

Li-Chun Hsiao

## **The Indivisible Globe, the Indissoluble Nation**

Universality, Postcoloniality, and Nationalism in the Age of Globalization



Li-Chun Hsiao

**THE INDIVISIBLE GLOBE,  
THE INDISSOLUBLE NATION**

Universality, Postcoloniality, and  
Nationalism in the Age of Globalization

*ibidem*  
Verlag

## **Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek**

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

ISBN-13: 978-3-8382-1524-2

© *ibidem*-Verlag, Stuttgart 2021

Alle Rechte vorbehalten

Das Werk einschließlich aller seiner Teile ist urheberrechtlich geschützt. Jede Verwertung außerhalb der engen Grenzen des Urheberrechtsgesetzes ist ohne Zustimmung des Verlages unzulässig und strafbar. Dies gilt insbesondere für Vervielfältigungen, Übersetzungen, Mikroverfilmungen und elektronische Speicherformen sowie die Einspeicherung und Verarbeitung in elektronischen Systemen.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the prior written permission of the publisher. Any person who does any unauthorized act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

Printed in the EU

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .....	7
Introduction .....	9
Chapter 1 The Postcolonial Paradigm/Paradox: Theorizing between the Universal and the Particular.....	15
Chapter 2 Toussaint, Mimicry, and the Primal Scene of Postcoloniality.....	47
Chapter 3 In the Name of the Father: Representing Postcolonial Nationalisms .....	93
Chapter 4 Toussaint, Globalization, and the Postcolonial Spectacle.....	131
Epilogue.....	163
About the Author.....	167
Bibliography .....	169



## 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?<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.

---

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.<sup>3</sup> 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;<sup>4</sup> 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 “post-colonial 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 post-coloniality” (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,<sup>5</sup> 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.