AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

A HIERARCHY OF SUFFERING: LEBANON, HEGEL, AND
NORTHERN EXPATRIATES SEARCH FOR RECOGNITION

by
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PREFACE

Growing up in an affluent suburb of a global city–New York City– money was always an emphatic subtext within the broader context. Although most people in this setting were well substantiated in capital, there was always a sense of insecurity that permeated even the most minute of interactions. It seems paradoxical, that those of material means could still be so insecure. In the United States, there's a pervasive dogma that capital equates to happiness and fulfillment– indeed its core to most understandings of the 'American Dream'. So why, in these settings of ubiquitous wealth, are people so insecure? This question has blurred the lines between both my academic and psychological pursuit for some elusive 'truth' that provides logic to this dynamic.

The level of societal rot in these settings is obvious to those from them: mental health issues, various addiction problems, solipsistic narcissism, family divisions; countless other maladies. All these projections of hurt are both reduced and normalized in the face of capital possession. If you have money and success–the two being constitutive in this setting– how could one ever be unhappy? Afterall, society instructs that money equates to some abstract happiness.

To critique this insecurity and search for the essence that drives it, I've long ago realized one must search beyond appearances; the words of Marx in a "ruthless critique of everything in existence" ring loudly. The randomness of birth is perhaps the hardest truth to reconcile. How can one break out of systemic patterns that they had no intention of creating? The compulsion to repeat predesigned processes without reflection and remorse is largely a contingency of sanity.

Beirut, in certain ways, is not so different than New York. Broad displays of inequality and exclusion, as well as rigid social milieus, litter the landscape. Although not a traditional 'global city', and not in the least a center of global capital, Beirut has seen its fair share of crony capitalists, bereft professionals and despotic strongmen. A cloud of insecurity and hurt also hovers over this space.

Agency is ephemeral, seemingly here today and gone tomorrow; its fleeting nature makes it hard to define. Too often, the high of supposed agency maintains the withdrawal of helplessness. Again and again, the wheel turns on oscillating between the pain and power of simply being. In this motion, too many attempts are made to rationalize and control the wheel. These attempts at individual control often accentuate the suffering.

This paper represents a learning process–one bound to understanding the wheel. Its intentions are neither to trivialize the pain, nor validate the power, but simply interrogate the oscillations. For far too long have the wheels of history continued to grind people unwittingly caught between the mortar.

ABSTRACT
OF THE THESIS OF

Christopher Cameron Jones   for   <u>Master of Arts</u>
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Title: <u>A Hierarchy of Suffering: Lebanon, Hegel, and Northern Expatriates Search for Recognition</u>

Despite more wealth and material extraction than ever before, modernity still consists of widespread poverty and suffering. The widespread continued inequality of today has led the world to suffer. This suffering is related to a proximity to possession of material, and conflicts predicated on a competition for proximity. This suffering, as with trauma in general, has withdrawn people further into notions of identity. These identities, in the positivist world of today, are taken to be stagnant and wholly representative. Trauma and suffering have come to define the identities of people around the world; in a rush to locate and organize identities, there is a drive to create a hierarchy of privilege and suffering. This hierarchy of suffering is a zero-sum game of stagnating identity and comparing traumas. Comparing traumas as a reflection of difference serves to further the I from the Other. This retreat further into the particular of identity is at the cost of a vindictive oscillation back onto difference. With this retreat, society comes to form smaller groups of identity progressively more alone in fear and paranoia.

The perpetual retreat of identity back into itself is representative of a perpetual mis-identity and negative mode of reciprocity that sustains it. George Hegel and his use of dialectics locate this reciprocity and attempt to trace a solution. However, it's clear that his philosophy has not inspired the progress and solutions of the 'universal history' it envisioned. In the capitalist hegemony of today, dialectics and Hegel's social ontology still have a lot to offer us; the question is how to apply them. Whether it be the emancipation of 'universal history', or a better mediated tomorrow, a dialectical conception of identity and difference can be used to enact a reflexive attitude of perception that is core to better understanding both historical experiences and its traumas. Using autoethnography, this paper uses narrative on time spent in Beirut, Lebanon–a place of both myriad identities and great inequality– as a vessel for exploring these themes.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

A RETURN TO BEIRUT

> There is no escape from ideology. Everyone knows we're acting ideologically and nobody cares (plus it's fun or hilarious). There is no ideology anymore.[1]

A. Lebanon and I: Now and Then

When I first arrived in Beirut in the winter of 2018, I was new to the 'international community', and largely the broader world. Citizens of the United States– 'Americans'– are largely sheltered from world by virtue of our own geographic enormity, a historically isolationist ethos, and certain strains of chauvinism. The Beirut of 2018 was a strange place to find oneself in as a first formative experience living abroad. On one hand, the country was an example of a semi-failed state in a 'normative Western' view. Rampant corruption, dysfunctional bureaucracy, questionable democracy, inability for the state to maintain a monopoly on violence and–perhaps most popularly– a non-state state actor more powerful than the state that many in the West label 'terrorist'.[2]

Despite all the various disfunctions, the Lebanon of 2018 provided many intriguing contradictions; indeed, this is popularly harped upon by those Westerners who visit. For a religious country with a Muslim majority, there is a large nightlife scene and industry. There are parts of the city–such as Zaitunay bay–that are very polished and primp, yet simultaneously surrounded by abandoned high-rises adjacent to them. There's a 'Parisian' shopping district that offers the most luxurious global brands. For an

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[1] Cole, A. (2020). The dialectic of space: An untimely proposal. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, *119*(4), 811.
[2] 'Non-state state' alludes to the fact that Hezbollah both operates outside of the state, but also maintains a political role within the state.

American with learned assumptions about the region, many of these scenes projected a 'Western' or 'American' lifestyle and setting. Also, the country was expensive. Not as expensive as a place like New York City, but for many things nearly as expensive as more regional cities in the United States. This expense was buttressed by the fact that there was this weird not-officially-pegged-yet-pegged situation with the dollar and the local currency, the Lira.

In various locales both within and outside Beirut, there are settings that project a Western vision of 'ideal' or some contemporary normalcy. Places like Batroun and Faraiya are renowned within Western circles and in the accompanying cost, yet places like Dahieh and Tripoli project and are perceived with a completely different sense of identity. The more conservative sentiment that Westerners may associate with the Middle East is surely felt in these areas, although even here it may generally be less than what many originally imagine. At the time, the specter of ISIS left some concern– especially in the latter locations which had been a vector for recruits (Tripoli), and attacks (Dahieh)– but mostly to the unassuming 'American' learning about the country (and indeed the world), it seemed–despite all the contradictions–stable, and–*for some*– flourishing. Like many Westerners, the contradictions, natural beauty and whatever *je ne sais quoi*, imprinted Beirut and Lebanon as a special place in my mind.

The Beirut of 2018 was belied by a secret; this secret was to lead to a crisis the following year. The fall of 2019 brought a run-on the banking sector, and it was revealed that the central bank and commercial banks were in cahoots running a Ponzi scheme on dollar deposits. The strange currency pegging situation, which I remember telling one of my economics professors about back in the United States to much chagrin, was a system built on deceit and folly. The complicated nature of the banking

sectors failures are both controversial and still debated. Of particular interest to this story, however, is that it ushered in an economic collapse on par with the worst the modern world has ever seen.[3] The complicated and contradictory Lebanon of 2018 was replaced by a nearly immediately destitute Lebanon of 2019. Depositors were locked out of their accounts as there were no more dollars available in the system, making many people immediately poor– with of course the more impoverished being the most at risk. The lack of dollars resulted in the dollar based local currency fluctuating wildly, ending in a runaway inflation which eventually rendered the Lira as largely useless. At the same time, the global slowdown associated with the COVID-19 pandemic arrived and worked to ground both protests and any semblance of an economy to a halt. Further, in August of 2020–amongst all this suffering and hardship– the Port of Beirut destructed in a hugely devastating and controversial explosion that damaged and destroyed much of the city. This explosion both destroyed what there was little money to fix and drained morale– further testing the famous 'Lebanese resiliency'.

Sometime after the occurrence of all these maladies, I chatted with friends in Beirut and was met by a sentiment of absolute dejection. In the COVID era of 2020, dejection was a common attitude–the pandemic had been challenging for all– but for those I knew in Lebanon, it seemed different and pronounced. Of course, it was a triple dejection of sorts; they had been hit by three catastrophes in quick succession. The lifeforce I had associated with many of them had been emphatically drained. Two years of hardships can be so incredibly formative and draining, and this was most apparent on one friend. I had known this friend since high school, and they had encouraged me to study at the American University of Beirut (AUB)–where they were enrolled. I consider them a

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[3] GUECHATI, I., & CHAMI, M. (2022). Lebanon, economic and financial crises, reasons for collapse. *Revue Française d'Economie et de Gestion*, *3*(6).

close friend, and more than anyone else in Beirut, I feel like I truly know them. The inflection and cadence in their voice, as well as a newly reserved energy, proved to me that there had been a dramatic shift. The energy of 2018 had been replaced by a morbid apathy of 2020. The irony with any shared trauma, is that those who do not experience it are left perversely wondering about what it is they missed. Trauma seems to leave an overwhelming imprint on the identities of those it touches; in a place like Lebanon, this imprint is omnipresent.

I ended up enrolling in a graduate degree in political studies– for which this paper serves as the final thesis– at AUB starting in the spring semester of 2022. My friends had warned me of the many various issues of Lebanon, but they had not truly attempted to deter me. Basically, they told me that the Beirut of 2018 was dead– which their shift in attitude had already instructed– and that the 'new' Beirut would be a very different adjustment from the "good times" of 2018. Indeed, my journey from Rafic Hariri airport to my apartment in Hamra quickly illustrated this reality. Given my poor Arabic skills and a certain desperation implicit in the present situation– combined with the lapse in seeing one another–my friend asserted that they were going to pick me up from the airport. There had been a few recent cases of reported airport-related robberies, and my friend was eager to deny any inkling of that possibility. The ride through the southern suburbs towards Hamra on a late afternoon in January seemed *different*. Surely part of my perception of the city was tied to an implicit bias of the warnings and knowledge I had with regards to the ongoing crises; not to mention the connected dire situation concerning electricity– for much of 2021 and parts of 2022, many were sufficing with little to no electricity. Even AUB had availed to the international community for petrol to continue to power its generators. Whatever the biases, the 20-

minute journey is recalled through almost a monochromatic lens, the nostalgia of 2018 had immediately given way to a darker essence. As Mediterranean sun showered the city with the days dying glow, I wondered, *had I made the right choice?*

In the first couple weeks back, I settled into the new normal of Beirut–new and old friends, and my own daily routine. I met both various new friends as well as reconnecting with the remaining old friends who hadn't, or more often *couldn't,* leave the country. Beirut is a very charged political space, and although tenuous, many people often talk about the ever-changing political climate. In the gilded 2018, dinners, coffees, and trips to the bar were defined by conversations relating to whatever the hot topic of the day. In 2022, it wasn't so much that these conversations were not happening, but rather that their nature and spirit had fundamentally changed. Rather than being somewhat trivial, entertaining, and sometimes enlightening, the conversations had changed in tone to often being listless, dire and foreboding. Additionally, there was a pronounced subtext of animosity and exasperation from my colleagues in discussing the situation. The trauma of the last couple years had changed a couple of them from outgoing happy-go-lucky types into more reserved and brooding personalities.

A weekend car ride to Tripoli with my longtime friend and their partner proved to me the depths of the trauma. Having been absent for so long and keen on catching up on the current situation, I pestered them with questions about the current crises and conditions. In hindsight, my interrogations, prescriptions and rhetoric at certain junctures in the conversation surely projected naivete and ignorance–not to mention slivers of arrogance. At one point, my friend sighed with deep resignation and contempt, something that immediately quieted me. Finally, the friends partner interjected and said something along the lines of: "we don't have the bandwidth and

energy to answer these questions". They asserted that the climb to learn about the various crises was a steep one, but that they could not necessarily help me with the journey. This wasn't because they didn't want to– or that they didn't have deep knowledge and conviction about the topics– but because they didn't have the energy to continually relive and reiterate their various traumas related to the situation–many of which continued to directly impact them. The response may have come off as somewhat curt, but it has served as great inspiration to the content and direction of this paper.

As I learned that there were certain subjects and topics to bypass, there was one seeming consensus amongst both my friends and many of those I was acquainted with: a general distrust and antipathy towards NGO's, development work, and quite generally expats from the Global North. Perhaps this sentiment existed in 2018, and I'm sure on some level it did, but it was not nearly as obvious and pervasive as in the Lebanon of 2022. Lebanon, with all its maladies and crises since its Civil War, has become very saturated with development and NGO funding and work.[4] Nearly any NGO one can think of exists in some form in Lebanon. With much of this development funding coming from external international sources, this money brought and attracted a whole expatriate-oriented NGO and development labor base.[5] The general perverse irony in NGO and development work is, the worse the situation is, the more jobs there are. In Beirut, this meant that the crises had bolstered many international NGO's. Further, the collapse of the economy and the countries decline in status from 'middle income' to impoverished, heightened the material juxtaposition between these expatriates and the

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[4] AbouAssi, K. (2014). The third wheel in public policy: an overview of NGOs in Lebanon. *Public administration and policy in the Middle East*, 215-230.

