

# Sunflower Identity: A Personal Note

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Painting by Lisbeth Vilkan Glad created for the cover of the book

When all the trees have been cut down, when all the animals have been hunted, when  
all the waters are polluted, when all the air is unsafe to breathe, only then will you  
discover you cannot eat money.  
— Cree prophecy<sup>1</sup>

*Sunflower identity*<sup>2</sup> is the name I use for my global unity-in-diversity identity built with fluid subsidiarity.<sup>3</sup> The unifying core of my identity (the core of the sunflower, so to speak) is anchored in our shared humanity, after many decades of global practice, this is deeply embedded in me.<sup>4</sup> Per definition, this identity is more securely anchored than any other, because all identifications are fickle except for one, and sociologist Norbert Elias said it already in 1939, ‘Only the highest level of integration, belonging to humanity, is permanent and inescapable’.<sup>5</sup> An ethos of globalism, a patriotism for *Earthland*, including all of its living beings, offers a much stronger mooring for personal identity than any we-against-them nationalism, simply because its anchor is the entire planet rather than local boundaries.

The technological means to reach all corners of our globe are more advanced now than ever — be it by train, plane, or internet platforms. My experience has shown me that it is psychologically feasible to relate to all human beings as fellow family members and that most people are capable of responding in kind. On my global path I am often asked, ‘Where are you from?’ and I reply, ‘I am a human being’, ‘a citizen of this planet, like you’. I avoid saying, ‘I am of this or that nationality’, or ‘I am of this or that profession’, in other words, I resist attempts to link my identity to my passport or genetic make-up.<sup>6</sup> I would rather say, ‘I am born with a certain passport’, or, ‘I have studied medicine and psychology’, or ‘my identity is a journey’. I even avoid saying, ‘I am a woman’. In

other words, I am extremely careful with the little word *am*, as it connotes essence, the core of my identity. The only sentence that truly fits my reality is ‘I *am*’ — only if I stretch myself then I would say, ‘I *am* a sentient being’ — ‘it is not identity, not autonomy, it is authenticity’, is psychologist Linda Hartling’s comment.<sup>7</sup>

At the periphery of my identity (the nested petals of the sunflower, so to speak), I am at home in the most diverse contexts on all continents (except Antarctica). I feel proud of all cultural achievements humankind has ever attained. I have learned to love many of them on my global path — the ‘selection’ ranges from the Indigenous seven-generation rule that is the home of my spirit and soul, to the pyramids of Giza that were my neighbours during my seven years in Cairo, to the Japanese aesthetics that inspired me when I lived in Japan, or fresh Belgium chocolate that seduced me in Europe. On the other side, I feel ashamed of all the atrocities humans ever perpetrated in the world, they all weigh heavily on my shoulders, be it atrocities committed by Joseph Stalin, Adolf Hitler, or any other oppressor. I feel what philosopher Karl Jaspers called the *metaphysical responsibility* to work for ‘never again’ not just in one particular locality, I feel this responsibility everywhere on our planet, and on behalf of all of humanity.

It is profoundly enriching for me to find safety in trying to ‘swim’ in the flux of diversity rather than ‘clinging’ to fixed positions. The experience of this movement provides me with a greater sense of security than any fortress wall. Rather than seeking safety in one particular local cultural realm, I find fulfilment through the nurturing of loving relationships in many realms. It is a pleasure for me to manifest a *protean self*<sup>8</sup> and continuously pendulate in the spirit of the non-dualist ‘double swing’,<sup>9</sup> it is a pleasure to be a *voyager* rather than a *vindicator*.<sup>10</sup> A voyager uses the challenges of cultural diversity and intercultural conflicts for forging new relationships and new ideas, while vindicators rather justify pre-existing ethnocentrism and stereotypes. Being a voyager is not the same as being a traveller. As emphasised before, I do not ‘travel’, I *live* in the global village by slowly moving from one home in my global family to another, as a humble cosmopolitan.<sup>11</sup> I see myself as a gardener, a nurturer of our cogitospheres, sociospheres, and ecospheres.<sup>12</sup> While walking our planet, I try to harvest the best from all cultures,<sup>13</sup> I enact ‘the role of the bumblebee’ that flies from flower to flower to nurture unity in diversity by connecting and cross-pollinating the diversity of cultural flourishings around the world, thus following the format of *dignilogues* that we have developed for our dignity conferences as an adaptation of what is known as ‘open space’ format.<sup>14</sup>

