

The Global Lakou World-System

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Abstract

This work highlights the Haitian sociopolitical economic organization, Lakous, as a form of libertarian communism that must be vertically integrated at the nation-state level so that people can experience total freedom from capitalist relations of production. I conclude the work by extrapolating the lakou system to the world-system level in order to offer it as an alternative to the Protestant capitalist world-system, which threatens all life on earth.

Keywords: Haitian Epistemology, Haitian Idealism, Vilokan Idealism, Vodou Ethic and The Spirit of Communism, Religiosity, Black Diaspora, Dialectical; Anti-Dialectical, Phenomenological Structuralism, Lakouism, The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism.

I. Introduction

Two forms of system and social integration would structure the material resource framework of Haiti after independence, the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism on the one hand; and the Catholic/Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism on the other. The African majority, referred here, and elsewhere in my works, metaphorically as the children of Sans Souci, the African Kongolese warrior of the Haitian Revolution assassinated by the Affranchis, Henri Christophe, would be interpellated and subjectified by the enchantment of the world around the former; and their children (metaphorically the children of Dessalines, (Jean-Jacques Dessalines, the creole founder of the Haitian nation-state), young Africans, creole, and free blacks raised or born on the island, although interpellated and subjectified in the former world-view in childhood, many of them would, relationally, marginalize and discriminate against it for the enchantment of the world around the Catholic/Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism of the whites and mulattoes (metaphorically speaking, the children of Alexandre Pétion, the mulatto first President of the Haitian Republic). In this work I extrapolate the lakou system of the Africans to the world-system level, the global lakou-system, in order to offer it as an alternative to the Protestant capitalist world-system, which threatens all life on earth, in the midst of the labor exploitation and climate change problematics caused by the latter.

1.1 Background of the Problem

In keeping with the logic of structurationist sociology—phenomenological structuralism, developed by Paul C. Mocombe (2016) out of Haitian epistemology, Haitian/Vilokan Idealism—the understanding here is that Haitian practical consciousness is a product of two opposing social structures. The majority, two-thirds, of the social actors who would come to constitute the Haitian nation-state were African-born amongst a minority of mulattoes, *gens de couleur*, creole, and petit-bourgeois blacks (*Affranchis*) on the island interpellated, embourgeoisied, and differentiated by the language, communicative discourse, modes of production, ideology, and ideological apparatuses of the West (the Catholic/Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism social class language game). As such, given their interpellation and embourgeoisement via the language (French), communicative discourse, modes of production (slavery, agribusiness, mercantilism, etc.), ideology (liberalism, individualism, personal wealth, capitalism, racialism, private property, Protestant Ethic, etc.), and ideological apparatuses (churches, schools, prisons, plantations, police force, army, etc.) of the West, the latter, Affranchis, became “blacks,” dialectically, seeking to recursively (re) organize and reproduce the ideas



and ideals, the Catholic/Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism social class language game, of the European whites in a national position of their own amidst slavery, racism, and colonialism. This entailed attempting to constitute the nation-state within the mercantilist and free-trade ideals of the emerging Protestant capitalist world-system under European hegemony via the *corvée* system, which sought to maintain Haiti as an export-oriented agricultural periphery state within the emerging capitalist world-system (Du Bois, 2004, 2012).

The African-born majority, were not blank slates, however, but brought with them from Africa their African languages, communicative discourses, ideologies, ideological apparatuses, and modes of production (form of social and systems integration), the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism social class language game, to the island, which they recursively reorganized and reproduced on the plantations and as maroon communities via the *lakou* system in the provinces and mountains when they escaped (Du Bois, 2004; Ramsey, 2014; Mocombe, 2016, 2019).

Following the Haitian Revolution, the majority of the Africans, given their refusal to labor on plantations or agribusinesses (*corvée system*), migrated to the provinces and the mountains, abodes of formerly established “maroon republics,” and established a “counter-plantation system” (Jean Casimir’s term), i.e., *lakou* system, based on husbandry, subsistence agriculture, and *komes*, i.e., the trade and sell of agricultural goods for income to purchase manufactured products and services, organized around the discursive practices of *lakous* (Du Bois, 2004, 2012; Mocombe, 2016). Unlike Jean Casimir, this *Lakou* system, for me, was not a reaction to enslavement, or a product of race as suggested by the theory of *noirisme*. Instead, it was grounded in the Vodou religion and its epistemological transcendental idealism and realism, i.e., Haitian/Vilokan idealism. Casimir’s “counter-plantation system” is nothing but the Africans’ *lakou* system, which is a discursive practice of the discourse stemming from the Vodou religion and its epistemological idealism, i.e., Haitian/Vilokan Idealism. As such, the *lakou* system is the product of the internalization of the ideas, ideals, and values of the Vodou Ethic as revealed in the material praxis, practical consciousness, and institutions of the Africans of Haiti and not a result of race or innate personalities as suggested by *noirisme* or Afrocentric theories.

