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To cite this article: Rowena A. Azada-Palacios (2022) Hybridity and national identity in post-colonial schools, Educational Philosophy and Theory, 54:9, 1431-1441, DOI: [10.1080/00131857.2021.1920393](https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2021.1920393)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2021.1920393>



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Published online: 02 May 2021.



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Hybridity and national identity in post-colonial schools

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ABSTRACT

The recent resurgence of extreme-right movements and the nationalist turn of many governments across the world have reignited the relevance of discussions within educational philosophy about the teaching of national identity in schools. However, the conceptualisation of national identity in previous iterations of these debates have been largely Western and Eurocentric, making the past theoretical literature about these questions less relevant for post-colonial settings. In this paper, I imagine a new approach for teaching national identity in post-colonial contexts, founded on postcolonial conceptions of identity and in particular, the concept of hybridity. I first develop a postcolonial account of national identity by drawing on Homi Bhabha's thinking about cultural identity, drawing on his concepts of liminality, splitting, and ambivalence. Then, building on Bhabha's notion of hybridity, I propose a distinction between national identity portrayals as either *fixed* or *malleable*. Finally, I demonstrate the implications of such a conceptual distinction on the way that national identity is taught in post-colonial schools; by way of an example, I envision a concrete approach to teaching national identity that views national identity as malleable rather than fixed, set in a hypothetical postcolonial school in the Philippines. By beginning from postcolonial assumptions about national identity, I hope to indicate new directions that the debates about the teaching of national identity in schools might proceed.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 30 July 2020
Revised 19 January 2021
Accepted 15 April 2021

KEYWORDS

Postcolonial thought;
hybridity; national identity
in schools;
citizenship education

Introduction

Since the 1990s, philosophers of education have engaged in debates with one another over curricular moves aimed at instilling a sense of national identity among pupils. These debates have often emerged in response to curricular changes pertaining to the teaching of national history, national literature, or civic values, such as the mandate to include the teaching of Fundamental British Values in the curricula of the United Kingdom in 2011. Whereas some of the scholarly responses to such changes have focused on the political climate or ideological leanings that have motivated such curricular revisions (e.g. in the UK, the controversial 'Prevent' strategy of 2011 that sought to address the perceived increase in radicalisation among some Muslim students), others have taken a more abstract approach, focusing on whether or not patriotism (broadly defined here as a positive regard for the nation-state one is residing in) is a desirable

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aim of schooling within liberal democracies (for recent examples, see Hand, 2011; Haynes, 2009; Kodolja, 2011; McDonough & Cormier, 2013; Merry, 2009; Tamir, 1992; Zembylas, 2014; Schumann, 2016).

The recent resurgence of extreme right movements and the nationalist turn of many governments across the world (e.g. in the United States, Brazil, Japan, and India) make the topic of these previous debates relevant once again in many contexts. However, the terms of these previous discussions have not been framed in universally resonant ways. Because of the geographic locations of most of the scholars involved in these debates, such discussions have typically taken for granted Western and Eurocentric conceptions of nationhood and national identity, which have not been as useful in other settings, and especially in post-colonial¹ settings. Some of the ways that these Eurocentric conceptions are complicated by the post-colonial experience can be seen by using a post-colonial optic to examine Costa's (2018) recent summary of the debates about the desirability of patriotic education, published in the *International Handbook of Philosophy of Education*. Costa's article makes a series of distinctions that are helpful in understanding some differences among countries, but which do not lend sufficient clarity for people reading about these from a post-colonial perspective. She begins by making a distinction between the possible objects of attachment of patriotism/nationalism. She distinguishes between attachments to an institutionalised polity, which she calls 'patriotism', and feelings of attachment towards a group of people who share a common identity, which she calls 'nationalism'. Such a distinction may be helpful to citizens of countries in conventional nation-states, but may be less helpful to those in the midst of political struggles where the forms of political institutions themselves are the object of contention, as is often the case in struggles perceived to be anti-colonial in nature. In such cases, the feelings of attachment are to a polity that has not yet been institutionalised, a polity that is yet to be imagined. Costa's definition of 'patriotism' is insufficient because of the condition that the object of attachment be an institution akin to a nation-state. Her definition of 'nationalism', however, is also insufficient because in such a case the object of attachment is directed not merely to the group of people to which one belongs but also outward towards a political vision.