[5] Dibeh, G. (2007). *Foreign aid and economic development in postwar Lebanon* (No. 2007/37). WIDER Research Paper.

common person. One of my friends in response to asking what another acquaintance did for work espoused "I'm not sure, something with NGO's– but I simply blackout whenever I hear the word NGO". This broadly sums up the general sentiment. In the Beirut of 2022, northern expatriates– and especially those working in the development sector– represented a class of 'haves' in a sea of 'have nots'.

At the same time as I repeatedly heard anti-NGO and expat sentiment, I was enrolled in a course pertaining to NGO's and humanitarian aid at AUB through the university's Center for Civic Engagement and Community Service (CCEC's). I was simultaneously getting both the academic and 'street' perspective on the contentiousness of NGO's and their role in a broader development schema. This class, my friend's statement on "lack of bandwidth", as well as the general sentiment revolving around NGO's and their employees, served as inspiration for synthesizing this information into some suitable theoretical conception. There must be some totalizing way to consider the various facets of identity, inequality, trauma, and history that makes them more intelligible. This path in unearthing some broader logic led me to reconceptualize these specificities of identity and trauma in a dialectical sense, specifically leading me to Georg Friedrich Hegel's seminal 'Lord and Bondsman' dialectic in the Phenomenology of Sprit. As I returned to Hegel's Phenomenology, it became apparent the virtues of the text in not only describing aspects of the current conditions surrounding Beirut, NGOs, and the global divide between North and South– but more abstractly the connection between social ontology, material, and a perpetual trauma and suffering derived from their interplay.

Hegel's use of dialectics– specifically his construction of the Lord and Bondsman– makes the constitutive nature of human relation obvious. It illustrates an ironic bind

between individuals and society, where there is no simple binary of 'good' and 'bad', but rather a complicated reality of mutual dependence and power imbalance. Within this mutual dependence that forms the basis for society and consciousness, there are specificities related to identity, desire, and the construction of power dynamics. Hegel's thought makes clear the strangeness that derives from human abstraction from one another, and the traumatic lack that remains in a world where mutuality is not recognized. For this, Hegel's dialectic is invaluable in examining dynamics of inequality and suffering, especially in the greatly unequal world of today, and in such an unequal place as Lebanon– one of the most unequal countries in the world.[6] With his constitutive logic, we can deny ascriptions of blame that stymie solidarity, and instead attempt to better understand the shared loss within the current moment.

B. Outline

In this paper, I start with Hegel and his Master-Slave dialectic, and from it construct a theoretical critique of capitalism and its current stage of globalization. Connecting this theoretical critique to narrative on my time and experiences in Beirut, I examine a sense of fear and shared loss that permeates current global society. I assert this shared loss and its perpetual loop of trauma begets a nuanced and continual reflexive examination of identity and difference within the context of human mutuality.

The first section–which introduces Hegel and others– serves as both a literature review and construction of this paper's theoretical components. Moving from Hegel to Theodor Adorno, Andrew Cole, Karl Marx, and many others, I piece together an argument on ontology that attempts to convey the exploitative core of the current

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[6] Assouad, L. (2023). Rethinking the Lebanese economic miracle: The extreme concentration of income and wealth in Lebanon, 2005–2014. *Journal of Development Economics*, *161*, 103003.

moment. Using Adorno's thesis of an ontology of 'perpetual antagonism', I attempt to connect the world of today to the dialectics of Hegel. From this, I construct a materialist critique of identity politics that extrapolates a world of fear towards alterity and an accompanying production of trauma. This trauma is organized under the positivist logic of capitalism that constructs it into a reified hierarchy. This hierarchy is of course untenable for breaking out of the circuit of antagonism, and instead continually recreates itself. The recreation of this order must be noticeable in some form to all identities, and this leads to the following narrative section on the suffering inherent in this reality vis-à-vis my experiences in Lebanon and Beirut.

The second section of this paper covers the methodological aspects of the thesis, further constructing a narrative on my experience in Beirut. This section covers how subinfeudation, mis-identity and 'thingness' manifest in the Northern expat community in Beirut. It explores different spaces and moments of interaction that convey the negative reciprocity between identity and difference. Through both explicit and implicit moments of recollection, I trace the stagnation of the expat identities and the connection to an underlying antagonism and trauma. This section strives to demonstrate that these expats may not be achieving the experience or fulfillment– desire–that they intended. In recollecting these moments, I make use of a general psychoanalysis that focuses on the connection between identity and desire.

The final section combines portions of the previous sections into a series of concluding remarks. Putting the theory, literature review, and narrative into relation, we come to think about what this all means. What can be done about the hierarchy of suffering and what are practical movements to escape mis-identity. Is universal history too idealist, and should we instead focus on mediating a less than perfect reality? I

assert creating alternative narratives and emphasizing reflexive thinking and circumspect are key to combatting 'thingness' and the fear of alterity.

In unison, these three sections present a critique of the current moment, the positivist drive, and the emphasis on a purported objectivity. From this critique, I hope to add more insight to the debate surrounding what I believe is the most pressing issue of our time–pervasive and seemingly never-ending global inequality. The hierarchy of suffering asserted here, is a pernicious and obtuse construction that only works to further a social hegemony of antagonism and trauma that is truly zero sum.

CHAPTER II

THEORY

A. Hegel and the Master-Slave

The initial reason for superimposing Hegelian dialectics over the tenuous relationship between Northern NGO workers and Lebanon, is that many are quick to ascribe Northern expats with privileged material identities that assume some fulfillment. Being one, and knowing many of these people, I am keenly aware that this projected privilege doesn't generally equate to fulfillment. Of course, many in the expat space are materially privileged, as comes with most voluntary travel anywhere in the world–being a greatly expensive task. However, I also knew that many of the people in this sector were not particularly pleased in this privilege, nor the role it played in their work and the identity projected onto them. My nascent understanding of Hegel's Master-Slave was piqued, as I remembered undergraduate lectures about how the Master didn't benefit from their privileged identity in the end, as they were proven to be perversely the Slave of the Slave. I thought, perhaps this setting served as a good example of a purported Master identity ironically being Slave.

Hegel's philosophical system in the Phenomenology of Spirit describes the progression of human consciousness towards ultimate ration, or 'Geist' (Spirit). On this path, he develops a circular logic through which the development of consciousness and history is meant to be conveyed. The Hegelian path towards full actualization in absolute spirit (Geist) is validated by its end, and as in any great story, the end comes to fully explain the beginning. Barry Cooper sums this up by explaining "After about six hundred pages the text comes to an end and everything is explained, including the

beginning. Indeed, the end is a return to the beginning".[7] Hegel's phenomenology is a teleological theory of history and becoming that relies on a linear progression and ending. This is a view expounded on by Alexander Kojeve in his famous lectures encapsulated by the phrase now referred to as 'the end of history'. Hegel's path towards completing history and fully realizing consciousness is reliant on a culmination of the history and being that has so far been analyzed and described; this is expressed in the Kojevian espouse of 'the end of history is the death of man'.[8] If Hegel's formulation of Geist were to be enacted, the linear progression described in the Phenomenology would be of no more use in the face of an 'absolute ration'– Spirit. In this way, Hegel's phenomenology is an idealist story in which there is a universal ending in unity, and from it, emancipation.

The Lord and the Bondsman dialectic, popularly retranslated as the 'Master-Slave', is perhaps the most well-known of the sections described in the Phenomenology. Like all of Hegel's writing, it leaves plenty of room for interpretation and contention.[9] The Master-Slave section delves into such concepts as intersubjectivity, reciprocity, the birth of consciousness and social ontology more broadly. The dialectic's popularity largely hinges in its praxis–presenting Hegel's idealism through a story of two characters. It portrays an ontological need for individuals to interact with other individuals to gain perception, and from it, meaning. This in turn, serves as the basis for the socio-political realm, and the dialectic can be further extrapolated onto society; Leo Rauch calls this a

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[7] Cooper, B. (1984). *The end of history: An essay on modern hegelianism*. University of Toronto Press.P 5

[8] Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel: Leçons sur la Phénoménologie de l'Esprit*, p. 388; quoted in OC XII, 362.

[9] This itself is a Kojevian interpretation and translation. See, Kojève, A. (1980). *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*. Cornell University Press.

"microsociety composed of two members".[10] In doing this, Hegel illustrates the bind of the individual to the Other and vice-versa, setting the basis for much of 'Continental philosophy'.

To summarize the specifics of the dialectic, Hegel conveys the story through the development of two individuals in a philosophic vacuum. These individuals are automatically– as humans with desires– "for itself". As humans "for itself" they have different desires, and because of this, they have different identities. However, they realize that they are not truly independent, as each being "for itself" is based on their joint mediation of each other's identities. Thus, being "for itself" is being for the Other and is mediated through the existence and alterity of the Other. Each side wants to be fully independent in "pure being-for-self" and wholly abstracted from the Other. This desire for phenomenological independence leads to strife with the Other, where they want to prove themselves independent through the Other's destruction (negation). The resulting 'battle to the death' is the fight to prove oneself independent from the Other. However, in this fight, one side eventually relents under the realization that the demise of one would be a total loss of being for both characters. In relenting, one of these characters makes themselves subservient and agrees to validate their 'opponent' as prime and independent. In this moment, they have realized that their opponent is perversely part of themselves. The eventual status-quo here becomes one of dominant and subjugated positions–or Master and Slave.

The Slave works for the Master, continuing to emphasize both the Masters individualism and dominance by mediating their negation of 'things'. Yet, the Slave implicitly understands the Masters dependence on them for phenomenological survival,

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[10] Hegel, G. W. F., Rauch, L., & Sherman, D. (1999). *Hegel's phenomenology of self-consciousness: text and commentary*. SUNY Press, 88.

as they had been the one who consciously relented and subsumed themselves. The Master, however, is dependent on their negation of 'things' and enjoys and consumes the fruits of the slave's labor through their work and shaping of 'things'. They serve as a purely negative ascription (pure negation), as they negate 'things' through the mediation of the Slave, as well as negating the Slave's identity as an equal; in doing this they come to ironically negate themselves. Since they are not equal and there isn't a complete reciprocity, the Master comes to be a 'slave to their desire', which abstracts them from 'real reciprocity'. The Slave supposedly becomes "conscious of what he truly is" through their toil and mediation of the 'thing' for the Master. In this, they gain some form of abstract independence from a connection to the physical world that isn't purely negative, since they labor rather than simply consume. The Master–stuck in a mode of 'pure negation'–figures that they are the "unessential consciousness", and because of this, the 'true' slave. "He in a way dies by winning the struggle for recognition and gaining that "lasting independence" (§189) that should bring him to Life".[11] However, without both being equal and "pure being-for-self", there isn't true recognition and self-consciousness, and because of this we are led to the next section on "unhappy consciousness".[12]

Eventually, Hegel's dialectics and the Phenomenology ends in "Aufhebung" or sublation. This sublation is generally a product of two negatives–the diametric antagonism between two contradictions– forming a larger positive. These sublations build on one another until they finally reach an end state of 'Geist'– absolute spirit. The

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[11] Cobben, P. G. Thinghood, Life, Desire.

[12] This whole paragraph reflects the Lord and Bondsman section from the Phenomenology. Hegel, G. W. F. (2018). *Hegel: The phenomenology of spirit*. Oxford University Press, §178–196.

Master-Slave is but one short passage in dialectical sublation that then moves forward in continuing towards an idealist unity.

Much of the importance of the Master-Slave section lies in its ability to present a dialectic of identity and difference that demonstrates an ontological irony of mutual constitution within the human condition.[13] The irony being, individuals want to have totally independent identities, yet they are mediated and defined (ontologically dependent) by the Other. Essentially, Hegel's path towards consciousness is paved in what Theodor Adorno labels an "ontological antagonism" between individuals.

> "we are dealing with the principle of mastery, the mastery of nature, which spreads its influence, which continues in the mastery of men by other men and which finds its mental reflex in the principle of identity, by which I mean the intrinsic aspiration of all mind to turn every alterity that is introduced to it or that it encounters into something like itself and in this way to draw it into its own sphere of influence."14

The paradox of a constitutive mutuality, yet the desire for wholly independent individual actualization demonstrates an obvious point of contention that seems quite prescient to the world of today. In globalized modernity, especially in 'rugged individualist' settings like the United States, the friction in identity and difference is extremely palpable–as is the socio-political entrenchment of identity politics. In fact, much of the 'Global North'–and indeed global society as a whole–has retreated to the confines of identity politics.[15] This suggests that Hegel's dialectic clearly has something to offer us in the present. The material basis of the dialectic also asserts the fundamental materialist connection between consciousness and nature.

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[13] Here I follow Andrew Cole, who emphasizes Hegel's dialectical contributions in establishing a dialectic of identity and difference, and from It the Other. See Cole, A. (2018). The Dialectic. *The Bloomsbury Companion to Marx*, 185.

[14] Adorno, "Lecture 1, 9 November 1965: The Concept of Contradiction", 9.

[15] Besley, T., & Persson, T. (2019). The rise of identity politics. *LSE Documents*.

