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# **My living-theory of International Development**

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Masters of Science in Economics

Masters of Science in Development Management

Submitted to the University of Lancaster in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Word Count: 78.680

March 2020

## Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

Arianna Briganti

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Arianna Briganti". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A' and a stylized 'B'.

## ABSTRACT

My thesis is focused on the relationally dynamic values of *empathy, social and gender justice, outrage, responsibility, love for and faith in humanity and dignity*. The originality lies in their use as explanatory principles in my explanation of my educational influence in my own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that affect my practice as a development professional. My other original contribution to knowledge is to relate the threefold nature of Living Theory methodology – a self-reflexive action-led research, a way of life, and a social movement - with my practice in International Development, which provides an example of how limitations in this sector might be overcome.

My self-reflexive research conceptualizes International Development as a global responsibility. It offers instances of how to work with others at micro (community) level, meso (organizational) level and shows my developing understanding of my potential systemic influence at a political (macro) level.

By drawing insights mainly from self-study and narrative enquiry methodologies, my living-theory of International Development is presented as an alternative to the neoliberal approach and rests on the idea that Development means having a chance to contribute to a good change (Chambers, 1997, p.1743). My stories derive from the experiences of my own life and that of the people I work with. I use the South African concept of *Ubuntu* and its transformative growth into I~we~us relationships. Whilst exploring commonalities between Living Theory and International Development, I show they can reinforce each other and combine in the practical realization of a commitment to a fairer world. A generative form of development emerges that includes a gendered epistemology. I discuss how my own pursuit of gender justice has improved the quality of my work as a female development economist and practitioner, living in a capitalistic era.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my supervisory team, Prof. Laidlaw, Dr. Murphy and Prof. Whitehead goes my gratitude for their support throughout the years and for being inspirational and encouraging. For the innumerable thought-provoking conversations that moved my thinking forward, challenged my ideas and helped me generating new ones whilst exposing my bias.

To my dearest friend, life mentor and English teacher Moira, who introduced me to the world of Living Educational Theory and taught me how to trust myself, my abilities and grow stronger as a woman and practitioner researcher. I am forever grateful for your friendship, our sisterhood, your loving care and our memorable conversations which I hope will never seize.

To Jack for having told me to trust what I have to say. Thank you for your gentle being, for your respect and curiosity in my research and for the intellectual role model you have become. To Joan for having welcomed me in your house, taken care of me and for the many beautiful conversations.

I will be forever grateful to the International Research Skype group of living theorists and all its members for their constant guidance, uplifting conversations, for having read years of my writing and providing challenging comments with the only intention to help me to develop my thinking and improve my practice. Thank you for the countless evenings spent rejoicing at my small and large life achievements; thank you for the good mood you always instill, as well as your laughter. I am profoundly grateful to Marie Huxtable for her never-ending support that has so greatly contributed to my thesis, and for her enthusiasm for my work and research. To Sonia Hutchinson, for her friendship, your brilliantly creative mind and for your free spirit I always looked up to.

To my friends and colleagues at Nove Onlus worldwide, who are incorrigible idealists and as such still follow a dream. In particular to Susanna Fioretti and Malik Q. who

taught me what International Development means in practice. My gratitude to you both is infinite.

To my family and friends for their love, their patience in bearing with my constant absence and for making fun of my restless self in a good-naturedly way.

I am filled with gratitude for my role model(s) and continuous source of inspiration, namely the many powerful, courageous, inspirational, brilliant, resilient, outspoken, committed, passionate, combative girls and women I have met along my journey and for the many more yet to come.

I dedicate my work to my loving husband Jochen and our daughter Marta, loves of my life. Thank you for your unconditional love. Thank you for accepting me the way I am.

Thank you for helping me becoming a better person.

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## List of Abbreviations

BERA	British Educational Research Association
CHWB	Cultural Heritage without Borders
EBRD	Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EJOLTs	Educational Journal of Living Theories
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GDI	Gender Development Index
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIZ	German International Cooperation
GNI	Gross national income
HDI	Human Development Index
ICRC	International Red Cross Committee
ID	International Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources
LT	Living Educational Theory
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MoLSAMD	Afghan Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled
NGO	Non-governmental organizations
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAR	Participatory Action Research Approaches
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNWOMEN	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the empowerment of women
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	The World Bank

I am human because I belong  
(Tutu, 1999, p. 35)

## GENERAL PROLOGUE

Unlike a traditional thesis (Laidlaw, 1996) I am going to begin my Ph.D. with a personal story, because my life as an International Development professional is grounded in the values that emerge from this life-changing experience. By writing a General Prologue (ibid.) I am aiming to introduce the reader to some of my core values in action. However, I am not at this stage attempting to explain them. The prologue, by telling my personal story, will shed light on the reasons why I am dedicating my life to working as a development professional. This translates into my aspiration to contribute to the realization of the human capabilities of the people I work with in developing countries. Through engaging in the processes of supporting vulnerable groups to regain their dignity by developing their own capabilities, I believe I contribute to a more just world. I would have not, however come to the understanding of my aspiration if I did not explore and reflect upon the incident encapsulated in this prologue that changed my life. Therefore, this narrative that represents the heart of my life as a development professional and living-theory researcher is to be considered as my own process of conscientisation (Freire, 1975e), namely the 'awakening of my consciousness' which is as Ledwith (2005) defines it:

the process of becoming a critical thinker and unpacking dominant thought and oppressive thought which results from the cycle of socialization (p. 52).

The reader is not only invited into my text (McAlpine, 2016, p.33) but most importantly into a part of my life the prologue represents. This is written using a narrative style, the same applied throughout the thesis whenever I tell the stories of the people I met and how they seemed to have experienced the world (Clandinin and Connelly, 1991, p. 14). By reporting my individual experience (Cresswell, 2007, pp.53-54) using my most

authentic voice I position myself in this thesis as the storyteller using a narrative research methodology (Clandinin and Connelly, 1991, p. 14).

The embedding of my prologue into the body of my thesis will be unveiled throughout the five Chapters of my thesis. The prologue and its significance will emerge while exploring International Development re-conceptualised as a global responsibility.

### **Her name is justice**

- What we think is less than what we know; what we know is less than what we love; what we love is so much less than what there is; and to this precise extend, we are much less than what we are. (Buscaglia, 1972, p.115)

When the following event happened, I was not aware of what I was getting myself into. I acted spontaneously driven by something I could not conceptualise at that time, nor did it occur to me I should have conceptualized it. I was at a time in my life when most of my actions were obeying a gut feeling rather than following a meticulous plan and analysis of the scenario with the detailed elaboration of its benefits and shortfalls, as I would do today. The beauty of those years lies in their spontaneity and in the fact that no over-thinking got in the way of my actions. It also was characterised by a deep wish to become, or better to start becoming the person I wanted to be, to identify myself ontologically and as a young professional and to find my place in this world. I did not know much about life or at least so I thought, hence I let myself be guided by my way of feeling which at that time shaped mostly my own ways of knowing.

The feeling I'm referring to is love. I wanted to love, and I wanted to be loved. I wanted to love those whom I thought were less loved, who felt lonely and vulnerable. I wanted to love those with whom I empathised, and although it was not a conscious thought at the time, I looked for those who seemed to be similar to my younger self.

I was also motivated by and infused with my sense of justice and fairness (which for me are fundamental human rights) or rather by the certainty that these fundamental principles were missing in many parts of the world. I then decided to work in those parts of the world where I assumed, I would find more evidence of injustice and could act proactively in changing the course of events.

- Love enables justice to see rightly (Civille, 1981, p. 300)

She must have been three or four years old. Nobody knows the date she was born, not even the mother that gave birth to her. I saw her for the first time in early July 2005 at the missionary house of the Sisters Congregation in the outskirts of Addis Ababa (Ethiopia). She was waiting for me together with her mother because one of the nuns, namely Sister Angela told them to do so. She did not know why, and she ignored who I was and why I was there. She could not have predicted our shared future. In fact, no one could predict how our lives would evolve and how we would become dependent on each other. When I look back at that Saturday afternoon at the missionary house, I wonder how she might have felt while she waited to meet a white, anonymous woman. Was she curious or perhaps annoyed with the nun for having asked her and her mother to walk such a long distance from their village on that cold and rainy day in July?

Her name was Marta and I found her stunningly beautiful. Not even the signs of severe malnutrition such as the lighter spots on her dark skin and the reddish hair could obscure the beauty of her perfect oval face and facial features. She had perfect heart-shaped lips seen only in cartoons, and big, brown, gleaming eyes. However, her dark eyes were as profound and intense as they were melancholy. She was undeniably a sad child. I wondered what she was thinking as she stared at me. And why was she so sad?



My young and inexperienced self, for the first time in Ethiopia, a developing country and one of the poorest, asked myself ridiculous questions. As if being a malnourished child, in rags, walking barefoot on a rainy day, were not good enough reasons for making a person feel sad. A week before, Sister Angela, who was in charge of the kindergarten of the Catholic mission, 'phoned me up, saying there was a young destitute boy, living with his grandmother, both in need of help. She wanted me to visit her on Saturday in order to meet the boy.

I had arrived in Addis Ababa from Italy only a few weeks earlier and I was still feeling excited at the thought of having obtained my first job as a junior development professional working for the Italian international development cooperation after a long internship and many failed job-applications. I had never been to Africa before, and I have to admit that when I was offered the job I had to look up exactly where Ethiopia was. Even on a map it looked immense (in 2005 there were 76 million people, today more than 100 million). My boss gave me less than two months to get ready, complete all the vaccinations and jump into the unknown. I was scared but most of all I was waiting for that opportunity for too long to refuse it. Being fussy and asking 'irrelevant' questions such as where would I live or how long would I stay, was not an option.

When my plane was about to land in Addis Ababa I looked at the city below and could not understand where it started and where it ended. It was huge. There were small shanty huts scattered throughout the perimeter of one of the biggest cities I've ever been to. However only a few places had lights on. I found out, together with the vast majority of the people living there, that lack of electricity and running water was the normality in the Ethiopian capital, headquarters of the African Union. I ignored that fact

that in one of those huts with no water and no electricity Marta was living with her mother.

I also expected a colourful, joyful, warm country perfectly in line with the stereotype of a continent often mistaken for the single country I saw on television and in attractive brochures for tourists. When I left Bole airport however, the reality presented itself rather differently. The colourful, joyful and warm country seemed to me to be very cold (July is in the rainy season in many parts of Ethiopia, and Addis Ababa is at a chilly altitude of 2300 metres above sea-level), monochromatic (the colour of the muddy streets and the houses made of mud) and sad, as the people were sad whom I met during my stay.

Inexperienced, a bit scared and disappointed was how I was feeling, when I met Sister Angela at the convent. I immediately loved the way they took such loving care of the vulnerable children and women, regardless of religion, ethnicity and everything else. Among their many activities they also ran a kindergarten, a literacy course and vocational training for women. I offered Sister Angela my help in taking care of whoever she deemed to be a particularly needy child. I remember the energetic, and optimistic Latin-American nun smiling at me (or at my naivety) and saying: 'The kids here are all particularly needy'.

Sister Angela told me to be at the mission that Saturday afternoon, the boy would be there too, and we could have started getting to know each other. Instead the boy and his grandmother were not there and, waiting for me were Marta and her mother. Sister Angela explained to me that she was trying to contact the boy's grandmother for days without luck. Often people are obliged to leave their modest houses due to a sudden increase in rent, or even worse due to the Government's bulldozers that crash

everything they find along the way in the name of the real-estate speculation, which demands more space for shopping malls and luxurious offices. It becomes difficult then to locate people living in one of a thousand hovels without addresses in the outskirts of Addis Ababa. Marta's mother Freire was sent away by the same bulldozers when she realised she had no other place to go, nor money and asked Sister Angela for help. Angela, a very pragmatic woman used to coping with emergencies, changing and adapting plans and believing in God's grace, decided that the Italian woman would not mind being introduced to Marta instead of the boy, and she was right.

- I'm out with my lantern looking for myself (Dickinson, 1854, p.139)

Marta and her mother Freire needed help. They seemed to have been abandoned by faith, at risk of harassment and physically and emotionally vulnerable. No relatives, no friends, no shelter, no job, only irregular and badly-paid daily work for Freire, still not enough to feed two people. Sister Angela accepted Marta in the Catholic Mission's kindergarten even if she was still too young. However, the child has explicitly and with what we would get used to call Marta's usual 'lively stubbornness' asked the nun to be enrolled: 'Please let me study with the other kids, I want to go to school!'. Angela could not resist. Marta started to attend kindergarten which would guarantee her a safe place to be for several hours, dry and warm, and a piece of bread and a glass of milk per day. That was all Sister Angela could afford to offer to the neediest children among the needy ones, and for a long time that was Marta's sole diet.

On that Saturday when Marta and I met for the first time, she looked shy but also intrigued by that white, robust woman, wearing so many things such as jeans, socks, shoes, a jumper, a raincoat and she even had a mobile phone (which from that moment she would play with all the time)! Sister Angela introduced me to mother and child as a friend from Italy who would spend some time in Ethiopia and was interested in helping

Freire who would enjoy Marta's company at weekends. Freire considered that as a good opportunity for her daughter to have someone to stay with while she was away. I was surprised at the naturalness with which Freire accepted the proposal of a total stranger to spend time with her daughter. Sister Angela was and still is a very trustworthy person within the community, hence I thought that being associated with her represented a good reference, which was the reason why Freire trusted me. Now I know that in developing countries my 'whiteness' is very often synonymous of trustworthiness. In other words, many believe that *ferengji* (as white persons are called in Ethiopia) are good people who would never cause any harm. In many places in the world my 'whiteness' gives me privileges I would not have otherwise. One of the many assumptions associated with the quality of being *ferengji* is related to one's economic status. A white person is always considered to be rich. Looking at my income at that time I can claim I was anything but rich. However, I admit that I was very rich, if by that it is meant to have the privilege to access the basic human rights. The destitute people I crossed paths with in Ethiopia might have interpreted it differently and at that time I tried often to explain that I was not financially rich. Again, it was my naivety speaking. Today I know that all my "richness", the one I was given by birth lies in the fact that my basic needs as a child were recognized. I was therefore able to live not worrying about surviving, and I was spared the appalling circumstances the child in front of me was faced with: powerlessness, vulnerability, hunger, abuse.

What would I then do with Marta during weekends? How would I cheer her up? I thought that an ice-cream and a visit to the local (and rickety) amusement park would be a beginning. I soon realised that an ice cream would not satisfy her hunger and that she was too weak for the playground. Our weekends started gravitating around acquiring the nourishment a child her age should have. I would also buy more food for her and Freire to eat during the week. That was the first unexpected, and challenging assignment Marta (unwillingly) tasked me with. It was in fact, harder than expected to

make her eat. Although she was hungry, she seemed not to enjoy food or at least not if she was supposed to eat on her own. She would wait for me to spoon-feed her and I still don't know if it was because of her young age or whether she was craving for attention and care. I believe it was the latter.

As soon as she seemed physically stronger and at ease with me to the point that she would timidly smile from time to time, I dared to take her to a paediatrician. I wanted to make sure that she was not affected by any major disease. At the first glance Angela and I, with no medical expertise whatsoever, decided to look on the bright side and felt confident enough to exclude the worst: HIV and leprosy. In fact, neither the mother nor the child bore any visible and worrying signs. However, both lack of hygiene and potable water are powerful vectors for many infections.

Marta didn't like people to approach her and she would scream if anyone touched her. For a long time, she would not allow me to hug her. Our first visit to the (female) paediatrician was not a pleasant encounter for Marta, who started crying from the moment the doctor tried listen to her heart with the stethoscope. Apart from stating the obvious such as the child being severely undernourished and weak as many in Ethiopia, she noticed Marta's visible state of depression, and that concerned the doctor more than her physical condition. She started enquiring about her mother and the way she took care of her child.

A few months passed, and I was delighted to note that Marta seemed happier and happier to see me on weekends. Was it because of the food and the presents I brought with me? Certainly, she associated me with positive basic-needs related experiences, but there was something more profound than that. We had no language in common (Marta was not a very communicative child anyway). However, we found our own way

of communicating. In front of that four-year old I was the most authentic self I have ever been. I was committed to ensure Marta human dignity and access to her rights, because I found it utterly unjust, she had none. And I found it unjust and heart-breaking to see a child feeling unloved. When I looked at her, I felt I was in front of the most humane human being I had ever met. With Marta I felt alive.

At that time, in my life, I was looking for my real self and for the place I wanted to have in this world. Marta helped me in clarifying these. Our relationship started showing me that love for humanity and social justice are intrinsically related, and the interdependence of them became my life cause. For the first time I set my standard of judgments based on these two fundamental values.

- What is truth other than the living for an idea (Kierkegaard, 1835, p.21)

Three months later my business assignment in Ethiopia was about to end when my manager offered me to prolong my stay for another year. I was very pleased since it was the solution, I was expecting in order to keep taking care of Marta. I had to fly back to Rome in a few weeks, undergo some training and then I could go back to Addis Ababa. And so, I did. Leaving Marta and the people I learnt to love there was painful, but I promised them, and I promised Marta I would be back soon. Sister Angela was the guarantee that Marta would not have been left alone. By the time I left we both had understood that Freire was not mentally fit to take care of her child, which was one of reasons why Marta looked so distressed. The day I left I gave her a gift, I thought a special one. She joyfully said: 'a doll'. Instead it was an angel. I hoped her guardian angel.

Once in Rome, the plans my manager had for me changed again: my new destination was Afghanistan and I'd been given less than a month to prepare and leave for Kabul.

It was November 2005 when I embarked on a plane from the military base in Pisa heading to the Afghan capital together with a number of soldiers among which I was the only civilian and apparently also the only one ignoring, once again, where exactly was I heading to and what to expect.

My life in Kabul was gravitating around my engagement in a project on gender-equality in Afghanistan. I was working with women who used to have no access to education, vocational training or job. I've been offered the job due to my background in economics, however I soon realised I had to deal with problems that in my eyes seemed to be greater than economic issues, such as post-war trauma syndrome, structural violence, gender-based violence, sexual abuse, and trafficking. That was the moment when I started building a quality relationship with the community of women and men I worked with. I knew I could not respond to their often tragic accounts of their lives, pretending to know how this feels and that I had solutions to their inexplicable sorrow. So, I simply did not do it. This is where I relied completely on my capacity to empathize and I let this part of me speaking for myself. As with Marta I engaged in a non-verbal communication that spontaneously emerges and that helps me convey my message of love and faith in humanity.

From that moment, that was my approach to my profession as a development practitioner, my idea of what it is development in practice, and I decided to live for it.

The communication between Afghanistan and Ethiopia was very difficult and I often did not hear from the nun and Marta for months. I trusted she was all right in Angela's hands. In the summer of 2006, I was finally planning my annual leave and I could not think of any better place than Addis Ababa. Another tough and cold rainy season awaited me, but most of all I really hoped Marta would be waiting for me as well and still remember me.

This time I did not fly alone to Ethiopia, Jochen decided to join me since he was looking forward to meeting Marta as well. I met Jochen in Kabul at a business meeting and in a very short time we moved in together and planned to get married. When I told him about my ties with Ethiopia, the people I met there and about Marta, he was at first surprised and then intrigued. He wanted to be part of my life entirely, so it felt like a meaningful choice for him to go to Ethiopia with me and meet my people there.

It was not been easy to find Freire and Marta. They had moved again, and those villages were like a maze. Asking random people whether they knew where a young woman with her child was living didn't work. Marta had been missing class for quite some time so not even her teachers knew where they were. Angela deployed all her creativity and people in the search. Eventually we found out where they had settled, and Marta not only remembered me, but seemed to be very happy to see me again!

Marta, Jochen and I spent as much time as possible together and I was pleased to see how the two got along well. We went back to our usual routine made of eating, playing and possibly laughing. Jochen was much better than me at making her giggle, with his many tricks and funny faces. Marta felt at ease with him, which is not something she felt with many people, especially men. However, at home Marta's situation did not improve. She wasn't healthier nor was she particularly joyful. During my absence Angela suggested that Freire take literacy classes and vocational training at the convent. She was given the chance to find employment in order to better provide for herself, Marta and the new baby she was pregnant with. Freire never attended the courses, nor did she accept any job.

Angela suggested we ask for help in monitoring Marta and the baby. At the nun's mission there was a young lady- mother of a 5-year old son- who worked as a baker called Fiker. She was also Freire's neighbour and Sister Angela cleverly thought to ask



her to pass by Freire's house on a daily basis and make sure Freire would feed the child, keep her as clean as possible, and walk her to the Sister's kindergarten in the mornings. The task was not an easy one as most of the time Marta would be at home alone.

Jochen's and my vacation came quickly to an end and this time saying goodbye was even more painful than the first time. We had to go back to our job in Afghanistan, but Jochen and I agreed that Marta and her family had to be supported in a better way, and that by just sending money their problems would not be solved. Jochen and I decided to leave Afghanistan and move to Ethiopia, which we did at the end of 2007.

- And without you, I shall not live. Alone, we are lost: together, we shall bring the morning (Garner, 1965, n.p.)

In the autumn of 2006 Marta's sister was born beautiful and healthy. Angela and Fiker were supporting Freire with her children as much as they could. Marta seemed so happy to have her baby sister, she was cuddling her all the time and holding her close to her chest. Jochen and I moved to Addis Ababa with the main goal of providing the girls with the dignified life any child in the world should have.

Fiker was still helping us following Marta's progresses at home and was advising Freire on how to deal with her and the baby. I was spending almost all my time with Marta handling her health issues, her nourishment, her mental wellbeing. However, little improvements were to be seen. Very discouraged and even more concerned, Jochen and I thought of asking Freire to let us raise her child and allow Marta to move in with us. Yet, we did not want to use our 'white privileges' to separate a child from her mother. We were confronted with ethical issues and we could not find easy solutions. I knew that Freire, due to her disempowered condition would not have been able to offer

resistance if I decided to take Marta with us; I knew also she was not able to raise her child, who was constantly distressed.

Sister Angela and Fiker helped us to figure out what to do and the solution they proposed seemed to be culturally appropriate and acceptable for all of us. The two women suggested that Marta could move in with Fiker and her young son. The vicinity to Freire's house would allow mother and child to see each other on a daily basis, but at the same time that would help Freire to concentrate on the baby. Angela explained to me that in Ethiopia it is very common to have children raised by the extended family or by close friends. The community supports each other and co-parent those kids whose parents need a helping hand. I found it very reasonable and Fiker's loving attitude towards Marta convinced us that the solution was the right one for the sake of the child. When we asked Marta whether she would like such an arrangement she smiled of a smile which was more convincing than a thousand words.

The beneficial influence that Fiker had on Marta was soon palpable. Marta's school performance improved tremendously, her good mood (till then almost non-existent) started being her natural way of being. Fiker's son and Marta would play like sister and brother and it was a joy for me to spend time with both of them. Marta's started gaining weight and acquiring a healthier appearance. As for Freire she rarely went to visit her daughter, she was away from home, with the baby on her shoulders, most of the time.

More than a year passed since Marta moved in with Fiker and things were good or at least I thought so. I started noticing that Marta's expression would change when I enquired about her life with Freire. Marta confided the situation to her best friend Fozija. Luckily Fozija decided to inform me. Apparently now that Marta was a bit older, she qualified as a good housemaid. Freire would overload her with household issues from cleaning to cooking and doing the laundry for her and her son, who as a male was not

supposed to get involved in 'women's job'. Freire's loving attitude towards Marta changed and she even started beating her.

I admit that I was so angry at Freire, at Fiker, at the whole world that in my eyes, let Marta down and kept violating her rights to enjoy a happy childhood, that I very quickly disregarded all the ethical issues I was so concerned with. Jochen and I spoke with Marta and asked her to tell us more about her recent life at Fiker's. 'Marta, where do you want to live?' I asked. She said: 'with you'. That very day, I collected all her personal belongings and moved everything into our house, for good. Marta would never have to go back to Fiker again. We communicated the news to Freire, assuring her that she could see her daughter anytime she wanted. She rarely made it happened. Jochen and I start finally talking about what, for a long time, we had only dared to think, namely to adopt Marta. She grew in our hearts and became at the heart of them.

We gathered information and concluded the only way was to start an international application for adoption in our countries of origin. Although we are both European citizens, we come from different countries in Europe where different adoption laws apply. We both felt heartbroken when we found out that due to colliding regulations, we were not allowed to adopt a minor. The reality was very hard to digest and opened up many more uncertainties about our future and the future of the child we both loved. Legally speaking we had to ask permission to be a family, I felt as I had to ask someone permission to love Marta and raise her as my daughter. All that felt so unjust! If I had conceived her and gave birth to her, would I had to ask for permission to love her? We concluded that we had to stay in Ethiopia as long as possible and hoped that we would figure out what to do next. Marta soon became healthy and cheerful; she enjoyed her life with us very much. She had friends, she loved her new school, and I wanted to believe she was finally safe.

- Human rights are not things that are put on the table for people to enjoy. These are things you fight for and then you protect (Maathai, n.p)

One day she come to me and said she felt some pain under her armpit. I had a look and could not see anything wrong. I asked her whether she had hurt herself while playing with Fozjia (sometimes the two girls would be a bit wild). 'Well, maybe' she said smiling. To make her feel better, Jochen rubbed one of his ointment onto her skin. Indeed, Marta felt immediately better, she admitted. The coming week, the pain was more intense, and Marta also started coughing. Although it was not yet winter in Addis, we had experienced some days of heavy rain and many people came down with influenza. I was sure Marta got it at school and kept her at home for one day to see how it went. Fortunately, she had no fever, but the coughing worsened, and I did not send her to school for another day.

On the third day her cough was so bad that she seemed to have difficulties in breathing and she also lost her appetite. Jochen and I wanted a doctor to visit her. Ethiopia is not famous for its functioning and reliable health service, hence we asked a Swiss physician, who was visiting Ethiopia, for advice. He thought we should first do an x-ray of the lungs in order to understand the cause of her coughing. The result was very unexpected. Apparently, her chest was full of liquid, one of her lymphnode was so swollen that pushed her heart towards the other side of the ribcage and the left lung had already collapsed. She was using only one lung, and no one could tell us for how long that could continue. No medical doctor in Addis Ababa was able to make a diagnosis, no one knew what Marta had. A nightmare of useless medical visits and unresolved tests commenced whilst Marta became weaker and weaker. I got in touch with some medical doctors in Italy and sent them Marta's x-ray. They told me to get her to a good hospital immediately. Her only functioning lung would not function for

long and the child was at risk of suffocation.

A good hospital? Where could we find such a thing in Ethiopia? The only option was for us, not her guardians, to take Marta, not our daughter, out of the country. But what embassy would grant Marta a visa? What country would accept her and treat her? Moreover, according to Ethiopian law, the designated governmental hospital must issue a statement confirming that the patient cannot be treated in the country and is allowed to seek treatment elsewhere. Jochen and I knew the country well enough to be assured that we would never obtain such permission. However, we were not to be denied. Jochen went to speak to the head physician of the governmental designated hospital to ask for his green light. He still describes that experience as one of the most stressful of his life. The hospital was overcrowded with people lying everywhere, in every room, in every corner. People screaming, people alienated. Jochen did not know where to look, he just wanted to go away. The head physician after he listened to Jochen said: 'She is just another child who will die'. And he refused Jochen the statement that could have saved Marta's life. I had never felt more desperate and helpless. I was living the embodiment of the total denial of human rights and respect for humanity. My child was seriously ill and might die and I could do nothing to help her. It was as she had no right to live.

Jochen and I did not give up: we called everyone and knocked at every door. We met many compassionate people in that painful time who helped us to get a passport for her in a single day (the usual length for an Ethiopian citizen to get their passport was six months); we communicated with a paediatrician in Kenya who assured us the hospital he was working for would accept Marta and treat her; we ensured that the Italian doctors I was in touch with, would put forth a request for funding to the Italian Ministry of Health to pay for the treatment of a young child coming from a developing country. Such a commitment by an Italian governmental authority would suffice for the

Italian embassy in Addis Ababa to issue the visa. However, that required too much time for a person who seemed to have only a few days left. Marta could not wait for Italian bureaucracy to finalise the paperwork. So, Marta and I found ourselves on a plane to Nairobi where Dr Mpinga was waiting for us. Kenya was the only neighbouring country where an Ethiopia citizen could enter without a visa.

At the passport control in the airport in Addis, no authority asked me if Marta was my daughter, no one asked me for any paper other than her passport. My 'whiteness' sufficed for them to assign me the right to travel outside the country with a minor without even making sure that everything was according to the law. In fact, it wasn't. I had informed Freire that Marta needed medical assistance, that I wanted to bring her to Nairobi, and I had asked her to help me with the paperwork, which she did while informing me that she was expecting her third child. In the frantic desperation of those days I forgot to collect her permission in writing, which would have protected me from being accused of kidnapping a minor. Even at Nairobi's airport I was not asked to provide any evidence that I had the right to travel with Marta. I said a private thank you to my God.

As promised Dr Mpinga was waiting for us together with his team of professional physicians. They provided Marta with oxygen which helped her a lot. Then they started with all the medical tests in order to establish the cause of the illness. Dr Mpinga, a very kind man, wanted to engage in an in-depth investigation and I was extremely grateful. He suggested therefore that a biopsy was also needed. A few days later Marta was diagnosed with lymph node cancer. My child must have been about ten years old. Marta and I spent almost a month in Nairobi, at the Aga Khan hospital. We were living in the paediatric ward with lovely and gentle nurses and doctors. But also, with many children constantly in pain. I still remember hearing some of them lamenting day and night, consoled by their moms and dads, who similar to Jochen and myself, did not

know what else to do other than hoping that the doctors would alleviate all our suffering.

Part of the investigation consisted of gathering data on Marta's childhood and biological history, which, of course, I was not aware of. I did not know much about Marta's biological father, or other cases of cancer in the family. The medical crew was surprised that I was not Marta's birth mother. In that ward everybody genuinely assumed we were mother and daughter. In that tragic circumstances, one of the few pleasant thoughts was to realize that the outside world recognized us as family.

During the hospitalization time in Nairobi, Jochen and I were very busy in collecting all the documentation the Ministry of Health in Italy asked us for. We were told that no one could afford to pay the long-lasting treatment for cancer, and that as a non-Italian citizen Marta did not have the right to the free therapy. Hence the only hope was to get the approval of the Ministry and its pledge. Dr Mpinga also encouraged us to take Marta to Europe, since the hospital in Nairobi had limited means in comparison to a modern European facility. The process was again complicated and spared us neither the pain nor the anxiety of knowing that there was little likelihood of obtaining the Ministry's approval. Finally, however, the approval arrived and with it the visa by the Italian Embassy which granted Marta the right to travel to Italy. It was our miracle! Marta and I embarked on our next journey, and this time the plane flew us home. Once in Italy Marta was hospitalized and underwent all the medical screening again. They confirmed the diagnosis and the doctors immediately began the chemotherapy which would last two years, according to the European protocols.

Apart from her medical condition, I had to face the reality of not being legally her parent, which left me with no rights to take responsibility for her treatment. Officially she was an unaccompanied minor migrant. The fact that social services would step in and claim parental authority was a scary reality. We sought legal assistance and once again we

were lucky to find compassionate people along the way. The judge processed Marta's case in no time and declared me her legal guardian. The memory of the two years of chemotherapy will stay with the three of us forever. Marta was (and still is) the boldest person I have ever met. She never complained, not once. Despite growing up in the oncology ward, her love of life and her amazing ability to adapt to the new environment made her learn Italian in a month, and she soon became the darling of all the medical crew. She was overwhelmed with joy when the doctors told her that she could go back to school. She also made new friends and started loving her new life in Italy very much.

Marta developed into a child full of laughter, vivacity and serenity, and with the capacity of great joy. I imagine because she had lived for such a long time, on the other side of that. Our family legal fight, however, was far from being over. Although Marta was now living in Italy with us, and holding a regular permit of stay, Jochen and I could still not adopt a minor. Our lawyer had confirmed that. However, she also said that Italy foresaw the possibility to adopt full-aged people, even foreigners in cases when the person was already living in the country. Jochen and I were ready to pursue any possibility to adopt Marta. She was far from being 18, but we were ready to wait. And so, we waited for four more years. The day after Marta's 18 birthday, our lawyer submitted our request to the court together with a very bulky file containing the evidence of Marta's and our common history. The process lasted almost one year, and throughout that time we wondered whether our right to be acknowledge as a family would have been denied.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> September 2017 the telephone rang, and I heard the lawyer screaming: 'Ms Briganti, we made it!' Our daughter is in my worldview the personal embodiment of social justice, and her story shows what can happen when the scales of justice is not blind.





Figure 1. Marta and me in Addis Ababa in 2005 (Briganti, 2005-2019, Private Photo Archive)

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The organization of the subsequent paragraphs that constitute the General Introduction of my thesis is inspired by the structure used by Pound's (2003) in the prologue to her Ph.D.

### What kind of thesis is this?

This thesis is the story of the past 15 years of my life spent working in developing countries (Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Georgia, Sri Lanka/Maldives, Albania/Bosnia and Herzegovina) as a development practitioner. It relates my own practice of International Development with Living Theory Research methodology, which results in the process of creating my living-theory, namely my epistemology. This process based on self-reflexivity and my unique constellation of values as explanatory principles led me to a better understanding of some of the strengths and shortcomings of International Development. What I learnt throughout the years is condensed in this writing which represents my best knowledge to date (McNiff, 1992).

### What contribution to knowledge does this thesis make?

In the process of creating my own knowledge through a Living Theory methodology I make an original contribution to the knowledge of International Development and Living Theory by introducing:

- my unique constellation of my living values that give meaning and purpose to my private and professional life and are the essence of my ontology. My ontology, my story, my living -theory derive from the interwoven experience of my own life and values, with the lives and values of the people I work with. The relationship between us opened the way to a transformative growth that I described as the I~we~us relationship, namely the process of engaging in a life of ethical

commitments 'through the bonding of self with other selves' (Schrag, 1997, p.19). These will be discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 as well as practical examples provided in Chapter 4.

- the study of Living Theory and International Development that reinforce each other and consolidate in a common goal, namely a commitment to work towards the flourishing of humanity (Whitehead, 1989). These will be discussed in Chapter 2 and practical examples will be provided in Chapters 3 and 4.
- the common goal and synergy between Living Theory and International Development from which a generative form of development arises, is presented as the ability to support the thriving of present and future generations. These will be discussed in Chapters 2 and 3.
- the influence that my work and research may have on various practitioners and partners in International Development are described in the thesis as the emergence of a global network of relationships of changemakers that hold values and take actions for a fairer world. These will be discussed in Chapter 3
- the influences that a gendered epistemology has in my daily life as researcher, female development economist and practitioner. This will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 5.
- my self-reflexive practice as a Living Theory researcher that rests on my sense of responsibility to action and towards others leading me to conceptualize International Development as a global responsibility, embedded in the primacy of the personal. These will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

### What are my values?

The elucidation of my unique constellation of values and explanatory principles arose in 2016 while I was on my way back to Afghanistan. The living values (Laidlaw, 1996) presented in the thesis and part of my ontology are: *empathy, social and gender justice, outrage, responsibility, love for and faith in humanity and dignity*. They had developed over the years, but the purpose of my professional life had not changed during that time. My values served to validate that. It is still about contributing to the human development of the people I work with who are victims of human-rights violations according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948, n.p.). This gives meaning to my life. In other words, I use my own capabilities to support vulnerable people in developing countries, especially girls and women, while I attempt to live my values as fully as possible by overcoming my own living contradictions. I do this in order to reach a sense of aliveness and purpose in life. Thus, attempting to live my values fully has developed in me as a way of life (Whitehead, 2018), which creates the space to engage in *my own living-theory* - *my personal explanation of my educational influences in my own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence my practice and understandings through a self-reflexive process.*

My practice as a living-theory researcher and development practitioner have made me aware that the evolution of my unique constellation of values over the years is influenced by both my own socio-historical context (Habermas, 1976) as well as the socio-historical context of the people I work with in developing countries. This may influence Living Theory as a methodology generating a global network of relationships, which is founded on people's unique constellation of values for the flourishing of humanity (Whitehead, 1989) that influence each other's constellation, transcending geographical borders and human diversities.

## What will you find in this thesis?

After the General Prologue with which I started my thesis and that represents how my life as a development practitioner began, my writing continues and is organized into five Chapters and the Conclusion.

**Chapter 1** outlines my unique constellation of values that constitute the core of both my living-theory and my involvement with International Development. I start by explaining my personal and professional identity and I continue by writing about feelings, emotions and the people I work with and their feelings, emotions and values.

**Chapter 2** explores Living Educational Theory research methodology (shortened to Living Theory) and International Development (theory and practice). By engaging with the two I am creating my own living-theory which is my explanation of my educational influences in my own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence my practice and understandings as a development practitioner. I also explore the threefold nature of my chosen methodology as an action-led research methodology, as a way of life and as a social movement.

**Chapter 3** introduces the importance of the primacy of the personal whilst seeking to respond to the humanity question, which in Freire's words (1970) is about how to become more fully human. The Chapter is divided into two main parts: the first is about being a female development practitioner with a background in economics who works in a capitalist context characterized by global injustices (Loewenstein, 2015, p.8) including patriarchy; the second emphasizes my insight that the global network of relationships that I have been nourishing over the past 15 years with both individuals and organizations active in the field of International Development transcends geographical borders and human diversities.

**Chapter 4** focuses on my responsibility *to action* and *toward others*. I use examples of my practice from Afghanistan and Ethiopia in engaging in development at the micro level, namely by working directly with individuals. This Chapter highlights how my work can have a systemic influence at community level (micro-level) triggered by a force I call generativity (Volckmann, 2014, p. 248). that some of my partners in development projects seem to have. This is instrumental in the expansion of the Living Theory global network of relationships (as a global social movement), based on people's unique constellation of values for the flourishing of humanity (Whitehead, 1989).

**Chapter 5** represents the concluding chapter which is about my original contribution(s) to educational knowledge and theory, their significance and my growth into my new professional endeavours. My writing offers reflections on my own process of becoming the best development practitioner and living-theory researcher I can be to date. This is based on the I~we~us relationship (Mounter, Huxtable and Whitehead, 2019, p.93) that I am creating with the people I have been working with. This chapter ends by exploring my new professional endeavour and the changes this has brought into my life.

**The Conclusion** encapsulates the essence of my thesis which is my understanding of the core of International Development that I perceive as a process that starts with having a chance to contribute to a 'good change' (Chambers, 1997, p.1743). This part of the thesis also elucidates why my thesis matters. It matters because as a Living Theory thesis it is relatable (Bassey, 1998) to other living-theorists who seek to engage in activities contributing to the flourishing of humanity (Whitehead, 1989). It may also be influential in the current discourses around International Development and helpful to development practitioners confronted with relatable difficulties.

The referencing style used in this thesis is APA as it is the most appropriate for Living Theory methodology.

## **CHAPTER 1**

**What makes me a living-theorist and development  
practitioner: my unique constellation of values**



## Introduction

This chapter engages with my unique constellation of values (Whitehead, 2012, p.2) that constitute the core of both my living-theory and my involvement with International Development (ID). My writings dwell upon the clarification of the meaning of these values in the cause of their emergence in practice (Feyerabend, 1975); in a way these are changing over time (Laidlaw, 1996), namely my understanding of their evolution and how this is influencing my life. The evolution of my unique constellation of values is influenced by the dialectical relationship between my practical experience and my own socio-historical context. It is also influenced by those same factors that influence the people I work with in developing countries. The values I hold and want to live by are *empathy, social and gender justice, outrage, responsibility, love for and faith in humanity and dignity* that I will explain below. I therefore write about feelings, emotions and of course the people I work with and their feelings, emotions and values. That is often considered ‘incompatible with objectivity, scientific rigour, evidence, and results’ (Chambers, 2017, p. 161) according to much research and knowledge, which aspires to be objective (ibid.). My qualitative research, as this chapter reveals, does not crave scientific objectivity (ibid.). Instead, I work in the realm of subjectivity where my unique constellation of values, emotions and aspirations often meet, are influenced by and influence those of the people I collaborate with, cutting across geographical borders and human diversities. I appreciate the limitations of my subjective approach as much as I appreciate the limitations of an objective one (Abbott, 2007, p.212).

Dispassionate is, after all, close to being a synonym for objective, for not allowing emotion to cloud one's view. Subjective is a disparaging put-down: research should strive for its opposite, the objectivity of rigorous and accurate elucidation and presentation of facts uninfluenced by the subjectivity of the researcher. Emotion has no place: it is personal and subjective and leads to unreliability. Certainly, those who are passionate about causes or hold deep-rooted beliefs are vulnerable to distorted views,

selecting and distorting evidence, and exhibiting tendencies towards myth and error.

But so, too, are scientists [...]. (ibid.)

I will start by shedding light on my personal and professional identity. I will then focus on the meanings of my values and explanatory principles that will be reflected throughout my thesis corroborated by examples of their emergence in practice.

## 1.1 My identity

Was Du erlebst, kann keine Macht der Welt Dir rauben<sup>1</sup> (Frankl, 1946, p.122)

I am a development practitioner<sup>2</sup> with a background in economics specializing in International Development<sup>3</sup> and Gender issues, who has lived and worked in Afghanistan (2005-early 2008), Ethiopia (early 2005 and 2008-2011), Georgia (2012-2013), Sri Lanka/Maldives (2014), Albania/Bosnia and Herzegovina (2015 – 2019) A simplified description of my profession would be that it is about designing policies and implementing projects that focus on poverty-reduction strategies in developing countries, in respect of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and fundamental freedoms<sup>4</sup>. I am also a Living Theory researcher and I will discuss about Living Theory research methodology in Chapter 2.

I am a white, Caucasian, Western-educated woman in her early 40s, born and raised in Italy, with a Catholic background. I am married to a German development professional. My husband Jochen and I adopted Marta, an Ethiopian Orthodox Coptic

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<sup>1</sup> What you have experienced no power on earth can take from you.

<sup>2</sup> In my writing I use the development professional, development worker and development professional interchangeably

<sup>3</sup> The meanings of ID are elucidated in Chapter 2

<sup>4</sup> The Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed in 1948 represents a milestone document in the history of human rights. However, in my work I often refer to other later international documents such as the European Convention on Human Rights (1953), the Helsinki Final Act (1975), the Charter of Paris for a new Europe (1990) and the Istanbul Convention (2014).

girl, whom I met in Addis Ababa in 2005 while I was working there for an international non-governmental organization. The prologue to this thesis is about Marta's and my story whose lives are inextricably interwoven. While my husband and I were living in Ethiopia with our child, we also hosted a Muslim Eritrean family of three sisters (Fozjia aged six, Salwa nine and Semira twelve) and their widowed mother Rahma in our house. The family was destitute and disenfranchised. The relationship with the Eritrean family commenced in mid 2005 when a few weeks after I met Marta for the first time, my path crossed that of the family as well. Jochen, Marta and I consider the Eritrean family as our extended family, and vice versa.

Marta's early years with her adopted parents were enriched by the presence of Fozjia, Salwa and Semira who now all identify as sisters (Briganti, 2015-2019). Rahma is a loving and nurturing mother who has always shown deep affection for my daughter and concern for her wellbeing. She has been pivotal in assisting Jochen and myself to learn about the Ethiopian/Eritrean culture and raising our daughter with respect for her identity and her country. Jochen and I welcomed the family not only in our house (they used to live in a very dangerous area where they could have been an easy target for exploitation), but most significantly in our hearts. I remember those years spent in Ethiopia as filled with love and joy for being so fortunate to have such a family (I will provide more details on my relationship with our Eritrean family in Chapter 4). Those years represent an emotional and transformative experience for me, forging my identity as a mother, and member of a multicultural, heterogenic family that appreciates diversity as an asset. What I experienced in Ethiopia and other countries and what I am learning from my family, is also moving me forward in my understanding of ID and is helping me in living my values fully as a development professional committed to empathy, social and gender justice, outrage, responsibility, love for and faith in humanity and dignity.



