

THE DARK SIDE OF HEGEL'S THEORY OF MODERNITY: RACE AND THE OTHER¹

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Abstract: This paper purports to identify the nature of Hegel's theory of race. Especially, the author will examine whether Hegel's theory of race in particular, his philosophy of spirit in general, provides the justification of a colonial racism or a cultural racism. While Hegel's theory undoubtedly contained racist elements, still unanswered is whether racism is inherently at odds with the basic principles of his philosophy of spirit. To be examined critically is the suggestion that racism is fundamentally incompatible with the basic principles of Hegel's philosophy of spirit, notwithstanding its undeniably racist elements. The paper aims to provide clarification in this question by showing that Hegel's racism is not an accidental or ancillary byproduct of his speculative philosophy of spirit and world history.

Key Words: Eurocentrism, race, cultural racism, philosophy of spirit, Hegel.

1. Introduction

Hegel's theory of race is not a subject much discussed academically. His racial theory is rarely mentioned even in relation to Eurocentrism, which stands out in his philosophy of history. This phenomenon is deeply connected with the current trend of Hegel study of neglecting the theory of the subjective spirit in which Hegel's theory of race is dealt with systematically. There is not much prior study of the theory of the subjective spirit, especially his theory of race theory.

Granted, the bitter experience of two world wars thoroughly discredited Hegelian political philosophy, to the point of stigmatizing it as the important forerunner of Nazi's racism and totalitarianism like Fascism. The best-known critic of Hegel was Karl Popper, who famously attacked him in his *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Popper's scathing verdict on Hegel's thought had done much to undermine its global reputation during the Cold War (see Popper 1950). Popper's critical pronouncement on Hegel, along with Rudolf Haym's influential criticism of Hegelian philosophy in his *Hegel und seine Zeit (Hegel and his age)*, is widely regarded as the most prominent verdict pronounced against the German

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philosopher.² R. Haym, in his book, reckons that Hegel's political philosophy provided theoretical justification for the contemporary reactionary Prussian state (see Haym 1962: 364).

The potential bias and limitation of Popper's claim, however, should be separated from the newfound controversies surrounding Hegel's thoughts.³ The arguments go beyond looking at the connecting link between racism and totalitarianism of the Nazi regime. It is necessary to admit that we will take the critique of Eurocentrism in Hegel's philosophy in particular, and in western philosophy in general seriously. In other words, behind the new discussions with regard to Hegel's theory of race and his racism lies the strong interest in a critical re-examination of Hegel's Eurocentrism along with its close corollary of 'otherizing' non-Western races and nations, which forms the core of orientalism as the other side of Eurocentrism.⁴ In recent decades, studies on Hegel's philosophy have resulted in increasingly stronger consensus, even among Hegel's most ardent supporters, that his racial theory and Eurocentrism deserve criticism.⁵ The recent researches on Hegel's racial theory revolve around the following question: do his thoughts in general, and his spiritual philosophy in particular, justify inherently racism?

This paper aims to examine the nature of Hegel's racial theory, with particular focus on addressing the claim that Hegel's racial theory advocates racism. Also to be examined critically is the suggestion that racism is fundamentally incompatible with the basic principles of Hegel's philosophy of spirit, notwithstanding its undeniably racist elements. My goal is to show that Hegel's racism cannot be dismissed as merely an accidental and ancillary part of his philosophy.

² It must be admitted that Karl Popper's rebuke of Hegel is criticized for lacking any academic rigour. M. Theunissen, for instance, notes that Popper's treatment of Hegel's philosophy only shows the most extreme case of oversimplification of R. Haym's criticism (see Theunissen 1970: 17).

³ Karl Popper overlooks the liberal and reformist dimensions of Hegel's political philosophy. In fact, Hegel's theory of modern rational state offered in his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right (1820)* is not a reflection of the actual Prussian state in 1820. Rather, it portrayed a hypothetical Prussian state that could have been realized had the reforms advocated by Karl Freiherr von Stein, Karl August von Hardenberg, and Wilhelm von Humboldt been successful (Wood 1991: x). It has now been widely accepted by many scholars that Hegel is not a conservative, reactionary or absolutistic, even totalitarian, but liberal and progressive. For example, John Rawls considers Hegel as "a moderately progressive reform-minded liberal." Therefore, he argues that Hegel can be interpreted as "an important exemplar [.....] of the liberalism of freedom" (Rawls 2003: 330).

⁴ Although "there is now a growing body of critical literature dealing with Hegel's racism and Eurocentrism", "it is far from being the dominant trend in Hegel scholarship" (Tibebu 2011: Xiii footnote 7).

⁵ For reference, see Bernasconi 2000 and 2003; McCamey 2000; Kain, Philip 2005. Closer examination of the latest literature on Hegel's theory of race and his Eurocentrism is covered in the main bodies of these publications.

2. Classification of races, their ranking and their mentalities

Hegel's racial theory gets systematic treatment in his philosophy of subjective spirit. His philosophical system divides philosophy of subjective spirit into three parts: "Anthropology", "Phenomenology of Spirit" and "Psychology." Racism is first mentioned by Hegel in Anthropology, which constitutes the first part of the philosophy of subjective spirit. The summary of Hegel's racial theory is provided in *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline* (Abbreviation: *Encyclopedia*) written in 1830, and readers can consult paragraph 393-394 for a detailed explanation.⁶ As will be elaborated later on, his racial theory is more than a question of biological traits of each race. It also has psychological and ethical dimensions, as well as social and cultural implications, which are clearly evident in paragraphs 435 and 482.

Hegel's philosophy of subjective spirit is an integral part of the philosophy of spirit (*Philosophie des Geistes*), which constitutes the third and final part of the entire system of his philosophy. As known widely, the entire system of his philosophy consists of three parts, namely, the science of logic, the philosophy of nature, and the philosophy of spirit. In Hegel's philosophy, spirit has a very broad meaning. For Hegel, spirit means "spirit as in itself" as a "the logical idea" (Hegel 1971: 18). Furthermore, the spirit means the truth of "the external nature". Hegel argues that the nature "is posited by the spirit" (Hegel 1971: 14). In this sense, Hegel emphasizes that the spirit is "the truth" of nature and "its absolute prius" (Hegel 1971: 8). Spirit encompasses all stages of development starting from the state of nature and ending as the formation and development of spirit for the spirit itself. It entails the entire process of elevating spirit into a self-knowing, actual idea (see Hegel 1971: 5). The actualization of spirit is understood as a process in which the spirit starts to recognize its own existence as it moves away from nature. Such formative progress of self-realization of spirit for itself contains three stages, which constitute subjective, objective, and absolute spirit. Like the *Encyclopedia* as a whole, the philosophy of spirit is divided into three parts, i.e., the philosophy of subjective spirit, the philosophy of objective spirit, and the philosophy of absolute spirit.

