

# Our Identity Remains Marked!

Roma Madan-Soni

*Department of Applied Arts and Design, Box Hill College Kuwait, Box Hill Institute,  
Melbourne, Australia and  
University of Wolverhampton, Wolverhampton, UK*

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this article is to collectively work towards understanding and resolving the COVID-19 pandemic issues based on Messersmith's (2018) song, We All Do Better When We All Do Better. Furthermore, Our Identity should not Remain Marked to understand and overcome the workings of a virus whose Identity [DOES NOT] Remain Marked!

**Design/methodology/approach** – Practice-based creation coalesced with analytical writing.

**Findings** – We All Do Better When We All Do Better! The COVID-19 pandemic corresponds to crucial fundamental assumptions which have appeared from adversity anthropology over the past epochs. First, that environmental catastrophes infrequently surface, because calamities are communal and reliant on trans-species relationships. Furthermore, they appear from a blend of threat and susceptibility, with susceptibility as the causal issue. Second, the disaster occurs at manifold ranks concurrently, with responses to a threat; it endangers all the weak issues along with the original threat (Kelman, 2020).

**Research limitations/implications** – Throughout COVID-19 much of the media left cavernous time gaps, masks turned into tools of rebellion, and power and violence were exercised indirectly on the vulnerable. The virtual campuses of WhatsApp, Facebook and conventional broadcasting are disseminating specialist knowledge in pandemic science; now everyone is certified. They voice a nouveau-vindictive biopolitical language, so we rise towards COVID-19 denialism. And, we turn into unthinking puppets who speed up the transfer of misinformation that moves like an “asymptomatic” cough through an overcrowded bar or beach as all inhale-consume it.

**Practical implications** – Part of pandemic planning and dealing with the consequential calamity is to integrate instantly the disastrous aspects caused by lockdowns. In this surge of terror and apprehension, we cannot afford to isolate people, even more through shame and prejudice. Each one of us is accountable to support each other and advocate for an all-inclusive healthy community.

**Social implications** – Unescapably, as an immigrant, I had never dreaded this “home away from home” and stay anyhow, and I always had something to write home about. But recently I have had “Nothing to Write Home About,” (Madan-Soni, 2019). Migrant employees in most countries including international students were not much more than uninvited guests positioned in a conventional neighbourhood. It is as if your every expatriate-neighbour was plague-ridden and waiting to infect you. But the virus required no genomic or national identity or visa rank, it could cut all lines to get to you. The virus's Identity Is [Not] Marked.

**Originality/value** – Our Identity Remains Marked (2020) is my probing visual description of how Our Identity Remains Marked, layered, and stratified in stone under authoritarian structures of patriarchy. I read and researched about how Our Identity Remains Marked when humans are othered through the colours of race, gender, national and immigrant status, including all Earth others. Crafting things, creating something engages with a developing field of ecofeminist research on visual and embodied approaches and creativity (VEM Network, n.d; Reynolds, 2021). Painting offered me a therapeutic way of thinking and of using my senses.

**Keywords** Patriarchy, Ecofeminism, Othered, Trans-species, Identity%21, Marked%21

**Paper type** Viewpoint

“This is something we can easily conquer. There's no need to panic, . . . the current lockdown “should not prolong beyond 3–4 weeks.” Dr D. Nageshwar Reddy cited in Vasu (2020).



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### Effective communication and public compliance

*Our Identity Remains Marked!* (2020, [Figure 1](#)) is my probing visual description of how *Our Identity Remains Marked*, layered and stratified in stone under authoritarian structures of patriarchy, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. I read, watched, and researched how *Our Identity Remains Marked* when humans are othered through the colours of race, gender, national and immigrant status. Crafting and creating something engage with a developing field of ecofeminist research on visual and embodied approaches and creativity ([VEM Network, n.d](#); [Reynolds, 2021](#)). Painting offers me a therapeutic way of thinking and of using my senses. In my artwork, by defining yet merging an array of marks that both narrate yet sham reality, the pigments percolate into and shield the canvas to applaud, commemorate and venerate our identities as colours that diffuse amongst us and as us. They emanate the realities of sunshine to sunshade and twilight to dusk.



Our Identity  
Remains  
Marked!

