# How Becoming a Global Citizen Can Have a Healing Effect
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## Introduction

A major characteristic of many conflicts around the world is the question of "home." I recently wrote a paper on the Middle East conflict, please see Lindner (2006b). I adapt the following text from this paper and hope to learn from the other participants in this Dialogue about their experiences. I am preparing a book on the theme of global citizenship and would very much like to include the participants' views.

When we reflect on the Middle East conflict, we realize that both Palestinian and Israeli suffering is embedded in the need – and demand – for a "home." This is related to the claims for land on both sides. During my fieldwork in the region in 2003 and 2004, I was exposed to the profound and intense emotionality that is connected to the concept of home, on both sides. Let us turn to the Palestinian side. Abu al-Abed professes:

> Every human being who has his land invaded, all he possesses taken and his rights denied has a right to resist. …This is a war of liberation, and it is a war to the end. What I mean by saying we seek death more than we seek this life is that everything we do is an attempt to achieve happiness and peace in our land and to regain control over our holy places (quoted from http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/in_depth/middle_east/2002/voices/abu.stm).

Israelis, too, have a deep yearning for a "homeland." During my stays in the region I heard many voices. A man in his seventies, who moved from the United States to Israel after retirement, confessed to me, "You have no idea of the healing effect of having a homeland! To have a place for your culture! I am no longer the only one among my colleagues and neighbors to celebrate Jewish feasts! This is so healing!"

**From not-belonging to a particular place to belonging to the world**

My personal experience of homelessness makes me identify in great sympathy with the quest for "home" and belonging and its potential to cause violent conflict. My personal life experience resembles that of many Jews who, over centuries, felt at home in their dreams of Jerusalem without ever having been there; it also resembles that of Palestinians who feel that Haifa, for example, is their home, even though they were born in a distant refugee camp and have never set foot in Haifa. I was born into a displaced family from Silesia, which is now part of Poland. Together with millions of others, they lost their homeland in 1945. My parents have lived in continuous trauma since that time. The loss of their homeland broke their hearts. During the first twenty or thirty years of my life, my identity was like a "black hole" of non-belonging. This is how I felt: "Where my family lives, we are not at home, we are rather unwelcome guests; however, there is no home to go to."

My personal life story has unfolded in the course of more than twenty years of international therapeutic experience coupled with my specific refugee family background. I have spent many professional years in many countries. Prior to my focus on social psychology, from 1984-1987, I was a psychological counselor and clinical psychologist at the American University in Cairo, and had my own private practice in Cairo from 1987-1991. I offered counseling in English, French, German, Norwegian, and, in time, also in Egyptian-Arabic. My clients came from diverse cultural backgrounds, many from the expatriate community in Cairo – Americans, Europeans, Scandinavians, Palestinians, and citizens of other African countries – as well as from the local community, both Western-oriented, and traditionally-oriented Egyptians. Part of my work was "*culture-counseling*," meaning that foreign companies working in Egypt asked me for my support in understanding Egyptian culture, Arab culture, and Islam. Prior to coming to Egypt, from 1974-1984, I studied and worked in New Zealand, China, Thailand, Malaysia, Israel, West Africa, USA, Germany, and Norway, as a student of both psychology and of medicine, learning about the world's cultures and languages. Eventually, I learned to handle about 12 languages to various degrees.

In 1996, I began with my current social psychological research, initially with a four-year doctoral research project - see Lindner (2000) – entitled *The Feeling of Being Humiliated: A Central Theme in Armed Conflicts. A Study of the Role of Humiliation in Somalia, and Rwanda/Burundi, Between the Warring Parties, and in Relation to Third Intervening Parties*. Since 2001, I dedicate my time to developing a *theory of humiliation* and promoting *humiliation studies* as a new global and transdisciplinary field – please see Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies, HumanDHS, http://www.humiliationstudies.org, and Lindner (2006a).

Given my background in a displaced family, I could be tempted to wish to reclaim "my homeland." But I have chosen another path. The world has become my "homeland" and I am a "global citizen." I do not feel the need to fight for Silesia where my parents were born, because wherever I am, I consider my home. I am at the forefront of a growing number of people who are developing a global or at least multi-local identity and becoming citizens of the world. My home is now what William Ury (1999) calls the *global knowledge society*. Practicing to be a "global citizen" demonstrated to me that

human beings all over the world indeed are connected in their wish for recognition, a wish that turns into feelings of humiliation when this recognition is felt to be failing.

