LI-CHUN HSIAO

THE INDIVISIBLE GLOBE

Universality, Postcoloniality, and Nationalism in the Age of Globalization

THE INDISSOLUBLE NATION

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Abstract

This book attempts to rethink, under the rubric of globalization, a number of key notions in postcolonial theory and writings by revisiting what it conceives of as "the primal scene of postcoloniality"—the Haitian Revolution. Theoretically, it unpacks and critiques the poststructuralist penchants and undercurrents of the postcolonial paradigm in First-World academia while not reinstating earlier Marxist stricture. Focusing on Édouard Glissant's, C. L. R. James's, and Derek Walcott's representations of Toussaint L'Ouverture and the Haitian Revolution, the textual analyses aim to approach the issues of colonial mimicry, postcolonial nationalism, and postcoloniality in light of recent reconsiderations of the universal/the particular in critical theories, and psychoanalytic conceptions of trauma, identity, and jouissance. This book argues that postcolonial intellectuals' characteristic celebration of the Particular, together with their nuanced denunciation of the postcolonial nation and the Revolution, doesn't really do away with the category of the Universal, nor twist free of the problematic of the logics of difference/equivalence that sustain the "living on" of the nation-state, despite an ever expanding globality; rather, such a postcolonial phenomenon is symptomatic of a disavowed traumatic event that mirrors and prefigures the predicament of the postcolonial experience while evoking its simulacra and further struggles centuries later.

Introduction

The Postcolonial Problematic

As with the precedents of postmodernism and poststructuralism, the expansion, together with the eventual ascent, of postcolonial studies to a paradigmatic status on the contemporary intellectual scene in recent decades doesn't seem to help clarify many of the fundamental questions about the field. There have been theoretical debates over the parameters, definition(s), methodologies or epistemological grounds, speaking positions, and the locality of postcoloniality: For example, is the postcolonial "post" in the same sense as the postmodern or the poststructuralist? When is (was) the postcolonial, or was there ever such a moment? What is postcoloniality, and how does one conceive of it vis-à-vis postcolonialism (and vice versa)? Who are the postcolonials? Who speaks as/for the postcolonial? Are the ex-colonized and ex-colonizer "postcolonial" in the same sense?[1] Like the designation "postcolonial" itself, key notions/terms in the

1 One of the most important representatives of such debates can be found in the special issue of the journal *Social Text* 31/32 (1992), which some critics consider an "event" in the short history of postcolonial studies (e.g. Masao Miyoshi, 750; Grant Farred, "New Faces, Old Places"). For queries of the term "postcolonial," see, particularly, Anne McClintock's and Ella Shohat's pieces in this issue. For the contour of the debate and the focus of these polemics, see the editors' "Introduction" to this special issue. The first question enlisted here, about the semantic vagueness of the "post" in "postcolonial," is adapted from Kwame Anthony Appiah's essay with the straightforward title, "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonialism?" The most notable and fiercest critiques of the "careerism" of postcolonial intellectuals, their complicity with the dominant neo-colonial regime of knowledge or cultural production, and their position vis-à-vis the non-cosmopolitan postcolonial subjects they presumably represent, are levied by Aijaz Ahmad, Timothy Brennan, Arif Dirlik, Stuart Hall, and Benita Parry, though Hall is adamantly critical of what he perceives as reductionist dismissals made by more orthodox Marxists, particularly Dirlik (see Hall, 258–259). In addition, Hall conveniently reviews these contestations over the term postcolonial itself, especially on the question of its temporality, in his "When Was the Postcolonial?" For critiques from scholars who identify with and work within the field of postcolonial studies yet register discontent with the French-inspired "high theory" in much of the works of prominent postcolonial theorists, see Bart Moore-Gilbert's distinction between "postcolonial theory" and "postcolonial criticism." For fairly comprehensive documentations of the more general "postcolonial controversies," see Ania Loomba (*Colonialism* 7–19) and Vi-

field, such as "hybridity" or "diaspora," tend to lapse into loosely conceived and exuberantly celebrated buzzwords as they appear more and more frequently in and beyond postcolonial studies.

