

Creolizing Hegel by Michael Monahan (ed.), New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017. P. 288. Paperback \$44.95. ISBN: 978-1786600233

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What does it mean to creolize something in an academic, theoretical context? Furthermore, how do we creolize the thought of an established, canonical figure such as G. W. F. Hegel? In the introduction to *Creolizing Hegel*, Michael Monahan explains the double register in which the word is taken by the theoretical movement affiliated with a project of creolizing the canon. On the one hand, creolization points, in a descriptive sense, to the emergence of peoples, languages, and practices out of the contact between diverse cultures and traditions, specifically in the American continent, as a consequence of its colonization by Europe. In a descriptive sense, creolizing means to uncover the clues, to follow the traces that show in what way traditions are never pure, uncontaminated, unambiguous, and how the canon (the authors and ways of thinking taken as authoritative) has been created out of clashes, erased conversations, removed influences, and so on. On the other hand, in a prescriptive sense, the call for creolization demands the explicit decentering of these central figures by putting them in conversation with unlikely interlocutors, in uncomfortable spaces and times, with regard to foreign questions and problems. As Jane Gordon puts it on her outstanding reflection on creolizing theory, the call demands “avoiding treating worlds of meaning as if they are already completely constituted, finished, and closed and instead writing as if we too are part of their construction and therefore broaden or foreclose, empower or silence many diverse and unequal coparticipants living and dead” (Gordon 2014, 197).

These two registers, descriptive and prescriptive, roughly apply to the project at hand in *Creolizing Hegel*. In the collection’s approach, Monahan effectively brings Hegelian thought and corpus to bear on the praxis of creolization, and creolization to bear on Hegel (Monahan, 2017: 1) by following the ambiguity of the word “creolizing” i) as a present participle used as adjective and ii) as a gerund. On the one hand, *creolizing Hegel* would describe a thought (a thinker) that is already creolizing, because is fundamentally concerned with change and transformation at the core of reality, and sharply criticizes either/or binaries traditionally used for understanding. On the other hand, *creolizing Hegel* could be taken as prescribing a way to approach his philosophy by revealing and unearthing the relationships with non-traditional times and place in philosophy, decentering his supposedly canonical thought, challenging him to think and approach new, different issues.

In his introduction to the volume, Monahan is interested in showing that these two senses of “creolizing” follow each other when applied to Hegel; the prescriptive project to creolize Hegel “is an imminently Hegelian project on its own right” (Monahan 2017, 10). Thus, after reflecting on the call for creolization of the canon, emphasizing Gordon’s and Édouard Glissant’s approaches to creolization, Monahan turns to an

analysis of reason in Hegel's *Science of Logic and the Encyclopedia Logic* to show that "while what is creolizing is not always rational, what is rational [in Hegel's sense] is always creolizing" (1). Speculative reason is shown as going beyond the static categories of the understanding, offering a unity of the opposing determinations that does not pose itself as a new, third, element, but as the reciprocal movement between them. According to Glissant's analysis, creolization creates a culture, a people, a set of practices, attitudes, and beliefs that we can grasp, although not in the sense of a result. Monahan's analysis of the *Logic* makes clear why "everything is inherently contradictory," and thus why we need to approach reality with the idea of dynamism, instead of static contradictions, and not as a result, but as a process.

Monahan's reconstruction of reason as creolizing is convincing, and establishes the grounds upon which the whole project of *Creolizing Hegel* rests. I think, however, that analyzing reason as creolizing only from Hegel's writings on the *Logic* misses a necessary historical aspect of creolization, at least as Glissant describes it. Monahan acknowledges that his use of creolization in the context of theory is metaphorical, especially when located at the prescriptive level (p. 4). In the logical, metaphysical realm in which the introduction locates Hegel, it is necessary to remove the cultural, historical conditions under which creolization has taken place and use it only as a metaphor that stand for the necessity of multiplicity, irreducibility, ambiguity, etc. But stripped from his historical manifestations, are we still talking about creolization and not merely a general form of co-constitution, openness, and continuous transformation?

It can be argued that Glissant's latter thought, from *Poetics of Relation* (1990) on, is more interested in a notion of creolization from an ontological perspective, as something that informs all historical reality and not only as a form of resistance to colonialism in the Caribbean. In *Traité du Tout-Monde* (1997), for example, Glissant states that even though there have always been places of creolization, "the one that interest us today has to do with world-totality of the world when it has been realized (mainly because of the action of Western cultures in expansion, that is, by the work of colonization)" (p. 25, my translation). However, even if creolization is the condition of our contemporary reality, it is still a historical condition of the world, one located in a different realm to the metaphysical of the *Science of Logic*; creolization for Glissant is historical, not logical, and thus, Hegel's conclusion ("All things are in themselves contradictory" Hegel 2010, 381) does not reflect yet an empirical side of reality, which is the only one in which creolization can be included. At the logical, metaphysical level, for example, this inherently contradictory movement can be systematized, as Hegel does in the *Science of Logic* and in the *Encyclopedia Logic*. It is true that speculative reason does not resolve or eliminate the contradictions at the heart of reality; it preserves differences and does not arrive at a static unity (Monahan 2017, 18). However, speculative reason reconstructs, systematically, the logic according to which reality moves, even if this movement is infinite. Creolization, however, as it has been approached in the introduction to *Creolizing Hegel*, and as it is conceived of by Glissant, cannot be systematized or structured, not even in a backwards glance.[1]