The task of Anthropology, which comes first in Hegel's philosophy of subjective spirit, is proving that our spirit is manifested as soul – the spirit in nature, is destined to develop into conscious ego (see Hegel 1971: 27). In other words, consciousness begins to awake in the soul. For Hegel, Anthropology deals with "soul or the spirit in nature" (*natürliche Seele*) as its subject-matter (Hegel 1971: 25). He remarks that the subjective spirit initially exists as "the natural soul" (Hegel 1971: 34).

⁶ Hegel's *Encyclopedia* had been published in three versions in 1817, 1827 and 1830 respectively. See Inwood 2010: 279.

For Hegel, the word “soul” (*Seele*) is used to indicate the “immediate” or natural existence of the spirit. At the stage of the soul, spirit exists in relation to “the difference of climates, the changes of the seasons” etc. As it moves up the stages of higher development, however, spirit as *natürliche Seele* is less bound to climate or seasonal constraints, thereby achieving emancipation from nature. According to Hegel, while the life of animals always depends upon nature essentially, in the case of human beings “these points of dependence lose importance, just in proportion to his civilization, and the more his whole frame of soul is based upon a substructure of mental freedom” (Hegel 1971: 36).

The natural spirit is less constrained by nature as it obtains freedom and independence. Before reaching this state, however, it is necessary to undergo a determinate phase of the development of different human races. Such differentiation of races is a specific and concrete manifestation of natural spirit. Like this, Hegel considers race as one of subject-matters of Anthropology.⁷ For Hegel, “according to the concrete differences of the terrestrial globe, the general planetary life of the nature-governed spirit specializes itself and breaks up into the several nature-governed spirits which, on the whole, give expression to the nature of the geographical continents and constitute the diversities of race” (Hegel 1971: 40).

As the quote implies, racial classification is closely linked to the division of earth’s continent into different regions. Hegel maintains that the geographical differences between the continents produce the racial diversities. In his philosophical anthropology, it is the interaction between these differentiated races and divided continents that gives rise to individual natural spirits. Each race is closely connected with the development of a peculiar ethical life and underlying special collective characters of people who belong to that group. Therefore, Hegel emphasizes that the differences of races are intrinsically linked to that of national mentality (see Hegel 1971: 34-35). Furthermore, this local or national character closely linked to its own race, plays a significant role in the world history. Hegel treats this significant meaning of the several nation characters and races as a part of world history more systematically. Simply put, differentiated races find their expression in the form of idiosyncratic natural spirits, which in turn evolve into various local or national spirits (*Nationalgeister*) (see Hegel 1971: 45-46).

Hegel dismisses the question of finding the origin of human being either from a single couple or multiple pairs merely as “a purely historical question” (Hegel 1971: 41). Polygenesis posits that all of us came from more than one pair of human beings. This stands in contrast to monogenesis, whereby we are offspring of a single pair of a man and a woman. This means that we can find no inherent difference or hierarchy of superiority among races with regard to the biological

⁷ According to Hoffheimer, Hegel’s treatment race as part of Anthropology is intended as a “decisive rejection of Herder” who thought that the physical features of diverse national groups “should be explored in Natural History”. See Hoffheimer 2001: 57-58, footnote 70.

level. One of the proponents of monogenesis was Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752 - 1840) who had a wide influence on the discourse on race in the 18th century. He is credited with coining the word "Caucasian" in reference to his fellow Europeans, a term subsequently embraced by Hegel (Tibebu 2011: 99).

For Hegel, recognizing different regions was more important than identifying different races, not least because where we live determines to a large extent what community we form. As above mentioned, the geographical divisions of the earth make up the various races. Hence, he emphasizes that "the differences between the continents are not contingent but necessary" (Hegel 1971: 42). As Darrel Moellendorf notes, Hegel's view that the geographical differences of the continents are necessary, implies that such differences are rational (see Moellendorf 1992: 245). Furthermore, the most important geographical division of continents is the distinction between the Old World and the New World. The New World, by which Hegel means the American continent, was only 'discovered' by Europeans in the modern age and thus carries insignificant historical importance. The Old World, on the other hand, is divided into Africa, Asia and Europe. He assigns a separate category for Africa and Asia proper, both in geographical and ethnical sense (a point that will be further explained later). North Africa "belongs to Europe by its character", and its inhabitants are "not strictly Africans, that is, negroes, but are skin to Europeans." Similarly, on the ground that the western Asia is geographically close to Europe like the Middle East, he claims that it "is European in character." That leaves China and India, along with their inhabitants, as being part of the Asia proper (see Hegel 1971: 41-42).

Hegel stresses two elements that should be considered in racial classification, bearing in mind the close association between geographical and racial division. For him, different races are characterized by their "physical and mental or spiritual bearings." This Classification by physical traits yields five or three races, depending on how detailed the criteria for division will be. Hegel lists "the Caucasian, Ethiopian, and Mongolian races" joined by "the races of Malay and America". Hegel sees the latter two not so much as being separated from the above three races as embodying characteristics different from them. "The formation of the skull and the face" could be used as the criteria for physical categorization. The formation of the skull is determined by both vertical lines (from earhole to nose) and horizontal lines (from forehead to jaw). Humans and animals have different angles at which the two lines intersect. The former exhibits a nearly perpendicular outline, whereas animals show less angular shapes (see Hegel 1971: 42). Looking at facial angles for classifying different species and races was first attempted by Petrus Camper (1722-1789), a Dutch anatomist (see Tibebu 2011: 81).

Hegel provides the following physical descriptions for Caucasian, Mongolian and Black; Caucasians show a newly perpendicular intersection between

horizontal and vertical lines with gently protruding forearms. Other features include white skin, pink cheek and long, soft hair. Mongolians, on the other hand, have short, stiff and black hair with high cheekbones. Blacks are characterized by a narrow cranium, highly curled hair, black skin, bulging forehead and very strong jaw (see Hegel 1971: 42).

