A Critical Review of the Mainstream Approaches to Humanitarian Aid Practice and Support Systems:
An Autoethnographic Inquiry into the Social, Political and Cultural Experiences of a Humanitarian Aid Worker

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Doctor of Philosophy

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Health Sciences

September 2019

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a highly personalised account of the complexities, interpretations and reflections of a humanitarian worker during a process of personal transformation. From an insider's vantage point, I have traced and chronicled my own personal transformation and state of well-being, using a qualitative methodology of self-study and autoethnography. I have observed and reflected on my internal processes to grapple with the relationship between self-transformation and facilitating collective social change/development and transformation, and to answer the question 'What needs to change for the humanitarian aid system and its processes to become more compassionate, empathetic and transformational?'

Data-gathering for this research consisted of literature reviews, examining and scanning personal journals, diaries and photographs from the past and the capture of my experiences on a humanitarian mission in writing, in a reflexive journal. These personal reflections on my life experiences and while on a mission served to provide retrospective insights into my personal transformation processes. I locate this data within broader philosophical debates to enable me to answer the research question.

This study found that within the complicated and vast landscape of humanitarian aid, characterised by complexity, diversity, uncertainty and danger, the inner health and well-being of all actors in the sector was vital, particularly because the only control that is possible is control of oneself. Thus, it found that the personal process of self-transformation is a crucial element for the effective facilitation of social transformation. The findings expanded into constructing a methodological direction for further exploration, research and future humanitarian practice. A further finding was that the principles of this methodology are highly applicable to other relational sectors of care.

This work is an original, authentic study of humanitarian aid from a unique, insider (emic) perspective with a focus on self-transformation that will be beneficial to the practices of humanitarians as it offers material expression to the ideals of humanitarianism. It also provides the basis for further questions to be explored, such as the impact of using this methodology, other sectors it could be applied to and how to facilitate higher capabilities in humanitarian aid workers and beneficiaries using this approach.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with appreciation and humility that I extend my thanks to the many people who made this PhD process possible. I thank the members of my Thesis Advisory Panel, Dr Helen Bedford, Professor Ian Watts and Dr Cathryn Britten, and my two supervisors, Professor Karl Atkin and Dr Janaka Jayawickrama at the University of York, for their support, constructive critique and positive feedback. I particularly thank Dr Janaka Jayawickrama, for his patience, humour and belief in me and my ability to do this piece of work. Janaka and Kamani's concern for and accommodation of me as a person, professional and student were outstanding and mean more to me than it is possible to express. I thank them profusely, with special thanks to Tikiri for playing games with me, adding much levity to my life in the UK.

I also want to extend my gratitude to the many individuals who were unwavering in their friendship and love and who provided invaluable support and encouragement over the years. I acknowledge Mrs Africa of the Africa America Institute for the support from the Ford Foundation, which started me on this journey. Also, my dear friend and former academic supervisor, Professor Sheila Meintjes, who continued to support and encourage me.

My sincere appreciation goes to all the people in all the deployments in Asia and Africa that I have been on, who befriended me, fed me, entertained me and included me in their worlds. They are too numerous to mention here, and many are life-long friends who shared experiences with me that we will never forget.

I am grateful beyond measure to the More-to-Life Programme, especially Beth and Manuela, and all the amazing individuals I have met through that programme. Thank you for setting me firmly onto the path of self-transformation.

I deeply thank my dear friend, Deb, who gave me her new apartment to live in while I was in the UK, as well as my friends in the GenCap roster, who were always supportive and encouraging and who steadfastly believed in my ability to complete this PhD.

My dear friends Lesley Ann, Hector, Zini and Sibylle, whom I have known for most of my life and with whom I have walked through the dark shadows: no words can adequately thank you for the unconditional love and support over many years that you have extended to me and to my children. Thanks also to all

the sisters, too numerous to mention, who have guided, advised, encouraged and sheltered me in more ways than one. I am also deeply grateful for Yusuf and the role he plays to keep me awake and to inspire me to keep finding my happy self.

I thank my true educators, Vaneshran, Suvesh, Vishanthi and Lavendhri. Accepting the role of mother and building the capacity to nurture, care for and be responsible for them was a monumental feat. Parenting and motherhood do not come naturally, in my experience. Not only did they challenge me to grow and accept myself in that role, but they continue to delight and surprise me with their creativity, their intellect and their wisdom. I thank them for continuing to be a significant part of my life, and for bringing Kaliya, who has travelled with me on many adventures and for my game-partner Rishi, fun-loving Iskah, super-hero Nuan and sweet, feisty Nika, with all of whom I continue to share such fun and laughter. To all my sons- and daughters-in-law, thank you for participating in this adventure.

It would be churlish of me not to thank the one who challenged my resilience the most, so I thank Eddie. I am grateful for the space life gave me to discover my inner strengths and wisdoms to rebuild my life.
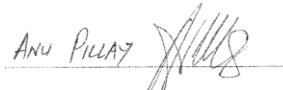
I have deep gratitude for my brothers, who are the pillars of my endeavours. My eldest brother, Kriben, who was always there to pick up the pieces when my life went pear-shaped; Devan, who stimulated and inspired me to try new things and to grow intellectually; and Indiren, who I know I can always rely on for unwavering support and assistance, despite the childhood memories of me rubbing butter on his face when he annoyed me. My nieces and nephews and my sisters-in-law have all been part of the journey. I especially thank Siddharthiya for her loving support of my mother.

Finally, I thank my father, Govindarajoo (Reg) Pillay, for all the books he exposed me to and my mother, Dayanithee Pillay, for playing the biggest role in setting me up to persist beyond the odds. She was steadfast in her determination to remain exactly who she is, never bending to the pressure to conform to anyone else's image or stereotype of a woman, sister, wife, mother and whatever else society expected of her. Without her relentless critique, startling insights and searing honesty, which burned through any ideas of grandeur I might have conjured about myself, I would not have developed the same determination to be myself.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university. All sources are acknowledged as references.

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Date: September 02, 2019

CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION

Over the last 50 years, the global humanitarian system has been seeking answers to the challenges of transforming both societies and itself, externally, from epistemological and empirical perspectives, without major success. The concern that this PhD study grapples with is the relationship between self-transformation and collective social change/development and transformation. It attempts to answer the question, 'What needs to change for the humanitarian aid system and its processes to become more compassionate, empathetic and transformational?' This study examines this relationship using a reflexive, autoethnographic approach through self-reflections and a robust critique of the humanitarian system and its processes. This chapter, from page 29 onwards, outlines the aims and objectives in more detail.

My life experiences and personal search to understand my experiences have indicated that transformation of the collective is closely connected to transformation of the individual. I wanted to examine this relatedness and find ways to bring the personal transformation process into the work of collective transformation or social change. This chapter sets the scene by examining the link between humanitarian aid work and health and expands from that discussion to all the related concerns on achieving well-being and transformation. It explains the aim of the study, which is to contribute to academia and to the policies and practices of the humanitarian system in relation to the concept of transformation in crisis situations. I look at these matters from a personal perspective, critiquing the humanitarian aid sector's Western-orientated, top-down approaches, its systems and process in order to bring into focus the role of inner transformation and well-being. This chapter also critically analyses knowledge, the humanitarian sector and the processes of transformation as they are currently conceptualised and employed in crisis settings, using discussions from literature and the data and analyses from autoethnographic self-enquiry. This study critiques assumptions and puts forward the notion that transformation is a personal process that comes about through confronting and navigating the discomfort of uncertainty and the dangers of life.

Although the current global humanitarian system is dominated by geo-political and geo-economic interests (see Chapter Three for more on this), there is an unwritten agreement or moral understanding within the humanitarian sector that responses should first and foremost serve the affected populations. However, how this 'serving' is operationalised can be very different. These different ways of working are often damaging and counter-productive to the goals of transformation.

One thing that has been highlighted for me throughout my career in the aid sector, which spans over 30 years, is that it is highly subjective and dependent on personalities to interpret and implement its operations. This is one reason I wanted to examine the processes of personal transformation by going inward to realise the agency with which to improve humanitarian outcomes. This methodology also aids in understanding the context, using reflexive insight and bringing forth ideas to contribute to the search for more effective ways to advance positive social transformation.

However, I realised that, in conducting a study of an inner process, the only data accessible to me would be my own inner processes and experiences, which I could support with relevant literature. Therefore, based on my personal experiences within the humanitarian system, I decided to go 'inward'. Rather than replicating the plethora of external searches on transformation, I conducted self-enquiry research, using methodological approaches from self-study, autoethnography, critical phenomenology and theories of non-duality, among others. I chose this research path to contribute a different perspective than what has emerged from the last 50 years of mainstream research. In my view, the hoped-for change to the humanitarian aid system[1] has not been achieved through those efforts. My approach is fully explained in Chapter Two.

This study is based on the idea that self-transformation is a necessary parallel to a collective transformative agenda and is, in fact, an agent for effective transformation in the complex, diverse, uncertain and dangerous world of humanitarian aid.

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[1]   Throughout this thesis, 'the humanitarian aid system' or 'the humanitarian sector' refers to the international system of aid delivery used by the United Nations, bi-lateral and multilateral donors, international non-governmental organisations ('INGOs'), diaspora groups and other international actors.

This thesis began while I was deployed in Afghanistan, through an online MSc programme in International Humanitarian Affairs ('MIHA'). Since the International Humanitarian Affairs programme is located in the Department of Health Sciences at the University of York, the research began with a challenge to demonstrate how the humanitarian sector and the topic of transformation connect to health and well-being. In the attempt to respond to this challenge, this saying from the Ayurvedic tradition (an ancient Indian health system) came to mind:

> *Sama-dosha sam-agnishcha*
> *Sama-dhatu-mala-kriya*
> *Prasann-atma-indriva-manah*
> *Swathya-ity-abhidiyate.*

> *If you sleep well, if you eat well, if your stools are clear and if you do not hate anyone, you are healthy* (Susruta Samhita, Ayurvedic Textbook of Medicine and Surgery, 6th Century BC).

Defining health and well-being from the Ayurvedic perspective points to self-control, self-awareness and the individual as the expert on their own health and well-being. Therefore, although this PhD is focused on the process of self-transformation, it is grounded in the achievement of health and well-being as outcomes of the transformative process.

I was born in South Africa and educated in the Western system of education. My use of the Ayurvedic quotation on health is an indication of my South Indian origins and that I have been influenced by Eastern philosophies as well as African culture. These diversities are what I wanted to connect and coalesce to show that, through complementarity and inclusiveness of philosophies, methodologies and ideas, we can transcend limiting ways of thinking, being and doing.

Thus, this research, as its unique contribution to the body of knowledge on the humanitarian aid system, seeks to discover methodologies that can facilitate collective transformation by shifting the focus to the inner health and well-being of humanitarian aid actors working at all levels. It grapples with the relationship between self-transformation and facilitating collective social change, development and transformation. It attempts to answer the question, 'What

needs to change for the humanitarian aid system and its processes to become more compassionate, empathetic and transformational?*'* This question emerges from the notion that, without transforming the individual, there is little chance of transforming the system, its processes and its impact on the beneficiaries of the system.

I begin with a discussion on how the examination of transformation in the humanitarian aid sector is linked to health and well-being.

I then provide an overview of the thesis and discuss how this study goes beyond the mainstream definitions, concepts and frameworks of health and well-being to understand transformation in the humanitarian aid sector from the personal to the collective.

My life experiences and the methods I used to transform my own life formed the basis and the motivation for this PhD. Transformation, in this process, was the realisation that all I needed to improve my own well-being was within me. This is not knowledge about the past or the impact of life experiences. It is about the ability to reflect, to gain insight and to learn and grow.

In the next chapters, I move this ontology to epistemology and formulate a practical application wherein I describe how the study offers a methodological direction to shift the limited paradigm of current international humanitarian aid. Details of how each chapter works towards this are set out from pages 34 to 40 of this Chapter One.

Humanitarian Aid System Rooted in and Broader than Health

The current humanitarian aid system at its inception was purely health centred and focused on responding to issues of nutrition, mother and child care, and prevention of and response to infectious diseases (Davey, Borton & Foley, 2013). However, since 1945, with the creation of the United Nations, establishment of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and ending of World War II, through the Cold War, the post-Cold War, the 11 September 2001 Twin Tower attacks in the USA, the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan and the Arab Spring (2010–2012), the humanitarian aid system has undergone significant changes that resulted in protracted crises in countries such as South Sudan, Syria and Yemen. In addition, the concept of 'health' broadened beyond the presence or absence of illness to incorporate the ability to lead socially, economically and psychologically productive lives. It also came to define health

for all, which requires leadership as the state discharges its responsibilities towards its citizen (WHO, 1948).

This compelled a much broader response from the humanitarian system than the narrow definition of being free from illness or injury, to include the promotion of human welfare and the advancement of social reforms, marked by such humanistic values as having the interest of humankind at heart. Generally, the most fundamental objectives of humanitarian aid now are to save lives, prevent and reduce human suffering, preserve human dignity and lay the foundation for well-being and improved life situations in the future (Du Bois, 2018; Davies, 2012). At present, the global humanitarian system is rapidly changing due to significant political changes in North America and Europe, as well as emerging global powers such as China, Russia, Brazil, India, South Africa and Turkey. It is buffeted by the ongoing wars in Syria, Yemen, Central African Republic and South Sudan and increasing natural hazards such as hurricanes, droughts and floods. Further challenges such as climate change, rapid urbanisation and a widening gap of uneven development are contributing to the instability of the global humanitarian system. In all of this, human suffering increases with high levels of malnutrition, unstable internal and external displacement, economic recession, exploitation and abuse of the vulnerable, escalation of communicable and non-communicable diseases, increased technological hazards and ultimately uncertain futures (Jones *et al.*, 2014).

Although various discussions, debates and discourses have emerged over the decades to deal with these challenges, the global humanitarian system recognises that it is still struggling to find sustainable, effective and relevant ways to respond to these situations (Buchanan-Smith & Scriven, 2011; Cosgrave, 2004).

In 2016, a workshop organised by the Council on Foreign Relations to discuss this found that the global humanitarian regime was not well-equipped to handle an era of chronic emergencies, accelerating climate change and revolutions in transportation and information technologies.[2] During the last 30

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[2] In March 2016, the Council on Foreign Relations' International Institutions and Global Governance programme held a workshop on the shortcomings of the institutions; financing mechanisms and legal frameworks for managing refugee flows, delivering humanitarian assistance and handling asylum applications; and prospects for reform.

years, the humanitarian discourse has tried various reforms to create a transformative agenda within the humanitarian system as well as for humanitarian responses. However, research and evaluation suggest that, while some gains have been made, the systems are limited by the top-down bureaucratic approach to change, rendering them mostly irrelevant and ineffective in positively transforming the lives of affected populations (ALNAP, 2015). These issues are discussed in detail in Chapters Three and Four.

Since transformation is at the heart of humanitarian work and of this study, it is important to discuss what is meant by this term.