Figure 1. left to right: Semira, Marta on Semira's lap, Jochen, Salwa, Arianna and Fozjia Addis Ababa, in 2006 (Briganti, 2005-2019, Private Photo Archive)

## 1.2 Values as explanatory principles

Values are fundamental (Chambers, 2017, p. 170)

The values mentioned above are those I want to live by. The elucidation of my values and explanatory principles arose with greater clarity in November 2016 while I was on my way back to Afghanistan for a short mission in Kabul, after an absence of nine years. The mission meant more than a work-assignment to me, as my early experience in Afghanistan (2005-early 2008) had shaped me as a yet-untried development worker in her late 20s. At that time, my job was to lead a project called “Literacy and Vocational Project for the Promotion of Activities to Generate Revenue in Favour of Vulnerable Afghan Women”. My main task was to provide Afghan women with vocational training and income-generating activities such as entrepreneurship.

However, I was confronted with a complex reality and with problems that seemed not to centre on economic issues only, such as post-war trauma-syndrome, structural

violence, child-abuse, rape and death<sup>5</sup>. I was not mentally prepared to face all that and I had neither the academic background nor the experience to deal with those issues. I started to fall apart, not knowing where to start from ([Briganti, 2015](#)<sup>6</sup>). By November 2016, I was looking forward to going back to the country and comparing my young self with my current self both as professional and human being. More deeply I was expecting to be able to make sense of all the years lived in challenging countries with the hope of not having caused harm (Anderson, 1999) and the wish of having contributed to the realization of human capabilities (Sen, 1999). Amongst those qualities I am including the capacity for people to assess their own problems, the capacity to find solutions to the problems and deal with medium and long-term solutions without external support.

The first thing I discovered when I arrived in Kabul is that although my living values (Laidlaw, 1996) had developed, the purpose of my professional life (that gives it a meaning) had not changed over the years. It is still about contributing to the human development of the people I work with who are victims of human-rights violation according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948, n.p.). The first Human Development Report (1990, p.10) by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) argues that:

Human development is the process of enlarging people's choice [...] In principle, these choices can be infinite and change over time. But [...] the three essential ones are for people to lead a long and healthy life, to acquire knowledge and to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living.

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<sup>5</sup> Up-to-date data on gender issues in Afghanistan will be provided in Chapter Four

<sup>6</sup> In 2015 I wrote a paper on my early years in Afghanistan published by the Educational Journal of Living Theories titled Generating my own living-theory: An interim Report which might be accessed via the hyperlink.

In Chapter 2 I will discuss the limits of this definition and how concepts such as central human capabilities (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 87) helped to improve it. In my own words human development means the holistic development of the individual (i.e. emotional, psychological, spiritual, economic) ([Briganti, 2016](#))<sup>7</sup>. The heterogenic identity of the people I work with and write about in this thesis is encapsulated by de Sousa Santos (2014) who speaks from the perspective of one who was born in the global South:

Who are we? We are the global South, that large set of creations and creatures that has been sacrificed to the infinite voracity of capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, and all their satellite-oppressions. We are present at every cardinal point because our geography is the geography of injustice and oppression. (p.4)

Human rights violations make people vulnerable and exploitable, because they often render people unable to think for themselves, make their own decisions (Sen, 1999) and provide for themselves. Chapter 4 will provide practical examples of what I am claiming here. My concern is about supporting vulnerable people in living a dignified life and reaching their own potential.

What we all have in common is that we all have to fight against many obstacles in order to live with dignity - that is to say, to live well. (de Sousa Santos, 2014, p.6)

In the process I also support myself in reaching my own potential and becoming a better development professional, as in my worldview this represents my contribution to a fairer world and the flourishing of humanity (Whitehead, 1989).

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<sup>7</sup> I presented this paper at 4<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Sustainable Development 2016. It might be accessed via the hyperlink.

The above introduces the subsequent discussion, which is about giving my own life a meaning. Whilst searching for a full meaning for human existence during his detention in the Nazi's concentration camps, Frankl writes that, 'He [the man] did not want to die for nothing. None of us wanted that' (Frankl, 1946, p.91). I would like to apply his wisdom to my search for meanings and agree with Frankl that I do not want to live for nothing.

Human life, by its very nature has to be dedicated to something, an enterprise glorious or humble, a destiny illustrious or trivial. We are faced with a condition, strange but inexorable, involved in our very existence. On the one hand, to live is something, which each one does of himself and for himself. On the other hand, if that life of mine, which only concerns myself, is not directed by me towards something, it will be disjointed, lacking in tension and in 'form'... if I decide to walk alone inside my own experience, egoistically, I make no progress. I arrive nowhere. I keep turning around and round in the one spot. This is the labyrinth, the road that leads nowhere, which loses itself, through being a mere turning round within itself. (Ortega y Gasset, 1957 pp. 141-142)

The *why* that explains my ontology is the will to give *my* life a meaning (Frankl, 1946, p.113) and to live by my values.

What matters, therefore, is not the meaning of life in general but rather the specific meaning of a person's life at a given moment. One should not choose for an abstract meaning of life. Everyone has his own specific vocation or mission in life to carry out a concrete assignment, which demands fulfilment. (ibid.)

What does give meaning to my life is using my own capabilities to support vulnerable people, especially girls and women. The choice of dedicating my professional life to support other people is not motivated by egotism. I am not aiming at saving the world, nor do I feel in any way a sense of guilt for the many benefits I enjoy from my middle

class, Western European, lifestyle. Instead I want to contribute actively to a fairer world, and paraphrasing Walker -in the documentary film by Parmar (2014, n.d.)- I believe that being a development practitioner is 'my way of paying the rent for living on this planet'. When I am at work, I experience a genuine sense of aliveness, which leads to happiness for me. I echo Fromm when he describes the sense of aliveness that brings people closer to each other:

What does one person give to another? He gives of himself of the most precious he has, he gives of his life. This does not necessarily mean that he sacrifices his life for the other- but that he gives him of that which is alive in him; he gives him of his joy, of his interest, of his understanding, of his knowledge, of his humour, of his sadness-of all expressions and manifestations of that which is alive in him. In thus giving of his life, he enriched the other person, he enhances the other's sense of aliveness by enhancing his own sense of aliveness. (Fromm, 1957, p. 19)

The profession I chose, in Frankl's words (Frankl, 1946, p.113), is my key assignment, which demands fulfilment, thus it represents the *how* of wanting to reach that sense of aliveness and happiness. In other words, by supporting vulnerable people in overcoming their daily struggle for survival and sustain them in realising their capabilities to stand up for their just and equal opportunities contributing to a dignified life.

The following sections engage with my values. They do not appear in order of importance as they are all intertwined, and it is not possible for me to 'rank' them. I decided instead to follow the flow of my writing. I also would like to clarify to the reader that from now on and throughout my thesis they will perceive a difference in style whenever I recall the stories of the people I work with. The style I use might read more as a narration and is recognisable also by the italicized text (McAlpine, 2016, p.33).



This is because I attempt to convey the stories of their lives as genuinely as I can. By that I mean that I would like to bring the reader in touch with those I work and share my life with, and with the uneasy situations they (often we together) find themselves (ourselves) in. I believe the reader needs to go through those narrations to understand the evolution of my own story and appreciate my learning process, reflections and conclusions. Freire (1998) has helped me to explain my choice of the narrative:

In this effort to recall moments of my experience—which necessarily, regardless of when they were, became sources of my theoretical reflections for the writing of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, as they would continue to be today, as I rethink *Pedagogy*—I feel that it will be appropriate to refer to an excellent example of such a moment, which I experienced in the 1950s. The experience resulted in a learning process of real importance for me [...]. (p.18)

In Chapter 2, I will discuss the choice of using narrative enquiry in generating my own living-theory methodology to enrich my research.

### **1.2.1 Outrage**

The word outrage often carries a negative connotation and I believe even more so if used by women to describe their feelings. In my personal experience such words are associated with labels used to denigrate women (Bernardez, 1987, p. 2) such as 'hormonal', 'hysterical', 'emotional'. I have therefore been pondering over using such words in my thesis. Even in the Living Theory realm, outrage might be considered an unusual value to hold, given that Living Theorists' work and research aim at contributing to the flourishing of humanity (Whitehead, 1989) and 'outrage' might appear at odds with that. I then thought to use a 'milder' word such as indignation, but that would not properly describe how I feel. I know that outrage is a legitimate part of

who I am. These writings will explain what I mean by that, why I hold outrage as a value and why it is so important to me to live by it. In order to clarify I would like to focus on to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948):

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind [...]

Whereas it is essential, if man [sic] is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law. (n.p.)

Since I am not an English native speaker, I have first had to clarify to myself what this feeling of outrage was about. My husband describes my feeling as 'Wut', the German word for 'outrage', which is why I now confidently adopt this word in my writings as well. He is acquainted with what I feel whenever I witness people's rights and dignity being violated and he describes it as follows:

Deine Wut hinterlässt Spuren. Die Spuren sind die Energie etwas zu ändern. Deine Wut ist der Motor zu Veränderung<sup>8</sup>. (Briganti, 2018, private conversation, Ph.D. Data Archive)

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<sup>8</sup> Your outrage leaves traces behind. These traces are the energy to change something. Your outrage is the engine of change.

For simplicity I have sketched that process as follows:

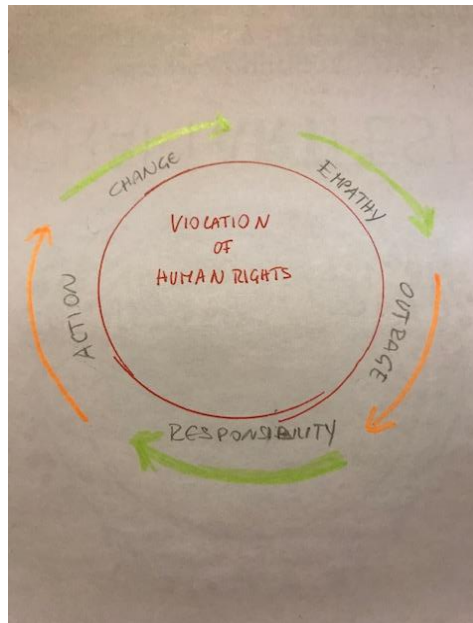


Figure 2. The empathy-responsibility-change cycle

I wish to tell a story that represents the explanatory principle of my value of outrage and clarifies how the empathy-responsibility-change cycle works. I will use some pictures and drawings to help my words describe the scene and adopt a narrative style.

*As I wrote in the prologue to this thesis, I arrived in Ethiopia for the first time in July 2005, in a cold, rainy and gloomy Addis Ababa. The many non-asphalted streets of the capital city were covered with mud, which rendered the sight of so many barefoot people with no proper clothing, painful to my Western eyes. I was seated in my office car. I remember how out of place I felt when from the comfort of the backseat, and warmly dressed I was staring at the (real) world outside the window made of beggars (mainly children), shoeshine boys and people who, were going to work on foot pushing their way through the hectic crowd of people and animals. It was then that I saw her. She was a beggar woman with two little children, the youngest on her back, like in the beautiful painting by Greenwood (1956).*



Figure 3. Beggar Woman and Child, 1956 by Marion Greenwood.

*While she was still holding the baby on her back, she laid the toddler down in a big puddle and started washing her child's head in it.*



Figure 4. A puddle in Addis Ababa (Briganti, 2005-2019, Private Photo Archive).

*I had never witnessed such a scene before and as I am writing this, I still feel that mixture of astonishment and disbelief in the face of an absence of human rights that obliges human beings to live as animals. I was about to burst into tears, but it was not due to sadness that I was crying. It was that deep sense of outrage that pervades me and fuels me when I believe people are deprived of their dignity.*



Figure 5. A woman and her children in Addis Ababa (Briganti, 2005-2019, Private Photo Archive).

I believe my capacity to empathize with people exacerbates the outrage and causes that unstoppable necessity to take an action and this characterizes my own way of dealing with the issues I am confronted with as a development worker. The capacity to be outraged generates energy that leads me to act in order to trigger a change. In Chapter 2 I discuss extensively about my meanings of change. Nobel Prize Winner, Levi Montalcini, argues that:

Non sempre per cambiare le cose c'è bisogno di violenza, molto spesso basta l'indignazione. (Montalcini, 2009, p. 9)<sup>9</sup>

This is the reason why I believe that the capacity to feel outraged in the face of

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<sup>9</sup> In order to change things what we need is not violence, but rather outrage.

violations of human rights is a crucible. The image below resonates with my understanding of outrage as a value, as it states: 'outrage is a gift'.



Figure 6. A picture seen on Facebook (the source is unknown)

The value of outrage is part of my ontology as it serves as a positive energy that motivates me and inspires me to be the best development professional I can be, in order to fight injustice and contribute to a fairer world. Chambers (2017) argues that:

We must celebrate and multiply those who do not look away but engage directly on the side of justice, decency, common humanity, and peace, fired and driven by outrage. This is about much more than mindsets and knowing. It is about feeling as well. It is about champions with vision, guts, and passion. (p.170)

I do not consider myself a violent person by any means, but I am driven to outrage by it. I suppose the capacity to turn outrage into actions in the complete absence of violence has been my way of revolting against the violence I suffered as a child. I will not elaborate on this part of my story as I don't feel this is the place to do so.

According to Gandhi, a pacifist is a person who, through loving indignation, has transcended her own violence, not one who is afraid to fight (Bernardez, 1987 p. 9). It's been a long time since I ensured my private life was free of violent individuals and

surrounded myself and my loved ones with warm-hearted and gentle people. Still, the motivation to act against human rights violations is intact. Vasilyuk (1991) highlights the link between energy, motivation and action in what he calls the 'Energy Paradigm':

Conceptions involving energy are very current in psychology, but they have been very poorly worked out from the methodological standpoint. It is not clear to what extent these (p. 63) conceptions are merely models of our understanding and to what extent they can be given ontological status. Equally problematic are the conceptual links between energy and motivation, energy and meaning, energy and value, although it is obvious that in fact there are certain links: we know how 'energetically' a person can act when positively motivated, we know that the meaningfulness of a project lends additional strength to the people engaged in it, but we have very little idea of how to link up into one whole the physiological theory of activation, the psychology of motivation, and the ideas of energy which have been elaborated mainly in the field of physics.

I echo de Sousa Santos' words (2014) that what we urgently need is a new capacity for wonder and indignation that is 'capable of grounding a new, nonconformist, destabilizing, and indeed rebellious theory and practice' (p. 88). I define my value of outrage as a rebellious force (for good) that arises as a counter-reaction to what offends and disrespects human life. This force, together with empathy and love for and faith in humanity, becomes generative since it drives me to action. The stories in this Chapter such as the one related to Roya as well those in Chapter 4 show what I mean by actions that offend and disrespect human beings.

### **1.2.2 Empathy**

I define empathy as 'the capacity to feel emotionally something like the other person is feeling' (McWilliams, 2011, p. 126). It means 'being open and available to others ...and [feeling] diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured

or oppressed and treated if they were less than who they are' (Tutu, 1999, p. 35). Empathy is "feeling with" rather than "feeling for" which would actually be sympathy. Sympathy implies a degree of defensive distancing from the suffering person (ibid.). Empathy is what connects me to people. Empathy, in my worldview can become a collective force with the power to change society (Krznaric, 2014). A missionary priest who spent his entire life working with vulnerable people in slum-like villages in Latin America, once told me: 'If you don't eat with them in the first place, don't even think you'll have any chance to establish a working relationship with them'. Almost two decades later, I still remember his simple but powerful words. Sometimes I believe that the essence of my work in development is indeed as simple as sharing a meal together with people who appear to be very different from me. Within such a shared experience we can be reminded of our indivisible humanity.

In the word "sharing" lies the key significance of sustainable development<sup>10</sup>, which is intrinsically related to the building of relationships with the communities I work with. By this I mean to establish a relationship that implies the recognition that as we are all human beings, we are ontological siblings (Barron, 2015). This recognition is key in both my private and professional life, as it represents the explanatory principle of my value of empathy I want to live by.

Fukuyama (1992) stresses the importance of recognition as follows:

Human beings seek recognition of their own worth, or of the people, things, or principles that they invest with worth. The desire for recognition, and the accompanying emotions of anger, shame and pride, are parts of the human personality critical to political life. According to Hegel, they are what drives the whole historical process. (p. xvii)

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<sup>10</sup> Chapter 2 will dwell upon my meaning of sustainability, development and sustainable development.



As a development professional, the key questions I ask myself are: how is it to be you? (Briganti, 2016, p. 142) and 'what can I do to recognize you, to really see you? However, it is not the putting of the question that solves anything, rather my wish to actively engage with the answers.

I believe that there is a crucial correlation between my capacity to empathize with people, hence to see them and my values of love for and faith in humanity (I refer to those at length in the paragraphs below). Adichie (Kuo, 2016) affirms:

In my language, Igbo, the word for 'love' is 'ifunanya' and its literal translation is, 'to see'. So, I would like to suggest today that this is a time for a new narrative, a narrative in which we truly see those about whom we speak. (n.p.)

I wish to add that in the field of ID it is imperative to be able to see those about whom we are speaking. I also deem it appropriate to be humble, and step aside in order for those who are directly concerned to speak for themselves. In Foucault's words:

We ridiculed representation and said it was finished, but we failed to draw the consequences of this "theoretical" conversion - to appreciate the theoretical fact that only those directly concerned can speak in a practical way on their own behalf. (Foucault, 1980)

It is pivotal to work inclusively towards the joint definition of a problem and its solutions. When I think on how this happens in my daily practice as a development worker, my actions resonate with Potts' (2014) concept of cultural empathy which helps me to celebrate and appreciate the richness of cultural difference (p.53). In practice I commence with simple steps such as sitting with them in their homes, sharing a meal and taking my time for an informal chat about family and life. People are open to welcoming me into their culture and I react accordingly, tiptoeing into their lives

discreetly, and showing respect for who they are: human beings just like me (Briganti, 2016, p. 143). My empathic self helps me relate to them and their concerns and shows them who I really am: a person, just as vulnerable and fallible as every other human being, someone not particularly knowledgeable about the problems that affect them, but keen to listen to them carefully in order to work on our capabilities (Sen, 1999).

The situations in which the people I work with find themselves into, are so far from my own life-experience that if it were not for my capacity to “feel with” them, it would be very hard for me to support them in finding suitable solutions.

I honestly can't claim that: I know how it feels, when the war killed your entire family because of a different ethnic group it belonged to; when you lost your entire harvest and thus there is no possibility that you and your family will have something to eat in the near future; when your country has been bombed and you had to run away and ask for asylum in another country which in response builds walls; when you were forced to marry at the age of six with a man of 45; when you have been abducted and used as a child soldier; when you have contracted HIV; when you are 32 and mother of six, you've never been to school, and you are not allowed to leave your habitation without a male member of the family; when the war separated you from your spouse who left you with three very young children, no job, shelter or money; when you left your country looking for a better future, but have been smuggled in another continent where you have no legal status, no identification paper, no rights to be. I cannot respond to these life accounts pretending that I know how this feels and that I have solutions to this inexplicable sorrow. So, I simply don't do it. This is where I rely completely on my empathic self and I let this part of me speaking for myself. (Briganti, 2016, p. 143)

We often use a non-verbal language to “see” each other and that might lead to establish trust among us. When this happens, we can envisage the path that might lead to an alleviation of suffering more easily. It is appropriate at this stage for me to

argue that my way of narrowing the distance with those I work with might be mistaken for the process called 'immersion'.

In a context in which it is now possible to build a career in international development without ever leaving offices and conference sites within capital cities, advocates of immersions stress the importance of development professionals interacting affectively, face-to-face with those whose lives their poverty reduction work seeks to address. (Pedwell, 2012, p. 169)

As a development professional who has spent the last 15 years working with vulnerable people in developing countries, I prefer to distance myself from people who, according to my worldview deal with ID by working exclusively in the Western-located headquarters of international organizations and for whom the palliative of 'immersion' seems to have been invented. What I am describing here is not an experiment I underwent in order to be able to claim that I "feel with" those I work with and whose lives are burdened by all sorts of human rights violations. I write about my daily life and in a limited manner also the lives of those I share problems and solutions with. It is very hard for me to imagine how could I possibly call myself a development professional if I needed to understand the nature of my work by going through a *una tantum*<sup>11</sup> "immersion" as if it were yet another management tool. I often collaborate with colleagues who are glad to leave the headquarters' office from time to time, in order to 'enjoy a bit of exoticism abroad' (Briganti, 2015-2019). I have known many instances of such workers looking forward to going back home after the usual "one week of field mission" and marking their farewell by asking those who stay the usual quite annoying question: 'how can you live here?'

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<sup>11</sup> Latin for 'once in a while'

Empathy is not only the capacity to 'feel emotionally something like the other person is feeling' (McWilliams, 2011, p. 126), but in my opinion is an active feeling that calls for action. The empathy-responsibility-change cycle (Figure 2) shows how my empathic self leads me to feel outraged; and the energy that results is what spurs me into action. My own empathy carries with it an ontological responsibility to take action. In Chapter 4 I will elaborate on my understanding of personal responsibilities.

The following is part of an email conversation I had in 2016 with my colleague Susanna Fioretti while brainstorming on the situation in Syria where a non-for-profit organization we both volunteer for was planning the evacuation of some orphans and their caretakers from besieged Aleppo. Susanna writes:

Ari you know how you and I have been always designing project's ideas. We first feel it on the skin, based on the capacity to empathize with those people we want to support and then we quickly assess the most urgent needs together with them. Then when our senses and our feelings tell us this is the right thing to do, we proceed, and we make it happen [...]. It is then easy to put ideas into the "frame" of donors' organizations and others. The projects we developed from the gut and by using our empathy have always been our most successful projects. (Fioretti, 2016, email correspondence)

I do not want to give the wrong impression by implying that my colleague and I do not adhere to the vast range of development management tools we are very knowledgeable about (Eyben, 2013, p. 22). However, empathy turns to be a very powerful ally when working with people, especially those made vulnerable by the circumstances described above. In my *modus operandi* there is, in fact, a relation between empathy (on the emotional spectrum) and actions (on the cognitive spectrum). Dadds (2008) writes about empathic validity as the process of transforming the emotional dispositions of people towards each other and fostering positive human relationships (p. 280). This process enables people to become "connected knowers"

who learn through empathy to get out from behind their own eyes and use a different lens, the lens of another person (ibid.).

I would like to draw a parallel between Feyerabend's powerful articulation on the relation between ideas and actions and my *modus operandi* guided by empathy and leading to actions:

We must expect, for example, that the idea of liberty could be made clear only by means of the very same actions, which were supposed to create liberty. Creation of a thing, and creation plus fully understanding of a correct idea of the thing, are very often parts of one and the same indivisible process and cannot be separated without bringing the process to a stop. The process itself is not guided by a well-defined programme and cannot be guided by such a programme, for it contains the conditions for the realization of all possible programmes. It is guided rather by a vague urge, by a 'passion' (Kierkegaard). The passion gives rise to specific behavior, which in turn creates the circumstances of the ideas necessary for analyzing and explaining the process, for making it 'rational'. (Feyerabend, 1975, p.17).

I would like to conclude my discussion on the value of empathy by acknowledging my own limitations. There are two main concepts I want to raise. On the one hand, the limitations of my empathic self, seem to suggest a form of bias given by the fact that I can easily empathize with girls and women in a state of vulnerability and unequally treated regardless of race, social status, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, place of birth. I am not in the position to claim the same when confronted with people whose beliefs and moral principles I disagree with (Krzmaric, 2010 p. 122) although I acknowledge that there might be a value in empathizing with those I disagree with. I do not wish to use empathy as a means to change people's worldviews or to claim that I can fully understand another person. I simply want to rely on my capacity to feel with

those whose freedoms are limited or violated in order to support them in finding solutions they believe suit them.

My propensity to easily empathize with vulnerable women and girls is linked to my personal story that goes back to when my young self was severely limited in her choices and freedoms (Briganti, 2016). Mine is a form of projection of my own vulnerabilities into other people's lives, which I recognize as a bias, and as such I tend to be wary of. I appeal to my own professional discernment in order to treat every individual as unique. I therefore often perceive myself as a living contradiction (Whitehead, 1989, p.45) and my Living Theory research is the learning process I engage in to attempt to overcome them and live my values more fully. My learning process aims to improve my practice by learning from the people I work with, their unique constellations of values and their approach to ID. I elaborate on these concepts in Chapter 2.

On the other hand, I cannot claim that my way of empathizing with those who suffer is mutual or dialogical, as I do not have any evidence that the person I feel with, does feel with me as well.

Further concerns address whether empathetic engagement across social and geopolitical boundaries can be mutual and dialogical, or whether empathy is more likely to remain the purview of those who are already socially privileged (Bartky, 1996; Koehn, 1998; Pedwell, 2010, 2012). The fluid and unpredictable quality of emotion also underscores the risks of figuring empathy as a stable or abiding resource for mobilising movements for social justice (LaCapra, 2001; Nussbaum, 2003; Ahmed, 2004). (Pedwell, 2012, p. 166)

In fact, I spontaneously and automatically react to girls' and women's plight. My empathetic feelings react more strongly to suffering as compared to joy.

There's no empathy in Utopia because there is no suffering. Empathy is grounded in the acknowledgement of death and the celebration of life and rooting for each other to flourish and be. it's based on our frailties and our imperfections (Rifkin, 2010, p. 3)

As I write my thesis I ponder over my wish to seek evidence of whether the people I wish to support in finding solutions to their problems also see me and empathize with my vulnerabilities, although I'm not in a condition of mortal suffering (Rifkin, 2009, p. 168) . The following section will elucidate my value of social and gender justice and the role of empathy in fostering both.

### **1.2.3 Social justice and gender justice**

My profession makes me witness a range of diverse injustices perpetrated at the cost of human beings across the globe. Injustice does not only refer to wealth distribution, but more subtly it includes dimensions that encompass

the legacy of colonialism and slavery, the sexual injustice of patriarchy, gynophobia and homophobia, the intergenerational injustice of hatred against the young and model of sustainable development, the ethnic-racial injustice of racism and xenophobia, and the cognitive injustice committed against the wisdom of the world on behalf of the monopoly of science and the technologies sectioned by science. (de Sousa Santos, 2014, p. 15)

In the majority of the above-mentioned cases I speak about social injustice not from my own lived experience with the exception of patriarchy and gynophobia. Thus, in order to support the people I work with in finding solutions to their troubles and pursue

social justice, it is vital in my worldview to develop the capacity to move closer to them and 'feel' their condition as much as I can. My practical experience of 15 years in ID have taught me that this is the key for initiatives to become really sustainable. By that I mean a time when people are capable of contributing to the building of a society in which inclusion, gender-equality, cultural cohesion, educational development, respect for diversities and the natural environment are recognized as fundamental values (Briganti, 2016, p.144). My understanding of sustainable development is concerned with the human development of those I work with as well as with my human development bearing in mind the question: How can I improve my practice? ([Briganti, 2018, p. 81](#))<sup>12</sup>.

Pedwell's analysis of empathy concludes that feminist, anti-racist analyses and International Development literatures converge upon 'moving the privileged subject from self-transformation, to an acknowledgement of complicity and responsibility, to wider social action and change' (Pedwell, 2012, p. 165). Therefore, empathy has a pivotal role in achieving cross-cultural and transnational social justice (ibid.). Segal (2011) seems to echo Pedwell who emphasize that empathy leads to social justice.

Increased understanding of social and economic inequalities can lead to actions that effect positive change, social and economic justice, and general wellbeing (Segal, 2006, 2007a, 2007b). It is built upon individual empathy. (Segal, 2011, p.267)

She also focuses the discourse on social empathy and explains it as the merging of individual empathy, contextual understanding and a sense of social responsibility (ibid.), altogether underpinning the process conducive to social justice.

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<sup>12</sup> My paper was published by Educational Journal of Living Theories (EJOLTs). It may be accessed via the hyperlink.



I concur with her that although humans are hardwired for empathy (Iacoboni, 2008, p.42), what leads me as a professional of ID to action and ideally to contribute to a 'good change' (Chambers, 1997, p. 1743), is my empathic self, reinforced by my understanding of the socio-economic, historical and political context of the countries I live and work in. My choice of sharing my professional and sometimes also private life with those who I intend to support in finding solutions to their problems, educates me about the real-life experience and perspective of those who struggle.

Between 2015 and late 2018 I worked in Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina on issues related to the preservation of cultural heritage in the Balkan region, and to human rights violations which are still plaguing the majority of the Western Balkans. At that time my boss was a Bosnian Muslim woman, who at the age of 15, was struggling for survival in besieged Sarajevo, while across the Mediterranean Sea I was fully enjoying my right to a safe adolescence. Lejla Hadžić is now a highly educated woman who fights against a lack of freedoms and works towards social justice in her country and beyond. Our lives could not have been more different, but more than two decades later our paths crossed, and we joined forces, each of us in her own way, in our common commitment to social justice.

As a Living Theory researcher, I use multi-media approaches, such as a video camera, to record conversations when I am granted permission. I find this method particularly useful in trying to understand the body language of the interviewees when in the same space with me. I like to capture the flow of life-affirming energy (Whitehead, 2010) and those imperceptible physical reactions to language which are impossible to reproduce in written form (Briganti, 2018, p. 83). In fact, multi-media narratives compensate for some of the limitations in our binocular vision into our relationally dynamic awareness of the movement of bodies in space and boundaries; in other words, our proprioception (Whitehead, 2010).

I therefore videoed my conversation with Lejla who reveals something very interesting when from minute 3:43 to 5:29 she talks about our projects that involve young people from various Balkan countries and foster peace building and reconciliation among different ethnic groups. She believes that after the war in former Yugoslavia (1992-1995) social justice can be achieved only if the process that leads to it implies fighting oppression and injustice together with those who have been its victims. In practical terms our projects bring people closer to each other not only metaphysically but physically. The people we work with are asked to focus on a common task and are expected to finalize it *together*. The organization Lejla leads and for which I worked for four years, is called Cultural Heritage without Borders (CHwB) and it has extensive experience in stimulating dialogue between people who are deeply traumatized from the war and its aftermath and have been used to see the 'other' always through the lens of hatred. In order to reach our aim, we use the preservation of national monuments as a catalyst for debate and reconciliation in the region. Those involved in joint actions seem to experience a sense of alonsideness (Pound, 2003) by creating and sustaining connections that enhance collaborative relationships. By that I mean relationships where differences are accepted and respected and people start bonding with each other (this concept will be further explored in Chapter 2)



Video 1. [Lejla Hadžić and Arianna Briganti on their work in Albania](#) (Briganti, 2015)

During one of our many meetings and brainstorming sessions on project design and planning Lejla said: 'you really understand us, you really do! Even if you are not 'one of us' and you have not experienced what we had' (Briganti, 2016, private conversation, Ph.D Data Archive). I felt vindicated by her words that show *me* acceptance and alonsideness. I often find myself wondering whether I am being successful in communicating my wish to build up a collaborative relationship with some of the people I work with, who are the one that chose to work with me. I also wonder whether it is only myself who feels closer to them in the attempt to work alongside each other in pursuing social justice or it is a shared feeling and joint action. Lejla explained that my analytical knowledge of the local context, together with my natural way of empathizing with people and my sense of responsibility to action (this concept is debated in depth in Chapter 4), provide me with the capacity to understand better even when I have not experienced social injustice myself. De Sousa Santos (2014, p. VIII), affirms that is no global social justice without global cognitive justice and his powerful concept resonates with my understanding of global social justice. I will write extensively about that in Chapter 2 and 4. However, my life and professional experience led me to conclude that there cannot be social justice without gender justice.

Right at the beginning of my carrier, I started noticing that in the countries I was working in, the 'poorest among the poor'<sup>13</sup> happened to be women (The World Bank, 2012). Although the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action has been adopted in 1995 with the aim of promoting and protecting the full enjoyment of all human rights and the fundamental freedoms of all women throughout their life-cycle (United Nations, 2015), recent data (The Word Bank, 2012) confirm that out of the 1.6 billion people who live in extreme poverty, the majority are women. I soon realized that in order to design policies and implement projects focussing on the alleviation of material poverty I had

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<sup>13</sup> In Chapter 2 I explain my meaning of 'the poor' and clarify why I take the distance from labelling the people I work with as such.

to work alongside women and girls who were the most discriminated against. I understood how much influence gender inequalities have on their personal and professional development. I also started to appreciate that injustice is a kaleidoscope of the lack of freedoms and a violation of human rights that cannot be overcome by treating people the same, by suggesting similar solutions, or expecting comparable results. Equalizing opportunities will not guarantee equal results (Lasch, 1973, p.19). Greene (quoted in Baldacchino, 2009) corroborates this by arguing that:

Concerned about deprivations and injustices, I recognize that they cannot be overcome by treating people, the same no matter how important equality of result may seem. (p. 79)

The solutions to fight against gender-based injustice are not to be found in gender equality, but in gender justice. Gender justice is the process of 'rooting out institutionalized patriarchal power systems' (Goetz, quoted in Mukhopadhyay and Singh, 2007, p.24). In the absence of that, gender equality is a mere utopia. Goetz's view of gender justice resonates with my empirical understanding of it. She sees gender justice as both the ending and the provision of redress for inequalities between women and men (ibid. p. 4). As a woman who is still discriminated against in terms of her gender, as well as a mother of a young woman, a foster-mother of three young women and a professional in ID, who works internationally on numerous projects and initiatives involving women, living my value of gender justice fully is intrinsically part of my ontology. These concepts represent the core of Chapter 3 where they are extensively discussed.

#### 1.2.4 Love for and faith in humanity are conducive to dignity

I perceive the International Development work I carry out as an act of faith in, and love for, humanity (Briganti, 2016). I wish to commence by clarifying what I mean by humanity, i.e. that it is the natural capabilities, aspirations and values of the people I work with in the developing world. Therefore, I do not refer to humanity as a whole, but to those my profession brings me in contact with. While carrying out my job I bear in mind Crary's (2015) vision of humanity:

[...] we can say that in ethics all individual humans are rightly seen, not only as beings to whom things matter, but as beings who accordingly merit concern and solicitude. We can say, that is, that merely being human is morally significant. (n.p.)

In my practical experience, I have learned that development work takes patience, humility, courage (especially the courage to fail) and above all a profound faith in humanity (Briganti, 2018, p.76). The explanatory principle of my value of faith in humanity has its origin in an encounter I had in Kabul with a young Afghan woman, in 2006. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, I was engaged with the project called 'Literacy and Vocational Project for the Promotion of Activities to Generate Revenue in Favour of Vulnerable Afghan Women'. The team I was leading was made up of male professionals and myself, the only female.

The recipients of the project, called "beneficiaries"<sup>14</sup>, were Afghan women. I ethically objected to the fact that there were no female colleagues working alongside me in

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<sup>14</sup> In Chapter 3, I explain why I prefer to call the recipients of the project I implement 'partners in development' rather than 'beneficiaries'. The latter is a wide-spread term in ID, that in my opinion carries a passive connotation suggesting that the people are just passive recipients (Eyben and Ferguson, 2005). In this thesis I use double quotes around the word 'beneficiaries' to signalize that by doing so I refer to the mainstream usage of it.

designing, planning and implementing the projects. It felt to me as we were working *for* them and not *with* them. Due to the country's history of war and (female) segregation, the Gender Development Index (GDI) that measures the difference in human development between women and men was and still is among the highest in the world in terms of inequalities (UNDP, 2016). For decades women had been forbidden to go to school and in 2006 it was almost impossible for our team to find a skilled and educated female workforce, until Ms Roya come to our office asking for employment. To tell her story in the subsequent paragraph, I use a narrative style (italics).

*Roya was in her early 20s and had spent the majority of her life in Pakistan as a refugee. She is the eldest of six sisters whose father was allowing them to go to school. Roya therefore could read and write and was fluent in English. And Roya out of gratitude promised her father she would marry any man he chose. She soon became a valuable and respected asset to our project. Some two years after Roya started working with us, she found out her father wanted her to become engaged and soon marry. A young man she barely knew asked her father for permission and made a good impression on Roya's extended family. Roya's reaction was first one of shock and then outrage. She was planning to enroll in University and marrying a stranger was not her priority. She seemed to have felt all the cultural pressure of an Afghan woman, who is supposed to become a wife and a mother and is left with no other aspiration. The paradox was such that whilst she was a professional project manager dealing with initiatives fostering gender justice, she suddenly found herself sharing the fate of those she was attempting to support. The male team and I were involved in various 'diplomatic' talks with Roya's family in an attempt to persuade the father and the future father-in-law, to break off the engagement. As a team leader I offered to co-finance Roya's University study in the hope of convincing the father that an educated woman would bring more pride into the family than a married one. Those were all abortive attempts.*

*Like many other young women at that time in Afghanistan, to be precise 5 out of every 100,000 (RAWA, 2010, n.p.) Roya thought that the only way out was to commit suicide. I vividly remember the numerous discussions I had with her begging not to kill herself. I equally remember how incapable of finding solutions I felt. That was when I knew the only thing, I could do was to have faith in Roya, in her reliance, and capability to overcome her personal tragedy. I never pitied her or saw her as a helpless being. I knew somehow, she would sooner or later regain control of her existence.*

In Fromm's words:

As we are human we are all in need of help. Today I, tomorrow you. But this need of help does not mean that one is helpless, the other powerful. Helplessness is a transitory condition: the ability to stand and walk on one's own feet is the permanent and common one. (Fromm, 1957, p.38)

*Eventually Roya decided to accept her new life as married woman. Her fiancé promised that after the wedding she would be still allowed to work and educate herself. In order to do so Roya was committed to not having children. She asked me to educate her on the usage of a contraceptive, a taboo for many Afghan women (Briganti, 2006, Field Notes Afghanistan). I also connected her with a private clinic for women only, who would provide her not only with the knowledge, but also with the contraceptive. She knew she had to hide her decision to her future husband. After the marriage her husband forbade her from going to the office and joining the University. He turned savagely violent on her and Roya would be beaten up and raped every day. The fact that she would not get pregnant due to the contraceptive secretly used, made her husband even more furious and eventually he attempted to kill her. She asked her father and father-in-law to intervene and save her life. The two men agreed that she*

*could not stay with her husband any longer, hence Roya was allowed to go back to her father's house.*

*Being a divorcee in Afghanistan is a shame that can lead to complete ostracization. This is because a divorced woman is seen as "used" and it is believed that no man would ever marry her again. A few years after her divorce, she found another employment and finally started university. One day Roya sent me the picture of her graduation ceremony together with her new loving husband. Their daughter was born in 2016.*

*In one of our email correspondences she wrote:*

*Salam Arianna jan [...] and thanks for remembering me. Your encouragements give me more power and the energy to face a nightmare [...] your nice word is always worth for me. I am proud to have you as my friend. When we worked together you really inspired me helping Afghan women particularly the activities I already experienced working with you, Susanna and Elena. My life has changed now for the better and I could not be happier. (Roya, email correspondence, 2016.)*

*In late 2016 during my short visit to Kabul, Roya and I met again in person. On that occasion she told me the following: 'when I look back at my life, I have changed completely since then. My life has changed completely, and I feel proud of myself now as a woman and mother.' (ibid.). The same day I wrote in my field notes:*

*Her eyes are filled with happiness when she talks about her current life. She graduated, she met a decent man who encourages her to continue her education, she has a good job that focuses on women rights, and she is mother of a wonderful 3-month-old baby girl. When I was in front of Roya I saw a woman, who knows who she is and what she wants despite the many tragic events in her life. I saw a woman who never gave up and*



*found the strengths to overcome all the hurdles. Ten years ago, I could not have done anything to get her out of trouble, but I had to have faith in her and in her abilities to help herself. I am happy that I had told her. Perhaps being with her with my words and my thoughts really helped her not lose hope. Now Buber's words echo in my head: "Trust, trust in the world, because this human being exists - that is the most inward achievement of the relation in education. Because this human being exists, meaninglessness, however hard pressed you are by it, cannot be the real truth. Because this human being exists, in the darkness the light lies hidden, in fear salvation, and in the callousness of one's fellow-men the great love." (Buber, 1961, p. 116). If development is a good change, this is development. What happened to Roya is developmental and life-changing. This also represents the motivating energy that keeps me working as a development professional around the world. (Briganti, Field Notes Afghanistan, 2016)*

I wish at this point to discuss my value of love for humanity and how it is interwoven with my value of faith in humanity. I see development in practice as a journey. For the development practitioner it is not only a physical one, but also a self-explorative one (Chapter 2 explains the metaphor of development as a journey in detail). Development is, in addition, a journey of participation in which the co-travellers share something of themselves and have faith that together they can work towards a 'good change' (Chambers, 1997, p.1743). It is a reciprocal act of faith since the people I work with decide whether or not to entrust me as the professional who will accompany them throughout the journey that might drive a positive change in their existence (Briganti, 2016). My practical experience shows that this process creates a common space for developing resolutions to problems. The journey of participation is also an act of love. I understand love as a mature answer to the problem of existence (Fromm, 1957, p.16). In Fromm's words mature love is:

a union under the condition to preserve each others' integrity, one's individuality. Love is primarily giving, not receiving [...] giving is more joyous than receiving, not because it is a deprivation, but because in the act of giving lies the expression of my aliveness. [...] Not he who has much is rich, but he who gives much (ibid.).

Hence, love and participation are fundamental ingredients in development in practice, and in my worldview reinforce each other as Skolimowski points out:

Love is the deepest form of participation. Where there is love there is participation.

Loveless participation is an anaemic involvement. To participate is the first step to loving. (Skolimowski, 1994, p.159)

Love intended as sharing my aliveness, feelings, experience, commitment and professionalism represents my personal and professional choice to support people in realising their own capabilities, which is in Buscaglia's view 'to assure them that we are dedicated to their growth (and I would add to my growth too), to the actualizing of their limitless potentials' (Buscaglia, 1972, p.117). I also wish to state that my choice to live my value of love for humanity as fully as I can helps me in attempting to equalize power imbalances between those I work with and myself.

[...] Martin Luther King can inspire us with his commitment, courage, and insights. He showed the transformative power of vision, guts, and passion combined with realism and how these could win against deeply entrenched resistance. In his words: Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anaemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love. (Chambers, 2017, p.169)

Both Chapters 3 and 4 will provide the reader with various example of how I do that in practice.

Love, however, has been a widely ignored subject and together with empathy the habitual absentee in the neoliberal discourse of International Development and Economics.

The sensate minds empathically disbelieve in the power of love. It appears to us something illusionary. We call it self-deception, the opiate of people's minds, idealistic bosh, unscientific delusion. We are biased against all theories that try to prove the power of love [...]. (Sokorin, 1954, p. 47)

On the contrary the value of love appears in many living-theory accounts such as the one by Delong (2002) who saw the value of love in her educational practice as a necessary and integral part of her research and that of Campbell (2012) who elaborated the concept of being loved into learning.

But to go back to ID, it was only in recent years that prominent development practitioners such as Chambers, have introduced love into discussions.

Love has had no part in mainstream development discourse. But with relationships now accepted and empathy heard more often, love should not be far behind. Love was used at an IDS<sup>15</sup> conference in July 2016 [...] where participants brainstorm words they would like to be used and acted on in development, love now comes up more often. It has no obvious part in the Newtonian paradigm: it cannot be measured. (Chambers, 2017, p.169)

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<sup>15</sup> IDS stands for Institute for Development Studies

As someone who has been educated in both economics and International Development, I have been suffering what seems to be lack of willingness to focus on what cannot be measured or easily grasped. Due to the values I hold and want to live by, I ground my capabilities into making sense of development in practice in my experiential learning and feeling towards the people I work with. As I mentioned earlier, I aim to take actions that lead to a change, but I cannot be certain that the change is “good” (ibid.).