In this book, I'd like to approach, in the spirit of polemics, the postcolonial "controversies," or—as I prefer to call them—"problematics" by focusing on two of the multiple and entangled facets of the issues: 1) the spatial dimension concerning the manifestations of these problematics in the postcolonial nation and the variegated inflections of postcolonial nationalism; 2) the temporal dimension entailing the indeterminate, convoluted temporality of *post*coloniality, trauma of colonial slavery as the "remainder" of the history of colonialism, and a query of the presumed pastness of colonialism in certain discourses of postcolonialism. Against the backdrop of this "postcolonial problematic," which might as well be called the point of departure of this book, I'd like to locate another, deeper, and more latent problematic in postcolonial studies—the question of the universal/particular; this latent level of the postcolonial problematic, as well as its manifest instantiations, then, has to intersect, or even be traversed by an "Event" that encompasses these contestations by both illuminating and problematizing them: Toussaint and the Haitian Revolution.[2] Let me briefly explicate the centrality of the historical figure of Toussaint—whose emergence itself was an "event" in the history of colonialism—and the Haitian Revolution to this book before we move on to full-length explorations (in Chapter 1) of the universal/particular problematic in postcolonial criticism and theory.

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lashini Coopan. Also see Graham Huggan for a recap of the institutional history of postcolonial studies as a field, as well as the trajectories of the postcolonial debates (228–264).

2 This capital "E" certainly cannot hide its implicit allusion to Alain Badiou's notion of Event or Truth-Event. For reasons that will become clearer to the reader in the remainder of the book, I'd say, under the rubric of Badiou's work, the legend of Toussaint and the Haitian Revolution is definitely an Event for the post-Bastille "situation" from which it sprang, and, to a certain degree, for the problematic of the "postcolonial situation" we're exploring in this book: It is an Event in the sense that it foregrounds the inherent lack or excess of the "official" situation—what the latter has to exclude in order to come into being; it produces its own Truth—a new Universal—which is not yet accountable or justifiable in the terms of the preceding situation.

Who is Toussaint?

This, no doubt, is meant to be more of a rhetorical question. Rather than supplying a biographical account or historical documentation, I'd draw attention to the historical disjunction or discontinuities in historiography through which Toussaint is largely forgotten in the Western memory of colonial slavery—a forgetfulness that is the background against which this question, in its literal sense, has to be asked, especially for those stumbling into the field of postcolonialism: no, really . . . who is Toussaint?

Maybe it would be easier to reawaken the memory of Toussaint by citing a work of canonical Western literature which treats Toussaint as its subject matter. One such rare case can be found in William Wordsworth's "To Toussaint L'Ouverture":

> Toussaint, the most unhappy man of men!
> Whether the whistling Rustic tend his plough
> Within thy hearing, or thy head be now
> Pillowed in some deep dungeon's earless den;—
> O miserable chieftain! Yet die not; do thou
> Wear rather in thy bonds a cheerful brow:
> Though fallen thyself, never to rise again,
> Live, and take comfort. Thou hast left behind
> Powers that will work for thee; air, earth, and skies;
> There is not a breathing of the common wind
> That will forget thee; thou hast great allies;
> Thy friends are exultations, agonies,
> And love, and man's unconquerable mind. (*Poems* 577)

Ironically, not only had Toussaint few allies, but he has been virtually forgotten, most conspicuously in Western colonial and abolitionist discourses (Hesse 164), before C. L. R. James's ground-breaking book, *The Black Jacobins*, resuscitated it from obscurity and the brink of oblivion, stirring not only memories but also Third-World revolutions in the mid-twentieth century.[3] In his interview with C. L. R. James, Stuart Hall says of his anecdote: "I once met a Haitian intellectual who told the story of how astonished people were in Haiti to discover that *Black Jacobins* was written

3 To be sure, the memory of Toussaint and the Haitian Revolution had lived in local folklore, historical accounts, and official documents written by Haitian historians or fellow Caribbeans, despite the metropolitan neglect which sufficed to ensure the marginalization of this memory. It was not until after the emergence of James's book, and the political climate of the last century, that it was able to have such planetary influence and significance. See Farred ("Mapping"; "Victorian").

