

Decolonizing Nationalism: Indonesian Diaspora and the Re-Imagination of Civic Belonging in Victoria, Australia

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Abstract: This article examines how the civic practices of the Indonesian diaspora in Victoria, Australia, exemplify decolonizing civic education through lived community experiences, language maintenance, and the use of urban social spaces. Drawing on a qualitative approach that integrates literature review and empirical observation, this study argues that the Indonesian diaspora performs a form of reflective and participatory citizenship that reinterprets, rather than reproduces, formal narratives of nationalism. Urban public spaces ranging from cultural gatherings to informal community interactions operate as “open citizenship classrooms” where decolonial, place-based learning emerges through collaboration, solidarity, and intercultural negotiation. The preservation of the Indonesian language and the active participation in diaspora networks demonstrate transnational civic loyalty that challenges nation-bound definitions of citizenship while fostering more inclusive and emancipatory postcolonial identities. These findings contribute to global discussions on decolonial, community-rooted civic education by illustrating how diaspora practices expand the possibilities of plural, justice-oriented citizenship.

Keywords: Diaspora Indonesia, Decolonizing Civic Education, Place-Based Learning, Diasporic Nationalism, Postcolonial Citizenship, Critical Citizenship

A. Introduction

Globalization has intensified cross-border mobility and transnational interactions. As noted by the Melbourne Asia Review, “The number of international migrants has grown from 84 million (2.3% of the world’s population) in 1970 to 281 million (3.6%) in 2020” (Melbourne Asia Review, 2022). These global movements reshape how national identity is understood, negotiated, and practiced. While globalization can erode traditional markers of national belonging, it also opens new spaces where nationalism is reimagined. Benedict Anderson’s (1983) concept of the nation as an “imagined community” becomes even more relevant in this era, as imagination itself becomes increasingly mediated by cross-border experiences and global connectivity.

Migration is one of the most visible consequences of this condition for Indonesia. According to the Australian Department of Home Affairs (2023), "As of 2023, there were 109,170 Indonesia-born people in Australia... comprising 1.3 percent of Australia's overseas-born population." Victoria especially Melbourne hosts one of the largest concentrations of this diaspora. Such demographic complexity is not merely statistical; it shapes how Indonesians overseas negotiate identity, belonging, and citizenship. Research shows that second-generation diaspora individuals "are not guaranteed to have a sense of attachment to Indonesia" (Oktafiani, 2019, p. 98), raising important questions about how Indonesians abroad maintain or reinterpret their sense of nationality.

Although scholarship on diaspora nationalism continues to expand, most studies remain confined within *methodological nationalism* the assumption that the nation-state is the natural, self-evident frame for analyzing identity and citizenship. This conventional view positions the diaspora as passive recipients who must be reintegrated or reoriented toward the homeland. For example, Rengganis et al. (2023) found low awareness of Indonesian civic values among diaspora participants in the Philippines, leading researchers to propose conventional civic instruction emphasizing geography, culture, and Pancasila. While valuable, such interventions reproduce a top-down pedagogical model in which citizenship is transmitted as fixed knowledge rather than interpreted through lived transnational experiences.

A decolonial critique offers a different direction. Bhambra (2015) argues that modern citizenship narratives are deeply shaped by colonial histories that continue to structure whose knowledge and experiences "count" as legitimate. In this context, Indonesian diaspora communities are not merely distant replicas of the nation, nor are they subjects in need of "reinstilled" nationalism. Instead, diasporas can be understood as active producers of knowledge and identity. Demir (2023) similarly emphasizes that "diasporas are not mere byproducts of modernity. They are central to the making of the contemporary global world" (p. 284). This perspective exposes the limitations of methodological nationalism and challenges civic education frameworks that privilege state-centered narratives.

By rejecting the assumption that the nation-state is the only analytical lens, a decolonial approach reframes diaspora identity as relational, hybrid, and formed through encounters in global urban spaces. Such an approach highlights how diasporic actors critically reimagine national identity through everyday practices language use, community engagement, cultural expression and how these practices constitute forms of civic learning that emerge outside formal institutions.