A second example of how Costa's account does not sufficiently include the post-colonial context is in her distinction between multinational countries with a history of peaceful co-existence among nations, and societies divided among national lines. Although her distinction is useful for many cases, she makes no mention of the colonial history which led to the discordance between national and state boundaries in many parts of the world.

Finally, Costa helpfully highlights the common assumption shared by advocates of patriotic education that 'having a sense of belonging together contributes to the well-functioning of social institutions and the well-being of individual citizens' and that having a sense of belonging, in turn, depends on 'experiencing specifically patriotic feelings of attachment and identification'. However, she makes no mention of the complexities of identity faced by people in post-colonial contexts, where the target of patriotic feelings is not so simple. The first complexity lies in the target of patriotic feelings: Does 'patriotism' in post-colonial contexts here only refer to patriotic feelings towards the state as defined after political decolonisation? What place is there for patriotism or nationalism towards the group of people considered to be one's nation prior to colonisation? And how does this relate with patriotism or nationalism towards the group of people constructed as the nation in the period after decolonisation? In the debates summarised by Costa, both those in favour of promoting patriotism as well as those critical of promoting patriotism appear to have taken the concept of the nation itself – the love of which patriotism seeks to promote – as an unproblematic given. However, a second complexity – and one that is the focus of this paper – lies in the conflation of the teaching of national identity (such as through the teaching of a national narrative or a national history) with the promotion of patriotism. In contrast to this, the post-colonial experience, as recounted in postcolonial literature, has more

commonly understood the concept of national identity much more ambiguously and perceived it much more ambivalently, because of the traumas of colonial history.

There are other ways in which a post-colonial starting point complicates debates surrounding the teaching of national identity in schools. First, the differences in the composition of the populations of Western versus post-colonial countries, and the differences in their historical experiences of nationalism, have affected whether nationalism is associated with liberalism or illiberalism. In the West, historical pathologies of nationalisms (e.g. the rise of Nazism and Fascism in Germany and Italy, respectively, or the nationalist justification of empire in the United Kingdom) have led recent Western accounts of nationalism to associate it with potential illiberalism, as expressed for example in racist or otherwise exclusivist treatment of recent immigrants, people in the political community who belong to minority religious groups, or people with minority ethnic backgrounds. This has shaped the presumptions that have underlain these debates: scholars on both sides have typically either judged patriotism to be incompatible with the values of liberal democracy and thus an undesirable aim of schooling, or have supported the promotion of patriotism in schools based on an argument that a more moderate, less exclusivist form of patriotism is possible, desirable, and compatible with liberalism. In contrast, in some post-colonial settings, because the development of national identity has been central to the struggle for self-determination amidst the occupation of foreign colonial powers, it has often been seen as a component of the historical struggles of the disempowered majority to share in the ideals of liberalism previously denied to them. Another concept that is challenged by an anti-colonial starting point is the very concept of 'nationhood', which in Eurocentric debates is shaped by modernist accounts of the nation-state. Foregrounding colonial history complicates this idea, because of the way that territorial borders were often historically drawn by imperial governments with little regard for the culture of colonised inhabitants; thus, groups of people that might be called 'nations' because of a common culture were scattered across different states, or borders drawn around several groups that might be called such.