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139

**Figure 1.**  
*Our Identity Remains  
Marked!* (2020), acrylic  
on canvas by  
Roma Madan Soni

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The life-threatening issue of the pandemic facing humankind remains unsolved. Humans are battling the virus either in public/medical spaces or within the privacy of their homes as they straddle between life and death. Many are struggling to breathe and very often to survive. Such a situation has made the virus the most significant Earth other, a subject of enquiry inviting much attention. We now relate this situation and the virus better to our planetary changes, our trans-species relationships and our control and influence – over all Earth others. As ecofeminists, we seek a balance between the existence of all ecosystem members and employ efforts to keep climate change at bay towards the long-term sustenance of our only priceless planet.

I, therefore, ask myself: Can I survive the COVID-19 global epidemic, for behind our facemasks *Our Identity Remains Marked?* However, *Our Identity Remains Marked* through shifts in skin tone, hair texture, changes in spaces and locations or even in the warmth of an interpersonal relationship. It remains a hierarchic identity. You may visualise my reaction to the COVID-19 calamity and *Our Identity Remains Marked!* (2020) as layers of distinction: differences “including but not limited to gender, sexuality, race, immigrant status, nationality, comorbidities, and informal, essential or other sector employment” (IFJP global 2020). Although “Art Supply Companies Contend with Racism as ‘Flesh Tones’ Come Under Scrutiny” ([Solomon, 2020](#)), *Our Identity Remains Marked!* You may begin “Thinking through the flesh” ([Ohito, 2019](#)) or even sort, classify, categorise and pigeonhole uniqueness and distinctiveness, yet, *Our Identity Remains Marked!* Our “Ancient flows of dark and light”

have been affected by our gene mutations throughout history. And through the pervasiveness of COVID-19, it is a mutation of bio-racism. Yet, Morton's legacy of racial distinctions continues to shape our politics and our neighbourhoods. Also, even when the "concept of race has no genetic or scientific basis" (Kolbert, 2018), it disrupts our sense of self. *Our Identity Remains Marked!* even though "There's No Scientific Basis for Race—It's [just] a Made-Up Label" (Kolbert, 2018).

Your saying, "I do not see colour" (Schultz, 2019) categorised or ranked in my exploratory creation, and *Our Identity Remains Marked!* (2020) is not helping. How are we going to fix something if people constantly believe they do not see it? Colour-blind racism is a concept that ignores race, racial and trans-species differences. Not seeing colour erases identity, oppression, discrimination and dismisses the struggles and experiences of being marginalised and "othered". People of colour are always aware and reminded daily worldwide of the colour of their flesh, passports, gender, professions, colouring their very existence (Alabi, 2020).

### Good news for all

The Science Squad is creating a stir! They are resolving various issues deconstructing the allegories of the virus, its portrayal, the progression and the development of the disorder. It's prospective treatments and sera, the configurations and patterns spread around the sphere and the wavers on the community. They are also trying to balance the back and forth of science and politics, moulding each nation's actions and reactions concerning their populaces. For the researchers ploughing passionately into the minutiae of the immune retort to SARS-CoV-2, the information received is so far predictable, and that seems to augur well (Suthar cited in Ledford, 2020). Organisations like the Pulitzer Centre, Magnum Foundation and ProPublica, amongst many others, reinforce projects and enable science to sustain its actual labour. They develop it through broadcasting from territories where the virus is now a compelling foothold, some of which have susceptible health structures or weak administrative systems (Science Magazine, 2020). In addition, freely accessible scientific journals are attempting to deliver high quality and timely research, analysis and updates of COVID-19 and the coronavirus that produces it.

### COVID-19: testing for "all" or "some"?

As healthcare specialists and supervisory establishments gain more information about the disease, future disease outbreaks rely on new learning. How did New Zealand, Tanzania, Seychelles and a few other countries declare themselves Covid-19 free? "They really engaged the minds and hearts of the population into doing the unthinkable, of saying [to Everyone] 'go home and stay there for the best part of six weeks'" (Baker cited in Reynders, 2020). Reynders (2020) used the time bought by the lockdown to finesse an extensive [all-inclusive] testing and contact tracing operation, holding it as an example to other regions (Jones, 2020).

