

# AGAINST CRITICAL RACE THEORY

To resolve the issue of racism in Western society, Critical Race theory (CRT) seeks to apply the negative dialectics of critical theory to the intersection of race, law, and power in the pursuit of racial and ethnic equality in Western society. That is to say, critical race theorists seek to convict Western society for not identifying with their values and ideals (liberty, equality, fraternity, etc.) due to the prevalence of racial and ethnic oppression and subordination in the society. I argue here that this pursuit of racial emancipation and anti-subordination through the negative dialectics of critical theory by critical race theorists offers a false sense of racial difference which is convicting the values (as embedded in the ever-increasing rationalization of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism) of the West for an alternative, more liberating, ontology and epistemology against its devastating effects on the earth, the environment, and human social interactions.

I conclude that the postmodern and post-structural emphasis on the politics of the racial and ethnic physical bodies as offering an ontological and epistemological difference from the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism episteme of the West is baseless. The tenets of critical race theory are a reflection or inversion of the values and ideals of the West against itself, and do not offer an oppositional alternative discourse or practical consciousness from which to replace Western ontology and epistemology for its oppression and subordination (consumerism, capitalist exploitation, pollution, etc.) against humanity and the earth. In the end, I propose an alternative anti-dialectical practical consciousness as grounded in the Vodou Ethic and spirit of communism of the Haitian Revolution as a more liberating discourse than CRT.

## BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

Critical Race Theory (CRT) grew out of a critique and repudiation of Critical Legal Studies with its liberal emphasis on colorblindness and intentional discrimination (Gordon, 1999). It critiques liberalism and argues that Whites have been the primary beneficiaries of civil rights legislation. Against Critical Legal Studies, CRT theorists recognize the racial, gender, and sexual power dynamics by which Western institutions were constituted, and seek to apply the negative dialectics of critical theory to the intersection of race, law, and power in the pursuit of racial and ethnic

equality in Western society (Crenshaw et al, 1995; Delgado, 1995; Tate, 1997; Delgado and Stefancic, 2001). To this end, Critical Race Theorists focus on analyzing and deconstructing white supremacy, racial power, and institutional racism in every aspect of the social structure in order to reconstitute Western society so that (phenotypical) differences are celebrated but not discriminated against (Crenshaw et al, 1995; Delgado, 1995; Tate, 1997; Delgado and Stefancic, 2001). As such, CRT stands against the liberal claim to colorblindness in favor of racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual differences as the basis for the constitution of a pluralistic and democratic society within the enframing ontology of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism of the West (Gilroy, 1993; West, 1993; Gordon, 1999).

For the most part, CRT has been attacked for its methodological emphasis on, and utilization of, narratives and other literary techniques from “postmodern and post-structural scholarship” to substantiate their arguments (Gordon, 1999). This undermines what some view as rational-based argumentation for personal experiences, narratives, and unrealistic thought experiences in order to convict the society of racism, sexism, heterosexism, etc. Regardless of the methodological attacks on CRT, in this work I argue that their aim remains “equality of opportunity, recognition, and distribution” within the construct of a Western social system whose constitution and constructed identity via practices and ideological apparatuses is taken to represent the nature of reality and existence as such (Fraser, 1994). That is to say, in their critical attempt to convict Western society of its “isms”, in this case racism, CRT is not offering an alternative ontology or epistemology that anti-dialectically opposes the constructed identity of the social structure (the ever-increasing rationalization of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism) of the West and its lived-experiences, modes of production, and ideological apparatuses as irrational and unwarranted. Instead, like critical legal studies, they are simply seeking to participate in the system by recursively (re-)organizing and reproducing its constructed identity into a racial-national position of their own, while fighting for the elimination or rejection of its “isms” by convicting the society of not identifying with their values and ideals. Such an ambivalent dialectical emphasis is not critical enough as its premise is simply to participate in a constructivity (the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism of the West) that is phenotypically pluralistic amidst its deleterious threats (consumerism, capitalist exploitation and oppression, pollution, etc.) to the survival of the earth and all life on it. This problem for me lies in the dialectical identitarian logic employed by CRT. In other words, critical race theorists are interpellated and socialized by the ideological apparatuses of the West. As a result, they are Western in identity, thought, and practical

consciousness. They attempt to live and articulate the constructed identity or practical consciousness of the society they are against as a phenotypical “Other.” Hence their aim can only be for equality of opportunity, recognition, and distribution amidst discrimination; and not to reconstitute a new social structure for an alternative practical consciousness amidst the threat the subject/object logic of the West and its constructed identity poses to humanity and the earth. Critical race theorists, in other words, have no other constructed identity or practical consciousness upon which to confront the West or reconstitute it. They are a subaltern who cannot speak from their original subaltern identity, and their ambivalence, contrary to Homi Bhabha, is not subversive. It is accommodating since it is a split between the desire to be Western amidst a hatred for the West’s discriminatory effects. By not offering the West an alternative constructivity/practical consciousness, prevents the racial Other from recursively organizing and reproducing. Therefore, I am suggesting that critical race, gender, etc., theory, contemporarily, is conservative, and that an alternative, anti-dialectical, approach to confronting the West —as one finds in the Vodou discourse of the Haitian Vodou sector who commenced the Haitian Revolution at Bois Caïman in 1791— is required if humanity and the earth is to survive this century and beyond.