You are qualified simply with regards to action, never with regards to its result. Do your duty to the best of your ability, O Arjuna, having abandoned attachment, undertake action...evenly disposed as to their success or failure. (Bhagavad Gita in Rawal, 2006)

In Chamber's words:

For good change, love and power need to be informed and inspired by grounded realism and direct experiential learning and feeling. This means having the vision and guts to face the realities of poverty, inequality, oppression, discrimination, intolerance, stigma, and the terrible insecurities and suffering of war and civil disorder. Most of us, not least myself, do not often if ever manage to do that face-to-face. (Chambers, 2017, p. 170)

What provides me with the courage to do the face-to-face work is the transformative power of my values of love for and faith in humanity, that provide me with life-changing and life-enhancing experiences as Chapter 4 describes in depth.

At this point in my thesis, I would like to elaborate on the concept of power. Power is a cross-cutting theme in my research, hence it emerges everywhere in relation to other key concepts such as love (Buscaglia, 1972; Chambers, 2017); patriarchal power systems (de Beauvoir, 1949; Becker, 1999); neo-liberal thinking and capitalism

(Antrobus, 2016; Elson, 2002); gender justice (hooks, 2000); power over and with people (Irwin, 1992; Briganti, 2018); language (Chambers, 2004); subaltern (de Sousa Santos 2014; Spivak, 1985; Tuhiwai Smith, 2008); to knowledge and truth (Foucault, 1977). It is not my intention to rank any of these concepts as they are all interconnected and equally important in both my personal and professional life as my thesis will show. I would like however to stress that Foucault's idea of knowledge-power-truth has been very inspirational since the beginning of my career as a development professional and researcher. I concur with his notion that 'power perpetually creates knowledge and conversely, knowledge constantly induces ...power' (Foucault, 1980b, p.51, quoted in Prado, 2006, p.68). The consequence is that the "truth" is socially constructed namely produced by the powerful (ibid.). The knowledge that my thesis contains is not only the one that is generated from my practice (my own truth which bears my biases and limitations), but also that of the many people I am working with in developing countries, whose "powerless truth" is often considered 'subaltern knowledges' (de Sousa Santos, 2014, p. 134) by Western epistemology. This concept will be elaborated in Chapters 2 and 4.

My values of love for and faith in humanity mentioned above, should not give the impression that I work entirely from altruism. I am not a saint or a martyr and have no aspiration to become one. I have simply chosen a profession which I believe is more significant than neoliberal economics and material growth. I believe that my training in (neoliberal) economics made me more aware of the tendency of the *homo economicus* (Skidelsky, 2014) to transform every aspect of life into a monetary issue, and I am saddened by the loss of humanity that often follows.

Economics offers us a way of getting what we want without love. Excluded is the idea that we might "want" to love and be loved, that we might want beauty, leisure and many other things that make life worth living. (n.p)

Yet the sector of ID has been colonized by ‘economics imperialism’ (Marino, 2017, p.6) from the very beginning (an overview of the birth and evolution of ID is provided in Chapter 2). Thus, economic explanations were sought in contexts such as racial discrimination, inequalities, relationship. Those prevalent economic modelling leapfrog the realms of feelings and values that are central when human beings interact with human beings (ibid.).

Introducing and living transformative words and values. Replacing market-speak with a vocabulary of complexity and relationships and making the rhetoric real with words already accepted like empowerment, transparency, partnership, and (on its way) trust. And adopting and living a transformative corporate motto, inspired by Kyocera’s<sup>16</sup>, of respect and love. (Chambers, 2017, p. 165)

I wish to elaborate on what I wrote earlier, namely that I am not motivated solely by altruism. Altruism, from the Latin, means “for the other”, caring for the “alter” (Haski-Leventhal, 2009, p. 271). Batson defines altruism as ‘a motivational state with the ultimate goal of increasing another’s welfare’ (Batson, 1991, p.6). As a living theorist I wish to live my values fully both in my personal and professional life. As a development professional I have the ambition that my values and my actions should increase people’s wellbeing. I concur with Smith’s provoking claim (in my view) that pure altruism does not exist and that every altruistic act is egoistic (Smith, 1981, p. 23). In Chapter 3, I will present an example of what that means in practice.

However, there is a more nuanced aspect related to this concept that I would like to focus on. When I was younger the circumstances of my profession invited me to

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<sup>16</sup> Chambers refers to multinational Kyocera’s motto which is: Respect the divine and love people (Kyocera, n.d) Kyocera (no date) Corporate motto / management rationale [online], <<http://global.kyocera.com/company/philosophy/>> [accessed 28 September 2018].

enquire whether as a development practitioner I was motivated only by altruism. Although I believe that selfishness is not a prevailing feature of my personality, my conclusion is that in order to be a professional in ID I need to deeply understand the difference between being an altruist committed uniquely to the other's wellbeing and someone who keeps the broader picture in mind and knows that the wellbeing of an individual might have a ripple effect and consequently a systemic influence at community level (micro-level) which I will elaborate on in Chapter 4.

When the person I work with, becomes fully aware of her own unique capabilities, can exercise it and enjoy her human rights fully, she might also decide to engage in actions contributing to a fairer world, independently from (my) external support. That person in her own unique manner might participate in providing me and the future generation with a fairer world to live in. This is what I call generativity, a force that creates anew over and above what has been done so far. The term was coined by Erikson (1959) and used first in Psychology by to express the concern for nurturing and contributing to the next generation. Chapter 2 provides an in-depth analysis of the issue of generativity.

Usually we have only the foggiest idea of what the consequences of our actions will be, especially further in the future. And the net of delusion is being cast ever wider, as we are bombarded with more and more information masquerading as knowledge, more and more material for the calculus, which far outruns our ability to sift it into truth and falsehood. Therefore, to follow our hearts rather than our heads, our intuitions rather than our calculations, is the distinctively human way of being. And if economics tells us the contrary, down with economics. (Skidelsky, 2014, n.p)

Moreover, Smith's words remind me that I cannot deny that engaging in actions that might lead to people's wellbeing, infuse me with life-affirming energy and is my way to

nurture my own well-being. Fromm's (1957) meaning of love that equates with the act of giving resonates with mine as stated above, as I profoundly believe that giving of my aliveness, feelings, experience, commitment and professionalism, is one of the main sources of my wellbeing. This is because I am not only a giver but also a strong recipient of the aliveness, feelings and values of those I associate with, which so greatly influence me.

However, it is not only about our wellbeing as it is about human dignity as well. By that I mean that the relational dynamic process that rests on love for and faith in humanity leads to dignifying myself as a professional and supporting the people I work with in re-gaining their dignity. Roya and the many other people whose stories I narrate in my thesis have been robbed of their dignity and forced by circumstances and other fellow humans to live in what are in my opinion unacceptable ways. As stated earlier the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) highlights that dignity is the 'foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world'. And dignity, namely the respect for the other's humanity is what love for and faith in humanity are conducive to. This resonates with Freire's concept of conscientization already mentioned and explored in my General Prologue, which is described by Sanders (1968) as:

an 'awakening of consciousness', a change of mentality involving an accurate, realistic awareness of one's locus in nature and society; the capacity to analyze critically its causes and consequences, comparing it with other situations and possibilities; and action of a logical sort aimed at transformation. Psychologically it entails an awareness of one's dignity (p. 12).

Through the process of conscientization I become aware of my own dignity. The awareness of my dignity is connected to that of the people I am working with. For that to happen, according to Freire they also have to embrace the process of 'awakening



of consciousness that has the power to transform reality' (Taylor, 1993, p.52). Transforming reality namely, to contribute to a more just world, is what I attempt to do through my profession as an International Development worker. I attempt to do so by supporting vulnerable people to develop their own capabilities and consequently also mine. I concur with Freire that 'social change should come from the masses and not isolated individuals' (Nyirenda, 1996 p.10) which is why my research rests on LT methodology which I acknowledge as a social movement as Chapter 2 will elucidate. Freire continues (1970):

In a culture of silence, the masses are 'mute', that is, they are prohibited from creatively taking part in the transformation of their society and therefore prohibited from being. Even if they can occasionally read and write because they were 'taught' in humanitarian - but not humanist - literacy campaigns, they are nevertheless alienated from the power responsible for their silence (p. 30).

In this thesis, my value of dignity is intrinsic in the many stories telling the life of people who struggle to take part in the transformation of their society. The first one is the story of my daughter Marta in the preamble followed by those narrated in Chapters 3 and 4, all examples that the process of regaining dignity cannot wait.

### **1.2.5 Responsibility**

To explain my meaning of responsibility I would like to walk the reader through an incident that happened at the beginning of 2019, while I was working for an intergovernmental organization<sup>17</sup> in Morocco. Before I commence with the narration, I

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<sup>17</sup> An intergovernmental organization is an organization comprised by several sovereign members states

wish to stress that I have very little documentary evidence that I am allowed to use here without breaching the code of ethics of the organization I worked for when the incident occurred. The following is therefore based on my field notes and only one email that I feel I can share.

*I have just been appointed as the head of the office for economics. The team was composed of a majority Moroccan expert and one foreign expert, who was acting as the head of office before my arrival. On my first day in my new office I had an early morning meeting with my supervisors that introduced me to the situation the office has been in for several months. I was told that the acting head of office “extremely difficult to manage” (in the language of my supervisors). They added that during the time she was leading the team, the situation grew tense to the extent that when I arrived a few Moroccan colleagues were about to resign out of frustration and high levels of stress. The difficult colleague that in this writing I call Nina was described as racist against the Moroccan team, and prone to abuse her power and impose it over subordinates. I have been provided with a few examples of how her behaviour was deemed to be unethical and cruel. I now felt less keen to engage in my new job. That feeling was not dictated by my lack of will to face a difficult situation and find solutions to it, but rather by the fact that in less than one hour I had been virtually introduced to a person whose values seemed to be at odds with mine. Joining a new organization and being in a leadership position was already enough of a challenge. The first bilateral meetings I held with each of my new team members and with Nina confirmed what my supervisors told me. Some of my younger co-workers were holding back their tears when recalling the time spent with Nina as team leader. They could not stop telling me, a complete stranger, how happy they were to have me finally in the team as the head of the office.*

In Chapter 5 I will discuss my new job position and describe it as a new engagement apparently very different from what I have been experiencing thus far, as the

organization is not an institution that deals with ID. On my first day I was wondering how I could best express my development practitioner-self in a context that I was told has nothing to do with ID in practice. How could I work with myself and others in order for each of us to contribute to the realization of our capabilities (Sen, 1999)? I also wondered how I could become my best development professional to date by exploring my educational influences in my own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations I operate in (Whitehead, 2009). I was almost resigned to this new reality when this experience provided me with answers to my questions and the elucidation of my value of responsibility.

As the new head of the office, I was made responsible for my co-workers and their performance. I was their supervisor according to the internal hierarchy. My role as a leader was clear to me, but less evident was how to conciliate that with my ontological responsibility to act towards the co-creation of a 'good change' (Chambers, 1995, p. 174) conducive to an improvement of people's lives (discussed in detail in Chapter 4 with examples from Ethiopia and Afghanistan). Although I was not dealing with people whose human rights were violated nor with girls or women discriminated against their gender, the situation at work seemed to me to resemble some of my previous experiences embedded within the "diseases of power" (Foucault, 1982 p.779) where power over people would prevail.

*Nina was in fact disrespectful towards the others and belittled, insulted and bullied those whom she considered subalterns (de Sousa Santos, 2014). Her attitude was verbally aggressive and her words spiteful. I started empathizing with my colleagues as I recognized their feeling of hopelessness, especially because those at the top of the hierarchy remained idle and did not take concrete actions to stop Nina, although her misconduct was very well known within the organization. Nina's exploitative behaviour triggered my outrage and I start feeling responsible towards the people in*

*my team not as their supervisor, but as a fellow human being who could not tolerate abuses of power.*

Here again, I wish to draw the attention of the reader to the empathy-outrage-action cycle, and on how my empathic reaction first leads to outrage and then to take responsibility because this context shows that the value transcends the professional sphere because it is part of my ontology. Even on that occasion my value of love for humanity was interwoven with my value of responsibility *for* myself and *towards* others. I feel inspired by the following thoughts by Scheler (1954, p. 167 quoted in Shotter, 2008):

If we love any human being, we certainly love him [sic] for what he is: but at the same time we love him also for what he *might* be, according to the possibilities of perfection inherent in his being. (p.153)

The responsibility *for* myself is what Chambers calls the primacy of the personal (2017, p. 164) and is exemplified by acting with integrity in order to co-create a good change that on this occasion implies equalizing power-relations in my working place. Responsibility *for* myself implies ‘ethico-moral and spiritual responsibility, embodying co-responsibility’ (Giri and Van Ufford, 2004, p. 4) namely responsibility *towards* others and involves “practices of self-cultivation including spiritual mobilization of self and society” (ibid). In my living-theory responsibility *towards* the others means that while recognizing that the other is responsible for themselves (Whitehead, 2014) I act in ways that support the development of their capabilities so that they can realize what they *might* be. I saw my colleagues not for what they appeared to be, namely demotivated, insecure, frustrated, overworked and to some extent underperforming, but for what they *might* be if they could realize their potential. My office needed a ‘good change’ (Chambers, 1995, p. 174) in order to better the working atmosphere and the business

life of everyone involved in the team. However, as already mentioned 'for good change, love and power need to be informed and inspired by grounded realism [...]' (Chambers, 2017, p. 170). My realism was infused by my sense of responsibility *for* myself, namely a team leader who takes actions in order to instil values of empathy, social justice, love for and faith in humanity into her workplace. I therefore dealt with Nina almost on a daily basis to understand why she was acting as a bully. At the same time, I wanted to encourage Nina to use her leadership position not to abuse younger colleagues, but rather to help them developing professionally by adopting a respectful attitude.

My sense of responsibility *towards* others led me to support each team member in reacting individually against an unjust situation, which had detrimental effects on the office's performance and on that of the majority of the team members<sup>18</sup>. In practical terms I told them that our office is a place where no abuses are tolerated, and that they had to find their own professional manner to contribute to a safer working environment by engaging in dialogue and fostering collaboration among colleagues.

*Unfortunately, the situation grew in tension as Nina's and my relationship worsened to the point that she become verbally aggressive with me as well. She involved my supervisors asking for their intervention in order to 'reprimand my poor, micro-managerial and dictatorial leadership style' as she used to described it in an email to them, found accidentally by a team member Fatima, printed off the communal office-printer. I was shaken by the words used by Nina to describe me and tired of working in an unhealthy environment that had started to affect both my professional and personal life. I started also to believe that I could not have been true to my living -theory self in*

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<sup>18</sup> An external moderator and leadership coach were asked to assess the situation in my office and to survey each of team members. The conclusions were that 90% of the team members were frustrated by the situation and that Nina was mentioned by everyone as the root cause of that frustration. These data belong to the internal and confidential documentation of the organization, and were shared with me and my supervisors only.

*a place where the supervisors never reacted to change a poisoned situation and remained idle while observing people being tyrannized. After all, it was not my responsibility to take responsibility for my colleagues and the best thing I could have done to take responsibility for myself was to look for a business environment where I could live my values fully. Fatima must have read my mind and sent me the following email:*

*Dear Arianna,*

*No matter what that email says, you are deeply appreciated as a manager and as a mentor. So thank you for being our boss and colleague. You helped improve a very strenuous and difficult period. You inspire me and make me grow professionally every day. You are not a micro manager-you are a giant manager. You take care of people, while also taking care of the work. SO, a huge thank you. (Briganti, email correspondence, 2019)*

*Her words brought tears to my eyes and so did other colleagues' reassuring statements that followed Fatima's message. What moved me was the spontaneity of her gesture and words that shown me that she also was ready to take responsibility for the relationship that we were building together. I believe that responsibility begets responsibility and Fatima confirmed that when she started to face Nina more confidently and speak her mind. Nina resigned a few days after I received Fatima's email. A few months later I received my supervisor's feedback on my performance, which part of it stated:*

*Ms Briganti made an immediate positive impact. She was confronted with a Department in a prolonged and difficult transition, with one very considerable staff challenge in particular. She faced this challenge with great resilience and care and saw it through to its necessary conclusion while trying to minimise the distress for the individual; a second legacy staff issue was managed to a conclusion with similar sincerity and*

*determination. More generally, her energetic work with the team individually and collectively, her impressive and dynamic personal manner, and her strong professional lead transformed the Department: a troubled and fractious atmosphere has become more harmonious and collaborative and professional, and she has brought the team up to full strength. She and the team are well placed to meet the challenge of delivering on the potential she has created. (Briganti, email correspondence, 2019)*

My concern for people and my wish to build human relationships with those I work with are a fundamental core of my ontology that cannot be fulfilled without my values of responsibilities *for* myself and *towards* others. These values are explained in practice in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 using various examples of my practice that is informing my learning. I see myself as a learner which is Buber's language someone who is 'the becoming character of the act of knowing' (Murphy, 1998, p.104) and while enroute to this journey I am 'free choosing my reality, free venturing into the unknown and the undisclosed and assume full responsibility for my own knowing' (ibid, p. 106).

I perceive my values of responsibilities to be interwoven with my learning path and that of the people I work with. However, many International Development actors fail to realize that 'the field and the practice of development provides, and ought to provide, an opportunity for learning (Giri and Van Ufford, 2004, p. 20) self-development and self-transformation both for the object and the subject of development'. I concur with the widespread view that 'an ethical agenda has almost always implied an agenda of the care of the other in a hegemonic manner where what is good for the other has already been defined by the benevolent Self' (ibid., p.20)

Rethinking development from the vantage point and practice of self-development urges a shift of perspective from us: a shift from looking at development as ameliorating the condition of the other to looking at it as an initiative in self-development. Self-

development here refers to the self-development of both the agents of development as well as subjects, the so-called target groups of interventions. (ibid., p.20)

By rethinking development, I mean to recognize that the existing web of human relationships (Arendt, 1998, p. 181) is the foundation of our living and interconnected stories. In Arendt's words:

It is because of this already existing web of human relationships, with its innumerable, conflicting wills and intentions, that action almost never achieves its purpose; but it is also because of this medium, in which action alone is real, that it "produces" stories with or without intention as naturally as fabrication produces tangible things. [...] They tell us more about their subjects, the "hero" in the center of each story, than any product of human hands ever tells us about the master who produced it [...] Although everybody started his life by inserting himself into the human world through action and speech, nobody is the author or producer of his own life story. [...] Somebody began it and is its subject in the twofold sense of the word, namely, its actor and sufferer, but nobody is its author. (p.181)

In Chapter 2 I will use my experience as a development practitioner to explore the web of human relationships and the South African concept Ubuntu (I~we) loosely translated as the sense of togetherness (Potts, 2014, p. 104) as key to my relational-self and how it developed into I~we~us while writing the living story of my life, which I call my living-theory. The concept of *Ubuntu* is a cross-cutting concept and explanatory principle of my thesis.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Living Educational Theory and International Development**

## Introduction

This chapter explains what is Living Educational Theory (LT) research and why I chose it as my methodological approach. It also focuses on explaining why and how I started to become self-reflexive about my own practice as a development practitioner. In both the theory and practice of International Development (ID) self-reflexivity is an exercise often overlooked at (Chambers, 2017, p.115) and my engagement with Living Educational Theory research methodology is providing me the instrument to nourish and strengthen my self-reflexive practice. This methodology is generated in the process of creating my own living-theory and often draws insights from self-study, narrative enquiry, action research and auto-ethnographical methodologies. Dadds and Hart (2001) point that out:

More important than adhering to any specific methodological approach, be it that of traditional social science or traditional action research, may be the willingness and courage of practitioners – and those who support them – to create enquiry approaches that enable new, valid understandings to develop; understandings that empower practitioners to improve their work for the beneficiaries in their care. (p. 169)

Engaging with Living Theory research methodology in the process of creating my own living-theory, led me to better understand the shortcomings of International Development and offers ways for overcoming them. I concur with Chamber who affirms that:

Reflexivity is rarely part of university and college courses. Yet arguably every course should include critical reflection by every student to realize how teaching and the discipline concerned have provided lenses, vocabulary, and categories for seeing and understanding the world, and how different these are in other disciplines. It remains a bizarre blind spot that universities and training colleges, and their staff, rarely recognize

or practice, let alone facilitate, reflexivity among their students. (Chambers, 2017, p.163)

The focus of this chapter therefore is my chosen research methodology and its threefold nature as an action-led research methodology, as a way of life and as a social movement. I also explore the synergies between this methodology and ID, in which I have operated since 2005. In order to delve deeper into those synergies, I engage with an historical exploration of both ID and LT research that seem to be conducive to the rise of generative development in relation to sustainable development. I clarify the language of ID throughout the past decades since the 'age of development' (Sachs, 1992, p.2) arose in 1949, highlighting how the neoliberal agenda steered the discourse and consequently the interventions. This second chapter paves the way for the next ones which are focused on practical examples of how I use the amalgam of ID and LT research to face the limitations of ID.

## **2.1. Living Educational Theory methodology**

I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill,  
one only finds that there are many more hills to climb.

I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me,  
to look back on the distance I have come.

But I can rest only for a moment, for with freedom comes responsibilities,  
and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not yet ended

(Mandela, 1994, p. 751)

### **2.1.1 A brief overview of the features of Living Educational Theory methodology and the terminology adopted**

I would like to briefly clarify a central definition of Living Educational Theory research methodology and the terminology used by living-theory researchers. I will explain these

in greater detail throughout the thesis and enrich the discussion with examples of my practice. In my writing I adopt the same definition of Living Educational Theory research as in Whitehead's book 'Living Theory Research as a way of life' (2018). He shortens Living Educational Theory research to Living Theory research (LT). In the literature, Living Theory that indicates an approach to research is sometimes written as 'living theory', which can be confused with an individual's living-theory (ibid., p.5), namely the unique explanation produced by an individual to explain their educational influence in learning (Huxtable and Whitehead, 2015).

Whitehead (1989) asks:

Have you ever made a claim to know your own educational development and subjected the claim to public criticism? If you have, what does such a claim to educational knowledge look like? [...] I'm assuming that all readers of this Journal will at some time have asked themselves questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my practice?' [...] I believe that a systematic reflection on such a process provides insights into the nature of the descriptions and explanations which we would accept as valid accounts of our educational development. I claim that a living-educational-theory will be produced from such accounts. (p.41)

The answers to the above questions represent the genesis of the definition of LT developed for the first time by Whitehead in 1989. In this Chapter I prefer to refer to the later definition by Huxtable and Whitehead (2008, p.1) which I favour for its clarity:

[Living Theory is] a form of self-study research in which practitioners research questions that are important to them to generate their values-based explanations of their educational influence in their own learning, the learning of others, and the learning of social formations.

My own study of this methodology gave me insights into its features which made me chose to adopt it for my doctoral research. I also decided to select Living Theory due to its inclusive characteristics, as it provides me with the possibility to draw insights from other qualitative methodologies discussed later in this Chapter. The Living Theory conceptual framework considers other methodologies as being not “in competition” but rather complementing Living Theory. At this stage the features described below are meant to provide the reader with an overview only. Each of them will be spelled out at length in the rest of this Chapter.

Living Theory:

- Is self-reflexive (Whitehead, 1989, p. 42) practitioner research;
- Is based on values for the flourishing of humanity (ibid.) as mentioned in Chapter

1

When offering an explanation for an individual's educational development these values can be used as reasons for action. For example, if a person is experiencing the negation of freedom, yet believes that she should be free, then the reason why she is acting to become free can be given in terms of freedom, i.e., I am acting in this way because I value my freedom. (ibid.)

- In questions of the sort of ‘How do I improve my practice?’ the I is experienced as a living contradiction. My I is also experienced as a living contradiction in my research questions (below). Whitehead clearly elucidates what it is meant by living contradiction:

I began to understand the concrete problems experienced by adherents to dialectical and propositional logics when they try to establish a sustained dialogue. The nucleus of dialectics, contradiction, is eliminated from descriptions and explanations presented in the propositional form (Popper, 1963). Dialecticians claim that the propositional form masks the dialectical nature of reality (Marcuse, 1964). I traced the tension between these logics to differences between Plato and Aristotle. In the Phaedrus, Socrates tells

us that there are two ways of coming to know. We break things down into their separate components and we hold things together under a general idea. He says that those thinkers who can hold both the one and the many together he calls dialecticians. Aristotle, on the other hand demands, in his work on interpretation, that the questioner puts his question into a definite form and asks whether or not a person has a particular characteristic or not. Aristotle's propositional logic eliminates contradictions from correct thought. (ibid.)

- Is relatable (Bassey, 1981) as opposed to generalizable:

Instead of thinking of an educational theory in terms of a set of propositional relationships between linguistic concepts I am proposing a view of educational theory as a dynamic and living form whose content changes with the developing public conversations of those involved in its creation (Whitehead and Lomax, 1987). The theory is constituted by the practitioners' public descriptions and explanations of their own practice. The theory is located not solely within these accounts but in the relationship between the accounts and the practice [...] The 'general' in a living theory still refers to 'all' but instead of being represented in a linguistic concept, 'all' refers to the shared form of life between the individuals constituting the theory. Now History shows us that new ideas have often met with scepticism, rejection or hostility from those who are working within the dominant paradigm. Researchers who are trying to make original and acknowledged contributions to their subject, education, might expect powerful opposition to their ideas.

- Is concerned with questions of validity:

[questions of validity] are fundamentally important in all research which is concerned with the generation and testing of theory. Researchers need to know what to use as the unit of appraisal and the standards of judgement in order to test a claim to educational

knowledge. I suggest that the unit of appraisal is the individual's claim to know his or her educational development.

- Is action-led in connection with my relational self, a social movement and a way of life;

### **2.1.2 My research questions and living answers**

A Maori woman<sup>19</sup> speaking to a development professional said: 'if you have come here to help *me*, then you are wasting your time. But if you have come here because you believe that your liberation is bound up with mine, let *us* work together.' These words describe my values and beliefs around the duty of a development professional I have extensively discussed in the previous chapter. My choice to become a development professional has to do with my personal story, through which I committed myself to support vulnerable people (in particular girls and women) in overcoming their daily struggle for survival and regain their dignity. I will give the reasons for my choices in Chapter Three. By vulnerable people, I mean those whose inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948: n.p.) are violated. I will show a practical example of what I am claiming here in Chapter 3.

My professional goal is to sustain them in realising the capabilities to stand up for their just and equal opportunities (Briganti, 2018, p.76). My thesis is a retrospective explanation of my practical work and influence that I felt the need to focus on in order to respond to some key questions that I have been asking myself all those years. The answers to those questions are key for my current professional and personal life. I am aware however, that the answers provided in my thesis are still in progress and by that,

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<sup>19</sup> This is a frequently used quotation which is attributed sometimes to Lilla Watson and also to a generic aboriginal activists group.

I mean that they are grounded in my current understanding of the values I hold and what I research. In other words, they evolve alongside the meanings of my values and my living standards of judgement (Laidlaw, 1996). I see them as representing my best knowledge to date (McNiff, 1992), and are therefore partial. I call them ‘living answers’ as they are still in the developmental stage. Similarly, in the years to come and with a deepened understanding of my values and living standards of judgement I will encounter more questions.

The chosen methodology, namely Living Theory has helped me to uncover and explore the findings in my doctoral research. The living answers represent *my* living-theory of International Development that I hope will contribute to the knowledge-base of development practitioners with an example of how to engage in self-reflexive practices that might be used to overcome limitations in the sector.

My questions are:

- How can I work with myself and others in order for each of us to contribute to the realisation of our capabilities (Sen, 1999)?
- How can I know better in order to act better (Chambers, 2017) as a development professional?
- How do I bring my values, in particular those of empathy, love and faith in humanity (conducive to dignity), into the realm of ID?
- How do I introduce the idea of generativity in sustainable development, and why is it significant?
- How do I explore the potential value of LT in the emergence of a global social movement of researchers who hold values for the flourishing of humanity (Whitehead, 1989)?



### **2.1.3 The roadmap - Making sense of my journey**

My research began in 2014 when I started looking at my lived experience of having been a development professional for more than a decade, focusing on my work in developing countries in places such as Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Georgia, Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. I feel as I have been on a journey ever since. The nature of my journey is twofold: it's a physical one in the sense that I travel a lot due to the nature of my profession that leads me to operate and live in developing countries, but it is also an internal journey of self-exploration. As part of my Living Theory research I focus on travelling within rather than outside, thus the traveller has the quality of the learner.

Wherever you travel on the road to learning, you are your own constant companion. The better travellers know themselves and the better they understand the role they themselves play in building and recognizing their conceptual construct, the more they will discover as they follow the trail of realization. This leads through our learning landscape and on to the host country. (unknown)

I use the metaphor of a roadmap to mentally visualize my research as I attempt to clarify the choice of LT as my methodology. Roads are being built, enlarged, modified, and abandoned. Some are less travelled than others, and some develop into complex routes. And so is my LT research, which is constantly changing and evolving (the way I change and evolve) and will only finish with my death. My internal journey has also unveiled the pillars of my ontology grounded in my values, living standards of judgement (Laidlaw, 1996) and explanatory principles, with which I dealt in chapter one.

My LT research helps me visualize and externalize the pathways, since it provides me with the clarity, I need to deal with the complexity of my life. I define some aspects of

my life as complex since I have to balance a vast number of apparently disparate elements (Briganti, 2019). For example: living and working in culturally-laden contexts and in regions of the world in varying states of political insecurity; moving from country to country every few years in order to engage in development projects; my married life with a development professional, who also works internationally with the consequence of long periods of physical separation among us; my motherhood and my relationship with my Ethiopian daughter who brings with her, her cultural background ( i.e. language, religion, race) which differs from mine; dealing with my own womanhood alongside that of often abused and vulnerable girls and women I work with in developing countries (more about this last point is clarified in Chapter 3).

I therefore felt the necessity to engage in developing a mental roadmap of my life so far spent in developing countries in order to deal with the intense nature of my profession, which has ramifications for my personal life. The metaphor of a roadmap offers the simplicity on the other side of complexity (Holmes 1961, p. 109) in terms of suggesting the reality of my life. This assists me in researching and writing authentically as well as coherently about myself and the people I meet along the way. By this I mean that I'd like to pursue a narrative style capable of including the reader in the journey (at least the written part of it) and make it accessible to whoever might have an interest in engaging with it. I also want my writings to be inclusive of the voices of those who are part of my professional life, in other words my co-travellers in this journey of exploration. I will elaborate more on my inclusive way of writing and knowing in the section on ethics and in Chapter 4.

The form (the roadmap) and the content (my living- theory) evolve together since they generate a dialectical relationship in Socratic terms, namely the art of holding the One and the Many together (Vegetti, 1999, p. 41). After engaging in a self-reflexive enquiry at the beginning of my research, I realised that what keeps all these elements together

is my ontological I, which is where the unity of those elements lies, whatever the complexity. Thus, LT research - in both its form and content - is helping me to strengthen my ontological I. By this, I mean my identity is given by the perception of who I am, at the core of which I find my values that give meaning and purpose to my life, and that I use as living standards of judgement and explanatory principles. I understand now that first and foremost LT contributes to the realization of my capabilities (Sen, 1999) and helps me to embody them fully in order to maximize the scope of that dialectic.

#### **2.1.4 The multifaceted nature of Living Theory**

This section engages with the multifaceted nature of Living Theory methodology which is three-fold. I will explain what I mean by LT as a methodology for action-led research, as a way of life and as a social movement. However, before engaging with that, I wish to go back to the definition of Living Theory. As mentioned at the beginning of this Chapter, Huxtable and Whitehead (2008, p.1) define LT as 'a form of self-study research in which practitioners research questions that are important to them to generate their values-based explanations of their educational influence in their own learning, the learning of others, and the learning of social formations'. Self-study research, however, is a challenging realm as Ham and Kane (2004) argue:

There is the more politically based dilemma specific to practitioner researchers, of how to please both practitioner peers and researcher peers when they read an account of a researched experience with very different purposes in mind indicative of the question: "How can my self-research be reported in a way that simultaneously makes it comprehensible to the audience of practitioner peers who might "use" it as knowledge, at the same time as making it sufficiently comprehensive for our researcher peers whose task it is to "judge" it as knowledge?" (p. 119)

In the next section I will return to both self-study and narrative enquiry and the fact that they are both methodologies 'enacted in partnership and bonding with others' (Garbett and Ovens, 2016, p.17), which is why I chose them to develop my own methodological approach in the generation my own living-theory. To Huxtable's and Whitehead's definition I would add that LT in addition to be a form of self-study research, is also self-reflexive research (Whitehead, 1989, p. 42). By that I mean that its self-reflexive nature helps me to reveal the underlying principles that I use to make sense of my own meanings of values such as love and faith in humanity and living standards of judgements along with their conceptual understanding.

The workings of reflexivity are accessed via observation and reflection, and through interaction with colleagues. We observe in action; we step back to reflect; and we step up again to action. (Attia and Edge, 2017, p. 36)

It is worth emphasizing the distinction between Living Theory (upper case) and living-theories (lower case) briefly introduced above. The former is the conceptual framework that allows individuals to place their academic inquiries within a research approach (Whitehead, 2019, private email correspondence). The latter denotes practitioners developing their own living-theories to bring about a "good change" by producing a valid explanation for their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others or in the learning of the social formations that influence practice and understandings (Whitehead, 2019).

The meanings of Living Educational Theory research are paradigmatic in the sense that they are the abstract concepts that define the field of Living Theory research. A living-educational-theory is the unique explanation produced by an individual to explain their educational influence in learning. By 'educational influence' we mean the values-related

influence we have in learning that contributes to the flourishing of humanity. (Huxtable and Whitehead, 2015)

The methodology Living Theory is used to investigate a particular research enquiry and to provide answers to specific research questions. As a methodology it leaves me with a sense of the finite, which brings a piece of academic research to an end. In my worldview, however, Living Theory is more than a finite research methodology, it has developed in me as a way of life (Whitehead, 2018), which creates the space to engage in *my own living-theory* that gives meaning and purpose to my life (ibid.) through the self-reflexive process illustrated above. My living-theory is evolving, as are the meanings of my values. Referring to the metaphor of the traveller once more, my living-theory represents the internal journey of self-exploration that offers me the possibility of judging the extent to which I have managed to live a worth-while life with love and productive work that carries hope for the flourishing of humanity (Whitehead, 2018).

Only a relative and fortunate few continue until the moment of death exploring the mystery of reality, ever enlarging and refining and redefining their understanding of the world and what is true. (Peck, 1983, p.33)

My internal journey of self-exploration is also characterized by living contradictions (Whitehead, 1989, p. 45), meaning that I hold certain values whilst sometimes negating them. In Whitehead's words (ibid.), the tension caused by this contradiction is what moves us to imagine alternative ways of improving our situation. The crucial point of LT and the reason why I have chosen it as my research methodology, is its potential to trigger action. In the initial stage of research development, the researcher who approaches LT is expected to deal with her self-reflexive enquiries. This self-study phase implies a very disciplined routine of self-reflexive practice which focuses on the

I, namely on the understanding one's values, explanatory principles and living contradictions. I concur with what Huxtable (2016) argues:

This self is not in isolation, self-serving, but one that is both an expression of the unique individuality of each person's self and their relational self. (p.9)

This may be neither easy nor painless. It felt sometimes as an unconditional surrender to my own story and the necessity to look into those “details” of forgotten memories, that I not always wanted or felt ready to be confronted with. That unveiled my vulnerabilities, shame and fears, revealed my many failures, disillusionments and above all put me in a position to be deeply and vulnerably seen (Brown, 2010). However, what this process of self-investigation taught me is that vulnerabilities can also be the birthplace of joy, creativity, acceptance, worthiness and love (ibid.).

This is also the time where I as a researcher/practitioner started to understand LT in its full maturity, meaning action-led in nature and in connection with my relational-self as highlighted in the list of its features above. Hence, my understandings (and actions) started moving from I to we (I~we). In order to clarify this, I use the South African concept of *Ubuntu*, a Zulu word for ‘being in community’ with no direct translation into English but meaning loosely ‘I am because we are’ which recognizes the importance of togetherness (Potts, 2014, p. 104). This sense of togetherness in my eyes is reciprocal. As described by Huxtable and Whitehead (2016, p. 9) it can be extended to ‘we are because I am’ (I~we~I) (ibid.)

We use ‘I’ and ‘we’ to point to a relationship where individuals and collectives are neither subordinated nor dominant but exist in an inclusive, emancipating and egalitarian relationship. We use ~ to stand for living-boundaries (Huxtable, 2012): trustworthy, respectful, co-creative space, where individuals, collectives and the complex worlds of

practice, knowledge and socio-historical cultures they inhabit and embody, touch.  
(Huxtable and Whitehead, 2015)

Tutu's (2013, n.p.) view on *Ubuntu* is described as 'I need you, in order for me to be me; I need you to be you to the fullest.' Mounter, Huxtable, and Whitehead (2019) are further developing Mounter's understandings of the meanings of the relational self as she researches I~we~us (p.3). In I~we~us Mounter (ibid.) argues the start is the "I", the interdependent-self, unique but connected to and with the community, "we". By drawing on Tutu's expression of starting with the "I" and "you" to the fullest in collective growth and transformation, Mounter (2017) develops this transformative process further that leads to the I~we~us (p.3).

The '~us~ relationships' in 'I~we~us' is the outward looking aspects of 'I' or 'we' in community as we offer, adding our living-theory research methodology to the educational knowledge base, adding to the flourishing of humanity. (Mounter, Huxtable, and Whitehead, 2019)

The outward looking aspect of the "I" and the "we" in community in Mounter's words resonates with Kierkegaard's:

a life of ethical commitment provides a constancy to the self which is achieved  
"through the bonding of self with other selves" (Schrage, 1997, p.19).

"We" is the collective of the "I" (Mounter, Huxtable, and Whitehead, 2019), but only through bonding the self with other selves the "we" can become "us". For this transformative growth to take place "I" and its collective "we" need to focus on the primacy of the personal (Chambers, 2017, p, 165). I use "growth" because of the

developmental nature of this dialogical and dialectical process (Pound, 2003, p. 25) that starts with “I”, grows into “we” and ultimately becomes “us”.

By that I mean that the “I” and its collective “we” need to assume responsibility *for* oneself and *towards* others as elaborated in Chapter 1. Levinas (1974) clarifies this transformative growth that generates “us” and entails responsibility when he argues:

The subject which is not an ego, but which I am, cannot be generalized, is not a subject in general [...] Here the identity of the subject comes from the impossibility of escaping responsibility (pp. 13-14).

I believe, taking responsibility for oneself is a journey of self-exploration. This journey that rests on the concept of *Ubuntu* and its later development into I~we~us is what inspired my research questions, whose answers I shall provide in this doctoral thesis, especially in Chapter 4. Later in this Chapter, I will elaborate on how the I~we~us is key to my meanings of ID and together with my value of responsibility inform my alternative way of engaging in development work.

At this point of my LT research, I have acquired the capacity to operate reflexively (Attia and Edge, 2017, p. 37) to the extent that I may be able to bring about a ‘good change’ (Chambers, 1997, 1743) together with the people I work with in developing countries, where I research and operate. I shall deepen those aspects throughout my thesis. Within the framework of LT, epistemology assumes a distinctive meaning. Epistemology is considered by Living Theory researchers as their own ways of knowing (Whitehead, 2018, p.50) as opposed to the theory of knowledge. Two issues are worth noting here. On the one hand knowledge is seen as developmental in nature, which is why I use the concept of living answers as stated earlier. Living Theory researchers utilize the dynamic “knowing” instead of the static “knowledge”. On the other hand, that ‘knowing’ is inclusive of many knowledges. LT in fact is a non-derivative methodology



(de Sousa Santos, 2014) by which I mean that Living Theorists generate new epistemological knowledges that foster epistemological emancipation and act as a counterforce to 'epistemicide' (ibid.), de Sousa Santos' formulation as 'the murder of knowledge'. I shall write more about LT as a non-derivative methodology in section 2.3.

I also would like to briefly focus on the three stages of evolution of the methodology since its conception. Whitehead (1989) inspired by Feyerabend (1975) writes about the clarification of the meanings of values in the course of their emergence in practice:

I do not believe that values are the type of qualities whose meanings can be communicated solely through a propositional form. I think values are embodied in our practice and their meaning can be communicated in the course of their emergence in practice. (Whitehead, 1989)

Laidlaw (1996) moved us forward by stressing the necessity of not only clarifying the meanings of values, but also understanding them in the course of practice.

Another characteristic of living educational theories is their recognition that values are not static but develop as we develop. (Laidlaw, 1996, pp.66-67)

Understanding the evolution of my values and how this is influencing my personal and professional life is core to my LT research. My practice made me also aware that the evolution of my unique constellation of values (discussed in chapter one) is influenced by both my own socio-historical context (Habermas, 1976) as well as the socio-historical context of the people I work with in developing countries. This leads to the third stage of evolution of the methodology that generates what I refer to as a global network of relationships, which lie its foundation on people's unique constellation of values for the flourishing of humanity (Whitehead, 1989) that influence each other's

constellation, transcending geographical borders and human diversities. In one of the subsections below called 'Living Theory as a social movement' I elaborate on the concept of LT as a social movement (Whitehead, 2017).

In order to add some visual clarity to the structure of this section I would like to outline its form which is divided into three subsections marked with the arrow symbol:

⇒ Living Theory as a methodology for action-led research

- Methodological inventiveness
- Ethics
- Validation

⇒ Living Theory as a way of life

⇒ Living Theory as a social movement

⇒ Living Theory as a methodology for action-led research

Earlier in Chapter 1, I mentioned my desire to give my life a meaning, hence I decided to work together with people in developing countries on designing and implementing development projects (action-led in nature) which hopefully will lead to a 'good change' (Chambers, 2005). This represents my professional decision to act against human rights' violations (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948: n.p.) and my contribution to a fairer world. Taking an action is key for my professional life, as it is the idea of realising human capabilities, which focuses on Sen's (1999) idea of people's ability to think for themselves and to make their own decisions about how they wish to live their life. Both approaches are key to LT methodology as well (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006, p.56). I will elaborate more on the synergies between LT and ID in section 2.3 and in Chapter 4.

Returning to my ideas about a values-based methodology, I would like action and

values to be intertwined. I believe the striving for this unity is the essence of my life and the core of my living-theory. Being a living-theorist has enabled me to identify my values through my own story and professional experience; moreover, it allows me to continue to expand on my ideas throughout my work life (Hutchinson, 2016). Therefore, I prefer LT as a methodology for its action-led approach in which practice informs theory and vice-versa, which is in line with my action-led professional self.

[e]fficient practice precedes the theory of it; methodologies presuppose the application of the methods, of the critical investigation of which they are the products. (Ryle, 1973, p. 31)

Unlike social science research that generates propositional theories (here is an explanation of what other people are doing) (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006, p.49), I chose LT as my methodology because it enables me to develop my explanation of what I am doing and to improve it.

- **Methodological inventiveness**

In this section I am dealing with methodological inventiveness (Dadds and Harts, 2001) and briefly introducing some of the qualitative methodologies I draw insights from in order to generate my LT. These are ethnography and autoethnography, action research, participatory action research, and narrative research. Due to its quality of flexibility and inclusiveness, LT encourages me to adopt a methodologically inventive approach whilst exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' (Whitehead, 1989). By that I mean that the methodological inventiveness gives me the possibility to choose between a wide range of research methods, and I also use insights from various methodologies in generating my own Living Theory methodology. The importance of

methodological inventiveness is explained as follows by Dadds and Harts:

Perhaps the most important new insight for both of us has been awareness that, for some practitioner researchers, creating their own unique way through their research may be as important as their self-chosen research focus. We had understood for many years that substantive choice was fundamental to the motivation and effectiveness of practitioner research (Dadds, 1995); that what practitioners chose to research was important to their sense of engagement and purpose. But we had understood far less well that how practitioners chose to research, and their sense of control over this, could be equally important to their motivation, their sense of identity within the research and their research outcomes. (Dadds & Hart, 2001, p. 166)

I draw insights from ethnography and auto-ethnography methodologies (Ellis, Adams and Bocher, 2011, p. 273) which help me analyse and explain my personal experience in order to better understand cultures different from my own.

