

The Haitian Revolution: An Insignificant Revolution?

Paul C. Mocombe

West Virginia State University, West Virginia, USA

This work posits that the Haitian Revolution became an insignificant Revolution the minute that it was usurped by the Affranchis class, the mulatto elites and petit-bourgeois creole blacks, seeking equality of opportunity, recognition, and distribution with their former colonial masters, from the Africans who commenced the event on the night of August 14th, 1791. Whereas the Africans, I conclude, sought total freedom from the mercantilist and liberal order of the whites, which made the Haitian Revolution significant, the vindicationism sought by the Affranchis class undermined the agential initiatives of the Africans rendering the Revolution revolutionarily insignificant.

Keywords: African-Americanization, phenomenological structuralism, Vodou, Religiosity, Black Diaspora, dialectical, anti-dialectical, Haitian Epistemology, Vilokan/Haitian Idealism

Introduction

The Haitian Revolution commenced on August 14th, 1791, at a place called Bois Caïman, Haiti, and lasted for 13 years culminating with Jean-Jacques Dessalines's declaration of independence in 1804. The traditional interpretation of the revolution is that representatives of 21 African nations met at the Bois Caïman site to discuss the denouement of the revolution and appoint its military leaders who would eventually liberate the island from racial slavery and French rule (Fick, 1990; Du Bois, 2004; 2012; Mocombe, 2016; 2017; 2019). This classic Hegelian interpretation of the Revolution is a liberal reading, which highlights the purposive-rationality of the mulatto elites and petit-bourgeois blacks, Affranchis, of the island who would go on to assume leadership roles in the revolution and write its history (Nicholls, 1979). In doing so, in both their writings on the revolution and the policies they would push forth on the island, they rendered the Haitian Revolution an insignificant revolution with an emphasis on racial vindicationism and the ability of blacks to assume the agential initiatives of their former slavemasters for equality of opportunity, recognition, and distribution at the expense of the majority of the Africans on the island seeking liberation from the mercantilist and liberal order established on the backbone of racial and wage slavery (James, 1986; Du Bois, 2004; Mocombe, 2016). In the place of the latter systemicity, the Africans sought to establish a communal way of living based on the lakou system of their Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism (subsistence agricultural production and living, harmony, and balance), while the Affranchis sought to continue the mercantile and liberal order, without (racial) slavery, for equality of opportunity, recognition, and distribution with their white counterparts (Mocombe, 2016; 2017; 2019). The latter, liberal order, for the most part, favored by the majority of the mulatto-elites invested in export/import trade; and the former,

mercantile (protectionist) order, supported by the majority of the petit-bourgeois blacks (under the umbrella of black nationalism) invested in large-scale agricultural production (Nicholls, 1979; Du Bois, 2012).

This work argues that the usurpation of the Haitian Revolution by the Affranchis, petit-bourgeois black (creole) landowners and mulatto elites, from the Africans on the island seeking total freedom from the mercantilism and emerging liberalism of the capitalist world-system under European and Affranchis hegemony, rendered it (the Haitian Revolution) an insignificant black bourgeois revolution focused on racial vindicationism and equality of opportunity, recognition, and distribution with whites within the denouement of the aforementioned systemicity. The latter move placed the Revolution on par with the American one, which was a counterrevolution to the abolition of slavery and the slave trade under mercantilism and liberalism (Horne, 2014). The work concludes: Had the Revolution remained under either the directorship of the African leadership seeking to implement their (communal) *lakou* system throughout the island, or Dessalines's Kojèveian (1980) synthesis, it would have been a significant revolution offering a counter systemicity to the Protestant/Catholic Ethic and the spirit of capitalism under European and American hegemony. However, the death of Dessalines, and the subsequent migration of the Africans to the mountains and provinces of the island maintained Haiti in a perpetual master/slave dialectic with the Affranchis seeking to integrate the Africans as a cheap labor source in the mercantile and neoliberal capitalist order under European and American hegemony (Du Bois, 2012).