Transformation: Conceptual and Practical

A general understanding of 'transformation' is the process of changing from one qualitative state to another. According to Harvey and Green (1993), transformation is a definitive concept of quality, in terms of change from one state to another. In educational terms, transformation can be argued to be the enhancement and empowerment of students or the production of new knowledge (Paphitis & Kelland, 2016). In social terms, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2017) argues that transformation is about societal changes and generally indicates a critical stance towards older notions of the idea of development. This is definitively about the change of a society's systematic characteristics and incorporates the change of existing parameters of a system including its social, political, cultural, economic and environmental restructuring (UNESCO, 2017).

In the humanitarian context, the term 'transformation' is used within its engagement with crises, including the impact of natural hazards and conflicts. Transformation as an internal concept was introduced as part of the Humanitarian Reform process following the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. It was initiated by the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee[3] ('IASC') in 2005 (Krueger *et al.*, 2016) to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian response through greater predictability, accountability, responsibility and partnership. Following the Haiti earthquake and Pakistan floods in 2010, the IASC

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[3]   See https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/.

launched the Transformative Agenda in December 2011 to set the parameters for improved collective response to major humanitarian crises (Figure 1).

Emergency response capacity has been reinforced at the global level per an agreed division of labour between the UN responding agencies. However, challenges remain to deploying adequate leadership, putting in place appropriate coordination mechanisms at various levels and ensuring clear mutual accountabilities, as evidenced by the mismanagement of several major disasters over the past years – for example, the Haiti debacle in 2010 (Katz, 2016). Furthermore, the application of the cluster approach in 2005 (see Chapter Five for details), where humanitarian organisations are grouped according to sectors like water, health and logistics, was instituted to coordinate more effectively and avoid duplication. According to Du Bois (2018), this has become overly process-driven and, in some situations, is perceived to potentially undermine rather than enable delivery. The IASC Principals thus agreed in 2011 (ALNAP, 2012) to a set of actions called the Transformative Agenda and based on leadership, coordination and accountability (Figure 1). Further discussion of transformation and the humanitarian structure is found in Chapters Six and Five respectively.
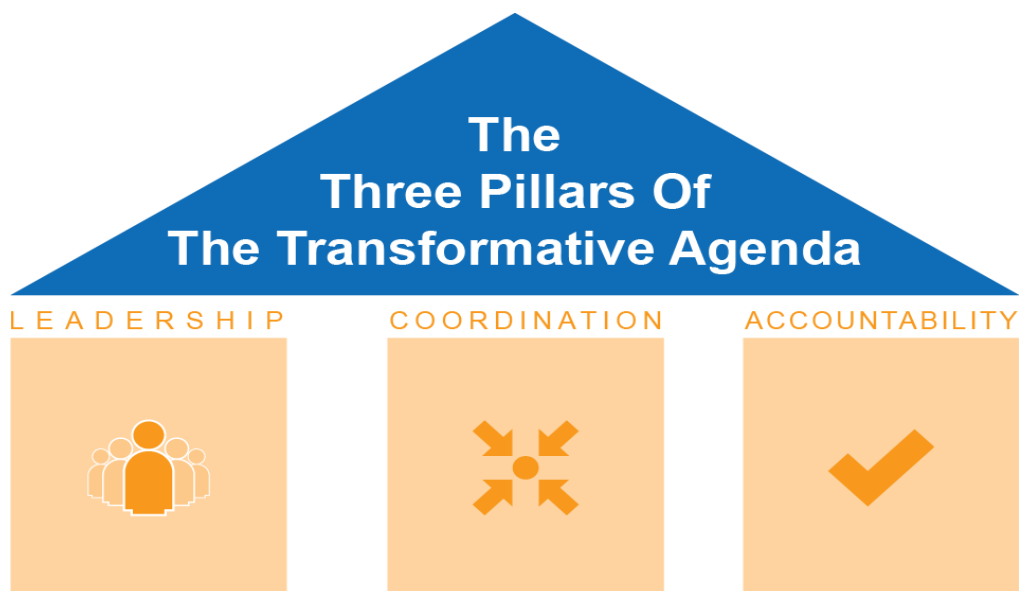
**Figure 1: United Nations' Transformative Agenda
(Source: www.unocha.org)**

Health and Expanding to Well-Being

Given the increased impact of natural hazards, conflicts and inequalities at the global level, the World Health Organization ('WHO') argues for Health in All Policies ('HiAP'), based on a concept that emerged through the European Union (Ståhl *et al.*, 2006). In the context of the 8th WHO Global Conference on Health Promotion, HiAP has been defined as 'an approach to public policies across sectors that systematically considers the health and health systems implications of decisions, seeks synergies, and avoids harmful health impacts, to improve population health and health equity' (WHO, 2014, p.2). Figure 2 explains the links between HiAP and all the other relevant sectors within the Transformative Agenda. Reference to 'SDGs' in Figure 2 refers to the Sustainable Development Goals[4] agreed to at the UN General Assembly 2015.
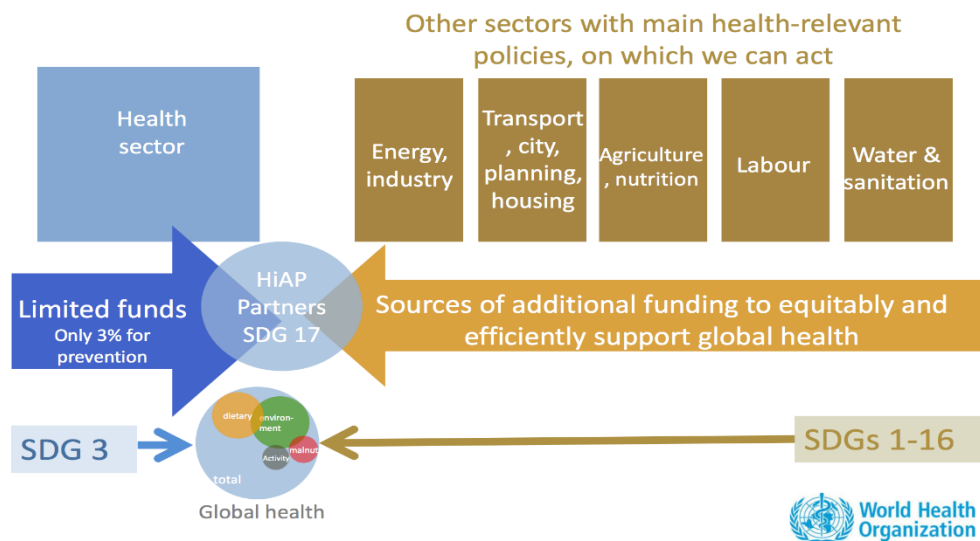
Figure 2: Links between HiPAP and other sectors within the Transformative Agenda
(Source: The WHO, 2014)

The WHO (1948) defines positive health as a state of well-being. In a 2012 report (p.9) it states that 'well-being exists in two dimensions, subjective and objective. It comprises an individual's experience of their life as well as a comparison of life circumstances with social norms and values.' Examples of life circumstances include health, education, work, social relationships, built and

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4   See https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/.

natural environments, security, civic engagement and governance, housing and work-life balance. Subjective experiences include a person's overall sense of well-being, psychological functioning and affective states.

Jayawickrama (2008) defines well-being in disasters and conflicts against the traditional economic explanation of the concept, by defining is as the ability to live *with* the vagaries of life, not despite them. This definition has already influenced global humanitarian structures, especially in collaborations with affected populations on the ground:

> *Dangers and uncertainties are an inescapable dimension of life,*
> *and well-being is the competence to live with uncertainty.*
> *Unpredictability makes life fulfilling, as it is part of human nature to*
> *deal with it. . . . The idea here is simply to point out that, though not*
> *knowing some things can create frustration, anger and*
> *helplessness, a process of pragmatic engagement with uncertainty*
> *can create a sense of well-being* (Jayawickrama, 2008, p.2).

From this perspective, the achievement of the highest standard of health and well-being is one of the fundamental rights of every human, regardless of religion, gender, race, political belief or social, cultural or economic condition. Based on this, the Transformative Agenda (IASC, 2011) of the humanitarian system should be able to facilitate the well-being of affected populations regardless of their status or condition.

Transformation as a 'Functioning' to Deliver Well-Being

The WHO's definition of health (1948) differs from the traditional medical model, which defines health as the absence of illness or disease and emphasises the role of clinical diagnosis and intervention. Its definition links health explicitly with well-being and conceptualises health as a human right requiring physical and social resources to achieve and maintain. 'Well-being' refers to a positive rather than a neutral state, framing health as a positive aspiration.

This definition was adapted by the Ottawa Charter (WHO, 1986, p.1), which describes health as 'a resource for everyday life, not the object of living'. From this perspective, health is a means to living well, which highlights the link between health and participation in society.

In view of Jayawickrama's (2008) definition and the definitions of health as part of an overall sense of well-being, it becomes clearer that it is important to understand and examine transformation in such an unpredictable setting as the humanitarian crisis context from a well-being perspective. One can define it as the ability to live a 'good life', including the maintenance of good health subjectively and objectively, within uncertainty and danger. This definition strongly connects with the principles of the WHO (1948, p.1): 'health is a state of complete physical, mental and social *well-being* and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity' (emphasis mine).

Generally, 'well-being' may be defined as a contented state of being happy, *healthy* and prosperous (Merriam-Webster, 2018). It is commonly used to refer to quality of life, or to someone's personal experience, and includes all aspects of a person's life, such as physical health, psychological well-being, social well-being, financial well-being, family relationships, friendships, work and leisure (Kane, 2003; Schwartz & Strack, 1999). Kahneman *et al.* (2006) argue the importance of well-being as a concept to measure the comprehensive quality of life. Furthermore, health and well-being are differently interpreted and defined in different cultural and linguistic contexts as well as impacted by religious frameworks of well-being and virtuosity. This diversity of definitions and broadening of the concepts are comprehensively explored here and in Chapter Four of this study.

Distinguished from other approaches that focus on the availability of means for health and well-being, a person's capability to live a 'good' life, Amartya Sen (1985a) maintains, is defined in terms of a set of valuable 'beings and doings' to which one has meaningful access, such as being in good health or having loving relationships with others. Sen developed what is widely accepted as a theoretical base to evaluate well-being through the notions of 'functions' and 'capabilities'. Alexander (2008) and Alkire (2005), among others, notably Martha Nussbaum (2014; 2011; 2009), have expanded on and critiqued this approach while accepting the fundamental idea that, when evaluating well-being and therefore health, the most important aspect to consider is what people are actually able to be and do. The commodities or wealth people have or their mental reactions (utility) are an inappropriate focus because they provide only limited or indirect information about how well a life is going. The Capability Approach (Sen,1999) is defined by its choice of focus upon the moral

significance of individuals' capabilities of achieving the kind of lives they have reason to value.

The Capability Approach is expanded here as a framework that includes transformative processes as a functioning. The notion of functioning indicates activities/role/characters that can be practised/done/played by or are attributed to a person. For optimal functioning, a person might need material commodities and certain circumstances (both socio-economical and physical). Capability is the level of freedom to choose from various available functionings. Having more functionings means having higher capability. Capabilities, therefore, stand for a certain level of available functionings, and, in turn, indicate health, well-being and quality of life.

This study argues that the awareness, understanding and management of the internal world of the individual and its interpretative processes are as important as material functioning and contribute to higher capabilities.

The WHO's (2011) definition of 'disability' adds weight to this health-and-well-being discourse if we see humanitarian emergencies, crises and disasters as situations that render individuals and communities 'disabled', especially in terms of their Capabilities as defined earlier. The WHO (2011) describes disability as encapsulating impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions that disable some individuals to execute a task or an action or restrict them from involvement in life situations. The WHO therefore defines disability as being beyond a health problem and describes it as a complex phenomenon that requires interventions to remove all barriers to an individual's ability to experience a full sense of well-being.

However, to understand transformation and transformative processes in the humanitarian context, it is important to examine what this means from both the individual and the collective perspectives. Where does it begin? Does the community transform itself and take individuals along with it, or is it the other way around?

Delivering Transformation

According to Heintzelman & Diener (2018) and Wilkinson (1991), well-being as a concept means the recognition of the social, cultural and psychological needs of individuals, their families, institutions and communities. From this definition the complexity of the concept of well-being is apparent. It indicates a necessity

to consider different aspects that constitute 'quality of life' at both the individual and collective levels.

In a crisis situation, the sense of well-being at all these different, complex levels is disrupted and the humanitarian system, striving not only to restore well-being, but also to transform situations to improve well-being, is deeply challenged. Recognising the complexities facing the humanitarian system is what has brought about the various reforms of the system, one of which was the development of the Transformative Agenda (IASC, 2011).

Although the humanitarian system has been advocating for the implementation of the Transformative Agenda for a long time, from many perspectives it seems to have failed to 'deliver' transformation (Wall & Hedlund, 2016; ALNAP, 2015). Policy makers and scholars such as Patel (DFID, 2017) and Ramalingam *et al.* (2013) argue that, despite all the good intentions, the global humanitarian system has been unable to improve the well-being of affected populations or facilitate any long-lasting solutions to their problems.

From the perspective of this study, what has emerged is that focusing on delivering aid and providing services only to collectives or 'communities' with the expectation that that community as an entity will transform, taking the individuals along with it, has not achieved the expected outcomes.

The neglect of the individual, which I found to be a critical component, extends to the way that the system operates. It is a collective operation with teams of experts all expected to deliver the same standard and quality of service according to overarching policies and codes of conduct. This makes invisible the fact that both the community and the teams consist of individuals, each with their own unique interpretation and understanding of how to be and how to do in the situation. This tension between individual and collective agency and well-being is a vital consideration in the quest for transformation. The recent exposure of sexual misconduct by individuals within the humanitarian system are documented examples of this tension (Jayawickrama, 2018b).

While the humanitarian system struggles to find an effective 'way' or methodology, there is increasing evidence that some crisis-affected people are themselves finding solutions to their uncertainties and dangers of life without international assistance and are truly transforming their lives. This is often through the actions and leadership of inspired individuals, as reported by Vijay Pinjarkar (2017) in the *Times of India*:

Eight years ago, when Ramlal Kale returned to his village, Payvihir in the Melghat region of Amravati (Maharashtra in India), he made a dash for his childhood playground – the vast forest lands which his forefathers had nurtured across generations. He was greeted by hard brown rocks, hectares of barren lands, no trees nor birds in sight. 'Our despair was such that we could not, not act,' he says.

He and his friends took charge. They moved 110 families to pool labour and willed and nurtured back 1022 hectares of denuded forest into an abundant, bio-diverse tract. Over eight years, the forest department became their most powerful ally. MGNREGA and small government grants constituted their working capital.

Payvihir set up village-based agri-businesses of Tendu leaves (with annual turnover of I crore/approximately GBP 115,000.00) and custard apple (with monthly profits of RS. 10,000/GBP 115 per family, in season). Women started local ration shops. Check dams and clean energy projects were launched. The 'Melghat Natural' brand of custard apple today fetches premium rates in Mumbai and Pune. Demand outstrips supply. 'But there were so many failures . . . we would often want to give up,' Ramlal says. 'A village can build a country,' he tells. 'But it takes time. And we have to stay united in purpose in the very long run.'

No NGO was set up, no [Community Forest Rights] or external funder was mobilised. It was just a village of active citizens who made up their minds to be the change. (Times of India, January 25, 2017.)