The contributions included in *Creolizing Hegel* offer some instances of this metaphorical conception of creolization, specifically Stefan Bird-Pollan's "Thinking through the negative" (Chapter Three) and Richard Dien Winfield "Why am I so wise?" (Chapter Four). It is difficult for me to see the sense in which these two contributions offer instances of the (prescriptive) project of creolizing Hegel or of an already creolizing Hegel (descriptive). According to Bird-Pollan, the creolization of Hegel performed in the third chapter has to do with a critique of the contemporary reading of Hegel in light of Theodor Adorno, but also a critique of Adorno's critique of Hegel through Hegelian elements in the latter's thought (62). But, what is the sense of creolization involved in this conception, and how would it differ from other close readings of metaphysical texts that interlace the thought of major figures of the Western philosophical canon? The same applies to Winfield's text, which defends the autonomy of reason against some of its "postmodernists" assassins using different Hegelian motives of thought's self-determination and freedom. Is any reading of Hegel from within the philosophical canon *creolizing*? Is the invocation of any other author, as long as it is more contemporary, enough to submit Hegel to a process of creolization, or do we need a radically different milieu where his thought is brought to travel and drastically mutate into something else?

With a similar framework to Bird-Pollan's, that is, the role of negativity in the conversation between Hegel and Adorno, Karen Ng's "Hegel and Adorno on negative history" (Chapter Six) offers a very different take on the project of creolizing Hegel, one that is much more promising in the path toward creolizing the canon. Ng not only locates her analysis of negative universal history within the larger question of social transformation or reform as formulated by Audre Lorde, but probes Hegel and Adorno with the demands of contemporary reflections from the Americas in the figures of Frantz Fanon and Lynn Hunt. Ng's project defends the contemporary relevance of an idea that is usually taken as contrary to social change, namely, universal history, in the interdependence of its Hegelian and Adornian formulations: the ongoing attempt at realizing freedom for all and the prevention of self-annihilation. Hegel (and Adorno) are thus creolized in a very different way than the previously mentioned contributions: Hegel's thought is brought to travel to different regions, times, and questions, where it engages in very different ways with unlikely interlocutors.

The bulk of the volume, and the most interesting contributions in light of the project of creolizing the Canon have to do with this second, less metaphorical way of understanding "creolizing." Creolizing Hegel means, for the majority of the authors included in the collection, accompanying his thought in a new form of navigation, to unknown waters from other times and continents where it is affected, adapted, repelled, wounded, revived and definitively transformed. There are at least three ways, not completely exclusive, in which this second understanding of creolization takes place in the volume[2]: a) putting his thought to test with questions and demands that are not immediately his own, b) using or applying Hegel's thought to understand issues located in different times and places, and c) transmuted his thought by decolonizing it, caribbeanizing it, cannibalizing it, etc.

In the first of these categories (a) we find, together with the afore-mentioned Chapter Six, Nicholas Germana's "Revisiting *Hegel and Haiti*," where the idea of creolization is explicitly taken up in the critique of Susans Buck-Morss' interpretation of the lord/bondsman dialectic. Even though Morss' analysis is shown as "misinterpretation" (96) both of the historical connections between Hegel and Haiti and of Hegel's lord/bondsman dialectic in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, it is "a valuable contribution to the larger project of creolization that this volume seeks to advance—the simultaneous enrichment of our understanding of both Hegel's metaphor and the contemporary events in Haiti (whether or not there was any actual historical connection)" (109). In his analysis, Germana also offers a new, different way of tracing the discussion with Hegel's dialectic; no longer the traditional Kojève, Sartre, Fanon trajectory, but the thought of Steve Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa in the 1970s. Another profound example of how Hegel's thought is put to test by alien questions is offered in Chapter Nine, "Hegel, musical subjectivity, and Jazz" by Craig Matarrese, where Hegel's reflections on music in the *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* are invoked to analyze a particular, contemporary manifestation of this form of art: Jazz. By offering a phenomenology of musical subjectivity, Matarrese does not only question Hegel's conceptions about the status of music as art, but also his famous defense of the sublation of art in religion and philosophy.