There's much debate regarding Hegel's formulation of the Master-Slave and whether it's ahistorical and idealist, or firmly grounded in a historical period. The modern 'French' translation of Kojeve and his colleagues in Sartre, Fanon and others, semantically popularized what had been the 'Lord and Bondsman' in the more racialized terminology of 'Master' and 'Slave'.[16] The fact that Hegel had not used the German word for slave but instead the specific word for 'bondsman' is pointed to as evidence of the direct historicity of the dialectic.[17] Detractors of the historical viewpoint point to the obvious idealism inherent in essentially every other aspect of the Phenomenology, and doubt that this one specific section would be explicitly historical. For the uses of this current paper, I conceive of the Master-Slave as an allegory to a social ontology of power that is as evident today as it was when Hegel wrote at the beginning of the 19th century. This stance most closely follows Jean Hyppolite's proclamation of the Master-Slave as a "category of historical life".[18] Surely Hegel's Phenomenology–and indeed his canon–is based in the historical moment of experience from which dialectics and the contradiction between subject and object derive.[19] Yet, the influence of his lived historical experience cannot be narrowed to a single moment or event. Meaning, Hegel– like anyone, was at the whim of his lived experiences and the happenings around him in constructing his philosophy. However, it's impossible to say that his theory singularly reflects one historical event or happening. His historical moment at a crossroads between industrial capital and prior modes of production–

[16] Kojève, A. (1980). *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*. Cornell University Press.

[17] Hogan, B. (2023). Reading Fanon on Hegel. *Philosophy Compass*, *18*(8), e12939.

[18] Hyppolite, J. (1974). *Genesis and structure of Hegel's" Phenomenology of spirit"*. Northwestern University Press, 170.

[19] Dews, P. (1986). Adorno, post-structuralism and the critique of identity. *New Left Review*, *157*(1), 31.

namely that of feudalism–cannot be distanced from his work. Yet, it seems mostly circumstantial the attempts to specify his thought to a minute historic such as chattel slavery.[20]

Hegel's dialectic is an example of power and 'history being bound to repeat itself', or better yet Voltaire's proclamation that "History never repeats itself. Man always does". The ontological tension that inspired Hegel's formulation of the Master-Slave, as well as his social ontology that reflects this tension, is still present today. To return to Adorno's stipulation on this friction, "if there were such thing as an unchanging ontology, it would be the negative ontology of a perpetual antagonism".[21] This makes room to accommodate both the historical argument vis-à-vis Hegel's subjective experience, as well as maintaining the possibility of idealist emancipation and 'universal history'. Taking Hegel's dialectic as an expression of a continually repeated process of antagonism that has never achieved the theorized sublation, allows the logic to be extrapolated onto both past historical moments and present reality. If the dialectic had been completed in synthesis and sublation–whether in idealist thought or historical actuality (eventually being one in the same)– there would be no point or desire in theorizing about conflict and the lack within intersubjectivity (returning to "the end of history"). The impossible question is, whether this dialectical 'ontological antagonism' is to be overcome (the panacea of emancipation), or whether it is simply a product of being to be considered and mediated.

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[20] Buck-Morss, S. (2009). *Hegel, Haiti, and universal history*. University of Pittsburgh Press.

[21] Adorno, T. W. (2014). *Lectures on negative dialectics: fragments of a lecture course 1965/1966*. John Wiley & Sons, 201.

B. Lebanon: Identity and Difference

Identity is intrinsically a fluid dialectical journey, as it finds itself between the 'entity and the concept' and between essence and appearance.[22] To consider oneself in entity and appearance rather than essence and concept is to deny the nuance of change that happens in the passing of time and being. Adorno illustrates this through the image of someone in old age looking back at their youth and considering all their changes in identity, they look as if a "stranger to be detachedly observed".[23] To revel in identity is a deep exhibition of a dialectical stagnation with the desire to define oneself as separate from the Other. This stagnation is largely a product of Adorno's prementioned 'perpetual antagonism' that plays out in historical manifestations of oppression and the destruction of alterity; the greater the perceived difference, the more people turn towards identity. Yet, this stringent identity denies the inevitable changes associated with being and builds walls in attaining an attitude of self-reflection.

The dialectic of identity and difference and the entrenchment of identity politics is clearly broadcast in the context of Beirut and Lebanon. For a small country with a relatively small population, Lebanon holds a vast array of ethnic, ethno-religious and religious groups, with 18 different sects being recognized by the government. This mélange of identities has created an aura of academic fetishization around it for those categorized with a 'Global North' identity. Countless professionals in various sectors ranging from humanitarian aid, to those in the policy world, to members of various academic fields, and others, come to work and conduct research. Much of the Global

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[22] Adorno, T. (2003). *Negative dialectics*. Routledge, 153.

[23] Ibid, 154.

Norths interest in Lebanon, it seems, is specifically geared towards a fascination in its identity and difference.

Amongst all the identity and difference of Lebanon, the identity of 'Northern expat' comes to work generally in the various sectors of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), education, policy and journalism. Much of this work is done under the auspices of 'development' and humanitarian aid. This expat demographic adds even more layers of identity and difference to the existing sectarian puzzle. In many ways, the 'expat' layers come to represent the deepest exhibitions of difference, as by virtue of their historical experience, they share less in common with the various sects. The expat class generally represents difference in both their historical (cultural) past, and in material privilege; because of this they represent obvious vessels of difference.

Within the 'expat class' itself, there are certainly various manifestations of identity and difference–especially regarding the vast diversity of nationalities. Further, even within these various nationalities there are clear divides in identity. Being so disparate in their identities, many expats find solidarity with one another, and this becomes very clear in certain areas of Beirut. Specific neighborhoods, bars, restaurants, cafes, and universities demonstrate the ease in which expats find and associate with one another. In this way, Beirut and Lebanon represents a setting for both the formation and reification of old and new identities and the accompanying projection of difference. The neighborhoods I've lived in, for instance, Gemmayze and Hamra, both have large contingents of expats from what many label as the 'Global North'.

These various expats are easy targets for many, including the prementioned Lebanese friends, because generally they in some variation i) are perceived to have stark cultural (historical) differences and little contextual understanding, ii) differences

in material privilege and access to 'things' and capital, iii) solidarity amongst 'themselves'–limited social-group crossover, and IV) the least 'real' connection to the land and 'actual work'–labor. In many ways, as I will attempt to demonstrate here, this group is projected with a Master ascription and identity.

The expat class is by and large wealthier and–for those who work– better paid than the numerous local identities. Almost always, expats who work and those who study are intrinsically mediated through locals more bound to the material world of 'things'. The various topics of academic interest (study) as well as many of the humanitarian and development projects, are further abstractions and representations of identity and history that have been supplied by generations who have engaged in real toil and experience– having lived the reality of the Lebanese context of 'perpetual antagonism'. The shaping of the various socio-political realities of such interest and employment, are based in the identities of those who have generationally shaped the landscape both physically and socially. Take for example, the fascination in Lebanon's consociational governance model, or the development of its downtown by Solidere– their existence's belie deeper stories of societal struggles for power, identity, and recognition. Much like with the Slave's labor on the material 'things', no amount of labor will bring the Lebanese identities the same type of possession and usage as that exercised by the Other–or in this case, the expats.[24] To the Northern expats, the various Lebanese identities represent a different sense of alterity than they project intersocietally, largely because they appear as further abstractions of difference. Lebanese identities are generally unable to use their history in the same way as the Northern expats. Certainly, Lebanese work in the humanitarian, academic, and development spaces, but as I will

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[24] Mitri, D. (2014). Challenges of aid coordination in a complex crisis: An overview of funding policies and conditions regarding aid provision to Syrian refugees in Lebanon. *CivilSociety*, 32.

describe later, they are almost always unable to profit and advance with the same ease and extent as their expat colleagues. In this way, defining difference is a tool of hierarchy, advancement, and validity– or more simply power–within the global setting.

The expat class in their various inclinations are largely 'slaves to desire', the desire– in end effect– being to utilize the experiences and labor of the various Lebanese identities to mediate their own identity in a beneficial way. This desire, much like in Hegel's construction, isn't explicitly obvious– the Master isn't simply anointed Master. Likewise, many of the expats are only subconsciously aware of their roles as Master; this only becomes clear in relation to the various privileges in possession they have over most of the other identities and population at large. However, for many Lebanese, they understand their positioning in the 'Slave' ascription through their mediation of these expats' desires and the clear juxtaposition in possession of 'things'.

Serving as a 'Master' ascription in the minds of many, it's assumed that the expats relation is purely negative (pure negation); and the focus is on how greatly they benefit in comparison (and at the detriment) of the various local identities. There is little thought paid to the abstract suffering and loss inflicted upon the expat by their projection into the Master role. The focus is almost always on their positions as dominant, rather than on the deeper essence of being the Slave of the Slave. Widespread fears within expat communities of certain neighborhoods, towns and areas, as well as at times certain sectarian groups, assert a 'Slaveness'. Their abstract relation to 'things'– being both the local identities and the land–leaves them in fear of certain activities and places. Their abstraction from other identities and actual labor leaves a psyche of paranoia. This paranoia and fear are part and parcel of a battle for possession and

dominance of 'things' that derive from the ontological basis of the dialectic of Master-Slave and identity and difference.

C. Possession, 'Things' & the Failures of Binary

Through Hegel we come to understand that 'things' are independent objects that mediate difference, desire and consciousness.[25] In regard to the bondsman on the path towards self-consciousness, Hegel describes "a consciousness which is not purely for itself but for another" as the form of 'thinghood'. "The Serf is the one who shapes the living Thing, he is a "consciousness in the form of *thinghood*" (§189), who externalises the simple unity of Self-consciousness — the inner difference of Self and Other — in the manipulation of an object as its other".[26] Generally, we think of there being a bifurcation between things and people, with people having a special status vis-à-vis being.[27] In the Lord and Bondsman, material is the easiest stand in for 'things', as things are what the Bondsman labors on to assert their independence, and what the Master has pure negation of through their enjoyment. The battle over 'things' is a battle to control the mediation of difference and desire. Without the sublation into self-consciousness, the Slave remains in the view of the Master as a 'thing' as they simply mediate their desires and aren't allowed the special status that a mutually constitutive (unity of Self and Other) self-consciousness enacts.

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[25] *Hegel: The phenomenology of spirit*. §114

[26] Cobben, P. G. Thinghood, Life, Desire.

[27] Kurki, V. (2017). Animals, slaves, and corporations: analyzing legal thinghood. *German Law Journal*, *18*(5),1070.

To return to Adorno's materialist interpretation of dialectics, human 'mastery over nature' is part of the procession of human mastery over one another. Given the material worlds primacy in the birth of perception ('experience') and society, mastery over nature supplies a power over perception and identity.[28] Fundamentally, the battle of identity and difference in the Master and Slave is over 'things', and a battle of possession.[29] The Master comes to possess things through desire and pure negation. The Slave is the Slave because they don't totally negate things through consumption, but instead work to produce the things for the Other. Possession both makes the Master the Master, but also simultaneously the Slave of the Slave. Similarly, the Slave's lack thereof makes them the Slave, but also saves them from being the Slave of the Slave. The expats are the easiest target in this jumble of identity, because of their abstracted difference through a general projected proximity to 'things', possession and pure negation. However, the battle for possession and ostensible 'Master-ness' goes on within its own ranks in the same way it goes on within Lebanese society between sects and inter-sect. This battle for identity through possession is one that happens on every level of society down to each individual relation. In this way, the battle for possession is the battle over 'things', and identity is inextricably tied to a proximity to 'things'.

The more possession of 'things' one has, or the more 'mediation of desire' one accesses, the closer they are to being the Master (or perversely the Slave of the Slave). The expat fear of going to certain areas and regions, especially in the Lebanon of today– where poverty is widespread–is certainly both an acknowledgement of possession and a certain Master-ness, but also ironically an admission of a certain 'Slaveness'. The battle

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[28] Classic Materialist logic that perception (consciousness) is dependent on food, shelter, subsistence etc.

[29] Cole, A. (2019). *The birth of theory*. University of Chicago Press, 72.

for identity through possession creates a hierarchy of 'have' and 'have nots', and instead of the 'have nots' being happy within their role in the dialectic, they are constantly trying to gain access to 'things'. This, it seems, is where Hegel's idealism goes astray in the historical application of the dialectic. In reality, instead of being happy just working on 'things' with the supposed independence that brings, 'have nots' –or the oppressed of the dialectic–are constantly trying to gain in possession. Again, this follows Adorno's 'perpetual antagonism' stipulation that leads to his opus in 'Negative Dialectics', where he questions the logic of this dialectical equation (something I will return to later). Under Hegel's construction, this represents a false consciousness of sorts where the Slave role is perversely seeking out the Masters 'pure negation'. This leads to a certain questioning of the binary of the Master-Slave and the positive progressive powers of joint negation.[30]

Certainly, the biggest reason for the failure of consciousness to progress in the way Hegel prescribes, is the reality that there is no objective historic Maser-Slave dynamic as dichotomous as that presented in the Phenomenology. Rather than a simple binary of Master-Slave, there are infinite jumbles of expression, dominance, and subjugation that are transient and changing. The lack of objective ascriptions within the historical arena of Master-Slave interaction makes the equation of the dialectic incredibly difficult. Instead, the ever-varying formation of identities leaves an indiscernible pendulum oscillating between sometimes 'Master' and other times 'Slave', leaving a wake of alterity and trauma. People strive for a proximity to 'things' and 'material' at the cost of those whose difference had previously restricted their possession. Possession defines

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[30] This is a major critique in Adorno's work, that Hegel's mathematic formula in constructing a positive out of the negation of negation is contradictory to other parts of his theory. See: Adorno, T. (2003). *Negative dialectics*. Routledge, 160.

identity based on a proximity to 'thingness' and material, and difference begets a certain sameness in reciprocity. The sameness in reciprocity corresponds to either a continuation of the battle for 'things' and 'thingness'– an ontological antagonism– or a turn towards a real recognition both in and for the Other and oneself. This real recognition would be either a unity in the I and Other (for Hegel), or a 'reflexive' version of 'non-identity' that is content with the inherent lack within alterity (for Adorno).