#### THEORY

Lewis R. Gordon (1999) in his short essay, “A Short History of the Critical in Critical Race Theory,” traces two strands as to the origins of the “critical” basis of CRT. The first strand builds on the theoretical discourse of W.E.B. Du Bois (1903), and the second on the works of Frantz Fanon. From Du Bois many critical race theorists (Derrick Bell, Lucius T. Outlaw, Tommy Lott, Robert Gooding-Williams, and Josiah Young) adopt his distinction between identity and policy to constitute their eliminative discourses for racial equality within the liberal democratic state. The Fanonian school (Cornel West, Paul Gilroy, David Goldberg, Michael Omi, Howard Winant, Anthony Appiah, Naomi Zack, Charles Mills, Stuart Hall, Victor Anderson, and many others) represents the postmodern and post-structural strand of CRT and highlights the constructivity of racial formation. That is, like Fanon, “they bring into focus the tension between structural identities and lived identities and the tension between constitutional theories and raw environmental appeals” to highlight the racism, sexism, etc., by which the West constitute itself against blacks, women, homosexuals, etc., as they experience the material resource framework in their everyday lives (Gordon, 1999). Gordon goes on to highlight how the latter school is further divided into two camps: those who hold on to the idea that liberalism can resolve racial

issues and tensions (Anthony Appiah, Naomi Zack, Charles Mills, and Victor Anderson); and those who are more radical and have lost faith in the ability of the ideals of liberalism to resolve them (Cornel West, for example). In either case, both positions represent a fight against the power elites of the West for equality of opportunity, recognition, and distribution within its “enframing” logic of organizing and reproducing the material resource framework, rather than an alternative constructed identity to it (Fraser, 1994). In other words, both strands of critical race theorists are seeking pluralism within the enframing ontology and praxis of the West, i.e., racial “Other” agents of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism, instead of replacing that ontology and epistemology with an alternative constructivity/practical consciousness upon which to reorganize and reproduce the material resource framework. The reason for this is because the theorists are themselves Westerners and are seeking to dialectically convict the society for not identifying with its values and ideals even though those very values and ideals, which they recursively reorganize and reproduce in their own praxis, threaten humanity and the earth with its consumerist, exploitative, and accumulative logic of organizing the material resource framework. Hence CRT, regardless of its strands, is not critical enough because of its identitarian, dialectical logic, which is grounded in the negative dialectic of the Frankfurt school, which is not an anti-dialectical logic or constructive identity which opposes the West like one finds in the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism of the originating moments of the Haitian Revolution at Bois Caïman and the contemporary Islamic Fundamentalist movements of the Middle East for example. The latter, anti-dialectical logics offer alternative means or constructivity of organizing the material resource framework we call the earth in order to structure lived-experiences against the consumerist, exploitative, and accumulative logic of the West that threatens the earth and all life on it. Critical Race Theorists are unable to offer that anti-dialectical response because of their incessant claim for equality of opportunity, recognition, and distribution within the already existing liberal/conservative bourgeois Protestant constructed identity by which the Western state and their identities are constituted. Cornel West’s recent attack against the American and global oligarchs of the capitalist world-system is an attempt to offer that anti-dialectical response. However, given his Western identity, he does not offer a prescription of what that new “new world order” and its practical consciousness or constructed identity should look like (as one finds in the counter-hegemonic plantation system of Haitian Vodou) if we and the planet will survive in the near future. The Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism of the Haitian Revolution I argue here offers such an anti-dialectical discourse

and discursive practice to the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism of the West and CRT.

#### DISCUSSION

If the constitution of European society is a by-product of their constitution and reification via the nation-state and its ideological apparatuses of their brutal ecological existence as the rationalization of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism language game, which they have reified and sought to export throughout the world since the seventeenth century, the majority of black consciousness, as a result of slavery and colonization, in Africa and the diaspora is an ambivalent dialectical response to their marginalization within this reified worldview. In other words, the majority of blacks in Africa and the diaspora are “Other” agents of the Protestant Ethic, a comprador bourgeoisie in the words of Frantz Fanon, seeking, as a result of their marginalization within slavery and the colonial system, to recursively reorganize and reproduce, as an “Other,” the tenets of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism for equality of opportunity, recognition, and distribution with their white counterparts within the global capitalist world-system under American hegemony, while convicting the society of non-identification with its values and ideals. Contrarily, the majority of Haitian practical consciousness is an anti-dialectical response to such a worldview as it stands against the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism of the *Affranchis* (mulatto elites and petit-bourgeois blacks) and European minorities on the island (Du Bois, 2012). I am not suggesting, as Joan Dayan (1995) in *Haiti, History, and the Gods* claims, that the Haitian belief system of Vodou and its practices, i.e., the spirit of communism, reciprocity, justice, etc., are less a product of African survivals than of the colonial past and the history that past keeps generating. Against this post-structural and postcolonial appropriation of the Haitian belief system to demonstrate ambiguity, hybridity, and liminality, and as such the subversive and resistant agency of the Haitian/Taino/Africans; I posit, in sociological parlance, a Weberian/historical-materialist constitution of the belief-system, which highlights its African materialist constitution, reification, and dissemination through its own mode of production, language, ideology, and ideological apparatuses, i.e., the language game, which Western society and *Affranchis* tried to destroy and supplant with their own under slavery and the colonial system.

The constitution of Haitian society, in the provinces, in other words, has been an intent by the majority of the Africans to reorganize and reproduce their culture/civilization or language game, the Vodou ethic and the spirit of communism, on the island, undergirded by the power elites, oungans, manbos, bokos, and elders, of the provinces, against the

liberal bourgeois Catholic/Protestant language game of Europeans and the *Affranchis* of the island operating through the state and its ideological apparatuses. That is, the constitution of Haitian society is the by-product of the structuralizing and differentiating effects of the Vodou ethic and the spirit of communism, via the subsistence agricultural mode of production (what sociologist Jean Casimir calls the counter plantation system), commerce, the Kreyol language, ideology (Vodou), and its ideological apparatuses, Lakous (Vodou family compounds), peristyles (Vodou temples), communal living (communism), etc., initially, by the practical consciousness or social class language game of religious African men and women, oungans (priests), Bokos (sorcerers), and Manbos (priestesses), of Bois Caïman in their rejection of the class division and social relations of production of the Catholic feudal and Protestant capitalist orders established by the French, Americans, and the *Affranchis* on the island of Haiti. They interpellated and socialized the masses through the ideology of Vodou and its mode of production, subsistence agriculture, and ideological apparatuses, lwas, ancestor worship, Vodou ceremonies, Lakous, peristyles, herbal medicine, communal living, reciprocity, and secret societies, i.e., Bokos, Bizango, Sanpwel, lougawou, etc., to provide law and order, in order to recursively reorganize and reproduce the *les mysteries*, i.e., the mysteries, of the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism worldview in the material world against the Protestant/Catholic bourgeois liberalism of the *Affranchis* and their European counterparts.