I resonate with Ury's conceptualization that for many millennia (since the inception of complex agriculture around 10,000 years ago), humankind has been caught in the rather malign win-lose framing that is brought about when land is the resource that people depend on. The emerging *global knowledge society* today promises to bring back the more benign win-win framing that hunter-gatherers enjoyed prior to the era of agriculture, this time not wild food but knowledge being the expandable resource that renders win-win framings.

Embracing all humankind as "my family" has often been a painful process. Such a process is like building a ship while at sea. It meant learning to "swim" and not to "cling." Developing a global identity meant that I transformed from being attached to lost land (Silesia) in pain, to connecting to the global knowledge society in joy. In other words, I have replaced a circumscribed piece of land (Silesia) with knowledge and with the entire planet Earth and all humanity. As a consequence, I do not wish to stir up resentment and ultimately war against Poland in order to "re-conquer" Silesia and reinstate the Silesian culture of my parents. Not only would the price be too high (war) – the world and I no longer use land as a main resource.

True, by identifying primarily with all humanity, in many ways I am betraying my parents' Silesian culture, accepting what Judith Viorst (1987) writes about in *Necessary Losses*. This I do, even though I love my parents deeply, profoundly resonate with their suffering, and would be overjoyed if their culture could survive.


## Concluding remarks

The question of "home" is profoundly relevant for the inhabitants of planet Earth. It is relevant for the identity of each citizen, for the solution of conflicts around the world, and for the kind of world that we envisage to build for our children in the future. Do we wish to build a world of domination/submission, where a few have luxurious homes and the rest has virtually nothing? Or do we want a world that provides everybody with a dignified home? Do we envisage a world of separate nations (with "enemy nations" endangering our homes)? Or do we want the entire world to be our nation that gives home to all? How should local and global aspects of identity be combined? What should we reply, when we are asked, "Where are you from?"

I have discussed these questions at great length with my dear friends on all sides of the divides of conflicts in many world regions. There are two ways out of homelessness, two ways out of being denied a dignified home: violent fight for a limited piece of land, or building a profoundly new global world of all-encompassing inclusiveness. Nobody forces us to define "homeland" in narrow ways. We are free to adopt the entire planet as our home and transform it, in the future, to house all humankind in a sustainable way. I regard such a struggle to be more benign than competition for narrowly defined pieces of land. Safety is not to be found in "owning" territory, because the concept of ownership is relational – it is dependent on its larger social context. Safety emanates only from building secure relationships among all world citizens in an all-encompassing home. The

mere option of such a vision, I hope, can facilitate compromises by reducing the despair with which people hold on to every inch of land they believe is "not yours."

Michio Kaku (2005), renowned physicist, concludes his book on *Parallel Worlds* with the following paragraph:

> The generation now alive is perhaps the most important generation of humans ever to walk the Earth. Unlike previous generations, we hold in our hands the future destiny of our species, whether we soar into fulfilling our promise as a type I civilization or fall into the abyss of chaos, pollution, and war. Decisions made by us will reverberate throughout this century. How we resolve global wars, proliferating nuclear weapons, and sectarian and ethnic strife will either lay or destroy the foundations of a type I civilization. Perhaps the purpose and meaning of the current generation are to make sure that the transition to a type I civilization is a smooth one. The choice is ours. This is the legacy of the generation now alive. This is our destiny (Kaku (2005), p. 361).

Kaku's type I civilizations points at the same vision that philosopher Avishai Margalit (1996) describes in his book entitled *The Decent Society*, where he calls for societies to build institutions that no longer humiliate their citizens. I call for a *decent global village* harnessed by a *Moratorium on Humiliation*. I believe that there is an extremely important role for the international community which needs to become more active and facilitate constructive social change towards a *decent global village*, which includes all citizens of the world in dignified ways.

I personally reply to the question "Where are you from?" with the following sentence, "I am from planet Earth, I am a living creature, I am a human being, like you." I identify as much with German history as with Russian history or any history of the planet. I feel responsible for not repeating what Stalin did, or Hitler, or any other such dictator. I define Russian history to be as much my history as Japanese or German history: my history is all humankind's history and I wish to carry the shame and disgust for the destruction that all humankind did and the responsibility for doing something constructive about it. The world believes that Germans during World War II ought to have stood up and not stood by when Jews were transported away. 6 million people died in the Holocaust. Today, 12 million children die each year before they are 5 years old, of preventable diseases and poverty. I identify with that. I do not want to stand by. And in order to stand up, I have to identify with all humankind primarily and put all "local" identities but on place two.

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