These examples demonstrate that much of the previous theoretical literature about the teaching of national identity in schools has not questioned the conceptual constructions related to nationalism and nationhood, in the way that critical traditions of political thought – such as post-colonial and decolonial thought, settler colonial studies, and critical race theory – have recently been doing. To be sure, the voices from these latter traditions have entered the wider spaces of political and educational philosophy in the past decade. However, with very few exceptions (see Zembylas, 2014), their perspectives have not yet figured strongly in mainstream discussions specifically about patriotism, national identity, and education, despite the fact that most countries in the world were colonised by European powers, and are post-colonial. This is a gap that I hope to partially fill. In this paper, I demonstrate how beginning with a postcolonial account of national identity can alter the presumptions underlying the way that national identity is taught in schools, and I specifically argue for making hybridity the conceptual foundation for teaching national identity in post-colonial schools. To set out my argument, I first develop a postcolonial account of national identity by drawing on Homi Bhabha's thinking about cultural identity more broadly, drawing on his concepts of liminality, splitting, and ambivalence. Then, building on Bhabha's concept of hybridity, I propose a distinction between national identity portrayals as either *fixed* or *malleable*. Finally, I demonstrate the implications of such a conceptual distinction on the way that national identity is taught in post-colonial schools. By way of an example, I imagine a concrete approach to teaching national identity that views national identity as malleable rather than fixed, set in a hypothetical post-colonial school in the Philippines, a country previously colonised by two Western powers (Spain and the United States) that is today one of the most populous post-colonial countries in the world. One effect of my approach is that it decouples the teaching of national identity from the promotion of patriotism; my hope is that such a way of understanding the teaching of national identity will be more useful to educational

theorists and practitioners in post-colonial contexts than the previous frameworks that dominate mainstream literature.

The complexities of post-colonial identity

If, as Miller (2007) posits, national identity is, for most, an important component of personal identity, then it is likely that many children come to school with some degree of a sense of belonging to one's nation (see also Archard, 1999). It is likely, however, that children in a post-colonial classroom come with complicated experiences of identity that have parallels with those of immigrant children in the West. The difference is that the complexity experienced by immigrant children is a result of family history, whereas the complexity experienced by post-colonial children is a result of national political history.

Developing a stance towards education for national identity in the post-colonial classroom, therefore, requires understanding how national identity is experienced from a postcolonial perspective. Bhabha (1994) has a rich account of this experience that highlights two characteristics of postcolonial identity: liminality and 'splitting'. Drawing from literary works from across the colonised world, Bhabha extracts accounts of the experience of liminality and in-betweenness in colonial subjects' and postcolonial writers' attempts to articulate their identity. Bhabha describes how the coloniser's treatment of the colonial subject created a desire within the subject to be other than they are, or to phrase it differently, a dissatisfaction with the identity they have. For Bhabha, enflaming this desire creates a 'tension', a 'splitting' (p. 44). Analysing the work of Franz Fanon, for example, Bhabha explains that:

'Black skin, white masks' is not a neat division; it is a doubling, dissembling image of being in at least two places at once that makes it impossible for the devalued, insatiable *évolué* ... to accept the colonizer's invitation to identity: 'You're a doctor, a writer, a student, you're different, you're one of us.' It is precisely in that ambivalent use of 'different' – to be different from those that are different makes you the same – that the Unconscious speaks of the form of otherness, the tethered shadow of deferral and displacement. (pp. 44–45)

Apart from the negative feelings that the postcolonial subject often has towards their identity, Bhabha also focuses on the instability of this identity and how this 'splitting' carries on beyond the moment of political decolonisation, becoming part of the postcolonial experience (pp. 45–48). This is what makes the postcolonial experience of identity different from the Cartesian, unitary image of the subject in the Western philosophical tradition. To cite an example, Bhabha analyses the words of the Bombay migrant poet Adil Jussawalla, focusing on Jussawalla's notion of the 'missing person':

What these repeated negations of identity dramatize, in their elision of the seeing eye that must contemplate what is missing or invisible, is the impossibility of claiming an origin for the Self (or Other) within a tradition of representation that conceives of identity as the satisfaction of a totalizing, plenitudinous object of vision. By disrupting the stability of the ego, expressed in the equivalence between image and identity, the secret art of invisibility of which the migrant poet speaks changes the very terms of our recognition of the person. (pp. 46–47)

These negative feelings identified by Bhabha, and the ambivalence towards one's identity (particularly one's political or national identity) are a recurring theme in the literature of peoples who have been oppressed or marginalised.