As an ecofeminist with long-standing, persistent and enduring curiosities and concerns towards a shared and healthy existence for one and all, I should be happy that things seem to be improving. Nonetheless, *Our Identity Remains Marked!* However, as the WHO Director-General states, "We will not be going back to the 'old normal'. The pandemic has already changed the way we live our lives. We're asking everyone to treat the decisions about where they go, what they do and who they meet with as life-and-death decisions – because they are" (Ghebreyesus, 2020). Fear spreads that if tests run out, there is a chance that an immediate increase of the coronavirus will engulf the [Syrian] camps and consume the most vulnerable people since *Our Identity Remains Marked!* (Reynders, 2020). Actress Al-Fahad (2020) argues for infected expatriates, "Aren't people supposed to leave during crises? We should send them out ... put them in the desert as hospital spaces are for ... [natives] only". For the marginalised, finding a bed is challenging enough. Therefore the desert would be the space

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left to quarantine, anyway. Singaporean student Jonathan Mok was attacked on Oxford Street in London, and a consumer spat on the proprietor of a Chinese takeout. Reizel Quaichon, an NHS nurse in Brighton, was verbally and physically abused on her night shift. Nguyen, a Vietnamese artist, was disinvented from the “Affordable Arts Fair” by an exhibitor to avoid discomfort to the audience (Coates, 2020).

I am perplexed that the virus supports its community and flourishes, whereas *Our Identity Remains Marked!* We need salvaging. We learn from the US Surgeon General’s tweets that masks “are NOT effective in preventing the general public from catching #Coronavirus” (James, 2020). If the indigenous people had masks or test kits, they would have performed better than us (in the present) in avoiding the colonial virus. It was the European “interaction” and “unusual” viruses that constructed the genomic make-up of authority and compromise for Primary Countries peoples occupying unceded terrains (Diamond, 1999).

Nevertheless, we realise that the oversized variance in the number of cases between the town of Vo and the Diamond Princess was that the former worked on early-all-inclusive screening: “testing, testing, testing,” and inexpensively quarantined only the infected (Ricciardi *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, the number of COVID cases both in the US and globally is the focus of discussion, for testing has been trundled unequally amidst territories since *Our Identity Remains Marked* (Schumaker, 2020). Our past learning from the *Black Death*, the Bubonic plague pandemic, one of the most significant cataclysm’s that hit Western Europe in the Middle Ages, and exterminated a third of the continent’s population, shows that viruses break every border to proliferate. They do not care about world politics (The Editors of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2020). The present-day coronavirus frenzy and public establishments’ reactions seem to align with the prejudice and denial of the pandemic’s outbreaks in the historical context (Kasriel, 2020; Betz, 2020). Contagious diseases do not revere state confines. Everybody needs to work together to recognise, encompass and handle epidemics. Dissemination of intelligence should be timely and unreserved. Essentially, thorough and dependable investigations are vital to define the degree of the outburst and to recognise those most susceptible to the pandemic. “You can’t fight a virus if you do not know where it is. That means robust surveillance to find, isolate, test and treat every case, to break the chains of transmission” is a required (Ghebreyesus, 2020).

### Retracing our steps through art

Throughout COVID-19, much of the media left cavernous time gaps, masks turned into tools of rebellion and exercised power and violence indirectly on the vulnerable. The virtual campuses of WhatsApp, Facebook and conventional broadcasting disseminate specialist knowledge in pandemic science; now, everyone is certified. They voice a nouveau-vindictive biopolitical language, so we rise toward COVID-19 denialism. And, we turn into unthinking puppets who speed up the transfer of misinformation that moves like an “asymptomatic” cough through a crowded bar or beach as all inhale-consume it. Notwithstanding all this, maybe because of it, I witnessed communal coalitions ascent: “insiders” and “outsiders” collectively supported the susceptible and those on the frontiers, the original vanguards. Writers, musicians and artists sought forms of unanimity and kindness as a provisional vaccine. We could all partake in such a performance since art is now the combat against unintelligibility.