first by a black man, secondly by a West Indian. Because of course it had come back to them through London, through Paris" (qtd. in Farred, "Mapping" 227). Perhaps thanks to Toussaint, James's work suffered another round of neglect. For instance, Paul Gilroy, whose ground-breaking conception of the "Black Atlantic" as an alternative to Western modernity charts the trajectories of the lives and works of a few monumental black figures, curiously relegates both James and Toussaint to nearly total oblivion. Though Gilroy acknowledges the importance of James, himself a diasporic intellectual, and refers to others' writings on him (see, for example, xi, 221), his virtual omission of Toussaint and the Haitian Revolution is quite puzzling: It is particularly so when one considers how the author attempts to, rightly, recuperate the significance of the memory of slavery and elegantly elevates it to the "slave sublime" (187–223); how the Haitian Revolution emerged as the first successful slave revolt in history;[4] or the fact that Toussaint and the slaves, displaced by the Middle Passage and thrown into an unknown modern world, collectively constituted or participated in the prototypical diasporic experience, which Gilroy argues is the defining characteristic of the routed Black Atlantic (and we may add, of the "postcolonial condition").

Remembering Toussaint, Rethinking Postcolonial

Why Toussaint and the Haitian Revolution? How do they tie into the context of our postcolonial inquiry? In my view, Toussaint's Haitian Revolution, which has often been considered an imitation of its immediate historical precedent, the French Revolution, best exemplifies the inherent inconsistency/antagonism of the Western model nation-state and presents itself as a thought-provoking case of the potentialities and limits of (post)colonial mimicry, the question of postcolonial nationalisms, and the convoluted temporality of the postcolonial. It was the first successful, sustained decolonization movement against European colonialism in history, and, in some sense, the first "postcolonial" moment as well. Yet Toussaint's Haitian Revolution further complicates the temporality of postcoloniality

4 Eugene Genovese emphasizes that the Haitian Revolution differs from the numerous slave revolts before it mainly because of its revolutionary ideology and practices, not simply due to its much greater military success over the white colonial powers.

not only in the sense that it predated, and inspired, the mid-twentieth century anticolonial movements, against which certain paradigms of contemporary postcolonial criticism register their antagonism and identify themselves as "postcolonial"; but also that it presaged a certain "undead colonialism" after decolonization, mirroring the uncanny recurrence of violence, corruption, and dependency epitomized in the failures of the postcolonial nation-state in our historical juncture. It is, in other words, an instantiation of Édouard Glissant's well-known notion of *vision prophétique du passé* ("the prophetic vision of the past"; 227). The displaced or disavowed memories of the colonial encounter and slavery, as well as the structural impossibility of revolutionary ideals, which I shall highlight in the analyses of the case of the Haitian Revolution, constitute the traumatic kernel of the postcolonial and engender or evoke what I call "the primal scene of postcoloniality" (see Chapter 2).

Still, such "institutional forgetting" of Toussaint, the Haitian Revolution, and colonial slavery persists in our allegedly "postcolonial" present, especially in the form of "spectacle." To rehabilitate the significance of Toussaint, the exploration of which cannot be extricated from the memories of the Haitian Revolution and of colonial slavery, would require that we remember them beyond their various forms of spectacle. Years before Edward Said's well-known argument that the Orient is literally the (discursive) creation of the West,[5] Frantz Fanon had contended that it was Europe that could be considered "literally the creation of the Third World," since it was the exploitation of the material resources and labor from the colonies, "the sweat and the dead bodies of Negroes, Arabs, Indians and the yellow races" that sustained the "opulence" of Europe (*Wretched*, 76, 81). Further back in history, colonial slavery, as Hardt and Negri argue, can be "*perfectly compatible with capitalist production*" (122; emphasis in original), even though it appears that the capitalist ideology of freedom "must be antithetical to slave labor" (121). "There is no contradiction here," Hardt and Negri conclude wryly, "slave labor in the colonies made capitalism in Europe possible, and European capital had no interest in giving it up" (122). This uncovering of the material base of colonial/capitalist

5 It must be noted that Said, as he was to stress again and again, never discounts a "really existing" Orient outside of the West's discursive formations. In his later works, for example *Culture and Imperialism*, he points out, on the other hand, the West's dependence on its epistemological and cultural Other.

system at an increasingly global scale is not merely the reinstating of a materialist mode of analysis—which is important itself, or even a sort of economic determinism; rather, it seeks to probe, in light of a psychoanalytic approach, the traumatic effects of a colonialism that often starts with, but goes deeper than material devastation. Moreover, this book attempts to bring to the fore what has to be radically excluded from this system so that it can be constituted, or how such "constitutive exclusion" is systematically obliterated, even by means of rendering it a spectacle.

