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Introduction

John Scileppi and Elizabeth Quinn

If a man is hungry and you give him a fish, you fed him for one day; but if you teach him how to fish, you have fed him for the rest of his life. This paraphrase of Anne Thackeray Ritchie's (1885) famous quote (frequently misattributed to Confucius and many other notable thinkers) sums up one of the most important goals of education. Our role as educators is to empower our students enabling them to reach their goals in the context of contributing to society. As we all know, our educational system does not always achieve this goal, perhaps because social scientific research on empowerment has been long overlooked in the discussion and teaching of philosophies of education. Or perhaps because the system focuses on teaching and testing academic subjects and not intellectual skills such as innovation, creativity, curiosity, and a sense of intellectual adventure (Zakaria, 2015). The purpose of this book is to help teachers and parents become more aware of empowerment and to help transform school-aged youth into enthusiastic, intellectually curious, self-directed learners who are motivated toward academic success, self-discovery, and civic engagement.

This book is written for those who believe the role of education is to empower students. In researching this theme, we found there is no academic course in teacher preparation curricula anywhere in the United States that is dedicated to this role. Many publishers rejected the manuscript as they did not expect college teachers would adopt the book as, in one editor's opinion, the book might pertain to at most a two week segment in either a graduate or un-

dergraduate teacher education course. Given that this perception is accurate, one wonders how a teacher in training might gain the necessary theory base and strategies needed to empower students. Thus this book helps to fill this need for prospective – and current – educators. Further, perhaps there *should be* courses dedicated to this theme. Thus this book is also useful for teacher educators and to those who create educational policy. A final audience includes those parents and concerned citizens who believe student empowerment should be a central goal in the national and state educational systems. Hopefully this book can provide a rationale for such advocacy. While the need for empowering students is important in the United States and in other developed nations, it is probably more imperative in the schools of developing countries. Empowering students in these latter societies will enable the youth to create their own goals and not merely replicate the beliefs and values of the formerly colonizing cultures.

This book addresses first some theoretical perspectives that can influence all levels of education. Maurizio Geri introduces what empowerment entails both at the individual and organizational levels. He notes that a social system will flourish if all of its subcultures are empowered. The empowerment movement of the past fifty years helps individuals realize their full human potentials. What follows are two chapters on the importance of language. Fabrizio Guarducci focuses on the role language plays in helping students structure their own ideas and feelings, symbolize their experiences and communicate them effectively. Guarducci discusses how mirror neurons enhance compassion and understanding others and how toxic language sometimes inappropriately used by teachers leads to negativity and aggression and numbs creativity. In the chapter on the power of language, Ron Cromwell and his colleagues show the effect of what educators say to their students on the students' belief in their own competence. Teaching the language of possibilities should be taught in every school as it helps students achieve success and frees them from distortions of reality. Educators need to listen to the voices of their students, and help youth to understand the social and political context which gives meaning to the words expressed. Maureen Fitzgerald-Riker points out the importance of teaching literacy as a basic right of all students to know

how to read and to comprehend the meaning of what they are encountering. Literacy education is a political act and an effective means of confronting oppression against the poor. John Scileppi describes how John Dewey's theories guided the empowerment in education movement in order to transform students into productive and contributing members of a democratic society. He shows various examples of how teachers can respect their students and invite them to cooperate in the teaching-learning process. In the following chapter, Scileppi also describes how value clarification can assist students in enhancing their awareness of the priorities they hold. Frequently students need to bring into their consciousness what truly matters to them so that they can make informed career choices and other decisions that will affect their lives.

While the chapters in the theoretical perspectives section also give examples of how the principles can be applied, the second half of the book focuses on specific applications. Beth Quinn follows up on the last chapter in the first section by describing how educators can teach their students to take control of their own behavior. Once students know their values and priorities, they need to learn some concrete strategies to implement them in practice. Educators can encourage students to manage their own behavior so that they can effectively utilize their time and energy. Taken together these two chapters empower students to "pull their own strings" and accomplish the objectives they have for themselves. In the next chapter, Quinn points out how educators consciously or unconsciously can harm student achievement and motivation on the basis of their gender. Girls and later women often are the victims of gender discrimination relating to educational and professional opportunity, but boys and later men need greater sensitivity in this issue so as to be able to develop more holistic and egalitarian relationships respectful of the other. The next chapter focuses on primary education. Barbara Ruggiero describes an inner city private school serving the needs of young students from economically poor families. This school, in existence for over forty years and supported nearly completely by donations and a very low tuition, has the objective of empowering students in its mission statement. Because of the creative instructional strategies developed in this school (and reported in the chapter), the children attending The Children's Com-

munity School have achieved scores on standardized tests that exceed state averages. Many of the alumni have succeeded in diverse spheres of life in the community. To balance the chapter, Linda Dixon-Dziedzic, a school psychologist, describes the strategies to empower students in a more affluent suburban school district. This chapter brings home the fact that students coming from both poor and middle class families need to be taught by educators who use effective strategies to enhance empowerment. The book ends with a chapter by Gavin Webb and John Peters on how international study abroad can be very empowering if those running the program are aware of their role in achieving this objective. Given that the world is "shrinking" and today's students will need a greater level of cultural competence to effectively succeed in multi-national corporations and to interact meaningfully with individuals from other cultures, exposure to multiple cultures is becoming more and more essential. In addition, young people studying abroad face many new and unfamiliar situations, and mastering them enhances their feelings of self-efficacy and confidence. By broadening their perspectives, these students become more cosmopolitan and are better able to creatively deal with whatever conflicts and problems they may encounter. Returning home from successful study abroad activities enables the students to become citizens of the world, able to confront challenges creatively and effectively.