The second way of creolizing Hegel in the volume (b) makes emphasis on using his thought in unfamiliar places and times, to understand issues perhaps foreign to him. This conception of creolization is at the heart of Rocío Zambrana's "Boundary, ambivalence, *jaibería*, or, how to appropriate Hegel" (Chapter 1). What the author presents is not an application of Hegel to the case of Puerto Rico in order to understand a particular manifestation of coloniality; an application would resist a meaningful transformation of either of the elements in the relation. Rather, the attempt is at an appropriation of Hegel's notion of negativity in the *Science of Logic* that would show negativity as a logic of ambivalence given the structure of double coloniality at place in Puerto Rico. As inscribed in an ambivalent system of Hegelian negativity, *jaibería* is shown as both complicit and subversive within the neocolonial situation of Puerto Rico as an *Estado Libre Asociado* to the US. Chapters Eleven, Twelve, and Thirteen[3] show as well Hegelian categories mobilized in contemporary conversations about issues of racial and gender-based oppression, relationships between cultural and legal perspectives, and boundaries between morality and right, and in conversation with authors such as bell hooks, Simone de Beauvoir, Charles Mills, John Rawls, and Catharine MacKinnon.

The third way of creolizing Hegel (c) does not apply, or appropriate Hegel's thought, but transforms it and forces it to adapt. In Chapter Eight, "Creolizing Hegel's theory of tragedy," Greg Graham describes it as "the processes, not only of appropriation, accommodation, coqueting, and intermingling [typical of the New World's formation, but also] the necessary mutual transformation and readjusting of each element that contributes to the emergence of the distinctly new, distinctly *creole*

phenomenon which comes upon the scene, arising out of the demands brought to bear by the unique set of circumstances which necessitated this particular type of amalgamation to being with” (153). In his piece, the creolization of Hegel’s theory of ancient tragedy is performed through radical African political thought, in particular through Fanon.

Three more instances of a Hegel of the “New World” are studied in the collection, laying out specific ways in which Hegel can be creolized through transcendental dimensions of Caribbean and Latin American philosophy. In Paget Henry’s “C.L.R. James, African transcendental philosophy, and the creolizing of Hegel,” the German’s thought is recoded in the Trinidadian’s, “seamlessly interwoven into the fabric of his mature dialectic” (60). This is done through the examination of the role that Hegel’s philosophy, but also Hegel’s own persona, had in the philosophy of C.L.R. James’ thought, and in particular in what Henry calls the third and fourth major syntheses of James’ life. In “The future is now: Leopoldo Zea’s Hegelianism and the liberation of the Mexican past (Chapter Ten), Carlos Alberto Sánchez reconstructs Leopoldo Zea’s appropriation of *Aufhebung* as *asimilación*, and how the Mexican’s philosophy of history attempts to include Latin American history into the framework of a universal history, transforming (creolizing) thereby both Hegelianism and Latinamericanism (192). Lastly, in Chapter Seven, “Hegel among the Cannibals”, ‘Oscar Guardiola-Rivera is moved by the fascinating example of Chile’s Project Cybersyn (or Synco) in the early 1970s, before the CIA-backed military coup deposed the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende. The project is presented as a political, aesthetic, and informational practice that reject the easy nullification of differences in a higher unity. For Guardiola practices like these “updated the force of Hegelian critique, decolonizing it, while enacting a milieu of liberation and universal freedom for decolonizing practices, thereby criticalizing them” (136).

Guardiola-Rivera’s is a suggestive formulation of the project of *Creolizing Hegel*, and it summarizes the spirit of this path-breaking collection of essays. The book itself demonstrates not only the possibility, but the urgency of intervening and appropriating the philosophical canon from unlikely regions, improbable times, and uncomfortable demands, instead of abandoning it altogether. In this shared goal, the chapters devoted to a less metaphorical conception of creolization offer a sense of urgency that forces Hegel in “any kind of unfamiliar territory where he must *adapt* in order to survive,” as Monahan states in the introduction (9). It is this more literal demand of creolization the one I take as more promissory in the imperative project of creolizing the philosophical canon.

Notes

[1] It remains to be studied if there can be a *creolizing* Hegel on other parts of his system different than the Logic, for example, in the realm of the Spirit (in particular, of the Objective or Absolute Spirit). Hegel's philosophy of history, for example, could offer a creolizing reading of the movement of world history in which the (Christian) idea of freedom for all could be mediated by the approach to freedom of non-Christian cultures. Notice that, in this path of investigation, creolization loses its more metaphorical sense to achieve a historical, objective one.

[2] Monahan divides the book in three sections according to the topics of each chapter (Part I. Reason, Logic, and Dialectic. Part II. History and Aesthetics. Part III. Ethical life, Law, and Politics). I propose here a division according to the "mode" of creolization of each text.

[3] "Crossing boundaries: Hegel, de Beauvoir, and hooks on exclusion and Identity" by Shannon M. Mussett, "Ideal theory and racial justice: some Hegelian considerations" by Brandon Hogan, and "Oppression, legal reform, and Hegel's natural law internalism" by Jeffrey A. Gauthier.

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