Above mentioned, Hegel includes mental, in addition to physical, distinctions as criteria for defining races. He then provides an explanation on mental aspects of the three races, starting with Blacks (in reverse order to the description for physical traits). Hegel claims that Blacks are at still the stage of being a “race of children (*Kindernation*).” They are thus incapable of dwelling on the rights and wrongs of buying and selling fellow human beings as commodities. Their religion is at a similarly primitive level, with objects of worship confined to physical entities such as stones. They are good natured and harmless when peaceful, but with sudden agitation could turn extremely cruel. Blacks, or at least those living in Africa proper (the Sub-Saharan region), are living under tyranny. In Hegel’s view, they “do not attain to the feeling of human personality” (Hegel 1971: 42-43).⁸ Furthermore, Hegel argues that “there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in” the African character (Hegel 2011b: 86). He also recognizes, however, the geographical influence (among other natural conditions) in building the mind of each race. The Blacks’ childlike state of mind, therefore, can be attributed to the natural peculiarities of the African continent. Their infantile mind “corresponds to differenceless mass of the African continent” completely (Hegel 1971: 42-43).⁹

Higher up the racial order are the Mongols, who had at least escaped the level of naive infants. They had started to separate themselves from nature on their path toward awakening. Hegel, however, still remarks that the spirit of the Mongols “does not as yet grasp itself in its absolute freedom, does not as yet know itself as the concrete universal which is for itself, has not as yet made its notion into an object for itself in the form of thought” (Hegel 1971: 43).¹⁰ According to Hegel, in the Caucasian race spirit can for the first time attain the “absolute unity with itself.” In other words, it is in the Caucasian race that spirit first “enters into complete opposition to the life of nature, apprehends itself in its absolute self-dependence.” Unlike Mongolians, Caucasians are less emotionally swayed, and avoids the fate of moving fruitlessly back and forth between opposite mental states. At its peak, the tide of Mongolians expanded its territory and subjugated other nations. Such expansion, however, was not followed by the process of

⁸ In the *Lectures on the philosophy of history* Hegel characterizes the Africans as “the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state” (Hegel 2011b: 86).

⁹ Hegel 2011b: 86. In his lecture on philosophy of history, Hegel divides Africa into three parts: The Africa proper or Sub-Saharan Africa, ‘European’ North Africa and areas surrounding the river Nile, the last of which are connected to Asia. See Hegel 2011b: 84-85.

¹⁰ On Hege’s misunderstanding of Chinese culture, see Na 2015.

consolidation, leaving little tangible evidence of their once mighty empire. Their conquest was for destruction, not construction, and no sooner had it reached its pinnacle than the empire crumbled in short order. The achievements of the Caucasian race, in contrast, were genuinely progressive in the world history (see Hegel 1971: 44).

Caucasians, more specifically the European race and its nations, are at the forefront of universal world history in their quest to achieve the principles of universal freedom. Hegel divides Caucasians into “the western Asiatics and the Europeans.” This distinction “coincides with that of Mohammedans and Christians.” The western Asiatics regard the absolute obedience to the one infinite god as the ultimate value. Unlike the western Asiatics, the European race has for its “principle and character the concrete universal, self-determining thought” (Hegel 1971: 44). As the Christian doctrine of the Trinity shows, so Hegel argues, the European spirit can attain the “concrete universal”, which contains difference within itself, completely in accord with the Christian religion. Therefore, Europeans are to be regarded as the focal point of world history. Both geographical and racial factors pushed Europeans to the center stage. As an example, Hegel defines the Mediterranean as “the center of world history.” Across the Mediterranean, rivers and seas acted less as barriers to exchange between North Africa, Near East and Europe. Rather, they provided “an easy means of communication” (Hegel 2011b: 80).

The lowest position in Hegel’s racial pecking order is occupied by Native Americans (Indians). In the eyes of Hegel, they are the most inferior among races who are “a vanishing, feeble race.” Hegel does admit that Indians had nevertheless reached a certain cultural and spiritual civilization when Europeans set foot on America. This civilization, however, was “not comparable with European culture.” Native Americans, therefore, “were incapable of having independence.” They are not also “in a position to maintain themselves in face of the Europeans.” This led Hegel to assert that only Europeans can play a leading role in building a new civilization on the American continent (see Hegel 1971: 45).

Europeans of the Old World resorted to violence when they neutralized the resistance of Americans and turned the region into its colony. This conquest and its extremely inhumane colonial violence, however, is not worthy of serious contemplation for Hegel. The barbaric violence of Europe’s modern capitalism, as evidenced by forceful migration of Blacks from Africa to America through slave trade and colonization, was beyond the scope of his philosophical reflection. This omission does not just point to the limitation of his theory of race. The conquest of America and the institution of slave trade were both underpinned by Eurocentrism. Hegel is strangely silent, however, on the crucial part that such historical development had played in the process of making the European modern society. He even systematically denies this dark side of European history, which

showcases his philosophical single-mindedness. Hegel's racial theory is key to understanding his philosophical reflection on western modernity deeply rooted in 'European universalism'. In this aspect, Hegel's theory of western modernity is deeply connected with the 'otherization' of the non-western people and cultures. Even J. Habermas, for example, seems to overlook the dark side of Hegel's theory of modernity when he emphasizes that Hegel was "the first philosopher to develop a clear concept of modernity" (Habermas 1990: 4).

Further discussion will be made, in raising the most controversial points of Hegel's racial theory, on the interaction between (from Hegel's standpoint) the inferiority of African Black and Native Americans, slave trade, conquest of the American continent and colonial rule. Hegel famously viewed America as "the land of future" (*das Land der Zukunft*) (Hegel 2011b: 80). It goes without saying that he was referring to a completely Europeanized America. It is equally evident that Europeanized America is the result of ruthless conquest and colonization of America by the Europeans. Hegel declares that the Europeans "will begin a new culture over there on the soil they have conquered from the natives" (Hegel 1971: 85).