Theoretical Perspectives Affecting Education in General

1

Personal and Social Empowerment in a Globalized World:

How Empowering Subcultures Results in Flourishing Societies

Maurizio Geri

> Everyone is the maker of his own destiny
> —*Appio Claudio, Rome, I century BC*

> Be the change you want to see in the world
> —*Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, India, XX century AD*

This chapter explores the concept of empowerment, in particular, personal and social empowerment, related to education. In this analysis, I draw upon my own observations and experiences in studying and working on peace and development in different countries of the world, and on theories of empowerment processes at different levels, with respect to the social relations, and the politics and the economics of a given society. The chapter begins with a general philosophical introduction on empowerment, followed by a more detailed analysis of the processes of social, political and economic empowerment, the influence of cultural dimensions on empowerment and concludes by analyzing how experiential learning experiences in peace building can represent empowerment tools for women and men around the planet. These experiential examples derive from an international studies program and women empowerment training workshop.

A philosophical Introduction

> Empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social, educational, gender or economic strength of individuals and communities. Sociological empowerment often addresses members of groups that social discrimination processes have excluded from decision-making processes through, for example, discrimination based on disability, race, ethnicity, religion, or gender.
> (Empowerment, n.d.).

This definition of empowerment can be found in Wikipedia, the free and collaborative encyclopedia freely written by women and men around the world a process which in itself is empowering.

But how can we really define empowerment? First of all we have to say the word "empowerment" nowadays can be defined and interpreted in a wide spectrum of meanings in different socio-cultural and political contexts, and does not translate easily into all languages. However, at its heart we could agree it has an intrinsic and instrumental value that can be considered a basic tool for human evolution and growth, an instrument for the realization of individuals' potentials and a foundation for the social, economic and political improvement of a community. Before discussing the analysis of the forms empowerment can take and the areas in which it can be carried out with a strong or weak impact, I would like to make a short philosophical digression to introduce this concept that since the 1960s has been used in different ways and with different consequences and interpretations. Therefore a brief historical and philosophical review of literature of philosophers and scholars across cultures, continents, and time follows.

As the most recent scientific theories tell us, the entire universe never stopped expanding, and it evolves at an increasing rate since its day of birth[1]. It could even be said that human life, which is considered the leading edge of its evolution (or at least that on Planet Earth) is doing the same, as an integral part of the universe, following parallel laws. Since our species is an integral part of our ecosystem, we could say that human life evolved and keeps evolving faster and faster, and not only that but also by "self-gestation",

thanks to its innate inner power, constantly "self-recreating" itself (as biologists teach us with the reproduction of the cells for themselves). Humberto Maturana, a famous biologist and philosopher from Chile, developed a few decades ago the theory of *autopoiesis*, to explain that every living system, from the human being to the universe, is a complex system in constant "redefinition", sustaining and reproducing "itself by itself" (Maturana and Varela, 1980). Similarly, Henry Bergson's (1911) "Élan Vital", the vital force that creates the evolution[2] or the "Omega Point**"** of Teilhard de Chardin (2004), tell us how the universe is constantly developing towards higher levels of complexity and consciousness).

So if we are able to think human life evolves thanks to its own inner power, innate in human beings as in every living being, and not from mysterious external forces that cannot be controlled, then the concept of empowerment represents a tool that may help human beings to become aware of their inner strengths, abilities and capacities, in order to use them for their growth and the growth of their communities. The "art" of empowerment could be defined then as the process of putting into practice our own thoughts, needs and goals to fulfill our lives and to improve as individuals and as part of a society, and to do this we should start by becoming aware of this power, instead of delegating it to the external systems that guided humankind since its birth. Obviously it is not enough for our inner consciousness to empower us but it represents the first step in the process. As Martin Luther King said we have to "take the first step in faith. We don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step" (Mirable & Mullins, 2009). And faith is not only something irrational but can be very rational. Erich Fromm (2004), explained to us in his masterpiece *The art of loving* how we have faith because we experience the growth of our own potentialities, the reality of the growth in ourselves and the strength of our own power.

So if empowerment can be defined as the ability to use our own power (and not the giving of it from the "powerful people" to the "powerless people", as sometimes could be erroneously interpreted in our societies) enabling us to achieve our full actualization and at the same time help others to do the same, in a personal and social path more satisfying for all, then we can affirm that empow-

erment is rooted, at least in some part, in humanism[3]. Humanism started as a cultural movement during the Renaissance, affirming the dignity of human beings as such, putting them at the center of the world, and considering reason, ethics, and justice as the basis for their evolution (while rejecting supernatural and religious ideas as the basis of morality and decision-making). Actually while in the medieval period people were trained mostly in logic, medicine, law or theology (in order to create doctors, lawyers and theologians) the renaissance humanists tried to teach grammar, history, rhetoric, poetry and moral philosophy, in order to foster citizens' ability to speak and write with eloquence and clarity. Citizens became more capable of engaging in the civic life of their communities, empowering them for more freedom and democracy.

Empowerment too puts human beings at the center of attention and ultimately seeks to help individuals to put in practice principles of self-guidance and self-realization, trying to realize what the Roman scholar and politician Appio Claudio was saying: "Everyone is the maker of his own destiny". Following the transformative learning theory[4] we could say empowerment needs the "expansion of consciousness, through the transformation of capacities of the self" in order to have a positive change in the lifestyle, for individuals and their communities.

If we agree empowerment starts with the awareness of our inner power, then this awareness must be developed through an educative process such as that used by Socrates called maieutics. Maieutics[5] is the idea that the truth is within us; we need not receive it from above or from outside ourselves. Interestingly, the word *education* comes from the Latin *e-ducere*, meaning "draw out, bring to light something that stays inside". Therefore education should have as its goal, first and foremost, to make people aware of their own inner truth and of the goals they want to fulfill in their lives. Guided by such awareness and with their own power, they are able to create their personal "story" and their mission, and be self-directed toward positive change and transformation. An educative process characterized by the maieutic method, for example, would implement experiential learning using empowering tools like narration of personal experiences, group activities to learn to dialogue, peer review to learn to analyze themselves, open space methodol-

ogy to enable them to express their ideas and so on, instead of trying to pour into their minds some knowledge or notion. It would teach more how to learn instead of what to learn. This would be a tool that would allow students to become aware of all the knowledge that stays inside them, increase their ability to express this knowledge and make them able to put the knowledge at the service of their growth and the growth of their community[6].