The expat identity–like any other identity– is of course not objectively Master; within itself there is a myriad of identities and difference that varyingly conflict and masquerade at various times. For instance, I can remember some of my Northern expat colleagues questioning the motivations of a Finnish roommate of mine for being in Beirut. Not only did they (Finnish roommate) have no background and grounding in Lebanon, but she was compensated quite well for her work at the 'Finnish Institute'. The Finnish reputation of a basis in plentiful material accommodation and a proximity to 'things' vis-à-vis their socio-political state, combined with her (contextually) generous compensation and seeming further abstraction from 'the real', all were taken as projections of their 'supra' 'Master' ascription. Yet, all of us were identities from the Global North, all contextually materially privileged, and all inherently distanced from the specificities of Lebanese labor and experience. The Master ascription is projected in response to one's identity and can obviously never be 'objective'. Rather, the Master is yet another term in the ascription of difference and the furthering of a stagnant sense of identity.

Likewise, for the Lebanese, the complicated sectarian reality has a perpetual jostle ('antagonism') between identities for dominance and power. The expats are the easiest

target of their ascription because they are the furthest abstracted from the world of the 'real' (meaning labor and material). However, they are by no means objective global 'Masters' and neither is any single Lebanese identity an objective 'Slave'. Both the various expat and the Lebanese identities are continually fighting to define their dominance and subjugation at every moment and interaction with the appearance of difference. The Master-Slave circuit towards synthesis and sublation clearly hasn't been completed, and it's stuck in the negative reciprocity of a collective 'thinghood'. Rather than the microcosm of Hegel's description, reality doesn't present a trite binary of Master and Slave, rather in global society the roles and accompanying identities are constantly changing and repeating themselves in similar but not identical ways; this is the continual dialectical circuit.

D. Subinfeudation

Andrew Cole in his chapter aptly titled "The Real Meaning of Hegel's Lord and Bondsman" urges a feudal historical context in examining the dialectic; refers to the process of "subinfeudation". In the context he's writing, he uses "subinfeudation" to describe Hegel's inquiry pertaining to the "ever-ascending orders of domination" under feudalism.[31] The Lord always had a higher Lord for whom he is in the role of Bondsman or 'Slave'; there is perpetual further hierarchy. In relation to the previous stipulations on the inability to label any objective 'Slave', not only are Masters actually Slave because of their negative relation to 'things', but they are also Slave because there is always a further 'supra' Master for whom they mediate identity. Taking this out of the context that Cole examines it, this seems quite applicable to the point I have been

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[31] Ibid, 79.

trying to excavate. Transposing the dialectic from its abstract philosophic binary onto society and historical experience conveys the complications of constructing a tangible Master-Slave hierarchy. As the dialectic is extrapolated within the context of global history and society, the nearly infinite expressions of identity and possession become impossible to sort. Both the multiplicities of Northern expat and Lebanese identities will always be constituted through alterities that have varying and fluid expressions of possession. Every subjective Master in possession always has someone even more Master, and because of this they are Slave to that Master, yet also Slave because they are Master to someone else. Ato Seyki-Otu sums this up the issues of obtaining objective ascription in saying "human intercourse is a cyclical experience of mastery and bondage: no one has enduring privilege of lordship; no one is condemned to a perpetual burden of servitude".[32]

Some may consider the dialectic worthless because the roles of Master and Slave become so obtuse as to be useless. However, the Master-Slave and its contradictions in its inability to fundamentally assert stringent objective Master or Slave identities uncovers the logic that belies a deeper reality– perpetual antagonism. The desire to create a hierarchy of identity and difference through possession alerts us to a continued preponderance towards stagnant concepts of identity and appearance. This antagonistic relationship between the I and Other serviced through a negative reciprocity constitutes fundamental mis-identity. In mis-identity, society is never seen for its innate humanity and attached inherent fluidity, but instead is constantly projected as stagnant objective 'things'. In the perpetual problem of mis-identity vis-à-vis 'the cyclical experience' of dominance and subjugation corresponding to the lack of dialectical sublation, historical

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[32] Bernasconi, R., Sekyi-Otu, A., Tembo, J., Stawarska, B., & Nethersole, R. (2020). *Violence, Slavery and Freedom Between Hegel and Fanon*. Wits University Press, 11.

life has implemented a system to emphasize and organize this 'thingness'. Jefferey Noonan says: "reciprocity can be manifested in two opposite ways: either i) each treats the other as an object, or ii) each treats the other as it treats itself.".[33] The trauma of perpetual mis-identity within experience and historical life has obviously led to the former, where the 'objectification' and 'thingness' of negative reciprocity is the *prima facie* logic of the social world. From the impersonal logic mandated by the evident continued failure of sublation within the dialectic, we are led to our current historical moment–that of a capitalist hegemony.

E. Negative Reciprocity and Capitalism

The Phenomenology's publication in 1807 places it at the emergence of global capitalism. Authors like Susan Buck-Morss and Andrew Cole may advocate for specific explicitly historical interpretations of the Master-Slave dialectic, with Cole urging a feudal framework and Buck-Morss one of racial slavery, but teleologically it becomes one of burgeoning capitalist domination. Cole speaks of the prescience in the dialectic predicting and foreshadowing the conditions that Marx and his acolytes would later critique; undoubtedly this is because it held a condemnation of the antagonisms of 'early capitalism'.[34] Indeed, Hegel both had knowledge and, in some capacity, had studied Adam Smith and *The Wealth of Nations*.[35] Surely, his formation of the Phenomenology and the Master-Slave were partially informed by Smith's thoughts:

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[33] Noonan, J. R. (1993). *The Concept of Human Essence in Hegel and Marx* (Doctoral dissertation), 33.

[34] Cole, A. (2004). What Hegel's master/slave dialectic really means. *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, *34*(3), 577-610.

[35] Henderson, J. P., & Davis, J. B. (1991). Adam Smith's influence on Hegel's philosophical writings. *Journal of the History of Economic Thought*, *13*(2), 184-204.

> "Since work is performed only [to satisfy] the need as abstract being- for-itself, the working becomes abstract as well... Each individual because he is an individual here, labors for a need. Yet the content of his labor goes beyond his need; he labors for the needs of many, and so does everyone. Each satisfies the needs of many, and the satisfaction of one's own particular needs is the labor of many others. Since his labor is abstract in this way, he behaves as an abstract I - according to the mode of thinghood - not as an all- encompassing Spirit, rich in content, ruling a broad range and being master of it."[36]

Here we see Hegel critiquing the division of labor as something that promotes 'thinghood' and distances sublation and Spirit. "Mode of Thinghood" should be construed as an object of mediation, rather than one being 'in and for themselves'. While taking the Hyppolite position regarding the dialectic as a "condition of historical life", we come to see that Hegel was undoubtedly informed by his experience and perceptions of an early capitalism. His historical existence being before the onset of full-on industrial capital surely accounts for the limits of his social-economic critique compared to that of the later Marx and Engels, but his construction of the dialectic and emphasis on the universality of labor in identity prefaces the coming abstraction of industrialization. As a condition of historical life, the Master-Slave illustrates an 'antagonistic' logic that spans the transition from feudalism into capitalism, and it's likely this is what Hegel was describing.[37] Instead of capitalism being 'Hegel's metaphysical monster come alive' as some assert, it's more likely that Hegel is describing the metaphysical condition of Adorno's 'perpetual antagonism' that allowed negative reciprocity such forms as 'feudalism' and 'capitalism'.[38] The negative reciprocity of domination and 'thinghood' described by the Master-Slave existed in

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[36] Hegel, G. W. F. (1983). Hegel and the human spirit: A translation of the Jena lectures on the philosophy of spirit (1805-6) with commentary,121.

[37] Cole, A. (2004).

[38] Smith, T. (2022). Hegel's Logic and Marx's Concept of Capital. *Hegel Bulletin*, *43*(2), 279.

both feudal society and in nascent capitalism.[39] Capitalism represented a new vessel in

the structuring of power and abstract 'thingness' that had also existed in the different

form of earlier feudal arrangements (as Cole asserts). In fact, as we learn through Marx,

capitalism is perfect at abstracting a mode of 'thingness' and the alienation of universal

labor. As Tony Smith concisely sums: "Capitalism is a historically unprecedented

system of impersonal domination, to which capitalists are themselves subjected. It's a

system of the domination of things".[40]

Marx, taking a cue from Hegel, elaborates further on such topics as possession,

labor, domination, alienation and identity. Marx's relation to Hegel in the formation of

historical materialism is popularly described as an 'inversion' of the Master-Slave,

where the Slave-labor-material relation is emphasized as the engine of historical

progress. Indeed, many Marxists following in the footsteps of Hegel, critique capitalism

as an abstract force works to reduce people (labor) to the status of mere objects, or

worse, *commodities*.[41] The key component in this critique is the proclivity in the

capitalist form of value to not differentiate between material and labor. Both material

('things') and labor (identity) are assigned values on the same impersonal scale under

capitalism. The value of labor and material are both broadcast as worth some abstract

monetary judgement that works to equivocate them. Value illustrated generally in

monetary (absolute commodity) terms comes not only to define an economic worth, but

also a more general worth in terms of an all-encompassing identity. This identity based

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[39] This is based on Cole's assertion vis-à-vis feudalism, my assertion pertains more to today's reality in terms of modern capitalism.

[40] Smith, T. (2022), 284.

[41] Fraser, N. (2014). Can society be commodities all the way down? Post-Polanyian reflections on capitalist crisis. *Economy and Society*, *43*(4), 541-558.

in 'thingness' is of course fundamentally mis-identity because it exists through negative

reciprocity. Exchanging labor is another facet of the same market that trades in all other

commodities; the exchange of labor becomes fundamentally no different than the

trading of all other 'things' in goods and materials. Labor becomes an object in the

same way as goods and material open to the abstract whims of "the bad infinity of pure

quantitative expansion".[42] Marx sums this negative reciprocity up saying:

> "The reciprocal and all-sided dependence of individuals who are indifferent to one another forms their social connection. This social bond is expressed in *exchange value*, by means of which alone each individual's own activity or his product becomes an activity and a product for him; he must produce a general product – *exchange value*, or, the latter isolated for itself and individualized, *money*. On the other side, the power which each individual exercises over the activity of others or over social wealth exists in him as the owner of *exchange values*, of *money*. The individual carries his social power, as well as his bond with society, in his pocket. Activity, regardless of its individual manifestation, and the product of activity, regardless of its particular make-up, are always *exchange value*, and exchange value is a generality, in which all individuality and peculiarity are negated and extinguished."[43]

Here in this excerpt from the Grundrisse, we see Marx emphasizing the negative

reciprocity of 'thinghood' as a social mode. This 'thinghood' as a social system is

mediated through exchange values represented by money (absolute commodity).

Money, as a representation of negative reciprocity and complete abstraction– or

"generality" –negates identity and thus true being-for-self. Identity instead becomes

mediated by the possession of money and its relation to 'things'.

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[42] Smith, T. (2022), 287.

[43] Marx, K. (2005). *Grundrisse: Foundations of the critique of political economy*. Penguin UK, 157.

F. Capitalist Positivism, Identity and Development

Through identity/difference and its mediation through possession and 'thingness', we see the antagonistic ontological bind between consciousness and material being the "bad infinity" of 'endless growth'. Not only must the negation of material 'things' expand, but so must the imperative for identities to be constituted by 'thingness'. Akin to the "spatial fix" of David Harvey, identity is something that is both negated and defined under capitalism.[44] Capitalism simultaneously defines some level of objective mis-identity vis-à-vis 'thingness', but also negates fluid subjective identity. The 'fix' here for capitalism, is to continually draw more identities into the vacuous objectivity of thingness. Part of the insatiable, expansive, and defining logic of a fluid capitalism is the continual proselytizing of identities into the world of 'things'. Everything in both material and human identity must be stagnated into a positivist assertion of value. Entwined with the spatial dynamic of expansion is a psychological prerogative; this further validates the physical component. Harvey was writing on this dynamic in response to globalization and the 'development agenda'. The ontological antagonism that allows the perpetual thirst for more space and objects of alterity to define and mis-identify–combined with the attached "profit motive"–is what underlies this.[45]

This "negative infinity" logic of infinite expansion and recreation described variously by proponents of materialist thought in the likes of Lenin (imperialism) or Gramsci (cultural hegemony) assert the perpetual antagonism inherent in a world of

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[44] Harvey, D. (2001). Globalization and the "spatial fix". *geographische revue: Zeitschrift für Literatur und Diskussion*, *3*(2), 23-30.