When these literary accounts are read against this postcolonial account of identity, it becomes evident that the existing literature on patriotic education tends to conflate national identity – that is, one's identification with a nationality – with partiality towards that nation. A person who identifies strongly with a nation, it is often assumed, is someone who sees that nation positively, and typically more positively than they see other nations. This does not account, however, for the ambivalence or even outright shame that one might feel in relation to one's national identity. In the case of some post-colonial contexts, identifying as a member of a nation – that is,

accepting the designation that accompanies national identity – cannot be equated to having positive feelings towards that identity, and vice versa.

One way to prevent such oversimplifications is by conceptually distinguishing, as political scientists Huddy and Del Ponte (2020) have done, among national identity, national pride, and national chauvinism. In their framework that is built on social identity theory, national identity is understood as a sense of belonging to a nation that has been internalised both cognitively and emotionally (assessed as an affective bond to the nation). National pride is a positive evaluation of national institutions and symbols. National chauvinism is a sense of superiority and dominance of one's nation over others, characterised by animosity towards outsiders or other nations. Although all three are characterised by national attachment, the conceptual separation of the three emphasises that national identity does not necessarily lead to national pride nor national chauvinism.

Thus, even if we assume that national identity is often an important part of personal identity, in the case of the post-colonial classroom, it is likely that children come with feelings of ambivalence towards their nation. It makes sense, then, to address the issue of national identity in schools not out of a desire to inspire patriotic nationalism, but as a way of addressing an issue that is pertinent to children within a post-colonial setting.

Moving beyond the civic/ethnic dichotomy: malleable vs. fixed representations of identity

One of the central tensions in previous explorations about teaching patriotism in schools has been the acknowledgement that patriotism can have both positive as well as negative consequences. One of the classic solutions to this tension has been to distinguish between ethnic nationalism, portrayed as potentially harmful and the source of unjust or illiberal actions towards others because of its essentialism, and civic nationalism, portrayed as more compatible with liberal values. Recently, there has been an increasing consensus among theoreticians that discussions about nationalism should move beyond the civic/ethnic dichotomy; nonetheless, the usefulness of the dichotomy is evident in the way that it continues to be deployed even in the most recent educational research about national identity and nationalism in schools (e.g. Hung, 2014; Ozga, 2017; Siebers, 2019). I propose, however, that in imagining the teaching of national identity in post-colonial contexts, it is especially important to move beyond such a dichotomy, because of the way that identity is commonly experienced in post-colonial contexts.

Recent empirical findings demonstrate some of the weaknesses of the civic/ethnic dichotomy, by highlighting that actual experiences of nationalism do not neatly fall into either of these two categories. Social psychologist Samuel Pehrson (2020) argues, for example, that popular conceptions of nationhood are much messier than the theory may lead one to believe. Analysing data from the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) modules on 'National Identity' conducted in 1995, 2003, and 2013, Pehrson found that a person may endorse both an 'ascribed' set of criteria (e.g. ancestry, birth, religion) for national identity as well as an 'acquired' one (e.g. respecting institutions, speaking the language); the two, in fact, were positively correlated in that people who supported one tended to also support the other. Analysing the differences in responses within countries, Pehrson proposes that, rather than defining their national identities based on abstract 'types' of nationhood, respondents position themselves within prevailing public debates. Similarly, Pehrson also points out that, on the national level, 'civic' and 'ethnic' are not types of country. Contrary to the still-popular theoretical practice of describing nationalism in countries as either 'civic' or 'ethnic', populations in most countries endorse a mixture of the two dimensions. Although scholars writing about non-European contexts already challenged the civic/ethnic divide even before Pehrson's findings, many of their theoretical attempts to reconceptualise nationalism resulted merely in slightly altered versions of the existing dichotomy and the