Even if empowerment starts as an inner process though, in order to be fully realized it has to be shared with the others, at a communal and social level, as alone we are not capable of self -actualization (Maslow, 1970). We are social animals living only in the relation with our natural and social environment, we really exists as a whole (as *Ubuntu* philosophy also teach us[7]). That is, actualization is a synergistic, not a parallel process between the individual and his or her social environment. Koestler (1983) described this as the "*complex of yogi and commissar*" meaning we have to learn how to be at the same time *yogis* and *commissars*: change ourselves and change the world, otherwise we will always be "out of sync". In other words, if we imagine social and individual development as the two legs needed for moving forward and we don't use them together, we will be forever walking lame. So, once we understand that evolution is based on both levels at the same time, our systems should understand also the importance of dedicating time, space and efforts to the citizens for their "inner" growth and time, space and efforts for their "external" growth, with the consequent economic, political and social implications for our communities. As Hanna Arendt famously argued (1958) to have active citizenship we need a *vita activa* based on labor or work but also political and social action, that is the action of "great deeds and great words".

Concluding this brief philosophical excursion one could say that everyone can benefit from the empowerment process but in particular the youth, who have to find their own social and professional definition and their "place in the world". Empowerment can have a big impact also in the life of people who are discriminated against or are living in a "minor level of power" with respect to the mainstream (from gender to ethnic, religious or sexual orientation minorities). These people need to empower themselves in order to be at an equal status with the other actors of the society and be able

to defend their rights against discrimination and oppression. But empowerment enables all citizens, not only the disenfranchised, to become active members of their society instead of maintaining passive roles. Active citizens are citizens who are able to influence their communities because they believe they have the right and the duty to participate and not only to observe what is happening around them. If I decide to avoid, for example, engaging in a problem of someone else, i.e. an accident or a fight on the street, I act as a passive citizen, who withdraws for fear or indifference, and that ultimately doesn't bring a contribution to the growth and welfare of the society. But if I decide to fully engage in what is happening around me, I become active and even freer, as I am able to influence with my thoughts and actions the events that are unfolding in front of me. So participation means finally freedom and evolution of all individuals, and these are the ultimate goals of empowerment. There is no empowered society without integration and solidarity, as Durkheim taught us.

The knowledge and study of empowerment processes would be useful then for educators, behavioral healthcare professionals, teachers and all the women and men who need to shape their abilities in order to support, in the process of growth, the people with whom they live or work. It can represent also a major force in developing future leaders as it grants individuals the permission to utilize their talents, skills, resources and experiences to make the right decisions to fulfill their career and become in this way a guiding example for the others, psychologically, socially, politically or economically. Ultimately we can say empowerment is a leading force that puts strong foundations for better future societies in all parts of our planet, regardless of their economic or social development, if we really take it as a strategy for the good of all.

But it has to be fulfilled taking into account several considerations; otherwise it would remain just a good intention, without a real impact.

Social, political and economic empowerment and the educative process

Amartya Sen, the famous Indian economist and Nobel Prize winner, conceived in the 1980s an approach to "welfare economics"[8]

called the capability approach[9], defining what women and men are capable of doing in their societies. The approach emphasized functional capabilities (such as the ability to live to old age, engage in economic transactions, or participate in political activities) that were construed in terms of the "substantive freedoms" people have reason to value (like happiness, desire-fulfillment or free choice) instead of utility or access to resources (like income, commodities, and assets). Since the contribution of Sen, the welfare and development concepts have been considered complex and holistic issues and not only a unique path to follow, but also good for all. The human well-being started to be valued as something based on freedom of choice and respect for individual heterogeneity and not only as something based on production and consumption. This doesn't mean, however, that both development and welfare are seen in this way in the mainstream politics nowadays, at least the ones of western countries.

This short analysis on social, political and economic empowerment was begun by discussing Sen's contributions in economic theory because empowerment can be very much related to his insights and reflections in this area. Actually empowerment as a social theory since the 1990s has represented one of the principal paradigms of development, in particular for the "developing countries" or the so called "Global South". And even if there is not yet a clear definition universally accepted, scholars agree empowerment in the development process has social, political and economic implications, being something that can be connected with all sides of human life, but it is also a process based on individual learning and personal improvement. As was stated, in the empowerment process individuals have first to learn to raise their awareness and control over their decisions, before becoming able to understand what are their needs, interests and goals. After this they start transforming their life and their role in the society, with both inner analysis and external action, towards a full realization of themselves. And subsequently they can improve their ability to influence the power relations in the society and participate more in the decision making processes of the political and economic arena, showing in this way how empowerment requires the acquisition of personal skills and abilities but also the acquisition of social power to influence the

objectives and the rules of the society itself, transforming the social system and fostering the full participation of everyone.

Going back to Sen's *capability approach*, we can say empowerment for holistic development implies in particular the building of the potentialities and the "capabilities" of women and men who are discriminated against or subordinated in their societies, the access of these people to the productive resources and the growing of their capacities of negotiation and influence in the relations and in the decisions that affect their lives. This process would allow the excluded to elevate their level of confidence, self-esteem and ability to address their own needs, in front of the structures of the society that many times oppress and subordinate them. Then, at the collective level, empowerment aiming at holistic developmental needs to facilitate the access of these individuals to the decision making process of the society, realizing their full participation in the social, political, economic and cultural structures and in the collective actions. And this has to be done through cooperation and collaboration among them, what is often called networking.