Hence I am not suggesting that the Africans who met at Bois Caïman, the originating moment of the Haitian Revolution, syncretized their African Vodou practical consciousness with that of the Europeans, or that the ambiguity, hybridity, and liminality of that syncretism provided them the space to speak as subalterns. On the contrary, at Bois Caïman, the Africans rejected the European worldview and the oungans, manbos, bokos, and elders syncretized their African worldviews with native Taino traditions, which paralleled the African, and sought to institutionalize it in the material world via ideological apparatuses against that of the European worldview or language game. The European worldview operated within but beneath the mystery and practical consciousness of the Vodou Ethic and spirit of communism as prescribed by the power elites, oungans, Manbos, Bokos, and elders of the communities. That is to say, the oungans, Manbos, Bokos, and elders of Haiti served as the power elites of the society. Through subsistence agricultural modes of production and commerce, the Kreyol language, proverbs, the ideology of Vodou, and the ideological apparatuses of the Lakous (village and family compounds), Peristyles (Vodou temples), herbal medicine, Vodou ceremonies, secret societies, and zombification they recursively (re)organized

and reproduced Haitian society in the provinces around the African and Taino practical consciousness or language game of Vodou and communal living, i.e., the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism. This latter worldview and its parishes or regions of influence (*hounfo*) were juxtaposed against the French language, liberal bourgeois ideology, and ideological apparatuses (Catholic church, so-called modern medicine, Haitian police force) of the Haitian state under the *Affranchis* and merchant classes, the comprador bourgeoisie of Haiti, which exploited and marginalized the majority of the Haitian masses as a Francophile neocolonial oligarchy in order to achieve equality of opportunity, recognition, and distribution with whites within the global capitalist world-system.

So the argument here is that like the Europeans, who migrated out of Africa and experienced a brutal existence in the barren environment of Europe where they constituted and reified an overarching worldview via the “Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism” (Max Weber’s term) that juxtaposed the world as an object that stands against their subjective existence that it threatened. Africans also reified a worldview based on their initial experiences of the earth. However, unlike the Europeans, the Africans encountered a bountiful environment that provided everything they needed for their physical survival in the material world (Diop, 1993). Be that as it may, they reified and constituted their being-in-the-world under an overarching worldview/language game, the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism, which emphasized their existence as sacred, communal, and an extension or manifestation of *Bon-dye*, i.e., the world-spirit, which is everywhere and in everything. The earth, which is a manifestation of *Bon-dye*, and its tilling, through subsistence agricultural production, became a means of uniting with the spiritual world, which is good (*Bon-dye Bon*).

In other words, African peoples reified, constituted, and shared certain linguistic and cultural commonalities that formed a tapestry that laid the basis for African cultural unity, which was diametrically opposed to the European cultural unity that would become reified and constituted as the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism when the European encountered Christianity (Diop, 1996). The Southern Cradle-Egyptian Model (African), 1) Abundance of vital resources, 2) Sedentary-agricultural, 3) Gentle, idealistic, peaceful nature with a spirit of justice, 4) Matriarchal family, 5) Emancipation of women in domestic life, 6) territorial state, 7) Xenophilia, 8) Cosmopolitanism, 9) Social Collectivism, 10) Material solidarity—alleviating moral or material misery, 11) Idea of peace, justice, goodness, and optimism, and 12) Literature emphasizing novel tales, fables, and comedy, gave rise on the continent to the language game, the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism, which the Africans of Haiti would use to overthrow the colonial system or language

game of the French. Against the liberal bourgeois discourse of an emerging Protestant worldview, the tribes of Africa reified and institutionalized their bountiful experience of the earth via what I am calling the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism in the mode of production, subsistence agricultural production; communal ethic and cosmopolitanism; language, i.e., Kreyol; ideologies, i.e., Vodou, matrilocality, and polygamy; and ideological apparatuses, i.e., *lwa yo* (spirits), proverbs, Vodou ceremonies, Lakous, secret societies, and peristyles of the provinces of the island. The latter worldview became juxtaposed against the Catholic/Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism language game of the *Affranchis* (mulatto elites and petit-bourgeois blacks) and their European trading partners following the Revolution (See Table 1).

So the logic here is that the early Europeans encountered a brutal material existence in Europe and later reified that existence as the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism when they encountered Christianity via Roman colonization. Whereas, in Africa, the bountiful experience of the earth, which the Africans encountered, gave rise to their Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism as an alternative constructive identity which they reified with the nature of reality as such. As such, for the Africans, Vodou became a monotheistic religion in which the one God, *Bon-dye*, or *Gran-Met*, is an energy force that gave rise to a sacred world out of itself. Everything that is the world, universe, galaxies, animate and inanimate objects, etc. are a manifestation of *Bon-dye*, and are sacred. Thus, unlike the barbaric God of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, which stands outside of spacetime and makes human beings, the fallen, the superior creation of its design, i.e., the earth, which is to be exploited and dominated for human happiness and wealth. The God of Vodou has no such place for the human being. *Bon-dye* is spacetime, and the human being is no different from any other creation that is a part of this being. The aim of the human individual is to maintain balance and harmony between nature/God, the community, and the individual. Ideologically in Vodou, therefore, as in all other West African and Native American beliefs, the human being and all that is the universe is a manifestation of *Bon-dye*. Balance and harmony with this Being as revealed in nature is the *modus operandi* for human existence. This one good God (*Bon-dye bon*) is an energy force that can manifest itself in the human plane of existence via the ancestors and four hundred and one *lwa yo* (spirits), which humans can access as a material energy force and concepts to assist them in being-in-the-world in order to maintain the aforementioned balance and harmony. Hence, like the God of Judaism, the Good God, *Bon-dye Bon*, of Vodou is active in history and in current political events, via ancestors, *lwa yo*, and humans, rather than in the primordial sacred time of myth. Unlike the God of Judaism, however, in Vodou human beings are



not distinct from that great energy force due to sin and must seek to reunite with it, we are always a part of it whether we like it or not. The human being, like all other beings, whether sentient or not, are a manifestation of the energy force of *Bon-dye*. In other words, the human being is a spirit or energy force living in a material body or physical temple. We are constituted energy, which is recycled or reincarnated sixteen times, eight times as a male and eight times as a female, on the planet earth in order to achieve perfection. There is no moral right or wrong in Vodou. As such, the energy, which constitutes the human-being is not punished for acts done in the material world through the descent into animal embodiment as highlighted in the reincarnation logic of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. The emphasis in Vodou is on experiencing the lived-world and perfection. The closer the human being gets to their sixteenth experiences on earth and perfection, the wiser and less materialist they are. At the end of their sixteenth life cycles the energy that constitutes the human being is reabsorbed with the original energy force, *Bon-dye*, which manifested them as life.