To remember Toussaint properly is therefore to confront the traumatic effects of colonial slavery, in its variegated forms, under the aegis of today's capitalist, globalizing world that feeds on the disavowal or liquidation of its memory (, Hess, 158); it also means to re-examine the West's liberal-democratic fantasy of the pastness of colonialism and its simultaneous rendering of contemporary postcolonial failures as otherworldly spectacle. In a more politically salient sense, to remember Toussaint is to come to realize that "the cruelest Haitian paradox, then, is not that its role as the nation that birthed the black postcolonial movement is forgotten. Nor is it that the country that was one of the wealthiest of the Caribbean . . . is currently the poorest in its hemisphere. Rather, it is that the very model of resistance that Toussaint and the slave developed almost two hundred years ago continues to offer *unread lessons* to contemporary postcolonial societies in Haiti, Ghana, Kenya, Jamaica, and even in the newly post-apartheid South Africa" (Farred, "Mapping," 245; emphasis mine).

Apropos of the structure of this book, the centrality of Toussaint and the Haitian Revolution to this book in general will be illuminated in terms of universality/particularity; of the final moments of (formal) colonial slavery and the fine moments of revolutionary hopes; of taking place at the originary instances of the (Western) nation-state, decolonization, and postcoloniality; and of the constitutive yet disavowed role of colonial slavery in an expanding capitalist globalization. Each chapter of this book, in a sense, is structured around one of these illuminations, though interrelated points are unavoidable and may thus cut across different sections.

Chapter 1
The Postcolonial Paradigm/Paradox: Theorizing between the Universal and the Particular

Although postcolonial debates, as outlined in the preceding discussion, have resulted in more problematics than consensus, the spotlight postcolonialism is enjoying has nevertheless invited more critical and, sometimes, soberer scrutiny across disciplines in the humanities. In the following pages, I do not attempt to document or reenact in detail these contested issues, but would like to situate them in the context of the rise of anti-foundationalism and multiculturalism on the (mainly Western) contemporary intellectual scene and on one of the most quintessential debates arising from the (in)compatibility and/or tension between them: the issue of the universal and the particular. I will, furthermore, call attention to a certain internal contradiction of postcolonial discourse and examine it in light of the complicated relationship between universalism and particularism.

Universalizing the Particular or Particularizing the Universal?: Between Anti-foundationalism and Multiculturalism

It is a critical commonplace of recent decades that the Enlightenment notion of the Universal is bankrupt, or at least, theoretically specious and politically malevolent. A wary critic, however, can notice at least two undercurrents in such "universalising condemnations of the universal" (Hallward, 176). On the one hand, there are profound and influential critiques of the foundationalism of Enlightenment Reason, consummated in the postmodern/poststructuralist debunking of the transcendental, universalist Subject and the subsequent substitution of "subject positions" in its place. The "dismantling of the universal" as well as the relentless questioning of any foundationalist claim to an epistemological ground or determinate identity has no doubt been summarily regarded as the founding gesture of contemporary (Western) thought (Schor, 15), befitting the characteristic fragmentation of the social in the present-day world. In the wake of, or perhaps owing to or in response to, the "death of the subject," we

witnessed, on the other hand, a proliferation of ethnic, sexual, racial, national, cultural, and other increasingly particularistic identities (e.g. age groups, women or gays within minority communities, disabilities, etc.) under the rubric of multiculturalism which, while sharing with postmodern anti-foundationalism the emphatic rejection of the Universal (as the "ethnia of the West," for example) along with the valorization of difference and particularity, nevertheless makes claims to a certain degree of authenticity and subjectivity in "identity politics." The rise of postcolonial theory and literatures can be said to have taken place in the debates over postmodern anti-foundationalism and multiculturalism, in the *simultaneous affinity and incommensurability* of the two.