Actually the concept of cooperation and networking is very important in empowerment as it is based on the fact that vulnerable people have more ability to participate in and defend their rights when they are united with others to reach a common goal, than when they are divided or isolated from others. A demonstration of this can be seen when the strength of the grassroots movements improved because they were coordinated and organized instead of divided among themselves. We have many examples of this concept around the world among discriminated people or minorities: from the indigenous movements demanding respect for their rights and the ownership of their lands (as in Mexico with indigenous people from Chiapas or in Brazil with the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra/Movement of the rural workers without land*) to the defense of the environment in the case of natural resources exploitation (like in Papua New Guinea with people fighting against the mine exploitation). Other examples of the importance of networking in the empowerment of vulnerable people can be seen in the economic empowerment of the poor in a given society (like with the *Grameen Bank*[10] in Bangladesh) to the gender empowerment based on coordinated efforts of women's movements asking for

improvements in women basic rights (like in many countries of central Africa or south Asia).

We can affirm than that empowerment requires the weakest parts of a society to obtain more power and more capacity of participation in the decision making processes in order to organize, mobilize and transform the relations, structures and institutions that limit their development and maintain their subordination. But this power needs to be a shared power otherwise it would not be strong enough to become a force for change. Kenneth Boulding (1989) (a famous English economist and philosopher, cofounder of the General Systems Theory[11]) defined the so called "integrative power" as a power which rests on relationships such as legitimacy, respect, community and identity. And this is actually the power that can represent the base of development and social empowerment, because it is the power without which the other two powers (as defined by this scholar the "threat power" (in the political arena) and the "economic power" (in the production arena) cannot be effective. So we can say empowerment needs relationships, needs network and community, without which it cannot really become a "transforming force" for the society.

But is empowerment a transforming force that defies the system, trying to create an alternative system, a different development with respect to the mainstream, or it is a force independent from it, able also to exist in parallel with the main system, and so is not interested in fighting the status quo? John Friedmann (1992), the Austrian/Canadian sociologist who wrote about empowerment as a development force, talks about it as an alternative force. He argued poverty should be seen not merely in material terms, but as social, political and psychological powerlessness, so, he stated, an "alternative development" should be committed to empowering poor people in their own communities, mobilizing them for political participation on a wider scale. In contrast to centralized development policies, implemented at the national and international level, Friedman described an alternative and sustainable development, that should restore first the initiative to those in need, on the grounds that unless people have an active role in directing their own destinies, long-term progress will not be achieved.

In history there have always been "alternative powers" to those

of the *Prince* and this allowed the progress of ideas, social mobility and political changes. Just to remember few examples from the Global South during the last century, which can be defined as empowerment processes that changed the status quo, we can mention the Independence Movement in India, the Anti-Apartheid Movement in South Africa or the People's Power Revolution in the Philippines. But also in the "Global North" there have been many experiences related to empowerment that had a deep impact in the societies and changed the traditional rules, like the Women's Movement or the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. In Italy too, many figures in the last century have worked for social empowerment of the poorest people. They looked for new tools raising the status of the poor relative to the mainstream system requesting the assistance of the state (often missing), and left today an important imprint on social movements. Notable among them were the founders of the Italian nonviolent-Gandhian movement Aldo Capitini and Danilo Dolci[12].

I personally think the development brought about by empowerment is more democratic, more complete and more sustainable development, as it starts from the idea that all the people involved in the society should be included in the process of decision making. Development should aim at achieving a consensus in the solution of the problems and the proposing of the future paths to follow by the society. So it is not important to think of it as an alternative or a parallel reality to the mainstream system, but as a resourceful force that can help communities improve and resolve even their apparent intractable conflicts or structural injustices.

But how is the social, political and economic empowerment, both in the south and the north of the world and fostering both an alternative or integrative power, related to the educational process? How can education influence the starting of empowerment processes at these different levels in our societies? First of all, education can be considered the principal tool of empowerment, as it allows individuals to become aware of their power and discover their talents, goals, interests, needs and so learn to build their own destiny. Secondly the educative process is something that can accompany the life of a person for a long time as we never stop learning, and the real educative process is a constant and continuous

process, not just an experience that starts and ends inside the school system. The Commission of the European Community (2001) set *lifelong learning* **,** called the Lisbon Strategy, as the primary tool for the empowerment of citizens, aiming at transforming Europe into the world's most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based society. And even if the agenda is still far from being realized we can agree that the process of lifelong learning is the key for the constant empowerment of citizens and societies. Zygmut Bauman (2005), the famous Polish sociologist, in his recent book *Liquid life,* reminded us that in liquid modern settings, education and learning should be continuous, in an empowering process that would allow men and women to pursue their life goals with resourcefulness and self-confidence and in the "rebuilding of the now increasingly deserted public space where men and women may engage in a continuous translation between the individual and the common, the private and the communal interests, rights and duties" (p125).

Besides being continuous and constant, the educative process, in order to be really empowering, has to be also maieutic, and not just based on content and viewpoints to be poured into the minds of students. Without this empowerment, the only result of education is constraining the unfolding of brains and hearts of the students (even if unfortunately often our educational institutions do so). Empowerment needs to individualize learning according to one's capabilities and needs and Paulo Freire, the famous Brazilian educator, can help us to understand better how pedagogy can work efficiently and effectively in the empowerment process both individually and socially. In fact in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Freire (1992) asserts "education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system, and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the 'practice of freedom', the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality, and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world" (p. 34). For Freire then, education can be a tool to transform society, not merely something to make young people conform to current norms, but to do so has to start from the "practice of freedom". According to him freedom will be the result of *praxis* — informed action — when a balance between theory and practice is achieved. And the teach-

ing method has to follow the maieutic system, what he calls the "problem-posing" method, in which there is not a student-teacher dichotomy, as the educator constantly re-forms reflections based on the reflections of the student.