3. Biological and racist elements in Hegel's theory of race

As have been noted, Hegel connects his racial classification to the division between the more civilized, progressed race and the backward, barbaric ones. Hegel's racial hierarchy also corresponds to ranking of cultures in world history assigned to each race, which may lead us to conclude that Hegel's theory of race justifies racial and colonial discrimination under the name of the idea of historical progress and universal mission of civilization. This is an issue, however, that researchers have yet to reach a consensus.

Hegel scholars are divided on their stance on Hegel's racial theory, which can be roughly grouped as follows:

A. Hegel's theory is not inherently racist. This view is endorsed by Walter A. Kaufmann and Stephen Houlgate, etc. Kaufmann, for example, in his article "The Hegel Myth and its Method", tries to demonstrate that the German philosopher was not a racist (see Kaufmann 1996). Granted, reviewing Hegel's philosophy was not the main topic of this article, as Kaufmann was more interested in illuminating the contradiction latent in the one-sided attack leveled by Karl Popper on Hegel's thoughts. Popper, Kaufmann emphasizes, makes excessive connection between Hegel and Nazi's racism. Less pages are devoted to a more detailed examination of Hegel's theory of race.

It should be noted, however, that Kaufmann published his book in 1951, when the West was at the early stage of the Cold War. Linking Hegel's philosophy to Nazism, if overdone, could be too much of a good thing, in light of this historical

backdrop, Kaufmann deserves some credit for shedding Popper's theory in a critical light.

But it is surprising that even in our time Terry Pinkard, a quite famous Hegel scholar in America, denies that Hegel's philosophy does not contain any significant racism and ethnocentrism. "As explicitly as he could", according to Pinkard, Hegel "rejected all doctrines of racial superiority flowing around Europe at the time" (Pinkard 2000: 493). In his recent book *Does History Make Sense? Hegel on the Historical Shapes of Justice* he holds again that Hegel's distinction between European culture and non-European cultures like African and Oriental can be justified because Africans and Orientals were not capable of attaining the stage of the reflective self-consciousness.

The overall distinction is clear enough: Prior to the Greeks, people were simply absorbed in both nature and in social life, and there was no place for individuality. After the Greeks, the distinction between absorption and reflective self-consciousness came to the foreground, and an entirely new set of metaphysical problems appeared in the lives of those peoples (or perhaps even appeared as genuinely 'metaphysical' problems for the first time). (Pinkard 2017: 54-55)

Stephen Houlgate also argues that Hegel was neither a racist nor Eurocentric thinker. He writes:

Where it is clear that one civilization's self-understanding is more advanced – more free – than that of another, then we should not be afraid to say so. This involves no doctrine of 'cultural imperialism' or 'racial superiority.' [...] Hegel's position does, however, commit him to the view that certain civilizations are more advanced than others and that the culture and civilization of the Western Christian tradition is the most profoundly self-aware and thus most advanced in history. (Houlgate 2005: 22-23)

Houlgate even goes so far as to say, in an interview with a German philosophical journal, that he cannot find out any place in Hegel's text, in which he could say, that 'what Hegel said here, is wrong' (see Houlgate/Max Gottschlich 2018: 541). Philip J. Kain, however, criticizes Houlgate's claims. According Kain, Houlgate does not give us any convincing arguments. Therefore, so he writes, Houlgate "does not actually give us an argument that Hegel is not racist or ethnocentric. He uses a few scare quotes and rhetorical flourishes to avoid taking the issue on directly and then slides into a defense of Hegel's concept of freedom" (Kain 2005: 247).

B. Another body of researchers concedes that there are serious and dangerous racial views be found in Hegel's philosophy, but claims they are not inevitable conclusions from his philosophy of spirit. Proponents of this view include Philip.

J. Kain,¹¹ Joseph McCarney¹² and Darrel Moellendorf. etc.¹³ The validity of this argument would be examined in more detail when I go through the third trend of interpretation, which finds a deeply entrenched racist view in Hegel's philosophy of spirit.

C. The last trend of the interpretation on Hegel's philosophy stresses the strong connection between Hegel's cultural racism and his philosophy of spirit. Among its supporters are Robert Bernasconi, Teshale Tibebu (see Tibebu 2011: 74-103), Gundrun Hentges (see Hentges 1999: 244-272) and Susan Buck-Morss (see Buck-Morss 2009: 116-118). etc.

Next will come an in-depth look on various controversies surrounding Hegel's theory of race, particularly on the question of whether his philosophy of spirit rejects racism. As noted, Hegel is against the view of polygenesis in which some races are superior than others. Therefore, he argues that the cruel subjugation of inferior people based on the biological theory of race cannot be justified. He writes:

But descent affords no ground for granting or denying freedom and domination to human beings. Man is implicitly rational; herein lies the possibility of equal justice for all men and the futility of a rigid distinction between races which have rights and those which have none. (Hegel 1971: 41)

Hegel also stresses in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) that the purported general rules offered by individual experts of physiognomy are "nothing more than empty subjective opinions" (Hegel 1977: 193). He spares no words in revealing their fallacies, who claim that our facial expressions give clue to our inherent characters. To show his contempt for physiognomy, Hegel cites the following quote from Lichtenberg:

If anyone said, you certainly act like an honest man, but I see from your face that you are forcing yourself to do so and are a rascal at heart; without a doubt, every honest fellow to the end of time, when thus addressed, will retort with a box on the ear. (Hegel 1977: 193)

Hegel warmly endorses Lichtenberg's criticism, commenting that "his retort is to the point" (Hegel 1977: 193).¹⁴ Some scholars present the *Phenomenology of*

¹¹ Kain, Philip J. maintains that "Hegel is not a racist in the strong sense—he is not a theoretical or scientific racist" (Kain 2005: 246). See McCarney 2000: 140-151.

¹² With regard to the limits of McCarney's interpretation of Hegel's racism and Eurocentrism, see Na 2015: 40-41.

¹³ See Moellendorf 1992: 243-255.

¹⁴ For implications of critiques on Hegel's Physiognomy, see MacIntyre 2006.

Spirit as a proof of Hegel's repudiation of "biological determinism" and "biological racism" (Tibebu 2011: 74 and 78).¹⁵

This paper has pointed out, however, many elements of Hegel's philosophy that do not square with his support for equality of liberty and rights. In other words, it is not convincing to overlook that there is quite a strong interrelation between biological and geographical racism and cultural racism in Hegel's philosophy. To avoid making repetitive argument, I would only look at those components of Hegelian philosophy that clash with his stress on the equality of rights entitled to everyone. Key focus would be put on his claim of supposed mental and physical inferiority of Native Americans, which highlights Hegel's division of "superior" and "inferior" races on biological and geographical grounds.