[45] Adorno, T. W. (2014). *Lectures on negative dialectics: fragments of a lecture course 1965/1966*. John Wiley & Sons, 9.

'things'.[46] A false consciousness pervades those under capitalisms guise offering a figment of individuality and fluidity.[47] The impersonal domination of 'thingness' replicates itself by perpetually spreading its virtues and recreating oppressive hierarchies of purported Master-ness and Slave-ness through empirical assertions of value. The continually larger the constituency of mis-identities, the harder it is to ascertain individual proximity to 'thingness' and have any reflexive understanding of subjective identity that works towards a 'real' reciprocity.[48] The development agenda and its basis in linear globalized capital, reduces all of those it envelops to a paranoia of (mis)identity politics. The specter of these stagnant identities urges the denizens of capitalism to continually recreate 'objective' hierarchies of privilege and suffering that are functionally impossible.[49]

Identity politics under capitalism are based in a continual examination of the Other's possession and proximity to 'thingness', and from it a defining of oneself. The unsated "bad infinity" here is that this antagonistic logic is universal and constitutes an ever-shrinking societal belonging where people progressively diverge into ever smaller social circles of identity. The I constantly compare themselves to the Other in an ever-narrowing scope until this includes even those of closest relation. The paranoia over

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[46] Lears, T. J. (1985). The concept of cultural hegemony: Problems and possibilities. *The American historical review*, 567-593; Lenin, V. I. (1966). *Imperialism and the Split in Socialism*. Moscow: Progress Publishers.

[47] What I mean here is: capitalism tries to convince people that it is the best system for exhibiting 'real' identity through commodity fetishism and various material displays of difference. Capitalism's (as a fluid system) use of these indicators of tribalism and difference is opportunistic in its quest to perpetuate an antagonistic logic. To believe in these manipulations of mis-identity is to bolster this antagonism (false consciousness).

[48] This is also the base of a critique of capitalisms fluidity in the use of race and marginalized identities to sow discord and prevent solidarity. However, given the limits of this paper, I digress in directly exploring this any further.

[49] Functionally impossible for people on a social level; of course, very functional on the impersonal capitalist level.

'things', and the adjacent perceived hierarchy of privilege, works to fundamentally disrupt and disfigure all social bonds and divert them into competition. The fight for a proximity to 'thingness' to construct identity, leaves the self increasingly only for-themselves, yet simultaneously completely abstracted from themselves.

G. Summation and Return to Narrative

It may be useful here to summarize what exactly I've tried to construct in this theoretical section, as to set up the 'methodological' narrative that follows. I started with Hegel and his formative use of dialectics to introduce a social ontology through the Master/Slave. Next, I reinterpreted the Master-Slave into a more simplistic rendering of identity and difference and a fight for primacy. This fight for primacy demonstrates Adorno's 'antagonistic ontology'. Given that this fight is bound to a materialist logic of existence vis-à-vis 'things', I asserted that any formation of identity and difference is related to a proximity to thingness. This proximity to thingness, however, isn't generally explicitly clear and leads us into subinfeudation, where there are infinite expressions of hierarchy and dominance. Subinfeudation demonstrates that the Master-Slave ontology doesn't function as a simple binary. From this, I return to Adorno and his 'perpetual antagonism' by offering that Hegel was critiquing the antagonistic ontological logic that underlies capitalism. Through a brief turn to Marx, we see the similarities in Hegel and his critiques of capitalism, and how this reflects the systems predilection towards perfecting the 'thingness' derived from an ontological antagonism. It perfects 'thingness' through offering positivist assertions of value and worth that can be transposed onto anything and anyone. Identity and difference do not escape these empiricisms and are led towards stagnant conceptions. These stagnant conceptions try

to construct an 'objective' hierarchy of privilege that is fundamentally impossible under the subjective reality.

Under the various levels and palimpsests of projected and ascribed identities in capitalist 'thinghood', we see a common thread of mis-identity and false consciousness. This misidentification promotes a trauma and fear towards alterity that is pervasive in various manifestations globally. The deeper the exhibitions of identity and difference, the greater the response in consciousness and psychology. Beirut and Lebanon are places of deep division and alterity where examples of mis-identity and its accompanying fear and trauma surface constantly in fluid expressions– where "the physical moment tells our knowledge that suffering ought not to be, that things should be different".[50] If one listens and observes closely, they may hear– to borrow from John Holloway– "*the scream"*, a constant echo of "no" to 'thingness'.[51]

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[50] Adorno, T. (2003). *Negative dialectics*. Routledge, 203.

[51] Holloway, J. (2002). Beyond Power. *& "Twelve Theses on Changing the World without Taking Power", http://www. commoner. org. uk/previous_issues. htm*, (4), 050131.

CHAPTER III
NARRATIVE

"Today, I presume, nobody in earnest can be reconciled or even seek reconciliation with a world of sharp contrasts between gated communities and urban ghettoes, where the prospect of any substantive social solidarity seems completely obliterated."[52]

A. Methodology

For the narrative section of this paper, I make use of both general psychoanalysis as well as autoethnography. Autoethnography is needed in connecting critical theory to my experiences in Beirut and the pretense for the subjects of this paper. Psychoanalysis, which is seemingly always providing some level of subtext within critical theory, is also within the autoethnography. Much of my perception of various memories within my autoethnography was grounded in the implicit and unconscious admissions of the Other. Psychoanalysis provides a framework for the inevitability and importance of unconscious and "reflection resistant" motivations in creating identity.[53] When a subject offers you language or movement, they offer you an instantaneous ephemeral glimpse into their perception, consciousness, and structure.

Obviously, this type of narrative methodology is very far from the positivist aspirations of a 'real' or 'objective' truth. Yet, this subjective manner of recall and its attempts to trace admissions of ideology, perversely both express and embody some 'truth' and reality. In this coming section, I voice my experience as I have structured

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[52] Abazari, A. (2020). *Hegel's Ontology of Power: The Structure of Social Domination in Capitalism*. Cambridge University Press, 2.

[53] Honneth, A. (2007). Chapter Six. The Work Of Negativity A Psychoanalytical Revision Of The Theory Of Recognition. In *Recognition, Work, Politics* (pp. 127-136). Brill.

and reflected on it, which inherently offers some value; admittedly and purposefully this escapes the confines of 'objective truth'.

B. Compulsion to repeat: Desire, Identity & Psychoanalysis

The connection between critical theory, Hegel's system, and psychoanalysis is simultaneously obvious and contradictory. Hegel's construction of self-consciousness is of course rooted in a psychoanalytical connection between the unconscious and desire where: "Hegel builds a second stage of "desire into the process of acquiring self-consciousness".[54] Hegel and critical theory's fascination with the motivations of the subject are dependent on some level of psychoanalytical analysis. Yet, the more abstract emancipatory inklings of Hegel and critical theory are at odds with the clinical and empirical motivations of psychoanalysis.

Quite generally, however, psychoanalysis "interprets the world and uncovers the repetition at work" and "exists simply as a negation of identity and power".[55] In focusing on the compulsion to repeat, psychoanalysis delves into the suffering of the subject within a global society inherently constituted by desires and consciousness. Freud's death drive and its basis in consciousness' aspiration for omnipotence, is inextricable from conceptions of identity formation and Hegel's 'battle to the death', as well as stipulations regarding the 'absolute lord' (death). This innate lack between subject and the very condition of their existence, attempts to convey the repetition of negative modes of reciprocity and certain anti-social behaviors. Lacan's 'master

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[54] Honneth, A. (2015). From desire to recognition: Hegel's account of human sociality. In *Debates in Nineteenth-Century European Philosophy* (pp. 81-94). Routledge.

[55] McGowan, T. (2013). *Enjoying what we don't have: The political project of psychoanalysis*. U of Nebraska Press, 6.

signifier' also has its basis in the Hegelian conception construction of domination and exploitation in the Master-Slave, expounding similarly to the ideations of this paper that "the crisis, not of the discourse of the master, but of the capitalist discourse, which is its substitute, has begun".[56]

Yet, although not offering modes of emancipation, psychoanalysis is grounded in improving circumspect: "the insight that, to begin with, the human is always a divided, inwardly ruptured being, yet one which, thanks to its inherent interest in extending its 'inner' freedom, has the ability to reduce or even overcome that ruptured-ness through its own reflective activity".[57] Thus, generally psychoanalysis serves as a good interrogation of the "neuroses" in the interrelation between identity, desire, consciousness and its manifestations in power structures–specifically here, capitalism. Manifestations of the unconscious in language and actions better inform us on tangible expressions of identity, negative reciprocity and the repetitive mediation of desires through 'thingness'. Thus, in the next section, I take interactions– some more obvious than others– as admissions of various identities and desires. Psychoanalysis grounds and supplements the practical narrative's connection to critical theory.

C. Beirut

The inequality of Beirut is visceral. Everywhere you go there are signs of exclusion and broad divide. In the wealthier neighborhoods, it's common to see teams of private security waiting outside buildings. Upscale restaurants and cafés seem to have squads of

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[56] Jacques Lacan, "Du discours psychanalytique" in Lacan in Italia/Lacan en Italie (1953-1978), ed. by Giacomo Contri (Milan: La salamandra, 1978) 10.

[57] Honneth, "Appropriating Freedom: Freud's Conception of Individual Self-Relation," in *Pathologies of Reason*, 127.

employees for every patron, dressed in ornate and archaic uniforms. Valets are omnipresent on every block for whatever business or event. People–largely women and children– crowd the sidewalk and street asking for money and food. Garbage men sweep perpetually dirty streets and pickup never-ending heaps of trash. Fisherman wait patiently for hours on the corniche for a catch from a sea known to be dangerously polluted. These are only some of the observations that become readily available to the observer in a short period of time in Beirut. If one dares towards further observation, they may make out clothes lines with laundry dangling from abandoned buildings, or corrugated roofs holding entire extended families. In this environment, one quickly comes to reflect on their identity and privilege.

The Global North has rampant issues with inequality, but largely not in the same form as Beirut. In the United States, the effects of gentrification are felt nearly immediately; neighborhoods change seemingly overnight in targeted 'development' gentrification campaigns and petit bourgeois demographic surges. In Beirut, a luxury building sits beside a long vacant apartment complex, and a shuttered luxury hotel overlooks multi-million-dollar yachts. Children begging for money in the street are nearly hit by speeding Mercedes G-Wagons and Range Rovers driven by those too busy or disinterested to look up from their iPhones. These glaring material contradictions are something those of privilege in the North hardly see, as the socio-political arrangements have successfully delineated and redlined the 'haves' from the 'have nots'. Rich suburbs and city districts are neatly divided from the ones that service them. In Beirut, the juxtaposition is an over stimulus of sorts–it's hard to reconcile the destitute starving child from the Louis Vuitton bag.

One way of coping with the over stimuli, is by eventually rationalizing the inequality as normative. Othering the space and declaring that this is just what happens in a place like Beirut is a common strategy. Declaration of the inevitability of this highly segmented reality is the easiest way to validate its existence. Declare "what can I do about it?" and observe all those who act as if this reality truly is normal. Join in the juxtaposition by hiring maids, tipping little, and curtly responding to those pleading for food or money– better yet, pretend these people don't exist. Make friends with locals who eat at the same dollarized institutions as yourself, and follow them to the fanciest bars, beach clubs, ski towns and other places and events. It's very easy for the material segmentation of Lebanese society to become normative. In fact, if it doesn't become normative in one way or another, it's very hard to consciously function on the daily. To focus on the layers of exploitation and low wages that abound in the scenery of a normal commute to school or work, is to live on the edge of mental chaos. However, there's always the creeping thought, as with all of life–what's my role in this? How much agency do I have in this reality?

Part of adopting this juxtaposition as a normative reality is further validating one's identity within this structure. If you socialize with those of a similar proximity to 'things'–who share in observing and normalizing the same content– the echo chamber becomes reality. Eat at the same restaurants, drink at the same bars, go to the same beach on the weekend, study at the same university; soon this is not a privileged reality– but rather your reality. Most of the world outside of this reality becomes ironically abstracted and alienated. It becomes weird to be poor, or go to public university, or to never eat and drink out, or to be from a certain area of the city. This is the fate of many

from the Global North who do any serious time in Beirut. A creeping deadness behind the eyes verifies that what you're seeing is indeed normal.

D. Constructing Global Northerners

There's a pervasive general sense in Beirut that 'Westerners', and those from the 'Global North' more generally, are materially privileged. Within this material privilege, is an assumption that these characters live fulfilling and 'charmed' lives. Those from the West, whether they announce themselves in their fashion choice, language, or some other signifier of identity, are met with assumptions about their positions as 'haves'. In my experience, this manifests in a variety of ways. In the streets, refugee's largely flock to Westerners–aware that they are both likely to have and possibly give them money. At restaurants, I've been with a large party that was given and charged for a bottle of wine that wasn't ordered nor on the menu; when this was mentioned it was met with "you can pay this, this amount is nothing for you". Even when I presented this thesis topic in a research and methodology class to an audience of almost all Lebanese, my mention of Global Northerners being judged as people of material wealth and power was met with eager nods of approval. Or, perhaps a Lebanese classmate will impress upon you the cars they drive and places they've been–assuming that as a Northerner, or a 'have', this is what impresses you.