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### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *Wildlife — not money — makes the world go round*, by Jon Hall, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 28th February 2019, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/wildlife-%E2%80%93-not-money-%E2%80%93-makes-world-go-round>.
- <sup>2</sup> This text is adapted from Lindner, 2022, pp. 383–384. See also Lindner, 2006, 2009, Lindner and Desmond Tutu (Foreword), 2010, Lindner, 2012a, and Lindner, 2017.
- <sup>3</sup> See Lindner, 2012b. See also Svašek and Skrbíš, 2007.
- <sup>4</sup> The Common Ingroup Identity Model (CIIM) by Gaertner and Dovidio, 2000, holds that re-categorisation into superordinate groups entails the potential to lead to better relations between the subordinate groups, including greater intergroup forgiveness in conflict settings, when group boundaries shift from 'us versus them' towards a more inclusive 'we'. See also Moss, 2014, Moss and Vollhardt, 2015, and notes 922–924 in chapter 4.
- <sup>5</sup> Elias, 1939/1991, pp. 226–227.
- <sup>6</sup> Individual self-categorisation (how a person sees themselves) and external categorisation (how she is seen by others) do not necessarily overlap. The discrepancy between self-categorisation and external categorisation can be experienced as *categorisation threat*, see Branscombe, et al., 1999, and Reimer, et al., 2020. Many people with a Jewish background, for instance, who identified with their German passport and felt more German than Jewish, could not believe when Nazi Germany identified and humiliated them as 'Jews' allegedly planning for world domination. In other words, a person might think to be part of a certain group while the social environment may not acknowledge this chosen identity but force her into a different social category.
- In my case, I refuse making the core identity of people congruent with any other attribute than 'human'. This is also valid for myself, I perceive it as a humiliating categorisation threat when I am categorised other than as 'human' in my core identity (the core of the sunflower). I therefore resonate with the work of Garry Davis and his world passport project. If passports are needed at all, then why not a world passport? See <https://worldservice.org/gov.html> and [www.futurewave.org](http://www.futurewave.org).
- In other words, at the superordinate level (the core of the sunflower), I am in line with the concept of single categorisation in the Common Ingroup Identity Model (CIIM) by Gaertner and Dovidio, 2000. At the subordinate level (the petals of the sunflower), in contrast, I resonate with many identities.
- <sup>7</sup> Linda Hartling in a personal comment, 5th August 2021.
- <sup>8</sup> Lifton, 1993.
- <sup>9</sup> Yoshikawa, 1980, 1987.
- <sup>10</sup> Matsumoto, et al., 2007, p. 92: With Emotion Regulation (ER), 'people voyage through life; without it, they vindicate their lives'. It is a privilege to have David Matsumoto as an esteemed member in the global advisory board of our Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies community.
- <sup>11</sup> Luis Cabrera is a professor of political sciences with research interests ranging from trans-state normative issues, including human rights, citizenship, and migration, to the development of democratically accountable regional and global political institutions. In September 2017, his essay *Global government revisited: From utopian vision to political imperative* (Cabrera, 2017), formed the basis of the monthly Great Transition Initiative (GTI) Forum. On 11th October 2017, in his response to the contributions to his essay, he wrote about *political humility* and referred to Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956), the Indian jurist, economist, politician, and social reformer, who inspired the Dalit Buddhist movement and supported the rights of women and labour:

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The model emerging is inspired directly by Ambedkar, who sought to put India's immensely diverse cultural, linguistic, and caste-divided groups into relations of *political humility*: formal citizen equality within shared democratic institutions. Humility I understand (with reference to extensive recent literatures in psychology and philosophy) not as plain deference to authority or competing moral claims, but as an acknowledgment of the equal moral standing of others, an openness to input from them, and an intellectual modesty about the finality and accuracy of the moral and empirical claims one can offer, including on the final shape of rights to be enshrined in constitutions or legislation. A similar ideal of cosmopolitan political humility would seek to promote the recognition of equal standing, participation, and reciprocity across borders in the near term, while also seeking to expand institutional mechanisms of suprastate input and participation, and especially accountability to the vulnerable within states, over the longer term.

See also Cabrera, 2018. See, furthermore, an earlier edited volume on humiliation in Guru, 2009, with a chapter titled 'Against untouchability: The discourses of Gandhi and Ambedkar', by Pantham, 2009.

<sup>12</sup> See Singh, 2013. See also Kasser, 2017. Kasser looks at the suggestion that engaging in pro-ecological behaviours (PEBs, such as recycling, eating locally, political activism) increases people's measures of subjective well-being (SWB, such as happiness, life satisfaction, and hedonic balance), and vice versa: Is it that pro-ecological behaviour makes happy, or, do happy people engage in pro-ecological behaviour? Other variables may be the prioritisation of intrinsic values over extrinsic values such as money or status, or mindfulness, or a choice to lead a more simple lifestyle. Tim Kasser writes in his contribution to the Great Transition Initiative (GTI) Forum on the topic 'Sustainability and well-being: A happy synergy', 12th March 12 2017, in response to Barrington-Leigh, 2017:

a) prioritising intrinsic values (for personal growth and relationships) over extrinsic values (for money, image and status); b) how mindful one is (i.e., how focussed a person is on accepting and attending to one's momentary experiences); and c) whether one has made a choice to work less and lead a more voluntarily simple lifestyle. Each of these three variables has been empirically associated with BOTH greater SWB and more engagement in PEBs, suggesting each could potentially explain the documented positive correlation.

<sup>13</sup> For 'harvesting' from all cultures, see, among others, Lindner, 2007. See more in note 166 in the introduction to Part I. I thank Adair Linn Nagata for inviting me to write this article and for welcoming me into her classes at Rikkyo University in Tokyo. It is a privilege to have Adair Linn Nagata as an esteemed member in the global advisory board of our Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies community. See also Wright, 1942, and Goonatilake, 1998, on 'mining civilisational knowledge'. Much more has been written since 2007 on this topic, here are just some recent examples, Dupré, 2015, Schlichtmann, 2017, Cabrera, 2017, May and Daly, 2020, or Townsend, 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Open Space Technology (OST) was developed by Harrison Owen. It is a privilege to have him as an esteemed member in the global advisory board of our Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies community. Open Space Technology is a 'method for facilitating community meetings and conferences' by building 'on the passions and interests of the people who attend' so that 'the programme emerges out of the group itself'. See [www.ktchange.com/openspace.html](http://www.ktchange.com/openspace.html):

Using less than one hour, no matter how large the group, the facilitator outlines the procedure for creating topics to discuss, the 4 principles of Open Space, and the Law of Two Feet Naturally, this creates two roles: Bumblebees and Butterflies. Bumblebees fly from group to group cross-pollinating the discussions while Butterflies sit around looking relaxed — interesting discussions emerge around them as people find them and pause to chat.

Owen has condensed four principles to inspire passion, responsibility, and flow:

Whoever come are the right people.  
Whenever it starts is the right time.  
Whatever happens is the only thing that could have.  
When it's over it's over.