For Hegel, Native Americans are at an even lower position in relation to African Black. Their mind is at a completely immature state owing to geographic and environmental factors peculiar to Africa. Based on the developmentalist schema of Hegel's philosophy of world history, which considers the realization of spirit or freedom as its goal, American Indians belong to the bottom of racial hierarchy and of cultural ranking as well. Hegel writes that American Indians are "physically and spiritually powerless." As a proof of Native Americans' immaturity, Hegel declares that they are "want of spirit, and a crouching submissiveness towards a Creole, and still more towards a European" (Hegel 2011b, 75). But his assertion that the American Indians lack fundamentally the feeling of any dependence shows only that Hegel used the historical sources inaccurately and selectively, since American Indians fought many times for their political independence against the colonial rule (see Hoffheimer 2001: 38 and 51 footnote 33).

Hegel even argues that they are "in all aspects" inferior, "even in regard to size." This spiritual weakness corresponds to the natural and geographical immaturity of America continent, to which the America inhabitants belong (see Hegel 2011b: 74-75). The backwardness even applies to American animals, including lions, tigers and crocodiles. Hegel writes that they are "in every respect smaller, weaker, and less powerful" (Hegel 1975: 163).

In the lectures, which Hegel delivered in 1825, recorded by H. von Kehler and K. G. von Griesheim, Hegel treated the implication of skin color with regard to racial superiority. It shows Hegel as being characteristically ambivalent. He moves between his support or the equality of rights for everyone on the one hand, and the supposed inferiority of Native Americans and Africans in both mental and physical terms on the other. As we prove in the next part of this article, these claims are mixed with his endorsement of violent colonization and even extermination of the inferior races. At any rate, Hegel offers the following

¹⁵ Buck-Morss, S. also emphasizes that Hegel's criticism of the pseudo-science of phrenology in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* is to be regarded as "a critique of already extant theories of biological racialism" (Buck-Morss 2009: 60).

argument on the status of human beings conferred by their skin color. “No color has any superiority, it being simply a matter of being used to it, although one can speak of the objective superiority of the color of the Caucasian race as against that of the Negro.” His claim of the objective superiority of white skin color is based on the assumption that “the finest color is that in which what is internal is most visible.” In other words, Hegel thinks that white skin is objectively superior, because white skin color is capable of making the spiritual inwardness more visible than nonwhite skin color can do it (see Hegel 1978: 47).

4. The elements of cultural racism in Hegel’s philosophy of spirit

I have already shown in part three that Hegel’s ranking of races is not concerned with solely in biological terms. In part four, I will examine how such biological features of each race, along with geographic influences (including climate) and spiritual characteristics justify the violent subjugation of inferior races and their colonialization. Such analysis would help us gain a better understanding on how Hegel’s racial theory is employed to legitimize cultural racism backed up by Eurocentrism. It would also show how his racist views are linked with his systematic schema of world history that expresses the development of freedom defined as the final purpose of history.

According to Hegel, the emergence of European modern rational states underpinned by Christianity as an absolute and consummate religion (especially the Protestantism) was no coincidence. Hegel explains the historical significance of Europeans in world history as follows:

It is in the Caucasian race that spirit first attains to absolute unity with itself. Here for the first time spirit enters into complete opposition to the life of Nature, apprehends itself in its absolute self-dependence, wrests itself free from the fluctuation between one extreme and the other, achieves self-determination, self-development, and in doing so creates world-history. The Mongols, as we have already mentioned, are characterized by an impetuosity which impels them outwards beyond their borders, but it dies away as quickly as it came, acts not constructively but only destructively, and produces no advance in world-history. This advance is first brought about by the Caucasian race. (Hegel 1971: 44)

In Hegel’s view, it is not only inevitable, but necessary that more advanced civilizations rule and conquer lesser ones. He claims that the colonization of non-Western world by modern European civilization was only a natural and necessary stage in the progress of the actualization of freedom defined as the final purpose of world history. In this sense Hegel emphasizes the world historical role of England:

The material existence of England is based on commerce and industry and the English have undertaken the weighty responsibility of being the missionaries of civilization to the world; for their commercial spirit urges them to traverse every sea and land, to form connections with barbarous peoples, to create wants and stimulate industry among those peoples, and first and foremost to establish among them the conditions necessary to commerce, viz., the relinquishment of violence, respect for property, and hospitality to strangers. (Hegel 2011b: 408-409)

In addition, Hegel claims that, in the face of the rights of nation, which reaches successfully to the present state of the world spirit's development, other nations "are without right" (Hegel 1991: 373). It doesn't matter if Native Americans go away due to the invasion of Western states. Faced with conquering Europeans, these people do not maintain the right to be independent, cowardly and helpless as they are. Hegel writes:

The Americans themselves are to be regarded as a spiritually weak nation, which has more or less had the fate being unable to rise to European culture, and on account of its having been unable to hold out against and beat it, of having had to give way to it. (Hegel 1991: 373)

Hegel's racism, his ranking of cultures and his Eurocentrism are rooted in some deep premise of his philosophy of spirit. In this context, Hegel's view of the relation between nature and spirit is very important. Hegel places the spiritual world above the natural world, because nature is in essence "subordinated" to spirit. A more detailed examination of Hegel's philosophy of spirit may be warranted. His philosophy of spirit intends to show how spirit is liberated from nature and actualized itself in the historical world. The actualization of freedom, which defines the essence of spirit, is the supreme goal of the world history, even though spirit is premised on the existence of nature. This supremacy of spirit leads Hegel to declare that it is the spiritual world, that is the historical world, which is genuine; nature is "subordinated" to spirit, and therefore nature "has no truth in comparison with the substantial world" (Hegel 1975: 55). The change in nature, whatever its level of variation, shows only "an eternally recurring cycle". In other words, in nature "there is nothing new under the sun." It is only in the spiritual world that anything new does emerge (Hegel 1975: 124-125). Therefore, for example, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel emphasizes that "organic nature has no history" (Hegel 1977: 178). For Hegel, natural objects are merely "used as a means" to achieve ends of human beings. In other words, humans are the only beings capable of being self-purposed existence, containing its own meaning of purpose. All the rest are just used as objects to serve our needs. Hence "all living things and their individual lives by their very nature are subordinated to the life of man and is rightly used by him as means" (Hegel 1975: 90).