So if the educative process is to be the "leaven" of empowerment we can say it has to draw from *humanistic education*, the education that puts the human being and not the "knowledge" at the center (like the models of Steiner or Montessori or Tagore for example[13]) seeking to engage the whole person, in his/her intellect, emotions, social capacities, practical skills and artistic creativity, as all are important foci for personal and social growth and development. It is like "crafting" a polymath, a *Renaissance man*, a person who has abilities in different fields[14], leading to the notion that people should embrace all knowledge and develop their capacities as fully as possible. Martha Nussbaum, an American philosopher, reminds us in her beautiful last book (2010) how historically the humanities have been central to education even if today the profitable and technical skills – that are the only skills often taught in the universities – have eroded our ability to criticize authority, reduced our sympathy with the marginalized and different, and damaged our competence to deal with complex global problems. The loss of these basic capacities jeopardizes the empowering effect of education, as well as the health and effectiveness of our democratic societies, which need people able to think with their minds.

Today we have to revive the importance of humanities and the importance of humanism in the education process, but beside this we also have to understand how important the concept of diversity in the formation of a person is, in this globalized world. We could say the empowerment processes, and the educative ones that guide them today, are entering a new era, a new modernity, as we are all living in a multicultural global village and we cannot think anymore only with one interpretation of the problems or an ethnocentric vision of reality. That is why it is important to build networks and bridges and to understand different cultures, points of view and ideas represent enrichment to the empowerment processes and not limitations.

Different cultures and empowerment in a globalized world

As we know from natural sciences, the path of evolution is the passage from independence to interdependence, which is how we progressed from the first forms of life, which were unicellular organisms, to animals and human beings, who are able to build systems and structured societies. In the social sciences it is the same: individuals need to learn interdependence, go from individualities to networks and systems, if they want to grow as a whole, as a society. According to renowned historian Yuval Harari, our *homo sapiens* specie could evolve precisely because we were able to cooperate in great numbers (overcoming the collective action problem) and with flexibly (adapting to the changing environment). It was the innate cooperation attitude, balancing the competition of the "natural selection" that made humankind reach this level of growth. Therefore as the Austrian founder of human ethology, Irenaeus Eibl-Eibesfeldt, argued, cooperation, besides aggression, is the prime mover of evolution; and as cognitive scientist Steven Pinker showed, these "better angels of our nature" are more and more present today, reducing violence and aggression and increasing peace and cooperation in our current world.

So in a globalized world like the current one we have to learn how to use more fully these "better angels", to overcome discrimination based on differences, whether they are gender, class, age, religion, cultural origin or whatever other differences, if we want to evolve as humankind, creating a real interdependent and united social system and a universal growing community.

Empowerment in itself requires diversity and interdependence, because intercultural, interreligious, inter-gender, interclass and all the intergroup relations are what make societies richer and able to grow at all levels, politically, economically, materially and spiritually. History teaches us this but we as human beings still have to learn to cross boundaries, to go beyond the "fear" of someone different from us, beyond the mistrust that bring us to suspect the stereotype of the other. We need to reduce discrimination and avoid the risk of conflict and clash. We still have to fully realize what the Bulgarian philosopher Tzvetan Todorov (1999) defined as the cultural *recognition* of the others, throw away what Eibl-Eibesfeldt

(1996) called the "hate" innate side of humans and keep only what he called the "love", also innate, side, and try to build what the Italian intellectual Ernesto Balducci (1986, 2005) dreamt for the future man: a "*planetary human being*". But in order to build such a global and cross cultural society, and empowerment to help such a society to born, we have to understand that every culture brings different points of view concerning reality, life and basic values, different epistemologies and ontologies, and so first of all we have to take into account these differences in order to be really constructive, creative and concrete in our future.

If we take into consideration the so called "dimensions of culture" for example, as defined by the Dutch scholar Geert Hofstede (2005), one of the most prominent and influential researchers in the field of "organizational culture", we see how there are similarities as well as differences across cultures and how we need to be open-minded and good observers to understand those differences. Hofstede utilizes six dimensions to compare cultures (Individualism/ Collectivism, Feminine/Masculine, Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Long Term/ Short Term orientation and Indulgence/ Restraint) in order to analyze societies and organizations and give leaders an understanding of how to adjust their leadership styles accordingly. Considering in particular the "power distance" dimension we understand, from what the scholar tells us, that a shorter distance between individuals and among groups implies greater equality and empowerment, but in a society where there is a greater "power distance", where people accept an unequal distribution of power, and accept "their place" in the system, it is more difficult to carry out empowering processes as there is a reluctance to speak up and ask for change. But this doesn't mean that in those societies which emphasize greater power distances it is impossible to realize empowerment; on the contrary, it is exactly in those kinds of societies where empowerment is more needed and can be carried out with more impact, as was previously stated in the examples of empowerment in the Global South.

However how can empowerment exist in societies that have a frayed social fabric or divisions at their interior, such as those experiencing conflicts in the Global South, or in Western societies that are still struggling to find a path of integration for all their citizens?

Robert Putnam (2000), an American political scientist, in his famous book "*Bowling Alone*", could help us to answer this question. He makes an important analysis distinguishing between two kinds of social capital: bonding capital and bridging capital. "Bonding" processes occur when we are socializing with people who are like us: same age, same race, same religion and so on, and these are important steps to build relations and networks, and form the base of societies. But in order to create peaceful societies in diverse multi-ethnic countries like the ones in which we are living today, we need to also have a second kind of social capital says Putnam: the "bridging" one, that happen when we make friends with people who are not like us, like for example supporters of another football team. The scholar argued that these two kinds of social capital, bonding and bridging, are interrelated and able to strengthen each other, meaning that with the increase of one comes the increase of the other, but also that with the decline of one inevitably comes the decline of the other, leading to greater group tensions. For Hofstede this is exactly what happened in USA and Western societies since the 1960s. With a reduction of the bonding capital, in civic, social, associational and political life (going from "collectivism to individualism" in that author's words) came a reduction of the bridging capital, bringing us to new conflicts inside our societies. Hence today we have to build again the "bonding capital" in order to open space for the "bridging capital", and so for the empowerment of society as a whole and not only in some of its parts.