### The Vodou Ideology and the Spirit of Communism

Normally referred to as animism in the academic literature, Vodou is the oldest religion in the world. If we assume the African origins of civilization hypothesis of Cheik Anta Diop (1996), Vodou gave rise to all of the other traditional metaphysical systems found among the early inhabitants of this planet, the animism of the native people of the Americas, Hinduism, Shintoism, Santeria, etc., which encountered the earth in bountiful conditions. Whereas slavery and the colonization of Africa undermined the Vodou religion and communal way of life among people of African descent in Africa and the diaspora, the Africans of Haiti given their early freedom from slavery and the fact that the majority of them, almost 70 percent of the population, were directly from Africa when the Haitian Revolution commenced were able to maintain, reorganize, and reproduce, the Vodou way of life, and its ethic, communism, and ideological apparatuses (Lakous, peristyles, hounfo, secret societies, etc.) in its purest form (Du Bois, 2004, 2012; Mocombe, 2016). At Bois Caïman or Bwa Kay-Imam (near the Imam Boukman Dutty's house), the birthplace of the Haitian Revolution in 1791, nineteen African tribes or nations and one tribe of the Taino nation organized a Vodou ceremony led by the oungan, Boukman Dutty and manbo, Cecile Fatima, to create one new nation, the Empire of Ayiti, the twenty-first tribe or nation of the ceremony, in the Americas around the Vodou religion, its ethic of communal living, subsistence agricultural production/komes, Kreyol language, and ideological apparatuses. As highlighted by Boukman's prayer, the aim was to recursively reorganize and reproduce the Vodou

religion and its way of life (practical consciousness) through the new Haitian empire against the European worldview or language game practiced by the Europeans and the *Affranchis*:

*Bon Dje ki fè la tè. Ki fè soley ki klere nou enro. Bon Dje ki soulye lanmè. Ki fè gronde loray. Bon Dje nou ki gen zorey pou tandè. Ou ki kache nan niyaj. Kap gade nou kote ou ye la. Ou we tout sa blan fè nou sibi. Dje blan yo mande krim. Bon Dje ki nan nou an vle byen fè. Bon Dje nou an ki si bon, ki si jis, li ordone vanjans. Se li kap kondui branou pou nou ranpote la viktwa. Se li kap ba nou asistans. Nou tout fet pou nou jete potre dje Blan yo ki swaf dlo lan zye. Koute vwa la libète k ap chante lan kè nou.*

The god who created the sun which gives us light, who rouses the waves and rules the storm, though hidden in the clouds, he watches us. He sees all that the white man does. The god of the white man inspires him with crime, but our god calls upon us to do good works. Our god who is good to us orders us to revenge our wrongs. He will direct our arms and aid us. Throw away the symbol of the god of the whites who has so often caused us to weep, and listen to the voice of liberty, which speaks in the hearts of us all.

Within the Vodou worldview or language game and its communal organizations and practices, serviteurs, practitioners of Vodou, as previously highlighted, believe *Bon-dye*, the primeval pan-psychic field, created the multiverse and all of its objects out of itself. As such, the earth, its objects, and all life on it are a manifestation of *Bon-dye* through our *nanm* (soul), and as such are sacred. *Bon-dye* manifests itself in the material and spiritual, or energy world, through the spiritual and conceptual essences of the four hundred and one *lwa yo* and deceased ancestors (*lwa rasin* or *lwa eritaj*) (ancestor worship is huge in Haiti), who manifest themselves to the living in dreams, divinations, and bodily possessions so that they can maintain balance and harmony within the material world, which is the manifestation of *Bon-dye*. *Lwa yo*, in essence, are manifestations of *Bon-dye* who exist, without a material body, in a different dimension of spacetime from living human beings as energy. Because the energy force of *Bon-dye* is so vast and powerful, it manifests itself in the material world through the deceased ancestors and *Lwa yo*, who represent cosmic forces, concepts, values, and personalities for us to model in the material world in order to achieve balance, harmony, subsistence living, and perfection as we experience being-in-the-world. Although

they do not possess corporeal bodies, *lwa yo* nonetheless have personalities and enjoy corporeal things such as drinking, eating, smoking, dancing, and talking.

*Lwa yo*, essentially, are cosmic forces, the spirits of the ancestors, and the major forces or concepts of the universe, i.e., beauty, good, evil, health, reproduction, death, and other aspects of daily life. Each *Lwa* is represented by a hieroglyphic symbol, a hieroglyphic *vévé*, and are predominantly divided into two nations or families, *Rada* and *Petwo Lwa yo*, representing *lwa yo* of the twenty-one nations of Bois Caïman. The *Rada Lwa yo* are relatively peaceful, happy spirits, cosmic forces, and concepts, beauty, reproduction, etc., of daily life served by *oungan yo* and *manbo yo*. *Petwo Lwa yo* represent malevolent spirits of animals and other forces of nature, and are usually served by members, *Bókós/Bokors*, of secret societies to gain wealth, political power, do harm, kill, or cripple. *Bokors* (*Bokor yo*, plural form in Kreyol) are also the police force of the society or village life, and mitigate the harshest punishment, zombification, in Vodou.