A living theory is similar to ethnographic research in paying attention to the cultural norms within which the researcher is acting and researching. It differs from ethnographic research in that it does not focus on an entire culture group [...] In engaging with the cultural influences in the individual's learning, especially in the learning of social formations, living theorists include an understanding of cultural influences in the explanations of their educational influences in learning. These influences can be emphasized in the application of Habermas' (1976) four criteria of social validity, especially with the criterion of demonstrating an awareness of the normative background from within which the researcher is speaking and writing. (Whitehead, 2009)

In my research approach I also value the transcendental sphere of knowing:

... in the transcendental sphere we have an infinitude of knowledge previous to all deduction, knowledge whose mediated connections (those of intentional implication) have nothing to do with deduction and being entirely intuitive prove refractory to every methodically devised scheme of constructive symbolism. (Husserl, 1912, p. 12).

In order to focus on that, I use multi-media, such as a video-camera, to record conversations when I am allowed to do so, and a voice-recording device when preferred. Data has already been collected such as video-recorded conversations with participants from Afghanistan, Albania and Ethiopia.

I find this method particularly useful in trying to understand the body language of the interviewees in the same space with me (Briganti, 2018). I like to capture the flow of life-affirming energy (Whitehead, 2010), and those imperceptible physical reactions impossible to reproduce in written language. The significance of multi-media narratives is that they compensate for some of the limitations in our binocular vision into our relationally-dynamic awareness of the movement of bodies in space and boundaries; in other words, our proprioception (ibid.).

I also use the methods of empathetic resonance and empathetic validity (as explained in Chapter 1) in clarifying the meanings of my embodied values and their inclusion as explanatory principles in my explanation of influence. My understanding of empathetic resonance echoes Whitehead's (2015, p. 250) who defines it as 'the feeling of the immediate presence of the other in expressing the living values that the other experiences as giving meaning and purpose to their life'.

I use an Action Research methodology, such as those described by McNiff and Whitehead (2010) to identify areas where I can strengthen my capabilities as a development professional. For example, as a method I adopt the action-reflection cycle

(the process of observe-reflect-act-evaluate-modify) (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006, p.10) as I have been inspired by the work of Whitehead:

My imagination worked to offer possibilities about improving what I was doing. I chose a possibility to act on, acted and evaluated the effectiveness of what I was doing in terms of my communications with my pupils. This disciplined process of problem-forming and solving is what I call an action reflection method. (Whitehead, 2008, p. 107)

Hence, I take stock of what is going on; identify my concern; think of possible way(s) forward; try them out; monitoring the action in gathering data to show what is happening; evaluate processes by establishing procedure for making judgments about what is happening; test the validity of claims to knowledge; modify practice in light of the evaluation (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006, p.9).

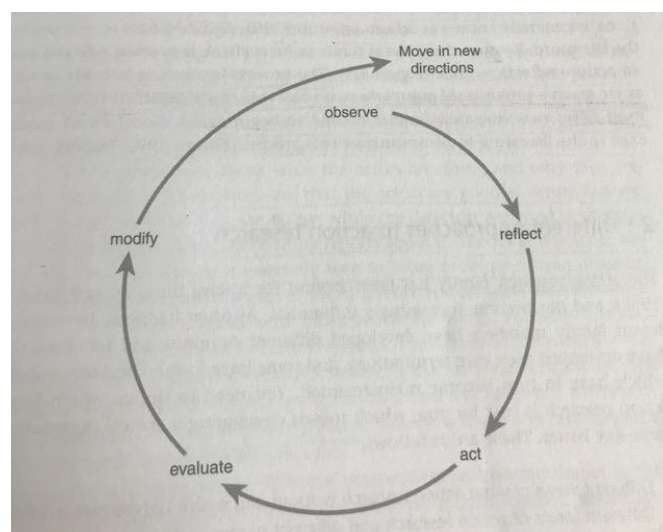


Figure 1. an action-reflection cycle (ibid.)

In my practice life I make use of Participatory Action Research methods such as those described by Chambers (1994) in order to help vulnerable people becoming their own agent of change (Allan and Thomas, 2000). By this I am meaning that they are actively involved in and capable of making decisions that impact their lives.

I also draw insights from narrative research methodology which is described by Cresswell (2007) as follows:

[...] specific type of qualitative design in which 'narrative is understood as a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected' (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 17). The procedures for implementing this research consist of focusing on studying one or two individuals, gathering data through the collection of their stories, reporting individual experiences and chronologically ordering (or using life course stages) the meaning of these experiences. (pp. 53-54)

The general prologue is an example of how my data collection started with my individual experience which provided me with valuable insights into the genesis of my values.

Whitehead (2009) affirms that:

a living theory can be understood as a form of narrative research in that it begins with the experiences as lived and told by the researcher. Within the narrative what distinguishes the story as a living theory is that it is an explanation of the educational influences of the individual in their own learning and in the learning of others. Not all narratives are living theories, but all living theories are narratives.

I therefore would like to argue that in this thesis I am enacting a self-study methodology with narrative enquiry, in the generation of my own living-theory. In Chapter 1, I mentioned that throughout my thesis I will be using a narrative style to invite 'the reader into the text' (McAlpine, 2016, p. 33) and most importantly into my life and the life of the people I speak about in my narration. I chose to enrich my LT research with a narrative methodology as it equips me with practical means 'to construct a coherent

plot about my life with a beginning, middle, end – a past, present and future' (ibid.). The use of narrative strengthens my LT thesis as it validates me as active agent and not a mere observer of other people's lives. I also would like to stress that I see myself as the storyteller of my living-theory, which *is* the story of my life. For the sake of this thesis, I decided that I as the author/storyteller needed to locate my first story in the general prologue. Clandinin and Connelly (1991) noted:

Humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and collectively, lead storied lives. Thus, the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world.  
(p.14)

The data gathered in this doctoral research emerge from almost 15 years of ongoing investigation, self-reflexive study and analysis of the practical knowledge I've gained and shared with the people I worked and researched with in various countries. My thesis is a collaborative document (ibid.) that sees data collection as:

[...] a co-construction between researcher and participant (Sfard & Prusak, 2005), with both jointly responsible for the stories that emerge. (McAlpine, 2016, p.40)

Data collected include the usage of various source of information such as field records collected through participants observations and discussions with them, journals, emails, and notes by the participants to me, unstructured and semi-structured interviews conducted between participants and myself, storytelling and participants' autobiographical writings (Clandinin and Connelly, 1991), as well as analysis of documents and reports.

The next section is engaged with ethics, but I wish to anticipate some of the ethical concerns related to self-study and narrative enquiry. I concur with Tronto (1995) that



'we aim to bring an ethic of care to our relationship with participants since over time we develop a privileged intimate knowledge of an individual'. The amount of information I collected about many of the people I interviewed and worked with is something that I believe might swing the pendulum of power more in my favour. I am wary and therefore particularly careful in not mis-using the information I have. I am also conscious that by using narrative enquiry I need to 'ensure that I do not attend only to the findings that support my hopes and wishes (Trumbull, 2004, pp. 1225-1226). In Chapter 5, I explain how I work with validation groups, namely a critical community of peers who help me to notice the influence that my own biases and worldview have on the stories that I use in my writings. One of these peers recently helped me in honing my self-criticism by saying that 'Living-Theory is not about creating a "nice" story'. I was reminded that I need to be constantly aware of my inherent predisposition to consider only the data and findings that meet my expectations. An example of what I am arguing here will be provided in Chapter 4 while narrating the story of Semira.

- **Ethics**

When thinking of the ethics that govern my behaviour as researcher and practitioner who lives and works in countries often plagued by colonialism and its legacies, I feel most inspired by the writings of Tuhiwai Smith (2008) on how to decolonize research methodologies and move towards research practices that put the respect for human beings and their cultures at the centre of the research.

One of the supposed characteristics of primitive peoples was that we could not use our minds or intellects. We could not invent things, we could not create institutions or history, we could not imagine, we could not produce anything of value, we did not know how to use land and other resources from the natural world, we did not practice the 'arts' of civilization. By lacking such virtues, we disqualified ourselves, not just from

civilization but from humanity itself. In other words, we were not 'fully human'; some of us were not even considered partially human. Ideas about what counted as human in association with the power to define the people as human or not human were already encoded in imperial and colonial discourses prior to the period of imperialism [...]. (p. 25)

While researching and collecting data, I follow the ethical guidance for educational research of the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2018). By this I mean that I believe I have operated within an ethic of respect for: the person; knowledge; democratic values; the quality of educational research; and academic freedom (BERA, 2018, p.5).

My research is also in line with the research ethics guidelines of the University of Cumbria which granted me ethical clearance. However, in my opinion the above-mentioned guidelines do not fully support me when faced with cultural differences and different ways of understanding ethical issues with communities while 'they protect themselves and their knowledge' (Tuhiwai Smith, 2008, p. 25). Irwin (1992, p.38) urges:

We don't need anyone else developing the tools which will help us to come to terms with who we are. We can and will do this work. Real power lies with those who design the tools - it always has. This power is ours.'

I concur with Irwin that the people I work with and who are also the interest of my research, do not need me to develop for them tools which will help them to come to terms with who they are. My *modus operandi* is when required by the people, to develop together those tools we all need in order to come to terms with who we are. By that I mean that I follow the reciprocal sense of togetherness, and its development into I~we~us mentioned earlier. This implies that people are free to choose their priorities and solutions and they are also free to choose to do that together with other people in full respect of each other's cultures and identities.

Contained within with this imperative is a sense of being able to determine priorities, to bring to the centre those issues of our own choosing, and to discuss them amongst ourselves.

I am arguing that theory at its most simple level is important for indigenous peoples. At the very least it helps make sense of reality. It enables us to make assumptions and predictions about the world in which we live. It contains within it a method or methods for selecting and arranging, for prioritizing and legitimating what we see and do. Theory enables us to deal with contradictions and uncertainties. (ibid, p. 38)

However, freedom which is ‘an object of both ontological and social commitment’ (Giri and Van Ufford, 2004, p.28) comes with responsibility. In order to work towards becoming “us”, I have found that the “I” and the “we” need to assume responsibility for themselves through an ontological journey of self-exploration. Giri and Van Ufford (ibid.), when recalling Gandhi’s call for responsibility, note that:

Gandhi’s walks with others, “w[ere]always (at the same time) an interior journey, an exploration of his being, and not just the working out of a preestablished strategy” (Pillai 1985: 77). “It is this insistent questioning of himself which distinguishes his actions from all self-sanctifying ‘social service’ based on representation. (p.27)

My Living Theory research methodology helps me to deal with my own living contradictions, set my priorities, and define my responsibilities and actions alongside those I work and research with. My thesis serves as an explanation of the educational influences I had in the learning of some of those people, and the influence that they had on my own learning and in the development of my living-theory. Although I attempt to operate in a power neutral manner while working and researching, I am aware that due to my dual role of researcher and developmental practitioner (often representing a donor organization), my position is power-loaded (Briganti, 2018). I will come back to

the issue of power throughout my thesis as it is a key issue both for my practice and research.

I attempt to explicate the above by using the example of the process of collecting consent, which was not as straightforward as it may have seemed to me when I started my research. This was not because I encountered difficulties in obtaining the consent; on the contrary it was very easy for me to obtain that. The interviewees' consent was voluntary and informed by a discussion on the purpose of my research in English, Amharic and Dari<sup>20</sup> that always preceded the interviews. I acquired the consent in written form as well. Ethical clearance to use email correspondence, chat facilities on social media and other communication tools has also been received. As for the individuals named in the thesis, I have used pseudonyms (with the exception of colleagues who did not require me to do so). Moreover, on many occasions I have not disclosed the real title, job description and gender of those whose identity should not be revealed. Many conversations have been videoed (with the written consent of the participants). However, I also decided not to video some conversations at all since I felt that, although I was sure to obtain the consent, a video camera might have been perceived as a violation of people's private boundaries. And this brings me back to my internal struggle on the process of gaining consent.

The reason why I found the issue of collecting consent intricate is because I know from my international experience as a development practitioner that the meaning of "voluntary" changes from culture to culture and is sometime more blurred than in my Western culture, which is regulated by a signature on a form and not subjected to social norms and cultural expectations. Of course, in my research no one has been (consciously) coerced into signing the consent form I prepared. Yet the fact that I am

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<sup>20</sup> Amharic is the native language spoken by the interviewees in Ethiopia. Dari is the native languages spoken by those in Afghanistan.

a foreign person who has been working with many of my research participants for quite some time, might raise my societal status in the eyes of many local people. In my experience in the many countries I've worked in, it is not acceptable to say no to such a person, thus I'm extremely careful that their consent is not solely motivated by cultural norms or gratitude, which might end up causing them personal discomfort. I aim at always being transparent about that. I know I am not able to affirm that gratitude does not have a stake at all in their decision to take part in my research. I am also not able to affirm to what extent their voluntary decision to participate in my research was free from cultural norms or gratitude (Briganti, 2018, p.78). I therefore decided to be open with all the participants about my concerns on ethics by discussing the issue transparently and trying to engage them in the discussion. This method proved very useful to sense whether there is some discomfort that the participants are trying to hide, for fear of disappointing me. Still I rely uniquely on my feelings and personal discernment.

Another issue is represented by my request to regulate the relationship with the interviews with a signature on a form, which in Afghanistan and to some extent also in Ethiopia is not considered the way agreements are reached. On the contrary, people are considered honourable if they can demonstrate they are keeping their word, whilst contracts are often perceived as a "Western invention" one can easily breach. Tuhiwai Smith (2008) seems to validate my point when affirming that:

In the debate about ethics distinctions are drawn between legal requirements and ethical codes of conducts. Indigenous groups argue that legal definitions of ethics are framed in the ways which contains the Western sense of the individual and of the individualized property-for example, the right of an individual to give his or her own knowledge, or the right to give inform consent. (p.118)

I therefore had to be very careful in asking them to sign the consent form not to offend my interlocutor. So often I have heard: 'I don't need to sign anything since you have my word'. I am then obviously faced with a cultural dilemma. If I insist on getting the signature, I believe I would risk losing the trust of the people I work with who would think I am insulting their culture. If I don't get their consent in written, the Western institutions I associate myself with might not consider my data of reliable. Whenever confronted with such situation I try to explain that I also do not need the written agreement, since I know what counts in their culture. However, in other cultures written consent form would be the only one accepted as a feasible agreement. The result of this causes me discomfort as eventually the form was always signed. I appreciate the genuine respect shown for my cultural norms, but since I am asking them to take part in my research I would feel better if I were to conform to their cultural norm, so I could show gratitude for making my research possible. This is a living contradiction in my opinion.

In order to foster the sense of *Ubuntu* and to work toward the I~we~us I invite the people I work with and interview, to challenge the work I do as well as my knowledge. This was especially so at the beginning of my career as a development professional, which principally resulted from my Western socio-historical and cultural background (Habermas, 1976). Indeed, I have been constantly searching for a stable balance between the part of my epistemology influenced by the 'metropole' I was born and raised in and that influenced by the 'periphery' where I decided to work and live (ibid).

The global economy is a dynamic and often turbulent affair. It doesn't produce a simple dichotomy. It does produce massive structures of centrality and marginality, whose main axis is the metropole-periphery, North-South relationship. (Connell, 2014, p. 526)

Connell's insights resonate with my experience since I value enormously the knowledge of the people I work with. However, I notice that local knowledge is often perceived as marginal. The purpose of my writings is also that of valuing and disseminating their knowledge, which is often considered 'subaltern knowledges' (de Sousa Santos, 2014, p. 134) by Western epistemology. I detached myself from the view of the 'periphery being used as a source of raw data which are shipped back to the metropole, that becomes the site of the theoretical moment in knowledge production' (Connell, 2014, p. 526).

I wish to reflect more on the concept of "subaltern" defined by Gramsci as the 'nonelite or subordinated social groups' (Landry and Maclean, 1996, p. 203) powerfully re-conceptualised in Spivak's original essay 'Can the subaltern speak?' (1985). My profession constantly confronts me with situations in which a given 'explanation and narrative of reality was established as the normative one' (Spivak, 1985, p.76). I also work with groups of people whose knowledges have been 'disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated' (ibid., p.77). This part of Spivak's work is contextualised in a post-colonialist realm, and therefore also relevant to understand the influence in the historical evolution of International Development (discussed in the section 2.2 below). Although I do not choose to ground my work in any post-colonial theory, I have learnt from the many thinkers who do. Spivak for instance helped me to consolidate my own understanding of a gendered epistemology in the context of International development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, discussed in Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

Spivak (1985) writes: 'If in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow' (p.83).

In my experience, I can affirm that the "subaltern as female" *is* indeed in shadow. She however can not only speak, but more importantly demand her rights with extraordinary resilience and courage. Chapters 3 and 4 will offer the reader some examples of women who succeeded in freeing themselves from the shadow of patriarchy in Ethiopia

and Afghanistan. Cognisant that my ethical agenda bears my conscious and unconscious biases derived by my western socio-historical and cultural background (Habermas, 1976) I am committed to 'decolonize my imagination' in Spivak's words (Landry and Maclean, 1996, p. 238). More on how I work on myself, my imagination and on how I co-create new knowledge together with my partners in development (often still considered subalterns by the neoliberal approach to ID) will be elucidated in Chapter 5.

To conclude, my response as a development professional operating in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to Spivak's question 'can the subaltern speak' is that yes s/he can speak. The key point is who and how s/he listens to them speaking. Bhabha (Huddart, 2006, p. 4) seems to validate my argument when he reiterates that that we "should listen to the subaltern voice" (ibid.). I want also to clarify that my work is not to 'allow the subaltern to speak' as it was expected by the colonial power around which Spivak's analysis gravitates, but to listen to them (Anderson, et al., 2012). My duty in my experience of ID, is to co-develop with them a sense of 'being in community' (*Ubuntu*). In this community, the I~we~us relationship unfolds, and individuals are not 'othered', instead feel included, liberated and equal. This is shown in practical terms in Chapter 4. My position as that of Bhabha's has sometimes "been dismissed as idealistic and unrealistic" (Huddart, 2006, p. 5), even when presenting my thesis in its very final stage. However, I insist on arguing that because the world of International Development, like the post-colonial one described by Bhabha, is still polarized and 'divided [...] into self and other' (opt.cit.), what is needed is to rediscover our humanity as written earlier in this Chapter 'through the bonding of the self with other selves' (Schrag, 1997, p.19).

Another evident living contradiction that limits the sense of togetherness and inclusion I want to promote with the participants of my research is that my thesis won't be accessible to all of them. This is because some participants do not have the language skills to read my writings and that the academic language might represent an added



obstacle. To overcome this shortfall, I discuss my writings (including the academic papers I published so far) with those who contributed to them. However, it is only a paraphrase, which rarely leads to comments and suggestions by the participants. In my professional experience I observed that in the communities I work with both in Ethiopia and Afghanistan, constructive critique is not a widespread concept and local people fear to be considered disrespectful if they put forth comments other than completely validating and appreciative. I discuss in depth the issue of validation in the next paragraph. I wish to add that I feel that this represents a limitation of my research that makes claims of inclusion and togetherness, but that it is faced with challenges I am still not able to solve to my full satisfaction.

- **Validation**

During my research I did not only seek validation with the participants and interviewees, but also with colleagues, peer Ph.D. students, and academics. In doing so I applied the four criteria of social validity suggested by Habermas (1976, p. 102) to strengthen the personal and social validity of my living theory. Almost every Sunday evening from 2014 onwards I meet a group of Living Theory researchers on skype to whom I have posed the following validation questions (ibid.) that helped me in structuring my research:

- How could I improve the comprehensibility of my explanations of influence?
- How could I strengthen the evidence I use to justify the claims I make?
- How could I deepen and extend my sociohistorical and sociocultural understandings of their influence in my practice and understandings?
- How could I enhance the authenticity of my explanation to show that I am living my espoused values as fully as possible?

Encouraged by Whitehead's approach (2018) I also follow Popper's insights (1975) about the mutual rational control by critical discussion.

...inter-subjective testing is merely a very important aspect of the more general idea of inter-subjective criticism, or in other words, of the idea of mutual rational control by critical discussion. (p.44)

I have therefore been engaging in critical discussions about my research and practice with other practitioners and family members. Some of those conversations have been recorded and are included in my thesis. In order to share my insights with a broader public and triangulate with researchers who use other methodologies, I have presented my partial findings at international conferences and taken part in summer school programs (including Cumbria University's summer programs). Throughout my thesis I am providing access to my papers via hyperlinks.

⇒ Living Theory as a way of life

In the previous section I discussed the difference between Living Theory as a whole and one's own living-theory and stressed that in my understanding Living Theory is more than a research methodology. After a few years from the beginning of my Ph.D. research I started wondering what I would do with the self-reflexive approach to life I was learning from LT research. My thinking about issues that matter to me soon moved from cognitive to metacognitive. By that I mean that my conceptual exploration of the most basic idea such as 'who I am' and 'what is the world really like' (Fisher, 1996), developed into the process of improving my own thinking, so that I could grasp a better understanding of myself as a thinker and of the actions I want to undertake and share it with others. In Freire's words I engage in a process of awakening of consciousness (Freire, 1975e) to explore and eventually be more aware of myself as

well as my role in society. I soon realized that the way I was approaching my research, namely the awakening of my consciousness leading to the creation of my own and unique living-theory was influencing other spheres of my life. Socrates said that the unexamined life is not worth living (Plato, Apology 38a) and these words resonate with my wish to live my life as an enquiry (Marshall, 1992) and my ontological values as fully as possible. Hence, my living-theory is my way of life (Whitehead, 2018), and my ontology.

⇒ Living Theory as a social movement

In my worldview, one of the common denominators of living theorists is that we are part of an international network of practitioners-researchers defined by Whitehead (2017, p.7) as a social movement, that produces a story of themselves (our own living-theories) whilst being preoccupied with other myriad responsibilities: to our family and friends; more distant people such as employers and the local community (Whitehead, 2018). We produce those accounts because we believe that we can create new forms of knowledge in the form of information-gathering and theory- generation and testing (see section on validation) (ibid.).

All citizens who are concerned with the future of our planet and humanity should produce a story for themselves and others to account for their contribution to the creation of a more peaceful, just and productive world. (Whitehead, 1993)

However, the individual living-theories do not aspire to be seen as generalizable in nature since their genesis lies in the unique constellation of living values that distinguishes each living-theorist from each other. Our unique constellation of values is called 'unique' because every single human being's value is different from each other, even if they have the same linguistic label. This is because our living values are being more fully understood in the course of practice (Laidlaw, 1996) and in relation to

other people's unique constellation of values that influence each other's constellation as explained in section 2.1.4 of this chapter. In addition, what seems to unify Living Theorists as a group of people is that the unique constellation of values that Living Theorists hold are for the flourishing of humanity (Whitehead, 1989). In light of the above living-theory accounts can be understood as relatable (Bassey,1981) as the following explains:

The idea of generalisability in traditional proposal theories, as explanations that apply to all, is replaced in Living Theory research by the idea of relatability in which the spreading influence of ideas from a living-educational-theory can be acknowledged in the generation and spreading of other living-educational-theories. The importance of understanding the power relations that influence the legitimization in higher education of educational knowledge, is also raised. (Whitehead, 2018)

I deemed it important to clarify why LT research feels as a social movement to me and why I concur with Whitehead in defining LT research as such. I am inspired by Snow's and Oliver's (1995, p. 571) definition:

[we] keep in mind that social movements are marked by collective actions that occur with some degree of organization and continuity outside of institutional channels with the purpose of promoting or resisting change in the group, society, or world order of which they are a part (Benford 1992, 1880; Turner and Killian 1987,223; J. Wilson 1973,8; Zurcher and Snow 1981,447).

Since early 2014 when I made my first encounter with living theorists such as Whitehead, Laidlaw, Huxtable, Pound, and Rawal I realized that from the 1980's they have been working on collective actions in various field of expertise ranging from education and health, community action and psychology. They and many more managed to organize resiliently those actions for four decades and give them continuity

outside the institutional channels they operate in. In order to share their worldview with others and disseminate their accounts the [Educational Journal of Living Theories](#) (EJOLTs) was created in 2008. The journal welcomes submissions by practitioners-researchers who wish to contribute to improving educational knowledge. In Whitehead's words educational means 'learning that is concerned with both enhancing the realisation of one's own life-affirming and life-enhancing values in practice, and contributing to the flourishing of humanity, flourishing of my humanity, the humanity of other people, and the flourishing of humanity as a species' (Whitehead, 2018, p. 6). In 2018 the editorial board of EJOLTs decided to set up a [LT wiki page](#) not only to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the journal, but also to stress the action-led nature of LT and how those actions might contribute to transform the world in a better place. Mellett's account (Briganti, 2019) below clarifies this point:

[...] I had asked the question: "What effect is a specific Living Theory paper having on my actions in the world as I attempt to contribute to its transformation into becoming a better place?" I continued:

"... my intention, [...] is to go beyond "hope for the future" and to ask what I and other readers are actually being led to do at the point of reading. What is going to happen to the behaviour-in-the-world of each of us, as our individual lives touch and interact with the lives of others? A given paper might make me, as its reader, think; it might offer me hope for the flourishing of humanity; but what am I actually going to do as the result of my reading? It is one thing to hold certain values and to have those values confirmed or challenged by the writings of others – but it is a further step for those writings to make me behave in my life in a better way. It is not enough to exchange affirming thoughts amongst ourselves [...] – each of us has to 'get out there' and do something.

I would like to conclude this section by acknowledging that I am aware that the issue of social movements is a whole field (i.e. a corporate view of social movements), but

my concentration at this point aims to advocate for those rooted in values concerned with the flourishing of humanity.

## 2.2 International Development seen from the perspective of a living-theorist

I can't understand why people are frightened of new ideas. I'm frightened of the old ones. (John Cage, n.d.)

### 2.2.1 Defining Development historically

I wish to start by clarifying what International Development is today, how it is changing over the decades and what it is in my view as a development practitioner with 15 years of experience in the field. The word “development” in biology describes the evolution of living beings and the process through which the potentiality of an object or organism are released, until it reaches its natural complete, full-fledged form (Esteva, 1992, p.8). The transfer of the biological term to the social sphere occurred at the end of the 18th century when Justus Moser spoke of *Entwicklung* (development) to refer to a gradual process of social change (ibid.). However, the meanings that the word development carries, and the technical jargon associated with the sector of ID, has been changing according to the contorted historical and political momentum.

The use of historical parallels or lessons derived from historical models to support (or refute) theories of development or to justify specific policy objectives has remained an enduring feature of the field of development studies since its inception (Jenkins, 2006, n.p.)

As Thomas (2004) argued, development is ‘contested, complex, and ambiguous’. The idea of International Development (often referred to as Development<sup>21</sup>) emerged right

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<sup>21</sup> In my thesis I use ‘international development’ and ‘development’ interchangeably

after the second World War following the reconstruction of Europe after the war and the breakdown of the colonial powers. The concept was used for the first time in Los Angeles in 1944 in one of the subcommittees preparing for the constitution of the United Nations (Van Soest, 1975, n.p.). The idea of development 'embodied a new beginning in hope against the cataclysmic experiences of World War II and against the backdrop of an expanding decolonization of the globe' (Giri and Van Ufford, 2004, p.9). In 1948 the constituting of The Declaration of Human Rights is important to understanding the "new beginning of hope" and the birth of the idea of development (ibid.) in an era where many perceived the end of the war and the collapse of colonial empires as anticipating a brighter future. Ignatieff (1999, p. 54) speaks of 'certain stillness, of a short period in which the arms of war and global power struggles were laid to rest'. The Cold War was not predominating the political agenda and the 'struggle for global hegemony had not yet asserted itself in the domains of the United Nations in 1947' (Giri and Van Ufford, 2004, p.11).

Personally, and professionally I also situate myself with those who consider development as originated "in a new beginning of hope" and as a living-theorist I believe that even in troubled times it still carries hope for the flourishing of humanity (Whitehead, 1989).

## International Development



Table 1. Timeline of International Development (2019, n.p.)

Some authors such as Sachs (1992, p. 2) consider instead the birth of the age of development the period that started in 1949 when Henry Truman declared that:

We must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas. The old imperialism – exploitation for foreign profit – has no place in our plans. What we envisage is a program of development based on the concept of democratic fair dealing. (Truman, 1949)

The understanding then of development seems to have been a synonym for political and economic liberalism (ibid.). Hence, organizations tasked with providing in Truman's words 'underdeveloped areas' with leveraged loans such as the World Bank (WB), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have been created. However, what the "democratic fair dealing" Truman spoke about did not always correspond to reality.

If the 1960s were still characterized by a strong sense of "doing development" and political action had until now some connection with dreaming and hoping (Giri and Van



Ufford, 2004, p.12) soon something defined as a 'process of social, moral and intellectual closure' set in (ibid.). This process was influenced by the Cold War and the widespread hegemonic power. Development started to be described by scholars such as Escobar as 'the loss of an illusion' (1995, p.4). The world seen through the political and economic lens of the Cold War, has been also linguistically separated into three main blocks, namely: the first world countries, inclusive of Western Europe, the United States of America, Canada, Japan and South Korea; the second world countries such as those aligned with the Soviet Union, China and Cuba; the third world countries neutral or non-aligned and often referred to as underdeveloped countries, developing countries, emerging economies or the South.

Truman's usage of the word "underdeveloped" initiated a new era characterized by the hegemony the United States of America (ibid. p.7).

A new perception of one's own self, and of the other, was suddenly created [...] two billion people became underdeveloped [...] they ceased being what they were, in all their diversity and were transmogrified into an inverted mirror of others' reality: a mirror that belittles them and sends them off to the end of the queue, a mirror that defines they identity [...]. (Esteve, 1992, p. 7)

This top-down concept of development (still understood uniquely in economic terms) has been largely criticized by economists such Furtado (Baer, 1969, p. 272) who argued that:

"underdeveloped" was a new terminology for "backward" and "poor" countries that were in that condition due to colonization and the continued raping by capitalist exploitation' (Sachs, 1992, p.11).

Although Truman spoke of overcoming the “old imperialism” approach that characterized the era of colonialism in the attempt to detach colonialism from development, he in my opinion reinforced the view of the universality of economics (ibid., p.18) that suppresses every other form of social interaction. I concur with Polanyi’s thesis (1947) that the market system violently distorted our views on people and society and provide one of the main obstacles to the solutions of the problems of our civilization (p. 96).

The transmogrification of autonomous men and women into disvalued ‘economic men’ was in fact the precondition for the emergence of economic society [...] Disvalue is the secret of economic value, and it cannot be created except with violence and in the face of continuous resistance. (Esteva, 1992, p.18)

In the 1990s another new era of development began to emerge. The global discourse that saw development as a long -term process of structural societal transformation (Chambers, 2007, p.12) also welcomed issues related to the environment. The first United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) has been organized in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro supported by a chorus of environmentalists, who commenced to highlight the urgency to focus on limiting climate disruption, preservation of the ecosystem, renewable energy, reducing food wastage and stopping degradation of the oceans (Ehrlich and Ehrlich, 2013, p.3). ‘No development without sustainability, no sustainability without development’ seemed to reveal the moral order of being (Sachs, 1992, p.32). At the dawn of the new century some colliding views on development emerged. On the one hand the post-modernist or post-development view, which insisted that development and poverty are social constructs, do not exist in an objective sense, and are brought about only “bad” change and “bad” outcomes (Chambers, 2007, p.14).

Poverty is a myth, a construct and the invention of a particular civilization. (Rahnema, 1997, p. 158)

Culturally perceived poverty need not be real material poverty: subsistence economies which serve basic needs through self-provisioning are not poor in the sense of being deprived. Yet the ideology of development declares them so. (Shiva, 1988, p. 10)

On the other hand, a new approach was created, concerned with short to medium-term performance indicators and goals, measured and compared with targets (Chambers, 2007, p.13). In 2000 in fact, the result of the Millennium Summit held at the United Nations (UN) headquarters, generated the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDG) launched by Kofi Annan<sup>22</sup> in 2001. The MDG were supposed to be reached by 2015. This interventionist approach considered different agents of development such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international organizations, markets and states as “entrusted” for others’ development (Allen and Thomas, 2004, p. 47). However, it also understandably attracted critiques related to who is actually ‘entrusting’ those institutions and whose objectives and values are expressed. This implies an unbalanced power relation between the parties involved. Saith (2006, p.1184) argued strongly that the MDG ‘ghettoizes’ the problem of development by locating it exclusively in the ‘third world’ with an agenda created almost exclusively by industrialized countries without adequate consultation and based entirely on generalizable standards of living. He also suggested that the MDG understate the new dimensions of development (i.e. participation, democracy, sustainable livelihoods, vulnerability and risk) and deal problematically with gender equality and sustainability (Chambers, 2007, p. 24). Moreover, international aid agencies and government bureaucracies tended towards the ‘misuse and manipulation of statistics and the misrepresentation of outcomes (Saith, 2006, p. 1174). A call for a more people-centred

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<sup>22</sup> Kofi Annan was at that time the Secretary General of the United Nations

development based on justice, sustainability and inclusiveness (Korten, 1995, p.171) were made to emphasize that development was not supposed to combat material poverty only, but restoring basic human capabilities and freedoms (Thomas, 2000, p. 783).

Table 1. Summary of the main views of development (Thomas, 2000, p. 43)

	Development <i>of</i> capitalism	Development <i>alongside</i> capitalism		Development <i>against</i> capitalism		Rejection of development
	Neo-liberalism	Interventionism		Structuralism	'Alternative' (people-centred) development	'Post-development'
		'Market efficiency'	'Governing the market'			
Vision: desirable 'developed' state	Liberal capitalism (modern industrial society and liberal democracy)	(plus achieving basic social/ environmental goals)		Modern industrial society (but not capitalist)	All people and groups realise their potential	['development' is <i>not</i> desirable]
Theory of social change	Internal dynamic of capitalism	Need to remove 'barriers' to modernization	Change can be deliberately directed	Struggle between classes (and other interests)	[not clear]	[not clear]
Role of 'development'	Immanent process within capitalism	To 'ameliorate the disordered faults of [capitalist] progress'		Comprehensive planning/ transformation of society	Process of individual and group empowerment	A 'hoax' which strengthened US hegemony
Agents of development	Individual entrepreneurs	Development agencies or 'trustees' of development (states, NGOs, international organizations)		Collective action (generally through the state)	Individuals, social movements	Development agencies

Table 2. Summary of the main views of development until the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Thomas, 2000 p. 43.)

I shall now discuss at length two prominent scholars who inspired me in my early years as a development economist, namely Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2000) who for the first time moved the attention of the global discussion on human development, freedoms and capabilities. My wish to highlight the work of both Sen and Nussbaum is because in my opinion their research and meanings of development bring the discourse back to the sense of hope I discussed above, which is intrinsic to my way of doing development in practice. One of my research questions mentioned in Chapter 1, namely 'How can I work with myself and others in order for each of us to contribute to the realization of our capabilities' is triggered by Sen's work. Chapter 3 will provide a response to the question informed by Nussbaum's work on capabilities.

What the capability perspective does in poverty analysis is to enhance the understanding of the nature and cause of poverty and deprivation by shifting primary attention away from *means* (and one particular means that is usually given exclusive attention, viz., income) to *ends* that people have reason to pursue, and correspondingly, to the freedoms to be able to satisfy these ends. (Sen, 1999, p. 90)

Sen argued that there is a broad set of conditions (including being fed, being healthy, being clothed and being educated) that together constitute wellbeing (Chambers, 2007, p. 22). Individuals have a set of entitlements (command over commodities) which are created through a set of endowments (assets owned – physical and personal characteristics – financial, human, natural, social and productive) and exchange (production and trade by the individual). These entitlements are traded for a set of opportunities (capabilities) in order to achieve a set of functioning (outcomes of wellbeing) (ibid.). I believe that Sen's understanding of development as freedom (ibid.) is ground-breaking and represented a step forward in the global discourse as it urged to move the pendulum closer to acknowledging that poverty must be seen as a deprivation of basic capabilities (which he never defined, therefore attracted some critiques) rather than as merely a poor income (Sen, 1999, p.87). Yet, his perspective is still situated within the economics realm. In fact, Sen focused on the role of capabilities in demarcating the space within which quality of life assessments (or standard of living) are made and compared (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 70).

Drawing upon the work of scholars such as ul Haq and Sen, the first human development report was compiled by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The central message of this Human Development Report is that while growth in national production (GDP) is absolutely necessary to meet all essential human objectives, what is important is to study how this growth translates - or fails to translate- into human development in various societies. (UNDP, 1990, p. iii)

The Human Development Report (UNDP, 1990, p.9) aimed to define and measure human development. The concept of enlarging people's choice, which is the UNDP's definition of human development (ibid.) does neither clarify in detail what those choices are coupled with nor specify the goal of measuring and comparing human wellbeing considering the many and multifaceted meanings of well-being. This is in my worldview an invitation to ethical enquiry. The ideas presented in the Report seem to me as focused on the "poor" although not as a homogenous cluster (UNDP, 1990, p.22) as a widely understood and accepted concept. I have learnt from my practice that often those whom I used to call 'poor' don't perceive themselves as such. That urged me to ask myself and the people I work with (allegedly the "poor") what this term really means to them and what would lead them to well-being in their opinion. Their responses and meanings of being "poor" is greatly influencing my practice. I shall write on my meanings of the 'poor' in session 2.2.3.

Nussbaum attempted to bridge the gap and complete Sen's approach (Clark, 2005, p. 6) by defining central human capabilities and use them together with the idea of threshold level of capabilities as foundation for basic political principles that should insure constitutional guarantees, human rights legislations and development policy (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 87; 2000, p.71). She gave a list of ten central human functional capabilities such as life, emotions, bodily health and control over ones' environment (Nussbaum, 2000, p.78). She also powerfully defined human capability as 'what people are actually able to do and to be – in a way informed by an intuitive idea of a life that is worthy of the dignity of the human being' (ibid, p. 5).

[...] we ask: Is the person capable of this, or not? We ask not only about the person's satisfaction with what she does, but about what she does, and what she is in a position to do (what her opportunities and liberties are). And we ask not just about the resources that are sitting around, but about how those do or do not go to work, enabling Vasanti to function in a fully human way. (ibid., p.71)

She also encouraged development practitioners to meet and learn from other cultures and societies in an effort to move towards a shared account of the core human capabilities (Nussbaum 1995, p.74) and that her list was a result (subject to ongoing revision) of 'years of cross-cultural discussion' (Nussbaum, 2000, p.76). Her view appeared to be supported by Sen's later writings (2004) when he emphasises the constructive role of democracy and the importance of public participation and discussion (Clark, 2005, p.7):

The problem is not with listing important capabilities, but with insisting on one predetermined canonical list of capabilities, chosen by theorists without any general social discussion or public reasoning. To have such a fixed list, emanating entirely from pure theory, is to deny the possibility of fruitful public participation on what should be included and why... public discussion and reasoning can lead to a better understanding of the role, reach and significance of particular capabilities... (Sen, 2004, pp.77, 81).

As stated earlier in this chapter and also in Chapter 1, the concept of supporting vulnerable people in living a dignified life is key to my practice as a development practitioner. From my practice I have also learned that the conditions of extreme material poverty and the attendant violation of human rights often hinder human development and deprive people of the possibility to live a dignified life (Briganti, 2017). In fact, all people are born worthy but at the same time, are vulnerable to having their dignity and worth violated (Hicks and Waddock, 2016). By human development I mean

the holistic development of the individual (i.e. emotional, psychological, spiritual, economical) (Briganti, 2016). I shall explore the concepts of human development and capabilities especially Nussbaum's (2000) and Agarwal (1995) in Chapter 4, where I will provide examples from my meanings of human capabilities in their emergence in practice within a gendered environment.

### **2.2.2 What is Development today?**

Chambers (2004) reflects on the issue of development so far, and provides us with a powerful message about the necessity to keep focusing even more on the personal dimension, as the following shows:

Since 1997, the polarisation of power and wealth in the world has become even more extreme. The personal dimension is central in mediating every big issue but continues to be relatively neglected [...] Words and concepts used in development have remained potent. Responsible well-being, pointing to individual agency, has languished at the same time as the scope for action and impact has been enhanced by growing interconnectedness [...]. So are new lines of thinking: to complement rights of the poorer and weaker with obligations of the richer and more powerful, worldwide and between all levels; to recognise power and relationships as central issues; to integrate institutional and personal change; to ground pro-poor policies and practice in realism; to think for oneself and take responsibility; to choose words and identify priorities personally; and to seek guidance by reflecting on what a poor person would wish one to do. (p.iii)

The attempt to move the issues of people and the personal dimension to the forefront has characterized the discussion for the past two decades. In 2011 the discussion on what could replace the MDG started in some countries and in 2013 the United Nations (UN) initiated a global conversation on the post-2015 development agenda. Some of



the main weaknesses of the MDG were debated because they omitted issues such as governance, peace and security, equality and unprecedented demographic change, and minimized the framing of environmental sustainability (UNDP, 2016, p.3). The indicators of development progress articulated in the MDG, also failed to express many of the issues that participatory research and survey had proven equally important such as effective and responsive state institutions, addressing inequalities, inclusive societies and political systems, jobs and well-functioning economies, advancement of human rights, freedom from insecurity and violence - in particular violence against women - and the intrinsic value of safeguarding the planet for future generations (ibid.,p.3). The protection of Human Rights was at the core of the global consultations as a non-negotiable as well as active participation from the grassroots, protecting and promoting access to information and freedom of expression (ibid., p.50). Those were the premises for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) to arise. In 2015 the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was compiled and defined as a plan for action for people, planet and prosperity (UN, 2015, n.p.) encompassing 17 global goals and 169 targets.

We recognise that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development [...] All countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership, will implement this plan. We are resolved to free the human race from the tyranny of poverty and want and to heal and secure our planet. We are determined to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path (ibid.).

The focus on people is highlighted on paragraph 52 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which states:

“We the peoples” are the celebrated opening words of the Charter of the United Nations. It is “We the peoples” who are embarking today on the road to 2030 [...] It is an Agenda of the people, by the people and for the people – and this, we believe, will ensure its success (ibid.).

However, the ambition of the new Agenda 2030 has been welcomed with various degrees of criticism. Critics claim that so many goals are unsustainable (Garson, 2015, n.p.) and too unwieldy to be implemented properly. Many experts also say that the SDG are more comprehensive and more ambitious than the MDG (Santos, 2015, n.p.). International NGOs such as Oxfam (2018, n.p.) question the vast attention that the SDG are gathering despite the lack of tangible progress by many governments. My professional experience with the Albanian Government on its concrete actions towards the SDG in particular the Target 8.7 that calls on ‘all to take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of all forms of child labour’ (UN, 2015, n.p.) is not encouraging. Since 2017 I have been witnessing a weak commitment by the national Government, which has slowed down progresses towards the eradication of forced labour in Albanian and human trafficking. Unfortunately, very often I have been working with UN agencies in Albania (and not only) which appear to me to have been adapting to the idleness of some local public institutions perceiving the SGDs as a mechanical exercise around which organizing international conference and workshops (Briganti, 2018).

Scepticism is also evident in a feminist analysis of the SGDs that points out that the goals are still characterized by ‘embedded liberalism’ (Utting, 2013) namely a softer version of market liberalism. The Agenda 2030 maintains a traditional take on gross domestic product growth (Esquivel, 2016, p.11) that collimate powerful actors. The language used for gender equality is associated with ‘equality of opportunity for

employment’ as Target 1.4, paragraph 20 reports (UN, 2018, n.p.), as if ‘barriers of entry’ was the only problem women face in the labour market (ibid.).

Still, in many occasions such as during the World Economic Forum’s Annual Meeting in Davos in 2017, the SDG are praised.

Today’s Global Goals are no longer about donors and recipients: because they are owned by all countries, they are about leaders being accountable to their citizens [...] they are predicated on the idea of leaving no one behind. The MDG by contrast focused on averages, so a country could still be seen as successful even if many of its citizens remained in poverty. Now the idea of focusing on the most vulnerable people, including people with disabilities and indigenous communities, is central to the goals. (Kumar, 2017, n.p.)