As have been noted, only human beings are dignified beings while the remaining entities are mere objects with no inner value of their own. Such view is scattered around Hegel's philosophy of spirit and politics. As an example, when he is providing philosophical justification for private ownership, Hegel declares that "the person must give himself an external sphere of freedom in order to have being as Idea." It is in *Sache*, or thing, that free will first finds the existence of its freedom. The natural objects in this sense are not endowed with any personality and therefore carry no intrinsic rights. The legitimacy of private ownership, Hegel notes, does not come from satisfying its owner's needs. The source of justification lies in the nature of ownership that enables its owner to earn respect for its personality, as each person is blessed with free will. This points to the "rational aspect" of private ownership (Hegel 1991: 73). Hegel's theory of ownership is premised the duality of objects and free will. His understanding of things and free will as separated entities is evident when he writes that "the will alone is infinite, absolute in relation everything else, whereas the other, for its part, is merely relative" (Hegel 1991: 76). Even animals are viewed as things by Hegel since they lack free will, and therefore they "have no right to their life" (Hegel 1991: 79).

The dominant-subordinate relationship between spirit and nature is extended to give theoretical justification for the same master-subjugated relationship between the civilized Europe and the backward, primitive non-European world. The natural world is considered to be 'the others', since all things in nature, including animals, are deprived of intrinsic value. Likewise, Hegel identifies the existence of national spirits within the spiritual world before determining each spirit's position within a hierarchy of value. The criterion is the degree to which a national spirit has reached the state of self-consciousness viewed as spirit's purpose. Those civilizations still at primitive or infantile stage are thought to be under the spell of nature. Nations of such lesser civilizations were similarly seen as unsophisticated group of people, who have not yet attained the higher level of spiritual consciousness. This dependency upon the nature of primitive civilizations put them on a subordinated place in relation to more advanced nations. Therefore, Hegel writes that "the weakness of the American physique was the chief reason for bringing the Negroes to America, to employ their labor in the work that had been done" (Hegel 2011b: 75).

For Hegel, even the massacre against American Indians after their encounter with Europeans, which drove the inhabitants to the verge of extinction, resulted from the uncivilized state of indigenous communities. The massacre, along with the colonization and subjugation perpetuated against Blacks, were perfectly acceptable and even inevitable. The enslavement of Africans did not eradicate their human nature; rather, they laid the foundation for elevating them to a more advanced state of development. It is worth noting that Hegel viewed slaves as a mere *Sache*, or thing. The local community of Mexico and Pero, for example, had not yet escaped from the state of nature, and therefore "must founder" (Hegel

2011b: 74-75). It is hardly surprising, then, that Hegel views slavery as the defining institution that determines the relationship between Europeans and Africans. "The only essential connection that has existed and continued between the Negroes and the Europeans is that of slavery" (Hegel 2011b: 91).

Hegel determined the hierarchical positions of nations in accordance with their level of reasonable state development. Such differentiation provided moral justification for all-out massacre and exclusion of less advanced societies in the name of promoting freedom and historical progress. Nevertheless, it is to be noted that Hegel emphasizes that racial and geographical conditions have a great role in the process of the actualization of freedom. He writes:

The stage of self-consciousness which the spirit has reached manifests itself in world history as the existing national spirit, as a nation which exists in the present. Consequently, this stage of self-consciousness exists within time and space, and its mode is that of natural existence. [...] But every particular national principle is also subject to natural determinants, so that it also appears as a natural principle. The various national spirits are separated in time and space; and in this respect, the influence of the natural context, the relation between the spiritual and the natural (i.e. the national character, etc.) makes itself felt. Seen against the universality of the ethical whole and its own active individuality, this relationship is purely external one; but as the ground on which the spirit moves, it is nevertheless an essential and necessary basis. (Hegel 1975: 152)

According to Hegel, the superiority of the European culture is not only based on the cultural factors like the Christian religion, but also the geographical and racial factors. In this respect, we can conclude that Hegel's racism is rooted not only in some deep biological basis, but also spiritual or cultural basis.

As we have seen, Hegel's discriminatory remarks against non-Westerners as an expression of hatred did not come from lack of empirical evidences or materials. Dehumanizing non-European people devoid of reason and maturity enabled Europeans to exclude and discriminate them without compunction. Such discrimination results from Hegel's philosophy of world history, which regarded the Christian world as representing the ultimate state of bringing enlightened reason into reality. Given Hegel's racist views, the following explanation offered by D. Moellendorf falls short of giving a full picture of his philosophy. "Philosophy of spirit is no necessarily racist, only contingently so, that his racism does not follow from any of his fundamental claims about spirit" (Moellendorf 1992: 243).

The idea of reason could be brought to define what is 'normal' and 'abnormal', with abnormal entities deserving harsher treatment. Going one step further, the absence of reason could be cited in justifying colonization and racial violence. As described above, the spiritual principle or freedom is in essence linked to the demand for the exclusion and colonial violence of the non-white people on the

ground that the primitive people or races do not yet attain to the European spiritual level and are nothing more than human beings “like unenlightened children” (Hegel 1975: 165). As Charles Taylor notes with regard to Frantz Fanon, “the major weapon of the colonizers was the imposition of their image of the colonized on the subjugated people” (Taylor 1992: 65).

As we have explained above, Hegel’s commitment to the doctrine of universal freedom is closely connected with the justification of the colonial violence. Here we can see that Hegel’s philosophy of spirit is not enough reflexive. What is lacking in Hegel’s philosophy is the clear consciousness that the “sense of civilizational superiority” can be related with “the persecution of scapegoats” (Taylor 2004: 70-71). As Hegel’s philosophy shows, the unreflective worship of reason could provide a convenient fig leaf for glossing over the most unreasonable act of destruction. Overlooking this internal connection of speculative reason and violence, Hegel’s philosophy of reason is not applicable in the 21st century.