addition of new categories (Anderson, 1983; Reid, 2009; Smith, 2002; Tønnesson & Antlöv, 1996), rather than addressing the fundamental problems highlighted by Pehrson: the fact that people do not experience nationalism as only one type, and the fact that the data does not justify the categorisation of populations within one nation as having just one 'type' of nationalism.

In the post-colonial context, one possible way forward in searching for a different analytical tool is opened up by the ethical-political project that Bhabha begins when he moves from his reflections on liminality to his introduction of the concept of 'hybridity'. Unlike the aforementioned attempts to challenge the ethnic/civic distinction from the perspective of non-Western contexts, Bhabha's insights, by radically disrupting the idea of 'identity' altogether, allow us to forge a different path.

Closely related in Bhabha's work to the notion of liminality, the word 'hybridity' recalls, for some commentators (see Mizutani, 2013) the politics of anti-miscegenation in various post-colonial contexts in history, where the 'mixing of blood' among colonisers and locals created colonial categories and hierarchies of race and ethnicity. Bhabha himself, though, does not use the term to refer to the politics of racialisation. Rather, he uses it in reference to post-colonial culture and identity. The concept is both an analytical tool, useful for understanding the effects of colonial practices, as well as a politically useful concept that can be deployed to subvert colonial presumptions. In Bhabha's account, it is insufficient to analyse power in the cultural sphere of the colonial milieu, merely as the exercise of command over a silenced or repressed population. For him, each attempt to exert colonial authority did not silence the native populations, but rather *produced* something new in culture: a 'hybridity' that developed when aspects of the culture of the colonisers were appropriated and then transformed by the colonised population. (Bhabha uses the example of the appropriation and enculturation of Christianity by a group of people near Delhi.) While the idea of culture as produced and lived (rather than 'inherited') is not unique to Bhabha (see Hollinshead, 1998), he infuses these ideas with a Foucauldian analytic of power to speak specifically of the colonial condition. Through its productivity and creativity, hybridity was also a subversion of and resistance to colonial power. The colonial authority may have sought to assert its power through the technics of knowledge: categorising the colonised population, cataloguing its traditions, and turning itself into the 'authoritative reference' (p. 114) of the colonised culture. The production of hybridity, however, challenged the colonial authority and contradicted its catalogues by creating new cultural artifacts and practices that no longer fit the colonisers' records of 'pure' native culture.

More than just an analysis of the historical colonial encounter, Bhabha imagines hybridity to be an ongoing post-colonial project. He calls this political space of hybridity the 'Third Space': in the field of global cultures where such cultures are oftentimes imagined as clearly distinct from one another, the spaces inhabited by formerly colonised populations are spaces of cultural agonism, negotiation, deconstruction, and creativity that resist essentialist notions of culture (such as those found in both imperialist and nationalist discourse), always exposing the ambivalence and instability of cultural representation. Against notions (which he attributes to colonisers) that 'pure' and 'uncorrupted' cultures are superior to 'mixed' ones (as evidenced, for example, by the derision with which white English subjects would view Eurasians who performed English culture), Bhabha advances hybridity as the postcolonial world's positive contribution to culture, because of the fecundity and creativity of the Third Space.

Bhabha's analysis focuses on cultural texts, artifacts, and practices. However, the concept of hybridity can be applied to cultural identities as well. His description, in fact, lends itself to such an application, because his account of the exercise of colonial power includes, among its examples, the categorisation of colonised populations according to different cultural identities. It can be argued, then, that among the objects of negotiation and deconstruction within the Third Space of hybridity can be cultural identities themselves, including national identities.