Another notable aspect that the SDG brought about, in my opinion is that they boosted the word “sustainability” and “sustainable” in an unprecedented fashion. The term “sustainable” signifies ‘that which can be maintained over time’ (Heinberg, 2007, n.p.). It is safe to assume that no society can be maintained for ever, thus the nature of sustainability is intrinsically limited since it refers to the temporal frame of reference for prior civilizations (ibid.).

The term ‘sustainable development’ was first used in the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) 1980 World Conservation Strategy Report (Thatchenkery, Avital and Cooperrider, 2015, p.3). It was defined as:

a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations. Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 43).

Elkington (1997) defined a sustainable enterprise as one that contributes to sustainable development by delivering simultaneously economic, social, and environmental benefits – the so-called triple bottom line. Yet nowadays the term “sustainable” and “sustainability” are ubiquitous, and I feel as their overuse is emptying them of its significance. It appears in fact, that we are living in the age of “sustainababble” a cacophonous profusion of uses of the word sustainable to mean anything from environmentally better to cool (Engelman, 2013, p.3).

In this sometime convoluted lexical arena, I deem it important to clarify my own meaning of “sustainable” and “sustainability”. I value the notion of environmental sustainability that promotes growth, progress and consumption in an ecologically friendly way (Thatchenkery, Avital, and Cooperrider, 2015) by meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p.43). I also concur with the necessity of shifting the global discussion to sustainable values (ibid., p.43), which offers a holistic approach to the issue of environmental sustainability by considering the values of both the shareholders and the stakeholders (Thatchenkery, Avital, and Cooperrider, 2015, p. 6).

However, in my thesis, by “sustainable” I refer to the capacity of a vulnerable individual to provide for themselves after having acquired the ability to assess and solve their own problems, without external support (Briganti, 2016, p.144). Sustainable Development is envisaged as a time when people are capable of contributing to the building of a society in which inclusion, gender-equality, cultural cohesion, educational development, respect for diversities and the natural environment are recognized as fundamental values. My understanding of sustainable development is concerned with the human development of the people I work with as well as with my human

development, bearing in mind the question: How can I improve my practice? (Briganti, 2018, p.81). The eternal challenge of development in fact, is to do better (Chambers, 2004, p.1).

### **2.2.3 My meanings of Development and related concepts in their emergence in practice**

The field of Development feels like home to me. It is my beloved field of work, my research area, a highly complicated and multifaceted context in which I try every day to engage with critical thinking, self-reflexivity, with an infinite appetite for learning and humility. To express it in the words of Giri and Van Ufford (2004, p. 14):

Development as critical understanding is vital to reconstituting development as global responsibility especially as it makes us aware of hegemonic intentions and relationships parading in the name of global solidarity but in itself is not enough it needs to be radically and transformationally supplemented by reconstructive activities.

The above introduces the idea of development as responsibilities which Giri and Van Ufford discuss in relation to Sen's concept of development as freedom (Sen, 1999). I always liked Sen's concept (revolutionary for the time) and I am still keen to consider Development as a way of supporting people in freeing themselves from human rights abuses. However, I concur with Giri's and Van Ufford's more nuanced consideration of responsibility or the primacy of the personal in Chamber's language, to be at the heart of my understanding of development.

This passionate call for responsibility has important lessons for us in reimagining and reliving development as a transformative practice. It can help us reconstitute development as responsibility, which can provide a self-critical and transformative

supplement to the contemporary redefinitions of development as freedom (Sen 1999).  
(Giri and Van Ufford, 2004, p. 27)

Development, in my experience, is embedded in the ontological personal commitment of an individual to contribute to bring about a good change and as McNiff (1997) puts it:

While it might be true that you cannot change the world, you can certainly change your bit of it; and if everyone changed a small bit at a time, a lot of change could happen quickly. (n.p.)

It also requires a shift in perspective from “I” to “we” to “us”. In other words, to go from the mainstream belief that development is *only* about the betterment of the lives of other people (the so-called “beneficiaries” of development) to the understanding that the ‘other people’ are me, hence it is about my self-development alongside theirs.

Embodiment of responsibility requires looking up to the face of the other and the mirrors of desires within oneself and going beyond the self-justificatory world of freedom itself. This, in turn, is facilitated by appropriate self-development. (Giri and Van Ufford, 2004, p. 28)

I wish to highlight that my research is my own way of remaining connected to the origin of development characterized by hope for the future. I therefore discuss my meanings of development on the basis of which I generate my reconstructive activities (ibid.). By that I mean that my critical understanding of 15 years of development in practice results not only in my thesis, but also in various development activities that encompass my values (as discussed in Chapter 1), those of the people I work with and form *our* own

way of doing development. Examples of that emerge in Chapter 3 while discussing the work with Nove Onlus.

Perhaps the right course is for each of us to reflect, articulate and share our own ideas... accepting them as provisional and fallible. (Chambers, 2004, p. iii, 1–2)

I appreciate, as Chambers suggests, that these reflect my professional view, informed by my practice, but I am ready to accept them as provisional and fallible. My scope is therefore not to impose my views but to reflect on them together with other professionals and from our dialogue enrich my thinking.

In the previous paragraphs I initiated the discussion on how the sector of development is influenced by and influences the language used to describe it, the recipient countries, the recipient people (often called beneficiaries as mentioned on the previous Chapters), those working with and for Development (called development professional or development practitioners<sup>23</sup>), and the political and economic framework within which development research and practice are moulded. Those considerations inevitably led me to ponder on the power that language is laden with. Chambers (2004) affirms:

The power of vocabulary to change how we think and what we do is easy to underestimate. It influences the course of development in many ways: through changing the agenda; through modifying mindsets; through legitimating new actions; and through stimulating and focusing research and learning. New language is easily dismissed as rhetoric or jargon. Seasoned sceptics can see changes in words and meanings as transient, superficial, and insignificant. Those impelled by authority or prudence to use new words signal their cynicism by dubbing them “buzz words”, “flavour of the month”, and “politically correct”. So, consultants, bureaucrats, and those

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<sup>23</sup> Throughout my thesis I use the two terms as synonymous

seeking contracts, support, security or promotion, tap out and parrot the latest vocabulary (p.3)

During a lecture at Sussex University I attended in 2016, Prof. Chambers showed us a slide he had made himself (see figure 3) with a powerful comparison of terminologies used by some of the leading organizations in the sector of ID. The table compares the language used in two different decades. The table is made available in Chambers' latest publication called 'Can we know better?' (2017, p.155)

Mid-1990s: progressive development speak	Mid 2010s: linear and market speak
Donor	Commissioner
Recipient	Supplier
Proposal	Bid
Plan	Business case
Funding	Procurement
Vision	Target
Achieve	Deliver
Commitment	Compliance
Inspire	Incentivize
Responsibility	Accountability
Participation	Feedback
Assess	Measure
Benefit	Result
Good Practice	Best Practice

Table 3. Table by Chambers debated during his lecture in Sussex University (Briganti, private archive, 2017)

Some of these terms are still widespread among many international organizations. My opinion is that notwithstanding the effort of many organizations to be people-focused, the sector is still influenced by a powerful market-led vocabulary. In my practice I find inappropriate to use the language displayed in the table. However, some of the words and concepts I use whilst writing reports or projects do parrot the latest vocabulary. Very often this is what it is expected from me by the international organizations I work for. In other words, I receive clear instructions on what lexicon is more appropriate to use according to the guidelines of the headquarters that are aligned with the historical momentum. Currently the concepts I am required to utilise at work are filled with the SDG's vocabulary and indicators



The world brought forth is usually constructed by the powerful in central places or by those well

placed to influence them. The words and concepts of development both express and form the mindsets and values of dominant linguistic groups, disciplines and professions, and organisations. (ibid., p.6)

In the light of the above, I can confirm that none of the people I work with, for whom development projects are supposed to be designed, have ever read a single report or project proposal written by me in the past 15 years. The reason for that, I believe is that the people I work with are mainly those whose inalienable rights (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, n.p.) are violated. By that I mean that often those are girls and women who are poorly educated (at least at the beginning of our collaboration) or well educated in their country of origin but would struggle with papers written in technical language reflecting policies they have not necessarily heard of. Sometimes, I work with craftspeople who struggle to make a living and earn enough money for the family. Asking them to dedicate some of their precious time to read what I do (even if what I do is trying to help them helping themselves), might be considered too much to ask, and seen as a waste of (their) time. I saw the surprise in the eyes of some young Ethiopian women I was working with when they saw me 'wasting my time' on my computer for hours every day. When I told them that that was part of my job, they were astonished that one could be just seated and write for hours and receive money for that.

As a living theorist, I am experiencing a living contradiction (Whitehead, 1989) as I am apparently not capable of including those I work with and for in the process that deals with their human development. The self-reflexive practice and research methodology I am engaging with helps me to improve my practice, know better and do better

(Chambers, 2017). It therefore also provides me with some ways to face my living contradictions and reduce the limitations of the sector. In order to better explain myself, I would like to go back to the language issue.

I feel that working towards a universal agenda, that although widely accepted by development professionals and agencies is often unknown among the people I work with, does not satisfy my sense of inclusion and participation. I appreciate that in every working field there are people qualified to deal with certain issues. Development, however, is not only about those who implement development projects and its policies in practice, but it is about those who receive those projects that might have the effect to change their lives for the better or for the worst. In order to include more the recipient of the projects I first need to understand what the problem is, seen from their perspective, and what solutions they believe might work. I want to create my language of development which results not only from my practice but also from the values, perspectives, wishes and visions of the people my development projects involve. I attempt to create a story of my development in practice, which I call my living-theory. This story is inclusive (as much as I am able to) of the stories of those I work with and their lives that carry *their* words, actions and beliefs.

All human beings carry about a set of words which they employ to justify their actions, their beliefs, and their lives. These are the words in which we formulate praise of our friends and contempt for our enemies, our long-term projects, our deepest self-doubts and our highest hopes. They are the words, in which we tell, sometimes prospectively and sometimes retrospectively, the story of our lives. (Rorty, 1989 p.73)

I strive to make the personal dimension central in mediating every issue (Chambers, 2004, p.iii) on the global SDG platform. Consequently, the policies and strategies I

develop are informed with the lives, stories and languages of those I collaborate with. The following paragraphs should shed light on some of the language I use.

⇒ International Development, Development and Developing Countries

The contemporary and mainstream meaning of ID is predominantly linked to SDG and the notion of sustainable development (defined above). It is made of a global community of professionals expected to comply with human rights standards (UN, 2013, n.p.), detain ethical standards, cultural competences and technical skills. Those professionals are also expected to be capable to understand and tackle the social, political, economic and environmental problems of the developing countries in connection with those of the developed countries. In my opinion all countries are developing, because all countries need to be understood as “in development” in terms of ethical and human rights standards. However, for simplicity I use “developing countries” to refer to those countries which are not high-income countries according to the Word Bank’s economic criterion that classifies each country according to the gross national income (GNI) per capita<sup>24</sup> (The World Bank, 2018, p. viii). I am aware of the limitations of using “developing countries”, especially because countries that follow in three different income groups (i.e. low, lower and upper middle) are still all labelled ‘developing countries’ (Fernholz, 2016, n.p.). Still this label is very widespread among the Governmental and Non-governmental organizations I work for and I seem to be often in the situation of parroting the latest vocabulary (Chambers, 2004, p.3). The following is an interesting overview of the most common labels for countries and related critiques.

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<sup>24</sup> The World Bank distinguishes between low-income countries (less than \$1,005); lower middle-income countries (\$1,006-\$3,955); upper-middle income countries (\$3,956- \$12, 235); high-income countries (more than \$ 12, 235)

**Box 1.3 Common Labels for Developing Countries and Critiques**

- Developing countries: too counterfactual or optimistic a term for many countries
- Less developed countries: too patronizing a term – strongly suggesting inferiority
- Low income countries: too economically determinist
- The South: not geographically perfect but the term used by both the 1980 Brandt Commission and the 1990 South Commission
- Majority world: too general to say the countries account for 80% of the world's population
- Post-colonial societies: too historically determinist – are countries that have had independence for, in some cases, several hundred years, still framed by that colonial experience?
- Non-OECD countries: those countries that are not members of the OECD, the body which essentially represents the economic interests of the industrialized countries]

Table 4. Common labels for developing countries and critiques (Chambers, 2007 p 17.)

When I am at work and talk with the “beneficiaries” of development projects about the meanings of development, I never use the description above. I prefer a much more powerful one, whose simplicity better represents the complexity of the matter (Holmes, 1961, n.p.). The definition borrowed from Chamber (1995) is that development is a ‘good change’ (p. 174). Some people might feel the irrepressible impulse to unleash their sharp capacity to deconstruct concepts, values, and theories, and argue that ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are empty words as well as culturally and historically constructed. However, besides the intellectual ability that many have or would want to have to conceptualize almost everything (and I include myself here), I decided to bear the risks and the consequences of making unsubstantiated claims such as: certain things are just good! (Briganti, 2016, p. 145). Of course, as Chambers (2007) himself asked on many occasions, who decides what is good or bad? My practice taught me that very often I don’t know what is good or bad for another person. However, that person is very likely to know what is good or bad for themselves. I am drawn to Husserl’s point about the transcendental sphere of knowing:

[...] in the transcendental sphere we have an infinitude of knowledge previous to all deduction, knowledge whose mediated connections (those of intentional implication)

have nothing to do with deduction and being entirely intuitive prove refractory to every methodically devised scheme of constructive symbolism. (Husserl, 1912, p. 12)

So, I know now that good is the change that gives back dignity and hope to people. I understand goodness when people who used to behave as enemies, fraternize and help each other transcending religion, race, culture, norm, and politics in the name of humanity. Good is the change that makes the lives of vulnerable people less miserable and perhaps even filled with glimpses of happiness. (Briganti, 2016, p. 145). I believe that happiness is the result of a good change in society such as an amelioration of the social condition, work condition, health, education, pollution, income and last but not least it is about the values that bring us closer to our humanity. I am constantly asking myself and the people I work with what makes us happy? In the World Happiness Report 2016 Sachs argues that the argument that economic freedom leads people to happiness, failed the happiness test. He also draws an interesting parallel between the 2030 Agenda and the encyclical *Laudato Si'* by Pope Francis (Sachs, 2016). In his Encyclical Letter the Pope argues that:

[...] the urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change. (The Holy Father Francis, 2015)

Both documents affirm that happiness is embedded in the idea that the 'good society' should focus on the triple bottom line of economic prosperity, social inclusion and environmental sustainability. In Chapter 4 I will show video conversations with some of the women I worked with who define what makes them happy.

⇒ The poor

In the narratives of market (Dowla and Barua, 2006) about ID there is another word which is ubiquitous, namely the word 'poor' who are seen as the passive recipients of development projects. My perception is that 'the poor' are considered as a homogenous group of individuals regardless of differences of race, gender, religion, ethnicity, socio-historical background, sexual orientation, physical, mental, emotional or learning ability. It feels, as it is the stereotypization of someone that in my opinion is not possible to and should not be categorized. Some recent and well-known publications represent the stereotypization of human beings in a superb as much as patronizing manner. Two academics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) uses the term 'the poor' as follows:

Why did the poor eat so little? (Banerjee and Duflo, 2012, p 33)

Microcredit, of course, is just one of many ways we can help the poor think in terms of a future [...] (ibid., p 203)

The widespread mistakes that ID organizations make is fourfold: firstly to regard 'the poor' as easily definable, as an homogenous cluster; secondly to look for a unified solution that would answer a unified problem; and thirdly to treat 'the poor' as a problem to fix, instead of as people with individual feelings, wishes, capabilities, strengths, weaknesses, values, and beliefs that make each individual unique and distinctive (Briganti, 2016, p. 140). The fourth type of mistake is to use definitions constructed by us which are merely an expression of our education, training, mindset, experience and reflections (Chambers, 2006, p.3). The former president of Uruguay Jose' Mujica reacted against the label of 'poor' given to him by those who might disagree with his frugal lifestyle and argued:

Poor are the ones who describe me so. My definition of poor is those who need too much, because those who need too much are never satisfied. I'm frugal not poor...frugal with a light suitcase. I live with little just what's necessary, not too tied down to material things. Why? So I can have more free time. To do what? To do what I like. Freedom is having time to live. Living frugally is a philosophy of life, but I'm not poor. (Mujica, 2013, n.p.)

I relate to the above thoughts since according to my practical experience it is unfair and inaccurate to put a label on a person's condition based on my evaluative judgments. Only those who are directly concerned can define their condition:

We ridiculed representation and said it was finished, but we failed to draw the consequences of this "theoretical" conversion - to appreciate the theoretical fact that only those directly concerned can speak in a practical way on their own behalf. (Foucault, 1980)

As already said earlier in this Chapter, my job is to listen to those people (Anderson, et al., 2012) and support them in finding tailor-made solutions to their troubles. They provide me with the evidence that certain measures used to tackle development projects are more beneficial to them than others as I will show in Chapter 4. They are also informing my understanding of poverty, as a part of my responsibilities toward others (as elaborated in Chapter 1) I have a duty to listen to them, to their vision, to their aspiration, and adjust and re-adjust my work according to what people find more favourable to their lives' improvement. I don't believe that it's only my voice speaking in this thesis. I'm doing the mere exercise to compile data and present them in an academic form. However, those data are representations of the lived experience of those I work with whom I like to refer to as my partners in development projects as Chapter 3 will highlight. Out of respect for those people I hope I am good enough at "packaging" their stories and write about them, with the desire to be authentic as much

as possible and ethical in the way I communicate their lives to the reader (Briganti, 2016, p.141). I would like to show that where I stand theoretically, practically and ontologically is a result of experience and reflections as well as of being a reflective practitioner (Schön, 1991). My practical knowledge grows stronger due to what I am taught by the many people I have the privilege to work. I am therefore grateful to Polanyi's (1958) account of personal knowledge in which:

He set out to free us from the sense of obligation we feel towards scientific ideals that rendered dubious the ontological integrity of anything that couldn't be made explicit to objective investigation inviting us to enter avenues of legitimate access to reality from which objectivism debar us. (Doede, 1985, p. 264)

In order to understand what poverty is, I asked 'the poor' directly and in Chapter 4 I will discuss the data collected.

## **2.3 The synergy between Living Theory and International Development: the rise of generative development in relation to sustainable development**

We know what happens when people are prevented from exercising their capacity to question, the gradual loss of excitement, and the quietude of acceptance. (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006, p. 45)

### **2.3.1 The synergy between LT and ID**

When I started my profession as a development practitioner I did it because I wanted to speak out and react in the face of acts of injustice and human rights violations. However, meaning well is not enough (Chambers, 2014, p.11). As a living theorist researcher, I wonder which the values are I want to live by, that led me to decide to act and become a professional in the field of ID. What we, as development professionals need, in my opinion are not only the technical skills, high ethical standards and cultural



competences, but also the willingness to accept that our knowledge is constructed, fallible and always open to questioning and doubts (ibid., p. 9). The discussion on values seems central to many practitioners I work with and scholars like Chambers (2007) who affirms that:

Values are central to disputes about the definition of development– what to improve, how to improve it and, especially, the question of who decides? (p. 25).

Practitioners nowadays can draw insights from numerous sources in order to navigate the sector such as the theory of change, the participatory rural appraisal (PRA), a vast number of Participatory Action Research Approaches (PAR), and various Development Management manuals like the one used by the German International Cooperation (GIZ) called Capacity Works<sup>25</sup>. I often use them. However, the more my management capacities were enriched by a master's degree in Development Management and various courses I have attended in the last decade, the more I still feel that all the above was not enough for me to understand metacognitively what I was doing and how to do whatever I was doing better. I was in search of a flexible methodology that could assist me in becoming more self-reflexive, de-colonizing my knowledge (I will come back to this point later in this chapter) and improve my practice. With LT as a methodology I found my way to explore the realm of ID in practice and to draw my living-theory from my experience. Methodology is implicit in every development studies activity (Chambers, 2014, p.17), yet my experience has taught me that each situation and context need the invention, piloting, and refining of its own tailor-made methodology (ibid., p.17), which in my language is my own living-theory. I concur with Chambers (ibid., p.17) who argues that methodologies associated with development studies are

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<sup>25</sup> More information on the manual can be found here <https://www.giz.de/expertise/html/4619.html>

still relatively neglected subjects; he also adds that one of the challenges of Development is the lack of transparent reflexivity:

Willingness to examine and present personal predispositions seems inversely related to the conviction, passion and rigidity with which views are held and thought. (ibid., p.17)

When I discovered LT as a self-reflexive study it started to enrich my understanding of Development and began to turn them into actions. I am aware that LT is not a panacea, yet it represents in my experience an opportunity to investigate the limitations of ID and the missed chances and advance towards a more inclusive knowledge of Development that represents the values, wishes, meanings and knowledge of the people I work with. Other professionals in the field of Development will judge for themselves whether for them LT is a helpful methodology for investigating their values and sharing their personal accounts in order to improve their practice. I deemed it fundamental, given the conundrum Development presents us with, that practitioners and researchers engage in a self-reflexive practice that sheds light on the practical experiences, theories, analytical practices and insights of the sector for the sake of the people I would like to support.

[...] development professionals, in a spirit of self-doubting pluralism, can help one another by drawing up and sharing personal lists and patterns of values and concepts, and seeing where and how these differ and cohere. There is space here for reflection on how one's personal realities and values have been formed, and to choose, change and give meaning to a personal list of words and concepts. There is scope here too to give priority to the values and preferences of the weak. For all development professionals, there are many sources of values, vision and concepts. The great religions will always be sources of inspiration to explore for values and vision. (Chambers, 2004, p.6)

I believe that the central question that development practitioners should ask themselves, is whether our development practices can lead to a fairer and better world (Chambers, 2014) hence in LT terms to the flourishing of humanity (Whitehead, 1989). It seems obvious to me that ID and LT have a fundamental goal in common. This explains my wish to combine the two, and why I decided to focus my Ph.D. research on the synergies between them. Both focus on the personal dimension and the human actions as a result of development projects and Living Theory research. Unfortunately, the human dimension is often forgotten by the large organizations that seem to follow the 2030 Agenda rigidly, whose aim is not to leave anyone behind (UN, 2018, n.p). My rhetorical question is why, then, are we leaving ourselves behind?

Yet, and again strangely, there is little systematic analysis of the causal links between our work-that book, that conference, that idea- and the poor [sic], deprived, vulnerable and excluded people whom we seek to serve (Chambers, 2014, p.18)

The consideration above leads me to raise another key point related to the pedagogy of the powerful (ibid., p.18). Chambers uses Freire's concepts of the pedagogy of the oppressed (1970) and reverses it to explain the need for a pedagogy of the non-oppressed, namely the powerful. In this category he includes development practitioners, donors, policy makers and all those who are part of the development sector, whose position is power-laden. We need better ways, procedures, methodologies and experiences (ibid., p.19) to equip those who influence policies to be more aware of their power, to make better decisions and to do better (Chambers, 2017). I know now that if I had applied LT methodology to some of the projects I dealt with in the past, I could have avoided some of the mistakes I made out of ignorance, and certainly not have caused harm (Anderson, 1999). However, mine is not meant to be a justification for my errors. In Freire's words, what is necessary for good practice

is to engage in the process of conscientisation (Laidlaw, 2016, p.132). I find Laidlaw's (2015) definition easy to grasp, and useful to validate my point about the necessity to raise my critical consciousness as a practitioner-researcher in order to reach my full potential by unpacking dominant and oppressive thoughts, which result from the cycle of socialization (Ledwith, 2005, p. 52).

This can be read as 'critical consciousness' or 'consciousness-raising'. It is used in the paper to mean a way of bringing to conscious awareness issues which systemically make it difficult for people to empower themselves and therefore to reach their full potential individually and in groups. (Laidlaw, 2015, p.33)

Laidlaw (2016) also affirms that:

only through the recognition of liberating both the oppressed and oppressor through dialogue can human groups be truly able to create systems that are human-friendly and, in the language of Living Theory, reveal the values that, 'carry hope for the future of humanity [...]. Without this equalisation of power within the relationships engendered in the names of social justice, education, equality, hope for humankind [...] then no genuine, deep, enduring and positive change is possible. (p.132).

Both the pedagogy of the oppressed and the pedagogy of the powerful urge development practitioners to equalize power relations in order to bring people closer to each other by learning, inspiring and influencing each other. Chambers (2017) insists that we need to transcend the us-them antagonistic stance if we want to co-construct and co-generate knowledge (p.153) and start seeing 'all of us equally together, a new world where we can celebrate and all gain for interconnected reciprocities' (ibid.). I do so by using an LT methodology, which represents an epistemological space in which critique has no negative connotation, but instead is perceived as a valuable way of improving one's own practice, enriched by other

people's knowledge and practice. By drawing insights from de Sousa Santos's (2014) concept of derivative and non-derivative thinking, Whitehead (2016) defines LT as non-derivative thinking. This means to think from the perspective of the other side of the line. The line de Sousa Santos refers to is what he calls the Abyssal Line and divides social reality so that whatever lies on the other side of the line (the side of the oppressed) remains invisible or irrelevant. The line divides metropolitan from colonial societies, decades after the end of historical colonialism (ibid. p. 70). LT in my opinion does exactly the contrary since due to its quality of being a non-derivative methodology it generates new epistemological knowledge that fosters epistemological emancipation and acts as a counterforce to 'epistemicide' (ibid., p. 70).

[...] there is another important epistemological act to perform, and that is to break with the first epistemological break so as to transform scientific knowledge into a new common sense. In other words, the new constellation of knowledges must break with the mystified and mystifying conservative common sense, not in order to create a separate, isolated form of superior knowledge but rather to transform itself into a new emancipatory common sense. Knowledge-as-emancipation ought to become an emancipatory common sense itself; beyond the conservative prejudice and the incomprehensible prodigy, I propose a prudent knowledge for a decent life (de Sousa Santos, 2007b).

I shall come back to Santos' concept of epistemicide in Chapter 4 as it is related to my meanings of de-colonizing knowledge and show how my work attempts to move the centre and the periphery closer to each other, with the fundamental principle in mind that 'in the beginning is relation' (Buber, 1971, p. 79).

### **2.3.2 The rise of generative development in relation to sustainable development**

The synergy between LT and ID represents the genesis of what I call generative development in relation to sustainable development. This results in a force that may drive human development and be conducive to a fairer world. Earlier in this chapter I define sustainability as the capacity of a vulnerable individual to provide for themselves after having acquired the ability to assess and solve their own problems, without external support (Briganti, 2016, p.144). This implies that my support comes with an expiry date, thus I aim at being made redundant. It is a life-affirming experience to see that the people I am working with are ready to continue their lives without my support. My meaning of sustainability is related to the lifespan of the individual hence intrinsically limited in time (Heinberg, 2007, n.p.). The term “generativity” is well known in psychology due to the work by Erikson (1959) who sees it as a concern for nurturing and contributing to the next generation. I share with Erikson the importance of supporting future generations. In order to clarify how the term “generativity” is linked to my practice, I would like to introduce a development project I used to be involved in. To describe the incident, I use my narrative style.

*The first time I used that term was during a discussion I had with an environmentalist about a slum-upgrading and poverty-reduction project I was part of in Eastern Ethiopia (Briganti, 2006, p.149). The project was concerned with a UNESCO<sup>26</sup> World Heritage site, which the local Government asked an international organization to help revitalizing. One of the aims was to restore the ancient core. As a pilot initiative the team started with the restoration of one of the historical houses. The ancient city had neither electricity, nor potable water and sewage system. The majority of the local population lived in extreme material poverty. The only sector that was generating a minimum income was agriculture, but the production was often sufficient only for the farmer's and his family's basic subsistence. In that area drought represented often an*

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<sup>26</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

*added challenge. The pilot- project house was eventually restored using local materials and local craftspeople. To electrify the house and provide water, we used renewable energy sources. A septic tank had been built to collect the wastage. The owner was very pleased with the result and transformed the house into a bed and breakfast. The local Government used that positive result for lobbying the private sector and engaging it in more restoration works as well as investments in the tourism sector (at that time the tourism sector was slowly showing some encouraging records). Some years after this project ended, I discussed the case with an environmentalist who suggested that I could have rendered the project 'generative'. He proposed to re-use the content of the septic tanks of the newly restored houses for agricultural purposes. The idea persuaded me completely. I was not able to implement his suggestions, so I don't know whether from an agricultural point of view it could have made. However, our discussion triggered my first thoughts around the evolution of sustainability into generativity. When I thought my job was concluded, since the houses we restored were "sustaining themselves" and provided the local population with means for engaging in income generating activities, I was shown a way of generating something anew. I was challenged to have a broader view and look beyond sustainability, so I started to observe closely the people I worked with moving towards sustainability, and I pondered over the influence that development projects had had on their lives beyond my actions. I noticed that in the majority of the cases individuals now seemed able to sustain themselves (mainly girls and women), and they started to or were about to start supporting others in reaching their own sustainability. I wondered whether my ultimate goal should only be to assist vulnerable people in reaching sustainability. Or was there something beyond sustainability?*

The finite nature of my meaning of sustainability has been surmounted by something else, which I call generativity. By that I mean the ability to originate, to create anew over and above what has been done so far. In my worldview generativity enables

people to utilize their own power with others since their choices are not dependent by the presence of a development professional. Moreover, I notice in the majority of the people I work with, the interest in engaging in actions that aim at supporting the next generation. Volckmann (2014, p. 251) argues that generativity involves supporting the thriving of present and future generations. To show in practice how sustainability evolves into generativity I would like to discuss another example of a development project.

*In 2005 while I was working in Ethiopia, I met three sisters named Semira (age twelve), Salwa (age nine) and Fozyia (age six) ( they are mentioned in Chapter 1). The girls were destitute and marginalised by the society, lived in inhumane conditions with no access to housing, education, potable water or sufficient food and exposed to all sorts of risks. They were living in a slum-like area of the city's outskirts with their mother, a widow and informal worker whose daily wage would not suffice to buy enough food for all of them (Briganti, 2016, p. 150). The family was helped to help itself out of poverty in various ways. The girls were enrolled in school and the mother underwent professional training education. The family was moved moved to a safer neighbourhood and given a decent accommodation with basic conditions of hygiene such as running water and electricity to minimise the spread of infectious diseases. The mother eventually found a good employment as housemate and cook. All the actions illustrated where taken by development professionals in full accordance with the mother of the girls. I think that none of the actions could have been undertaken by the mother independently from external support due to her very vulnerable status of an almost illiterate, physically ill and destitute widow. From that raises again the issue of power-relations between the development professional and the recipient of development, or in more extreme terms the power imbalance between the “oppressed” and the “oppressor”.*



*My intention was certainly not to oppress anyone, and I believe I did not. Yet I was a very powerful player in the relation with that family, power which always makes me feel uncomfortable. I knew, as I know now, that I made decisions to help four human beings out of their distressing conditions and although the decisions have been discussed with the family members, the feeling of 'imposing' myself and my view about what it might be better to do, was subtly always there. In 2015, I video recorded a conversation with Salwa (who will graduate from University in the summer of 2019) on how life can change for the better if vulnerable individuals are given a chance to find a way towards living a sustainable life. Interestingly Salwa also raises the issue of generativity when she explains her desire to support other vulnerable people in the same way she and her family have been supported in the past. In the following videos Salwa is showing the influence that the support she was provided with has transformed in her into a desire to help other people who live in the same condition she used to be. In the second clip, she imagines herself in ten years and claims that her main goal is not only to have a family and a good job, but also to support vulnerable people. I concur with Ntaiya (2015, n.p.) who affirms that 'If I can help one person and that person can help another person than it becomes a change'. In my language I would say that the change is generative. In the third and fourth clip she speaks about her reactions when she sees baggers on the street of Addis Ababa. In those destitute people she sees her younger self. She also adds that education has changed her life as she knows now who she is.*

*In the fifth clip Salwa talks about what is she doing to fight for people's rights. The focus of her work is on young girls being victims of female genital mutilation (FGM), sexual violence and early marriage. She insists that although she is not a victim of FGM she feels she has to do something to support those women who are. I am filled with life-affirming joy when I see that the people I worked with for years becoming committed to support more people in having a dignified life. I have the feeling that Salwa is creating something new independently from me and my choice of interventions, but dependent*

*only on her power to decide how to live her life and what causes her to join in. I have been made redundant. Generativity is ignited by the desire to invest one's substance in forms of life and work that will outlive the self' (Vaillant 2002, p. 115).*



Figure 1. Salwa and Arianna in conversation

Video 1. [Salwa and Arianna 'What has changed'](#) (Briganti, 2015)

Video 2. [Salwa and Arianna 'In ten years'](#) (Briganti, 2015)

Video 3. [Salwa and Arianna 'Poverty'](#) (Briganti, 2015)

Video 4. [Salwa and Arianna 'Education'](#) (Briganti, 2015)

Video 5. [Salwa and Arianna 'Female genital mutilation'](#) (Briganti, 2015)

In an email conversation with the oldest sister Semira (who graduated from University in the summer of 2017) she writes:

*'Good Morning Ariye<sup>27</sup>! Yesterday it was my happiest day since I move here to Mekelle. I was at the theatre in the afternoon and then my friend took me somewhere and that somewhere made my day beautiful and great. We went to visit some poor children supported by the charity club. They were celebrating the Ethiopian Eastern and we celebrated with them for the whole day until 9 pm. I danced with them, I ate with them and played with them. They were so happy and smiled for the whole time, isn't this beautiful? I've been introduced to the children and they welcomed me with a smile, now I'm the new member of the charity club. I can feel now that I'm already rich, because till*

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<sup>27</sup> This is the nickname people in Ethiopia call me by.

*now I was receiving your love and now I start giving my love to someone who need it and can make good use of it. You Ariye [...] gave me a good picture of helping people and giving love'. (Email correspondence, 2016)*

Both Salwa's and Semira's account unveil the essence of the self-perpetuating energy I call generativity, which nurtures the blossoming of the next generation and is the result of sustainability. The following reflection resonates with my understanding of generativity:

In essence, generativity is the act of preparing another's garden for spring. It's power in the service of love. It's an act of giving that enables another person to manifest his or her own strengths and gifts through love... Generativity protects our mental and physical health across an entire lifespan. When we nurture others, we nurture ourselves. (McCaslin, 2013, n.p.)

In Chapters 3 and 4, I shall provide more evidence related to my meanings of generative development in practice, as I will illustrate more conversations (some also videoed) with girls and women I work with who show how they engage with future generations. As I write I am still not able to argue whether generative development is something that as a development professional I can foresee at the beginning of a development project (in order to work towards it as I do with sustainability) or as a human phenomenon that I only have the pleasure to recognize whenever it happens.

## **CHAPTER 3**

**Being a female development economist and  
practitioner in a capitalistic era: how do I work  
towards gender justice**

## Introduction

In this chapter, I advocate for the primacy of the personal (Chambers, 2017, p.165) whilst seeking to respond to the humanity question, which in Freire's words (1970) is about how to become more fully human. I attempt to respond to the question by:

- being a development professional active in the International Development (ID) sector who works at the micro- level with individuals whose human rights are violated;
- attempting to have a systemic influence at organizational level that can bring about change by introducing into the global discourse values such as social and gender justice, love for and faith in humanity, empathy and outrage.

The data that is presented here informs my own living-theory and constitutes, together with my unique constellation of values, my personal choice to understand the world from my own point of view as an individual claiming originality and exercising her personal judgment responsibly, with universal intent (Polanyi, 1958 p. 327). The chapter is divided into two main parts. The first one is about being a female development practitioner with a background in economics, who works in capitalistic context characterized by global injustices (Loewenstein, 2015, p. 8) including patriarchy.

The focus of this first section is to clarify why gender and patriarchy have become so important in ways that influence both my personal and professional lives. The second part focuses on my professional ways of overcoming patriarchal influence by working towards social and gender justice in developing countries. I will lead the reader through a number of examples from my practice, video interviews with my colleagues and my own reflections on how my years as a development practitioner have influenced my living-theory. By that I mean an individual explanation of my educational influences in my own learning. By using the data reported in this chapter I also will explain how the

unique constellation of values of my colleagues have influenced my own distinctive constellation of values (and vice versa) and contributed to their evolution over the years and today represent my ontology.

This chapter also emphasizes that the global network of relationships that I have been nourishing over the past 15 years with both individuals and organizations active in the field of ID transcends geographical borders and human diversities. It might have a systemic influence on the social formation I am operating in. In my worldview this also constitutes the core of Living Theory as a social movement (Briganti, 2015). This chapter is rich in my colleagues' self-reflexive stories. It also contains my own self-reflexive account about how these stories create new knowledge in the ID sector in the form of information-gathering, theory-generation and constant testing (ibid.). Finally, this chapter prepares the ground for Chapters 4 and 5, which will show respectively my work with individuals at the grassroots level and the personal aspects embedded in it, as well as new possibilities for me to generate a systemic influence at the political level (macro-level).

### **3.1 Being a female development economist and practitioner in a capitalistic era**

I hesitated a long time before writing a book on woman.

The subject is irritating, especially for women; and it is not new.

(de Beauvoir, 1948, p.13)

I am a female development economist and Living Theory researcher who lives in a world where men often force women to see themselves as the Other (de Beauvoir, 1949 p.37). The world is dominated by patriarchy, namely institutionalized sexism (hooks, 2000, p. ix) and women are among the poorest and most discriminated individuals globally (The World Bank, 2012).

I concur that 'what drives patriarchy as a system - what fuels competition, aggression, and oppression - is a dynamic relationship between control and fear' (Becker, 1999, p.24). Everyday thousands of girls and women are victims of violence, including sexual abuse, trafficking and early and forced marriage (ibid.). In 1995 the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was adopted with the aim of promoting and protecting the full enjoyment of all human rights and the fundamental freedoms of all women throughout their life cycle (UN, 2015). However, in 2012 out of the 1.6 billion people who lived in extreme poverty, the majority were women (The World Bank, 2012). At the current rate of progress, the overall global gender gap would only be closed in 61 years in Western Europe, 62 years in South Asia, 79 years in Latin America and the Caribbean, 102 years in Sub-Saharan Africa, 128 years in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 157 years in the Middle East and North Africa, 161 years in East Asia and the Pacific, and 168 years in North America (World Economic Forum, 2017).

I am lucky enough only to have been directly discriminated against a few times in my life in terms of my gender, although I do recognize that 'the story of women's contribution to history has not been coherently taught until feminist scholarship started filling up the gap' (Lerner, 2012, n.p.). I could have decided to look away and spare myself the frustration I feel every time women and men suggest that talking about gender issues is futile, or worse, anachronistic feminist talk, a mere remnant of the feminist movement of the 1960s.

Yet, 'women stand at the crossroads between production and reproduction, economic activity and the care of human beings, therefore between economic growth and human development' (Antrobus, 2016, p. 589). Therefore, I embraced the decision long ago not to look away (Mander, 2015), but to join the cause of millions of women who are struggling for freedom of choice. I concur with the deconstructivist Spivak (Landry and Maclean, 1996, p.54) and argue that I cannot speak of feminism in general terms since no rigorous definition of anything is ultimately possible. Instead I can only speak about what I do as a woman in my personal and professional life. My definition of women is as simple as Spivak's, which rests on the word 'man' (ibid., p. 54).

I construct my definition as a woman not in terms of a women's putative essence, but in terms of a words currently in use. 'Man' is such a word in common usage. Not a word but *the* word. I therefore fix my glance upon this word even as I question the enterprise of redefining the premises of any theory. (ibid., p. 54)

As opposed to the simplistic general definition of "woman" that can be deconstructed in Spivak's terms, I would like to focus on writing metacognitively about my *own* existence as a woman rather than a commonly accepted essence (ibid.). What is crucial for me as a Living Theory researcher is to analyse my own living and evolving womanhood and what challenges it. As a development professional who very often works with women in developing countries where a large gender gap is immanent in many societies, it is crucial for me to explore other people's womanhood, and how that womanhood steers their *own* existence in their unique context and what threatens it. However, I appreciate that definitions to a certain extent are necessary in order to facilitate us to take a stand (Landry and Maclean, 1996, p. 64). For the sake of clarity, I therefore define myself as a feminist, who in my own definition is a female or male person, who values and respects women and men equally and who *actively* supports the end of sexism, sexual exploitation and oppression (hooks, 2000, p.viii). My meaning acknowledges that humanity is greater than gender and is shaped by the desire to live in world where:

[...] there is no domination, where females and males are not alike or even always equal, but where a vision of mutuality is the ethos shaping our interaction. Imagine living in a world where we can all be who we are, a world of peace and possibility. Feminist revolution alone will not create such a world; we need to end racism, class elitism, imperialism. But it will make it possible for us to be fully self-actualized females and males able to create beloved community, to live together, realizing our dreams of freedom and justice, living the truth that we are all "created equal." (ibid., p.x)



I wish to highlight the point made above by hooks, namely that other variables such as racism, class elitism and ethnicity need to be tackled as they contribute to shape inequalities. Becker (1999) validates this point when she argues that:

Other social systems of group-based oppression coexist with sexism in patriarchal structures [...] Women, as well as men, are privileged or disadvantaged by their positions along these variables. Women, as well as men, can oppress those in more vulnerable groups. (p.25)

Inequalities, subordination and discrimination intersect (Crenshaw, 1991) at a point where power influences operating in a multi-axis framework oppress the more vulnerable.

Women and men are not alike (de Beauvoir, 1949 p. 35) and, in their differences, lies the beauty of our diversity. Gender equality is defined by UN WOMEN<sup>28</sup> (2018, n.p.) as 'the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men, of girls and boys'. Equality does not mean sameness, but rather that 'women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female' (ibid.). However, I believe that there is no gender equality without gender justice. The process leading to gender equality passes through the recognition that society needs to end institutionalized sexism for the benefit of both women and men. If we want to be *really* fair to women and men (UNFPA, 2018, n.p.), we need to pursue gender justice by transforming the system and bringing an end to patriarchy and sexism (hooks, 2000, p. 4).

To end patriarchy, we need to be clear that we are all participants in perpetrating sexism until we change our minds and hearts, until we let go of sexist thought and action and replace it with feminist thought and action (hooks, 2000, p. ix).

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<sup>28</sup> The 'United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women' is commonly known as UN WOMEN

I echo hooks (2000) and think it is imperative that women and men work together to end patriarchy. It is for me a validation of my definition of feminism, which is inclusive of both women and men, to acknowledge that I am surrounded by men who detach themselves from sexist thinking.

Most men find it difficult to be patriarchs. Most men are disturbed by hatred and fear of women, and male violence against women, even the men who perpetrate this violence.  
(ibid.)

Freire (1970) validates this point when he affirms that dominant societal groups may recognize their loss of humanity:

Dehumanization, which marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it, is a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human. (p. 44)

Notwithstanding all the joint actions towards ending patriarchy in many parts of the world in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN WOMEN, 2018, n.p.), the aforementioned data show that the overall global gender gap is far from being bridged. This is the reality that I am confronted with every day and this makes me very aware of the fact that my gender has a great influence on my personal and professional life.

Yet, this is not due to my gender per se, but to the way my gender is perceived by many people, namely being subordinate to the male gender (Eltahawy, 2012, p. 78). In a male-centred and male-dominated society, 'men and women will be encouraged to regard women as beings suited to fulfil male needs' (Becker, 1999, p. 25).

When I was younger, I mistakenly thought gender imbalances and subordination were more widespread in developing countries where often societies are patriarchal (Eltahawy, 2012, p. 78) My experience has taught me however that the tendency of exercising power over women is everywhere and patriarchy transcends geographical boundaries.