As in the case of the popularization of cultural studies in Western academia,[6] the remarkable spate of general interest in postcolonial studies stemmed from a growing dissatisfaction among cultural and literary critics with the (earlier) postmodern/poststructuralist approaches—probably the most widely endorsed theoretical means available—not only for their preoccupation with deconstructing "grand narratives" primarily at the linguistic and epistemological levels, instead of directing or extending the assault to more "toxic" socio-politico-historical issues; but also for their apparently Eurocentric frame of reference—both in terms of theoretical edifice and objects of study—which appears inadequate in the face of the necessary pluralization following the breakdown of metanarratives and which runs counter to the patently postmodern imperative to always contextualize and attend to the local, the marginal. The typical postcolonial gesture against the postmodern paradigm is that "merely postmodern writing," as Peter Hallward recounts, "tends toward a certain placelessness, a disembodied abstraction uncomfortably close to an ideological reflection of prevailing modes of production in the West" (20). The "postcolonial," by con-

6 Huggan suggests that the rise of postcolonial studies in the 1990s be seen as "partly the offshoot of a wider institutional phenomenon—the so-called turn to cultural studies in an increasing number of English (among other humanities) departments at Western universities," or even "an analytical attempt to *globalise* the already wide scope of cultural studies" (240). Loomba's book *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* further places the recent boom of postcolonial studies under the aegis of historically situated anti-imperialist critiques produced in modern as well as contemporary socio-cultural movements and phenomena, such as the history of decolonization and the "revolution" within the "Western" intellectual tradition (Marxism, 1980s colonial discourse analysis, etc.).

trast, signals not only a temporal lapse, but also a certain spatiality, an outside, a "somewhere-else," though the accent is predominantly placed on the transient trajectories of migration (rather than the "fixed" locations themselves), on the border-crossing, boundary-effacing movements of unspecification. In short, postcolonialism sets itself against what it perceives as the failed postmodernist/poststructuralist promise to affirm the particular or the marginal and eschew any universalizing attempt by more forcefully valorizing the particular and the marginal and highlighting what heretofore has been neglected and marginalized by Enlightenment thought and Eurocentric anti-foundationalism alike. This brings postcolonialism closer to the particularism of "identity politics," one of the important players in the debates about multiculturalism.

Apropos of multiculturalism, postcolonialism is empowered by, and caught up in "the politics of authenticity": the postcolonial gains a great deal of currency in the milieu of a pluralist promotion of particularity and multiculturalist accentuations of strong identity claims from the margins; however, the particular, though born of contingency, can hardly present its particularity if it is conceived as constantly permeated by the contingent, by a flux of (subject) positions or movements of the changing, which postcolonial intellectuals believe characterize contemporary mode of existence. While recognizing the necessity to somehow vindicate a certain particularity in their distancing from the postmodern penchant of obliterating origins, of collapsing all kinds of boundaries, including the identitarian one, the postcolonial critics, like many participating in the debates on multiculturalism, are quick to avoid, locate, and even castigate any trace of ethnic or racial essentialism in the constitution of identities.[7] After "the linguistic turn" and the "cultural" or "ethnic" turn, therefore, we don't quite have yet another paradigm shift. It is easy to discern in postcolonial

7 A notable exception to this unanimous avoidance of the designation "essentialism" would be Spivak's proposal of "strategic essentialism," which is echoed among cultural critics and theoreticians (e.g. Laclau, *Emancipation(s)*, 50–51). However, numerous instances in Spivak's writings, ever elusive themselves, disprove the notion that she would by this term endorse the common understanding of using essentialism strategically, as a tool to reach some common political goal. Her self-reflexive, relentlessly self-deconstructing tendency in what she calls a "self-separating project" (*Postcolonial Critic*, 21) and more recently, her affirmation of some sort of ineluctable yet productive "complicity" (*Critique*, xii, 3–4, 9) in any resistance certainly mark a sharp distinction from those insisting on maintaining strong, politically salient identity claims.