In what specific ways, then, do Bhabha's ideas complicate the civic/ethnic taxonomy of national identity? Firstly, hybridity challenges the temporal presumptions that underlie the

traditional dichotomy. In their acceptance of the civic/ethnic taxonomy, many theorists see ethnic national identity, which is based on shared culture, shared history, and myths of shared ancestry, as a national identity that looks to the past (in contrast with the civic national identity that looks to the future in its quest for aspirational goals). Bhabha's notion of the postcolonial identity, however, is cultural, and yet is not tied to the past and in fact rejects essentialist understandings of culture. Following Bhabha, we see how it is possible to conceive of a cultural identity that is constantly being remade. Thus, Bhabha's ideas also challenge the notion that only a civic identity can be future-oriented.

Closely related to such temporal presumptions are the presumptions related to the idea of inclusivity and exclusivity. A civic national identity is conventionally seen to be more inclusive than ethnic national identity, because the markers of commonality are seen to be more accessible to all than the markers of an ethnic national identity: it is more difficult for an immigrant to lay claim to shared ancestry than it is to pledge allegiance to political principles, the latter of which can be a product of a rational decision. Again, Bhabha's ideas complicate this supposedly neat bifurcation. The biological roots of the term 'hybridity' immediately challenge the idea that 'ancestry' must be equated with some form of 'purity'. Ancestry, rather, is and always has been the product of encounter and 'mixture'.

Building, then, on Bhabha's ideas, I propose a dichotomy of national identities that differs from the ethnic/civic distinction. I propose that the *representation* of national identities be understood either as *malleable* or *fixed*.

At first glance, there may seem to be a parallel between the two taxonomies, in that an 'ethnic' national identity appears to be a fixed national identity, and a 'civic' national identity is malleable. However, this is not necessarily the case. First of all, unlike a civic identity, a malleable identity does not preclude any reference to ethnicity. 'Ethnicity' is conceptually vague. In some contexts, the word 'ethnicity' is used as a code for 'race' and is used to refer primarily to skin colour and physical features associated with different geographical regions of the world. In other contexts, however, it is used to refer to shared languages, as with the distinctions drawn among ethnolinguistic groups. In still other contexts, it is used to refer to belief systems, such as the ethnic distinctions among religious groups. What all of these have in common is that they refer to characteristics that are already given – something that is in a person's history, rather than in someone's future. These include physical features one is born with, one's mother tongue, the religion that one has been raised in, the place from which one's ancestors hail. A malleable identity, then, does not preclude the fact that such features of one's past play into one's national identity; however, it recognises that the weight and importance given to one of these features over another changes, often as a result of negotiations about these features in political discourse. Moreover, certain civic virtues may also be part of the negotiation.

The concept of a malleable identity then also foregrounds the fact that the shared identity of a community – such as a national identity – can change. In the United States, for example, 'Anglo-Saxon' was, at the end of the 19th century, central to the American identity, as seen in its use in public discourse and Congressional debates of the time (see Bell, 2020). However, this identity was negotiated, and the idea of what it meant to be American was altered somewhat with each generation. The incorporation of the Indian State into Ohio and the annexation of Hawai'i and Puerto Rico altered American identity; it began to decouple, legally at least, race from the American national identity, a process that led to the repealing of the Chinese Exclusion Act and the granting of civil rights to African-Americans. Today, American identity continues to be negotiated, often heatedly, alongside questions of immigration, debates about undocumented immigrants and the DACA program, and, most recently, the resurgence of a white ethno-nationalist movement.

In contrast, the concept of a 'fixed identity' refers to an identity which one presumes to be finished and unchanging. The question might be raised, however: are there any identities that are, in actuality, fixed? Is it not the case that all identities are malleable? I do believe that this is,

in fact, the case. However, I propose the distinction between malleable and fixed identities as a useful analytical tool for evaluating representations of identities constructed and perpetuated within societies. More specific to the problem posed by this paper, this distinction can also be a useful tool to evaluate the way that national identity is taught in schools, as I elaborate further in the next section.