Men have presumed to create a feminine domain - the kingdom of life, of immanence-only in order to lock up women therein. (de Beauvoir, 1949, p. 97)

In my experience, development professionals often come across abuses against girls and women often perpetrated by Western men. These abuses seem to be widespread as the following incidents might show. In February 2018 an investigation into sexual misconduct of some senior staff members of the British charity Oxfam, triggered a wave of revelations about harassment, gender-based violence and sexual exploitation by members of non-governmental and governmental organizations across what is supposed to be the humanitarian sector. I am not only appalled by those dehumanizing acts against women seen uniquely as sexual objects (Porter, 2010), but also by many misogynist comments that followed the scandal, such as the one highlighted by Bindel (2018) in her article when referring to the tweet of a white male “development worker”:

Buying sex from professionals is not sexual misconduct and women in Haiti may well have been glad to get the sex work. I hate prissy Establishment fiddle-faddle implying ‘development’ workers are ethical puritans or saints. (n.p.)

I have been a development worker for 15 years and it never occurred to me that one needed to be a puritan or saint to carry out this profession ethically. It also never occurred to me that the contrary of being a puritan and a saint is to be a sexual predator. However, I strongly believe that everyone, including development

professionals, should hold values that respect human dignity and endorse gender justice (hooks, 2000, p. 3). Part of my responsibility for myself is to act with integrity towards others. Whilst I am rethinking development (as said in Chapter 1) I am also positioning the ethical agenda at the core of *my* own way of doing development. This urges a shift of perspective from I to we and ultimately to us (I-we-us), as explained in Chapter 2.

Misconduct and exploitative behaviour are unfortunately not limited to a few Oxfam employees. The United Nations “peacekeepers” sexual abuse became well known and as a field worker on many occasions I came across the disgraceful view of expatriate Western men (employees of embassies, multinationals, governmental and non-governmental organizations, journalists, travellers) with underage-looking women in restaurants and hotels throughout developing countries. Even when the women in question appeared to be adult prostitutes, I question the fairness of the power relationship embedded in that “working agreement” and I challenge the idea that women have not been coerced by the circumstances into choosing prostitution as a profession.

This is not the place for me to engage in a discussion on the (a) morality of prostitution, but I do want to stress the underlying inequalities and vulnerabilities many girls and women in developing countries are exposed to, which make them easier to exploit and to be considered as commodities.

Some journalists who reported on the scandals involving the non-profit sector blame these misbehaviours on Western colonial thinking (Hirsch, 2018). In my eyes this view portrays only one side of the problem. I would in fact concur with it, if sexism was to be found only in former colonies and was exclusively perpetrated by Western male at the expenses of non-Western women. However, this is not the case. As the global gender

gap data show us, there may be no place in the world where women and men are treated equally (World Economic Forum, 2017). The Western colonial thinking, that exacerbates the situation, is another by-product of institutionalized sexism, namely patriarchy (hook, 2000).

My personal experience shows me that individuals are capable of gender-based discrimination and exploitation regardless of their race, colour, education and place of birth. The case of the United States of America Supreme Court judge Brett Kavanaugh is only one of the many cases of Western men accused of sexual misconduct at the expense of Western women, and nevertheless have been defended by the most powerful political enclave (The Economist, 2018, p. 38). However, given that I operate in developing countries, my analysis shall continue to explore patriarchy and gender-based discrimination in that context and from the perspective of a female development economist by focusing on how I attempt to work towards gender justice (clarified in the following sections).

It is my experience of a development professional working internationally and in a capitalist economy that some groups are discriminated against according to race, religion, income, political affiliation, sexual identity, physical and mental ability. However, among those discriminated there are people who are made even more vulnerable because they are female. Those most at risk are girls and women, because:

the social order that is emerging under globalizing capitalism is one which excludes or oppresses certain groups of people, especially women in labour-rich economies and those with less access to skill and education wherever they live. (Antrobus, 2016, p. 585)

My profession as a development economist and practitioner is to design policies and implement projects that focus on poverty-reduction strategies in respect of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Because my experience tells me that women and girls are more likely to be victims of human-rights violations, I have found myself working on those policies and projects alongside women and girls and realising how much influence patriarchal societies have on their personal and professional development. Throughout my practice I have understood that there is a relationship between patriarchy and neoliberal economics, which is especially harmful to women living in developing countries (Elson, 2002). In 1999 the World Survey on the Role of Women in Development (United Nations, 1999, p. 95) argued that neoliberal economics policies have transformed the public policy environment in ways that are detrimental to women (Elson, 2002, p. 40). Some 15 years later the same report by UN WOMEN (2014) affirmed that:

Economic growth trajectories continue to perpetuate gender inequalities, confining women to low-paid jobs and relying on women's unpaid care work, while at the same time exploiting natural resources and damaging ecosystems and biodiversity [...]. Power imbalances in gender relations, in the exercise of rights, access to and control of resources, and participation in decision-making, persist as a significant obstacle to women's full and equal contribution to and opportunity to benefit from sustainable development. (p.111)

### **3.2 How do I work towards social and gender justice**

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere (King, 1994)

While writing this thesis, I have been distracted by New York Times news-feeds on my computer regarding the Nobel Peace Prize 2018 being awarded to Nadia Murad, who

became the voice of the women who survived Islamic State sexual violence (Callimachi et.al., 2018) and to Dr. Mukwege, a Congolese gynaecological surgeon committed to support rape survivors in his country and beyond. At the United Nations General Assembly Opening Session Murad referred to the world leaders gathered saying:

You are the one to decide whether another girl like me in a different part of the world will be able to lead a simple life or will be forced to live in suffering and bondage [...] We should not close our borders to innocent women and children who flee from violence. The world has only one border, it is called humanity. [...] if beheadings, sexual enslavement, children's rape if all those acts do not force you to move, when will you do that? (Murad, 2019)

In a recent interview Dr. Mukwege said, 'It's not a women question; it's a humanity question, and men have to take responsibility to end it' (Callimachi et.al., 2018). I believe that Nadia Murad and Dr. Mukwege personify the commitment to fight patriarchy and its most appalling manifestations such as rape and enslavement. But what Dr. Mukwege is pointing out is that gender justice is responsibility of humanity in its entirety.

I am convinced that it is *my* moral imperative to act in order to provide an answer to the 'humanity question' as Murad exhorts world leaders to do. My personal and professional way of responding to the humanity question is twofold: on the one hand it is about being a development professional who works at micro-level with individuals whose rights are being violated and therefore made more vulnerable than others (Chapter 4 elaborates on my work with individuals and the systemic influence at community level I aim to have). On the other hand, my work in International Development represents my attempt to have a systemic influence at organizational level that can bring about change by introducing into the global discourse values such

as social and gender justice, love for and faith in humanity, empathy and outrage. I also advocate for the primacy of the personal (Chambers, 2017, p. 165) believing that systemic change starts with an individual's responsibility, that leads to decisions and actions (as seen from the empathy-responsibility-change cycle explained in Chapter 1) and passes through 'the inspiration and drive of champions to become mass movements in which everyone's actions matter and contribute (ibid.). I will go back to this point later in this Chapter.

Obviously, I am not one of those world leaders addressed by Murad in her speech at the United Nations, yet I can still take my responsibility as human being and decide to embrace actions that provide the sector with another possible way of engaging in development work, which rely on self-reflexivity and provide an alternative to patriarchy and neoliberalism in development. As highlighted in Chapter 2 I want to engage critically in understanding ID by analyzing the sector's positive influence on people, but also its shortcomings. Harvey points out that critics to the sector have to be:

“insurgent architects” with a desire to translate political aspirations across the incredible variety and heterogeneity of socio-ecological and political-economic conditions.  
(Harvey, 2000, p. 246)

In practical terms, my intention is to bring my values to the ID sector by concentrating on the micro- and the meso-level of intervention. By this I mean that whilst working with individuals I attempt to contribute to a systemic influence on the community level (micro-level) as I will explain at length in the next chapter. Moreover, I also engage with networks of organizations in order to move towards a systemic influence at organizational level (meso-level). This intention prompted me and some colleagues to set up our own organization.



### **3.2.1 Nove Onlus non-profit organization**

In 2012 three development professionals, namely Susanna Fioretti, Elena Noacco (with whom I have been working for more than a decade) and myself, founded the non-profit Nove Onlus. We established the board of the organization whose members such as Susanna (the chairperson) and me (the deputy chairperson) are working pro bono. We are experienced professionals in ID, women who share the same commitment for social and gender justice and decided as a result to pull together our capabilities, experience and years of self-reflexive practice in ID, and continue working for the cause. In the following paragraphs the work of Nove Onlus and its team will help me answering my research questions mentioned in Chapter 1:

- How can I work with myself and others in order for each of us to contribute to the realization of our capabilities (Sen, 1999)?
- How can I know better in order to act better (Chambers, 2017) as a development professional?
- How do I introduce the idea of generativity in sustainable development and why is it important?
- How do I explore the potential value of LT in the emergence of a global social movement of researchers who hold values for the flourishing of humanity (Whitehead, 1989)?

Nove Onlus' mandate is to support people whose human rights are neglected and finding ways out of oppression and subordination. The organization's group of interest is mainly women, children and disabled persons. The three of us acknowledged that the number of the existing non-profit institutions was already high, in European countries alone around 130,000 (Observatoire de la Fondation de France, 2015, p. 3).

Nevertheless, we were convinced that our *modus operandi* would be conducive to systemically develop a network of reliable partners. By that I mean a global social movement of people and organizations already located in various countries, and together support existing initiatives proven to have a good (Chambers, 1997, p. 1743) influence on the local population. I believe that both this chapter and Chapter 4 bring to the forefront the positive influence that Nove Onlus' work is having on the lives of the people here represented and the influence that such a movement might have on a global scale.

Minimizing administrative costs without compromising the quality and professionalism of our work is another key feature of our organization. This is why both the founding members and the board of directors have been working pro bono. The volunteering aspect of that has not been easy to sustain over the years, since everyone is engaged in full-time paid work, and family commitments. I believe that the motivation that drives us, and the feeling that we are contributing to a fairer world, supersede the efforts and the sacrifices we need to make in order to accommodate our busy schedules. These aspects emerge from the conversations with my colleagues below. Although we are still very small in terms of capital, we want Nove Onlus to have a greater influence in the ID sector. Therefore in 2016 we registered as an international non-governmental organization in Afghanistan where our training centre for women is located and represents the hub of the majority of our activities.

In the Autumn of 2018, I had conversations with colleagues and members of the board to understand their standpoint in relation to our organization and what we are *doing* about working towards social and gender justice. I include some of those (video and audio) discussions which were held in our native language, Italian. What I offer the reader is my translation into English, which is an explanation rather than a description of the conversations. My intention is to provide a summary with full respect for my

colleagues' lives, work and the time they dedicated to me. I will sometimes interrupt the dialogues (but I hope not the flow of the dialectic) with my own self-reflexions on the debated topic and how they inform my living-theory of International Development. I also would like the reader to bear in mind that this is a tribute to my colleagues (including those who are not mentioned here explicitly) and their work for Nove Onlus internationally. I acknowledge the fallibility of my translation and my partisan view on the matters, so I shared this piece of writing with them asking for any necessary clarification and the approval to add their contribution to my thesis, both of which I obtained. I did so as I believe that part of my responsibility for myself is to act with integrity towards others and being transparent and open about my intentions.

I would like to start by describing in my narrative style our activities in Kabul that mainly gravitate around our training centre and offer a video that shows the centre, its staff and its trainees in Kabul.



Video 1. [Nove Onlus training centre in Kabul \(Nove Onlus, 2018\)](#)

*The training centre was established in 2014 in collaboration with a local partner, non-profit organization. The intention was to start a pilot project offering 420 socially disadvantaged women (such as widows, unemployed and disabled women) free*

*professional training courses and an employment advisory service. We were delighted to receive twice as many applicants as the number of available seats. This result encouraged Nove Onlus to continue its activities and increase the number of trainees accepted. Currently the training centre offers more than 1,400 places and is the only one in town accessible to women in wheelchairs. The courses, selected in line with the demand of the Afghan market focus on English language, computer skills, professional cooking, and car driving. In addition, Nove Onlus provides scholarships in information and communication technologies (ICT) at a recognized institute, for the best performing computer students. The employment advisory service is implemented in collaboration with an international partner non-profit organization and helps graduates to find jobs or launch their own businesses. The project is in line with the priorities of the Afghan Government and collaborates with relevant institutions, such as the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled (MoLSAMD) and the Ministry of Women's Affairs.*

*My practice taught me that in order to integrate better the activities within the local community and reduce the risks of being boycotted by individuals and groups hostile to initiatives that foster gender justice, the project had to actively involve the broader community and local authorities. Thanks to the outstanding commitment to social justice in Afghanistan shown over the past 30 years by Alberto Cairo, one of our board members, Nove Onlus has now had the privilege to engage in a very special project that promotes the social reintegration of disabled men and women into Afghan society through wheelchair-basketball and other sporting activities. The project is designed and implemented by Alberto whose viewpoint of his work in the country is reported later on in this chapter.*

### 3.2.2 Livia and Arianna in conversation

I wish to continue by introducing the reader to my colleague Livia Maurizi who is not member of the board but worked as Project Manager and desk-officer for the Afghan project for three years. She is a young and very committed development professional who enriched our organization with her insight and passion for our common goals. Recently she decided to dedicate herself to other ventures and left Nove Onlus, but her friendship and her values are still with us. She knows the project in Afghanistan extremely well although she was never there in person. Livia managed to establish a rapport with our team in Kabul, and very successfully to supervise all the activities related to Nove Onlus' training centre.

During our videoed conversation Livia shares with me her standpoint about her work with Nove Onlus in retrospect. I find her insights about gender justice very helpful in clarifying my own.



[Video 2. Livia and Arianna on Nove Onlus' work \(Briganti, 2018\)](#)

From minute 7:20 of the video conversation Livia says the following:

*Nove Onlus' work starts with an analysis of the current situation and needs in Afghanistan. The aim is to engage in those targeted grassroots projects that might ignite*

*change in the whole system and influence the broader Afghan society. During my work at Nove Onlus I found the weekly Skype conversations with Mushtari Jan and Fozija<sup>29</sup> Jan very interesting. The Skype calls usually started with checking in with each other: 'How are you, and the family? how is your son?' I found this way of interacting with each other most beneficial to me in order to grasp what was really happening there, beyond just business. I could find out more about the local life and customs, given that I have never been to Afghanistan. I used to listen a lot and from time to time I would ask questions on given arguments in order to deepen my understanding of the local customs. I realized from their stories how women are considered in Afghanistan, even those women such as our colleagues who hold quite a high profile due to their business position. I used to ask them to interact with our Afghan male colleagues by directly addressing questions to them or discussing strategies. Despite their role in the organization our female colleagues would not feel sufficiently confident to do so, as it doesn't seem appropriate for women to directly interact with their male colleagues. I therefore understood that there is a discrepancy between how we - Western people - understand the concept of gender justice and how it is understood in Afghanistan among our colleagues.*

*I vividly remember an incident in which I wrote an email to Ing. Ismail (male of course and Pashtun<sup>30</sup>) who is considered by Nove Onlus team in Kabul the most powerful presence in our training centre: he decided to change the training's schedule by adding one more day of training per week. The decision would have had an impact on the overall management of the centre and its team. He took the decision without discussing or informing me as the desk officer and project manager located in Rome. I wrote him a note pointing out the issue using what I believe is a professional and firm tone.*

The following is their email exchange on the issue:

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<sup>29</sup> The names of our Afghan colleagues are anonymized

<sup>30</sup> The Pashtun made for the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan and considered the caste with the highest social status in the country.

Email from Livia to Ing. Ismail:

*Dear Ing.*

*Hope this email finds you well.*

*This is to ask your organization for some explanation with regard to the change of opening times of the training centre and the adoption of the UN agencies and embassies holiday calendar.*

*I understood that just after the beginning of the course session, your organization arbitrarily decided to keep the centre opened in addition on Thursdays, and to adopt a different holiday calendar. I am here asking for an explanation why your organization took this decision without an approval from Nove Onlus HQ. This is something that should have been discussed before entering into effect. We are very disappointed. I am kindly asking you the reasons behind this decision. Hope to hear from you. Livia. (email correspondence from Livia Maurizi, 2017)*

Email from Ing. Ismail to Livia and her supervisor:

*Hello everybody<sup>31</sup>*

*I have read the email of livia maurizi regarding centre opening days.*

*This should be the last time to write email by this way and if in the future we received such email from her we will not responde to her*

*I dont like to have dialogue like criminal and judge so take care and do not repeat.*

*Miss Sussana you know me better and i request you to clear for her it. I am not responsible to give any clarifscation by this way.*

*Regards*

*(email correspondence from Livia Maurizi, 2017)*

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<sup>31</sup> For the sake of transparency, I did not correct the text written by Ing. Ismail who is not an English native speaker.

This email conversation between Livia and Ismail evokes Foucault's (1977, n.p.) thoughts on power and truth:

[...] But there exists a system of power which blocks, prohibits, and invalidates this discourse and this knowledge, a power not only found in the manifest authority of censorship, but one that profoundly and subtly penetrates an entire societal network.

The reaction of Ing. Ismail suggests that Livia's voice and truth is considered as the Other's voice (de Beauvoir, 1949 p.37), subordinated to that of men. Livia, myself and many other women struggle for our truth to be considered as legitimate. I concur with Whitehead (1993) who affirms that 'the struggles "around truth" are not "on behalf" of the truth, but about the status of truth and the economic and political (and I add also social) role it plays' (p.69).

Livia continues our conversation until minute 12:15 by saying:

His response sent to the entire team still shocks me today. In Italy such a thing would never have happened. That was to me a clear example of the subordinated relationship between Afghan women and men and how women are perceived by men.

I would like to stress the point raised by Livia about how I perceive myself as a woman and how in certain parts of the world I am perceived as a woman. It was often said by women who are born, raised and socialized in Western countries that talking about feminism in the way that I am doing in my writing is to accentuate a separation among human beings. It was therefore suggested to me that I look at humanity as a whole, rather than simply at what those critics define as a socially-created female category. I understand the intrinsically positive intention in such a suggestion, but as a matter of fact I am not the one who created the separation among the genders. I simply find



myself living in this reality where initially I had no wish to identify myself as a member of any gender category, because I perceive myself simply as a human being.

However, on many occasions I have been categorized as a woman and therefore considered “the other”. Livia experienced what it means to be considered “the other” when a male colleague showed her his hostility not for *who* she is but for *what* she is perceived to be: a woman. It is because of that socially-created categorization that seclude many women in a subordinated position, that I decided to engage in gender justice. This represents my personal and professional attempt to make connections instead of divisions. Morgan (2001) reinforces this concept by affirming that ‘unless the majority of the human species, which women constitute – the majority that has lived daily and nightly under a terrorism so ancient and omnipresent as to be called civilization – unless that enormous body of ordinary experiential experts addresses and engages this issue, it can never be understood, much less solved’ (p. 18).

Livia speaks about her reaction to the hostility of our colleague:

*It was the first time I was faced with such a situation. I felt treated as not being ‘enough’ because of my gender. He also totally ignored the fact that he was talking with a Western woman who lives in a context where we are considered very differently than in Afghanistan. I believe he acknowledges that (Ing. Ismail is a well-educated and well-travelled man), but his consideration of women being inferior seems so deeply structured in his own way of being and in his culture that he never admitted his wrongdoing, nor did he apologize.*

*Going back to the weekly Skype call with our female colleagues, my interest was also to ask questions in order to understand how this difference among the gender was perceived by them and how they were treated by our male colleagues like Ing. Ismail. I had the feeling that Mushtari Jan for instance who is a middle-aged and does not*

*belong to the higher caste, feels a sense of resignation and perhaps acceptance of her condition as a woman. Whereas Fozija Jan is much younger and more prone to challenge the status quo, and also to fight against the injustice perpetrated at the expenses of women. The evident difference between these two women representing their own generation and upbringing in the way they perceive themselves as women and how their face the way men perceive their gender, led me to think that we are on the right track in the way Nove Onlus works towards gender justice. The merit is obviously not only that of Nove Onlus, since the structural change in the Afghan society has started years ago, but I believe that the work of our organization contributes to being the impetus for change.*

*This project is a piece of my heart, I was utterly delighted to witness how Mushtari Jan evolved into a more self-confident woman and director of the training centre throughout the years we worked together. I was full of delight when I noticed that she had the courage to address issues directly to our male colleagues without asking for my intervention. Hence, those who have benefited from the project were not only the trainees but also the staff, especially the women who learnt how to confront male prejudices at work as well and underwent a consciousness-raising of their dominance in the society. To be witnessing this change is what motivated me to keep going even when it seemed too complicated and against all the odds. Even if one can contribute to the change of one or two individuals only, it is still a big reward, my big reward. It is certainly not about the salary I earn, it is about giving meaning to what I'm doing and see the effects of the work I do on the lives of the people I work with.*

*This is the big difference with the job I did at Nove Onlus and the one I used to do when I was working at the United Nations. I never had a sense of wholeness in what I was being asked to do, nor did I see the benefit of my work. Nove Onlus reinvigorated my passion for this profession because the organization is in touch with the person it helps, and this always gave me the strength and the willingness to go ahead, despite the many difficulties. Now with the experience I have gathered so far and by engaging in a self-*

*reflexive thinking of what I have done so far, I am more capable of facing certain situations and avoiding mistakes.*

From minute 26:29 onward Livia speaks about one of our Italian projects, called ‘Lend a hand to an Italian’, which is an attempt to work towards social justice. This initiative supports people and families affected by unemployment or a loss of purchasing power of wages and pensions, who are trying to stay afloat without losing their dignity. It supports people in overcoming critical situations and assists them with remedying emergencies, thereby contributing to the achievement of economic autonomy.

*The approach with which Nove Onlus deals with this project is the key for its success. It is about involving the people we work with from the very beginning of its implementation. Nove Onlus therefore wants to establish a relationship based on mutuality, which I describe as: ‘I give to you and you give to me’. It is not the usual relationship of partner-beneficiary but partner-partner. Our partners in the project are people. Again, it is about changing the perception people have of themselves from a person being helped, to a person who can help herself.*

Livia introduces here a fundamental concept, namely that of “partners in development”<sup>32</sup> as opposed to “beneficiaries of the project”. As anticipated in Chapter 1, the latter term is wide-spread in ID and is part of the everyday jargon used by many international organizations (Scott, 2013, n.p.). My opinion, however, is that the word “beneficiaries” reinforced the “us versus them” (Cornwall and Pratt, 2011) approach and implies that people are passive recipients (Eyben and Ferguson, 2005) instead of active partners. I concur with Ho (2015, n.p.) that:

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<sup>32</sup> I am aware that the term “partners in development” has been used in 1969 by the Pearson Commission. My meanings however have little if nothing in common with the usage of the term in that context.

In the act of naming, subjects are born. In the act of reiterating the name, power dynamics, inequalities, and structural violence are reinforced. And so, it is with the word “beneficiary”.

I am aware of the power of vocabulary (Chambers 2004, p. 3) as stated in Chapter 2, hence I am keen to use words that are perceived as respectful of people’s dignity. I have to admit however that I have not asked any of my partners in development how they would like me to call them in general terms and how they would like to call me. This is a shortfall in my work and research which I am ready to tackle.

What Livia is also saying during our conversation resonates with my own understanding of sustainability discussed in Chapter 2, and what I refer to as the capacity of a vulnerable individual to provide for themselves after having acquired the ability to assess and solve their own problems without external support (Briganti, 2016, p.144). I would like to draw a parallel with my meaning of sustainability and Nussbaum’s (2011) concept of capability security (p. 43) which describes when people enjoy a certain level of functioning and are able to sustain it over time. Both concepts rely on the necessity for people to develop the ability to stand and walk on their own feet, which is a permanent and common one. (Fromm, 1957, p. 38).

The sense of mutuality that Livia raises by saying, ‘I give to you and you give to me’ is fundamental for a development professional as highlighted in Chapter 2 when I first mentioned *Ubuntu* that emphasizes the importance of togetherness (Potts, 2014, p. 104) encapsulated in the concept ‘I am because we are’ and extended first to ‘we are because I am’ (I~we~I) (Huxtable and Whitehead, 2015, p. 9) and ultimately to I~we~us (Mounter, Huxtable, and Whitehead, 2019). My practice as a development professional reflects the sense of togetherness brought about by *Ubuntu*.

Livia adds that:

*Fundamental for the success of the project is to understand which resources those people have in order to support them in strengthening and corroborate those resources and utilize them for their own benefit. The key success of the project as I said is the ability to change the person's perception of themselves in relation to their role in the project equally shared between Nove Onlus, the institutional partners such as the municipality and the individual who has an active and not passive role. The people we have worked with so far have also contributed not only emotionally but economically according to their possibilities.*

As stated in Chapter 1, in my research question, 'How can I work with myself and others in order for each of us to contribute to the realization of our capabilities (Sen, 1999)?' Nove Onlus is responding with practical examples to my question as the project elucidated by Livia shows. In other words, our goal is to identify those capabilities (resources in Livia's language) that we have and together work on their realization.

At 33:45 I ask the question about whether Nove Onlus is succeeding in living one of its values fully, which is about working together with the people at grassroots level and have a constant and mutually enriching relationship with them. In the discussion with Livia I call this 'the human factor'. Livia answers with the following:

*Yes, I believe we are doing that [...] the organization reflects the attitude and character of its funding members and you all have the 'human factor' tattooed on your skin; and your ideals, your values permeate in the structure of the organization, but also in the way [the organization] implements projects. Not only is the 'human factor' present, but the willingness to safeguard it is also a distinctive feature of our organization, which includes the staff members who welcome an approach based on real feelings and the desire to open up to people. This gives us the possibility to communicate what we do*

*to the external world using not only facts but feelings and emotions. I agree with you when you say that there are many organizations where the 'human factor' is faded.*

The video below leads to Nove Onlus webpage where one of the partners in the project speaks about what the collaboration with Nove Onlus meant to her.



[Video 3: One of our partners in the project 'Lend a hand to an Italian' \(Nove Onlus, 2018\)](#)

Our partner says that she never got before the support she gets from Nove Onlus. She was very sceptical when she met our organization and thought we would not do anything tangible to alleviate the burden given by her situation. However, she is happy that we could prove her wrong and is pleased with our collaboration although her situation is still challenging (Briganti, 2018).

Livia concludes her discussion with a comment on hers and my professional relationship which surprised me as much as it flattered me. Livia as I said had recently left Nove Onlus in order to engage with her many other private and professional endeavours. She thanked me for the time spent together while she worked with us. In those years my presence at Nove Onlus has been variable as I could not often meld my full-time work, my family, my research and volunteering for Nove Onlus. It is

important for me to highlight that the success of Nove Onlus is uniquely due to people like Susanna Fioretti, Elena Noacco, Alberto Cairo, Livia Maurizi, Paola Valitutti, Daniela Asterri, Andrea Pascarelli and our Afghan team and partners in the various projects.

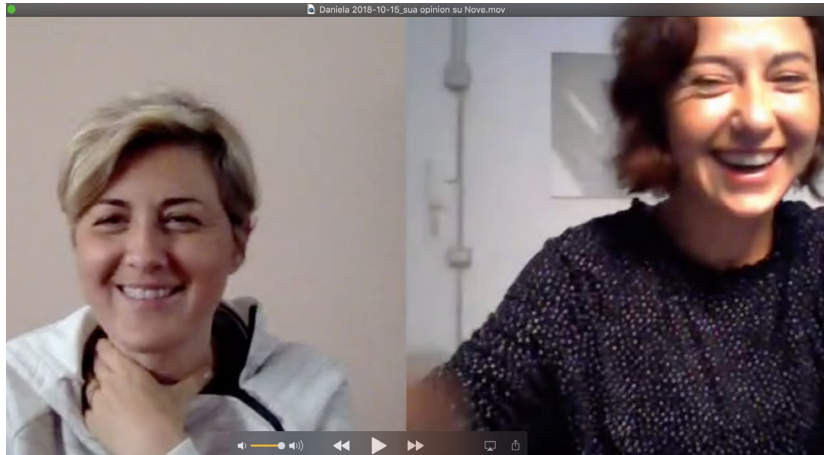
From 36:10 Livia says:

*I am grateful to your transparent way of working and for approaching problems with the certainty that there is a solution to them [...] Seeing a more senior colleague who still sticks to her ideals and wishes to carry on with this profession after so many years and challenging circumstances, is heartening for me.*

Her words resonate with Yamamoto's concept of the effects of being recognized and appreciated when stating:

[...] women, especially those with talent, may respond particularly sharply to the experience of being regarded, being seen. As Sangiuliano put it (1980), "it is indeed heady to be affirmed and recognized for gifts that not even she has recognized in herself. (Yamamoto, 1998)

### 3.3.3 Daniela and Arianna in conversation



Video 4. [Daniela and Arianna on Nove Onlus' work \(Briganti, 2018\)](#)

Daniela Asterri joined Nove Onlus in February 2018 and is dealing with finance and administration. Daniela's practical skills, sharp intuition, values and fast adaptability made her a very valuable member of the team. I appreciate her honest and direct way of dealing with Nove Onlus and its numerous projects, and I was very keen to understand what she thinks of the work we do. At 0:48 of our conversation she affirms the following:

*Nove Onlus is a small reality but very complex. I describe it as an organization where people work ten times as much as in other realities I've got to know, and the commitment and seriousness of its team members. At the beginning I had to align myself quickly to this way of working and it was not easy, but now it is very rewarding since I am learning so much. In my former job I had the joy of being in touch with young people in need all the time. I have established a rapport with them that endures to the present day. It meant everything to me, it represented my motivation. I felt the job I was doing was the most important thing for me and it made me feel richer. Working directly with people filled my life completely. Every time my salary was not paid, I felt 'paid' by the human relationships I had with those young people. I see Nove Onlus as an opportunity for me to grow professionally. However, to be honest with you, a part of my*



*soul smiles less. I leave the office with my head full of administrative issues since my job is not linked to the human aspect. I love to work in the field, however I also accept the fact that as a professional I grow and am required to perform different tasks.*

I respond to Daniela in these terms:

*I totally agree with you Daniela. I am also a field worker and I need the daily contact with the people I work with. For many years I have dealt with managerial and political issues and I am not in contact with people as much as I used to be and as much as I would want to be. This is one of the reasons we decided to create Nove Onlus, in order not to lose touch with the individual and also to attempt to have a systemic influence within the network of organizations in which we operate. We also would like to suggest an alternative to the mainstream approach to ID, which seems to be tangled up in convoluted bureaucratic processes and has forgotten the human factor. However, I don't know whether in practice we manage to do that.*

Daniela responds by saying:

*I believe you did manage to do so and represent an alternative way of working in the ID sector. What always struck me is the high commitment you and Susanna have for this organization, working around the clock and pro bono because you aim to meet the goal and are not to be convinced otherwise. This is not something to be taken for granted. I know of many other realities where people are highly paid and still show little commitment and passion. Nove Onlus represents an exception. And I believe this is one of the most important qualities that Nove Onlus has.*

From 14:40 onwards Daniela shares with me her opinion on the projects that we currently implement both in Italy and Afghanistan. She is constructively critical towards some of trainings we decide to provide our partners (in Livia's language) with such as

information technology and its usefulness in both the Italian and the Afghan contexts. It is a delight for me to have had that conversation with her and to acknowledge that she feels at ease with me, a senior member of the board, in highlighting the weaknesses of our activities. The founders of Nove Onlus do not believe in hierarchical power: what we want is to build up an organization in which everyone feels their own distinctive capabilities and that their unique values are respected and nourished. In Socratic terms I see Nove Onlus as a space that welcomes a dialectical relationship among its member of staff in all the countries where it operates. By that I mean the art of holding the One and the Many together (Vegetti, 1999, p. 417).

### **3.2.4 Elena and Arianna in conversation**



Video 5. [Elena and Arianna on Nove Onlus' work \(Briganti, 2018\)](#)

Speaking as the deputy chairperson of the board of directors, I see Elena Noacco together with Susanna Fioretti as the backbone of Nove Onlus. As mentioned early in this chapter the idea of setting up an organization that could carry our values and love for the people we work with (as exposed in Chapter 1) was generated by these two colleagues and myself. Elena is a senior development professional skilled in project management, administration and finance. We met in Afghanistan in 2006 which marked the beginning of our friendship and professional collaboration. Our

conversation informed my answer to the research question: how can I know better in order to act better (Chambers, 2017) as a development professional?

From 2:39 onwards Elena says:

*We at Nove Onlus are trying to work towards gender justice, which represented the trigger for the creation of our organization. What we decided to do is to provide the most vulnerable people (among which there are girls and women) with an opportunity to change their lives for the better. The difference between Nove Onlus and many other organizations lies in the fact that we decided to start not only by assessing the needs of the people we work with, but also by focusing on small realities in order to concentrate on the individual and her own needs. We decided to adopt this approach although it presented many difficulties. However, I believe the results we achieved, especially with the project in Afghanistan, are highly qualitative rather than only quantitative. The level of trainings that we deliver in Kabul is very high and leads to women's empowerment.*

*We [she refers to Susanna Fioretti, me and herself who worked together in Afghanistan] looked back at where we started from, namely when we worked for an International Donor Organization dealing with gender issues in Afghanistan. We treasured our experiences, experimentation, huge efforts and mistakes we made at that time, whilst we were pursuing women empowerment in that country. I think that our mistakes were constructive and led us to where we are today, namely again in Afghanistan working in the same field; and although we were not present there all the time, we managed to reach tangible results. Those have guaranteed our trainees a high-quality service that has a positive influence on their quality of life according to their opinion and to what they share with us in the questionnaire we distribute. The weakness is that it is difficult for us who are not in Kabul all the time, to fully understand how the everyday management of the project is dealt with by our local partner-organization<sup>33</sup>. As we know*

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<sup>33</sup> The team-leader of our local partner organization is Ing. Ismail mentioned by Livia during our conversation

*it is managed by a staff of male Pashtun who can be pretty authoritarian, and we are not aware of all the internal male-female dynamics gravitating around the project... speaking of gender justice. We cannot however expect to solve those dynamics all at once and for good.*

Elena, in my opinion, is stressing the importance of the primacy of the personal (Chambers, 2017, p.165) not only by referring to the single development professional's self-reflexivity and values to be highly regarded in the realm of ID, but to the needs of the single individual within a distinctive group of people. In this profession and in this thesis, I am claiming there is no room for a one-size-fits-all approach. Nove Onlus is seeking to embrace approaches to ID that aim to be transformative for each of the individuals within the targeted group and support them to achieve a good change. We do not have the "perfect recipe" for that. What we know is that it is of fundamental importance to share the lessons learnt, and include errors, positive results, and further adjustments with other groups, communities, partners, colleagues, institutions and funders.

Many who struggle for good change working in the spirit of this new professionalism can show others the way. There is much to learn from them. As champions and pioneers they can enable the rest of us to perceive and explore pathways to new and better ways of knowing, better practices, and better relationships. It needs not a few but a multiplicity of communities of passion, of allies with like minds and like emotions. (ibid., p. 165)

From 6:23 onwards she says:

*Yet among our female staff we have very special women like Fozjia Jan, who give me heart. Looking at this new generation of women, so different from the majority of the women we worked with years ago, makes me think that what I'm doing is really*

*meaningful after all [...] what is happening in our training centre makes me think of seeds that we plant and then....*

At 6:40 we both smiled at each other as we understood perfectly what we mean by planting a seed. It is the life affirming feeling we get when believing that we are contributing to the blossoming of the new generation. Elena's insights also help me to respond to my research question: how do I introduce the idea of generativity in sustainable development and why is it important?

Elena adds the following:

*Moreover, such a project implemented in Kabul gave the training centre a wide visibility. It was built in 2014 and is now very well-known in the city. People refer to it as an example to follow<sup>34</sup>. Every time we open up the registration for the new courses, we have so many women lining up, many more than we can accept. In terms of age they range from young students to middle age workers and professionals. However, in the past few years we've noticed that unlike the early years when mostly widows and destitute women would apply for our courses, we now attract the interest of young women keen to learn English Language and computer-skills. Those women are already educated and are looking for something still so rare in Kabul, such as our training-courses. I believe that working toward gender justice with this new generation has a greater influence than the one we tried to have years ago when we used to work mainly with older women.*

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<sup>34</sup> At the time of my discussion with Elena another Italian newspaper (<https://www.radiobullets.com/rubriche/le-ragazze-con-la-patente/?fbclid=IwAR2Q1g9nFkKldw9gU-sQixUQvoUY-1058NPsgQ7DMp6LQUbKk-NIzJihyMY>) reported on the job that Nove Onlus carries out in Kabul and validate what Elena says about Nove Onlus being referred to as an example for its work with Afghan women.

I ask:

*Do you mean that working with the new generation of women in Kabul is having a ripple effect? Do you believe our work has the possibility to influence many more people and consequently the broader society?*

Elena at 7:48 answers:

*Yes, exactly*

I then add:

*I agree with you. During my last visit in 2016 I met BBC journalists who were attending our courses. I met educated professionals such as teachers and business-women frequenting our training centre. I was really surprised to see so many educated women who could spread the influence of our training centre much faster and more systemically than we could do alone.*

Those words inform my understating and meaning of generativity and why it is important for sustainable development as discussed in Chapter 2. It is about nurturing and contributing to the new generation (Erikson, 1959). The last paragraph of Chapter 2 ended by wondering whether generative development is something that I could foresee at the beginning of a development project and to work towards it, or whether it is a human phenomenon to be recognized and appreciated as such. The work done by Nove Onlus in Afghanistan and in Ethiopia (as I will show in Chapter 4) seems to be conducive to a systemic influence at organizational level but also at community level, and it might foster generativity. At this stage of my research I can only observe

how this seems to be happening in practice, but I am not in a position to claim more.

Elena and I raise our concerns at the end of this section.

Elena continues:

*Moreover, from June 2018 our training centre is offering an internet corner to the trainees, which has enormous potential. In fact, it gives the trainees the possibility to look for jobs, connect with companies, explore employment-possibilities. I mistakenly thought that all of them had a mobile-phone like our employees, but they don't. And if they have one, they lack the money to buy credit for it or the freedom to use it since the male family-members might control it or even confiscate it. Hence the internet corner in our centre is the only way many of them have to benefit from the digitalized world.*

At 11:42 Elena adds:

*Nove Onlus was born from our desire to create an 'alterative organization' [we both smile at each other while thinking of that] to counterpoise the dependency culture so widespread among many large international organizations active in the ID sector.*

What she is saying I believe is in line with Chambers' appeal for 'revolutionizing professionalism' (Chambers, 2017):

Values, norms, and methods are integral to the new professionalism. Those prevailing in professions across the board cry out for root-and-branch questioning and revision.  
(p.163)

I feel the urge for a radical transformation in the ID sector and I agree that four domains need to be tackled, i.e. the professional, institutional, personal, and collective (ibid.) Nove Onlus represents a practical attempt to pursue both professional and institutional innovations. A practical example of Nove Onlus professional and institutional

innovation is represented by the initiative “The power of sport” implemented in Afghanistan by our colleague Alberto Cairo. His view on the work he does and why he does it is reported later in this chapter.

The project lies on the premises that sport contributes concretely to the physical rehabilitation and the reintegration of disabled people into society (Nove Onlus, 2018, n.p.). It gives them security and self-esteem, opportunities to build social relationships and to be part of a team. It also restores the fundamental right to play and enjoyment, rights that are so easily – and so often – denied to persons with physical disabilities. Disabled people in Afghanistan receive compassion and pity from their countrymen, but not rights or social justice (ibid.). Despite the lack of essential health services in the country, which regards sport as a superfluous luxury, there are hundreds of athletes – both male and female – who regularly practice basketball in wheelchairs, participating in national and international tournaments that are followed by media and fans in ever-increasing numbers (ibid.).

From 14:15 onwards Elena and I speak extensively about this project and the effect it has not only on the people involved but also on ourselves while witnessing such a great change in these people’s lives. I would therefore like to show the reader a video done by Nove Onlus in which Nilofar Bayat (the captain of the Afghan wheelchair basketball team) and her team are preparing for a competition.





Video 6: [Nilofar Bayat and her team of female basketballers](#) (Nove Onlus, 2018)

From 15:02 I say to Elena that:

*Looking at the video of Nilofar and her team I get immediately emotional. It is so humbling to work with people who have such a resilience and love for life. It gives me the strength to continue doing what I'm doing.*

Elena's response is:

*Yes indeed. It would be so nice if we could just concentrate on our work as we did at the beginning when we started with Nove Onlus where we were all working from home and had few administrative and bureaucratic burdens. Now, the constant lack of funding is jeopardizing our projects, and dealing with that keeps us busy most of the time. It is very difficult to keep working due to the lack of money but when I see the people, we work with ...it is very rewarding.*

Our discussion continues by considering the systemic influence our work seems to have in Afghanistan. This is also validated by the fact that our organization is highly respected by the partner institutions as the Ministry of Women Affairs and that we collaborate with both local and international well renowned organizations such as the

International Red Cross Committee (ICRC). However, we both agree that due to the instability in the country it is hard to foresee what will happen and whether the systemic change we might have achieved to a certain extent is *really* going to last.

When I look back at the video conversation that ends with an optimistic statement by Elena who says at 36:12 ‘we have so many positive stories to tell’, the words by Gramsci resonate in my head ‘I’m a pessimist because of intelligence, but an optimist because of will’ (Gramsci, n.d.). I know that as a development professional I acquired the experience that often lead me to be pessimistic about the design and implementation of a given project particularly when the environment where the project takes place is politically, socially and economically unstable and unpredictable. However, it is my will to carry on with my profession due to my value of love for, and faith in, the people represented in my writing and the many more who are not, that in Gramsci’s words makes me an optimist. Alberto’s responses to some of my questions around this topic are reported below and shall shed some light on what I mean here by being optimistic because of my will.

### **3.2.4 Alberto speaking about his work**

Alberto Cairo, member of the board of Nove Onlus is a physiotherapist by profession. He has been living and working in Afghanistan as the head of the ICRC’s orthopedic program for almost 30 years. In 2010 he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize and three years later was awarded the Henry Dunant Medal, which is the highest award of the Red Cross Movement and Red Crescent. In July 2019 the Afghan President granted Alberto the honorary Afghan citizenship.

However, what struck me the most about Alberto is, in my own language, his profound love for humanity that emerges from his life-long commitment to the people of

Afghanistan that he never stopped to assist throughout the years of war and political instability that last till today. In Alberto I recognize the humility of an ordinary person who dedicated his entire existence to social justice. My viewpoint about him is that he sees really the people he speaks about and works with (Kuo, 2016, n.p.). He does not remain idle when confronted with people's struggle but engages in actions such as setting up 'The power of sport' project in collaboration with ICRC that have changed for the better the lives of so many Afghan people.

The following video concisely explains how Alberto and ICRC initiated that initiative, because he claims 'I used to think physical rehabilitation wasn't a priority, but I've learned that dignity cannot wait for better times' (Cairo, 2012, n.p.).



Video 7: [The wheelchair basketball tournament in Afghanistan \(ICRC, 2012\)](#)

I therefore asked Alberto what makes him carry on with his job against all the odds.

His response to me:

*I like what I do, the reason being is that my job makes me happy, useful and gives meaning to my life [...] it is the right work, at the right time in the right place. I am lucky also because the work I do is very practical, and very often I can see immediate results.*

*I see that [making prothesis for people] makes people happy and that makes me happy.  
It is a virtuous circle.*

I believe that Alberto's virtuous circle is validating Smith's concept (introduced in Chapter 1) that every altruistic act is intrinsically an egotistical one (Smith, 1981, p. 23). Some act of "egotism", however, might be conducive to generativity, which is that force used by Nilofar, Fozjia, Mahamadullah and many others to create in their own way over and above what has been done by Nove Onlus so far. His words also help me to recognize the virtuous circle as that which gives my life a meaning (Frankl, 1946, p. 113) and informs my ontology as woman and as a development professional. He continues:

*My experience helps me avoiding mistakes and improve my practice every day. It is about analysing what I'm doing and making it better.*

Alberto is able to simplify a very complex concept largely debated in ID which has to do with rigour. It is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as the quality of being extremely thorough and careful. Chambers advocates for the adoption of canons for an inclusive rigour for complexity (2017, p. 91) which rightly demands radical personal, institutional and professional reorientation (ibid., p. 91). Alberto affirms that he transcends the evident and practical result of his daily work as a physiotherapist and understands that the ultimate goal for a development professional (regardless of her/his technical skills) is to contribute to the realization of their own capabilities to stand up for their just and equal opportunities (Briganti, 2018, p. 76) such as the full reintegration of his patients in their society.