There are many similar examples from Asia, Africa and the Middle East of local communities taking care and control of their own problems – whether they are development, conflict or disaster related. What is important to remember in this process is that local communities do not appeal to New York, London, Brussels or Geneva to request humanitarian and development assistance. Whether there is external help or not, the affected populations continue to live their lives. International humanitarian agencies, disaster and

development experts and conflict-transformation consultants are occupied in conducting need assessments, analysing and diagnosing risks, writing proposals and designing evaluations, while most affected communities are practically dealing with their life situations, whatever they may be, with or without external help.

In fact, there is enough evidence to suggest that, even in the midst of the worst horrors, many communities continue to live, to celebrate and to enjoy. This might appear controversial, especially if the everyday life is located in a 'stable' context and is considered uneventful – one would get up in the morning, eat breakfast, go to work, meet friends, come home, have dinner and go to sleep. This routine, combined with insurance, access to health care and many other 'safe' mechanisms, can be understood as generating a sense of stability. How then can we say that communities affected by crises maintain a sense of health and wellbeing? The point here is that most communities that are in crises today may have been experiencing them for generations. Through these generational experiences, many have developed sophisticated yet pragmatic approaches to maintaining their wellbeing. Through an awareness of this and an understanding of what constitutes wellbeing for a particular community, we have a better chance of assisting the community to strengthen its wellbeing, rather than assuming that it has been destroyed completely. In the context of conflicts and disasters, where lives are severely disrupted, to be able to maintain even a semblance of everyday life is indeed an achievement (Jayawickrama, 2010).

Going Beyond Traditional Conceptions – Deconstructing the Foundations of Power, Knowledge, Practice and Being

The failure of the humanitarian system to implement and live up to its transformational goals has been widely and comprehensively discussed and acknowledged. This acknowledgment gave birth to the World Humanitarian Summit ('WHS') in 2016, from which emerged yet another policy, 'The New Way of Working'[5] (see Chapter Five for more details).

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[5] Information about the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit and the New Way of Working is available on the UN OCHA website: www.unocha.org.

What is not recognised and acknowledged in the humanitarian system is that changing policies without changing the delivery mechanisms and the people who facilitate the delivery is potentially a recipe for failure. In addition, the foundational philosophy of the system remains unchallenged, and it is from this basis that the system is unable to meet its transformational aspirations (Jayawickrama, 2013). This statement rests on the debates that have raged over many years about colonisation/decolonisation and the arguments put forward by Mignolo (2011) and Maldonado-Torres (2007) questioning the universal conception of knowledge and the hidden geo-historical, biographical conditions in which it is produced (see Chapter Three for more on decoloniality).

What remains unchallenged and unacknowledged is that the entire humanitarian system, from policy to practice, is underpinned by traditional European, North American and what is also known as Western[6] conceptions of knowledge (Davey, Borton & Foley, 2013). Yet this knowledge system has been fundamentally challenged by different ontologies and epistemologies. Koch (1998, p.1188) quotes Grenz's (1996) statement that that 'the old objectivist position is no longer viable, that there is no single, timeless truth existing out there'. Mignolo (2009) talks of epistemic disobedience, pointing out that the long-held stigma for knowledge and people of colour has been that white people have knowledge while brown/black people have culture. Mignolo (2009, p.7) builds on Frantz Fanon's epistemic foundational statement on language:

> *To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization . . . The problem that we confront in this chapter is this: The Negro of the Antilles will be proportionally whiter – that is, he will come closer to being a real human being – in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language* (Fanon, 1967, pp.17–18).

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[6] Throughout this thesis, the concept of 'Western' refers to the European-North American origins of a mindset that understands things in terms of their material essences, based on a belief that the use of logic and the precision of definition can penetrate to the inner meaning of existence to discover timeless truths (Quora, 2018).

Mignolo highlights that the imperial/colonial view of what it means to be human, including ideas about personal and collective health and well-being, was defined on the basis of 'white knowledge and white history'. It must be acknowledged that this is no accident. There are massive power dynamics at play centred in economic, material gains for the Western world (Du Bois, 2018). It is therefore unsurprising that Western knowledge continues to form the basis upon which the entire humanitarian system of aid and assistance is calibrated. Mignolo (2011, p.50) would thus attribute this failure to deliver transformation to 'changing the content but not the terms of the conversation'. Chapter Three elaborates on and discusses these realities on the ground in the humanitarian context.

In my view, despite these robust challenges to Western knowledge and conversations on 'decolonisation and de-Westernisation', humanitarian-assistance mechanisms continue to make colossal mistakes due to the unquestioned employment of Western-based theories and practices as the foundation of the operational system.

The power dynamics and material-gain system underlying the politics and decisions also go unchallenged (Dabashi, 2015). For example, implementing the New Way of Working in Myanmar, I encountered anecdotal evidence of INGOs giving out free accounting software packages to assist local NGOs to raise their standards of accounting up to international levels and enable them to compete for funding at the same level as they do. This was done without considering that electricity and computers, let alone the internet, are scarce commodities in that context. Uncritically deciding that the solution to the problem was to 'make them like us' is a similar idea to that which European colonialists employed when they clothed the 'semi-naked' locals and almost wiped them out with diseases because their skin was no longer exposed to the sun, which destroyed bacteria (Aboriginal History of Yarra[7]). One should therefore ask why things like this happen in humanitarian contexts and who stands to gain from these faulty practices. Chapter Three further elaborates on and analyses these aspects.

This Western way also perceives authoritative knowledge as emanating only from empirical studies and rational thinking (Dabashi, 2015; Maldonado-

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[7]   See https://aboriginalhistoryofyarra.com.au/9-disease/.

Torres, 2007). Employing an exclusively Western way of knowing that is centred on scientific reductionism devalues and underestimates different forms of knowing stemming from relatedness with nature, life experiences and self-knowledge. Even though there has been an upswing of interest in different ways of knowing that emphasise the relational aspect of human life, the humanitarian system has been slow to shift from its Western moorings (Jayawickrama, 2018b). It continues to work from a perspective that underlines the cult of experts and content specialisations, is based on a single point of view with one reality, supports an excessive bureaucracy in the need for control and certainty rather than 'truth', and does not acknowledge and factor in that human beings often selflessly help each other in crisis situations (Du Bois, 2018; Zohar *et al.*, 1994).

The Aim of This Study

When a crisis hits a community anywhere in the world that overwhelms the ability of the country to respond adequately, the international humanitarian system is activated to assist it to recover and to effect changes in attitudes and behaviours to prevent future crises. Humanitarian aid workers are despatched as neutral 'experts' and aim at the collective to deliver this assistance. They provide services that emerge from the assumption that working with 'communities' or 'women' or 'affected populations' as groups will bring about collective change (transformation).

The aim of this study is to contribute to academia and to the policies and practices of the humanitarian system in relation to the concept of transformation in crisis situations, focusing on inner transformation and well-being. It critically analyses knowledge, the humanitarian sector and the processes of transformation as they are currently conceptualised and employed in crisis settings through discussion from literature and the data and analysis from the self-enquiry. This study critiques these assumptions and puts forward the notion that transformation is a personal process, which comes about through confronting and navigating through the discomfort of uncertainty and the dangers of life.

The study explores the possible ways that practitioners in the humanitarian sector can break away from limiting paradigms and training from their disciplines and proscribed social roles that form hidden obstacles and unconscious biases. It works towards a methodological direction for the

realisation of creativity, intuition and empathy when working with affected populations in crisis situations. The main question it attempts to answer is:

What needs to change for the humanitarian aid system and its processes to become more compassionate, empathetic and transformational?

In the attempt to answer this question, I formulated six sub-questions based on my experiences as a humanitarian aid worker. Developed from the basic questions that I ask myself when sent out on a mission, the six questions cover the epistemological underpinnings of humanitarian aid, historical legacies influencing the current situation, moral and ethical operational frameworks, delivery expectations and the impact on the self in terms of self-knowledge, self-understanding, self-awareness and self-transformation. The questions are:

- What is my context?

- What do I know?

- What is my operational framework?

- What am I expected to deliver?

- Who/what am I?

- What is my outcome?

   The last question brings forth an emergent paradigm.

   While exploring these questions and scoping literature, folklore, ancient texts and personal experiences, I reflected on the following:

1. What defines the concept of transformation in the mainstream humanitarian discourse? Does it differ from the perspectives of different Cosmovisions; i.e. African, Asian, Buddhist, Hindu, Christian and so forth? Is it universal?

2. What serves as 'triggers' or preconditions that form the driving forces that influence the dynamics of transformation?

3. How can epiphanies and realisations from self-awareness, self-knowledge and self-understanding be internalised and employed in life and work situations?

Given the chosen research methodology, my knowledge, experiences and insights are from:

- critically reviewing and analysing the conceptualisation and employment of the concepts and practice of transformation in the humanitarian sector;

- observing and participating in programming in humanitarian settings that works with communities on health and well-being in crisis situations;

- recalling, reviewing and analysing my transformative experiences; and

- exploring the possibilities of creating self-transformative processes for individual and community health and well-being.

Based on self-reflections on my experiences as a woman growing up in apartheid South Africa, experiencing violence and working to end violence against women while being a single parent, this research examines the role and process of personal transformation as an agent for social transformation. Its aim is to highlight and operationalise the neglected inner world and inner interpretative processes that are part of the transformative process, yet which, in my experience, are very under-explored and not acknowledged in the humanitarian aid system.

Material functioning and physical relief are top priorities in humanitarian response, although there is much more recognition now of psychological relief as a need (WHO, 2016). In this study, the idea of transformation is being examined within wider social, cultural, economic, political and environmental contexts rather than the narrow conceptual framework of health. It is based on the notion that, only when more and more individuals start to become aware of the imperatives for establishing a worldview that starts with their own inner well-being, can we talk about establishing well-being and transformation of communities and society. Fundamental change can, after all, only be brought about by a transformation of individual consciousness, in which conventional Eurocentric (see footnote 6) definitions are challenged and reinvented to serve

as a basis of transformation, consistent with how people give meaning to their lives (Vasudev[8], 2016; Krishnamurti, 2011).

The Focus of This Study

To effect change in attitudes and behaviours and to assist recovering communities hit by unexpected turbulence and crises, humanitarians aim at the collective. Humanitarian services assume that working with 'communities' or 'women' or 'affected populations' as groups will bring about collective change and social transformation. From my experiences, which include working in the humanitarian sector as well as observing and studying how programming is implemented, I have derived significant and compelling insights and realisations. I have experienced that self-transformation processes play a critical role in the ability of the individual to confront and navigate uncertainty, danger and conflict. This study thus aims to highlight and promote the neglected area of self-transformation as an integral, parallel and essential element of any transformative process.

The Question

The concern that this PhD study grapples with is the relationship between self-transformation and collective social change/development and transformation. It attempts, therefore, to answer the main question, 'What needs to change for the humanitarian aid system and its processes to become more compassionate, empathetic and transformational?', by looking at the people who are to effect the change and understanding the role and personal process of transformation as an agent for social transformation in a humanitarian context.

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[8]   Jaggi Vasudev (born 1957), referred to publicly as Sadhguru, is an Indian mystic and author. *Sat* in Sanskrit means 'truth' or 'reality'. Therefore, *sat-guru* or *sadhguru* means 'true Guru' – a guru whose knowledge does not come from scriptures, but arises from his or her own experience. Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev says that sadhguru means 'uneducated Guru'. He founded the Isha Foundation, a non-profit organisation that offers yoga programmes around the world and is involved in social outreach, education and environmental initiatives. His books have appeared in *The New York Times'* best seller list. He is referred to as Sadhguru and referenced as Vasudev throughout this thesis.

What I Expected to Achieve

My interest in undertaking this PhD study was to observe the context that I work in and, from my own experience, find a way or ways that practitioners in the humanitarian sector can work in more compassionate, creative, intuitive and empathic ways. I wanted to examine my experience to offer a way to transcend limiting paradigms.

My experiences have demonstrated that hierarchical thinking from training and from proscribed social roles and practices form a culture of expertism, with hidden obstacles and unconscious biases that often do more harm than good and have contributed to the criticisms and discussions of failure aimed at the humanitarian system (Du Bois, 2018). I thus set out to achieve a transformative methodology based on a scholarly engagement with existing literature and self-reflection on personal experience.

My objectives were twofold: (1) to conduct a critical review of top-down Western approaches to humanitarian work; and, (2) to conduct a critical review of humanitarian aid practices and support systems. Interwoven is the emergent process of personal transformation, which is fully explored in the discussion in Chapter Seven.

The Significance of this Study

My work spans more than 30 years and covers working from the grassroots with small, community-based organisations and groups to the huge international bureaucracy that is the United Nations (see Appendix B). In this world of work, despite the attempts to reform and notwithstanding the rhetoric of community engagement and bottom-up approaches, I have seen how a reductionist, mechanistic worldview continues to dominate the world of aid. The mistakes made have triggered countless reform processes that have spewed out endless documents on paradigm shifts, new ways of working, restructuring and transforming with what appears to be little result.

From my perspective, the missing link is that the focus is on structural change rather than a change in consciousness. Changing the structure without changing the ways of being and ways of doing things does not lead to transformational change. As Krishnamurti (1969–1986) points out, we are so

conditioned to behave and think in certain ways that anyone trying to change things will be fiercely resisted. I have seen this in practice and witnessed how it negatively impacts on staff within these rigid, fiercely competitive institutions and the trickle-down effect it has on the work and the changes they are trying to bring about.

The resistance to change and the rigid rules are incongruous with the ideals. It creates fragmentation, disempowerment and fear. I question how transformation of the difficulties of the situation can be possible if the people facilitating and delivering the assistance are in such states. Is it possible for burned out, jaded and exhausted individuals, shivering with the fear of making the wrong step and ruining their lucrative careers, to be facilitators of transformative change?

I started this process 15 years ago as a study of transformational individuals who had contributed to sustainable change in their societies. I wanted to understand their inner self-transformation processes so that I could develop practices that I and others working on social change could learn from and practise. After a few years, I realised that it was not possible. The only inner processes that I could comprehensively study were my own.

In this study, therefore, I reflect on the inner processes that I experienced, which awakened me to my own shortcomings and how I needed to shift. I reflect on the integration of wisdom from different sources and how it links to working in a more creative, innovative and compassionate way that honours the knowledge and wisdom of others.

How this Study is Organised

This introduction provides an overview of how and why this study came to be and makes visible the link the humanitarian sector has with health and well-being. It lays out the framework for what it hopes to contribute to the international humanitarian aid system. Chapter Two contains a discussion of the various methods and methodologies used in the study and reflections on the challenges and learnings of this PhD process. It is followed by six chapters that achieve the objectives and connect the key points and arguments, weaving literature, theories and experiences from diverse fields into a conceptual framework that serves as the foundation and framework of this work. The study is supported by four appendices that provide concrete evidence of the elements

that impacted on the motivation for this PhD, particularly Appendices B, C & D. The research itself consists of an enquiry into personal processes and experiences of transformation and is supported by conversations with others and personal observations of humanitarian programming and practice.