2. Theory and Method

In this work, I utilize Paul C. Mocombe’s theory of phenomenological structuralism to highlight the relationship between the ideas, ideals, and values of Vodou as they are internalized and recursively organized and reproduced to constitute the *lakou* system and the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism as the practical consciousness of the Africans of Haiti. I go on to demonstrate and conclude how the latter gave rise to a libertarian communism, which ought to be vertically integrated as the form of system and social integration of nation-states’ and their political economy, in order to form a global (federated) *lakou* (world-system) against the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism of the world-system under American hegemony amidst the latter’s labor exploitation and environmental destruction.

3. Discussion

Following the Haitian Revolution, whereas the *Affranchis* of Haiti sought to integrate the Haitian masses and the state into the dialectic of the emerging Protestant capitalist world-system of the whites with its emphasis on labor exploitation, commodification, economic autarky/free trade, privatization, and individual liberties. Among the Africans of Haiti, the arrangements of individual, social and familial obligations, relationships, and interactions moved outwards from the central cosmic, geometric, spiritual, and communal worldview or language game of Vodou, also known as the mystery system, through its power elites, *oungan yo* (priests), *Manbo yo* (Priestesses), *Bokor yo* (sorcerers), *gangan yo/dokté fey* (herbal healers), and *granmoun yo* (elders); the agricultural mode of production, husbandry, and commerce (*komes*), which provide food for sustenance and herbs for medicinal purposes; and their ideological apparatuses, *lwa yo*, *lakous* (*lakou yo*), *peristyles*, *alters*, *secret societies*, *herbal medicines*, *vévés*, Vodou ceremonies, magic and rituals, songs, dances, musical instruments, proverbs, and *zombification* (Beauvoir, 2006; Mocombe, 2016). The latter system, what Paul C. Mocombe (2016) calls “the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism,” with its emphasis on communal sharing, equality, independence, subsistence living, and freedom, diametrically opposed the former. In Vodou, the emphasis is on balance and harmony with the laws of creation, cosmic forces, nature, the community, and within the individual all of which are interconnected. As such, agricultural production, i.e., the tilling, cultivation, and protection of the earth by men and women for food and medicinal purposes; husbandry, for food, clothing, and the making of musical instruments; and the trade (commonly referred to as commerce, *komes*, usually performed by women) of agricultural and animal products for other goods are emphasized as the proper form for human environmental, communal, and individual interactions with nature and each other. Hence initiates of Vodou are environmentally conscientious as village religious, medicinal, and agricultural life is depended on the environment, which is deemed sacred, an extension of the primeval pan-psychic field of *Bondye*, i.e., god.

Village life in the majority of the provinces is constituted around the *lakou*, family compound, and its *peristyle* where everything is shared. All provinces, cities, communes in Haiti have *Lakous* and *peristyles*. The three dominant *Lakous*, *Souvenans*, *Badjo*, and *Soukri*, are located in Gonaives, Haiti and maintain the rites and traditions of *Dahomey*, *Nago*, and the Congo, respectively. The social class structure of the *lakous* (*lakou yo*) and the villages or regions they influence are not based on the



mode of production but on the spiritual relationship, which is tied to nature, i.e., the sun, earth, the cycle of birth, rebirth, and death in nature that the people seek to keep balance with. 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, oungan yo, manbo yo, bokor yo, and gangan yo/dokté féy, are healing through herbal medicine, performing Vodou ceremonies to call or pacify the spirits and bring about harmony to village life, initiating new oungan and manbo, prognosticating the future, reading dreams, casting spells, resolving village disputes, protecting the society, and creating protections. Conversely, Bokor yo 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.

Via the lakou system the Africans recursively reorganize(d) and reproduce(d) the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism as a form of system and social integration for total liberty and equality, against the Protestantism Ethic and the spirit of capitalism of the Affranchis and mulattoes seeking to integrate them into the inequality and global labor organization of nation-states (periphery, agricultural; semi-periphery, industrial; core, postindustrial) of the latter system. The lakou is a community of people and houses organized and gathered around a common yard under the directions of an oungan, manbo, or family elder that promoted and promotes an egalitarian existence rooted in the Vodou religion and ancestor worship, land ownership arrangements, and working the soil (Du Bois, 2004; Mocombe, 2016). Within the lakou system, each individual or nuclear family owned/own their own land, through which they provided/provide for basic necessities by growing food and raising livestock for their own consumption and for sale in local markets. They also grew and grow export crops, such as coffee, in order to purchase imported consumer goods such as clothes and tools. The libertarian communism of the lakou thus divided power in a way that allowed rural residents to live and work as they wished (through land and garden ownership to provide for their own subsistence), while preventing the consolidation of wealth, and therefore control and inhibitor of equality, in the hands of any one person within the community through a set of customs and secret societies of the Vodou religion that regulate(d) land ownership, land transfers, family relationships, and community affairs. Communal assistance and exchange, via food sharing, harvesting, house building, religious life, and ancestral worship, under the leadership of women also characterized and characterizes lakou life (Du Bois, 2004; Mocombe, 2016). In essence, the purpose of lakou life is to promote communal sharing, total liberty, and equality (libertarianism and egalitarianism), via land ownership and self-sufficiency, for all without distinctions and economic differentiation within a libertarian communist state. As such, the libertarian communism of the lakous is not anarchic, regardless of its forms, as we find in the West. Power is both federated and consolidated around the power elites of the Lakous whose sole purpose is to integrate, maintain, and balance both liberty and equality within and via the lakous and natural environment. In other words, at the base of the lakou system emanating from the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism are communal sharing or exchange and agricultural production at the family level for subsistence living, trade, and independence so that the individual can live free and equal to all. This must be balanced against the (over) accumulation of wealth by any one member of the lakous, which may cause inequality and curtail liberty, and the destruction of the natural environment.