Generally, if you are from the Global North, in Lebanon you will be seen as a person of wealth; largely, contextually this may be well founded. Such a tiny sliver of travelers–nonetheless people from the North in general– make it to either Lebanon or the Middle East. For those who do end up in Beirut, they are largely experienced travelers with university educations–both endeavors that require ample time and money.

In the mind of many, it seems, the Global North is some monolithic whole. Like the logic of Samir Amin and dependency theorists, a binary is drawn that casts a geographic ascription of 'have' and 'have not'.[58]

There is this sense that the Global North is this capitalist fairyland where everyone is glut and free to pursue whatever desires. Many–even those who have visited countries in the North– are less inclined to focus on the societal rot on display in the North– especially in a locale like the United States. It's not difficult to see a houseless person on the streets of the global city of New York; of course, the irony being, New York's juxtaposition as the center of global capital and markets, yet the preponderance of those that have been so obviously excluded. Certainly, many of the Northerners in Beirut are also foreign to the specificities of the depths of poverty in their own states; very few have ever experienced the poverty in the Global North, nor of course in the South.

Within these Northern states, there are huge hierarchies of 'haves' and possession of wealth. The opulence of globally consumed pop culture stars and notorious billionaires belies a more fundamentally depressed reality. Whatever one's position within this hierarchy of material possession, there are certainly many people with *much* more. These northerners who represent 'haves' and masters of material possession in Beirut, are not necessarily bestowed a similar ascription within their own societies.

Between the specific states that make up the monolithic 'North' there are of course particularities in locale and socio-political realities. The embedded liberalism of Northern Europe can hardly be compared to austerity ridden Greece, or the largely

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[58] In some ways, Amin and other dependency theorists are very helpful in elucidating the constitutive material bind between states. In the more reductive simple binary of Master-Slave this thought is useful, however this thought doesn't subscribe to the 'slave of a slave' or subinfeudation logic that truly broadcasts the dialectic's emancipatory potential. In this way, it gets caught in "middle level problems". See, Leys, C. (2005). *The rise & fall of development theory*. EAEP, East African Educational Publ, 123.

social-net free United States. Even within a place like the United States, the deindustrialized centers of Gary, Indiana–or the farms of Mississippi–look very different than the cosmopolitan gleam of Los Angeles or Manhattan. The binary of 'have' and 'have not' does little to interrogate these more minute differences within these states. Largely, within these settings, those from the Global North and even those from whatever state or province, have little in common and perhaps generally little affinity in their identity. Yet, when they come to Beirut, they easily settle into the ascription of Northerner or Westerner.

The classic liberal argument would assert that those in the Global North share the same 'values' or 'governance' and this is the vector of some mutual identity. This identity comes at the construction of difference and the 'Other', ala Edward Said's opus in Orientalism.[59] However, rather than this being reduced to race and a cultural prejudice, this is a representation of a deeper perpetual antagonism– one currently encapsulated by capitalism. Certainly, there are racial and cultural dynamic built into capitalist exploitation, but it is not the vector. The Northerners who come to Beirut aren't building their new identities based off a dialectic of race and culture, but rather the dialectic of possession. In their own societies, the Northerners are from disparate backgrounds, yet in Beirut they are identified as those with material possession; the predilection is for those with this ascription to coalesce.

Within these groups of Northerners who largely live and operate together, there are further specificities of difference and in this one can begin to witness subinfeudation and the unfolding of further difference. A drop in the value of the euro to the dollar, or

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[59] Said's work largely connects to the negative reciprocity in constructing identities: "To a certain extent modern and primitive societies seem thus to derive a sense of their identities negatively". Said, E. W. (2023). Orientalism. In *Social theory re-wired* (pp. 362-374). Routledge, 49.

the death of the Queen of England, may uncover further divides between us Northerners. These identities are artificial constructions of difference that only work to lull us into a false sense of safety; It's not hard to witness the infinite fissures between those encapsulated in the faulty monolithic binary.

Yet, in Lebanon, a lot of the nuance of identity and difference is thrown out in favor of the monolith. One of the few times one may hear claims of Lebanese solidarity is when in response to that of a Northerner. For both the Northerner and the Lebanese–whom in their own microcosms identify in breathtaking arrays of specificity– come to locate and define one another binarily. Like with Samir Amin, these come to represent broad ascriptions of possession that denigrate the larger picture– that of an epoch of capitalism that dominates everything and everyone.

The desire to build these binaries is part of the capitalist compulsion to repeat its basis in a perpetual antagonism. Settling for identities under the guise of a proximity to possession forms a false consciousness that only heightens the process of subinfeudation and unfulfillment. The everyday unraveling of these monoliths into further categories and delineations of identity and possession illustrates the futility in our repetition of a dichotomous reality.

E. Competition Amongst Haves

The constructed Global North identity comes to build a heavily segmented social scene in Beirut. Many of those within this expat designation come to remain almost fully within this exclusive community. Most from the Global North live with one another in a few specific neighborhoods, the popular ones being: Hamra, Gemmayze, Ashraefieh, Geitawi and Badaro. There are known flats in these neighborhoods that

perpetually cater to a rotating cast of Northerners. They frequent the same cafes and bars and eat at the same restaurants. Three universities largely cater to those Northerners in the academic realm, consisting of AUB, Lebanese American University (LAU) and University St Joseph (USJ). On the weekend, you can see the same people at the beaches in Batroun or the mountains of Faraya. These spaces are largely dollarized and off limits to those lacking in possession. The incestuous nature of these spaces comes to reify these Northern identities into an echo chamber where this experience is 'real' Lebanon.

Within the echo chamber of the exclusive spaces of the Northern expat in Lebanon, the battle for identity needs to continue. Given the narrowed social circles of the expat– one that rarely includes many Lebanese–this competition largely happens amongst other expats. Deliberations on where to get a coffee or a drink–something trivial– serve as moments to demonstrate one's taste and 'local' knowledge of the scene, rife with clashes on suitability. At every moment of interaction there stems the possibility for identity to be challenged and formed. Surely these interactions are omnipresent in global society at large, but in the context of a heavily delineated locale such as Beirut, these types of remarks work to construct walls and build further psychologies of exclusion and difference. These moments of 'subinfeudation' further distance these 'have' identities both from and into themselves.

F. Admissions of the 'Masters'

Within the Northern expats that come to Beirut, there's a delineation between those who come to work, and those who come for leisure, semesters abroad, or 'gap years'. Those that come for leisure are generally less rabidly ideological than those who come

for employment. While of course still ideological, the leisure types are generally

relatively unaware of many of the specificities relating to Lebanon, and because of this

come to learn with varying degrees of effort and prerogative. They are, in many ways,

at the total whim of mis-identity–and they largely come to have their identities

constructed in ways that that they had never considered. Being thrown into the

ideological and segmented space of Lebanon and its myriad of identities, these types are

largely pigeonholed into categorizations that they had never themselves perceived. This

can be highly confusing and generally leads either towards developing an ideological

doctrine or remaining perpetually aloof–both beckoning a retreat inward.

I have lived with and experienced many of these leisure types in my time in Beirut.

Because of Beirut's status as a past French colony ('mandate era'), as well as the

existence of a French university, Lebanon attracts many young French who come for

vacation, exchange semesters, or humanitarian volunteering. I've lived with three

people who fit into these types of categorizations. Of these three, two were largely

unideological about Lebanon, besides normative Western notions of a 'chaotic region'.

Largely, they had a very limited understanding concerning the complicated reality of the

sectarian state, and seemingly only had a limited desire in learning. Instead, Lebanon

seemingly perversely encouraged a retreat further into their French identity. Faced with

the alterity of Beirut, these characters operated in packs who would go to all the same

events and live in the same general areas. At any one time, at the café Sole Insight,

Tota, or Riwaq, one may find one of these groups. Before 2019 and the revolution

(Thawra), Americans had operated like this as well; my time as an exchange student

was largely spent in proximity to other Americans. It is a strange dynamic, one where

you go to ostensibly immerse yourself in another culture yet end up surrounded by those of a similarly held identity– ironically further constructing it.

One French flat mate burst through the door in tears about their adventure. They had ended up at university outside the three 'standard' for Northerners; and obviously their expectations were not being met.[60] They had figured they would be surrounded by many French or other Europeans 'like themselves' and instead were at a university with few Europeans and many Lebanese outside the 'moneyed' one's that occupy a place like AUB. Many of their classmates did not have the capital to do the fun events that they wanted, nor the travel experience to engage with them in 'interesting' conversations. They were distraught that they were facing all this complication and alterity with little support. Everything about Beirut was constantly compared to France, further cementing the juxtaposition between their expectations and the reality. The differences in croissants, wine and baguette served as vessels of a deeper existential reckoning with alterity.[61] To make matters worse, all of us other Northerners in the flat had previous experience living in Beirut and were less amenable to their perception of reality. Their identity for them was clearly 'French' and 'have', and they couldn't understand why their adventure wasn't clearly reflecting this in the positive way they had imagined. Expecting a positive mirror of themselves, they were faced with the rupture of difference. However, many who stay in the confines of their exchange groups never directly face this reckoning.

These types of Northerners who come to Beirut with little background or care are relatively common, and (of course) not all French. Another roommate of mine, one

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[60] 'Standard' being, AUB, Lebanese American University (LAU) and University St Joseph (USJ)

[61] This may seem cliché and pejorative, but the roommate would constantly say things such as "In France we judge the euro by the price of baguette", etc.

from the United Kingdom, came to Beirut to learn Arabic. It was never clear that their desire, however, was to seriously learn Arabic. They repeatedly failed their private lessons and continually signed up for them again– serving as an impetus to receive continued funding from their family. Their fascination with learning Arabic was strange given their complete dereliction of interest in anything about Lebanon. They never offered any insights into opinions on Lebanon besides chiming in with something along the lines of a condescending "that's so interesting". Obviously, they had little ideological interest in Lebanon or the Middle East, and this was buttressed by an admission from their colleague. Their colleague, who had gone to university with them in the United Kingdom, announced that they had helped them with much of their work for their degree in international relations. With an apparent lack of interest in international relations and Lebanon, why were they so inclined to stay?

While they had little interest in Lebanon and seemingly any other manifestation of politics, they did talk about many other things. Announcing the lavish lifestyles and wealth of past friends, as well as talking glowingly about the five-star hotel their family friends had stayed at in Achrafieh, gave clues to their priorities. Similarly, the reverence offered towards their Oxford graduate friend–who was working in policy in Beirut– offered more clues. For them, Beirut was clearly a place of honing status with those of similar means; largely this meant the wealthy and prestigiously educated Northerners that abound within the city. Beirut was like a little side quest on the road to social capital in the halls of suburban London. On some level, most of us 'Northerners' may be guilty of this in one way or another, yet rarely is it so brazen. Generally, there's a pretense in learning about Lebanon and it's various identities.

This roommate's lack of interest in the setting of Beirut and focus on the subinfeudation of Northerners left them open to an unexpected reality. Getting robbed on a Bolt motor, served as a complete surprise and moment of sadness. Further, the Hamas rocket barrage of April 2023 brought them a fear that couldn't be rationalized within any historical analysis. The compulsion of becoming worldly and yet simultaneously not attempting a deeper understanding of the world, is a common theme for the wealthy in the North. Chasing the dragon of an ephemeral status of being "well-traveled" points to an intrinsic competition amongst other 'haves'. Yet, this chase didn't seem fulfilling for them, and instead projected a strange stress. Last I knew, they were still in Beirut.

For those who only see Beirut as a setting for competition and subinfeudation with others of a similar material ilk, it's common to present a stress or fear of alterity. The difference they seek to compete is generally manifested in those who appear like them. People from the Global North like this are common in Beirut, who see Beirut and Lebanon as an interesting side quest in their quest to appear 'worldly' and eccentric; to build the abstract 'status resume'. They come in many forms, from the very affluent– who get family appointed jobs at fancy art galleries in the downtown–to those who pursue a gap year reveling and exploring the bohemian corners of Geitawi. Some develop a keener interest in their surroundings, others stay seemingly blissfully ignorant. Indeed, I've met Northern retirees in 'pristine' Batroun who live most of the year in Lebanon, yet they never go south of central Beirut or east of Mount Lebanon.[62] Although this travel restriction is a clear admittance of identity and a socio-political position, they appear completely disinterested in alterity generally–rather excited

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[62] Batroun, Jbeil and 'East Beirut' are largely Christian areas that are seen by Northerners as more 'normal' and affluent than most other parts of the country.

instead to announce their triumphs as supposed past 'titans' of Northern industry and finance. A reference to travels in the south to Saida and Tyre elicits a "wow, brave man!" response that feels more frustrating than congratulatory. The focus for these people isn't on discussing the specificities of their current locale, but instead staying within the confines of their identities within the constructed Northern context.