Six perspectives merge to build the theoretical framework. I developed this framework based on my engagement with literature on the humanitarian sector, as well as literature from ancient Hindu, Buddhist texts and African philosophy. I formed questions framed around the elements of an emergency mission. These six elements are the guiding questions I tend to pose to myself as I embark on a mission, arrive in the context and start to work:

1. **What is my context?** In the first part of Chapter Three, I look at the complexities of the context from an historical perspective to understand all the underlying factors of the context in crisis**.**

2. **What do I know?** What knowledge do I have to do this work, and where does it come from? Chapter Three then delves into ways of knowing, which impact on ways of being and doing.

3. **What is my operational framework?** Through awareness and understanding of the moral and ethical frameworks that guide my decisions, I understand what underlies how I cope with uncertainty and danger. Chapter Four explores the notion that internalised moral and ethical codes are what form the basis of critical, life-changing decisions, not overarching principles, standards or codes of conduct.

4. **What am I expected to deliver?** Against the background of the complexity, what should I do? Chapter Five examines the structure of the delivery context and what a humanitarian aid worker is expected to deliver.

5. **Who am I?** Chapter Six unpacks the process of realising that self-transformation is a life-long process leading to wisdom and inner well-being.

6. **What is the outcome of my work?** The realisation that the only thing I have the power to change is myself leads to ways to operationalise working from inner transformation and well-being. Chapter Seven attempts to bring all the thinking and discourse of the previous chapters together, into a methodological direction that is more than the sum of its parts.

Chapter Three: What is My Context? What Do I Know? The Complexities of the Humanitarian Context and its Ways of Knowing

To work effectively in this field, there is a need to understand where one is going and what lies beneath the facts and figures of the country profile. Every context has a history and a legacy that it is dealing with that must be considered, especially in terms of the layers of uneven development from the colonial past. Against the background of harsh and unkind criticism, where the likes of Dambisa Moyo (2010) argue that development assistance is not merely a waste of money, but a cause of persistent poverty, this chapter examines the complexity of the humanitarian terrain that any humanitarian actor, be they a donor, responder or government official, has to navigate. It goes into the historical underpinnings of crisis and of aid to offer a clearer understanding of the depth of the complexity of this area of work. It also requires an examination of knowledge and the power it generates. Issues of knowing, not knowing, power and powerlessness (referred to earlier) and who stands to gain materially (Du Bois, 2018 p.8) are at the heart of the culture of expertism and hierarchy that plagues the system and sustains the top-down approach, despite all attempts to move to more participatory, localised approaches.

This chapter therefore examines the Western mindset as a worldview that emphasises the absolute, the unchanging and the certain. It looks at how the Western way of thinking breaks the whole into isolated, separate and interchangeable parts and creates a gulf between human beings and the physical world. However, there has been an upswing of interest in different ways of knowing that emphasise the relational aspect of human life. Merleau-Ponty in Bannan (1967, p.373). speaks of witnessing in every minute the miracle of related experiences: 'nobody knows better than we do how this miracle is worked, for we are ourselves this network of relationships.' Key literature, personal reflections and insights are reviewed and analysed in this chapter to delve into the questions 'What is my context?' and 'What do I know?'

The discussion draws out the complexities and dilemmas that face the humanitarian aid worker, which the next chapter will address in terms of morals and ethics that guide life-altering decision-making.

Chapter Four: What is My Operational Framework? Morals and Ethics that Guide Decisions in the Face of Uncertainty and Danger

This chapter is the first part of a discussion on how to be and what to do after arriving in the context requiring aid. It builds on the discussion of the complexity of the context and looks at what guides a humanitarian worker in the face of uncertainty, danger and threats. Not knowing whether her own survival is guaranteed, the aid worker also has to make very serious judgments about right and wrong behaviour in unstable and fluctuating situations. Drawing on scholars such as Arthur Kleinman (2006) and Rességuier (2018), this chapter explores how such decisions are made and looks at studies and literature on the topic, supported by personal reflections. It puts forward the idea that the individual level of critical decision-making is important and must be included to understand the implementation at the practical level of moral codes, standards and principles. The next chapter expands on this discussion and looks at what the humanitarian worker is expected to deliver within this context.

Chapter Five: What Am I Expected to Deliver? Working Amid Mismatch, Contradiction and Silencing

After examining how to be and what guides a humanitarian worker on how to be, I then look carefully at what it is that we are expected to do and what we actually do. Although the rhetoric states that humanitarian action responds to life-threatening needs, the fact of the matter is that international humanitarians either work in the countries at peace that neighbour a conflict-affected country or, most frequently, are sent into a country when the danger of the crisis is over. It is far more common that formal humanitarian action functions as a surrogate when state or community structures are overwhelmed and cannot cope. Against the background of all this fluctuation, complexity and uncertainty, what is the individual supposed to deliver in terms of practical action? Chapter Five discusses this dilemma and analyses personal experiences to demonstrate how inner resources and wisdom emerge to fill the gaps. This discussion leads to the question 'Who am I?' in terms of 'How am I being through all of this complexity of context, moral and ethical dilemmas and confusing expectations? How do I, as the humanitarian aid worker, interpret all of this, make sense of it and take action that fits the goal of my deployment to the context? Who, what and how do I need to be to do it successfully and with all of myself intact?'

Chapter Six: Who am I? The Process of Transformation

This chapter draws the discussions in the previous chapters into the main topic of this study, which is transformation. Given that we have diverse libraries and banks of knowledge to which we are exposed; that we enter a complex, diverse context with histories of exploitation, extraction, degradation and denigration from colonialism; that our moral compasses are diverse and varied; and that we are set up to deliver vague, intangible goals, how can we effect transformation? What are we going for as facilitators of social change, and how do we do what we do with who we are? This chapter draws on different theories and discussions on transformation, particularly self-transformation. It is a very personal account of my own transformation process, which demonstrates that self-transformation is a concomitant process to social transformation and should be integral to that process.

From the foundation set by the entire thesis up to this point, a strategy to effect transformation from inward-outward collaboration through new methodologies is discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Seven: What is my outcome? An Emergent Methodological Direction

This chapter synthesises the discussions and experiences put forward in the thesis and focuses on what could be done differently to fill the gap identified from the literature and from personal experience. It builds on the discussions on the complexity of context, the knowledge sources, the moral and ethical dilemmas and the unrealistic expectations of the system to put forward a strategy. This strategy starts from the self and brings the focus of transformation onto how to be rather than on what to do. Starting from incisive self-awareness, self-knowledge and honesty, it recommends radiating outwards from the core of self-transformative practice to engage with others and the context in a different way from the conventional project cycle. It highlights working inclusively to bring the diverse strands of human experience (from knowledge, experience and practice) together.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion and Final Reflections

This chapter summarises the critical review of the Western, top-down approach of the humanitarian aid system and the personal account of self-transformation processes in relation to the critique. It looks at what the study found in answer to the research question, which was deconstructed into six sub-questions covering historical legacies of context, aspects of power and knowledge, moral and

ethical guides to doing the work, the technical structure of the humanitarian aid system, a discussion on personal and social transformation and the goal or outcome of humanitarian aid work. It summarises the literature review of each chapter, which is supported by personal reflections to demonstrate the role of self-transformation. Lastly, it makes recommendations for possible next steps and some final reflections on using an autoethnographic approach to examine the humanitarian system as well as the challenges and experiences of a humanitarian aid worker.

Concluding Remarks

This introductory chapter provided a comprehensive overview of what this study is about and what it hopes to achieve. In summary, this thesis presents a unique autoethnographical self-study that goes beyond the mainstream definitions, concepts and frameworks of health and well-being to understand transformation in the humanitarian aid sector from the personal to the collective.

As its unique contribution to the body of knowledge on the humanitarian aid system, it uses reflexivity and self-enquiry methods to discover methodologies that can facilitate collective transformation by shifting the focus to the inner health and well-being of humanitarian aid actors working at all levels.

It attempts to answer the question 'What needs to change for the humanitarian aid system and its processes to become more compassionate, empathetic and transformational?'

My interest in doing this study was to observe the context that I work in and, from my own experience, find a way or ways that practitioners in the humanitarian sector can work in more creative, intuitive and empathic ways. The entire scope of my intellectual journey as a humanitarian aid worker has emphasised for me that, unless there is a constant awareness of how we are being through danger, uncertainty and the unpredictability of everyday living, we are unable to respond to the challenges we face effectively. We need to be aware of the limitations of cultural heritage, the established paradigm, our professional training and the roles imposed on us by our social conditioning. As pointed out by Krishnamurti (1969; 2010) it is only through freedom from conditioning that we can give ourselves room to be inclusive and mindful of ourselves and others. This theme emerges as the focus of my doctoral study.

CHAPTER TWO:
METHODOLOGY, METHODS AND CAVEATS

This study's research framework was guided by its focus on what needs to change for the humanitarian aid system and its processes to become more compassionate, empathetic and transformational. The messy, multi-sectoral and complicated terrain that constitutes the humanitarian system pushed me to engage with a range of diverse methodologies and methods. Thus, a framework for a critique of the humanitarian aid system, humanitarian aid processes and the role of personal transformation as an agent of social transformation emerged. It led to my basing the research on the tradition of cultural anthropology, taking a qualitative approach. I borrow from the methodologies of autoethnography, phenomenology and self-study, while taking some elements from praxis intervention (unsettling the settled mind) and indigenous research, such as appreciative enquiry (looking back and finding the positive emergent learning) and decolonial analysis (awareness of power relations and reductionist thinking), as described and discussed by Chilisa (2012), among others. My engagement with self-reflection, life history and literature were influenced by the concept of 'epistemic disobedience' as described by scholars like Mignolo and Escobar (2013) and Maldonado-Torries (2006). This motivated my weaving together of different methodologies and methods to do this type of research, as elaborated on in this chapter.

The research framework includes the use of self-enquiry and self-reflection methods to investigate the personal, social and professional elements of transformation such as are used in self-study (Grant *et al.*, 2018; Pillay, 2016) for personal, professional and programme renewal. For example, the results of collective self-study, using a reflective framework for analysis and discussion, were informative to educators and programmers seeking to better understand their roles in designing dialogic spaces for students to think deeply about the connections of their courses and in supporting ongoing teacher professional development (Samaras *et al.*, 2016). The framework also uses autoethnographic methods of analytical and reflexive interpretation of self-reflection (Ellis *et al.*, 2013, Loy, 1999). Essentially, however, it transcends all of these methodologies to utilise concepts of non-duality, non-separation (Scharmer, 2009; Pillay, 2016) and higher consciousness to bring forth the

transformative aspects of experience and offer a complementary strategy for bettering humanitarian aid work.

Although there are some limitations to this research framework, which are elaborated in this chapter, it is the best available approach to this topic because, as noted by Philips and Earle (2010), only through memory and reflection are our lived experiences and internal worlds accessible, and the only internal world accessible to me is my own.

The main methodological elements of the framework are explained in detail in this chapter. It important to note here that, although this is not a conventional methodological approach, it is nonetheless consistent with the methodological tradition of autoethnographic and self-study approaches. While understanding the importance of explaining the methodology comprehensively, it is challenging to describe such an approach concisely.

The methodologies and methods used allow for a contextual account with many different layers, which in turn allows for an exploration of the research question from different points of view. Clifford Geertz's (1973, p.5) term 'thick description', which was developed as an antidote to overly technocratic, mechanistic means of understanding cultures, organisations and historical settings, fits this approach. Geertz described the practice of thick description as a way of providing cultural context and meaning that people place on actions, words, things and so forth. Thick descriptions provide enough context so that a person outside the culture can make meaning of the behaviour. In this process, as thick description describes, I attempted to pay deeper attention to contextual detail to observe and interpret social meaning to what I was experiencing as a humanitarian aid worker.

From Personal to Social

In line with my methodological approach of reflexive and analytical autoethnography using self-reflection and self-enquiry, including appreciative enquiry from indigenous research methods, I begin with the personal, reflecting on how my life history elicited the motivations and drivers for taking a phenomenological, autoethnographic, self-study approach.

I was raised in South Africa as part of the community of Hindu, Tamil-speaking Indians brought in by the British colonisers in 1860 to grow sugar.

Image 1 below is of the arrival of the first Indian workers in Durban, South Africa, more than 150 years ago. Among them were my great-grandparents from South India.

Image 1: From Bondage to Freedom – The 150th anniversary of the arrival of Indian workers in South Africa (1860–2010)
(South African History Online, www.sahistory.org.za)

Born in 1958, I grew up in the apartheid era, which ended when I was already an adult, single parent of four teenagers. Below are photographs (Images 2 and 3 respectively) of my grandparents and parents, demonstrating the colonial-Indian influence (my grandfather in a Western suit, my grandmother in a saree) as they pose formally for historical posterity. My parents' wedding also illustrates this Eastern/Western cultural crossover in that they had a Western wedding cake as part of their Hindu ceremony.

My life history of discrimination, violence and the struggle to feed and educate four children drew me to work in the development and humanitarian sectors of national and international aid. I became an 'expert' on advancing gender equality and addressing and preventing violence against women. My work career (see Appendix B) spans more than 25 years and covers working at the grassroots level with small, community-based organisations and groups as well as with the massive, international bureaucracy that is the United Nations.

Image 2: My grandparents (1920) (Pillay Family Archives/ © Anusanthee Pillay)

Image 3: My parents' wedding (1955) (Pillay Family Archives/ © Anusanthee Pillay)

Although my ethnic/cultural group has similar patriarchal values to those expressed worldwide, the personal qualities of intelligence, excelling at learning and gaining good education are highly valued for both girls and boys. Hinduism also carries many empowering messages through the roles of women in Hindu mythology, if one cares to look for and interpret them in this way. These messages shaped my thinking and made me determined not to be added to the statistics of women who marry too young, have children without getting an education and are likely to be doomed to a life of low-paid, menial work, living from hand to mouth until their children are old enough to take care of them. This determination gave me a passion and dedication to transform my life and the lives

of other women trapped in the same external environments of discrimination and barriers, which prevent them from realising their full human potentials.

It is important to note that, although I claim a feminist ideological identity and am a survivor of violence and discrimination as a woman, my work includes that standpoint and goes beyond it. As I am a complex, multi-dimensional person facing uncertainty and danger every day, my self-transformation process is continuous. It cannot be set in one ideology, mindset or knowledge base. If I am to be effective at working in many different contexts, I must be flexible enough for all of my thinking and being to be challenged.

I entered the humanitarian world of work with the same intention, passion and dedication to contribute to making a difference to the lives of people affected by emergencies (disasters and conflicts), and it was in this context that I became aware of some disturbing issues. I noticed how different international work was to the local self-help work that I had engaged with, particularly in Southern Africa and with Ashoka (an NGO promoting social entrepreneurship and changemaking), where creativity and innovation were the order of the day. In sharp contrast to this, the international aid work was set up in such a way that it slowly squeezed out the passion, innovation and creativity from its personnel, effectively deadening their human spirits into bureaucratic, nervous responses to get the job done in the time and budget allotted, relegating them to having a marginal impact, but doing it anyway.

I was saddened (and sometimes enraged) further as I, more often than not, witnessed the less-than-high impact these lacklustre people had, along with their tired problem-fixing approaches, on the affected communities. I realised that, in contrast to the self-managed groups that operated in many cases without budgets, the organisational procedures, practices and methods of these bureaucracies and large NGOs were based on worldviews that largely clashed with the worldviews of the beneficiaries.