Hybridity and national identity in schools

I have argued thus far that postcolonial thought challenges conventional presumptions about national identity that underlie debates about patriotic nationalism. I have proposed that national identities, especially but not exclusively in post-colonial contexts, be seen as hybrid and malleable. How might this way of understanding national identity inform the discussions about national identity in schools?

In the past, much of the discussion about national identity in schools has centred around the question of whether or not partiality towards a nation should be promoted. An alternative way of approaching the issue, and one that I believe to be especially meaningful in post-colonial contexts, sees national identity itself as a contentious and ambivalent experience that the child either undergoes or will undergo eventually. National identity is no longer the aspiration or goal; rather, national identity itself becomes the question that begs to be explored. Such an approach, then, departs from questions regarding the desirability of patriotism in schools, because the goal of the inclusion of national identity in schools is no longer patriotism at all.

Moreover, seeing national identity as something malleable rather than fixed presents it to children as something that is continually being created and re-created. The question that can be posed to children, then, is no longer: *Is it desirable to have a strong sense of national identity?* Rather, it becomes: *How might your generation shape your national identities?*

It must be clarified that this approach, as I imagine it, goes beyond the mere advocacy of different versions of multiculturalism in schools. Multicultural approaches can often themselves result in essentialist portrayals of cultural identities. Even approaches that emphasise children's capacity to choose among identities (e.g. Sen, 2007) can tend to see each identity as largely static, like different items of clothing worn and then taken off, where each item of clothing itself does not change.

In contrast, I suggest that school be conceived of as a space where a pupil can think more deeply and reflectively about the different dimensions of a *particular* identity, including national identity, thus helping pupils eventually make more reasoned choices about how they might wish to shape that identity as they grow up, and also develop a sensitivity towards the ways in which some dimensions of identities are not easily shaped merely by individual choice.

What, then, might it look like if school is imagined as a place where pupils can explore the malleability of their national identities, and therefore, their creative potential?

For Bhabha (1994), the very spaces of ambivalence are themselves the spaces of creativity. Where post-colonial subjects find themselves either torn between two identities, or where two identities appear to come into conflict with each other: these are also the spaces of hybridity, where new possibilities of identity emerge. In emphasising the creativity of hybridity, Bhabha provides an alternative to both the anti-colonial nostalgia for an imagined indigenous purity, as well as to the anti-colonial longing for future cultural coherence, both of which are common in many post-colonial curricula. For Bhabha, the concept of hybridity expresses the reality that cultures not only inevitably intermingle with each other but also inevitably transform each other, a process we can call 'cultural miscegenation'. At the same time he rejects the expressions of longing for a future coherent culture that assume the present-day mix of cultures to be problematically chaotic. Rather, Bhabha likens the present-day moment to the liminality of a stairwell, which is neither upstairs nor downstairs, but in between. He counters the view that this liminal space is

problematic by presenting it as a space of creation and generation. This space can be the classroom itself.

These theoretical considerations can be illustrated better by way of some imagined examples. The hypothetical examples I propose below are situated in one such post-colonial setting, the Philippines. There are a number of opportunities in the current Philippine curriculum for a discussion with pupils about the contested nature of national identity in the Philippine context. One of the mandatory topics in the social science curriculum, for example, is a discussion on who counts as 'Filipino', a topic first introduced in the curriculum for Grade 1 (six- to seven-year-olds) and then returned to several times over the years. The standard approach, as suggested in most textbooks, is to look at the word 'Filipino' primarily as a legal status of citizenship, and to enumerate the different ways that a person might acquire citizenship based on current Philippine citizenship laws. An alternative approach, one that assumes identity to be malleable, could be to lead students into an exploration of how those laws have changed in history. Moreover, a more explicit acknowledgement of the difference between 'Filipino' as a citizenship and 'Filipino' as identity can be explored, such as in the context of a discussion of how communities belonging to the Philippine diaspora, many members of which are not Filipino citizens but who self-identify as Filipino because of familial ties. For older students, a more sophisticated exploration can lead to conceptual connections with larger questions about the meaning of the word 'nation'. Such an exploration might include, for example, how the meaning of the word 'Filipino' changed through colonial and post-colonial history (see, for example, Thomas, 2016, p. 54), or how the legal category of Filipino citizenship has been used to include and exclude people through colonial and post-colonial history (see, for example, Aguilar, 2010).