There are those from the Global North who come on these saunters to Beirut with seemingly fewer ideological convictions, who do choose to engage with the setting. As I've noted, the Northern Expat class is both large and incestuous, which can make it hard for those interested in breaking its enclosure. The ease to fall in line with a nearly wholly expat social group can lull many into the echo chamber of the constructed normative Northern narratives revolving around identity and politics within Lebanon. This echo chamber may feel like learning, but often it regurgitates preconceived notions of the state and the region that work to validate the Northern expat identity and their metropoles. Normative narratives revolving around groups and populations such as Syrian refuges, Hezbollah, and places like the Bekaa Valley create assumptions that entrench their own identities through maintaining difference. I remember a friend on holiday repeatedly asking a popular question, it went something like: "If the U.N and other aid-agencies and NGO's get so much funding for Lebanon, why are there so many refugees and homeless?". Their angle was that the money was poorly spent, and it should be easy to simply reallocate the money onto projects that alleviated the 'core issues'. For them, this was an example of the state being corrupt and practically failed–a popular narrative about Lebanon and many countries in the so called 'developing world' and Global South. The friend was content with this narrative and had little interest in the deeper intricacies of the why, where and who. Had they been interested in the

specificities, they would have had to open a pandoras box on how identity and difference manifest in socio-political sectarian politics, development agendas, historical conditions and many other topics that muddy such a simple narrative. Their desire for a simple positivist assertion on the failures of the Other hid a deeper frustration with themselves. Being able to blame the Other and their difference in entirety for the failures of their own reality was supposed to absolve them of responsibility. Instead, more nuanced interrogations into society and manifestations of an ontological negative reciprocity left them frustrated. For the rest of their trip, they avoided discussion on the socio-political reality.

G. Positivism and the Development Class

In comparison to those who come for short trips and exchanges, are those Northerner's who come for career purposes. This can range from the academic, to policy, development and journalism, among other sectors. This class is certainly more ideological than their temporary peers and come to build stringent identities that reflect their relationship with the Other. These characters are compensated off their relationship with difference. Fundamentally, many of these people are paid to mis-identify representations of identity and difference in Lebanon, and in this must develop a strong sense of what their own identity is.

This type of character is more akin to Hegel's simplistic rendering of the Master, as it's clear they benefit from the mediation of difference. Being able to secure an income from a juxtaposition of difference in proximity to material, is to secure a use of alterity that is unavailable to those that live and create it. Like the Slave in the dialectic is unable to use 'things' in the same way as the Master (in pure negation), many Northern

expats are compensated for their negation of identity. However, instead of negating identity in which they totally consume it, they come to represent it in a mis-identity that perpetuates the ontological antagonism. However, this isn't an active choice of agency like Hegel represents it to be, where there is a 'battle to the death'. No, instead it seems, these characters have simply trod paths that teleologically had already been created for them under the auspices of a negative reciprocity. In fulfilling these roles as functionaries of capitalist hegemony, they are simply acting as mediations for further subinfeudation.

At a bar in Mar Mikhael one night, a friend and I run into a BBC Australia journalist. This journalist is relatively intoxicated and acting derogatory towards a group of Syrian children. My friend and I announce our disgust as they continue to taunt the children, and instead of offering money, they offer a young child a cigarette. The journalist takes offense to our displeasure in their handling of the situation, announcing their proclamations on the topic. According to them– and indeed a commonly peddled narrative– the children were part of a greater 'mafia' and giving them money would only support the abuses of the men at the top of this mafia. Without going into the details of this complicated subject, we pointed out that this belief did not beget nor justify the treatment of these young children. The journalist proceeded to follow us around for a while, asserting their status as a "leftie", saying that we had totally gotten them wrong and that they were 'actually very progressive'. The desire to change our minds was so strong that I had to ask the journalist to please leave us alone, and halfheartedly announce that I believed his 'leftie' pronouncement. This journalist had credited his knowledge on the 'mafia' to their many years spent in the country. How could someone who has spent so much time in Lebanon–and on some level be

informed–act in the way they did? Further, the apology for their actions wasn't aimed at amends with the children, but rather in embarrassment of being called out by another Northerner.

In thinking about this journalist, I return to the topic of subinfeudation and the ever-ascending order of domination under perpetual antagonism. This journalist, who is paid to document and project the world of identity and difference, clearly had biases on how that alterity manifests. Their behavior in asserting a 'progressive' and "leftie" nature was an indication of their belief that we were within a certain proximity to their construction of identity. Their treatment of the children was not bad in-itself, as they constituted a projection of alterity so far away from any recourse. Instead, they wanted to validate to my friend and I that they were indeed 'like us', as we fell into their range of subinfeudation; we were people they felt justified in competing with.

This journalist is just one example of how these types of long-term Northerners construct exclusionary spaces of identity and difference. A strong example in the world of careerist positivism, is that of the United Nations House in Beirut, which houses agencies such as Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). Within this heavily fortified space that exists in the center of the city are many Northerners who have come to advance the 'unifying' mission of the UN. The UN and ESCWA are supposed to sponsor both 'inclusive' development and growth in the region, and act as a voice for the myriad identities in Lebanon and the region. Yet, some Lebanese describe a workplace dominated by an oblivious management class composed of those from the Global North, and an accompanying broad divide between compensation and efficiency. Lebanese workers are reportedly paid less despite their efficiency and inherent knowledge. Some point to the Northerners lack of Arabic skills

as one of the clearest examples of this divide and favoritism. Yet, this Northern management class is expected somehow to advance development and economic interests of the state and region without even having to understand the 'mother tongue'.

A peer of mine who worked as an unpaid intern for the mission, described the permanent workforce as "mostly Western" with underpaid Lebanese contract workers filling in the gaps. The peer was astonished that their boss had little understanding of either demographic or geography in terms of neighborhoods, something integral to even beginning to operate in heavily delineated sectarian Lebanon. Further, they described their coworkers lives as a monotonous routine of going between their luxury apartments, the United Nations, and the few restaurants and bars bespoke to moneyed clientele. This peer called their work dinner "the fanciest meal they've ever had"–which seemingly didn't register similarly with the Northern employees. Meanwhile, a Finnish researcher at the Finnish institute I talked to, anointed that only United Nations 'types' could afford to send their children to the top Beirut private schools like International College (IC). This illustrates a privileged 'upper class' that has obviously been made contextually wealthy through their employment in the United Nations.

However, to return to my peer's critique of their time at the UN, they described how the Northern colleagues were anointed as "children" by the Lebanese in the office. Their point is quite clear; given their seemingly fantastical lives–yet little contextual understanding–these employees came across simultaneously as people without serious responsibility and knowledge. Yet, of course, on some level they do have serious responsibility, as most of these jobs are supposed to reflect identity and difference in an ostensibly positive manner. Monitoring humanitarian crimes and issues in development are topics that require serious interrogations of identity and difference, not to mention a

reckoning with oneself. Surely, these Northern employees don't consider themselves "children", and would be disappointed to be conveyed in these terms. Yet, their abstraction from the 'real' that they are meant to understand–and document–keeps them aloof and unknowing. Their incestuous environment amongst the other Northern haves, as well as a paranoia of certain neighborhoods and areas–which keeps them locked in their luxury apartments– lets the façade of whatever 'truth' they believe remain. Yet, there is clear mis-identity between their intent and how they are perceived (children).

Another example of the disconnect between perception and intent became apparent with the Finnish roommate I had. They had previously spent a limited tour as a UNIFIL soldier in Southern Lebanon, sharing a base with the French contingent. One of our roommates announced their immense displeasure in the Finns role as an armed soldier in a country that they had little knowledge and understanding of. The Finnish roommate responded by asserting that the people in the South really liked the Finnish soldiers– unlike the French, who were apparently met with hostility. This, of course, sounded delusional to the critiquing roommate and I, as in our experience those in the South are generally displeased with the imposition of UNIFIL and their actions–such as house searches. Yet, to this Finnish roommate who had little interaction with any Lebanese friends or colleagues, their reality and construction of identity was such that they were the 'good ones'. Again, this Finnish peer was also being compensated at a level far beyond most Lebanese to wield an immense amount of (existential) power over their lives. Yet, their desire was almost certainly to believe that they had genuinely been 'good' and well received.

For those Northerners in the UN, or the NGO employees, or the countless journalists, assuredly they want to be serious people– 'development' is inherently a

pretty serious space; and people are quite ideological in entering it. Yet, their desire to be serious and be abstractly 'good' or 'true' and have 'correct values' is betrayed by the stagnant nature (mis-identity) of their work and its structures. These avenues of employment are so rigid in constructing identity and enacting an ideological battle of subinfeudation, that they limit the critical thinking and purview of those working within these spaces. Rather than having the epiphany about their identity and its construction, they tend to fall back into an easier self-validation of virtue and agency. The Finnish hark on the French, the Norwegian Refugee Council employee derides the UN, the Australian journalist belabors their colleagues, vice versa; etcetera. To face a reality that the walls of one's identity are not as strong nor permanent as they appeared, is a much more arduous task than simply continuing to trivialize the Other. In continuing down a 'development' tainted path of mis-identity, they are both the Master, the Slave, and the Slave of the Slave all at once and all together.

Beyond the projected psychological suffering that occurs to those within the Global North expat community–one largely based in contextualizing conversations and experiences–I've also gathered explicit admissions of unfulfillment. I've known various Northerners who have gone to work in the competitive sector of policy and think tanks. Some have quickly quit because they figured the work would revolve around learning and writing about Lebanon in a way that facilitated "real change" and intellectual growth and were instead met by a reality where they were mostly sourcing donor money. I've had had multiple friends quit highly competitive internships because of how draining and lifeless these policy thinktanks are. Likewise, I know workers in the sector who must spend much of their time courting donors, largely from Global North institutions and funds that have little concept of Lebanon and its peoples besides a

blithely Western-normative one. One person, for example, who worked at a women's reproductive health NGO, had a British donor overseer spend a week in the office following the limited staff around asking of obtuse generalizations that did not pertain to the NGO's mandate or activities. Even the most careerist of those I have witnessed in the sector, have become agitated and jaded by the reality within these supposedly interesting institutions. Those who have managed to remain in the sector have been met by walls of apathy, where many colleagues and friends consider their jobs at best uninteresting and useless– and more often pejoratively as wholly detrimental. This experience obviously is not enjoyable for nearly anyone in the sector, whether they be ideologues or careerists. The silver lining for many seems the allure of 'incremental progress' that too often is proven to be either non-existent or counter effective. It's hard for many to understand that this 'incremental progress' is a representation of perpetual antagonism and its current iteration in the empirical drive to produce and recreate an objective and impersonal mode of 'thingness'. Those I know in these fields tend to have desires to bring about more equality, yet they are consistently stymied by tedious systemic hindrances.[63]

In returning this conversation squarely back to the Master-Slave, what I've tried to illustrate here are examples of a Northern Expat class that struggles in various ways with their experiences in Beirut. What these are supposed to demonstrate is an inability to construct a trite binary of Master and Slave. While it may be relatively simple to view a hierarchy of material 'haves' versus 'have nots', especially in a highly unequal space like Beirut and Lebanon, it's much harder to ascribe an overall fulfillment of desire. Material 'having' doesn't correspond to reciprocity and recognition, and often it

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[63] Being an embedded and operationalized systemic mode of 'negative reciprocity' that capitalism represents.

actively constitutes the opposite. While the Northern Expats may eat fancy dinners, go on beach vacations and generally jet-set around the world, they are the "slaves to desire" that perpetually dooms them to certain forms of suffering. Rather than being free, their possession and mediation of 'things' leaves them continually unfulfilled at certain junctures. Rather than being fulfilled and content in their status as contextual 'haves', they continually chase and mediate further superficial desires ad nauseum. The distorted realities that their identities and proximity to thingness construct leave them varyingly adrift in an emphatically fluid and complicated setting such as Beirut.

While these characters may be well compensated and rich in possession, their negative modes of reciprocity and perpetual mis-identity stem any 'real' recognition, and in this there is of course suffering. These notions of identity and truth that are held by these characters are under a constant threat of rupture. Their seriousness, virtue, 'goodness' and whatever else generally drives their ideological selves are constantly open to a possibility of betrayal. The greater the ideology and corresponding rigid construction of alterity, the wider the horizon of trauma.

The Northerners proximity to possession has kept them in insular modes of subinfeudation distanced from various demonstrations of alterity. Whatever the desires, be it to be taken seriously by other Northerners, or be pronounced as 'interesting and worldly', or to 'actually change the world', Beirut presents challenges. The plethora of identities– all with whatever varying desires– constantly illustrates a negative mode of reciprocity that assert our confines and limits in being. The compulsion to repeat in building walls of identity and desire through setting and its people of course does not escape Beirut.

Within negative reciprocity and its current historical actualization in capitalism, thinghood reigns supreme. Both the setting and people–be it locals or other expats–within Beirut and Lebanon, serve as mediations of desire and identity for the Northern denizens. For some, such as the development class within NGO's and the UN, the mediation may mostly involve Lebanese. For others, such as the gap year and semester exchange proponents, this mediation may chiefly instrumentalize the other Northern expats. Either way, rather than being guaranteed a special status vis-à-vis some ontological joint constitution, status is only afforded within the context of utilizable mediation. However, as both Hegel and Freud instruct, corporeal desire is both fleeting and insatiable (and irrational).[64] There will always be a new and 'supra' desire to mediate, as subinfeudation has alerted us to.[65] Because of this, Beirut and Lebanon remain a space of unfulfillment and mis-identity, where desire remains a futile individualistic pursuit of I, at the cost of the constitutive turn and *real* desire (recognition) of we.[66]

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[64] Pagel, G. About Desire at Hegel, Freud and Lacan, *Revista del Círculo de Cartago*, 13.