Like Moellendorf, however, some Hegel scholars think that Hegel’s biological and cultural racism may *not* be a necessary and systematic by-product of the fundamental principles of his philosophy of spirit centered on the stress for universal freedom. Such interpretation, however, overlooks the fact that Hegel’s philosophical system justifies colonialism and violent expansionism. Furthermore, Hegel’s explicitly racist views scattered around his literature, therefore, are anything but an accidental byproduct of his philosophical introspection.

As a case in point, Hegel employs such terms as “contact with” (*Berührung*) or “the breath of European activity” (*Hauch*) when he describes how Europe destroyed the Native American civilization. It is difficult to find any evidence that the use of these words was accidental (see Hegel 1975: 163). Hegel considers that “culturally inferior nations” such as American Indians are “gradually eroded through contact with more advanced nations which have gone through a more intensive cultural development” (Hegel 1975: 163). This phenomenon necessitates a reflection on the violence of spirit deeply embedded in his philosophy of spirit.

As Enrique Dussel pointed out, expression that the European and American world had an “meeting” is nothing more than “totally euphemistic and vacuous.” The contact of the two civilizations resulted in “the essential structure was destroyed” of the New World (Dussel 1995: 42). Hegel’s insensitivity to the plight of Native Americans receives harsh criticism from Teshale Tibebu, as Hegel was endorsing “American holocaust” (Tibebu 2011: 91). Gudrun Hentges agrees, defining the violence perpetuated by Europeans against Americans as “genocide” (Hentges 1999: 252). Even Ludwig Siep, one of the most acknowledged experts on Hegel in Germany, points out that Hegel’s writings amount to a “certain justification of historical extermination” (Siep 2010: 83 footnote 18).

To be fair, we must remind that Hegel recognizes the inhumanly brutal treatment meted out to the Native Americans. According to him, the responsibility for such barbaric subjugation, however, is put on the shoulders of Native Americans, not Europeans (see Hegel 2011b: 75). In his lecture delivered from 1817 to 1818 he claimed that “no people ever suffered wrong; what it suffered, it had merited” (Hegel 2012: 307). This was not a one-off remark. We can see his similar sentences from the *Encyclopedia*. He writes:

Slavery and tyranny are, therefore, in the history of nations a necessary stage and hence relatively justified. Those who remain slaves suffer no absolute injustice; for he who has not the courage to risk his life to win freedom, that man deserves to be a slave; on the other hand, if a nation does not merely imagine that it wants to be free but actually has the energy to will its freedom, then no human power can hold it back in the servitude of a merely passive obedience to authority. (Hegel 1971: 175)

It was the spiritual and physical weakness of African people, according to Hegel, that explains their fate of being sold and working as slaves. His assumption of European supremacy cannot be separated from his racial thinking. In explaining the differences of Christian nations in Europe, Hegel links Spain's religious fanaticism to its Catholic church. Spanish Inquisition and witch trials are noted for their ‘African savage cruelty’ (see Hegel 1971: 48). For Hegel, savage barbarism does not belong to Europeans, because only they are at the pinnacle of actualized human spirit, and show the clearest expressions of human mind in its perfect form. When the African people as a whole are described by Hegel as being inherently cruel savage in contrast to civilized Europeans, we can find elements of racist taxonomy underlying his philosophy of spirit.

Another problem of Hegel's racial theory is laid bare in his writing on African cannibalism, as part of his explanation that African civilization remains still at its primordial, barbaric state. His racial theory in particular, and his philosophy of spirit in general, leads him to adopt an arbitrary and one-sided interpretation of empirical evidences, sometimes even to the point of manipulation and distortion, driven by his conviction that European civilization represents the apex of human history.

In Hegel's theory, Native Americans were destined for extinction, as they were too uneducated to receive the baptism of European civilization. African Blacks were slightly better, because they showed more promise in being civilized, infantile as they were. Slavery might serve the African proper well, because the slavery was “endemic” to the African region and its people are still at “a state of animality.” “Absolute slavery”, therefore, would be appropriate for the continent of Africa (Hegel 1975: 178 and 183).

Hegel does admit that African Blacks “cannot be denied a capacity for education.” But at the same time he proclaims that they do not have “an inherent striving for culture” (Hegel 1971: 42-43). Africans should first undergo the state

of slavery instituted by *Europeans* before they achieve spiritual maturity and accorded the status equal to Europeans enjoying freedom and equality. While many Blacks were sold against their will to work as slaves in Europe, the fate of their peers who remained in Africa, was “almost worse” (Hegel 1975: 183). Those who arrived on European shores at least had a chance to attain a higher spiritual stage after enduring the rigors of hard labor in a rationally organized state.

Even in our time, Stephen Houlgate, for example, repeats Hegel’s claim without any hesitation. For him, “Hegel does not give particular priority to racial differences between people because, in his view, human self-consciousness is what determines a civilization’s character, and this self-consciousness can be changed and developed through education” (Houlgate 2005: 22-23). But one cannot but point out the contradiction in Hegel’s argument: if Africans do not have the inner drive for cultural attainment, how can they be civilized by simply serving Europeans as slaves? Aside from such logical tension, Hegel at one point highlights that slavery is “unjust in and for itself”, only to argue later on that they must be mature enough to be let free. With regard to the abolition of slavery, Hegel argues, “it is more fitting and correct that slavery should be eliminated gradually that it should be done away with all at once” (Hegel 1975: 184).¹⁶

Hegel’s description of Africans’ barbarity is accompanied by an introduction to their cannibalism. The cannibalism, Hegel writes, is “altogether consonant with the general principles of the African race” (Hegel 2011b: 88). A detailed study on Hegel’s examination of African cannibalism and human sacrifice reveals two fatal flaws: first is his dismissal of evidences that did not fit his theory of history characterized by the contrast between backward Africa and the more advanced Europe. The second problem is his tendency to distort or exaggerate empirical evidences that do support his historical-philosophical framework (see Hegel 2011b: 88).

Hegel’s narrative of African slavery should be criticized not just for commission, but omission as well. He overlooks the substantial impact the institution of slavery had on the development of Western capitalism. Marcus Rediker, for instance, provides an excellent research on the slavery’s role as ‘an integral component of and crucial foundation for the rise of capitalism’ (see Rediker 2007). The ordeal of countless Africans who were dragged from their birthplace and enlisted for forced labor serves as a compelling case of “the violence and terror that have always been central to the rise and continuing operation of capitalism” (Rediker 2007: 355).