Background of the Problem

Traditional interpretations of the Haitian Revolution attempt to understand the sociohistorical phenomena within the negative dialectical and dialectical logic of Hegel's master/slave dialectic of the Affranchis who were seeking racial vindication against (racial) slavery and its discriminatory affects (James, 1986; Du Bois, 2004; 2012; Buck-Morss, 2009; Mocombe, 2016). In other words, from this perspective the Revolution represents a dialectical and negative dialectical struggle by the enslaved Africans, who have internalized the (liberal) rules of their masters, for equality of opportunity, recognition, and distribution within and using the metaphysical discourse of their former white masters to either remain slaves (the dialectical position) or convict them (the negative dialectical position) for not identifying with their norms, rules, and values as recursively organized and reproduced by the Africans who are now blacks. Although, historically this dialectical, and its negative dialectical counterpart, understanding holds true for the mulattoes and free petit-bourgeois (creole) blacks or Affranchis who, interpellated and embourgeoised by whites, used the language of the declaration to push forth their efforts to gain liberty, equality, fraternity with their white counterparts as slaveholders and masters as brilliantly highlighted by Du Bois (2004). This racial vindicationist position, I posit here, is not an accurate representation of the antidialectical purposive-rationality of the majority of the Africans, and their leadership, who met at Bois Caïman, the originating moments of the Haitian Revolution. Unlike the majority of the Affranchis, the majority of the Africans were and remained in their original non-circular and antidialectical position of their encountering with the white French and Affranchis. They were choosing and chose death, over the master/slave dialectic as instituted by either the French or the Affranchis, for an alternative systemicity grounded in their Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism, not racial vindicationism. That is, their fight was for an alternative form of system and social integration, the *Lakou* system of the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism, against the liberal and mercantilist capitalism of the whites and Affranchis, not for equality of opportunity, recognition, and distribution (Fick, 1990; Du Bois, 2004; 2012; Mocombe, 2016).

Theory and Method

This work, using the case of the Africans of the Haitian Revolution, positions Mocombe's (2019) theory of antidialectic within Hegel's and Kojève's dialectical reasonings to argue against this classic liberal reading of the Affranchis and white bourgeois scholars. Mocombe posits that the non-circular and antidialectical position in Hegel's dialectic is the position of each self-consciousness when they initially encounter each other at the onset of the master/slave dialectic. Whereas the master seeks to move from their antidialectical to the dialectical position in order to dominate and eliminate the original (antidialectical) position of the slave, the slave, in the logic of Kojève (1980), remains in this non-circular and antidialectical position so long as they choose death and seek to fight against their enslavement for the purpose of maintaining and reproducing their original, antidialectical, position, which is social, political, ideological, and economic. In any other instances, they (the slaves) are either in the dialectical or negative dialectical positions. In the former position, dialectical, the slave seeks to maintain the status quo in order to stay alive; in the latter, negative dialectical position (which is itself still a dialectical position), made famous by the theorists of the Frankfurt School, the slave seeks to integrate the status quo by convicting the master for not identifying with their (antidialectical) values, ideas, and ideals as it should be applied to not only the master but the slave, who has attained self-consciousness within the dialectic, as well. The latter two positions, I want to argue here, represent the purposive-rationality of the Affranchis, which rendered the Haitian Revolution insignificant as they sought to dialectically and negative dialectically recursively organize and reproduce the purposive-rationality of their former slavemasters by convicting their former masters for not living up to their values, ideas, and ideals given their discriminatory effects against blacks who embody these values, ideas, and ideals. However, the former, antidialectical position, is the purposive-rationality of the African nations who commenced the revolution at Bois Caïman, and is the only instance in recorded history where the slaves chose death (and continues to do so in Haiti's mountains and provinces), contrary to Kojève's reading of Hegel and the French Revolution, in order to eliminate (rendering it non-circular) the dialectical and negative dialectical relation that is the master/slave dialectic. Jean-Jacques Dessalines following the Revolution attempted to synthesize the antidialectical position of the Africans (the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism) with the dialectical and negative dialectical positions (the Protestant/Catholic Ethic and the spirit of capitalism) of the Affranchis; however, his assassination by the latter negated his Kojèveian attempt, and Haiti and its revolution were rendered insignificant as it became a racial vindicationist project seeking equality of opportunity, recognition, and distribution with whites within the systemicity of the capitalist world-system.

Discussion and Conclusions

Jean-Jacques Dessalines's assassination returned Haiti back to its original 1791 position structured by the liberal and mercantilist capitalism of the Affranchis, the new masters who replaced the French, on the one hand; and the communal lakouism of the Africans—who refused their slave status as the Affranchis attempted to reestablish—in the mountains and provinces of the country where they relocated to following the death of Dessalines, on the other (Du Bois, 2004; 2012; Mocombe, 2016; 2017). Haiti since has been in this master/slave dialectical position unable to move forward given the racial class animus of the Affranchis, now supplemented by an Arab elite, against the Africans, which they are attempting to interpellate and embourgeois for capital accumulation, exploitation, and racial vindication. Today, Haiti is a periphery (vassal) state within the global capitalist world-system under American hegemony within this continuous and circular dialectical and negative

dialectical struggle of the Affranchis, now augmented with a Syrian/Arab minority, who, contemporarily, are seeking to integrate Haiti in the capitalist world-system through tourism, sports and entertainment, and industrial production against the lakou system of the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism—their original antidialectical position, where subsistence living via agricultural production is emphasized—of the majority of the Africans who are dominated and led by a black professional managerial class seeking wealth through the control of the latter processes by securing authority and legitimation of the political process and its ideological apparatuses.

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