Based on this conceptual gap, this study seeks to examine how the Indonesian diaspora in Victoria, Australia reimagines their national identity within a global setting. The analysis focuses on how diaspora communities construct, maintain, or transform their understanding of Indonesian nationality through transnational experiences and how these practices contribute to the broader discourse on decolonizing civic education.

B. Methods

This study uses a qualitative method with an ethnographic approach. This approach was chosen because it is able to deeply explore the meanings, values, and social practices carried out by the Indonesian diaspora community in Victoria, Australia. Ethnography focuses on understanding the life experiences of a community through the researcher's direct involvement in their social context. In the context of this study, the ethnographic approach is relevant because it allows researchers to interpret how the social practices, language, and community space of the diaspora reflect the process of decolonization of citizenship education in the transnational sphere.

Through this method, researchers seek to understand the social and cultural dynamics that occur within the diaspora community, not only from the surface of visible activities, but also from the symbolic meanings attached to each practice. Data collection techniques were carried out through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, as well as literature studies and community documentation. Participatory observation was conducted in various community activities such as the Indonesian Festival in Melbourne, the Indonesian Street Food Festival, the PPIA Victoria student forum, and Indonesian language classes organized by local communities. Direct involvement in these activities allowed researchers to capture patterns of interaction, national values, and forms of citizenship learning that take place informally in public spaces.

In addition to observation, in-depth interviews were conducted with a number of community members, language teachers, cultural activists, and Indonesian students involved in social activities in Victoria. These interviews aimed to obtain personal and reflective perspectives on their experiences as members of the diaspora, including how they understand national identity, loyalty, and their relationship with their country of origin and country of residence. Data from the interviews and observations were then analyzed thematically, emphasizing the process of interpreting the symbols, practices, and narratives that emerged from the participants' life experiences.

This ethnographic approach is also enriched by a critical literature review of the concepts of decolonization, transnational citizenship, and community-based citizenship education. Literature analysis is used to strengthen the conceptual framework and broaden understanding of the historical and theoretical contexts underlying the social practices of the Indonesian diaspora in Australia. Thus, this method not only highlights the empirical experiences of the community, but also places them in a broader theoretical dialogue on identity, nationality, and postcolonial citizenship education.

Overall, this qualitative-ethnographic approach aims to reveal how diaspora social spaces function as open citizenship classrooms, where the values of collaboration, solidarity, and diversity are reflected and practiced. This approach allows researchers to deeply understand how the experiences of the Indonesian diaspora community in Victoria contribute to the global discourse on inclusive, equitable, and liberation-oriented citizenship education.

C. Results and Discussion

Recontextualizing Identity and Decolonizing Civic Education Practices

The civic practices of the Indonesian diaspora in Victoria demonstrate how identity, citizenship, and belonging can be reinterpreted through a decolonial civic-education framework. Within the multicultural environment of Australian society, the Indonesian community sustains its identity as “Indonesian” not simply as a legal category, but as an emotional, cultural, and historical orientation. According to the 2011 Australian Census, approximately 15,405 Indonesian-origin residents live in Victoria, representing nearly a quarter of the Indonesian diaspora across Australia.

This demographic concentration transforms Victoria especially Melbourne into a transnational cultural sphere where Indonesian identity is continuously reproduced through lived experience. From a decolonial perspective, these practices reclaim the meaning of citizenship from frameworks that have historically positioned non-Western citizens as passive recipients of Western civic norms. As contemporary postcolonial scholarship (e.g., Bhambra, 2015; Hall, 1996; Gilroy, 2004) emphasizes, citizenship has long been constructed upon racialized, colonial epistemologies that marginalize the voices of formerly colonized societies. The Indonesian diaspora's effort to maintain cultural rootedness abroad, therefore, is not merely sentimental it is an epistemic assertion that non-Western languages and cultural values are legitimate sources of civic knowledge.