The *Rada* tradition constitute ninety-five percent of Vodou practices, and *Petwo* five percent. Notwithstanding its sacerdotal hierarchy, Vodou is very democratic. Once initiated, everyone establishes their *lakous* and *peristyles* and serve their *lwa* or *lwa yo* according to the will and desires of *lwa yo* (This is similar to the Protestant faith, where pastors establish their own churches based on their readings and interpretations of the bible). Albeit recently, January 2008, all the *lakous* and *peristyles* have organized themselves under one political organization *Konfederasyon Nasyonan Vodou Ayisyen* (KNVA) led by, Max Beauvoir, who is called the *ATI-oungan* of Vodou.

Whereas in the *Petwo* tradition the human individual seeks assistance from *lwa yo* through a *bokor* for wealth, power, i.e., *pwen*, to do harm to someone, vindicate oneself, revenge, etc.; in the *Rada* tradition, that is not normally the case. In the *Rada* tradition, the human individual does not seek *lwa yo*. (Albeit, they can seek certain *Lwa* to assist them in acquiring wealth, love, health, political power, revenge, etc. But this is done through *Bokors* (sorcerers), initiates of secret societies in Vodou). Each person has a spiritual court, meaning that particular spirits show interest in them and become intertwined in their lives. Everyone's spiritual court is different and people must learn to recognize their spirits so they can effectively work with them. Religious professionals, or the power elites of Vodou, i.e., *oungan yo*, *Manbo yo*, *Bokor yo*, *gangan yo*, and *granmoun yo* (elders) in the family are consulted to decipher the spiritual court of an individual and ensure that their life is being led in harmony with the desires and wills of *lwa yo* who constitute their spiritual court, since it can be difficult to decipher exactly what a spirit wants

and which spirit is affecting a person's life. Once an individual's spiritual court is determined through a card reading or Vodou ceremony, many people use this knowledge to create a home altar to strengthen their relationship between themselves and *lwa yo* of their spiritual court. For individuals who are called further, they may choose to have a head washing (*lave tèt*), which connects them permanently to their *mèt tèt* (ruler of the head) who is the spirit most closely aligned with them. The next step, if one chooses, would be to initiate into the religion into one of three stages: *ounsi* (congregation member), *manbo* or *oungan* (priestess or priest), and *manbo asogwe* or *oungan asogwe* (high priestess or high priest). These levels of initiation (*kanzo*) are not decided by the individual but by the spirits and revealed through dreams, card readings, and other forms of communication. This is a permanent life-time commitment and each level requires different duties to spirit and community. Contact provides a way to mitigate relationships with *lwa yo* and ancestors who otherwise could impact lives without individuals having the ability to negotiate their situation. *Lwa yo* and ancestors have individual personalities and preconceived notions about proper behaviors that can cause them to help or hinder people as they see fit. Engaging with *lwa yo* allow humans to gain their aid and take control over their own luck. However, this usually requires a pledge of either a direct exchange of offerings for services or a lifelong commitment to serve and honor. Failure to uphold a person's end of the deal or to recognize when a spirit is making a demand can result in punishment that affects luck, health, personal relationships, and financial situations. *Lwa yo* also become part of an extended spiritual/material family, and as such individuals love them and provide offerings because they enjoy making the *Lwa yo* and ancestors happy. Home altars, as in Hinduism, dedicate a space to honoring and feeding *lwa yo* and ancestors, dreams bring messages, and daily experiences reinforce their presence. Hence humans and spirit beings exist in a symbiotic relationship on earth.

Within this symbiotic relationship on earth, the Petwo tradition dialectically balances and harmonizes nature, the community, and the individual by counterbalancing the relatively peaceful and happy spirits or concepts of the Rada traditions with the malevolent forces and concepts of nature. In the Petwo tradition, the individual seeks the aid of a Bokor for wealth, political power, protection, or to do harm to an adversary through the aid of the malevolent forces or concepts, i.e., revenge, greed, hate, violence, etc., of nature. Whereas the killing, harming, etc. of an individual is not allowed in the Rada tradition, they are sanctioned in the Petwo tradition. The Petwo tradition houses both the secret societies of Vodou, which are in place to protect the society from those who violate the norms of the *ounfo*, and the sorcerers, bokors, who use their knowl-

edge of *les mystere* to kill, cripple, or do harm (financially, socially, politically, etc.) to an individual. According to Max Beauvoir, the late *ATI-oungan* of Haitian Vodou, the Bokors stem from the Taino tradition, which paralleled the Congo elements of the Africans, of the island, and when serving in the capacity as the protector of social norms and social relations, practitioners, Bokors, of the Petwo tradition must obtain the consent of leaders, *oungan yo avek manbo yo*, of the Rada tradition, of the *ounfo*, which is not the case when serving as sorcerers to benefit themselves or those seeking power, wealth, or to do harm to an adversary. In the former instance, zombification is the ultimate punishment allowed by *oungan yo avek manbo yo* to be meted out by a bokor for violation of social norms and relations, which are deemed sacred. In the latter instance anything and everything goes, i.e., financial, social, and political ruin, zombification, or death. The Petwo tradition is considered the black magic of Vodou, and it is this tradition and its practice of zombification that is and has been portrayed by Hollywood and Wade Davis's (1985) work, *The Serpent and the Rainbow*. Conceptually, the Vodou tradition is not one or the other it is both. The two traditions represent the energy/material symbiotic (binary) world that is Bon-dye and within which all life is constituted and experiences existence.

As the late *ATI-oungan* of Vodou, Max Beauvoir (2006), highlights, within this energy/material symbiotic relationship, the human being is a sentient being, which is constituted as three distinct entities, the physical body, the *gwo bon anj* (*sé médo*), and the *ti bon anj* (*sé lido*). The latter two constitute our *nanm* (soul), and the physical body is aggregated matter that eventually dies and rots. It is animated by the energy force of *Bon-dye* or the universe, the *gwo bon anj*, which is not active in influencing personality or the choices that the human subject makes in life. Instead, it is simply the spark of life or the energy force that keeps the body living or activated. In other words, metaphorically speaking, imagine the body as an electrical cord, *Bon-dye* as the socket, and the spark of energy from the socket that animates the appliance as the *gwo bon anj*.