Going back to the cultural dimensions of the Hofstedes, and taking into account this time the "feminine/masculine" dimension, we see how societies stress competition/achievement or cooperation/nurture depending on which side of the dimension they traditionally follow and this is another important factor in the empowerment processes. In fact masculinity, in this model, is seen to be the trait which emphasizes ambition, assertiveness, acquisition of wealth, and differentiated gender roles, instead of femininity which stresses caring and nurturing behaviors, sexual equality, environmental awareness, and more fluid gender roles. So in societies that have a stronger masculinity dimension it seems more difficult to realize an empowerment that includes all genders, as the empowerment is more unidirectional, and so in those societies the

best strategy for holistic development would be the emancipation of the discriminated gender, i.e. the feminine one, in order to create a more cooperative and global development. To learn from different gender perspectives in different cultures then is another important tool, together with the multicultural perspective, that has to be taken into account if we want to think about a real empowerment in our globalized world. On this issue it is enlightening to consider the contribution of Nicholas Kristof, an American journalist who wrote an interesting book with his wife Sheryll Wu Dunn (2009), on gender discrimination in different parts of the world. Drawing on many cases they show how a little help can transform the lives of women and girls around the world, helping us to see that the key to economic progress of a society lies often in unleashing women's potential, and they show us also how countries such as China for example have prospered more precisely when they started to emancipate women and bring them into the formal economy.

A final point to consider in this new globalized world, is the fact that different cultures and different epistemologies bring different approaches to environmental issues to the question on how we should relate with our planet, in particular in the future, when global warming and population growth will have consequences we cannot yet imagine. Jared Diamond (2005), an American scientist and author best known for his popular science books, reminds us that different cultures in the past had different attitudes towards environmental and survival challenges, and this determined whether they survived or disappeared. Today we have similar problems. As examples of different approaches China and Australia are trying to cope with environmental risks in innovative ways relative to our "old" approach, (as Diamond described in his book) and we cannot save ourselves if we don't save all together. So empowerment has an important role to play today, first of all because it teaches us to listen to all of society and not only to the elites or leaders From the "bottom" comes the popular wisdom that can become guiding wisdom for future leaderships, and this reminds us there is not a unique solution to the problems of the planet and the development of humankind: we have to learn from different ontologies and epistemologies in order to find the way for a real growth of the society and not risk our failure and collapse in the future.

But how do all of these reflections on a globalized world have consequences on the educative processes? How should we take into account these questions and integrate them in an educative path in order to make it more empowering for future generations? Personally, I think education cannot escape from the intercultural point of view, the multidisciplinary approach and the inclusiveness approach, all empowering elements that unfortunately are not always implemented in our schools. These elements should be our guides when developing the educative programs in our schools and in our governments. But many times this is not the case, as we saw with the examples brought by Nussbaum regarding the humanities. Occasionally this is the case, and what follows is an example of this type of educative process, based on international and experiential education, that I observed and in which I had the honor to participate.

In June 2012, I participated in a summer program in Vermont, USA, where 60 people from around the world gathered to study and practice peace building, in a course called "Conflict Transformation across Cultures"[15]. This is just one of the many international programs that use experiential learning as a tool for empowerment, not only for all the participants but for the communities to which participants return after the program. I was astonished by the amount of experience the participants brought to this course, and I have wonderful memories of the days passed together with these engaged people who brought their lessons learned to share in a process of common empowerment for the community that was built in those three weeks of program.

These kinds of courses that call people from all over the world are very important. International education is an extraordinary instrument in itself, as it helps to build networks, relations, connections, that strengthen and develop the knowledge of the diversity and so they grow and promote a culture of tolerance and peace. In addition, the way in which many of these international training courses are lead is very similar to the humanistic educational process discussed previously, based on developing the "positive view of socialization", as one of the following chapters of this book discusses when talking about humanistic education. This type of education empowers students in their holistic learning process in

which they can choose, to some extent, the content and the goals of their training, and above all they can integrate it with their personal experiences. Their educators represented facilitators of learning more than source of knowledge. One important feature of this course for example was that the trained people became also trainers in their personal expertise, and there were planned activities in which participants had the opportunity to share their competences and experiences with their colleagues through short workshops or presentations. This not only allowed the new trainers to empower themselves as "first actors" on the scene but also allowed the colleagues to see how their peers were contributing ideas and knowledge, thus making the participants more aware of their own power and wishing to model the same next time.

Besides this the summer program in Vermont tried to approach conflicts from the broadest perspective, taking into account gender issues, environmental questions, migration elements, violence and nonviolence, reconciliation and so on. The method of experiential learning was put into practice with small learning groups that allowed everyone to feel secure in a safe environment and as such they could share openly in a respectful and cooperative way. This process of learning was accompanied by a process of "learning how to learn", as every participant had to reflect on the processes of teaching and training using both evaluations of the others and self-evaluation, with the effect that people wanted finally to learn more and more about different topics and different styles. Therefore, this program was a clear example of empowering training that could serve as a model for other international programs and study abroad courses also, not only for peace building studies.

I firmly believe studying abroad is more than just studying in a foreign country and building tolerant and intercultural relationships; it is a means of understanding and broadening one's identity. Feeling like "strangers in a new place" makes people develop more creative abilities and, at the same time, teaches them to be open to new ideas and to listen to other points of view that could represent important lessons learned to be applied when they return "home". The international and experiential education is an empowering process because it allows participants to integrate themselves in a globalized active world, a productive world community where

each individual contributes with his/her own creative idea to the future development and progress of human society in its whole. Ultimately I believe international education can foster the building of a new globalized and professional society, spreading the diverse knowledge learned for the empowerment of all the citizens of a given society and not only of those who participated in the international experience.

