

JOHN DEWEY AND GLOBAL
CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION:
BEYOND AMERICAN AND
POSTCOLONIAL NATIONALISM
IN AN AGE OF CULTURAL
HYBRIDITY

HYUNJU LEE
University of Iowa



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How do we think of nationalism today? Nationalism has contributed not only to the establishment and national unity of the United States since the independence of thirteen colonies from Britain, but also the independence of other colonized countries under imperialist power in the twentieth century.¹ However, is nationalism still meaningful, at a time of increasing transnational mobility and cultural hybridity? This paper sheds light on the American nationalism and postcolonial nationalism's overemphasis on the nation and argues for the importance of global citizenship education, based on John Dewey's democratic ideals.

American Nationalism and Postcolonial Nationalism

Europeans began to settle in North America in the seventeenth century, and the British colonies declared independence in 1776. The leaders of the young nation recognized their task to reinforce sense of unity among the people with diverse ethnic backgrounds in one nation for the nation's settlement and integrity. They attempted to build their nation's social, cultural, political, and legal norms and standards and socialize the people by transmitting it. Dewey acknowledges that the political ideology of "loyalty to a nation" was conducive to the establishment of a modern nation by encouraging unity. He mentions that it was a better than devotion to the parochialism and despotism of the past.²

Dewey continues that nationalism also contributed to the independence of colonized countries and the emancipation of the oppressed under imperialist power in the twentieth century. The fighters for independence were willing to commit themselves to wars against imperialist colonizers, and nationalism inspired and strengthened the nation's desire for independence. Focusing on national restoration, postcolonial scholars tended to emphasize the historical, cultural, and ethnic peculiarity and unity of a nation and

¹ John Dewey, *The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882-1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press (1967-1990), LW 3:157.

² Dewey, LW 3:153.

argue that the postcolonial generations should retain their own cultural traditions and national values.³

Nationalism, Globalization, and Cultural Hybridity

Dewey acknowledges that national interests exist. However, he states that nationalism can be detrimental in the following ways.⁴ Nationalism does not encourage people to be moral and legal agents whose judgments are based on social responsibility, but rather privileges national interests. In addition, when nationalism justifies the mere persuasion of national interests, international anarchy could ensue, which all nations are irresponsible for global concerns.

Dewey's challenge to nationalism is meaningful to today's globalization that engenders cultural hybridity. Stuart Hall discusses the hybridity of culture and cultural identity; Hall's ideas allow us to understand cultural hybridity existed in both American and postcolonial societies in different ways.⁵ Culture and cultural identity are in continuous formation and transformation, as a person is exposed to different cultures and interacts with people with different cultural backgrounds. Migrated people in American society are in re-formation of their cultural identities, which are different from people both in their home countries and in their settlements.⁶ As a result, the society becomes more culturally diversified with people holding diverse cultural identities. Therefore, national identity is too simple to decide their collective identity.

On the other hand, colonization enforced cultural assimilation of the colonized and it resulted in cultural hybridity in their nations, which blended the indigenous and the imperial cultures.⁷ People in

³ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. (New York: Grove, 1963), 164.

⁴ Dewey, LW 3:157.

⁵ Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 235.

⁶ Roland Sintos Coloma, "Border Crossing Subjectivities and Research: Through the Prism of Feminists of Color," *Race Ethnicity and Education* 11, no. 1 (February 2008): 23.

⁷ Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 231.

postcolonial societies attempt to rebuild cultural identity with their own traditions. However, the re-formation cannot be the same as their cultural origins, because colonial experience has already been part of their life and culture, which has resulted in cultural hybridity in postcolonial societies. Also, postcolonial nationalism confines the people within their national boundaries that leads to isolation, for the sake of national restoration.

Deweyan Democracy and Global Citizenship Education

In contrast to nationalism, Deweyan democracy supports individual agency, diversity, and association among individuals because it is how the society evolves.⁸ Given that participation and association are the democratic way of life, decision-making is unbounded, because diverse voices of individuals and groups, regardless of race, gender, class, and cultural backgrounds, are supposed to be reflected in solutions to social problems. Moreover, democracy does not limit individuals to national boundaries.⁹ His concerns about international anarchy and global responsibility imply that his democratic principle can be applied globally. Deweyan democracy extends “conjoint communication” to the global context and encourages cultural hybridity by interactions among culturally different others. In this way, it lends insights into both American multicultural society and postcolonial societies, beyond nationalism.

⁸ Dewey, MW 9:93-96.

⁹ Dewey, LW 2:279-280.

Dewey does not use the term “global citizenship education.” However, I have imagined how Dewey, with his democratic ideals, would respond to today’s globalization and cultural hybridity.¹⁰ Expanding and applying Dewey’s democracy to the global context, I propose that global citizenship education is consistent with Dewey’s thoughts on democracy. Deweyan democracy, which emphasizes not only individual agency and diversity, but also communication and association, undergirds the idea of global citizenship education that encourages individual’s active engagement in global issues with critical minds, cultural diversity, and global associations.

¹⁰ Dewey, LW 3:157.

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