He adds:

*However, my work is not only about providing people with new legs and arms [...] the ultimate goal is not just to allow a person to walk again, the ultimate goal is to reintegrate them back into their society and support them in realising whatever they want to do and be happy doing that. The physical rehabilitation and the social reintegration go hand in hand.*

*At the end what makes me happy is when I see a person getting back what they have lost due to their disability, they get back their previously lost self-esteem. The key word is dignity, they get back their dignity. The wheelchair basketball-initiative makes this very evident.*

(audio conversation with Alberto Cairo, Briganti 2018)

I agree with Alberto that re-gaining dignity is crucial, as extensively expressed in Chapter 1. It is the loss of it resulting from the violation of equal and inalienable rights (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, n.p.) that, in my opinion, renders people vulnerable and therefore incapable of fully realising their own capabilities.

I also ask him what he thinks of ID nowadays and which are the most crucial weaknesses to address? He replies as follows:

*Very often we ID professionals are too distant from the 'beneficiaries', which means that we can have only a partial understanding of what is going on in their lives. Another big problem of the sector is that people like us very often arrive in a given country with ready-made projects all set to be implemented. We do not listen to the 'beneficiaries' as we should, we do not talk to them as we should, we do not involve them in the fundamental thinking process that is supposed to lead to the project-design. I started doing my job better when I finally understood that I needed to let the Afghan people guide me. They opened my eyes and have shown me that what is the priority to me is not to them and vice versa. Hence...to listen, to listen and go on together, otherwise it will not work.*

(audio conversation with Alberto Cairo, Briganti 2018)

Alberto's insights into the profession of ID highlights the importance of listening to those with whom we work.

Learning to listen sounds simplistic but is basic, applying to all of us especially when we are interpersonally powerful and dominant. It applies most with multiple 'uppers' such as older, white, educated, patriarchal men who enjoy talking (mea culpa). (Chambers, 2017, p. 166)

I very much appreciate the work by Anderson called the Listening Project (Anderson et al., 2012) which provides a powerful example of the positive changes that can be achieved by practitioners engaging in active listening.

### **3.3 Concluding self-reflections**

In Chapter 1, I wrote that my practice as a development professional taught me that injustice is a kaleidoscope of lack of freedoms and violations of human rights that cannot be overcome by considering people the same or by suggesting similar solutions for everyone. I also added that the solution to that conundrum is not to equalize opportunities, because that will not guarantee equal results (Lasch, 1973, p. 19). In this Chapter, I have affirmed that some of the solutions used to support people in developing countries to enjoy their freedoms are capitalist approaches that are detrimental to women and gender justice.

My aim in this chapter has been to show how I react to those solutions steered by capitalism that in my worldview felt demotivating and devalue the human potential and in particular that of women in developing countries. My reaction was to create

together with some colleagues the non-governmental organization Nove Onlus, which looks at different ways of approaching ID and the quest for social and gender justice. Our aim has always been to seek fundamental structural and transformational changes to the current neoliberal, exclusive development model that perpetuates the inequalities of wealth, power and resources between countries, within countries and between men and women (Petchesky, 2016, p. 204).

Nove Onlus and its team members believe that solutions to fight gender-based injustice are not to be found in gender equality, but in gender justice, which is the process of 'rooting out institutionalized patriarchal power systems' (Goetz, quoted Mukhopadhyay and Singh 2007, p. 24). As a Living Theory researcher, I deem it fundamental for the improvement of both my practice and research to focus on self-reflexivity (Whitehead, 1989, p. 42) and metacognitively ponder over my 15 years long practice as a development professional and the values that inform my ontology. I do that because I would like to bring about a 'good change' (Chambers, 1997, p. 1743) in the lives of the people I work with. This chapter therefore has shown how I use my practical work to develop a 'self-critical epistemological awareness' (Chambers, 2017, p. 98) which Chambers describes as the 'reflexivity and critical awareness of one's mindset, predilections, preferences, and biases, to offsetting these, and to continuous learning, unlearning, and changing' (ibid., p. 98).

When I decided with my colleagues to set up our organization, I wanted it to reflect my values that inform my way of doing development in practice, in particular the value of love for, and faith in, humanity, social and gender justice, responsibility and empathy. Looking at the discussions with my colleagues portrayed in this chapter I believe that Nove Onlus not only reflects those values in its practice but shares them among its team. The language I use to describe my living-theory of International Development

might differ from that used by my colleagues, but the essence I believe to be the same, as their actions and commitment towards social and gender justice are revealing.

According to what my colleagues say, Nove Onlus' *modus operandi* values transparent reflexivity, personal behaviours and attitudes and good facilitation (ibid., p. 98) enormously. I acknowledge that my unique constellation of values as they appear in Chapter 1 have been influenced by the unique constellation of values of Livia, Daniela, Elena, Susanna and Alberto. Among other things, Chapter 4 will show how my unique constellation of values is being influenced by other people other than my colleagues and with whom I work at grassroots level. By testing through action (ibid., p. 98) this chapter sought answers to the questions:

- How can I work with myself and others in order for each of us to contribute to the realization of our capabilities (Sen, 1999)?
- How can I know better in order to act better (Chambers, 2017) as a development professional?
- How do I introduce the idea of generativity in sustainable development and why is it important?
- How do I explore the potential value of LT in the emergence of a global social movement of researchers who hold values for the flourishing of humanity (Whitehead, 1989)?

Chapter 3 is also a way of finding my living answers to some of my research questions presented in Chapter 2 (paragraph 2.1.2). The questions I attempt to answer in this Chapter are informing my ontology as a woman, and female development economist as well as my gendered way of knowing, which I will write about in Chapter 4.



## **CHAPTER 4**

**My responsibilities to action and towards others: two  
examples of development at micro level in practice**

## Introduction

The focus of this chapter is my responsibility to action and toward others. My value of faith in humanity leads me to believe that people by assuming responsibility can become agents of their own change. To corroborate my living-theory I use examples of my practice from Afghanistan and Ethiopia in doing development at the micro level, namely by working directly with individuals. My writing is based on the necessity to look at the self in ID (Chambers, 2017, p.164) and offers an example from my practice with individuals who I consider being my partners in development projects. After having discussed in Chapter 3 how my work with Nove Onlus appears to have a systemic influence at organizational level (meso-level), I discuss here how my work can have a systemic influence at community level (micro-level) triggered by a force I call generativity that some of my partners in development projects seem to have. This is instrumental in the enlargement of the LT global network of relationships (as a global social movement), based on people's unique constellation of values for the flourishing of humanity (Whitehead, 1989). I also reflect on my practice at micro level that unveil my meanings of vulnerability, capabilities and the co-creation of knowledge. The force of generativity is also emerging from this chapter through the words and actions of the women I am working with. The chapter ends with my reflections on the meanings of vulnerability that differ according to the context, and those concerned with capabilities which are defined differently by each of my partners in ID. These pave the way to the final Chapter which is about my contribution to educational knowledge and theory and my possible systemic influence at political level (macro-level).

#### 4.1 Responsibility to action and towards others

As long as there was a man in the world feeling hungry,  
lonely, sick or living in fear then he is my responsibility (Schweitzer)<sup>35</sup>

My choice to commence the section with Schweitzer's thoughts is motivated by my wish to clarify my meaning of responsibility to action. I do believe that whilst I am responsible *for myself only*, I have responsibilities *towards* others. By that I mean that I recognise that the other is responsible for themselves (Whitehead, 2014) but at the same time when confronted with another people's plague I feel responsible to act as elaborated in Chapter 1. Hence, I would paraphrase Schweitzer and argue that as long as there was a person in the world feeling hungry, lonely, sick or living in fear then it is my ontological responsibility to act towards the co-creation of a 'good change' (Chambers, 1995, p. 174) conducive to an improvement of that person's life. I wish to elaborate on this concept in the following paragraph.

In Chapter 1, I presented the empathy-responsibility-change cycle, showing how my empathic self leads me to feel outraged and that results in energy that motivates me to take action. The actions I undertake in the framework of my profession as a development practitioner aim at contributing to the realization of the human capabilities of the people I work with (Sen, 1999), in order for them to move towards a good change. At the same time, I work on the realization of my own capabilities as well. In my own way of dealing with development in practice, each of us is treated as an end as Nussbaum's (2000) reflections point out:

And I shall argue that the capabilities in question should be pursued for each and every person, treating each as an end and none as a mere tool of the ends of others: thus, I

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<sup>35</sup> Various sources attribute this saying to Albert Schweitzer but I could not find written evidence of that.

adopt a principle of each person's capability, based on a principle of each person as end. (p.5)

In the process of supporting the realization of human capacities by treating each person as an unique individual, I also deem it important to acknowledge the significance of togetherness (Potts, 2014, p. 104) as already emphasized in Chapters 2 and 3. Togetherness is key to my approach to development in practice and to my living-theory research that both aspire to bring about a good change by producing a valid explanation for my educational influences in my own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence my practice (Whitehead, 2018). Togetherness is best captured by the concept of *Ubuntu*, namely 'I am because we are' that evolves into 'we are because I am' ( I~we~I) (Huxtable and Whitehead, 2016, p. 9) and ultimately into I~we~us (Mounter, Huxtable, and Whitehead, 2019) as explained in Chapter 2. This idea is also well narrated in the words of de Chardin:

We are one, after all, you and I, together we suffer, together exist, and forever will recreate each other. (Buscaglia, 1972, p. 92)

The sections below on Afghanistan and Ethiopia provide practical examples of how I follow *Ubuntu* when attempting to support the realization of the capabilities of the people I work with (mainly women), but also how through the sense of togetherness those people are supporting the realization of *my own* capabilities and informing *my own* meanings and understanding of ID in practice. In full respect of each other unique constellation of values and identity, and in consideration of the fact that no one is seen as a mere tool serving others' end, our work and experiences have become intertwined in a relationship that by transcending the "I" and its collective "we" transforms into I~we~us as explained in Chapter 2.

At this point I would like to clarify that my responsibilities towards others is linked to my faith in humanity (discussed in Chapter 1) which leads me to believe that people can become agents of their own change. I therefore see my role in my function as a development professional as someone who provides support to the individual in acquiring the instruments to define their *own* meanings of good change and acting accordingly. This is my way of appreciating and respecting the responsibility that the other has for themselves.

I also want to bring back into the discussion my value of love for humanity as highlighted in Chapter 1, which is a fundamental ingredient in my development in practice. My understanding of love encompasses responsibility towards the other. In sections 4.1.1. and 4.1.2 I focus on single individuals I have worked with or am still working with. The reason for the inclusion of this work in my thesis is not self-indulgent. In this way I aim to underlie the development practitioner's need to look deeply at the self, because change starts with individual people (Chambers, 2017, p.165) taking responsibility. This should commence with small, single initiatives that contribute to the broader picture made of collective actions for the promotion of change in the society (Snow and Oliver, 1995, p. 571) conducive to the flourishing of humanity (Whitehead, 1989). What I am learning from my practice might be useful to inform new ways of dealing with ID. My practice is underpinned by mutual collaboration with the people represented in this thesis (and the many more not explicitly mentioned here) that are influencing my unique constellation of values and consequently shaping my living-theory.

The revolutionary changes of a new professionalism need the inspiration and drive of champions to become mass movements in which everyone's actions matter and contribute. Transformations occur through individual decisions and acts and

accumulations of innumerable quiet, small steps in the same direction. (Chambers, 2017, p.165)

In following sections, my value of love reveals itself when I describe how the I~we~us works in practice. In other words, we seem to share our aliveness, feelings, experience, commitment and professionalism as we are all becoming agents of our own change. However, I have come to realize that my personal and professional involvement with a single individual is not the end, it is in fact generative and has potential new beginnings. In order to clarify what I mean I am use Buscaglia's words:

Some begin with a deep personal involvement with another individual. From this they learn that love cannot be exclusive. They learn that if love is to grow, it will need diverse minds, innumerable individuals, and the exploration of varied paths [...] the love of humanity is the natural outgrowth of love for a single individual. From one man to all men. (Buscaglia, 1972, p. 114)

The ongoing relationship with these people nurtured over many years, seems to have developed a force that supports new generations by transcending what we have done together. As mentioned throughout my thesis I call this force generative (Briganti, 2018). Otto (ibid., p. 115) seems to validate my point when arguing that:

Only in a continuing relationship is there a possibility for love to become deeper and fuller so that it envelops all of our life and extends into the community.

Otto's sense of community is what I referred to in Chapter 2 as a global network of relationship. Part of this community is in my worldview constituted by an international network of practitioners and living -theory researchers (among which I count myself) who are producing a story of themselves because they believe that they can create

new knowledges in the form of information gathering and theory generation and testing (Whitehead, 2018). In Chapter 3, I added my twofold intention to bring about a change by engaging with grassroots work with individuals and by attempting to have a systemic influence on the social formation I am operating in. For instance, in Afghanistan and Ethiopia that inspired the creation of Nove Onlus.

According to de Beauvoir's philosophy (1949), social norms grant men transcendence and place women in positions of constant immanence. She defined transcendence as active, creative, forward-looking and freedom-oriented while immanence is seen as passive, internal, and centered on the maintenance of the species. Women are 'doomed to immanence' (de Beauvoir, 1949, pp. 97, 248, 643). In the following sections my experience in both countries shows that even very vulnerable girls and women who appear to be 'doomed to immanence' by patriarchal societies are instead embracing transcendence. The following lived experiences by the individuals I work with demonstrate how I attempt to contribute to a systemic influence on the community level (micro-level) that might lead not only to sustainable but also to generative development (as I anticipated in Chapter 3).

The narrative that follows is rich in insights and emotional experiences both for those who recount their living experience and for me. Conscious of the pain of the interviewees whilst recalling those instances, I decided that I would not interrupt the flow with my own reflections in order to capture as much as possible the authenticity of those moments with them. At the end of paragraphs 4.1.1 and 4.1.2 where I use my narrative style, I engage with my own reflections.

#### **4.1.1 Afghanistan: Development at micro-level**

In truth, all human existence is transcendence and immanence at the same time; to go beyond itself, it must maintain itself; to thrust itself toward the future, it must integrate the past into itself. (de Beauvoir, 1949, p. 443)

Afghanistan is a country still characterized by insecure political institutions and a weak civil society (Briganti, 2017). In 2016, the Human Development Index (HDI), which measures health, education, and standard of living indicators, places it near the bottom of the list of countries with the lowest in terms of human development, namely 169th out of 187 (UNDP, 2016). Although poverty affects both women and men, there is evidence that women are poorer and their capacity to cope with poverty is more limited than that of men (Briganti, 2017). According to the Gender Development Index (GDI) that measures the difference in human development between women and men, Afghanistan is amongst the twenty countries in the world where inequality is highest (ibid). Women and girls are subjected to male decisions and are often the victims of violence. 68% of the Afghan female population are illiterate and less than 16% constitutes a part of the workforce (Nove Onlus, 2017). For the vast majority of young girls, their only future prospect consists of a marriage arranged by their families and a life spent at home (ibid). My engagement with Afghan women fully reflects the words of the former United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon:

The wellbeing, human rights and empowerment of the world's 1.1 billion girls are central to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. When we agreed on that agenda, we promised girls quality education and health services. (UN News Centre, 2016)

My pro-bono engagement with Nove Onlus brought me back to Kabul in 2016 where I carried out a monitoring assignment of our projects at Nove Onlus' vocational training



centre (as mentioned in Chapter 3). While I was there, I video-interviewed some students who were attending the courses, applying de Sousa Santos' (2014) meanings of epistemological emancipation to my living-theory research (Briganti, 2017). Here I mean that Living Theory is about non-derivative thinking (Whitehead, 2016) because it aims at generating new epistemological knowledge that fosters epistemological emancipation and acts as a counterforce to 'epistemicide' (de Sousa Santos, 2014). My intention is to understand the epistemologies of the Afghan women I work with, who are my partners in development projects but find themselves on the other side of the line (ibid.). The line de Sousa Santos refers to is the 'Abyssal Line' that divides social reality. What in fact lies on 'the other side of the line' (the side of the oppressed) such as Afghan women's epistemologies remains invisible or irrelevant. The following data about their epistemologies is for me extremely relevant as it informs my living-theory and meanings of ID. It also serves as a guide to enable me to understand their needs and consequently how to support them in realising their capabilities, constrained by power imbalances embedded in the Afghan culture as expressed below:

Power imbalances in gender relations determine whether women's actions and work translate into the realization of their rights and capabilities (UN WOMEN, 2014, p.13).

The interview process took the form of unstructured interviews with each student individually but with the presence of the head of the training centre Ms Mushtari who translated when necessary. The majority of the students spoke English, however. I collected the interviews of a total of 21 female trainees. What is represented here is a small sample of the data collected. In the interview process I believe I operated within an ethic of respect for any persons involved in the research I undertook (BERA, 2018, p. 5) by following the ethical guidance for educational research published by the British Educational Research Association (2018). The consent (also in written form) of the participants was voluntary and informed by a discussion in both English

and Dari (the native language spoken by the interviewees) preceding the interview.

Although I videoed all the conversations (as confirmed in Chapter 1) I decided not to use the visual data and utilize pseudonyms in order to guarantee their safety. I am aware that due to my dual role of researcher and donor representative, my position is power-laden (Briganti, 2018, p. 78). As mentioned in Chapter 2 I am aware of the “societal status” I carry i.e. Western, educated, white. In my experience all these characteristics might lead some people both in Afghanistan and in Ethiopia to feel obliged to accept my invitation to the interview. It is my responsibility to appraise whether their consent is solely motivated by cultural norms or gratitude. I acknowledge that my perception is open to error, and I cannot affirm with indisputable evidence that gratitude does not have a stake in their decision to take part in my research. Hence, I decided to openly address my concerns about ethics with them by engaging in discussion with both Afghan and Ethiopian participants. This method proved useful in enabling me to sense whether there was some discomfort that the participants were trying to hide for fear of disappointing me (ibid., p. 78).

I invite my partners in development projects to challenge my work and my approach to ID which (perhaps inevitably) is also informed by my Western socio-historical and cultural background (Habermas, 1976) (Briganti, 2018). By being self-reflexive, I aspire to reach a balance between the part of my epistemology influenced by the “metropole” I was born and raised in and which was influenced by the ‘periphery’ I decided to work and live in (ibid.). This conundrum is expressed by Connell (2014):

The global economy is a dynamic and often turbulent affair. It doesn't produce a simple dichotomy. It does produce massive structures of centrality and marginality, whose main axis is the metropole-periphery, North-South relationship. (p. 526)

The above seems to validate the concepts put forth by de Sousa Santos (2014) on the existence of 'subaltern knowledges' (p. 134). I too distance myself from using the 'periphery as a source of raw data which are shipped back to the metropole, that becomes the site of the theoretical moment in knowledge production' (Connell, 2014, p. 526).

The following cases underscore my attempt to support people in telling their own story, which in my view is as a contribution to the process of dignifying themselves by speaking with their own voice (Briganti, 2018, p. 83). It also shows in what ways I as a development professional have chosen to support each individual who has decided to fully realize their own capabilities, embody transcendence and move towards freedom (de Beauvoir, 1949). More data on my last visit to Kabul in 2016 are included in the paper I wrote titled [Inequality and Poverty have a female face](#), presented at the [International Conference on Inequality. Trends in inequality: social, economic and political issues](#) in 2017. The writing below represents a limited example of that.

⇒ Conversations with the trainees of Nove Onlus' training centre

*Seema<sup>36</sup> is 23 years old and is attending the driving course at Nove Onlus training centre. This course is a pioneering one because although there are no more legal obstructions for women to hold a license and drive<sup>37</sup> only a few of them have begun to drive. According to a traffic department official in Kabul, in 2002 only 7 of the 8,698 driving licenses were issued to women (Kearl, 2014, n.p.).*

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<sup>36</sup> I'm using a pseudonym to protect the students' and the staff's identities.

<sup>37</sup> During the Taliban era (1996-2001), women were banned from driving and those who disobeyed were sentenced to death.

*In 2017 among the 350 newly-licensed female drivers in Kabul, 80 attended Nove Onlus' driving school<sup>38</sup>. The situation has improved, but whilst there is an increasing number of women seeking employment, their freedom of movement remains a challenge and still represents an obstacle to women's full participation in country's work force (Nove Onlus, 2019). The following paragraph derives from the discussion we had on her life and her dreams.*

*I really like to drive. Unfortunately, our society does not give us the right to drive a car. To have a driving license is a big thing. I can finally work and help my family. I also feel free because I don't have to ask anyone: 'please bring me there' [...]. I am currently working as a journalist for BBC Kabul and I love my job although I face so many problems in being a women journalist in Kabul. When I go for an interview people look at me and wonder what a young woman is doing here. They tell me I should stay at home [...]. But I don't care, I have my goals in mind and I follow my dreams. At the BBC I work for women, for those who don't have the opportunities I have. I make special programs for women. This is how I contribute to human development, especially girls' and women's development in Afghanistan. I believe that as a woman is very important to work for women's rights and to encourage other girls to educate themselves.*  
(Briganti, transcript from the video conversation, Afghanistan, Data Archive 2015-2019)

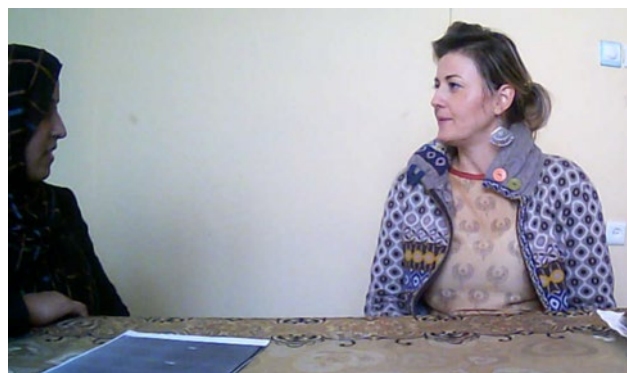


Figure 1: Seema and I during our conversation

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<sup>38</sup> This data has been communicated to Nove Onlus by its team in Kabul who went to the road authority for data collection purpose. The road authority in Kabul does not enjoy a digital system of data collection and storage yet.

Noorjahan is attending the professional cooking course and already works in a restaurant. However, her wish is to become an entrepreneur by setting up her own restaurant and employing women, providing them with a safe place to earn a living.

*I want to learn as much as I can, which is why I attend this course. Luckily my husband supports me. I ignore the critique that I receive from our people, I just want to work and grow as a professional. What I learn makes me feel stronger, I feel empowered because my future is in my hands now. I want to invest in myself to be able to help my family. I study and work at the same time, I'm very tired and I have no time to see my five kids as much as I want, but after all I'm happy. I do it for them as well, I'd like them to improve their capacities. I have three daughters and two sons, and my husband was never upset with me that I gave birth to three daughters first and then to the sons. We treat our children equally. (Briganti, transcript from the video conversation, Afghanistan, Data Archive 2015-2019)*

Aziza studies at University and at the same time she attends advanced training in computer skills. This is what she says about Afghan women:

*Afghan women face too many problems, we are victim of violence and we have so many problems that it's impossible for one person to solve them all. The only way we have to make our rights respected is through education. This is the only way for Afghan women to feel like human beings. Most of women in my country don't feel like women, they are treated as slaves. This is unacceptable. Women are sold like a piece of cloth, they are victim of violence beaten and forced into marriage.*

*I decided to join this training center because already the name of the project 'I'm woman and I want to work' really excites me. This is how I feel, I want to work. This is my goal. I want to improve my knowledge and support my family. I also want to support other women who are not educated. I feel very well in learning here because it's a safe place only accessible to women. My family trusts you [Nove Onlus] and is happy that I attend*

*this course. I decided that I want to work in education. Become a teacher would be accepted by my family hence I'm studying to become a teacher.*

I then asked the question: how would you define poverty? And she responded:

*Of course, Afghanistan is economically poor, but the worst poverty is cultural poverty. This means that our culture stops women to educate and empower themselves. A woman is poor when she is illiterate and lacks self-confidence. In that case she can't be a good mother because she can't teach her children. This is the worst poverty I know. (Briganti, transcript from the video conversation, Afghanistan, Data Archive 2015-2019)*

Mushatari, the head of the training centre also provided me with her insights on poverty:

*[Poverty] is all linked with education. If a woman is educated than she can solve all her problems, she will know how to live and how to reach her goals. Poverty is when someone is not educated and has no capacity to defend her right to educate herself. Nove Onlus' work is really great because it provides free vocational training for women and women can do something for themselves finally. It's a good opportunity for them and all our students are happy to be here. If such a training was not in Afghanistan these women would have to face many more challenges in their lives. All the students wish this project to continue. (Briganti, transcript from the video conversation, Afghanistan, Data Archive 2015-2019)*

#### 4.1.2 Ethiopia: Development on a micro-level

If I can help one person and  
that person can help another person  
than it becomes a change (Ntaiya, 2015, n.p.)

Ethiopia is the second-most populous nation in Africa with 102 million people (The World Bank, 2016, n.p.), but although it is the fastest growing economy in the region, it is also one of the poorest, with a per capita income of \$783 (The World Bank, 2018, n.p.). Ethiopia aims to reach lower-middle-income status by 2025 (ibid.). Currently, one in three women experience physical, emotional or sexual violence, 65 percent have experienced female genital mutilation, and only half of the girls who enrol in primary schools ever make it to grade 5<sup>39</sup> (USAID, 2018, n.p.). Although the primary school enrolment rate of girls in Ethiopia has climbed from 21 to 91 percent in the last three decades, the majority are still unable to transition to secondary and tertiary school due to distance, personal security and economic challenges (ibid.).

In such a context where girls and women are particularly disadvantaged, in 2013 the board of directors of Nove Onlus decided to develop a project in the capital city of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa called 'I do not have leprosy'. The aim of the project, which is currently in its last year of implementation, is to provide six vulnerable women with access to higher education opportunities (Briganti, 2018). These women are part of the so-called ghetto<sup>40</sup> known for hosting the country's biggest leper-community. Its inhabitants, even those who are not infectious, are discriminated against and excluded from the socio-economic life of the country (ibid.). They are not allowed to

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<sup>39</sup> Usually in grade 5 the children are 9 or 10 years in Ethiopia. However, many children start school much later than other, hence it is possible to find in the same grade 5 classroom children whose age varies from 9 to 13 years.

<sup>40</sup> In order to protect the identity of those who are part of the project and of the leprosy---affected community I avoid mentioning the real name of the ghetto.

leave the ghetto, unless they manage to hide their origins. If caught and recognized as belonging to the ghetto they risk being subjected to violence that endangers their lives. In the vast geographical area of the ghetto there are only a few kindergarten schools, and a severe lack of job opportunities (Nove Onlus, 2019). Hence many people, including children, are obliged to beg on the street of Addis Ababa.

Ethiopia is still a patriarchal society (BBC, 2018, n.p.) and the misery affecting the ghetto is exacerbated by the way women are treated who are left with very limited possibilities to educate themselves and provide for themselves in a dignified way. In October 2018 the first female president was appointed in Ethiopia. Ms Sahle-Work Zewde in her capacity as newly-elected president of the nation promised to focus on gender equality (ibid.). After her election the prime minister's chief of staff Fitsum Arega tweeted:

In a patriarchal society such as ours, the appointment of a female head of state not only sets the standard for the future but also normalizes women as decision-makers in public life. (ibid.)

I concur with the above statement and wish to remind the reader about what I affirmed in Chapter 1, namely that human rights violations render people vulnerable and exploitable. However, I believe that the meanings of vulnerability can genuinely differ according to the context. In the context of the leprosy ghetto in fact, deprivation, adversities and the stigma isolating people from the rest of the community are borne by girls and women predominantly (Briganti, 2018).

*The project 'I do not have leprosy' was developed in order to tackle the specificity of the ghetto and respond to the request of the above-mentioned six partners of Nove Onlus' development project to be supported in realising their capabilities as university*



students. The Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai's words coincide with my view on education:

*Education is one of the blessings of life and one of its necessities [...] education went from being a right to being a crime. I had two options: one is to remain silent and wait to be killed and the second was to speak up and then be killed. I chose the second one. (Yousafzai, 2017, n.p.)*

*Kure, Banchu, Alex, Tseghe, Mercy and Fere<sup>41</sup> were raised in the ghetto, but by hiding their origin they managed to go to school, a right they had to fight for. Eventually these girls have been awarded their high-school diploma with honours, which opened the door to the public university. However, this feels like a cruel paradox to me, because although they are allowed to pursue higher education these students are so poor that they would not have been able to accept the offer of the Government<sup>42</sup>, which only pays for the fees. They lacked the money to travel to the campus, feed themselves, buy a blanket or even a piece of soap. Many young women end up prostituting themselves in order to earn what they need to start university. Many more continue to prostitute themselves during their university years in order to survive (Briganti, 2018).*

*Nove Onlus started implementing the project in partnership with a group of Catholic nuns very well respected in the ghetto's neighbourhood for the help they provide to destitute people regardless of their religious affiliation and origin. We provide the financial means and the mentoring support to the six students. In order to protect the identity and the work of those nuns and the people they assist I refer to them simply*

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<sup>41</sup> In line with the request of the six students I use pseudonyms.

<sup>42</sup> The Government displaces the students, sending them to universities located far away from their city of origin. Students in order to attend the university have to leave their houses and families for years. The Government chooses the faculty the students are going to attend.

as the 'Sisters' and to their focal person as Sister Angela, already represented in the Prologue to this thesis. In 2017 I went back to Addis Ababa for a pro bono monitoring assignment and had the chance to meet the students and discuss their progress. Our discussions took the form of an unstructured interview with all the students together. With Merci, Alex and Banchu I also had the chance to deepen some topics bilaterally and better understand their epistemologies. We spoke English as they are all good at it. In terms of my conduct in Ethiopia I followed the same ethical guidance mentioned already in compliance with the University's requirements. The participants gave me their written consent for the interviews. I decided not to video any of the interviews as I had the feeling that a video camera would have made some of them very uncomfortable. The following is the result of my field notes and the correspondence my colleagues and I had with them over the years. The paper I wrote for EJOLTs on my work in Addis Ababa entitled [How can I improve my practice? A journey into my personal and professional growth as a development worker engaged with gender inequalities in Ethiopia](#) provides more detailed information. The writing below represents only a limited sample of the data collected.

⇒ Conversations with Mercy

Mercy is 22 years old and has been raised by a single mother who is mentally ill. She was conceived as a result of a rape. She writes to Nove Onlus the following message:

*Dear Friends of Nove ONLUS,*

*How are you? Thank to God I am doing well. I always thank God that He gave you to me. By your support and God help, I am in good situation. You know, hopefully, I will graduate in Marketing Management. This is will be big success for me. In the future I have big plan to work in this profession. [...]. You taught me how to help people and to show them love. [...] I know this letter would not explain all my thankfulness, but you will always be in my heart because of your great support, and for this I always*

*thank God and pray for you to have a blessing and wonderful time. God be always with you!*

*Yours Mercy (Mercy, Personal Communication, 2015)*

In 2017 during my visit to Ethiopia I met Mercy and followed up on her progress. She said:

*I graduated from Bahardar University in Marketing and Management. I'm so happy that I completed my education and grateful to Nove Onlus for its support without which I could not have completed my bachelor, which changed my life. I found a good job at the Commercial Bank in Addis Ababa where I work as a marketer in the department of e-payment. I really enjoy my work there. I'm still a member of charity club in the university which mandate is to help street children. Our motto is 'keep hope alive'. [...] I've been helped to go to school and finish University and now I want to help other children. I've been helped the way I help them now. Everybody has the responsibility to help other people.' Now that I'm educated, I feel safe, it's a way out and I feel stronger. I have overcome a lot of challenges, and finally I made it and completed my studies. (Briganti, field notes Ethiopia, 2017)*

⇒ Conversations with Alex

Alex, 20 years old, was born in the ghetto. The following is part of our conversation in July 2017:

*I study pharmacy (currently 3rd year). In 2 years, I'll be done with my bachelor's degree. I learn how to create new medicines and I enjoy it. I want to help my country and my people. I want to work in a hospital in Addis Ababa. I want to become a doctor and gain a master's degree. I have 2 sisters and 2 brothers (twins), my mom is divorced, and my family's financial condition is very bad. We all work and study. During the summer, the Sisters provide me with a job, I clean and cook and do*

*whatever I can to help my family. Life in campus is very difficult, the food is horrible, and I very often fall sick. Lately I had typhus due also to the appalling hygiene condition. Thanks to the money I receive from Nove Onlus not only I can study but I can buy some food and the medicine I needed to recover from typhus. I also bought my books, and I could pay the bus to travel back home twice in a year. (Briganti, field notes Ethiopia, 2017)*

On education she said:

*Education is the source of life, the source of a beautiful life. The world needs educated people. I'm more confident now due to my education, I feel lucky because I can educate myself. You [she refers to Nove Onlus] have helped me so much. Sister Angela is hiring me during the summer and I'm so happy that she offered me a job, I'm so happy I can work. I'm never tired of working. (ibid.)*

The insights of the two young women is a practical vindication of what Machel (2017) affirmed:

*Research has shown that the education of girls can help break the cycle of poverty, boost the economy and improve health, and affirms the human rights and dignity of women. The cost of gender inequality is great. We know that we cannot stop the cycle of poverty, economic deprivation and poor health unless everyone has an equal opportunity to access education. (n.p.)*

In summer 2019, Alex sent me the picture below taken during her graduation ceremony. She finally obtained a bachelor's degree in pharmacy and the smile on her face transmits me the self-affirming energy that makes me feel alive.



Figure 2. Alex's graduation in 2019. (Briganti, 2005-2019, Private Photo Archive)

⇒ Video-conversations with Rahma and her daughters

Apart from the Nove Onlus' project described above, my long-lasting experience in Ethiopia which started in 2005 and is still ongoing, brought me in contact with many vulnerable children and women. My relationship with them has changed my life and shaped my understanding on how to better support vulnerable people in realising their capabilities and lie the foundation for the co-creation of a good change. Some of the people I met and my relationship with them are described in the following writing. As mentioned in Chapter 1, I do consider some of those people such as Rahma and her daughters as my extended family.

*This is the story of Rahma, 43 years old, and of her three daughters: Semira (27-year-old), Salwa (23-year-old) and Fozjia (21-year-old). They are of Eritrean origin, although they have been living in Addis Ababa for the past 25 years. Their lives have been changed irredeemably by the Eritrean-Ethiopian war (1998-2000). Rahma's husband, the father of her daughters had been deported to Eritrea where he died*

*during the war. Rahma suddenly found herself alone in Addis Ababa, completely isolated from the community (people of Eritrean origin were discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity) with three very young children and no source of income. The family was disenfranchised, thus exposed to any sorts of danger and abuses (Briganti, 2018). For years they suffered from severe hunger, diseases, lack of potable water, hygiene, and proper shelter. They were harassed by the community and ostracized since Rahma's disease was mistakenly considered to be HIV. In other words, they lived without many human rights (ibid.). I met Rahma and the family in 2005 and since then we've been very close.*

*In June 2017 while I was in Addis Ababa, I had various conversations with Rahma and her three daughters. She talked about education and how that has changed for the better the lives of her daughters. Below Rahma's insights:*

*I was born in Eritrea in the countryside and I'm not educated. When I was young, I did not want to give birth given the situation for girls in my country. I didn't want my kids to grow up in the situation I grew up in. (Briganti, field notes Ethiopia, 2017)*

*To my question: 'how do the lives of your educated daughters differ from yours?' Rahma in a video conversation with her daughters Fozjia and Salwa responds the following:*



Video 1. [Rahma talking with Arianna and her daughters on education](#) (Briganti, 2017)

*Her daughter Salwa on her left-hand side (translating Rahma from minute 3:08 to 4:08) argues:*

*It's very incomparable. In older times if you made it to attend the first grade, you would have learnt the Amharic alphabet in order to write your name and avoid signing with your thumb. If you reached first grade, especially for a girl...that's it! Then you were ready to get married. But nowadays even to be a cleaner you need a paper that you attended 10th grade at least.*

*From minutes 4:58 onwards Fozjia, Rahma's youngest daughter recalls when she was attending the Sisters' kindergarten. Even when life was so difficult for them, she has always been the one who, with her contagious laughter and optimism, would remind her family (and myself) not to allow anything to deprive them of the little pleasures of life (Briganti, 2018, p. 85). I find her ability to have faith in humanity, in the future and to look always at the bright side of life both healthy and dignifying (ibid.). For many years she and her family were living on less than 1 USD per day (according to the World Bank estimate in 2013, 10.7 percent of the world's population lived on less than US\$1.90 a day) (The World Bank, 2016, p.59). I want to highlight that Fozjia, her family and the many people I have been working in developing*

*countries never inspired pity in me. Fozjia embodies the dignified image of African children 'one not of malnutrition, but of health, not of child soldiers or street children addicted to drugs, but hardworking students and intact families' (Maathai, 2009, p.81). Acknowledging and honouring people's inherent dignity (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, n.p.) is a daily obligation for a development practitioner without which the I~we~us would not be possible.*

*The next video is about my conversation with Semira, who in June 2017 graduated in Business Management. At the age of 12 Semira had to take charge of the entire household. She had to leave school in order to find ways of feeding her family. Out of despair she decided to leave Ethiopia and look elsewhere for more income for her family. Some human traffickers committed to recruit Ethiopian girls duped Semira into believing that a brighter future awaited her in Saudi Arabia (Briganti, 2018). Thirteen years later Semira talks about that period of her life. From minutes 1:52 -5:41 she recalls her past and provides a powerful insight on how education changed her life. Her younger sister Fozjia sent me recently her very powerful writing on those terrible years that helped me understanding our common story from her perspective, namely that of persons directly concerned (Foucault, 1980).*

*Below some of her key points:*

*Do you remember when I disappeared from the house? The only thing that I had in my mind was to go to the Arab countries, because I saw a lot of my neighbours' children going there, working there and then changing the house [...]. The only think I imagined was to go there and gain more money. Because I was tired to see my mom cooking enjera <sup>43</sup> every morning ready to be sold and washing other people's clothes.*

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<sup>43</sup> This is the Ethiopian typical bread.



*I was not sure about you (Semira refers to me) [...] I thought you would come sometimes, give us some food and then you would leave us [...] Being educated gives you confidence to say: this is my life [...] I can fight for my rights and I can be independent.*

*From minutes 9:17 to 10:03 Semira while thinking of all those girls that are now in a similar situation as her younger self says:*

*There are some girls staying at home doing nothing and I can convince them to go to school, being free from others, then they will do the same and we can change our world.*



Video 2. [Semira and Arianna on education](#) (Briganti, 2017)

*In early 2019 I received a phone call from Semira, not unusual for her to get in touch with me and update me and my husband on her life. She was particularly delighted to let me know that she has been dating a young man for almost one year and have both decided to introduce each other to the respective families. I too was pleased with the news. I thought of that woman in her late 20s, with a university degree, a job and a bright future ahead. I was sure that the perspective to start a family was already understandably on her mind. A few weeks after the phone call her younger sisters confirmed to have met Semira's boyfriend, who seemed to have made a positive impression on the rest of the family. For a few months I indulged in the idea of something exciting happening to Semira who in my eyes was an example of reliance. The situation changed rapidly and the bright future prospects as well. The family of*

*Semira's boyfriend is a Muslim traditional one. It decided that since the children have been introduced to each other's family the next step was to get married as soon as possible in order for the bride and the groom to be able to live together and start getting to know each other. Rahma and her two other daughters were caught by surprise and so were my husband and me.*

*I am very familiar with the Ethiopian culture as well as with the Muslim community in Ethiopia. I knew that in such culture the absence of a man in Semira's family (Rahma as said above is widow) would have exposed Rahma and her daughters to great social pressure. Not only his family but also neighbours and friends of Rahma started to exercise pressure for the marriage to take place immediately. I could not believe that Semira would consider that, I thought that after all she went through in her life, she would not accept to be told what to do. Moreover, at the time when this happened, she has lost her job and was struggling to find a new one. I talked to her a few times and she gave me the impression to be distressed. She said she did not feel ready, but his family did not want to listen to her reasons (Briganti, 2019). Her younger sister Fozjia wrote me that 'the situation at home was unbearable and that she could not understand how the situation degenerated like that' (Briganti, 2019, private email correspondence).*

*A few weeks later she signed the papers and was officially married. She did not want to move into the house of his in-laws (is part of the culture that the bride lives with the groom and his family) and stayed at Rahma's for a while. The last time I talked to her she was crying on the phone and told me she has committed a terrible mistake. The sense of impotence that this story gives me is not new to me (it resonates with that of Roya in Chapter 1 for instance), but that does not make it less painful. In Chapter 2 I mentioned one of my peers who reminded me that Living Theory is not about creating a "nice" story. This thesis shows that my living-theory is the story of my life and is interwoven with the many stories, often painful of those whom I share my professional*

*and personal life with. For many years the story of Semira made of her resilience, her emotional and intellectual strengths, her joy of life and willpower has been validating what I always believed in, namely that taking responsibility for oneself and acting accordingly may lead to a good change. This recent incident however also shows me in a very practical manner where the boundaries are between being responsible for myself and my own actions and being responsible toward others that implies recognizing that the other is responsible for themselves (Whitehead, 2014). Semira is used to my solution-oriented attitude. This time I do not have any solution to her problem, because it is simply not for me to do so. I thought a great deal about this incident and my reaction was everything but composed. My feelings ranged from denial, and disbelief, to anger, disappointment and despair. Still I do not want to fall into the trap of the 'development professional' who knows a priori what is good for the other and because of that she can "fix things" in any occasion.*

Giri and Van Ufford (2004) argue about that:

In our experience with development projects we find that an ethical agenda has almost always implied an agenda of the care of the other in a hegemonic manner where what is good for the other has already been defined by the benevolent Self. (p. 20)

It is easier to write (cognitively) about Semira than to think (emotionally) about her. At this moment I am not sure I can rationalize my feelings, but I know that if I want to live my values fully and respect her integrity and dignity, I have to have faith in her humanity, in her capacity to overcome the situation and find happiness in her marriage.

### 4.1.3 Reflections

My experience in ID which include the examples from Afghanistan and Ethiopia presented in this narrative, taught me that the meanings of vulnerability are different according to the context. This is also true of the meanings of capabilities which are defined differently by each of my partners in ID. The contexts in which they live and operate are often among the common denominators of their own definitions of capabilities, which shape the solutions they put forth to themselves, to me and other development practitioners. As this chapter demonstrates by listening (Anderson et al., 2012) to my partners in development, I am more capable of understanding their own epistemology, which emerges from the multidimensionality of their subordination to patriarchal power in their own distinctive social structure (Cooper, 2016). I concur with Crenshaw (1991) that there is a ‘need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed’ (p.1245). Therefore, I do not wish to homogenise people’s identity, needs, culture, knowledge and struggle for their unique ways of being. My understanding is resistant to developing a universal model of International Development.

Throughout my 15-year career in developing countries my innumerable conversations with people in difficult situations, have helped me to understand that the answers need to be envisaged by both parties, equal partners in development projects. Those answers need to respond to the *distinctive* conundrums of each *distinctive* social world by adopting the principle of each person’s capability based on treating ‘each one as an end and none as a mere tool of the ends of others’ (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 5).