The animated body, the physical body and the *gwo bon anj*, gives rise to consciousness and the personality through the *ti bon anj*. The most important part of the body is the head, which is the seat of consciousness and the space where sight, hearing, smell, and taste all reside. The five senses of the head, and the brain's reflection on what is smelled, heard, seen, tasted, and touched gives rise to the *ti bon anj*, which is consciousness, intellect, reflection, memory, will, and the personality. That is to say, it is the *ti bon anj* that houses the ego, self, personality, and ethics of the person from experiences in life. So the *gwo bon anj* animates the physical body, which gives rise to the *ti bon anj*, i.e., the

individual ego or I of a human subject as they experience being in the world with others.

The three aforementioned distinct entities constitute the average individual and can be separated at various points throughout their life cycle and at the time of death. As previously mentioned, people who are called to work with *lwa yo* also have a fourth entity, personal *lwa*, *mét tét*, who permanently resides within their head, i.e., a sort of split personality that guides the individual in making important and daily decisions. For the average individual, at the time of death the physical body dies and rots, the *ti bon anj*, the ego, personality, etc., returns to *Ginen* (Africa), and the *gwo bon anj* lingers around seeking to animate a new body. Serviteurs, *oungan yo*, *Manbo yo*, and *Bokor yo*, can work to bring the *ti bon anj* of elders back across the waters from Africa so that they can be an active and honored ancestor. This latter process of ancestor retrieval is usually done a day and a year after the death of the person, and requires an animal sacrifice, i.e., the taking of a life to feed *lwa yo* in order to retrieve the deceased ancestor from *Ginen*. Upon retrieval, the *ti bon anj* of the ancestor is kept in a *govi*, a small clay bottle. Bokors, who are members of secret societies in Vodou, and stand apart from *oungan yo* and *Manbo yo* as sorcerers who serve *Petwo lwa yo*, can also capture the lingering *ti bon anj* to do spiritual work aimed at healing, ascertaining money, love relationships, work, political power, i.e., *pwen*, or other desires. This latter act is one form of zombification wherein the *ti bon anj* of a deceased person is captured in a bottle, *govi*, and directed to serve either the *Bokor* or an individual seeking wealth, love, political power, or to do harm to another person, etc.

Aside from separation in death, separation can also take place during a person's life cycle. During a person's life cycle, the *gwo bon anj* can be displaced by a *lwa* during possession or a *Bokor* for zombification. The *lwa* utilizes the animated body (the person possessed is called a *chawl* or horse for the *lwa*) to experience the world, heal, protect, etc. The *ti bon anj* can be displaced during a person's life cycle by a *Bokor* for the mitigation of punishment through zombification. This latter action is essentially the death penalty in Vodou when individuals morally violate nature, communal life, or an individual. *Bokor yo* are called upon by *oungan yo* and *manbo yo* to punish the transgressor through the removal of their *ti bon anj* from their bodies. During this process, the ego and personality, *ti bon anj*, is removed, and the person is left with the material body and the *gwo bon anj*. The purpose of this act is to render the transgressor without the desire and drive to commit any further acts, which arose from their *ti bon anj*. The person is not killed, but the desire and passion that caused them to commit the initial transgression that they committed is removed. Hence the person is left alive as a mindless zom-

bie. Essentially, whereas oungan yo, manbo yo, and gangan/dokté fey are the readers, judges, and healers, Bokor yo are the sorcerers and police force of the village. They are practitioners of black magic, and are visited by people seeking to do harm to someone, or seeking wealth, power, luck, revenge, etc. There are three other, external, cosmic force and lwa yo that impact the individual. They are the *zetwal*, i.e., the star of a person, which determines their fate; the *lwa rasin*, or *lwa eritaj*, the spirit of the ancestors “who enter the path of the unconscious to talk to him or her in dreams, to warn of danger, and to intervene at the many levels of his [or her] life”; and the *wonsiyon*, “these are a series of spirits that accompany the *lwa mét tèt* and modify somewhat the amplitude and the frequencies of its vibration or presence” (Beauvoir, 2006, pg. 128).

#### THE POWER ELITES AND IDEOLOGICAL APPARATUSES OF VODOU

The arrangements of social and familial obligations, relationships, and interactions (i.e., Haitian practical consciousness in the mountains and provinces) move outwards from this central spiritual and communal worldview or language game of Vodou, also known as the mystery system, through its power elites, oungans, Manbos, Bokos, and elders, subsistence agricultural mode of production and commerce, and their ideological apparatuses, Lakous, peristyles, secret societies, herbal medicines, Vodou ceremonies, and zombification. In Vodou, the emphasis is on balance and harmony with nature, the community, and within the individual all of which are interconnected. As such, subsistence agricultural production, i.e., the tilling and protection of the earth, and the trade (commonly referred to as commerce usually performed by women) of agricultural products for other goods are emphasized as the proper form for human environmental, communal, and individual interactions with nature and each other. Village life in the majority of the provinces is centered on a Lakous, family compound, and its peristyle where everything is shared. All provinces, cities, communes in Haiti have Lakous and peristyles. The three dominant Lakous, Souvnans, Badjo, and Soukri, are located in Gonaives, Haiti and maintain the rites and traditions of Dahomey, Nago, and the Congo, respectively. The class structure of the Lakous and the villages or regions they influence, *houngo*, are not based on the subsistence mode of production but on the spiritual relationship, which is tied to nature (i.e., the earth, the cycle of birth, rebirth, and death in nature). That is religious leaders and elders of the community constitute the power elites of the society followed by the middle-aged and the young. The elders are the intermediaries between the young and the religious leaders. The functions of the religious leaders, oungans and manbos, are healing through herbal medicine, performing Vodou ceremonies to call or pacify the spirits and bring about harmony

to village life, initiating new oungans and manbos, forecasting the future, reading dreams, casting spells, resolving village disputes, protecting the society, and creating protections. Conversely, the Bokos are the sorcerers and police force of the society. They are responsible for black magic, patrolling village life, through Sanpwels, Bizangos, and lougawous, and meting out punishment through zombification.