'What is that about?' I wondered. 'Surely, if effectiveness were the goal, more effort would be poured into understanding what would work?' However, it became rather clear that the large bureaucracies operate from an assumption that their worldviews or theoretical/philosophical bases are the best and should inform how they work, regardless of any evidence to the contrary.

This contributes to the energy-depleting atmosphere that aid workers find themselves in, especially when they are from diverse backgrounds themselves

and do not subscribe to the way that the operations are set up to work – or fail, as is often the reality. Clashes develop with their personal moral and ethical frameworks, so that when they group together to work, they are more likely to perform as a disparate, rag-tag bunch than a well-oiled, effective team. This can and has caused more damage to the situation than the good that is intended.

Finally, I came to see that work with communities was focused on collective change and collective impact without taking the individual into account.

'Surely,' I thought, 'if collective change is to happen, each person will have to change or at least take on the process of change willingly.' Therefore, my concerns were about the individual states of the humanitarian aid worker trapped in this bureaucracy and the beneficiary of the aid, whose individual process was being neglected.

This led me to the two research objectives of this thesis: to critique the humanitarian aid system and the humanitarian aid process, with the aim of discovering the role of personal transformation in social transformation. The results would answer the fundamental question that this study asks of the humanitarian aid system and its processes: what needs to change to make them more compassionate, empathetic and transformational?

Studying my life experience

It occurred to me, having experienced similar things in different contexts, that my background and life experiences could be documented, studied and analysed to offer some insight into how the humanitarian aid sector could be different and to build a methodology to achieve that change. As the contradictions and dysfunctions of the system mounted before me, I felt drawn to find a way to use some of the learnings from my experiences to investigate the relationship between personal and collective transformation.

Through conversations with myself and others, through participant observations of programming, and by drawing on different bodies of knowledge from literature, ancient texts and folklore, I would critique the humanitarian system and its processes and enquire about the process of transformation from the individual to the community. I found immense value in reconciling personal experience within broader theoretical debates. I determined that my study would be guided by the question, 'What needs to change for the humanitarian system

and humanitarian aid processes to be more compassionate, empathetic and transformational?' and by the messy, complicated terrain that constitutes the humanitarian sector.

My intention was to bring to life an understanding of how the system works and, from this understanding, open up other ways of working that were more compassionate, empathetic and transformational.

Key ontological and epistemological questions were posed as I sought to find meaning from life experiences to address the questions. They demanded an approach that provided methods of gathering and analysing (a) rich descriptions of personal experiences; (b) data from experiences of programming in humanitarian contexts; and (c) folklore and literature that provided support and sparked new ways of thinking and being by helping to embed the learning from the personal experiences.

Against this background, I reviewed the dominant and marginal approaches to qualitative research in search of methods and methodologies to guide the research design.

While doing my master's degree on conflict and conflict management, I had attended a course in India on conflict resolution. To my astonishment, there was no theory or literature offered. That is, while the instructor worked from some theoretical foundations, he offered no written literature or programme to guide or prepare us on what to expect. During the three weeks there, he invited introspection and self-enquiry to understand conflict and used only our discussions and sharing of experiences with the group as the training material.

Through various exercises and techniques, he demonstrated the internal origin of conflict, which radiates to the external world if unaddressed and unmanaged. My master's mini-thesis, written in 2003, thus emerged as a piece of self-discovery. It was an exploration of internal conflict as the precursor to all conflict, using myself as the subject of enquiry. At the time, I was concerned about its academic merit as I had not yet encountered autoethnography or self-study methodologies, and so I presented it as a personal case study. I was thus pleasantly surprised by the positive reception the work received from my South African university, and I received the Master of Philosophy cum laude.

Wright Mills (1959) in Gillam (1975) argues that everyone is her own methodologist and her methods must not prescribe problems; rather, the other way around. Gillam (1975) quotes Wright Mills as providing good guidance on

what we understand as 'self-study' or 'autobiographical' types of research, such as this:

> *Know that many personal troubles cannot be solved merely as troubles but must be understood in terms of public issues and in terms of the problems of history-making. Know that the human meaning of public issues must be revealed by relating them to personal troubles and to the problems of the individual life. Know that the problems of social science, when adequately formulated, must include both troubles and issues, both biography and history, and the range of their intricate relations (Wright Mills, 1959, p.226).*

Wright Mills (1959) also suggests that there is an important relationship between personal growth and understanding and public discourse about that understanding. He articulates clearly that for public theory to influence practice it must be translated through the personal. Only when a theory can be seen to have efficacy in a practical arena will that theory have life. Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) take this further and maintain that, when biography and history are joined, when the issue confronted by the self is shown to have a relationship to and a bearing on the context and ethos of a time, self-study becomes research. The balance between insights from personal experience and learnings from theories on solving personal trials forms the nexus for self-study (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p.15).

Since the primary focus of this research was to explore the process of transformation from a personal perspective, a phenomenological approach fitted the task, which was to examine life as it is lived. Earle (2010) maintains that the domain of our lived realities, our lived experiences and our internal world is not accessible to observation and experiment. It can only be accessed through reflection, interpretation and feeling, which are inherently characterised by singularity, freedom, choice and value.

I therefore concluded that the most effective approach was to bring biography, history and reflection together through autoethnographic and ethnographic case studies to explore my life-world stories. I would locate my experiences within broader theoretical engagement in accordance with the autoethnographic methodology (Ellis *et al.*, 2013) – in other words, epiphanies

from the stories would be joined with critical literature reviews to shape understandings and to answer the research question.

As mentioned above, I was also influenced by debates raging in the global south about the need to decolonise research methods. Researchers were being urged to bring in concepts like *Ubuntu* (which I elaborate on in Chapter 7) to challenge the Eurocentric research methods that undermine local knowledge and experience.

Scholars such as Chilisa (2012), Mafeje (2000) and Mbembe (2015), building on the works of Mignolo (2009) and others, encourage the practice of 'epistemic disobedience' and urge that the positionality of the researcher be accounted for in relation to the field, the people investigated and the 'geopolitics of knowledge'. They also urge us to theorise our own lives as valid academic knowledge (Zavala, 2013) and design methods that speak to our own histories, backgrounds and realities:

> *When indigenous people become the researchers and not merely the researched, the activity of research is transformed. Questions are framed differently, priorities are ranked differently, problems are defined differently, people participate on different terms* (Smith 1999, cited in Zavala, 2013, p.59)*.

This standpoint formed the basis of how I engaged with self-reflection, self-enquiry, appreciative enquiry and literature – ensuring that I was visible in the research and used my own life as valid knowledge, rigorously questioned my positionality and geopolitical knowledge system and pushed the boundaries of how I presented the material under investigation.

Methodology

The tension between Eurocentric or Western perspectives and 'alternative', 'other' or 'indigenous' perspectives runs throughout this thesis to propel constructive discussions on knowledge systems, how they are used and how they restrain and exclude other forms of knowledge. Mainly it is used to gain analytical insight and to find the kinds of actions needed to make the humanitarian system more open and integrated. Therefore, far from being merely polemic, this thesis uses autoethnography and self-study methods to

self-reflect and extend understanding on how diversity can be complementary and beneficial rather than oppositional.

The overall research design of the study, from the Eurocentric academic perspective, fits the description of qualitative research. Qualitative research engages with things that matter, in ways that matter. Through qualitative research we can explore a wide range of dimensions of the social world, including the incidents of everyday life and the understandings, experiences and imaginings of ourselves and others (Mason, 2002). It is about interpretation in context, recognising that our ideas are not equivalent to the object and so we construct interpretations in order to understand different perspectives.

It is important to note that qualitative researchers rely heavily on theories drawn from the social sciences and humanities to guide the research process and to illuminate findings. Approaches commonly used include phenomenology and critical theory. Elements of these approaches were drawn into the analysis; however, the main methodological approach was to use autoethnography and self-study as the main framework.

Theories provide complex and comprehensive conceptual understandings of how societies work, how organisations operate and why people do the things that they do. They give 'lenses' to researchers through which to look at complicated social issues and problems and provide frameworks to use for analysis (Reeves, *et al.*,2008). Taking a qualitative approach allowed me to use my lived experience as the basis of this study.

Mason (2002, p.2) draws on many eminent researchers to contend that, while any research can be critiqued for shortcomings such as self-indulgence or unscientific approaches, qualitative research offers extraordinary strengths – celebrating richness, nuance, context, multi-dimensionality and complexity – and has an unrivalled capacity to constitute compelling arguments about 'how things work in particular contexts'.

Qualitative methodology creates a challenge to the relationship between object and thought object. In other words, the idea is not the same as the reality; thus, everything is about perspective and is subjective. The subjectivity in the process guides everything from the choice of the research question(s) to formulating fieldwork and to interpreting data. In qualitative research, the researcher is encouraged to reflect on the objectives and values she brings to her research and how these affected the research itself. Kenneth (2001) and

Angen (2000) suggest a framework that further guided my use of qualitative research methodologies and methods:

- carrying out the research with respect for that which is under investigation;

- being attentive to and expressing the selections and interpretations the researcher makes during the inquiry process and taking responsibility for those choices;

- having discourse within the community pertaining to the research;

- navigating the challenges of political and ethical considerations; and

- self-reflecting to understand the researcher's own transformation in the research process.

As argued by Max Weber (1964), the purpose of interpretive social enquiry is to realise the worldviews of people (and the self, in this case) and to investigate the effects of perspectives, values and beliefs of their actions under the given historical circumstances in which they find themselves. This thesis tries to understand the underlying motivations and intents of the deeply held perspectives and behaviours of humanitarian actors, including myself, to better explain how those actions come about and, thus, to suggest what needs to change rather than present a mere polemic.

Qualitative research was the best method to uncover trends in thought and opinions, and to dive deeper into the questions I was asking, especially on what needs to change for the humanitarian system and its processes to be more effective from the bottom up. This research design provided a way to gain insights into my questions and helped develop my ideas for a way forward.

The literature dictates that, for any study based on qualitative research to be useful and to create substantive outcomes that can be understood and practised, it must focus on meaning-making and provide an adequate description of what influenced the design (Morse, 2016; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The methodologies and the methods used for this thesis are fully justified and explained in this chapter, and Chapter 7 puts forward a substantive outcome that can be practised.

The purpose of qualitative research is to examine any social phenomenon by enabling the researcher to go into the participants' naturalistic

setting and try to get a comprehensive understanding of it (Bryman, 2008). Autoethnography is an instrument through which researchers can explore and portray the culture where a phenomenon is being experienced.

Autoethnography: process and product

Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse ('graphy') personal experience ('auto') in order to understand cultural/political experience ('ethno') (Ellis, 2004; Holman Jones, 2005). It emerges from critical ethnography and embraces a post-critical stance with a focus on personal knowledge. It uses self-reflection to uncover trends in the thinking and opinions of the self within the historical context. Ultimately, it aims to connect the personal with the social by collecting a variety of data through personal recollection, reflection and introspection, and by interviewing others with similar or different experiences who can corroborate or add depth to the researcher's recollected experiences (Adams *et al*., 2014; Denzin, 2013; Cook, 2012; Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011; Chang, 2008).

In contrast to more traditional ethnographic forms, autoethnographic writing is based upon and emerges from relationship and context. It is open to experimentation in ways that set it apart from more 'scientific' approaches to inquiry, both in theory and in method (Anderson in Jones *et al.* 2016). This openness, for example, made room for the use of photographs in this thesis to add texture to the narrative.

This approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others (Spry, 2001) by treating research as a political, socially just and socially conscious act (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008). Ellis (1999) maintains that this way of doing research should have an impact on reality and the ability to transform it. It should provide a way of doing something meaningful for the researcher as well as for the world. Reed-Danahay (1997) sees it as autobiographical ethnography, in which personal experience is injected into ethnographic writing – in other words, a researcher combines characteristics of *autobio*graphy and *ethno*graphy to do and write *autoethno*graphy.

Thus**,** autoethnography is both process and product (Jones, 2013; Adams *et al.*, 2015).

This thesis utilises different forms of autoethnography and in part takes a reflexive ethnographic approach as described by Ellis (2004, p.50) and Van

Maanen (1988). It documents the ways that I changed as a result of doing fieldwork and researching, through hindsight, my past experiences, the feelings and discomforts they created and how I interpreted them.

My methodology can also be described as, and compared to, analytic autoethnography, the aim of which is to document personal experiences to give an 'insider's perspective' and then to use this empirical data to gain insight into a broader set of social phenomena (in this case, transformation) than that provided by the data itself. It has five requirements: (1) complete member researcher status; (2) analytic reflexivity; (3) narrative visibility of the researcher's self; (4) dialogue with informants beyond the self; and (5) commitment to theoretical analysis (Anderson, 2006). Therefore, I aimed to:

- be a full member in the group or setting I was researching;

- be visible in the research;

- be committed to developing theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena;

- speak with other informants; and

- use analytic reflexivity by analysing the results of self-reflection without its emotive content.

In Chapters Three to Seven, I present reflexive and analytical autoethnographic material alongside reviews of literature and critiques of the humanitarian system and aid processes, in answer to the questions each chapter poses.

When writing an autobiography, an author retroactively and selectively writes about his or her past experiences. Usually, the author does not live through these experiences solely to make them part of a published document; rather, these experiences are assembled using hindsight (Bruner, 1993; Denzin, 1989; Freeman, 2004). In the process, the author may interview others and consult texts like photographs, journals and recordings to help with recall (Delany, 2004; Didion, 2005; Goodall, 2006; Herrmann, 2005).

Mostly, autobiographers write about 'epiphanies': remembered moments they perceive to have significantly impacted the trajectory of their lives (Bochner & Ellis, 1992; Couser, 1997; Denzin, 1989), times of existential crises that forced them to attend to and analyse their lived experiences (Zaner, 2004), and

events after which their lives do not seem quite the same. While epiphanies are self-proclaimed phenomena (one person may consider an experience transformative while another may not), they reveal ways a person could negotiate 'intense situations' and 'effects that linger – recollections, memories, images, feelings – long after a crucial incident is supposedly finished' (Bochner, 1984, p.595).

The materials presented herein describe epiphanies – that is, remembered moments perceived to have significantly impacted and shifted my way of thinking and being and allowed for a fundamental transformation to occur on a personal level. These epiphanies helped me and my colleagues to negotiate in different ways subsequent (similar) situations that we encountered in our lives and work.

Jeanette Schmid (2019) writes that autoethnography is a deeply personal research approach that links identity and cluster, as well as the individual and social. It is essentially tied to critical practice or praxis, directed by rigorous reflexive analysis of self-observations. Critiques, she explains, which suggest that autoethnography lacks scientific foundation and therefore is not generalisable, is emotive rather than factual and is self-indulgent, overlook the intention of the work. The intention is to lift meaning out of experiences. I use experiences, feelings and interpretations of those feelings to generate broader insights, with the aim of improving personal, professional and programmatic practice. I do this as a counter to so-called 'scholarly' research that arguably confuses 'certainty' with 'truth' by reifying experience.