I was personally enthused by educational mediums like the Harvard Gazette, “Fighting Bigotry with Art” (Aggarwal-Schifellite, 2020). Shirley Chen’s *Reunion Season* (2020), Emily Hong’s *Acts of Service* (2020) and “Coronavirus’s Unearthing of Anti-Asian Racism” (2020) by Tina Gong motivates me to create. The *Wave* (2020) commenced as a pan-Asian literary and arts magazine, but its undertaking changed with the rise of racism and xenophobia with the pandemic. To take corrective action, the Elliott School and the SMHS held webinars on Anti-Asian Racism during COVID-19, declaring, “Virus has no nationality: Stop” (Dvorak, 2020). Educational institutions are required to disseminate health-related knowledge. It is time

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academic establishments essentially change their approach to teaching and pledge to fundamental interdisciplinarity: a continued investigation into interfaces between “biography, arts, culture, history and societal organisation that contributes to discussions about political, social and economic determinants of health” (Dvorak, 2020). University of Toronto’s “How to live in a pandemic’ is the type of university class we need during COVID-19” (Ketchell in Charise *et al.*, 2020).

Barua’s *Will you be my Quarantine?* (2020) inspire me. It illustrates how Members of LGBTQTTSI+ communities are predominantly susceptible to the adverse penalties of social isolation. These add significantly to higher reports of psychological disorders such as “anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation and acts, self-harm and controlled substance dependence” (Garcia, 2020). Both public health and sociological research reveal that LGBTQTTSI+ people have minimal access to healthcare, socioeconomic reserves, professional prospects or other forms of social support that their cisgender heterosexual colleagues can access. Regardless of gender and sexual identity, culturally appropriate and inclusive care will help us tide over the COVID-19 waves (Gorczyński and Fasoli, 2020). Zheng Fanzhi’s painting further persuaded me, *Hospital Triptych no. 1* (1991) – masked doctors focusing on the flesh of their nude female patient, analysing her outer corpus. A one-panel comic series: *I am not a Virus* (2020) by Korean-Swedish artist Lisa Wool-Rim Sjöblom addresses the hostility increasingly faced by Asians as the global pandemic “physically connects” but racially hierarchises humanity. The Asian people went “from being invisible” to being “hyper-visible, but as a virus or as a carrier of a virus” (Sjöblom cited in Garcia, 2020).

Panic spurts out of plague-like pandemic outbreaks and flows amongst the community transformed into bigotry and xenophobia to further blossom into chauvinism. It flourishes as it builds political and social fractures, building prejudice and hierarchy within the community, relegating the marginalised (Devakumar *et al.*, 2020). To uphold its historical stand, it maintains the ostracised as othered. While COVID-19 sees no barriers in its responses, the policy-strategy comebacks have unreasonably affected those in resource-poor situations, with minimal forms of health security or social safeguard. The marginalised with greater risk of comorbidities, and fearful migrants, particularly without documents, present themselves late and possibly with progressed infection.

Unescapably, as an immigrant, I had never dreaded this “home away from home” and stay anyhow, and I always had something to write home about. But recently, I have had “Nothing to Write Home About” (Madan-Soni, 2019). Migrant employees in most countries, including international students, were less than an uninvited guests positioned in a conventional neighbourhood. It is as if your every expatriate-neighbour was plague-ridden and waiting to infect you. But the virus required no genomic or national identity or visa rank. It could cut all lines to get to you. The virus’s *Identity Is [Not] Marked*. The COVID-19 situation is bursting with bias as it is grounded in a combined network of social, political, and historical frameworks. Its misuse buttresses racial prejudice by amplifying antimigrant oratory, border procedures and public health controls. Donald Trump’s use of the phrase “Chinese virus” and Salvini’s expression, “African asylum seekers”, turn into fishhooks that manipulate foreign strategy and trade talks through the COVID-19 hazard (Devakumar *et al.*, 2020). With stretched resources in a stressed society and a strained economy, to maintain the strength of the health skeleton inclusive of worldwide coverage – communal inclusion, impartiality and cohesion are imperative. When this does not happen, inequalities are amplified, blaming perseveres and bigotry persists long after. Deep rifts combined with a dread of others will lead to sadder consequences for all (Devakumar *et al.*, 2020). The signs to show that *Our Identity Remains Marked* are not required to be “fluorescent”; only anxiety, depression and human devastation lay stress on the already crumbling health structures worldwide.