Women mediation training as an example of empowerment

Citizens of every country in the world suffer from ethnocentrism, and perhaps those in western cultures suffer more. Europeans and Americans think the empowerment of women started in the Western world, in particular in the 1960s with the feminist movement, and perceive that had a big impact and many important repercussions on the whole of society. In reality in different parts of the world gender issues were already addressed and handled, often in ways consistent with the structure of their respective society. We can argue whether these different situations of gender relationships were really empowering or not for women, but there were already developed paths regarding how genders should have shared power. Women also discussed which aspects of life they wanted to keep and which ones they wanted to change, especially if living in a patriarchal, and sometimes, archaic society. So in a globalized world like the one in which we are living today, it is our moral obligation to look at other perspectives, other cultural and religious views, other epistemologies and ontologies, in order to understand better which kind of evolution and gender empowerment we want for our future generations.

An example of empowerment of women in which I have been personally involved is the issue of enhancing women's participation in peace processes. Women around the world, making use of the UN Resolution 1325 (October 2000) on "Women, Peace and Security", since the turn of the new century, started to create organizations, activities and networks aiming to influence mainstream political and economic power, in order to push for a "genderization" of peace processes in the current conflicts. Today many women from different countries have begun to exert an important im-

pact in this area, and have created regional international networks of women working in peace issues (like for example the *N-Peace Network*[16]). Through trainings and workshops these women have been empowered to be peace mediators and negotiators). Still the role of women in this area needs to be improved today. According to UNIFEM[17] since 1992 women mediators have accounted for only 2.4 percent of signatures on peace agreements and the UN is yet to appoint a woman as a lead mediator in a major conflict.

Sanam Naraghi-Anderlini (2007), a scholar of gender issues in conflicts, enabled us to better understand the potential role of women in the area of conflict resolution and peace. Women, says Naraghi-Anderlini, have been discriminated against and excluded from formal peace processes until now. There had been a fundamental neglecting of the contribution of women participants in the process, at both the formal and informal level. In her book this scholar explained how women's associations played important roles in conflict or post-conflict areas, despite the lack of their inclusion in the formal peace processes[18] and she states how important it is to find ways to improve the expertise and preparation of the women, trough capacity building and empowering trainings, in order to make them able to fully participate in the formal negotiation and mediation processes in post-conflict areas.

Recently I had the honor of assisting in enhancing female empowerment processes in conflict areas, in particular in South East Asia which I had been visiting between 2012 and 2014. In this region, in particular in countries like Thailand, Burma, Philippines and Indonesia, I observed women playing a very important role in conflict resolution at a grassroots level, through engagement in informal diplomacy, local and international advocacy and also capacity building; in particular Muslim women engaged in solving the conflict between their state and the local Muslim minorities.

We often think the exclusion of Muslim women from political and civic participation is influenced by their patriarchal societies, which favor women's subordination to male authority. (Such an exclusion is correlated to poverty, according to the World Economic Forum's 2010 Gender Gap Index, 20 of the 25 lowest-ranking countries are Muslim-majority countries). Recently however, Muslim women have begun to have an important role in changing this

situation, challenging from inside their societies the disempowerment of the women due to cultural hindrances, lack of knowledge and capacity building and sometimes a trend of radicalization of the Muslim faith, which pose greater obstacles to Muslim women's valuable participation to peace processes and to political and economic processes in general.

Shadia Marhaban, co-founder of LINA-Aceh Women's League and also a consultant for UN Women, has been training many women in Asian countries, from Afghanistan to Philippines, from parliament level politicians to grass roots level activists. In addition to training members of her own Muslim faith she also assists women who are members of the Buddhist and Christian faiths (including women living in conflict areas in South Thailand and in Papua-Indonesia). I had the opportunity to accompany Ms. Marhaban on several occasions and was amazed by her ability to inspire women and drive them to become an important and leading participants of their society. I want to share briefly her educative approach in order to explain how her work supporting women participation in peace processes represents a very good example of women empowerment.

Her trainings were based on various theories, the Hicks's (2001) "dignity approach"[19] as well as Burton's (1990) "human needs" and Kelman's (1996) "interactive problem solving" theories (that refers to the fact that all human beings have psychological needs that if threatened, can give rise to conflict). The Burton and Kelman approaches in particular focus on providing a forum for parties to discuss unmet needs, the insights from which can be fed into both psychological and also political processes. Burton's original list of "ontological" needs (needs that are fueled by the force of human development) included developing and maintaining identity, recognition, security and belonging. The strength of the trainer in this process is the ability to connect the principles of the theoretical explanation with the stories of the participants. This was done very well in the training programs in which I participated. The important element of those trainings was the application of theory to experience for a type of education that was quite empowering, following a process that started from a personal experiential learning going towards a more common and shared learning.

In particular, there were several elements in the trainings that are very much related to empowering education: practical elements (applying theories to concrete situations, either through case studies or through analyzing the processes within the group) interactive elements (involving the participants actively through personal and group reflections, role plays etc.), participatory elements (making the group itself a learning body and mobilizing its organizing capacities) and "elicitive" elements (drawing from the experience, knowledge and personal resources of participants through eliciting questions). Another important tool was the "public narrative: story of self, us and now"[20]. This emphasizes the importance of storytelling and messaging providing an overview of two crucial elements of mobilizing and empowering people: engaging them in why they should act to change their world (their values) and engaging them on how they should act to change it (their strategy).