The persistence of Indonesian identity within the diaspora shows that national belonging extends beyond territorial boundaries and state administration. Many individuals continue to identify as Indonesian even after decades abroad or after formally acquiring Australian citizenship. This illustrates nationalism as an affective, culturally lived experience grounded in memory, language, religiosity, and social relations. Rather than relying on older models of civic nationalism, contemporary understandings of postcolonial and diasporic identity (e.g., Clifford, 1994; Brah, 1996; Anthias, 2002) offer more relevant conceptual tools: the diaspora embodies a form of transnational affiliation in which identity is constantly negotiated across borders. Members of the Indonesian community in Victoria bring this identity to life not through symbolic repetition alone, but through critical reinterpretation redefining what it means to be Indonesian citizens living within globalized public spheres. Decolonization, in this sense, emerges from lived practices: citizenship becomes an ongoing negotiation shaped from below rather than merely imposed from institutional structures above.

Community as a Place-Based Learning Arena

In place-based civic learning theory, as explained by Gruenewald (2003) and Smith & Sobel (2010), place is not merely a geographical setting, but a socio-cultural context that shapes the civic learning process. The Indonesian diaspora in Victoria clearly demonstrates this: various community activities such as the Indonesian Festival in Melbourne, the Indonesian Street Food Festival (ISFF) at Queen Victoria Market, and the August 17 Independence Day celebrations at Federation Square, become lively and

contextual spaces for civic learning. At these festivals, Indonesians and Australians exchange stories, tastes, and values through music, cuisine, and traditional arts.

Children of the diaspora practice Saman dancing or playing the angklung, while the older generation serve as cultural mentors. Activities such as these form place-based civic pedagogy, where citizens learn about diversity, identity, and social responsibility through direct experience not just discourse in the classroom. Such activities are decolonial in nature because they reverse the position of cultural dominance: Indonesian culture is no longer seen as “exotic” in the eyes of the West, but appears as an active subject defining itself. Through festivals and community forums, the diaspora not only shows national pride, but also participates in an equal intercultural dialogue. Thus, civic learning in Victoria takes place through collective experience, not just through formal curricula.

Melbourne itself is a city that supports community-based education. The Victorian government, through its Community Engagement and Partnerships policy, provides space for schools and migrant communities to collaborate in socio-cultural activities. This context reinforces the theory of policy mobility (McCann & Ward, 2011): public policy moves across borders and is adapted to the local context. When Indonesian communities utilize public spaces such as Queen Victoria Market for cultural activities, they are actually practicing the transfer of citizenship policy from the national (Indonesian) to the local (Australian) level, and then modifying it to be relevant to the lives of the diaspora. In this practice, civic learning is no longer the monopoly of schools, but rather the social responsibility of the entire community. The diaspora learns about rights, obligations, and solidarity through mutual assistance activities, festival committees, and social solidarity in response to disasters in their homeland. Every community activity is an open citizenship class, where the values of participation, empathy, and reflection are constructed organically.

Community as a Place-Based Learning Arena

Within the framework of place-based civic learning (Gruenewald, 2003; Smith & Sobel, 2010), “place” is understood not only as a physical environment but as a sociocultural context where civic identities are produced. The Indonesian diaspora in Victoria exemplifies this paradigm through community activities such as the Indonesian Festival in Melbourne, the Indonesian Street Food Festival at Queen Victoria Market, and Independence Day celebrations at Federation Square. These events function as vibrant civic learning arenas where intercultural exchange takes place through food, art, music, and collective participation. Children practice traditional dances, elders pass down cultural knowledge, and community organizations collaborate to create a shared civic experience rooted in Indonesian values yet open to Australian multicultural interactions.