Self-study

Linked closely with autoethnography is self-study, which is conceptualised as 'a methodology for studying professional practice settings' (Pinnegar, 1998). It has the following characteristics:

- it is self-initiated and focused;

- it is improvement aimed;

- it is interactive;

- it includes multiple, mainly qualitative, methods; and

- it defines validity in scholarship as a validation process based in trustworthiness (Mishler, 1990). Mishler encourages a realist approach, which bases validity on the kinds of understanding we can have of the phenomena we study. He posits that this is more consistent and productive than prevailing positivist typologies based on research procedures. These are important points to consider with regard to rigorous integrity and brutal honesty when recalling incidents through self-reflection. It requires an awareness of the trap of selective memory which might 'colour' the experience.

Samaras *et al.* (2004) define personal-history self-study as reflecting on and analysing personal history or the formative, contextualised experiences that have influenced practitioners' thinking about their own practices.

Personal-history research is the historical or life experiences related to personal and professional meaning-making for researchers. It includes both the autobiographical and life-history research of practitioners' personal histories, work and themselves, with a view to improving their practice. Holt-Reynolds (1991) notes that a major purpose of personal-history self-study is to move away from generalising and towards real learning. By nature, it is (1) collaborative; (2) contextualised; and (3) conducted through diverse methods of qualitative research.

Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) are two major pioneers of this methodology who developed guidelines for autobiographical research because of its many challenges and the criticisms levelled against it. What is relevant to this study is the balancing of biography and history, as mentioned above, and conducting the research through diverse methods of qualitative research. This methodology offers an opportunity through a self-enquiry process and self-reflection to use personal knowledge gained from experiences to understand the process of transformation.

One may question why autoethnography and self-study are gaining so much ground as viable research methods. During my time as a service provider for victims of gender-based violence, I wondered why anyone, especially women, would choose such a challenging field and if other women's reasons would resonate with my own, which was my personal experiences of violence. It was no surprise when I asked my colleagues, and this proved to be the case in most instances. This made me curious as to whether research topics are

chosen for similar reasons. Many students I questioned anecdotally confessed to their ideas coming from their personal experiences, some confidently and others not, depending on whether they were aspiring to higher or lesser degrees of objectivity in their research area.

During my reading on justifications for the autoethnographic approach, I came upon Muncey (2010), who writes that 'there is no distinction between doing research and living a life' and maintains that all that we are and do as human beings is shaped and influenced by the connections we have with the people, animals and things in a time and geographical space. While reading and reflecting on my life, my background, my experiences and what influenced me, I became aware of how much influence my Eastern spiritual background, Hinduism and Buddhism, has had on my thinking and my attraction to autoethnographical methodologies, with their focuses on introspection.

A drop of spirituality

While autoethnography and self-study may be considered relatively new approaches to social science research that have accelerated within the last few years (Chang, 2016; Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001), they can also be considered comparable to ancient methods used for centuries to harness wisdom for the benefit of others. They resonate with interpretations of the Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama, c. 563 or c. 480 BCE to c. 483 or c. 400 BCE), the writings of Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869–1948) and the wisdom and life-history of Nelson Mandela (1918–2013). The sagacity these individuals shared with the world was gained from deep introspection into their personal life experiences and phenomenal life challenges. These were analysed and converted into practices that others can follow and replicate. As the more contemporary spiritual leader Sadhguru (Vasudev, 2016) says, introspection is part of a need to realise experiences within a social context so as to transform the world in a positive way. It is what he calls a 'drop of spirituality' for every human being. It resonates with a 'virtuous argument' expounded by Plato (428/427 or 424/423–348/347 BC), which is to use wisdom to generate knowledge, to uncover truth and to do good, resulting in happiness and well-being. Informed, reflexive action is therefore key to the process of expressing ideas as material strategies.

This focus on introspection and awareness of insights from my personal history also illuminated the fact that, as a woman, I had a particular story to tell that had its own validity.

Feminist phenomenology and autogynography

Alongside autoethnography and self-study, this study borrows from feminist phenomenology, a methodology that clarifies how sex and gender impact one's experiences and understandings of the world and broadens them to explore their social-political consequences. This allowed me to include my own such experiences.

Weaving together different methodologies for this research provided a space for an autogynography[9] to be voiced and documented. All human life experience is gendered; using the tool of autobiography to tell the story, from a female perspective, of transcending the traditional norms and barriers of a male-dominated world emphasises that the thoughts and writings of marginalised women are valid.

My life experiences are textured, shaped and coloured by my feminineness, my gender roles and my status as a woman in a male-dominated society. From feminist theories, then, I borrow the view that all attempts to know are socially situated. My social situation, gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexuality and physical capacities played roles in forming who I am and what I know and am permitted to know. They shape how I understand the world and how I experience it. Gender (and race) power relations influence my life in ways that give rise to the choices I make. The process of transformation is itself gendered, which requires that a feminist lens be maintained throughout this investigation to inform the perspective from which the analysis is conducted.

The following points are some key insights into feminist phenomenological research as a methodology, taken from various papers and captured in an article by Simms and Stawarska (2013, pp.12–13).

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[9]   Autogynography is a term coined by Domna Stanton in *The Female Autograph* (1987) to highlight (and counter) the canonical identification of autobiography with men's writing. Moreover, 'gyno' raises the possibility that female self-narrations may be different from those of men.

1.   Feminist research practice emphasises the human, subjective aspects of the process from personal and cultural perspectives. The research participant's subjective experience is paramount, and critical questions about voice, choice and safety for women must be asked.

2.   Feminist researchers must be aware of inherent power structures and patriarchal practices within academia. Therefore, they need to develop alternatives for data collection and engaging with their participants that do not replicate those inequalities.

3.   Feminist researchers must have high levels of self-awareness and engage in reflexive practice to maintain clarity of the role, power and position.

4.   Feminist approaches are relation-centred and do not subscribe to the idea of the self as an isolated, independent entity. Awareness of our inter-dependence and even 'entanglement' (Finlay, 2015, p.2) is critical.

5.   Feminist research can be an empowering process through the research approach. Treating participants with dignity and respect for their knowledge, wisdom and skills can be a powerful tool for women to gain self-esteem and confidence.

6.   Feminist researchers try to capture and present their data in ways that showcase the voices of the participants. It could be artistic and poetic to bring out the qualitative nuances and texture of the data rather than the quantitative.

In this research, these feminist principles are what guide me to use my subjective experience and to ask critical questions of myself, the material and the research process with confidence. This framework allowed me to acknowledge introspection, self-awareness, collectivity and positionality and empowered me to give voice to my subjective experiences. As a participant researcher, I also found that phenomenology resonated with my research needs and interests because of its interdisciplinary approach. This and the intersectional aspect of feminist theory are valuable elements of the methodological framework.

Interdisciplinary, intersectional critical feminist phenomenology

Interdisciplinarity fits studies of humanitarian aid, which itself is a cross-cutting sector traversing all other social, political and cultural sectors of society. Intersectionality serves to illuminate the multi-layered forms of diversity and identity that impact on life experiences in terms of inclusion and exclusion.

While on the one hand phenomenology is a conceptual system within the history of Western philosophy to understand the dimension of human experience and meaning more fully, on the other hand, it provides a deeper access to the fullness of phenomena as they present themselves to the human consciousness (Husserl, 1859–1938). It slows down the stream of human consciousness to focus attention on the fullness of things and events. This is particularly appealing to me because it dovetails with the concept of meditation practices as taught by the Buddha.

Moustakas (1994) summarises phenomenology as a method and a methodology that focuses on the appearance of things – a return to things as they are given, removed from everyday routines and biases. It is concerned with wholeness and finding a unified vision of the examined essences of phenomena. It seeks meanings from appearances and arrives at essences through intuition and reflection on conscious acts of experiences, leading to ideas, concepts, judgements and understanding. It is committed to descriptions and rooted in questions and in themes that sustain inquiry and generate further interest in what is being experienced.

Feminist phenomenology includes questions related to gendered experience from an intersectional perspective, including sexual difference within the field of study. Contrary to the conservative and narrow view of phenomenology as being confined to the stance of a (presumably) sexless, individualistic ego, gendered embodiment and sexual hierarchy do not fall out of the pure transcendental domain into the contingent and the empirical; they belong to the aspirations of phenomenology to describe concrete, lived human experience in its richness and complexity (Moustakas, 1994).

As a methodology, phenomenology has several functions (Simms & Stawarska, 2013; Dreyfus, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Understanding the way, it works provides a helpful explanation for how this study is framed. I have taken from phenomenology the following aspects for this study (Sims & Stawarska, 2013, pp.9–10):

1. Qualitative, phenomenological research in the human sciences works closely with first person descriptions about specific human experiences.

2. In relation to qualitative research, a phenomenological inquiry practice pushes the researcher to question the fundamental conceptual assumptions that buttress their theories and practices for new ways of understanding what is being researched.

3. Engagement with a wide spectrum of disciplines like psychology, sociology, anthropology and, in this case, aspects of spirituality has the potential to enliven philosophical phenomenology.

In keeping with the above points, I have applied throughout this thesis this phenomenological methodology by working from my personal interest and intimate connection with the humanitarian aid system and its processes, and integrating my critiques of it with my personal, human experiences. I questioned my assumptions to try to gain insight into what I learned from the experience and how it shaped my thinking and my practice. Examples of how I used this are evident throughout the following chapters, especially when faced with my own biases as explained in my account in Chapter Three. Thus, the data of my own experience, through thinking, intuiting, reflecting and judging, is regarded as the primary evidence of the investigation.

Simms and Stawarska (2013) emphasise that feminist phenomenology is by definition a form of critical phenomenology, given that the world of academia and research is an age-old male domain. I realised that I must be highly critical of my own intellectual history as well as of the knowledge-producing institutions. Suspicion, integrity and empowerment are important principles that guide my work to be ethical. My spiritual background, particularly my exposure to Buddhism, is totally in line with this critical thinking.

Critical phenomenology and Buddhism

Husserl (1859–1938) believed that radical reflection and radical questioning are necessary for beginning philosophy and entering into what he calls pure or transcendental phenomenology. So long as we fail to question our world-belief and the world as such, we fail to reach philosophical purity and our analyses will in fact become parts of worldly sciences and will not be philosophical (Audi, 1998). Simms and Stawarksa (2013) write about Husserl's

Epoché; that is, the suspension of judgment, and that the phenomenological movement demands that we work on achieving an understanding of the limitations of our own socio-historical discourses in which we were trained and which colour our everyday lives.

Phenomenologists from Husserl back to the Buddha find the quantification of knowledge denigrating to the value of feelings and the subjective human experience with all its uncertainty and unpredictability. Consciousness and perception are therefore to be rehabilitated as proper fields of inquiry. We need, they say, to be suspicious of our own cultural prejudices and accept that we will never be able to reduce human experience into observable parts.

Epoché played an important role for the sceptics or searchers who worked towards achieving *ataraxia* (equanimity), which is the link to Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam through this concept of equanimity. For me, who first encountered this term as an experience in the teachings of the Buddha and in practising the meditation called *Vipassana*[10], this is a very important link. For the Buddha, equanimity[11] (*upekkhā*/*upekṣhā*) is one of the four sublime attitudes and is considered to be the following:

> *Neither a thought nor an emotion, it is rather the steady conscious*
> *realization of reality's transience. It is the ground for wisdom and*
> *freedom and the protector of compassion and love. While some*
> *may think of equanimity as dry neutrality or cool aloofness, mature*
> *equanimity produces a radiance and warmth of being. The*
> *Buddha described a mind filled with equanimity as 'abundant,*
> *exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill-will'*
> (Fronsdal, 2004).

The following section is based on Rahula (1959), who writes on what the Buddha taught. Equanimity, according to Buddha, is developed by cultivating

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[10] A self-transformation technique developed and taught by the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama (c.563–c.483/400 BCE).
[11] See http://www.insightmeditationcenter.org/books-articles/articles/equanimity/.

seven qualities of the mind. He describes them as follows: living and acting with integrity; confidence or conviction to engage with spiritual practice; a well-developed, strong, balanced and stable mind through practices that cultivate calmness, concentration and mindfulness; a sense of well-being intentionally sought and not left to chance; deep understanding or wisdom that comes from inner awareness of interactions and being present with what is happening – that is, accepting reality for what it is rather than what it should be, and accepting that others are responsible for themselves and wishing them well without taking responsibility for their happiness; seeing things for what they are as impermanent manifestations that are ever-changing; and, finally, freedom from reactivity and responding rather than reacting to life, emphasising that our life experience is interpretation and action.

The two forms of equanimity, the one that comes from the power of observation and the one that comes from inner balance, come together in mindfulness practice. As mindfulness becomes stronger, so does our equanimity. We see with greater independence and freedom (Vipassana). At the same time, equanimity becomes an inner strength that keeps us balanced in the middle of all that is.

It is apparent that Buddhism, which teaches techniques for paying close attention to the inner phenomena of the rise and fall of sensations within the body in order to fully understand the rise and fall of life, fits into the paradigm of critical phenomenology. Critical phenomenology, like Buddhism, understands the contingencies of human experience and consciousness and works on understanding the pervasive influence of ideology, politics, language and power structures as they construct and constrain the lived experiences of human beings. While Buddhism teaches methods to observe and overcome these influences, critical phenomenology raises intellectual awareness of how one is conditioned and limited by socialisation, cultural milieus and power dynamics of leadership, authority and dominant discourses.

Although it could be said to be a flawed and limited enterprise due to the subjectivity of the methodology, phenomenology and Buddhism teaches us to pay closer attention, to describe well, to investigate and understand phenomena within their larger context and to reflect on our limitations as practitioners, researchers, thinkers and fellow human beings. That this is a subjective process means that every individual must interpret their own experience and derive

meaning and understanding for themselves. So, while it is a way to examine oneself and one's thinking to work towards inner well-being, extrapolating the emerging understanding to others is limited.

Indigenous research

To move away from the positivist, reductionist and essentialist tendencies of Western research paradigms, I found it important to examine indigenous research methodologies and methods to bring into focus the relational aspects that are an essential aspect of the study and to offer a critique of dominant thinking. Indigenous research methodologies acknowledge different ways of knowing from the mainstream, Western notions, because they were born of the basic need to survive and transmit values. To some extent, indigenous research methodologies address important balances and challenge the concept of 'norms'. This is not only achieved through indigenous research; Zygmunt Bauman, renowned 'Western' philosopher, in his speculations on the politics of certainty as part of his critique of postmodernity, writes:

> *[E]ach formula of self-constitution, however carefully selected and tightly embraced, is ultimately one of the many, and always 'until further notice'* (Bauman in Tester, 2004)

Indigenous research requires that research outcomes be both pragmatic and purposeful. It highlights organic ways of knowing that are reciprocal, humorous, and both cerebral and heartfelt (Kovach, 2010a&b; Wilson, 2001).

It is possible within this methodological framework to bring diverse elements of different research paradigms together. Most interesting to my work are the participatory methods that it invites the researcher to use.

Participatory action research is highly favoured by this methodology, based on the conceptualisation of praxis, mentioned earlier, which connects theory to practice and vice versa. Arising from this is Praxis Intervention, a form of critical praxis as a continuous cycle of reflexivity with an aim to transforming by unsettling the settled mind, particularly where the settled mentality has contributed to creating the situation.