[65] Since possession mediates desire, and desire mediates identity, this is a continuation of the same logic.

[66] Much of Honneth's work revolves around similar prerogatives in asserting the primacy of recognition and linking recognition and critical theory to psychoanalysis. See, Honneth, A. (2014). *The I in we: Studies in the theory of recognition*. John Wiley & Sons.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

"Utopia would be above identity and above contradiction; it would be a togetherness of diversity."[67]

"The truth is, no one of us can be free, until everybody is free."[68]

Using dialectics, Hegel's system creates its own conception of ethics that challenges a trite binary of 'good' and 'bad'.[69] Instead of stringent binaries, Hegel's system sees the world as jointly constitutive–where thesis and antithesis are both core in perception and the construction of a greater 'real' or 'truth'. This is fundamentally revolutionary because it challenges normative notions of ascriptive value and objectivity and leaves space for inherent fluidity and nuance within joint constitution. If everything is defined by its opposition– and this opposition is constitutive of a broader whole–this urges understanding the world as a space of fundamental interrelation and reciprocity. This reality of interrelation and reciprocity challenges stagnant conceptions of society and identity, and from it, manifestations of oppression and hierarchy. For Hegel, society is a place of mutuality and interrelation, where we exist both together and for one another.

As this paper has discussed, interrelation and reciprocity between humans is essentially a dialectic of identity and difference. This friction between identity and difference is what the Master-Slave demonstrates as an ontological social condition to

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[67] Adorno, Negative Dialectics, 150.

[68] Maya Angelou

[69] For more on Hegelian ethics, see: Williams, R. R. (1998). *Hegel's ethics of recognition*. Univ of California Press.

be overcome. However, rather than its eventual sublation into joint (and universal) recognition as Hegel philosophized, clearly this ontological lack continues to exist. The modern epoch of capitalist hegemony and the universal 'thingness' it has expanded, are indicative of the failure to thus far transcend the ontological antagonism between identity and difference; the I and Other. The inability to resolve this ontological conflict (perpetual antagonism) leaves a state of 'negative reciprocity' where relations and identity are continually defined by hierarchies of domination.

As the narrative section described, Beirut and Lebanon are locales of great inequality. In this environment, the compulsion towards negative reciprocity and false consciousness presents itself every day for those of material privilege. For many, the subconscious decision to further validate one's identity through their proximity to thingness hampers their lives in various ways, and it leaves them open to an unexpected world. Whether explicit or implied, many of the Northern expats continue to both be denied and deny their own humanity. Perceiving the world as fundamentally dialectical, changing, and ripe with constant unknowns, is undoubtedly key to decolonizing stagnant conceptions of identity.

A. Recognition

This paper has briefly touched on recognition, and of course alluded to it throughout the whole paper. For a paper with recognition in the title, it may be helpful to finally come full circle here in describing what this means. On a basic abstract level, Hegelian recognition involves a fundamental understanding of the importance of the Other for one's basic being; on a practical and lived level, this means some tangible equality. 'Real recognition' is protection, an admission that the manifestations of power and

domination have negative consequences for all parties– and because of this it's in one's interest to act for the Other. This is why someone like Axel Honneth bridges critical theory with psychoanalysis and emphasizes recognition as everyone's 'true desire'.[70]

What recognition truly is, is a common understanding of mutuality within society. It's a world where committing the heinous acts of wanton power and violence is unconscionable, where self-reflection and critical thinking has evolved to the point of understanding the ironically perverse effect wielding unequal power has on the self. This recognition cannot be achieved by individual philosophers but is dependent on a broader pivot within global society towards a more benign form of reciprocity based in self-reflection and conducive communication. Rather than being the asymmetrical false recognition of the Master-Slave and perpetual antagonism, enacting a more benign recognition would involve greater balance and symmetry.[71] In this reality, rather than seeking recognition, people are innately bestowed recognition simply in their being; and this is of course diametrically opposed to the current moment. Real recognition is both an abstract and practical guarantee of a common humanity. Hegel observes this emancipative moment on the horizon, yet unfortunately, his story and its prescriptions have gone astray in reifying the ideal.

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[70] Honneth, A. (2015). (pp. 81-94).

[71] Monahan, M. J. (2006). Recognition beyond struggle: On a liberatory account of Hegelian recognition. *Social Theory and Practice*, *32*(3), 389-414.

B. Universal History

To return to Kojeve's–or dare I say Fukuyama's–declarations regarding the 'End of History', returns us to the purpose of Hegel's Aufhebung.[72] The Master-Slave and Hegelian dialectics in general are aimed towards a unity both in history and in spirit. The desire for an 'ending' to history is an admission of possible emancipation, something that universalizes the post-modern and binds everything and everyone together. Fukuyama on the side of 'thingness' rightly insists that capitalism does this, however, he is either nonbelieving or unaware in the thesis of a perpetual antagonism. The great equality of capitalism is the lowest common denominator of a common (mis) identity in thingness. Kojeve, on the other hand, finds a more positive non-capitalist emancipation imminent; that we are all but there in 'form but not content'– that 'actual' historical progress is simply catching up to the philosophic realm.[73] This view also has its problems, namely that this belief is largely contrary to global historical experience, and it validates our current path to no end. Both Fukuyama's sanctimony in a capitalist convergence, and Kojeve's chimera in an illogical form over function, are but fanciful affirmations of emancipation and self (agency). Hegel himself, like Fukuyama (the end of Cold War) and Kojeve (rise of socialism) saw emancipation on the horizon in a concrete historical moment, for him this was the arrival of the French Revolution.[74]

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[72] Of course, here I am referring to Fukuyama's famous piece: Fukuyama, F. (2015). The end of history?. In *Conflict after the Cold War* (pp. 16-27). Routledge.

[73] Roth, M. S. (1985). A Problem of Recognition: Alexandre Kojève and the End of History. *History and Theory*, 303.

[74] Smith, S. B. (1989). Hegel and the French Revolution: An Epitaph for Republicanism. *Social Research*, 233-261.

On the other hand, those who focus on a quality of recognition have all but given up hope on a universal emancipation in favor of a more localized variety.[75] While on some level, this focus on quality may seem practical, it will surely be stymied in the larger global context. It seems impossible in a globalized world that there can be different variations of recognition and reciprocity occurring simultaneously, except perhaps in the smallest pockets of near total isolation.[76] Largely, the path towards a positive practice of mutuality and identity must be considered an endeavor of the international community in conjunction.

The space in-between the universal and particular in framing a path forward returns us to the likes the Frankfurt School of Adorno and Walter Benjamin. Adorno's formulation of a non-identity leaves space for a possible transcendence while also urging a practical critical theory of today. Denying the inevitability and problematic 'faulty' mathematic assumptions of Hegel's ontology, non-identity leaves space for focusing on innate nuance and fluidity.[77] For Adorno, a constant reflexive thinking and circumspect are core to understanding society and to "reveal it to be as indignant and distorted as it will appear on day in the messianic light".[78] In this way, he opposes the stagnant identities of 'thingness' that capitalism offers. A shared move towards any emancipatory moment or attitude, is certainly hidden within this circumspect.

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[75] A lot of contemporary critical theorists focus on concrete socio-political steps that can be taken in enacting recognition, yet the paradox is in enacting recognition without recognition. See, Fraser, N. (2008). Social justice in the age of identity politics: Redistribution, recognition, and participation. In Geographic Thought (pp. 72-89). Routledge; Fraser, N. (2000). Rethinking recognition. New left review, 3, 107; Ricoeur, P. (2007). The course of recognition. Harvard University Press.

[76] This is exhibited by capitalism and its conduits continually attacking forms of economic governance non-conducive to the construction of 'thingness'. See such examples as the Zapatista's and their struggle in Chiapas: Paulson, J. (2001). Peasant struggles and international solidarity: the case of Chiapas. *Socialist Register*, *37*.

[77] Adorno, T. (2003). *Negative dialectics*. Routledge

[78] Adorno, T. (2005). *Minima moralia: Reflections from damaged life*. Verso, 247.

Obviously, there are issues pertaining to enacting this reflexive attitude in a way that doesn't drive society further into trauma and mis-identity, but generally this move seems promising. As Bradley Macdonald illustrates, reveling in this non-identity or "anti-identity" presents a resistance and alternative to capitalist hegemonic prescriptions.[79]

Walter Benjamin, for his part, offers a complete reversal of linear dialectical thought. Like Adorno's 'negative dialectics', he questions the basic premise and assumptions of sublation and emancipation. However, rather than offering an alternative path towards emancipation, he asserts that perhaps these emancipatory and linear ideals are what affirm the continuation of a perpetual antagonism. For Benjamin, the prementioned 'dialectical images' display and assert the illogic in our premises of progress and being. Benjamin suggests a montage of used commodities can be used to illustrate a broad subtext of unfulfillment under capitalism. Commodities–as things–represent desire, and their continual scrapping in favor of replacement with newer versions represents the "endless compulsion to repeat".[80] This repetition make's clear that capitalism is unable to secure ontological fulfillment. Through these images of waste, we can come to understand the mire of 'thingness' and perpetual antagonism; it reflects onto identity. These dialectical images are epiphanies of reflexivity that assert the futility of capitalism and its basis in a negative mode of reciprocity, as the commodities can never fulfill the needs of identity.

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[79] Macdonald, B. J. (2012). Theodor Adorno, Alterglobalization, and Non-identity Politics. *New Political Science*, *34*(3), P 333.

[80] Pensky, M. (2004). Method and time: Benjamin's dialectical images. *The Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin*, 188.

While all the scholars may have competing views on the feasibility of a universal history and what it specifically means, they share agreement in anointing an imperfect world of today. Adorno and Benjamin's assertion in a certain circumspect in finding the 'truth', point us towards a shift in narrative that can encapsulate and triumph moments of reflexivity. Both non-identity and dialectical images are universally accessible modes of combatting stagnant perceptions and identities under capitalism.

C. Shifting the Narrative: Denying the Hierarchy

Benjamin's 'dialectical images' suggest a rupture in identities of 'thingness', where one's place in the world of perpetual antagonism is emphasized. This image doesn't have to be solely material; for some, a child sleeping on the streets long absent a bath and new pair of clothes may be this rupture. For others, it may be the juxtaposition of a Lamborghini parked in front of a long abandoned and dilapidated building. Whatever it is, these dialectical images confront our identities constructed sense of normalcy, and they make it clear that our everyday humdrum is habitual rather than 'correct'. These moments are obviously more easily located in immense contradictions–the more muted the contrast, the more difficult the epiphany. Everyone can have these dialectical epiphanies, just for some it comes early in life and for others it never does.

What dialectical images suggest is that the compulsion to repeat in forming mis-identity through thingness is pervasive. It again advances the idea that identities under capitalism are unfulfilled and always on the verge of a certain precariousness and trauma. This precariousness represents a shared loss where the urge to perpetuate a false consciousness continues the zero-sum pendulum. These moments of clarity and non-identity, however, can shatter this compulsion if used correctly.

Through harnessing moments of dialectical images and the circumspect it brings, we may be able to slowly change the narrative on capitalism and the stagnation of identities in abstract 'thingness'. Rather than asserting 'winners' and 'losers' under capitalism, if the narrative revolved around a shared yet individually specific loss, we would be able to better build a movement of solidarity. Instead of instructing people that they should not (or *cannot*) feel a certain way because of their proximity to material, we would understand that all of those within the dialectic of possession have hurt in the shared loss. Normalizing dialectical images and allowing everyone to react to them in their own unique and learning manner sets the stage for a flood of consciousness. Everyone is to be given space to grapple with and comprehend the infinite forms of imposition 'thingness' has cast upon them. Changing the narrative would illustrate that ranking a hierarchy of suffering to validate one's supposed identity is counterintuitive and regress. Understanding and sensitivity of shared global loss is crucial to building solidarity and advancing towards greater equality and any hope of 'universal history'.

To return full circle to my friends and colleagues who have had such disdain for the Global North and have continued to suffer trauma seemingly to no end, I hear the impulse. Trauma demonstrates a need for safety and leads one further into both identity and a suspicion of alterity. My friends in Beirut have suffered great traumas, ones that have defined their lives and seared into them a sense of anguish. The traumas and identities of those from the Global North are seemingly alien in contrast to those who've experienced existential brushes with negation or what Hegel refers to as the "absolute Lord".[81] These identities appear as obvious displays of difference and activate

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[81] Hegel, G. W. F. (2018). *Hegel: The phenomenology of spirit*. Oxford University Press, §194.

a deep resentment. There's resentment in not being able to share anguish; a feeling that the Other can never truly understand. What I offer here, is that these people who appear charmed and privileged, in dialectical essence are neither as different as they seem nor as purposefully malign as they at times might appear. This assumption must form the basis for the future.

Dialectical reflexive thinking and circumspect demonstrate the subjectivity inherent in being, and it assures us that we are both fluid and changing. There is great comfort in this logic because it detracts from Hobbesian 'nature' arguments that all but assure us of a certain stasis. If we can change, we can always remedy and mediate the issues of today. Denying the hierarchy of suffering is core to engaging in more conducive social interactions that allow us all to witness an intrinsic mutuality that feels so obvious.

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