Once again, I wish to stress the importance of the concept of togetherness (*Ubuntu*) discussed in the previous chapters when engaging in common solutions that aspire to bring about a good change (Chambers, 1995, p. 174). It is not for me *alone* to define

what it is that will bring about a good change in their existence and to define people's capabilities. If the aim of International Development is that of having a positive and generative influence on peoples' lives, it is of fundamental importance for those directly concerned to speak in practical ways (Foucault, 1980) about vulnerabilities, capabilities, knowledge and actions. The actions that Nove Onlus, our development partners and myself decide to take, result not only from an in-depth analysis of the distinctive socio- historical and economic context of the countries we operate in, but from the process of co-creating knowledge (Hall and Tandon, 2017, p. 8). By that I mean the process of co-creating forms of knowledge inclusive of more than one social reality (de Sousa Santos, 2014), where everyone is considered a knower, and no one is on the other side of the Abyssal line (ibid.). The solutions we decide to pursue emerge from this process of knowledge-creation.

Knowledge is defined in several ways: the facts, feelings or experiences of a person or a group of people, a state of knowing or awareness, and/or the consciousness or the familiarity gained by experience or learning. Knowledge is created through research, through the experience of the wise, through the act of surviving in the world, and is represented in text, poetry, music, political discourse, social media, speeches, drama and storytelling. Knowledge is linked to practical skills, to our working lives and to universal and abstract thought. Knowledge is created everyday by each one of us and is central to who we are as human beings. (Escrigas, et. al, 2014, p. Xxxiii)

In light of the above, in Afghanistan our choice was to focus on vocational training and social entrepreneurship while in Ethiopia it was Higher Education. The issues tackled by ID are like a palette of colours in which a nuanced diversity is sovereign, and therefore there is no single solution applicable to every context. Even in patriarchal societies such in Ethiopia and Afghanistan women are not “doomed to immanence” or at least not all women. Even among the most vulnerable there is always a group of

people that can demand their rights and move towards the 'long walk to freedom' (Mandela, 1994, p. 751) as Etlahawy's statement seems to suggest:

I took off my headscarf and I began to demand rights. The revolution has made me much bolder. I'm now much more likely to speak and know I'm entitled to demand my rights, especially when it comes to me. (Etlahawy, 2015, p. 72)

The determination and courage that I witness in the actions taken by the many girls and women I have met along my professional and personal road have led me to believe they are not affected by a 'false consciousness' (Agarwal, 1995, p. 57) as they are aware of the practices that disadvantage them (ibid., p. 57). In my eyes their many forms of resistance are testimony to their discernment that they can 'get a better deal' (ibid., p. 57). In my practical experience they often know how that is possible as well, but the impediments they face do not allow them to become an agent of change. Thus, as a development professional the emphasis I place is on those constraints to their acting on their own interests (ibid., p. 57). I am therefore motivated to keep advocating and acting for women's full representation in various fora as I firmly believe that:

Women's voices and participation in diverse forums is of critical importance, both as an issue of justice and equality and because the active presence of women can put gender-specific concerns on the agenda and contribute to collective actions that are more effective in meeting the three dimensions of sustainability. (Agarwal, 2010, quoted in UN WOMEN, 2014, p. 34)

Another common denominator of the stories I collected before and during my research is represented by the self-perpetrating energy I call generativity. This energy seems to permeate the lives of some of the people I worked with and translates into their desire to nurture the blossoming of the next generation (Briganti, 2016). As

already noted in Chapter 2, some of the people I work with in various developing countries have already taken responsibility for actions that support other vulnerable people. If I look back at my years of practice, I can confidently argue that many of my development partners do not need external support anymore in order to sustain themselves. I do not mean to suggest that they have solved all their problems. However, they seem to have acquired the capacity to provide for themselves after having fully acquired the ability to assess and solve their own problems, without support (Briganti, 2016, p.144). What I want to highlight here is that I observe how many of those people generate something anew that has an influence on other people's lives. In that way I observe the systemic influence at community level in practice. This systemic influence at community level contributes to the enlargement of the global network of relationships, based on people's unique constellation of values for the flourishing of humanity (Whitehead, 1989). This is what gives me hope and makes my life worth living. As mentioned in Chapter 1 this is what gives my life a meaning (Frankl, 1946, p.113).

Buscaglia (1972) narrates a similar experience when he writes:

Education should be the process of helping everyone to discover his [sic] uniqueness, to teach him [sic] how to develop that uniqueness, and then to show him [sic] how to share it because that's the only reason for having anything. (p. 9)

Finally, I wish to stress that I do not have any expectations for people to engage in generative actions. I believe that it is everyone's free choice to commit to their own wellbeing and also that of others. My actions do not expect anything in return but the joy to know that my contribution might have alleviated someone's suffering.

## **CHAPTER 5**

**As a female development economist, development practitioner and Living Theory researcher where do I go next?**



## Introduction

This concluding chapter is about my original contribution(s) to educational knowledge and theory, their significance and my growth into my new professional endeavours. My original contribution(s) to educational knowledge and theory emerge from telling the story of my professional life of the past 15 years. My thesis offers reflections on my own process of becoming the best development practitioner and living-theory researcher I can be to date. This is based on the I~we~us relationship that I am creating with the people I have been working with. Now I can affirm with confidence that I know who I am, I know where I stand, and I know what I stand for. The chapter ends by exploring my new professional endeavour and the changes this has brought into my life. The new job I am engaging in is not about ID anymore but about policy-making and politics, quite a novel realm for me. My new assignment is embedded in power relationships of a different nature than my previous one. I therefore discuss the role of power from a new perspective, namely that of a decision-maker (myself) who has been attempting for more than a decade to shift the discourse from power over people to power with people and power from within (Hanlon, 2005, p. 33). One of the major challenges is represented by the fact that in my new position the I~we~us relationship seems not to exist. However, by admitting to myself that this job/position is indeed powerful in nature and by accepting my responsibilities, I am also welcoming further possibilities for me to generate a systemic influence at the political level (macro-level).

## 5.1. My original contribution(s) to educational knowledge and theory

We only have one life and we can choose to make a world a better place.

It would be much easier if we concentrated on our similarities instead of on our differences (BBC, 2019)

In 2015, I decided to utilize a Living Theory methodology to research my first 15 years as a development practitioner with a background in economics specializing in International Development and gender issues. As mentioned in Chapter 1, since 2005, I have lived and worked in Afghanistan (2005-early 2008), Ethiopia (early 2005 and 2008-2011), Georgia (2012-2013), Sri Lanka/Maldives (2014), and Albania/Bosnia and Herzegovina (2015-2019). This decision was motivated by my interest in the explanation of my educational influences in my own learning, in the learning of the people I work with and in the learning of the social formations (Whitehead, 2019) that affect my practice and understanding of International Development. The wish to explore my years of practice does not emerge from an “egotistical” perspective, but from the desire to learn from it and from the knowledge that has been co-created during this time. That might provide an alternative way to engage in ID, where responsibility, namely the primacy of the personal (Chambers, 2017, p.165) is key and where ‘values, norms, and methods are integral to a new professionalism’ (ibid., p.163). By that I mean that my way of rethinking development (as stated in Chapter 2) implies a shift of perspective from I to we and from we to us (I~we~us). This shift encompasses the self-development of all partners in development, hence not only that of the development professional but also that of the so-called ‘beneficiaries’ of development.

Rethinking development from the vantage point and practice of self-development urges a shift of perspective from us: a shift from looking at development as ameliorating the condition of the other to looking at it as an initiative in self-development. Self-development here refers to the self-development of both the agents of development as

well as subjects, the so-called target groups of interventions. (Giri and Van Ufford, 2004, p. 21)

This doctoral thesis, which represents my exploration of ID based on LT research methodology, claims to be making an original contribution to educational knowledge and a contribution to educational research methodology in the following ways:

- I introduce my unique constellation of values (Chapter 1) into the International Development sector with a contribution to the idea of generativity in sustainable development (Chapter 2);
- I acknowledge and describe the influence of Living Theory research in the emergence of a global network of relationships (a global social movement) of researchers and practitioners, which hold values and engage in actions for the flourishing of humanity (Chapters 2 and 3);
- I recognize the significance of gender, professionally, personally and interpersonally and I am aware of the influence that a gendered epistemology has in explaining how gender justice contributes to my work as a female development economist and practitioner living and operating in a capitalistic era (Chapter 3);
- I use a self-reflexive practice and the primacy of the personal to enrich International Development and help practitioners in improving their practice and contribute to both Living Theory research and research into International Development (Chapters 3 and 4);
- I co-create an example of ways of dealing with ID in practice at micro and meso level that offers an alternative to the neoliberal approach to ID and fosters the necessity to prioritize the human dimension of ID by using the I~we~us approach (Chapter 4).

I concur with Brown (2010) when she asserts that it takes courage to tell the story of who you are with your whole heart. This thesis is indeed my way of telling *my* own

story; the story of a development practitioner, who does not aspire to offer the 'perfect solution' but believes herself to have the courage to expose her own and her story's imperfections as a result of her authenticity (ibid.). In order to be authentic, I had to let go the overarching idea of what kind of development professional I should be according to my Western education and upbringing and make room for the development professional I want to become (ibid). This process of becoming (which is my living-theory as explained in Chapter 2) is ongoing and is based on the I~we~us relationship that I am creating with the people I have been working with and implies co-learning and co-creating new knowledge. My research has taught me how these two selves could coexist. Marshall elucidates my standpoint:

Learn to see from your one eye with the best or the strengths in the Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing ... and learn to see from your other eye with the best or the strengths in the mainstream (Western or Eurocentric) knowledges and ways of knowing ... but most importantly, learn to see with both these eyes together, for the benefit of all. (Marshall, 2017)

This process of becoming is strengthening my ontological I, namely the understanding of *who I am*, *where I stand*, and *what I stand for*. At the core of my ontology as stressed in the both Chapters 1 and 2 I found my values that give meaning and purpose to my life and that I use as living standards of judgment (Laidlaw, 1996) and explanatory principles.

In order to substantiate my own authenticity as a researcher, practitioner and author of this thesis and be able to communicate my best knowledge to date, I engaged in triangulation and other validation practices with colleagues, friends, and academics throughout my research in order to attempt to 'decolonize my imagination' (Landry and Maclean, 1996, p. 238), my knowledge and my actions. I find the thoughts below most

relevant to explain my will to co-create new knowledge in ID together with my partners in development:

There are key opportunities for a transformative knowledge agenda that is co-constructed with those who are experiencing inequalities and are in a position to influence change through policies, practices and politics...In a world in which knowledge shapes power and voice, and vice versa, the fundamental inequality in the production of knowledge about inequality itself must be addressed. (UNESCO, 2016, p. 275<sup>44</sup>)

I therefore started not by *telling* about my research findings but by *sharing* them through the above-mentioned categories, seeking also for alternative perspectives. The latest iteration of my thesis presented to the reader is not only the result of my self-reflexivity, but more significantly the result of having tested my own reflexivity against other people's knowledge by engaging in triangulations and validation practices. In practical terms I have been involved in the following practices.

In late 2014 I started being part of a research validation group called 'Living Theory Research Group' whose international members e-meet (using skype) every Sunday evening at 8 pm GMT. The validation group counts on the active participation of more than ten people from different walks of life ranging from academics, teachers, health visitors, social workers, non-profit managers, information and technology experts, psychologists and Ph.D. students. Since then, every week support is provided to and received by the members of the group. The aim is to help each other in falsifying (Mellor, 1977) our living-theories. We do this in order to strengthen our self-reflexivity and understanding of each other's explanation of the educational influences in our own

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<sup>44</sup> The 'United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization' is commonly known as UNESCO.

learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence our practice.



Figure 1: Screenshot of the skype call of the Living Theory Research Group on December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2018

Our common denominator is the use of LT methodology in our enquiries. In 2016, in order to share our experience and knowledge with a broader public, Sonia Hutchinson (a member of the group) and I wrote a paper on the usage of new technologies in fostering a more democratic and cross-cultural way of learning. We presented a paper titled [Living Theory Research Group – a model of sustainable learning for the flourishing of humanity](#) at an international conference on sustainable development whose participants were not familiar with LT.

The practice of sharing my findings and knowledge with an international public is one of the instruments for triangulation/validation/falsification I have used since the beginning of my research. Since the beginning of my Ph.D. in January 2015 I attended four international conferences and presented five papers on ID using a LT methodology. I used the feedback of other participants and moderators to strengthen my research and to clarify why I have chosen LT as methodology to describe my ID

engagement and what is LT about. Their questions, doubts about the mandate of the ID sector, and sometimes scepticism towards my LT-based research, proved very useful to clarify my thinking and strengthen my doctoral writing. I learned how to clarify some of the meanings of ID for those who are not familiar with it and are currently informed by the negative narrative of the many governmental and non-governmental organizations involved in various issues omnipresent in the global political agenda such as migration which is only one of the many aspects ID covers nowadays. I also learned how to sharpen my way of communicating about LT research, why I have chosen it and what are the advantage of using it to investigate my profession.

I also published two papers in the EJOLTs. Submitting those papers was a very rewarding learning experience. The review process is open and transparent. By that I mean that both the papers submitted and the contribution of the review team (usually made up of three people) are made public on the 'Open Reviewing Space' and the 'Community Space' of EJOLTs for everyone to engage with the discussion. The living values of the reviewing system are relatable (Bassey, 1981) to mine as they are living values such as love, freedom, justice, compassion, courage, responsibility and care (EJOLTs, 2019, n.p.). Thanks to my reviewers and their numerous comments I was able to tackle the gaps that my writing presented and discuss the validity of my findings with an audience of senior researchers. Lately I also became a peer-reviewer of EJOLTs and I reviewed two papers so far. Becoming involved in people's ideas and living-theories proved most beneficial to enlarge my understanding of my own living-theory.

My partners in development projects whether or not present in this doctoral thesis have been involved in my research at various times. I shared my writing (via email, skype or social media) with the people I speak about and mention in my thesis. In order to be

respectful of the time they devoted to my research I decided to share with them only the writing related to their own story. I asked them to go through what I wrote and evaluate the accuracy and authenticity with which I portray their stories. As both my partners in development projects and I are using English as a common language (which is not our native language) I also wanted to make sure that I have not misinterpreted what they said during the interviews. Before and after adding their stories to my thesis I obtained their permission in writing (as stated at the beginning of Chapter 4). Some of my own writing and material I used in my initial draft have been erased as the protagonists did not find appropriate to include them. All the people who are part in the last iteration of my thesis confirmed that what I wrote corresponds to their meanings. I am very grateful to all of them who helped me so greatly by allowing me to use the stories of their lives in my research. I am even more grateful as I know that for them it was not easy to recall those painful moments.

As for my colleagues of Nove Onlus and other organizations I have worked with, I shared all my findings (as mentioned in Chapter 3) with them and obtained their feedback on the way I used the video and audio material. An important validation of the authenticity of my work comes from my Nove Onlus' colleague Daniela. She asked my permission to translate Chapter 3 into Italian, and to use it as a description of our work, based on our values and understanding of ID and to share it with a group of young Italian people interested in our Afghan projects. I was not expecting my academic writing to be used as a means of communicating what we do as development practitioners outside the academic realm. I was delighted to acknowledge that and believe this may affirm that I am succeeding in communicating my story in ways that are not just significant for me.

In January 2017 I took part in a course entitled, 'Using Participatory Action Research to Improve Development Practice' organized by Institute of Development Studies at



the University of Sussex. My goal was twofold: I wanted to deepen knowledge about Participatory Action Research and clarify the difference between that and LT methodology; I wanted the chance to discuss my research with Robert Chambers, whose writing on ID has taught me so much. I believe our conversations helps me in assuming a better responsibility for my researcher self, my writing and the influence the latter might have.

Chambers was not familiar with LT methodology, but he appreciated its values-led and self-reflexive approach, which in his opinion is fundamental to ID as his latest book 'Can we know better' (often cited in my writing) states. Some of the suggestions he gave me during our face-to-face conversations are the following:

- To help LT methodology to spread throughout various disciplines, by keeping the core values and adapting to other contexts, perhaps even changing its name to something easier to understand and to be more accessible for a greater number of people;
- As reflexivity is becoming more popular among mainstream academia, he sees LT as fitting a range of university's courses;
- I would need a workspace (i.e. a university or an ID organization) that allowed me to keep researching LT and ID and bring the methodology to a level where it could grow and be used by many more practitioners.

He also asked me a question that keeps puzzling me, namely whether 'I am ready to corrupt LT methodology' (I am using his exact words). I acknowledge that I am part of the second generation of Living Theory researchers who are growing their own way of developing their living-theory narratives from the work done since the 1980s by the methodology's creator Jack Whitehead (one of my Ph.D. supervisors) and his colleagues. However, I am still not completely clear on how to "corrupt" it (in Chambers' words) and stimulate more development practitioners in considering it as one of the methodologies that can enrich our work. After the course there was a brief email

correspondence in which I thanked him for his advice. I was pleased to read his response.

Dear Arianna,

The pleasure and enlightenment were mine, and the provocation to try to think a bit more deeply. Thanks for your visit and may things go well for you, Robert. (Chambers, email correspondence, 2017)

In June 2018, in order to strengthen my understanding of ID, in particular its relationship with the neoliberal approach that greatly influences ID (as explained in Chapter 2), I participated in the summer school on 'Responsible Capitalism: Micro and Macro-institutional conditions of transformation'<sup>45</sup>. I was the only development professional among the participants and the only one using an LT methodology. The insights and suggestions of the other Ph.D. students that took part in the summer school and the international professors, were pivotal in enlarging my knowledge on issues relating to neo-liberal policies, but also the power of social movements worldwide, language, societal change and transnational governance.

All the above experiences - although key to enriching my epistemology (my theory of knowing as discussed in Chapter 2) - will not provide me with any certainty but the fact that my epistemological theory is fallible, hence I will keep looking for constructive critiques as the following seems to suggest:

I have offered a feminist (e)pistemological theory that insists that knowers/subjects are fallible, that our criteria are corrigible, and that our standards are socially constructed, and thus continually in need of critique and reconstruction. I have argued that an (e)pistemology that rests on an assumption of fallibility entails pluralism, both in terms

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<sup>45</sup> The summer school was organized by the Venice International University

of there being no one final answer at the end of inquiring, and also in terms of the need to be open and inclusive of others, in order to help us compensate for our own limitations [...]. (Thayer-Bacon, 2003, p. 273).

## **5.2. My projection into a new endeavour: where do I go next.**

Those who have the privilege to know have the duty to act, and in that action are the seeds of new knowledge (Einstein, n.d.)

At the beginning of 2019 I started a new job for an intergovernmental organization. I have been assigned to Morocco in order to lead the office for economics. In Chapter 1 I described my profession as designing policies and implementing projects that focus on poverty-reduction strategies in developing countries, in respect of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, since I started this new job, I do not work in the ID sector anymore. In practical terms I am working uniquely with governmental bodies (i.e. Ministerial bodies and Parliaments) by helping them to design and enforce laws. I do not have partners in development projects and the I~we~us relationship with the ordinary people supposed to benefit from these laws is missing.

It took me a while to accept this enormous change and I admit that I ponder over the appropriateness of this job to my ID and living-theory self. I accepted the work as I found it stimulating to learn something new, but also because I need to keep assuring my family a steady income. My new position is of a privileged nature. It implies that I am now in the situation 'to influence change through policies, practices and politics' (UNESCO, 2016, p. 275). I have some power to shape the policies we put forth to the Government of Morocco.

Throughout this thesis I have often mentioned the concepts of power (power over people, power with people and power from within) as engrained in my profession, in

the lives of my partners in development, and in the process of the co-creation of knowledge that my living-theory is about. In the previous Chapter I have also written about my attempt to decolonize my imagination and my research methodology, and about working with those on the other side of the abyssal line in order to include in the global discourse those who are often still considered “subaltern”. I continue to appreciate that my role as someone who works for international organizations (often donor organizations) is power-laden. My professional and personal life has always been focusing on shifting from ‘power over people’ to ‘power with people and power from within’ (Hanlon, 2005, p. 33), in order to avoid the powerful imposing her unavoidable truth (Foucault, 1983) to others. I believe that I can manage to get closer to ‘power with people and power from within’ due to my ongoing relationships with those I have been working with, that make me wary of the ‘diseases of power’ (Foucault, 1982 p. 779). However, notwithstanding my attempts, my pragmatic self, reminds me that ‘a society without power relations can only be an abstraction’ (ibid, p. 791).

The organization I now work for has a reputation as a powerful political institution whose truth is listened to. To explain what I mean by that I cite Foucault again (1976):

Power never ceases its interrogation, its inquisition, its registration of truth: it institutionalizes, professionalizes and rewards its pursuit. In the last analysis, we must produce truth as we must produce wealth, indeed we must produce truth in order to produce wealth in the first place. In another way, we are also subjected to truth in the sense in which it is truth that makes the laws, that produces the true discourse which, at least partially, decides, transmits and itself extends upon the effects of power. In the end, we are judged, condemned, classified determined in our undertakings, destined to a certain mode of living or dying, as a function of the true discourses which are the bearers of the specific effects of power (p. 91).

I believe my new work position is one that ‘produces the true discourse which decides, transmits and itself extends upon the effects of power’. I have no aspiration of changing the power structures intrinsic in any organization, unless it is about Nove Onlus. As its co-founder and active deputy chairperson, I would like my values (discussed in Chapter 1) and those of my colleagues to be at the core of our commitment. My experience has taught me, however, that powerful positions are used to influence decisions. As a living-theorist I am committed to producing an explanation of the educational influences in my own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that affect my practice. As a development professional I am interested in working with individuals and towards a systemic influence at community level (as in Chapter 4) as well as in having a systemic influence at organizational level (as in Chapter 3). I am beginning to understand that my current job offers me the possibility to have a systemic influence at the political level (macro-level).

Although I have been advising various ministries in different countries on political matters, I also always had the privilege of operating at micro and meso levels. Working directly with people is what gives me the deepest joy as this doctoral thesis has hopefully clarified. Now, I do not have the comfort of relying on that human factor (as we called it at Nove Onlus) made up of their generous smiles, their insightful stories, their forgiveness for my incapacity to fully understand their struggles, their words of encouragement, their trust in what we are doing together and their love for, and faith in, **my** humanity.

This doctoral thesis as representative of my past 15 years in the ID sector, provides me with some of the deepest insights of my life – into my own growth and my educational influence in my own learning as a professional and as human being. As outlined in Chapter 1 I can see truly now those about whom I speak (Kuo, 2016, n.p.), namely myself. I can see that this research led me to the cusp of myself and grounded

me in my ontological I more thoroughly. That is to say that although at the moment my new job makes me feel far from my “emotional home” I also know that I cannot possibly forget the way back home. In Chapter 2 I use the metaphor of the roadmap to explain my internal journey of self-exploration that shapes my ontology, my values, living standards of judgement (Laidlaw, 1996) and explanatory principles. I am still travelling on my road to learning and I am aware that ‘the better travellers know themselves and the better they understand the role they themselves play in building and recognizing their conceptual construct, the more they will discover as they follow the trail of realization’ (unknown).

So far, the journey has enabled me to understand who I am, where I stand, and what I stand for. In the part of my journey that I have recently commenced, I will have to get used to my new role and learn how to work at the macro level by bringing it into the forum of my experience and values as a living-theorist and development practitioner. Sometimes, I expect to feel myself as a living contradiction (Whitehead, 1989, p.45) but I also expect myself to be able to overcome that with the insights that I gained so far from my practice and research. If I wish to, I can learn how to produce a valid explanation of my educational influence in my own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence my practice and understanding of the political landscape I operate in.

As I am approaching the end of my thesis, I am in the position to say that I have already gained a sense of anticipation about how to integrate my practical experience in ID coupled with my living-theory self. I am beginning to understand that on the one hand an intergovernmental organization lacks the agility of a small non-profit organization working at grassroots level but also struggling for surviving. On the other however a bigger framework of operation can provide me with direct access to decision-making processes at the political level. I therefore started to renew the portfolio I am

responsible for and create new possibilities for developing project ideas that reflect my living values.

One of the topics included in my portfolio is the fight against corruption. I find the topic highly significant and in order to be true to my ID self I decided to add to the work done by my predecessors so far, a human rights-based approach, which includes gender justice. My new colleagues and I are embarking on ventures that are new to the country we operate in by focusing on issues such as trafficking in human beings in public procurement. This matter has been tackled so far only by training public officials in avoiding corrupt practices throughout the process and strengthening the legal framework. However, issues such as labour exploitation of adult and children in the supply chain have been overlooked. In Albania no research has been conducted to explore whether corruption has a more negative impact on vulnerable group and on women than on men. In both cases I have the decision-making power not only to address those gaps and work with my team on designing new projects, but also to negotiate with the local government to facilitate necessary changes for instance to local legislation. The organization I work for does have the political leverage for engaging in those sorts of negotiations.

As I mentioned already, I am new to this kind of work landscape, but I am experienced enough to know that such a highly politicized environment will present me with a range of new challenges and limitations. I am not in the position to say clearly what those challenges will be, but I can sense that my values will inspire me to find solutions, take actions and develop my next research questions. I do not mind being uncertain about where my profession will lead me as this is the beauty of life which is constantly evolving, as it is my living-theory. This is why the reader perhaps might perceive these last lines as unfinished, but I would like to remind you that my narrative only represents my best knowledge so far (McNiff, 1992, n.p.).

## CONCLUSION

I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill,

one only finds that there are many more hills to climb.

I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me,

to look back on the distance I have come.

But I can rest only for a moment, for with freedom comes responsibilities,

and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not yet ended

(Mandela, 1994, p. 751)

Throughout my thesis I often used the metaphor of the journey; hence I wish to conclude it by using the same one. In particular, now that my writing is approaching the end, I am reminded of Mandela's wisdom:

1. [...] but I can rest only for a moment, for with freedom comes responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not yet ended' (ibid., p. 751)

These pages condense my experience of the past 15 years on the road to learning about International Development and Living Theory research, and my companions along the journey have been my unique constellation of values: outrage, empathy, social and gender justice, love for and faith in humanity, dignity, responsibility. This journey has been a complex route of self-exploration that has culminated in my own living-theory of International Development that rests on my understandings of ID in theory and practice, some of its shortcomings and strengths and its commonalities with LT as a social movement and a way of life. I have been able to make sense of my work as a female development economist operating in a capitalistic era using a Living Theory methodology and utilizing my story and my values as an explanation of my educational influences in my own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations that affect my practice in ID. This has been presented in my thesis as based on the primacy of the personal and on human relationships (I~we~us). My practice as



a development professional and my LT research are offered as ways of reconstituting development as a global responsibility which I also narrated using the stories of my partners in ID, at micro, meso and macro levels.

Consciously my journey of self-exploration started in 2005 in Addis Ababa with the life-changing experience of meeting my daughter Marta for the first time, as described in the General Prologue. I remember how much I wanted to free myself intellectually from the indoctrination of my western upbringing on what kind of development professional I ought to be. My encounter with a four-year-old helped me initiate my personal and professional on-going change.

2. [...] with freedom comes responsibilities (ibid. p. 751)

I have learnt that with freedom comes responsibilities, while working in the field and at the same time generating my own living-theory of International Development. Mine is a journey of awakening where I acknowledge my responsibilities as a human being. My thesis discusses and presents my awakening in the form of a multi-layered original contribution to knowledge which demonstrates why my writing matters in the first place. By that I mean that as a Living Theory thesis it is relatable (Bassey, 1998) to other living-theorists who seek to engage in activities contributing to the flourishing of humanity (Whitehead, 1989). My thesis may therefore be influential in the current discourses around ID and helpful to development practitioners confronted with similar conundrums. I would argue that this thesis is a 'an invitation [to development practitioners] to try it and see if the same thing happens for you' (Dzakiria, 2012, p. 44)

My original contributions to knowledge focuses on:

- my unique constellation of my living values introduced into ID that gives meaning and purpose to my private and professional life and is the essence of my ontology. My ontology, my story, and my living -theory all derive from the interwoven experience of my own life and values with the lives and values of the people I work with. The relationship between us narrated in this thesis opened the way to a transformative growth that I described as the I~we~us relationship, namely the process of engaging in a life of ethical commitments through the bonding of self with other selves. The thesis illustrates how such relationships blossom at micro and meso levels;
- my self-reflexive practice as a LT researcher that rests on my sense of responsibility to action and towards others and corroborates the importance of the primacy of the personal in International Development leading me to conceptualize it as a global responsibility. My findings may be useful to other development practitioners engaged in both LT and ID;
- the influence that my work and research may have on various practitioners and partners in International Development have been described in the thesis as the emergence of a global network of relationships of changemakers that hold values and take actions for a fairer world;
- the study of LT and ID that reinforce each other and consolidate in a common goal, namely the commitment to work towards the flourishing of humanity;
- the influences that a gendered epistemology has in my daily life as researcher, female development economist and practitioner. I feel confident to claim that my own pursuit of gender justice has improved the quality of my work, my life as a woman, and a mother who lives in a patriarchal society;
- the common goal and synergy between LT and ID from which a generative form of development arises, has been presented as the ability to support the

thriving of present and future generations. In ID the finite nature of my meaning of sustainability has been superseded by generativity. Many of my partners in ID whose capabilities I contributed to support towards their realization, are currently engaged in doing the same for other people. The many examples I collected in those years of practice have not clarified yet whether generative development is something that a development professional can foresee and aspire to at the beginning of a development project or it is a human phenomenon we can only have the pleasure to recognize whenever we witness it. This is a query I have raised throughout the thesis, in particular in Chapters 2 and 3.

3. [...] and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not yet ended (ibid., p. 751)

My academic journey has arrived near its end and brought me to a place where I know who I am, where I stand and what I stand for. My journey, however, as an LT researcher and development professional is far from its conclusion as 'the long walk is not yet ended'. My living-theory self is still committed to continuing to produce an explanation of the educational influence in my own learning, in the learning of others and in that of the social formations that affect my practice. As a development professional the I~we~us relationship is at the core of the kind of ID I want to be a part of, in which people are changemakers and their shared values prompt them into actions to make the world a fairer place.

As explained in Chapter 5 I do not have a clear idea of where my current assignment is leading me to and that comes with no sense of discomfort. This is because my thesis has left me in place where I am grounded in my ontology, where I attempt to live by my values as fully as possible and where I am cognizant of the fact that my living theory is

being influenced by the epistemologies of the people I am meeting along the way, who enrich my life and my profession.

So far, my practical experience has shown me that ID needs to be reformed if it is to contribute to a good change (in Chambers' words) in the lives of people whose human rights are being neglected and who strive for a dignified existence. This is the reason why I decided to become a development professional in the first place. However, when I started my career, I knew too little to understand the contradictory forces that are influencing the system of International Development worldwide. I believe I was acting out of a 'gut feeling' rather than being metacognitively aware of whether what I was doing was *really* alleviating people's suffering or causing an extra burden. In other words, I ignored what was guiding me, what provided me with a sense of direction while I was moving in a very foggy landscape. I wanted to learn more about myself as a development professional, the influence of my actions at various levels (and vice versa) and most importantly about my partners in development and our relationship. At that time, I saw them uniquely as 'beneficiaries' as explained in this thesis, namely passive recipients of my decisions and actions related to their lives.

A Master's Degree in Development Management provided me with a useful technical and institutional framework of ID but still limited if I were to transcend the surface of that already set framework. My journey was still missing a sense of direction that I found when I started to use LT as a research methodology to better understand ID. Embracing ID is of course not the only way to contribute to a good change in people's lives (and in my own), but ID is the path I have chosen and around which my job and my thesis gravitate. I am always very keen to learn from friends, acquaintances and colleagues what their approach is. I am specifying this as I do not want to be misleading and suggest that the only way to work towards the flourishing of humanity (Whitehead, 1998) ought to be related to ID.

Looking back, I know that the first thing LT provided my research with, is the orientation along the intense and self-reflexive journey of exploring myself as a development professional, as a woman, a mother and researcher. This is the reason why this metaphor is constantly present in my writing. The second and fundamental thing I understood was the importance of values. Both Whitehead (1989) and Chambers (2017) stress values in their life-long research. Still I remember the difficulties and reluctance I had in comprehending what they meant by that. One of the first conversations with Prof. Whitehead on values did not produce the effect I was expecting. I have to admit that I did not quite recognize the importance of explaining my values, explanatory principles and living standards of judgment (Laidlaw, 1996) in order to become a better development professional. After numerous conversations with my Ph.D. supervisors and colleagues over many years I learnt that the primacy of the personal (Chambers, 2017) starts indeed with metacognitively understanding myself and my ontology that rests on my unique constellation of values. What I mean by metacognitively understanding myself and my ontology is that the many years spent as an LT researcher provided me with the capacity to grow deeper in the way I make sense of my reality as a female development professional, a mother, a human being who is understanding her place in the world. I believe I acquired the capacity to evaluate the quality of my own living values (Laidlaw, 1996), epistemologies and actions. The reflections woven into my thesis are part of this inner growth on which my concluding ideas are resting for now.

It then became clear that the 'gut feeling' which I thought was guiding me in my early years was in fact my values. I found it complicated to name them and to understand whether or not I was living them fully in my personal and professional life. I remember my surprise when I found out for the first time that I was 'preaching' about holding certain values, but my actions were contradicting that in practice. The consequence of

that awakening is that I walked away from a job which represented the first living contradiction I fully understood I was being faced with. To me that moment still represents the 'point of no return' that marked the time when I understood what LT research is and what makes me a living-theory researcher. Once I got in touch with my ontology and my values, I could not ignore them anymore. They would act as my lodestar and remind me of the influences (negative and positive) my actions might have on other people's lives and consequently on my own. Now I know that my values *are* my conscience and are helping me discover my critical consciousness. This process resonates with Freire's (1975e) concept of conscientization, in which I engaged through a practice of (self)reflection and action that is at the core of my ID work. I felt for the first time as St. Augustine (1961) describes:

For I was: I was alive: I could feel: I could guard my personality, the imprint of that mysterious unity from which my being was derived.

This is how I feel about my profession that is infused with the will to contribute to a fairer world. I wish to refer again to Freire's idea of the revolutionary transformation of society, which he believes 'leads to people organizing themselves to take action so as to change their social realities' (Nyirenda, 1996, p. 6). However, the people I met along my journey made me realize that for many it is very difficult if not impossible to 'take an action so to change their social realities'. Due to their condition some of them seem to be 'prohibited from creatively taking part in the transformation of their society and therefore prohibited from being' (Freire, 1970, p. 30). In order to clarify my meaning, I would like to tell one more story, the last and conclusive one of my thesis.

*I met Ana in Albania, at a beauty center in Tirana where she works as a beautician. At the time of my writing she is a 28-year-old mother of two showing an energetic and witty attitude for life. Soon our relationship become friendly and our conversations shift*

*the focus from beauty treatments to family. Every time I would meet her, I would start the conversation by asking about her children, their health and their school performance as appropriate in the Albanian culture. One day I noticed that she looked much less cheerful and changed expression when I asked about the kids. She was very worried for her 5 years old boy, whom she said, 'is different from the other boys in his age' (Briganti, field notes, 2018). Ana told me she went to the hospital for a check-up and found out that Klodian her son is autistic. Ana is not familiar with the terminology and does not know what implications autism has on the life of the boy. The doctors did not provide her with any clues apart from telling her that Klodian needs therapy. Ana then asked me for clues. I tried my best to explain what autism is and encouraged her to look for a skilled therapist. She replied that she has no money for therapy. I then asked questions about the school he goes to and whether his teachers can help. Ana became sadder and sadder and replies that Klodian would spend the entire day on his own, isolated from the other kids and not taken care of by his teachers who clearly stated to lack the time to focus on the boy. She said she feels left alone dealing with a problem she does not know how to solve.*

*The Albanian health system is known for being dysfunctional and corrupt (Vian, 2011, p. 4), public institutions are weak and unable to respond to people's need (ibid., p. 4). Due to my work experience in Albania with civil society organizations I am familiar with the only organization in the country that supports children with mental disabilities. I contacted them to ask whether they have specialized personnel that could assist a child with autism. Luckily, they do, and the treatments are free of charge. Ana brought Klodian to the organization's center the day after. I received her call a few days later as she wanted to thank me for the contact (she found the center very well organized and professional and Klodian is happy to go there) and for having paid the therapy. I told her that I did not pay because the center does not charge any money. Ana is unbelieving so I explain her what no profit organization means. Her response was as simple as profound: 'I am sure they help people because helping others make them*

*feel better. Even if I am poor, I help people in my neighborhood whenever I can and this makes me feel happy' (Briganti, field notes, 2018). Indeed, I feel very well knowing that Klodian finally has the right to being treated by professionals and that his mother feels less lonely.*

*My conversations with Ana continue over the years. She opened up telling me more about her family that forced her to get married when she was 17, her physically and mentally abusive husband who spends all the money she earns leaving her and the kids with the bare minimum and again her feeling of loneliness and desperation for not knowing whom to ask for help. She wanted to leave his house but with her little salary she cannot afford the rent of a new apartment. She tried to divorce him various times, but when he found out he turned even more violent. She found the courage to go to a lawyer once, but he asked her for sex favors to initiate the paperwork. When she tried to ask her parents and closest friends for support and understanding the response, she told me were the same: 'Why are you making such a fuzz, this is our culture and men are like that. You should be happy to have a husband in the first place' (Briganti, field notes, 2019).*

*In my professional experience with women victim of domestic violence, the pattern of desperation and loneliness that unite them nourish the vicious circle they are in and therefore they are often unable to break it alone. My observation is that often they are not only incapable of breaking the cycle, but their problems escalate as it seems the circumstances force women like Ana to pursue what would appear to me as the wrong decision. Ana got pregnant again, but she did not want to keep the baby as she feels she is already struggling to provide for her two children. I asked how I can help. She fears going back to the hospital, because last time she was there delivering her son the doctors left her bleeding for a long time until the husband bribed them (Briganti, field notes, 2019) for taking care of her. I therefore offer her to go to a private*



*gynecologist but again she refused due to lack of money. Saddened and worried to see how she is struggling for a dignified life I offered to lend her the money and begged her to consult with a reliable doctor (I found one with impeccable references). Ana is a very proud woman and I knew she did not want me to provide her with any financial support. Indeed, she did not accept my offer and performed an abortion in a highly dangerous environment. She felt so sick afterwards that she could not go to work for quite some time and her meagre earnings were cut for those days of absence.*

I believe that Ana's story, like the many others in my thesis encapsulate my meaning of development which rests on Chamber's insights that 'development is good change' but is rooted in the process that enables the 'good change' to occur. Ana and my other partners in development have taught me that development means first and foremost "having a chance". Ana was not in the position to help and provide herself with the possibility to initiate "a good change" in her life or as Freire wrote to, 'take an action so to change her social realities' (Nyirenda, 1996, p.6). In my experience people like Ana often need to first have the chance to change their social realities. As a development practitioner I understand that my responsibility towards others is to act for the co-creation of a "good change" aiming at a fairer world as argued in this thesis. In order to enable the co-creation of a "good change" to happen, both partners in development need first to have a chance. This process is not linear. I imagine it as a spiral, which I summarized in the diagram below:

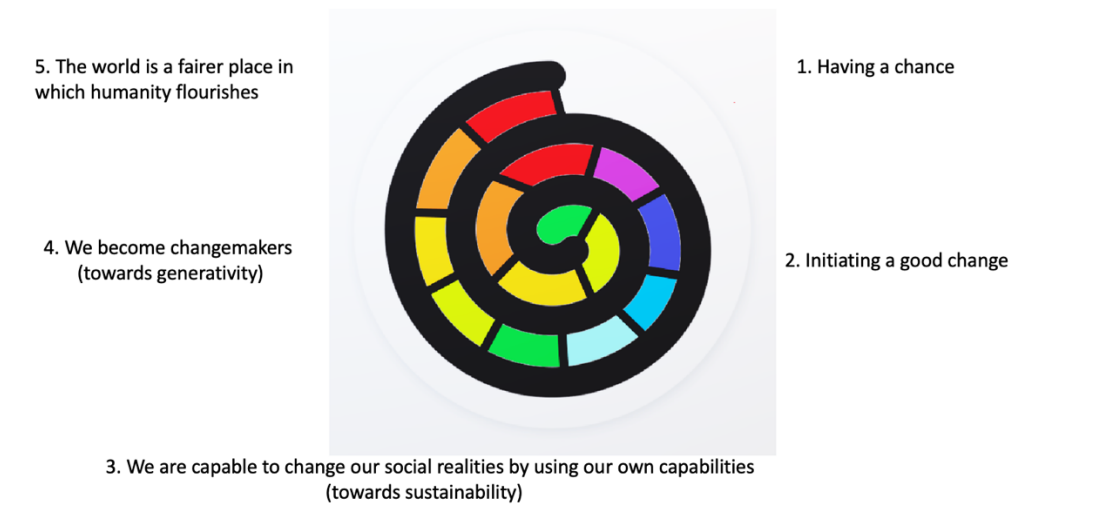


Figure 1: Development is having a chance

*In the summer of 2019, I attempted to explain this to Ana. We met for a coffee and we started talking again about her situation. I told Ana that 'having a chance' is based on reciprocity. I told her to visualize two hands that hold each other. However, in order for both hands to get to the point to hold each other, they have to want to reach out to each other. I told her that my responsibility is to stretch out my arm, but only she can give me the chance to hold her hand and only she can give herself the change to hold mine. The result of our talk was that when I offered her a job, she accepted my offer. The salary she will get from it will top up her income as a beautician and could be invested in her future and if she will embrace the path of generativity also that of her children (Briganti, field notes, 2019).*

Ana does not know that but while I was talking to her our conversation helped me greatly in visualizing the exact moment when the I~we become ~us. The above is the essence of my thesis in which the many forms of data collected throughout my years of experience have led me to conclude that development is first and foremost about having a chance. In Chapter 2 I argued that I am among those who consider

development as originated 'in a new beginning of hope'. In my worldview 'a new beginning of hope' starts with having a chance. As far as my actions are concerned, I use my empathy to seize the moment when I can stretch my arm to reach out to the other person. If on the other side, there happens to be another stretched-out arm our hands are likely to hold each other's and together we can initiate a good change.

My writing is approaching the end, and the reader may want to ask why my thesis matters to me. An LT researcher Dr Swaroop Rawal (whose life-long commitment to reform the Indian education system I admire) once told me that if she were not to do what she is doing who else would? There is no trace of arrogance in her words, only the certainty of pursuing a task and assuming responsibility for its completion. My task was to write about my experience as a development professional and to learn from it, from my mistakes and my successes in order to become the best professional I can be to date. I felt the need to communicate and share my experience and research findings with others in the hope that my research might be considered as a contribution to a fairer world. I also acknowledge the gaps of my research for instance that it lies on my practice of working with people whom I perceive as similar to me in terms of a worldview. It is a product of my socio-historical background and education and reflects my western approach to research although my attempt while gathering data and writing the thesis was to render the final result as inclusive of other cultures as possible.

It carries the biases, convictions and hopes of the author that consciously or unconsciously are leading the discourse of the thesis. My research is geographically limited to the places I have been to and institutionally limited to the organizations I worked with. It carries the perspective of a woman, the author and the stories of many women which represent the major voice in my writing. The concept of generativity which I believe is an original contribution to knowledge in the field of ID is at an

embryonal stage of research and I would need more time and resources to investigate it in greater depth.

My last thoughts are dedicated to my aspiration to share my experience with the younger generation of development professionals, especially those who are studying development at university level. My wish is to join academia and teach about development from the perspective of someone with a very practical experience of it. Once again, my inspiration comes from our daughter Marta who is currently thinking about what university path to choose. Recently a friend asked her the usual question, 'what do you want to study after high school?' she replied: 'I want to study International Development and do the same job as my mom'. I did not expect that response and I felt very flattered. My husband and I thought she was tired of moving around with us and of being often physically apart from us due to our profession. We have never suggested that she follows our path and it came as a surprise that she seems to have decided already. I started then thinking that if Marta were to study ID at university, I might really enjoy teaching it to young people like her. Becoming a university academic with no teaching experience nor an extensive record of publications seems to be unrealistic. However, as so many other things in my life looked improbable at first and sometimes even second glance, I know that 'where there's a will there's a way'.



Figure 2: My road



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