These engagements operate as decolonial pedagogies because they reverse cultural hierarchies that historically positioned Western culture as the normative center. Instead, Indonesian cultural expressions appear as self-defining, agentic, and dialogic. Melbourne’s cultural infrastructure supports such interactions, but rather than conceptualizing these dynamics through policy mobility frameworks, it is more accurate to foreground the city as a decolonial counterspace an urban arena where marginalized identities gain visibility, recognition, and authority. In this context, civic learning emerges organically from

community activities, rather than exclusively from formal curricula, revealing how everyday practices can nurture civic sensibilities grounded in participation, empathy, and solidarity. Loyalty and Nationalism in Transnational Spaces

Indonesian Language as Infrastructure for Epistemic Sovereignty

Language preservation plays a central role in sustaining Indonesian identity in Victoria. Many Indonesian families intentionally use Bahasa Indonesia in the home, and community-based language schools supported by organizations such as BBIVT and AIAV provide structured learning spaces through classes, film screenings, and conversation programs. These practices are more than linguistic continuity; they serve as political and epistemic acts. Drawing on Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's (1986) argument that colonial domination operates through linguistic suppression, the preservation of Bahasa Indonesia constitutes a form of epistemic sovereignty. It asserts the right to think, feel, and interpret the world through one's own linguistic framework, resisting global linguistic hierarchies that privilege English.

For children of the diaspora, Indonesian language proficiency creates a bridge between two cultural worlds. This dual-language competence nurtures what Du Bois (1903) conceptualized as a productive "double consciousness," enabling them to navigate global modernity without severing ties to their cultural roots. Weekly language classes, community conversations, and cultural storytelling sessions transfer not only grammar but also civic values such as mutual cooperation, humility, and respect for elders. In this way, language becomes an infrastructure for decolonized citizenship, cultivating a dual loyalty that enhances rather than undermines civic identity: loyalty to Indonesia's cultural heritage coexists with active participation in Australian society.

Loyalty and Nationalism in Transnational Spaces

The continued salience of Indonesian identity within the diaspora demonstrates that nationalism in global contexts is multidimensional and reflective. Rather than manifesting as rigid allegiance, nationalism emerges as an ethical commitment to solidarity, care, and civic responsibility. Diaspora communities actively engage in social initiatives such as fundraising for disaster relief in Indonesia, promoting Indonesian culture in Australian media, and participating in overseas elections. These actions illustrate a form of postcolonial citizenship (Bhambra, 2015) that acknowledges historical inequalities while forging new transnational connections.

This dual loyalty, however, is not without tension. Navigating obligations to both Indonesia and Australia requires constant negotiation balancing cultural belonging with civic duties, and reconciling divergent political expectations. Yet these tensions become productive sites of reflection where diaspora members critically examine their role in both societies. Through the lens of transnationalism (Glick Schiller et al., 1995), their civic engagement reflects simultaneity: the capacity to participate meaningfully in two sociopolitical worlds at once. This dual engagement aligns with contemporary notions of global competence, where individuals understand both local and global issues and take action for collective well-being.

Civic Learning in Festival Networks and Diaspora Leadership

Indonesian festivals and community forums in Victoria operate as experiential civic curricula, enabling participants to develop leadership skills, organizational abilities, and intercultural communication strategies. At the Indonesian Street Food Festival, for example, young volunteers learn event management, negotiation with local authorities, and public communication all essential competencies within democratic citizenship. Groups such as the Indonesian Women's Network Victoria, Gamelan Melbourne, and Indonesian Film Week foster participatory governance, collective decision-making, and respect for diverse perspectives.

Rather than situating these practices solely within global frameworks such as those of UNESCO or the Council of Europe, it is more analytically precise to view these festivals as mechanisms for glocalizing civic values. They blend Indonesian principles such as *musyawarah* (deliberation) and *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) with Australia's democratic ethos, generating hybrid civic norms that are contextually grounded yet globally relevant. Through this glocalization process, community activities become both cultural and political: they challenge state-centric models of civic education by demonstrating that knowledge about citizenship is generated through lived practice in public spaces.