This study stems from the notion that human individuals cannot and should not be perceived as self-contained boats floating about in a sea,

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occasionally bumping into each other, trading goods for comfort and survival while each constructs his or her own reality. As human beings, from the perspective of non-separation and non-dualism, we are integrally connected to each other and to everything else in the world. Our lives are affected by the most microscopically minute beings like germs, and we react to all physical and non-physical vibrations of the world. Carl Jung (1875–1961) grapples with this understanding by asking:

> *But what if I should discover that the least among them all, the poorest of all beggars, the most impudent of all offenders, yea the very fiend himself – that these are within me, and that I myself stand in need of my own kindness, that I myself am the enemy who must be loved – what then?* (Carl Jung in Becker, 2001, p.147.)

Wholeness, non-separation, non-duality and Theory U

Theoretical physicist David Bohm (1917–1992), cited by Murrel (n.d.), expands on this approach in his work on wholeness, in which he expounds on the 'unbroken wholeness of the totality of existence as an undivided flowing movement without borders.' He puts forward the notion that, if one thinks of life as fragments of independent parts, the mind will operate in that fragmented way. However, if one could arrive at the realisation that everything is connected harmoniously, the mind would move in a similar way, and from this an orderly action would flow.

This aligns with the teachings of, among others, Krishnamurti, and, more recently, the Isha Foundation, led by Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev, which advocates for concentrating on how to be and not on what to do. Sadhguru implores humanity to embrace the idea of total inclusiveness, inviting us to perceive ourselves as part of each other and part of the environment. Understanding life this way means never having the compulsion to harm anything, be it a fly, a rock or another human being.

These ideas of non-separation are not new. They exist in all the ancient traditions of wisdom and mysticism from Buddhism to Islam to Christianity. However, the culture of separation is dominant in the world today:

> *The idea of individual identity has fostered such immense greed, ill-will and inhumanity that it threatens to annihilate us* (Pillay, 2016).

This quote rings particularly true when we see that all our systems are structured from this perspective. We are encouraged to look out for 'number one', using competition, personal wealth and individual championing to drive the idea that we are separate from each other, from the animals and the earth, as if we are immortal. We must crush the obstacles that get in the way of our 'achievements', be they other people, animals or the environment. Chapters Three and Five examine in more detail what this looks like in practice and how it locks us into a top-down approach, even when we intend to do things differently.

From the Western, intellect-based perspective, we tend to support our thinking of separateness on the proof provided by our five senses: taste, touch, hearing, smelling and seeing. Buddhism finds this the core of delusion, out of which arises all the miseries and ill-will we are generating, to create what we perceive as a hostile world (Rahula, 1959).

All of this discussion may appear to some as too philosophical and difficult to prove and understand with our logical, rational minds. However, as pointed out by Pillay (2016), the perspective that we hold now, the path of separation, is clearly not working: 'We have reached a tipping point; the centre cannot hold,' he writes.

What, then, do we have to lose if we integrate these perspectives of non-separation, non-duality, Advaita Vedanta and quantum theory into our ways of thinking, being and doing? Pillay (2016) quotes Weber and Doyle (2015, pp.42–43) as saying:

> *If you realise it's all one and not just metaphorically, or philosophically or intellectually, if you really do begin to understand that this is all one thing, not just me and the rest of the things, then why would you go around doing what you do? You just say, 'Oh this is all one thing. Why would I mess this up?' and you would behave differently. But you've got to somehow unwind that structure in a way that gives you that clear, true understanding that includes, but isn't limited to, the intellectual aspect.*

Otto Scharmer (2009), a senior lecturer at the Massachusetts Institute for Technology ('MIT'), developed a theory called Theory U on learning and change management, which is a modern-day expression of this perspective. This theory offers pathways to break through past, unproductive patterns of behaviour that prevent one from empathising with the perspectives of the other, which in turn contributes to ineffective patterns of decision-making. Although critiqued by Heller (2019) as not meeting Western academic standards and recommending 'a healthy dose of humility and "western" rationality in the tradition of Kant and Husserl' to upgrade the theory to meet these standards, Heller concludes nevertheless that Theory U uniquely embraces non-conventional (read: non-Western) schools of thought beyond the mainstream literature (read: Western literature) on change-management theories.

The perspective of non-separation therefore transcends the conventional, Western-accepted methodologies and methods outlined in this chapter and calls for a move into a different, keener consciousness and awareness of the inner workings of oneself. It requires absolute honesty, integrity and authenticity to unravel the ways one has been taught to think and react to life. With this in mind, one is encouraged to suspend all judgments based on the past and open mind and heart to new forms of engaging with the self, with others and with the context.

Methods: Weaving Together Diverse Research Methodologies

Each of the methodologies examined in this subsection offered elements that would allow me to conduct this study. However, no singular methodology offered all that I needed to allow me to fully engage with the aims and objectives of this process. Given that the intent of this study is to explore, through a vibrant critique of the humanitarian aid system and its processes, how personal awakening and processes of inner transformation work as agents of collective social transformation in a complex, diverse, uncertain and dangerous world, I decided to weave together relevant elements from these methodologies. The end-goal is to examine what needs to change to make the humanitarian system and its processes more compassionate, empathetic and transformational.

Gathering and analysing the data

Sandelowski (2010; 2004) recommends that a selected methodology be harmonious with its study design and reflected in methods and analysis techniques. As noted above, autoethnography is both process and product (Jones, 2013; Adams *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, perhaps unusually for a PhD thesis, the methodological framework of this study plays a major role in determining the methods used to gather and present the research data.

Nonetheless, like ethnographers, autoethnographers are expected to view their data with critical, analytical and interpretive eyes to detect cultural undertones in what is recalled, observed and told to them. The goal is that, at the end of a thorough self-examination, an understanding of self and others is gained. I looked out not just for the cultural undertones, but critically sought data that illuminated an epiphany or a shift in thinking; or embedded a value that stayed with me my entire life.

With this in mind, I used a mixture of qualitative research methods taken from the different methodologies that frame this work.

To gather information from literature and to discern from more than fifty years of life-experience, I used a mix of qualitative research methods: auto-interviews (recording, transcribing and analysing self-reflections), reading and analysing narrative texts from personal journals, and face-to-face conversations with others whose influence and impact emerged from the self-enquiry process. Over the years, journaling has become a habit and I have a collection of writings from the age of 17 up to the present. This presented me with a wealth of material, the experiences documented in which I painstakingly categorised into the themes 'empowering', 'educational', 'insightful' and 'awakening'.

This was an iterative process of reading the literature; discussing my critique and analysis of the humanitarian aid system and its processes of aid with academic, personal and professional colleagues; and reflecting on my personal experiences while reading through my journals.

From this, I devised the framework for the study around the main question – 'What needs to change?' – and the questions that flowed from that, which are:

- What do I know?

- What is my context?

- What is my operational framework?

- What am I expected to deliver?

- Who am I?

- What is my outcome?'

Phenomenology lent methods for carefully constructing these research questions; I chose each word deliberately to capture the attention and direct the process of seeing, reflecting and knowing (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Study Questions, Methods and Frameworks

Questions	Categories	Self-Reflection	Self-Enquiry	Literature	Conversations
	Methodologies and Methods	X		X	
	Research Ethics	X		X	
What do I know?	Ways of Knowing	X	X	X	X
What is my context?	Complexities of Humanitarian Context	X	X	X	
What is my operational framework?	Morals and Ethics	X	X	X	X
What am I expected to deliver?	Delivery of Humanitarian Aid	X	X	X	
Who am I?	Transformation, Self-Development/ Change	X	X	X	X
What is my outcome?	Emerging Paradigms	X	X	X	

My experiences of the humanitarian aid system and its processes left me with a recurring question: what needs to change for this system and processes to be more compassionate, empathetic and transformational? The subsequent questions that flowed from this were influenced by my self-reflections as a human-rights activist, a humanitarian adviser and feminist thinker, as well as by my readings of various texts since childhood.

The PhD process was guided by these six sub-questions. Combining them with my engagement with literature and including the topics 'methodology' and 'research ethics' gave me eight categories into which I systematically organised the literature, the self-reflections, the appreciative enquiry from life-history, the

notes from participant-observation studies, the conversations with others and the self-enquiry. My conversations with Professor Kriben Pillay (my brother and scholar of non-dualism) and Dr Leslie Ann Foster (a childhood friend and the woman with whom I established the first women's centre in our hometown) gave me the material with which to shape 'Ways of Knowing', 'Morals and Ethics' and 'Transformation, Self-Development/Change'.

The research framework that facilitated and guided this PhD process of self-reflection, self-enquiry, engagement with literature and conversations fits into an adaptation of the reflexive and analytical autoethnographic approach as outlined by Ellis, Adams & Bochner (2011).

Using the system of literature searching explained below, I then selected the key literature for each question and systematically categorised it against those questions. Going through my experiences, I identified the ones that aligned with what I wanted to illustrate through my critique of the humanitarian aid system and processes and how I drew on my life experience to address that question.

I held face-to-face conversations with Professor Pillay, who had introduced me to the literature of J. Krishnamurti and Carl Jung when I was 18 years old. It was important to verify some of my memories and reflections with him. I talked also with Dr Foster, who verified and contributed to my reflections on experiences I had with her.

Cultural anthropology, autoethnography and ethnography's descriptions of how to use the tools of self-reflection, self-enquiry, conversations and document review helped me to use the tools effectively. According to these methodologies, I analysed and interpreted self-reflections as data to decipher the cultural meanings, epiphanies and shifts in thinking and behaviour.

While deployed in an emergency context, I used participant observation from self-study methods to collect data to investigate and analyse programming in the humanitarian sector. I was particularly looking for what worked, what did not work and what were the factors that enabled or obstructed the mission from achieving the goals that we were deployed to achieve.

Critical phenomenology and Buddhism provided a critical lens that pushed critical self-reflection, honesty and acknowledgement of my standpoint and positionality on what I was presenting, while the open-ended and emergent process of learning from cultural anthropology played a critical role in facilitating an iterative process of reading, discussing, thinking and recalling the past to link

literature and reflections. It required ontological, epistemological and methodological flexibility and creativity in the use of a range of methods from different methodologies to help understand the topic with the greatest emic validity as possible. Daily and continuous notetaking was important, to facilitate the iterative process. Emic biographical narratives were analysed in an etic manner, by restricting the focus to analytical content and excluding wider emotional connotations. This allowed meaningful critical incidents to be analysed for the personal transformative moment that demonstrated a change in self-conceptualisation and how worldviews, values, attitudes, morals and ethics were affected.

The literature collected was systematically categorised in relation to the objectives and research questions of this study by adapting the scoping review approach to literature (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005). As this PhD required me to engage with mainstream articles (peer-reviewed journals), policy documents, evaluations and reports (by the humanitarian sector), and modern and ancient books, I could not fully adopt the scoping review approach. What I wanted to do was broader than that: to understand how the literature framed the debate, along with any insights aligned to the research question. Therefore, I used the following inclusion criteria:

- **Policies of interests**: Global humanitarian policies and policy evaluations addressing humanitarian responses, including the challenges that are based on knowledge, histories and colonial legacies as well as practices that affect the communities.

- **Subjects of interests:** This is two-fold – (i) European and North American philosophy and knowledge of humanitarian discourse, including gender, feminism, affected populations, human rights, research design, methodologies and methods, knowledge production approaches, religion and spirituality; and (ii) Non-European and non-North-American (mainly African and Asian) philosophy and knowledge of humanitarian discourse, including gender, feminism, affected populations, human rights, research design, methodologies and methods, knowledge production approaches, religion and spirituality.

- **Study designs**: No restrictions were made regarding study designs. Studies included, among other primary studies, narrative reviews,

systematic reviews, editorials, opinion pieces, technical reports, policy briefs, and books, including ancient texts.

I excluded sources that are not published in the English language. No time filter was used due to the nature of the research aim and objectives. I mainly searched for mainstream articles through six electronic databases: PubMed, Scopus, JSTOR, Cochrane, Social Policy and Practice, and Web of Sciences. Regarding humanitarian policy documents, reports and evaluations, I used four electronic databases: ReliefWeb, UNDP, UN Women and ALNAP. The following combinations of keywords were used in the search:

- Humanitarian Sector OR Humanitarian Aid OR Humanitarian System OR Humanitarian Response OR Crisis Response OR Affected Populations OR Community

- AND (Research Methodologies OR Research Methods OR Research Tools)

- AND (Research Ethics OR Research Frameworks OR Research Guidelines)

- AND (Knowledge OR Philosophy OR Awareness OR Understanding)

- AND (Complexities OR Field Realities OR Challenges OR Evaluations)

- AND (Morals OR Ethics OR Principles OR Meanings)

- AND (Policy OR Practice OR Complex Political Emergencies OR Disasters)

- AND (Transformation OR Self-Development OR Change)

- AND (Alternatives OR Alternative Paradigms OR Complimentary)

Books were accessed through the libraries of University of York; University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa; Indiana University, USA; and University of Ottawa, Canada. In addition, the Buddhadharma Education Association, Numata Centre, Poona Oriental Book House and Isha Foundation provided access to e-books of ancient Hindu, Buddhist and Daoist texts.

However, due to the combination of modern literature and ancient texts, I realised that to take the full path of a systematic literature review or scoping review would not be possible with this PhD. I therefore decided to take the ancient

path of seeking – seeking knowledge from the above gathered literature, which then allowed me to integrate my self-reflection, self-enquiry and conversations (Rahula, 1959). In the tradition of Buddhism (Rahula, 1959), seeking starts with identifying with not knowing the answers. In the same way, I examined the literature from the perspective of not knowing and teased out the answers to my research questions. In the mainstream data analysis, this can be somewhat explained as coding of qualitative data (Gibbs, 2018). I asked the following questions of the literature as I read it:

1.   What they are saying? What do they represent?

2.   What ideas are they trying to convey?

3.   Are they contributing to answering my research questions?

Maintaining relationships, resolve and integrity

Sikes (2015) writes that researching, writing about and re-presenting lives carries an ethical burden regardless of the methodology or data-collection methods used, because telling one's own story usually implicates others, since life is not lived in isolation. Everyone mentioned is therefore potentially, if not explicitly, identified. As a result, some standards around truth and truths must be adopted.

Sikes (2015), adapting from other researchers in this field, offers guidelines that include:

- protecting anyone who is mentioned by respectfully depicting those people;

- being aware of tricky and slippery questions and issues around truth(s);

- avoiding the need to shape information to present and privilege a version that is more flattering to the researcher;

- consulting with the ethics committee of the institution;

- not publishing anything that one would not show the persons mentioned;

- anticipating future vulnerabilities and taking any steps necessary to avoid harm;

- perhaps using a nom de plume if all the above is not possible; and

- assuming that all people mentioned in the text will read it one day.

Taking the above guidelines into account, this work always strove for complete honesty. It did not fabricate data and kept uppermost the notion that anything mentioned in the text may be read by the persons mentioned and would not cause harm to them if they happened to read it. Since every incident mentioned is analysed to bring forth the learning of self-delusion and self-awareness, everyone mentioned as the other is presented as an interactive part of the process. The focus is on the transformative learning that emerges, not on the other, and their role is relevant only as part of the trigger for the process. All names of others have been omitted and, where possible and necessary, identifying descriptions masked.

