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Patriotism for People in Diaspora Is Love of Humanity

Ming Fang He

Patriotism is always contested. It is even more contested for people in diaspora. Diaspora (in Greek, διασπορά – “a scattering [of seeds]”) refers to the movement of a population sharing common ethnic identity who are either forced to leave or voluntarily leave their indigenous or ancestral lands and become residents in areas often far removed from their former homes (He, 2010).

In a broader sense, diaspora refers to the situations when indigenous peoples, immigrants, and emigrants are forced to leave or voluntarily leave their tribes, native lands, territories, communities, or countries due to such reasons as imperialism, colonialism, political persecution, economic exploitation, trade or labor migrations. While people in diaspora might not maintain strong ties with their homelands or native lands, they lack full integration into the host lands. This mobile and unsettling existence of diaspora complicates the meaning of patriotism to people in diaspora.

The meaning of patriotism becomes unprecedentedly complicated for people in diaspora in the United States since the recent rise of “draconian, enforcement-based policies and executive orders” (Huerta, 2017, para. 1). These enforcement policies and executive orders have given license to an outbreak of hate speech, harassment, bullying, and violence targeted at immigrants, Latinos, Blacks, Muslims, Jews, Gays, girls, women, and other individuals and groups in diaspora across the United States of America.

Immediately after the 2016 presidential election, the Southern Poverty Law Center’s Teaching Tolerance Project administered an online survey across the United States. The survey results indicate that “schools with significant numbers of African-American and Hispanic students and immigrant students of color” are experiencing what many teachers describe as trauma, fear, bigotry, anxiety, physical harm, emotional breakdown, despair, division, tension, loss of trust, and hopelessness (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016, p. 4). The enforcement policies and executive orders perpetuate “an isolationist and white nationalist philosophy, harkening back to the more oppressive periods of U.S. history” when individuals and groups in diaspora with diverse racial, cultural, linguistic, religious backgrounds, and sexual orientations “lacked basic civil rights, privileges and freedoms under the law” (Huerta, 2017, para. 1).

What does patriotism mean to people in diaspora at this moment? In *Orientalism*, Edward Said (1978) states,

[H]umanism is the only, and I would go so far as to say, the final resistance we have against the inhuman practices and injustices that disfigure human history....The human, and humanistic, desire or enlightenment and emancipation is not easily deferred, despite the incredible strength of the opposition... to human freedom. (pp. xxix-xxx)

Thus, patriotism for people in diaspora is love of humanity, which embodies “the common heritage of humanity and common good of humanity” (UNESCO, 2003, p. 29). To protect the common heritage of humanity demands volunteer exile (He, 2010) from commodified, acquisitive, and deskilling societies

to make the impossible possible (Ayers, 2016), to keep boundless human potential evolving (Lorde, 1984/2007), to keep questioning and challenging authoritarian and dominant narratives, to fight against all forms of oppression, to seek a balanced human condition in between contradictions and complexities, and to cultivate beauty, integrity, justice, love, and humanity (Nussbaum, 1997; Schubert, 2009).

To love humanity in inhuman and unjust times calls for radical imagination that keeps “an optimism of the intellect” alive (Harvey, 2000, p. 6); cultivates “educated hope” that evokes “different histories and different futures” and “substantiates...ambivalence while problematizing certainty” (Giroux, 2007, p. xiii); inspires “optimism over despair” (Chomsky, 2017); “provides radical new ways to think about the art of loving” (hooks, 2000, p. xxix); and politicizes possibilities (Olson & Worsham, 2007) without romanticizing or cynicizing the world where we live.

To love humanity in inhuman and unjust times demands engagement in solidarities and joined efforts to move beyond boundaries, transgress orthodoxies, and bureaucratic procedures (Giroux, 2017).

To love humanity in inhuman and unjust times requires us to develop creative insubordination strategies for “challenging forms of domination,” to create “more equitable and just public spheres within and outside of educational institutions” (Mohanty, 1989, p. 207), and to passionately participate in the life of schools, families, and communities.

To love humanity in inhuman and unjust times thrives on passionate involvement, strong commitment, and unfaltering advocacy for disenfranchised, underrepresented, and invisible groups and individuals in diaspora. This passion, commitment, and advocacy cannot be cultivated in isolation. It calls for an exile community, “the hybridity of imagined communities” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 5), a movement of community organizing, involving teachers and educational workers with shared experience of teaching against the grain (Cochran-Smith, 1991, 2001, 2004; Simon, 1992).

To love humanity in inhuman and unjust times, we need to work together as allies, take to heart the predicaments of the oppressed, suppressed, and repressed groups and individuals, and develop ideas, languages, and strategies to enact positive educational and social change that fosters equity, equality, freedom, and social justice. This exile community can only flourish when the efforts of teachers join with the efforts of researchers, educators, administrators, parents, students, community workers, and policy makers to “hope radically, imagine creatively, and act inspirationally” (Ball, O’Connor, & Wilson, 2017, p. 2). This community can only thrive when we work together to cultivate humanity (Nussbaum, 1997), a space where we might live more robustly and develop our human capacities more fully in an increasingly diversified, complicated, and contested world.

As Alice Walker writes in her book *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens* (1983/1967): “Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the Folk. Loves herself. Regardless” (p. xii). Patriotism for people in diaspora is love of humanity.

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