The public narrative starts with the creation of a "story of self", in order to allow others to experience the values that move one to lead. The second step is the creation of a "story of us" which aims to expand on the ability of participants to communicate the purpose of the shared work and to create common cause through the exploration of shared values. And finally there is the crafting of another story of us, the "story of now", this time framing the current challenges in terms of concrete strategy, pushing participants to specify the actions they should take to address their shared future. This is a very good empowerment process as it creates initially strong relationships, trust and solidarity within a group, and then equips participants to engage with the others more effectively, creating a concrete, constructive and common plan for their future.

In conclusion, without drafting capacity building processes based on concrete empowering tools it will not be possible to end the discrimination of women and enable women to fully participate in our societies. If we want to create more equal and just societies, capacity building is the path, and not only women but men too should walk on that path for a real personal and social empowerment in our globalized world. These experiential learning experiences on peace building that I briefly presented represent not only an improvement of women's participation in peace processes but also a general process of empowerment for the society as a whole.

Notes

1   See the *Metric expansion of Universe* and the *Accelerating Universe* theories.

2   Henri Bergson, a French philosopher influential especially in the first half of the 20th century, developed the concept of *Elan Vital* as a kind of 'vital impetus' which explains evolution in a less mechanical and more lively manner, accounting for the creative impulse of mankind. He convinced many thinkers that immediate experience and intuition are more significant than rationalism and science for understanding reality.

3   During the fourteen and the fifteen century, together with Renaissance, in Florence and in Italy an activity of cultural and educational reforms born in order to oppose the medieval vision of life (with God at the center of the universe) with a new vision in which the man was at the center of the universe, as the maker and the owner of his own destiny. A great trust and confidence in the human intelligence started to spread, exalting the dignity of human being, their superiority over the other living beings and their countless creative capacities.

4   'Transformative learning' theory was firstly developed by Jack Mezirow, an American professor of adult and continuing education, at the end of the 1970s. It can be defined as a process of personal transformation with three dimensions: psychological (changes in understanding of the self), convictional (revision of belief systems), and behavioral (changes in lifestyle). It is an approach that tries to integrate rational processes and emotional ones.

5   Socrates, the ancient Greek philosopher credited as one of the founders of western philosophy, was using a pedagogic method (called since then *Socratic Method*) that is a type of pedagogy in which a series of questions are asked not only to have individual answers but also to encourage fundamental insight into the issue. This method is the origin of the concept of maieutics, the idea that the truth is latent in the mind of every human being due to innate reason but has to be "given birth" by answering intelligently proposed questions. As we can understand this method is empowering in itself as give the person the ability to express the truth from the personal perspective and experience.

6   One educational experience of this type for example was a summer program for peace building activists in Vermont, USA, on "Conflict Transformation across Cultures", in which I had the honor to participate and of which I relate at the end of this chapter.

7   *Ubuntu* is an African ethic and humanist philosophy focusing on people's allegiances and relations with each other (from a definition offered by Liberian peace activist Leymah Gbowee: "I am what I am because

of who we all are"). As South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu said: "Ubuntu speaks particularly about the fact that you can't exist as a human being in isolation. It speaks about our interconnectedness (…) We think of ourselves far too frequently as just individuals, separated from one another, whereas you are connected and what you do affects the whole World."

8   Welfare economics is a branch of economics that evaluate economic well-being, especially relative to economic efficiency and the resulting income distribution associated with it. It analyzes social welfare in terms of economic activities of the persons in the society.

9   Subsequently, and in collaboration with other political philosophers and economists, Sen helped to make the capabilities approach predominant as a paradigm for policy debate in human development, where it inspired the creation of the UN's Human Development Index .

10   The Grameen Bank is a microfinance organization and community development bank founded in 1983 in Bangladesh by Muhammad Yunus (Nobel Peace Prize winner together with the Bank). The Bank makes small loans to the impoverished without requiring collateral.

11   *General System Theory* is the interdisciplinary study of systems in general, with the goal of elucidating principles that can be applied to all types of systems in all fields of research.

12   Aldo Capitini was a famous philosopher, educator and political activist that started the idea of *omnicrazia*, 'power of all', and founded among other things the yearly "March of Peace" and the "Centers for Social Orientation-COS". Danilo Dolci was a famous sociologist, popular educator and social activist that fought against Mafia and social exclusion in south Italy and founded among other things the "Centers for Full Employment."

13   Rudolf Steiner was an Austrian philosopher that started the *Waldorf Education,* whose overarching goals are to provide young people the basis on which to develop into free, morally responsible and integrated individuals, and to help every child fulfill his or her unique destiny. Maria Montessori was an Italian educator founder of the *Montessori Education* that is characterized by an emphasis on independence, freedom within limits, and respect for a child's natural psychological development. Rabindranath Tagore was an Indian polymath that founded the *Visva-Barathi University* based on Socratic method, holistic teachings and on the believe that every person is a genius but all students may not bloom at the same time (so allowing students for example to continue their course till both the student and the teacher are satisfied).

14   The definition of *Renaissance man* comes from *Renaissance*, when *Humanism* considered man empowered and limitless in his capacities for development.

15   This is a course organized every year by the World Learning Institute at the School for International Training, which have among its alumni also a Nobel peace prize, Jody Williams.

16   This network consists of women activists from six Asian countries: Nepal, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Timor Leste, Philippines and Afghanistan and the goal is to establish relations and collaboration in order to strengthen the role of women in peace building through trainings and workshops. See www.n-peace.net

17   "UN Development Fund for Women", since 2011 hast been substituted by UNW ("UN Women").

18   As an example we can mention the peace process of Aceh province in Indonesia, for which only one woman participated to the formal peace negotiation in Finland and in which there is no mentioning of what the UN resolution 1325 says about the adoption of a gender perspective in peace and security.

19   The ten elements of Hicks' dignity approach are: acceptance of identity, inclusion, safety, acknowledgment, recognition, fairness, benefit of the doubt, understanding, independence and accountability.

20   The "Public Narrative: self, us, now" is a Harvard University Kennedy School approach used by Marshall Ganz.