Given the effectiveness of the lakou system in curtailing the spread of capitalist exploitation in the provinces of the nation-state of Haiti, I suggest extrapolating it to the nation-state and global level to combat the deleterious effects (labor exploitation, inequality, climate change, and environmental devastations) of the Protestant capitalist world-system under American hegemony, contemporarily. Expanding the system from the familial and communal levels to the national-state and global levels, state and global libertarian communism, would mean organizing communities and states around lakous at the nation-state level in order to constitute a global (federated) world-system where all states are integrated and self-sufficient to maintain balance and harmony between the global environment and satisfying basic human needs through subsistence living. At the nation-state level integration would involve, 1) promoting agricultural production at the family level for subsistence living and trade; 2) light manufacturing, textile production, etc. on every lakou for lakou consumption; 3) tertiary industries for service and entertainment at the lakou communal level; 4) infrastructure, i.e., schools, roads, medical facilities on each lakou provided by the state as a result of taxation of each lakou, not the individual; 5) community policing provided by each lakou; military provided by the state via recruitment from the lakous. These five factors constituted by and as the state would ensure the balance between the libertarianism and egalitarianism, state libertarian communism, which forms the basis of communal lakou life. That is, individual liberties and equality would be maintained by constituting a state wherein its resources are used by the people for the effective redistribution of societal resources through the provision of an extensive safety net of public services like publicly supported education, health care, transportation, child care, housing; a progressive tax structure that reduces the wide disparities of income between rich and poor; and the guarantee of a living wage to all members of the community so that they can experience total liberty. Political systems at the nation-state level do not matter as the emphasis is on maintaining a balance between liberty and equality, which can be done under any political system so long as the aforementioned economic organization of lakou life is maintained.

At the global world-system level, this nation-state of lakous would be governed politically as the Africans did prior to the advents of Islam and Christianity on the continent. Traditional West African political structures were constituted around “a



hierarchical bureaucracy of kings who were regarded as being invested by divine right, ruling in accordance with the will of the ancestors and some omnipotent power. The kings had their own councils and advisers, or ministers of state, who supervised military affairs, external affairs, the treasury, justice, courts, etc. The various subordinate districts within the kingdoms had their rulers, and the villages had their headmen" (Harris, 1998, p. 52). In the constitution of the contemporary nation-states, via the vertical integration of the lakou system as enframed by the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism, as a global lakou, in place of the king would be the president/council of elders, representing each nation-state, ruling in accordance with the will of the ancestors and the people in a global political system, such as the United Nations, under one global currency and rules set in place to maintain balance between the liberty and equality of all the nation-states and the preservation of the natural environment against climate-change and ecological devastation. The president/council of elders would have their own councils and advisers, or ministers of states, who supervise military affairs, external affairs, the treasury, justice, courts, etc. of each nation-state of the United Nations. He/she would be appointed for life by the representative body, parliament or political leader, of the various nation-states to constitute a global parliament or national assembly constituted by the councils and advisers, or ministers of state. This parliament would constitute a political body replaced every seven years by lot, like the American jury system, from their respective nation-states, which would be under the leadership of its headperson/president in the security council of the United Nations. Once again, the intent of this political structure, regardless of its form, would be to maintain the balance between individual/state liberties and egalitarianism, state libertarian communism, and the (global) natural environment, which is at the heart of the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism and lakou life.

Contemporarily, however, instead of vertically integrating the lakou system (expanding the agricultural capacities of each lakou; establishing centers of secondary industries for local consumption and exports on each lakou; facilitating the rise of tertiary industries on the lakous for leisure and entertainment; and providing schools, medical facilities, which combine holistic medicine with western, and other infrastructure) to achieve the vision of total democracy, equality, and liberty among the masses and states to constitute a global lakou world-system. Nation-states, under the neoliberal projects (austerity, privatization, free markets, individual liberties, corporate power, diversified consumerism, exploration of the self, sexuality, and identity politics) of the United Nations, World Bank, and International Monetary Fund under American hegemony, are integrated as periphery, semi-periphery, and core states (under the US currency) to facilitate global capital accumulation at the expense of people and the natural environment.

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