Vodou morality is not a black and white understanding of right and wrong, but rather a contextual response that above all works to maintain harmony in the community. The universe exists in harmony as a natural state, and any action that creates discord is a moral transgression. Moral transgressions are not individual acts that permanently taint the soul and change the outcome of the afterlife as one finds in Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc. There is no defined concept of heaven in Haitian Vodou and reincarnation of the *nanm* is not affected by the sins of the past life. Rather, moral transgressions change the circumstances of the individual and community in the here and now but can be overcome and moved past through some form of retribution or punishment. Also important is that the moral violation of harmony by one individual can affect the morality of the group and cause repercussions from spirits and ancestors that affect the community. This places a huge focus upon the collective and tends to downplay the individual. Yet, it would be wrong to characterize the Haitian Vodou worldview as solely a collective one. That is to say, individual action is an important part of disrupting, maintaining, and repairing balance through the religious leaders and elders of the community who must decide the appropriate course of action to take against any transgressions in order to restore balance and harmony. As the taking of life is prohibited in the Rada Vodou family, the ultimate punishment in the Haitian worldview is the second form of zombification outlined above, which is usually performed by Bokos of the Petwo tradition. Vodou requires that some form of retribution or punishment is required for all forms of moral transgression in order to restore balance and harmony in nature, the community, and within each individual involved in the transgression. Understandably, this is why the Haitian Revolution commences with a Petwo Vodou ceremony at Bois Caiman on August 14, 1791. The ceremony was called upon by the oungans, Manbos, Bokos, and elders under the leadership of oungan Boukman Dutty and manbo Cecile Fatima to bring about retribution and punishment against whites for the institution of slavery, which was causing great disharmony and imbalance in nature and in the African communities on the island. According to Seviteurs, manbo Fatima was mounted by the Petwo Iwa, Manbo Erzulie Danthor (the Goddess of the Haitian nation), who meted out the punishment for the whites, and laid out the hierarchy of the leaders of the revolution. In return, as highlighted by Boukman's prayer, the



participants promised not to serve the white man's God or allow inequality on the island. Following the revolution, it would be the struggle between the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism language game of the Africans of the mountains and provinces and the Catholic/Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism language game of the *Affranchis* which would bring about the great disharmony and imbalance that has plagued Haiti since the death of oungan Jean-Jacques Dessalines October 17, 1806, the father of the Haitian nation. Ostensibly, this struggle, contemporarily, is captured in the political discourses of political leaders and the masses as the ideas of: social inclusion, democracy, equitable distribution of wealth, social wealth, etc., of the children of Dessalines versus the ideas of: capitalism, individual wealth, etc., of the children of Pétion who assassinated him.

### CONCLUSIONS

Essentially, the Frankfurt school's "Negative Dialectics" represents the means by which the *Affranchis*, Critical Race Theorists, Fanon, the Du Bois of *The Souls*, and the majority of liberal/conservative bourgeois blacks in America and elsewhere have confronted their historical situations within the global capitalist world-system under American hegemony. The differences between their "negative dialectics" and the anti-dialectical response I am calling for as represented in the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism is subtle, but the consequences are enormously obvious. For the Frankfurt school, "[t]o proceed dialectically means to think in contradictions, for the sake of the contradiction once experienced in the thing, and against that contradiction. A contradiction in reality, it is a contradiction against reality" (Adorno, 1973 [1966], p. 145). This is the ongoing dialectic they call "Negative Dialectics:"

Totality is to be opposed by convicting it of nonidentity with itself—of the nonidentity it denies, according to its own concept. Negative dialectics is thus tied to the supreme categories of identitarian philosophy as its point of departure. Thus, too, it remains false according to identitarian logic: it remains the thing against which it is conceived. It must correct itself in its critical course—a course affecting concepts which in negative dialectics are formally treated as if they came "first" for it, too (Adorno, 1973 [1966], p. 147).

This negative dialectical position, as Adorno points out, is problematic in that the identitarian class convicting the totality of which it is apart remains the thing against which it is conceived. As in the case of blacks, their "negative dialectics," their awareness of the contradictions

of the heteronomous racial capitalist order did not foster a reconstitution of that order but a request that the order rid itself of a particular contradiction and allow their participation in the order, devoid of that particular contradiction, which prevented them from identifying with the Hegelian totality (i.e., that all men are created equal except the enslaved blacks). The end result of this particular protest was in the reconfiguration of society (or the totality) in which those who exercised its reified consciousness, irrespective of skin-color, could partake in its order. In essence, the contradiction, as interpreted by the blacks was and is not in the “pure” identity of the heteronomous order, which is reified as reality and existence as such, but in the contradictory praxis (as though praxis and structure are distinct) of the individuals (i.e., institutional regulators or power elites), who only allowed the participation of blacks within the order of things because they were “speaking subjects” (i.e., hybrids, who recursively organized and reproduced the agential moments of the social structure) as opposed to “silent natives” (i.e., the enslaved Africans of Bois Caïman with their Vodou and Islamic Fundamentalists with their radicalized Islam, for example). And herein rests the problem with attempting to reestablish an order simply based on what appears to be the contradictory practices of a reified consciousness. For in essence the totality is not “opposed by convicting it of nonidentity with itself—of the nonidentity it denies, according to its own concept,” but on the contrary, the particular is opposed by the constitutive subjects for not exercising its total identity. In the case of black America, the totality (American racial capitalist society) was opposed through a particularity (i.e., racism) which stood against their bourgeois identification with the whole. In such a case, the whole remains superior to its particularity, and it functions as such. But this is not the logic required if humanity is to survive in the near future. We must seek to go against and beyond the master/slave dialectical logic highlighted in the negative dialectics of the Frankfurt School and Critical Race Theory.