The COVID-19 pandemic corresponds to crucial fundamental assumptions which have appeared from adversity anthropology over the past epochs. First, that environmental



catastrophes infrequently surface because calamities are communal and reliant on trans-species relationships. Furthermore, they emerge from a blend of threat and susceptibility, with susceptibility as the causal issue. Second, the disaster occurs at various ranks concurrently, with responses to a threat; it endangers all the weak problems along with the original threat (Kelman, 2020). Part of pandemic planning and dealing with the consequential calamity is to integrate instantly the disastrous aspects caused by lockdowns. In this surge of terror and apprehension, we cannot afford to isolate people, even more through shame and prejudice. Each one of us is accountable to support each other and advocate for an all-inclusive healthy community. The power of the media and the administration should work toward educating the community, safeguarding the vulnerable and disallowing and condemning bigotry and bias. COVID-19 is not simply a Marked-Communal bug. The virus motivates us to reconsider the schemes of universal environmental devastation, our earthly illness (ours, at least, in the sense that we caused it), which has been transmuted asymptotically since the early nineteenth century, if not earlier, possibly since Columbus set sail. Raising scientific voices will prevent xenophobic narratives and racist spasms from long-term adverse effects on our planet. And, let each pandemic hero's colour remind us that our unique hue has a special place in our shared planet. My purpose is to collectively understand and resolve the COVID 19 pandemic issues based on Messersmith's (2018) ecofeminist song, *We All Do Better When We All Do Better*. Furthermore, *Our Identity* should not *Remain Marked* to understand and overcome the workings of a virus whose *Identity* [DOES NOT] *Remain Marked* for its community.

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### About the author

Roma Madan-Soni is an artist, art historian and researcher. She holds a Ph.D. in Art History from the University of Wolverhampton. Her art, teaching, and research are interdisciplinary, positioned at the node of ecofeminism, feminist art practice, theory and history, and contemporary visual politics. Her exploratory work focuses on visual cultures, gender, colonial studies, postcolonial criticism, and modern and contemporary art. She is exhibiting her work at the Venice International Art Fair 2021 and Florence Biennale 2021. Her paintings and installations, based on social and environmental issues, have been exhibited at the Dar Al Athar Al Islamiyah, The Scientific Centre Kuwait, MOMA-Kuwait, and Masaha 13, Mayinart, Saatchi Gallery, to name a few. Her art has been commissioned by TAPRI, Finland, Routledge Handbook of Feminist Peace Research (2021). Professor Soni has received research grants and awards from The Scientific Centre Kuwait, Kuwait Foundation of Science, Kuwait Institute of Scientific Research, United Nations Habitat, and Arab Open University, among others. Professor Soni has made research-based presentations at the College Arts Association, Nuqat Regional Conference, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Lady Sriram College, Raza Foundation, University of Wolverhampton, Kuwait Institute of Scientific Research, Gulf University of Science and Technology, Dar Al Athar – Yarmouk, Kuwait University: Marine Sciences Centre, American University of Kuwait, Box Hill College Kuwait, American Open University, UN Habitat and Beit Sadu, Near East South Asia Conference-Istanbul, American International School – Riyadh, and NESA – Atakamul, Kuwait. She has exhibited work and published numerous articles on these topics for the journal of Ecofeminism and Climate Change, International Feminist Journal of Politics, Crafts Research Journal, Art and The Public Sphere, NECSUS\_European Journal of Media Studies, Journal of Visual Art Practice, and Swasti. Her chapter “Have we lost our Senses?” will be published in Cambridge Scholars in December 2021. She has conducted a Design Camp in collaboration with Dr. Fahad Dhawi and Professor Jawaher Al Bader for the Nuqat Regional Conference (2019), a workshop with Professor Jolic on TEDx Global Day for Gulf University of Science and Technology (2018) towards seeking sustainable design solutions. And, a workshop, “Wildlife of Kuwait’s Coastal Habitats: The First Forum on Wildlife in the State of Kuwait” at the Kuwait University Marine Sciences Center. She chairs the “Transformative Education Think Tank” for the “Collective Impact Coalition”, for Env.Earth in collaboration with Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. She mentors and curates the work of “Artronauts”, a community of artists and designers. Roma Madan-Soni can be contacted at: [sonimroma@gmail.com](mailto:sonimroma@gmail.com)

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