6]" (159). More than ambiguity, colonialism reveals the State's tremendous potential for harm in the absence of regulatory mechanisms capable of matching a State's strike force.

Pierre Clastres' work showed that other forms of freedom have been historically thinkable, and realized, outside a strong State. To be sure, Hegel did not know what Clastres knew. Yet, for one who admits that no "philosophy can transcend its contemporary world" (Hegel 15), the philosopher's method of turning to History for stages of evolution of human consciousness should have qualified his claims to universality. Of course, for better or worse, the world colonization made is one where the State form may have become unavoidable, maybe even necessary. It remains important, nonetheless, to keep in mind that history contradicts the alleged monopoly of full rationality that a State exhibits as it guarantees freedom. In fact, looking at how we've been conducting our wars of late, and bombing our way to resources, it may seem that the more civilized one believes one to be, the more savage one is likely to prove.

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6 "it is precisely here, at the moment when the Hegelian State enters world history, that the ambiguity of Hegel's theory of the State, and, at the same time, the ambiguity of the Hegel's theory of law as a whole, comes to light". My translation.

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