In order to go against and beyond this “mechanical” dichotomy (i.e., whole/part, subject/object, master/slave, universal/particular, society/individual, etc.) by which society or more specifically the object formation of modernity up till this point in the human archaeological record has been constituted, so that society can be reconstituted wherein “Being” (Dasein, Martin Heidegger’s term) is nonsubjective and nonobjective, “organic” in the Habermasian sense, it is necessary, as Adorno points out, that the totality (which is not a “thing in itself”) be opposed, not however, as he sees it, “by convicting it of nonidentity with itself” as in the case of blacks in America and elsewhere, but by identifying it as a nonidentity identity that does not have the “natural right” to dictate identity in an absurd world with no inherent meaning or purpose except those

which are constructed, via their bodies, language, ideology, and ideological apparatuses, by social actors operating within a reified sacred metaphysic. This is not what happened in black America and elsewhere, but I am suggesting that this is what took place with the Vodou leadership, oungans and manbos (Vodou priests and priestesses), of Bois Caïman within the eighteenth century Enlightenment discourse of the whites and *Affranchis*, mulatto elites and petit-bourgeois blacks, and contemporary Islamic Fundamentalists.

Blacks in America and elsewhere by identifying with the totality, which Adorno rightly argues is a result of the “universal rule of forms,” the idea that “a consciousness that feels impotent, that has lost confidence in its ability to change the institutions and their mental images, will reverse the conflict into identification with the aggressor” (Adorno, 1973 [1966], pg. 94), reconciled their double consciousness, i.e., the ambivalence that arises as a result of the conflict between subjectivity and forms (objectivity), by becoming “hybrid” Americans desiring to exercise the “pure” identity of the American totality and rejecting the contempt to which they were and are subject. The contradiction of slavery in the face of equality—the totality not identifying with itself—was seen as a manifestation of individual practices, since subjectively they were part of the totality, and not an absurd way of life inherent in the logic of the totality. Hence, their protest was against the practices of the totality, not the totality itself, since that would mean denouncing the consciousness that made them whole. On the contrary, Boukman, the Vodou leadership at Bois Caïman, and Jean-Jacques Dessalines decentered or “convicted” the totality of French modernity not for not identifying with itself, but as an adverse “sacred-profaned” cultural possibility against their own “God-ordained” possibility (alternative object formation or form of system/social integration), the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism, which they were attempting to exercise in the world. This was the pact the participants of Bois Caïman made with their lwa, god, Erzulie Danthor, when they swore to neither allow inequality on the island, nor worship the god of the whites “who has so often caused us to weep” (Du Bois, 2004, 2012; Buck-Morss, 2009). In fact, according to Haitian folklore and oral history, the lwa, Erzulie Danthor, who embodied Fatima, descended from the heavens and joined the participants of Bois Caïman when they initially set-off to burn the plantations in 1791, but her tongue was subsequently removed by the other participants so that she would not reveal their secrets should she be captured by the whites. Haiti has never been able to live out this pact the participants of Bois Caïman made to Erzulie Danthor to reconstitute their society within an alternative constructivity, because of the claims to positions of economic and political power by liberal bourgeois *Affranchis*, mulatto elites and petit-bour-

geois blacks, who were backed by their former colonizers, America and France. The latter groups in the society have, as a Francophile neocolonial oligarchy, attempted to organize and reproduce modern rules and laws grounded in the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism that have caused the majority of the people to weep in dire poverty as wage-laborers in an American dominated Protestant postindustrial capitalist world-system wherein the African masses are constantly being forced via ideological apparatuses such as Protestant missionary churches, privatization, industrial parks, tourism, and athletics, for example, to adopt the liberal bourgeois Protestant ethos of the West against the ideology and ideological apparatuses of the Vodou ethic and the spirit of communism of the Vodou leadership who commenced the Revolution.

This same anti-dialectical logic of the Vodou leadership who commenced the Haitian Revolution at Bois Caïman against the negative dialectics of the *Affranchis* seeking equality of opportunity, recognition, and distribution with the West, holds true for Islamist Fundamentalists who, contemporarily, are fighting the West not because they are convicting them of not identifying with their ideals and values, which Muslims (liberal bourgeois Muslims) recursively reorganize and reproduce in and as their praxis. But they are anti-dialectically seeking to reconstitute an alternative constructivity to that of the West based on Sharia law. In a world globally organized around the accumulative and consumerist logic of the West the negative dialectics of Critical Race theory is problematic in that it seeks to maintain the “enframing” totality to which it is against. Instead, an anti-dialectical discourse similar to that of the Vodou leadership of Bois Caïman and Islamic Fundamentalism is necessary if humanity and the earth will survive this century. That is, a call for a constructivity/practical consciousness that speaks against and rejects every aspect of the West, not just particular “isms,” is necessary if humanity and the earth is to survive the exploitative and consumptive constructive identity of the West grounded in the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism. This new constructivity, must stem from an earth center discourse, as encapsulated in the metaphysical logic of Vodou, that seeks to align human practical consciousness with the spirit of the earth, not against it, in order to go beyond the subject/object, master/slave, etc., logic of the West.

TABLE 1. *Differences between the Catholic/Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism and the Vodou Ethic and the Spirit of Communism in Haiti*

Differences	The Catholic/Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism	The Vodou Ethic and the Spirit of Communism
Language	French	Kreyol
Mode (s) of Production	Agribusiness, Manufacturing (Industrial production), and Post-Industrial Service	Subsistence Agriculture, Husbandry, and Komes (Wholesale and retail Trade)
Ideology	Individualism, Capitalism, subject/object thinking, Authoritarianism, racialism, liberalism, private property	Individuality, Social Collectivism, syncretic thinking, Democratic, spirit of social justice, holism
Ideological Apparatuses	Church, schools, police force, army, law, patriarchal family, Prisons, the streets, bureaucratic organization of work	Ounfo, peristyles, dance, drumming, lwa yo, vèvés, Secret societies (Bizango, which serve as police forces of The society), ancestral worship, alters Vodou magic
Communicative Discourse	Economic gain for its own sake, wealth, status, upward mobility, class	Balance, harmony, subsistence living, and perfection
Power Elites	Upper-class of owners and high-level executives of businesses And corporations, educated professionals, bureaucrats, Managers, etc.	Oungan/manbo, bokor, gangan, dokté fey, granmoun

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