Negotiating Postcolonial Identity through Embodied Civic Practices

The citizenship identity of the Indonesian diaspora in Victoria is fluid, hybrid, and negotiated through daily practices. Many diaspora members express that they still "feel Indonesian" despite living abroad or holding Australian citizenship. This sentiment reflects the relational nature of postcolonial identity (Hall, 1996), where belonging is shaped by memory, heritage, and everyday cultural practices rather than legal status alone. The community embodies critical citizenship (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) by actively reflecting on the responsibilities and moral meanings of identity within transnational contexts.

Religious gatherings, traditional ceremonies, and community-based acts of care function as embodied civic education. Through shared prayer, cultural rituals, and interpersonal support, the diaspora nurtures civic virtues such as empathy, responsibility, and solidarity. These practices illustrate how cultural and religious customs serve as decolonized forms of civic education, aligning spiritual and cultural expressions with Pancasila values that emphasize humanity, justice, and collective harmony.

Decolonization as Knowledge Emancipation

Decolonization in civic education involves reshaping knowledge systems to challenge Western-centric notions of citizenship. The Indonesian diaspora in Victoria demonstrates how Pancasila values can be reinterpreted in global contexts. Principles such as "just and civilized humanity" are enacted through participation in multicultural initiatives, humanitarian volunteering, and cross-cultural dialogue. These practices reflect what Appiah (2005) terms rooted cosmopolitanism cosmopolitan ethics anchored in local cultural roots.

This approach disrupts the common assumption within formal education that national and global identities exist in opposition. Instead, the diaspora shows that these identities can coexist, interact, and strengthen one another. Their everyday civic actions illustrate a decolonial reimagining of citizenship where knowledge, values, and identity are shaped not by hierarchical state structures but by lived, communal experience within transnational social spaces.

D. Conclusions

The civic practices of the Indonesian diaspora in Victoria illustrate that citizenship education can be reimagined as a decolonial and community-driven process. Rather than functioning as passive recipients of state-defined civic values, diaspora members actively construct and reinterpret Indonesianness through everyday cultural, linguistic, and social engagements. Their participation in cultural festivals, community language schools, independence celebrations, religious gatherings, and mutual-support networks demonstrates how civic identity is produced through lived experience and collective memory.

These practices challenge the dominant assumption that civic formation occurs solely within classroom boundaries or national territorial borders. The diaspora's assertion that "we are still Indonesian" reflects not only symbolic attachment but also a form of transnational civic agency. Their sustained use of Bahasa Indonesia, preservation of cultural rituals, and commitment to mutual cooperation operate as acts of epistemic sovereignty resisting global linguistic homogenization and affirming indigenous ways of knowing. At the same time, the diaspora's active involvement in Australian civic life volunteering, participating in local community events, engaging in public deliberation illustrates how national loyalty and global citizenship can coexist productively. Their hybrid, reflexive identity embodies a postcolonial form of citizenship that transcends the dichotomy between national and global affiliations.

These findings carry significant implications for Indonesia's Citizenship Education Curriculum. The lived experiences of the diaspora demonstrate that civic identity is no longer confined to a single territory, language environment, or political jurisdiction. The curriculum must therefore acknowledge that Indonesians increasingly inhabit transnational spaces where civic values are negotiated, embodied, and expressed in diverse contexts. Incorporating diaspora perspectives would enable the curriculum to move beyond nation-bound narratives and embrace a more plural, reflective, and global understanding of citizenship one that aligns with contemporary mobility, multicultural coexistence, and digital interconnectedness. Moreover, recognizing diaspora practices as legitimate forms of civic learning can guide policymakers to broaden the scope of civic education in Indonesia. The curriculum can integrate themes such as glocal citizenship, intercultural competence, transnational solidarity, linguistic preservation, and epistemic justice. By doing so, civic education would not only become more inclusive but also more adaptive to the realities of Indonesians living within global networks. Ultimately, the diasporic model shows that decolonial civic education thrives when citizens are empowered to interpret, enact, and negotiate national values through their lived experiences both within and beyond Indonesia's territorial borders.

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