¹⁶ Bernasconi observes that Hegel’s justification of black enslavement provided logic to slave owners in the United States who were opposed to abolishing slavery. Hence, these owners considered Hegel as their ally. See Bernasconi 1998: 58. Similarly M. Hoffheimer remarks that Hegel’s “depictions of Africans were so damning, they were quoted at length in support of slavery during congressional debates in 1860” of America (Hoffheimer 2001: 36).

It is worth noting, that even Hegel's treatment of cannibalism in itself is one-sided. Europeans colonized a large part of Africa and America and dragooned many of their inhabitants as slaves. They were keen, therefore, to stress the cruelty of cannibalism in order to justify the colonial conquest. According to Silvia Federici, "defining the aboriginal American populations as cannibals, devil-worshippers, and sodomites supported the fiction that the Conquest was not an unabashed quest for gold and silver but was converting mission" (Federici 2004: 221). Under this logic, Africa and America only had themselves to blame for all the violence perpetuated by Europe against them amid the conquest, colonization and exploitation of the New World. The savagery and barbarism of colonial enslavement were hailed as a legitimate path toward civilizational advancement.

Hegel associates the cannibalism in Africa with its people's unique cruelty and savagery. It seems that he did not know that there are practices of consuming human flesh in modern Europe which were not unlike the cannibalistic practice in Africa. But Silvia Federici notes that "the drinking of human blood (especially the blood those who had died of a violent death) and mummy water, obtained by soaking human flesh in various spirits, was a common cure for epilepsy and other illness in many European countries" (Federici 2004: 222). Federici cites the following case of execution which was not uncommon in Europe. "It was the prerogative executioners to sell the blood of decapitated criminals. It was given still warm, to epileptics or other customers waiting in crowds at the spot of execution 'cup in hand'" (Federici 2004: 240 footnote 5).

As above mentioned, Hegel contrasts the backwardness of Native Americans and Africans and the advanced state of European civilization. He holds that the responsibility for creating all the pain and misfortune lay in non-Europeans themselves. In Hegel's view, the colonization and enslavement are to be regarded as the means of education of primitive Americans and Blacks. When Europe's colonization is praised as a tool for achieving the project of universal freedom, we can detect the common thread of Eurocentrism running through the whole gamut of Hegel's philosophy of history and spirit. Hegel's Eurocentrism finds its legitimizing expression in the following sentence: "world history is a court of world judgement" (Hegel 2012: 307). Such premise was first pronounced by Friedrich Schiller, but Hegel emphasizes this point on multiple occasions.¹⁷ For Hegel, "world history is unsparing and pitiless" (Hegel 2012: 306).

Above mentioned, it is not misleading to conclude that Hegel's philosophy of spirit can be defined as a systematic project for justifying slavery and colonialism in the name of the idea of historical progress for the universal freedom. According

¹⁷ In his lecture about the philosophy of law delivered at Heidelberg University in 1817-18, Hegel declared that "Nothing profounder can be said than Schiller's words, 'World history is a court of world judgement'" (Hegel 2012: 307). This pronouncement is also contained in Hegel, G. W. F. *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (see Hegel 1991: 371) and Hegel, G. W. F. *Hegel's Philosophy of mind* (see Hegel 1971: 277).

to this Eurocentric paradigm, the West's colonization of non-West societies were the necessary and inevitable byproducts of primitiveness of the non-western nations and races. What mattered, then, was that for Hegel we cannot criticize the racism, the Eurocentrism and colonialism any more. On the contrary, we must concede that the colonial system and slave trade are eventually not a violation of universal freedom, but give the colonized the chance to lift the non-West from abject immaturity onto the path toward civilizational advancement. Like this, Hegel's racist view is uncannily combined with a Eurocentric system of philosophy of spirit, which advocates the actualization of universal freedom. He assumes that only the Caucasian race blessed with Protestant Christianity is entitled to be the ultimate bearer of universal freedom, occupying a privileged position in world history. All of these philosophical claims suggest that Hegel's racial theory is inextricably linked to cultural racism.¹⁸

5. Conclusion

This paper gave an overview of the nature of Hegel's racial theory. It has shown that his theory of race expressly espouses anti-racist and anti-discriminatory views in some cases. Hegel advocates that human beings as spiritual beings are all free and fundamentally equal. Furthermore, he holds that the universal freedom must be regarded as the essential principle of his philosophy of spirit. On the other hand, Hegel's philosophy of spirit justifies Eurocentric views which bestowed privileged status to Europeans to the exclusion of all others. The call for attaining of universal principles of freedom is distorted through the prism of Hegel's Eurocentrism and Orientalism. Likewise, his racial theory shows no hesitation in classifying races in hierarchic ranking, which is closely connected with progress paradigm of world history. Of course, Hegel's developmentalist paradigm of universal history gives the role of the vanguard for the Europeans and the western modern world. Hegel's Eurocentric cultural racism violates totally his commitment to the idea of universal freedom and humanity.

Highlighting his non-racist view only at the expense of ignoring all the evidence for shameless cultural and Eurocentric racism, therefore, would not do justice to Hegel's philosophy. Granted, his acknowledgement of a principle of universal freedom and strong support for anti-discriminatory causes serve as an antidote to equating his thoughts with Nazism, fascism and totalitarianism. This suggests that interpreting Hegel's philosophy in a positive light is not impossible.

¹⁸ Susan Buck-Morss claims that Hegel "was perhaps always a cultural racist if not a biological one" (Buck-Morss 2009: 74). As shown in this paper, however, Hegel's theory of race stands on the inextricable link between biological, geographical and cultural racism. It is the author's view that, at least in Hegel's philosophy, the distinction between biological and cultural racism is less than clear-cut.

Nevertheless, if we overlook the ambivalence or ambiguity of his racial theory, eventually, deny and dismiss the discriminating and colonizing elements of Hegel's racial theory, this attitude results in another dangerous dilemma.

If our quest is to open a new forum for discussing Hegelian philosophy with regard to searching for a genuine universalism beyond an European universalism, the starting point must be the recognition of non-western societies as equal partners of intercultural dialogues. In order to overcome the limits of Hegel's philosophy of spirit, Frantz Fanon's last sentence in *The Wretched of the Earth* should be again reminded:

For Europe, for ourselves, and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man. (Fanon 1963: 316)

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