Similarly there are many opportunities in the Philippine curriculum to allow students to explore how national identity is continually being created. A topic first taught in Grade 5 (ten- and eleven-year-olds) that is likewise returned to through secondary school is the history of the Philippine revolution against Spain. Currently, most textbooks take a historical narrative approach: identifying important dates and significant people during the revolution. An approach that can explore how national identity continues to be created can use this topic as a departure point. It can, for example, extract from the texts of the period – anti-colonial poetry and fiction, essays written by the leaders of the nationalist movement, and the documents of the revolutionary government – the principles, attitudes, and characteristics that the writers thought Filipinos in a sovereign state ought to have. This can then lead into a discussion during which students can express what kinds of principles, attitudes, and characters are important for Filipinos to have in the present and in the future.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to argue a case for making hybridity the conceptual foundation for teaching national identity in schools in post-colonial contexts. I first drew on Homi Bhabha's thinking about cultural identity to develop a postcolonial account of national identity. Then, I built on Bhabha's concept of hybridity to propose a distinction between national identity portrayals as either *fixed* or *malleable*. Finally, I showed that, in post-colonial settings, presuming cultural identities to be hybrid and malleable rather than fixed could allow national identity and the markers of such to be presented to children as having a past that was contested and a future yet to be created; this would thus introduce children to the culture of the national community while also encouraging them to see themselves as co-creators of that culture.

I hope that these moves I have made can signal to practitioners a new way of conceptualising the teaching of national identity that decouples it from presumptions that a strong national identity is a patriotic one, and instead allows the classroom to be a space where ambivalent feelings towards national identity may be explored. I also hope that these reflections help

educational theorists reframe some of the debates about national identity in schools, by focusing not only on the question of whether patriotism is a desirable aim in schools by the standards of liberal democracy, but rather, by presenting pupils' experience of identifying with a nation as one that is contentious and ambivalent, and worth exploring.

One of the limitations of these considerations is that I have taken the identity of the post-colonial pupil as my starting point, and I have not yet included a consideration of the identity of the pupil who identifies with the coloniser-nation. The identity of the latter may be particularly significant in heterogeneous classrooms with students from diverse backgrounds or in settler colonial contexts, in which a curriculum should ideally be relevant to students who identify either with the colonised nation (e.g. First Nations pupils) or the coloniser-nation. These conditions are beyond the scope of this current reflection; nonetheless, the identification of this limitation points to possible directions for future reflections on the topic. Specifically, the distinction I have proposed between fixed and malleable portrayals of national identity might be useful in helping pupils who identify with coloniser-nations to work through ambivalences or even guilt that they may feel, arising from an awareness of their nation's complicity in global historical injustices. This suggests a topic for future scholarly consideration: how an understanding of the teaching of national identity founded on hybridity might be useful beyond postcolonial contexts as well. Centring this postcolonial insight about identity as one that is possibly applicable to all contexts, rather than treating it as a mere alternative to the Eurocentric conception of identity would then truly be a decolonial act.

Note

1. In this text, I render the word as 'post-colonial' when I refer to the historical fact of having been previously colonised, and I render it as 'postcolonial' (without the hyphen) when I refer to postcolonial theory.

Disclosure statement

The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

Funding

This work was supported by grants from the Philippine Commission on Higher Education and Ateneo de Manila University.

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