Presenting the data

This thesis offers a 'layered account' wherein personal experience is presented alongside relevant literature, using vignettes, reflexivity and introspection. It considers evocative, concrete texts to be as important as abstract analyses (Ellis, 1991; Ronai, 1995 & 1996).

The first part of Chapter Three looks at the complexities of the context from an historical perspective to understand all the underlying factors of the context in crisis. Chapter Three then delves into ways of knowing, which impact on ways of being and doing. Through awareness and understanding of the moral and ethical frameworks that guide my decisions, in Chapter Four I attempt to understand what underlies how I cope with uncertainty and danger. I also explore the notion that internalised moral and ethical codes are what form the basis of critical, life-changing decisions, not overarching principles, standards or codes of conduct. Against the background of this complexity, what should I do? Chapter Five examines the structure of the delivery context and what a humanitarian aid worker is expected to deliver. Chapter Six unpacks the realisation that self-transformation is a life-long process leading to wisdom and inner well-being. The realisation that the only thing I have the power to change is myself leads to ways to operationalise working from inner transformation and well-being. Chapter Seven thus attempts to bring all the thinking and discourse of the previous chapters together, into a methodological direction that is more than the sum of its parts.

Advantages and Limitations of Autoethnographic Methodologies and Methods

Champions of autoethnographic methodologies and methods assert that one of the main advantages of personal narratives is that they give us access into the writers' private worlds and provide rich data (Pavlenko, 2001 & 2007). Another advantage is the ease of access to data, since the researcher calls on his or her own experiences as the source from which to investigate a particular phenomenon.

For me, the most important appeal of this type of methodology is the potential it has to contribute to the lives of others by pushing them to reflect on and empathise with the narratives presented. It may cause some to become aware of certain realities and perspectives that may not have occurred to them before; it can also inform and educate others by making connections with personal experience. As emphasised by Plummer (2001, p.401), 'What matters is the way in which the story enables the reader to enter the subjective world of the teller – to see the world from her or his point of view, even if this world does not "match reality".' Writing autoethnographically allowed me to write first person accounts for my voice, thoughts, feelings, interpretations and perspectives to be heard, which also gave me a way to be an outsider and an insider in the research, as discussed in Hitchcock and Hughes (1995). There is also an emancipatory advantage of telling one's own truth as experienced rather than having others tell it, as acknowledged by Richards (2008, p.1,724):

> [T]hose being emancipated are representing themselves, instead of being colonized by others and subjected to their agendas or relegated to the role of second-class citizens.

Despite the advantages of autoethnography as a method of research mentioned above, there are also some limitations that need to be borne in mind. For example, the feelings evoked in readers may be unpleasant, since the connections readers make to narratives cannot be predicted (Bochner and Ellis, 1996). Another limitation is the exposure it implies of the researcher's inner feelings and thoughts, which require honesty and willingness to self-disclose. There are some that argue that, by subscribing analysis to a personal narrative, the research is also limited in its conclusions. However, Bochner and Ellis

(1996, p.24) consider that this limitation on the self is not valid, since, 'If culture circulates through all of us, how can autoethnography be free of connection to a world beyond the self?'

One limitation of autoethnography that warrants consideration, according to Schmid (2019), is alienation of the academic community as a consequence of using 'non-scholarly' conventions (Biesele and Hitchcock, 2008; Tomaselli, 2013). Since much of the humanitarian literature is not considered 'scholarly', this critique was overcome in this thesis by dealing with the literature in a systematic way and aligning it to the objectives, the research questions that are presented in each chapter and the fundamental question posed by the entire thesis.

For Ellis (2000), a good autoethnographic narrative should be able to engage your feeling and thinking capacities at the same time as generating in the reader questions regarding the experience, the position of the author, how the reader may have experienced the event described or what the reader may have learned. For me, autoethnography is transformative, since, as expressed by Bochner and Ellis (2006, p.111), it 'show[s] a *personal* process of figuring out what to do, how to live and what the *personal* struggles mean.' In doing so, it helped me to not only build meaning out of my experiences, but also, through these narratives, others may be able to reflect on similar experiences and then do something beneficial for themselves and for others.

A second limitation relevant to this study is the issue of selective memory, which might bleach out uncomfortable truth and colour in more palatable constructions of the past; or get entangled in it as a therapeutic vessel. Lyons and Kubler LaBoskey (2002) discuss this potential problem in qualitative research as a concern for confessionalism. This is related to the concepts of reliability and validity in qualitative research that Mishler (1990) describes as 'inquiry-guided', which includes many variants of qualitative research such as ethnographies and analyses of texts and discourses. Mishler argues for a redefinition of these concepts from the path of positivist science and suggests that reliability and validity in inquiry-based research be reformulated as validation based on trustworthiness. Making validation the key term and focusing on trustworthiness rather than truth meant that I was able to move from objective, neutral reality to the social world constructed in and through my discourses and actions – in other words, through praxis. Other scholars like Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that the conventional criteria might

be replaced with substitutes like credibility, dependability and confirmability. The importance to me is the reminder that these are historically, culturally and socially situated criteria and that the principle aim of this autoethnographic research is for me to convey as accurately as possible the lived experience of my encounters and to provide relevant, accountable knowledge.

The Challenges Faced During This Process

It was difficult to do a study of this nature within the hallowed halls of an institution that is highly representative of the Western culture I extensively critique. The questions posed by members of the Thesis Advisory Panel ('TAP') and the Research Governance Committee of the Department of Health Sciences, although kindly stated, were indicative of the gulf that exists between my world and some of theirs. For example, that I had rooted the need for inclusiveness in a critique of colonial legacies and Western power-mongering elicited some defensive reactions because of a misinterpretation of my critique as a dismissal of all things Western, rather than an advocation for a widening of the epistemological space for the inclusion of other worldviews. Some of the members of the thesis advisory panel had no prior experience of self-study or autoethnographical methodologies and methods and confessed to not understanding how the reflective pieces I presented to them would come together to form a thesis. This caused some anxiety in me as to whether my work would be positively received and understood by my examiners. However, my supervisors understood exactly what I wanted to do.

Not only was I motivated by my conscious decision to do this as a study and not as a book, but also, I was motivated by the magnitude of the financial investment by my sponsors as well as of my own funds to be at this institution. Additionally, the generosity of my supervisors and their willingness to work with something different to the traditional PhD increased my determination to stay and get it done.

The Department's Research Governance Committee's questions and lack of understanding of autoethnography as research was indeed puzzling and it led them to conclude that my work was outside of their purview (see Appendix A), as stated in their letter to me:

> *[I] confirm that the project falls outside the remit of the [Health Sciences Research Governance Committee ('HSRGC')]. As such, it does not need committee review or approval. However, if the nature of the study changes in any way you think might bring it within the purview of the committee, do not hesitate to get in contact with me (Chair, HSRGC, 2 June 2017).*

This conclusion was arrived at despite growing evidence that autoethnography is gaining acceptance as a research method in health science (Chang, 2016).

I received that letter after I had submitted a written explanation of the methodologies and the need to borrow from different frameworks, as they each had something to offer this research based on personal reflections, programme reflections and consultations with others. My submission also highlighted the works of Chang, Ellis, Andersen and many other authors who celebrate the potential of autoethnography as a suitable health-research method. They guided me to provide 'thick descriptions' of personal experiences with sociocultural interpretations of such experiences, and to make a scholarly contribution with my conclusion and engagement of existing literature (Chang, 2016).

It was disconcerting that I was not able to personally explain my approach to the HSRGC for mutual learning and sharing of ideas.

In some way, the reactions of the HSRGC tied in with the essence of my critiques of the Western paradigm. Rather than confront the stretching of the paradigm that my unusual PhD was presenting, they perhaps feared that it would crack the paradigm, so they decided to take the path of least resistance and disengage.

While I realise that my approach is unorthodox, it is only so to those unexposed to the bodies of knowledge that guide it. Therefore, I thought it a lost opportunity that the committee did not call me to a discussion to find out about it and to understand why my supervisors, in the same institution as themselves, were supportive of this approach.

Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) presented an interesting and relevant argument through his deconstruction ideas when he wrote:

[D]econstruction is neither an analysis nor a critique . . . I would say the same about method. Deconstruction is not a method and cannot be transformed into one . . . It must also be made clear that deconstruction is not even an act or an operation . . . (Derrida, 1991, p.273).

Derrida's statement helps me to explain that deconstruction is not destruction, and Krishnamurti also offers intellectual attempts to explain that, without that inner work of transformation, not much will change by itself externally. This comes close to the teachings of the most ancient philosopher, Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha), on Impermanence. The fundamental difference to both Derrida and Krishnamurti is that Buddha offered a methodology with practical methods that one can employ towards self-transformation. As Karl Marx (1845 in Wiltshire, 1995) once said, 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it.' This is ultimately the aim of this work – to facilitate the reader of this PhD towards a methodological outcome that offers a way to bring about a change.

Scanning through journals, diaries and photographs was an evocative process, but was also challenging at times. It brought back many memories of long-forgotten events and processes, pleasant and unpleasant. In addition, wearing the researcher hat while at home, at work and at university meant that every conversation, artefact or event took on another meaning as a possibility for study. It added an element of watchfulness to my daily life, accompanied by scribblings on pieces of paper and little notebooks I took to carrying around with me.

Bullough and Baughman (1997, p.75) point out that, when discussing the acceptance of change in a new social setting:

we also engage in accommodation and create new beliefs, new ways of being in the world in response to new experience. Sometimes these changes are more or less forced upon us; at other times they are openly sought.

Fortunately, this innate ability of humans to adapt to change enabled me to live and study in the United Kingdom at my advanced age. I found that the self-transformation processes I was reflecting on and advocating for in my thesis

were important for me to use and practise so that I could adapt well and to maintain my sense of inner well-being. During this time, as mentioned above, I struggled with the Research Governance Committee, the Thesis Advisory Panel and various life challenges, experiencing all the uncertainties and dangers that I was writing about, since these are not events but ongoing life processes. It demonstrated to me over and again the need for continuous growth through the practice of inclusivity and mindfulness, be it at the individual, collective or institutional level.

How did I address those challenges?

The challenges I describe above pushed me to reflect on ways to address the issues I was confronting. For example, I knew that unless I acknowledged that I felt some resentment towards this country that had enriched itself from both of my countries of origin (India and South Africa) and now demanded that, to get this PhD, I had to comply with their stringent requirements, I would not progress. If I apply the strategy that emerged from this study, I can see that the principles of humility and not-knowing, authentic relationships and co-creation based on trust and willingness were all at play in the PhD process. Without applying these principles, I may have stalled and not overcome the rages and frustrations that flared up over the time spent in Britain.

Through the months of navigating through the visa process and the university bureaucracy, finding the funds to pay the fees, living alone in a student residence, the isolation in a Yorkshire village, the days and weeks of concentrated time with photographs and memories and the time in a strange, hot country on deployment doing fieldwork, the practices of self-transformation were vitally important. Inclusiveness, openness and honesty gained through the self-transformation practices of meditation, reflexive journaling and self-enquiry were the principles that guided me through the process and aided in establishing new relationships that will go beyond the PhD. The consistent self-enquiry, reflection and questioning propelled me to go beyond the boundaries of countries, skin colours and historical grievances to find joy and excitement in the process of learning and understanding the context, the people and the history.

Establishing supportive and mutually respectful relationships with my supervisors and the TAP were also keys to addressing the challenges successfully. I chose to perceive the questions from the TAP meetings as

stimulants for deeper thinking, rather than labelling and dismissing them. I saw that they could give me an indication of the questions I might have to answer from others later. They also urged me to write in more detail than is my usual style. I am particularly grateful for the depth of Professor Karl Atkin's sociological and philosophical knowledge and his willingness to engage with a topic that was stretching the Western paradigm to make room for other approaches. His support during the TAP meetings boosted my confidence in the study and in my ability to take it forward. I owe the successful completion of this work to the consistent support of my supervisors.

The challenge of being participant observer

Going into a humanitarian operation to observe programming and engage with co-workers as a participant observer was both highly challenging and rewarding. My work was intensified by the meta-process of observing and capturing thoughts in my daily journal for my thesis. I was very conscious of myself, my thoughts and my feelings. It sharpened my awareness and motivated me to be the change I wanted to see by practising the self-transformation tools and processes that I know about to sustain a state of inner well-being.

This does not mean that the challenges were any less easy to survive. My duty station was far from the capital city of the deployment country, with few flights to get to it and only then in small planes. I missed flights, got redirected to other cities in the boiling heat, got abandoned by a taxi driver in the middle of nowhere due to a language misunderstanding, and my bedroom was riddled with cockroaches – a particular horror for me. Keeping joyful, calm and centred was no easy task in this environment, and I wondered what others were doing to keep themselves sane. It helped enormously to write in my daily journal, knowing that all this information would be put to some use and that the experience was not in vain. Practising the Isha Kriya meditation, the Upa Yoga exercises and the breathing techniques all helped as well. I also knew that relationships were key, and I established those that have continued till the present time.

What I Learned Through this PhD Process

This study was an opportunity to re-examine my own attitudes and values in the work that I do and the way that I live my life. From the beginning of the PhD process to the end, I was deeply challenged by knowing and not-knowing on many levels. As a very organised person with high self-expectations of productivity, I found not knowing how the process was going to unfold unnerving. Firstly, since autoethnography and self-study are relatively new research methodologies, I could not find a similar PhD done in the UK. It was therefore unprecedented in the Department of Health Sciences, so there were no guidelines for how to go about it. Also, although other PhD students confirmed that the writing process is an emergent one, I nevertheless felt doubly challenged by the unique approach I had chosen and was worried that it would get stuck somewhere along the way. I had no established methodological framework from which to work that could guide my progress, nor was there a culture or tradition that I could fall back on. This caused uncertainty and doubt as to whether I was proceeding in the right direction and whether or not I had missed any nuances. Interestingly, it reflected the world within which I work, and that encouraged me to expand on the learnings from working with uncertainty from that world into this one. I knew from that world of danger, uncertainty and unpredictability that, to challenge and advance my understanding, I had to be prepared to stand outside of my comfort zone, which is to know and to plan.

Finally, I was unnerved by the pace of the process. Coming from the humanitarian world, where everything is done with such urgency, I was defied to sit in the process and enjoy the budding of the ideas, the emerging of the structure and the unfolding of the writing. In the same way that working in a humanitarian setting is stimulating in terms of not knowing what will happen there and what and who one will encounter, so did this process excite and startle me. I imagined that, having experienced some of the most difficult contexts like Afghanistan and Somalia, I could not be surprised. I was proved totally wrong and was consistently surprised at how ideas and discussions would turn into themes that linked and flowed into patterns. The process evolved slowly and compelled me to trust it, to trust my supervisors and, most importantly, to trust myself. I had to trust that I had the capacity to think, to analyse and to write. More significantly, I had to value my inner voice as an authentic and trustworthy guide to show me the way to proceed.

Reviewing the literature, reading, analysing and reflecting on my experiences changed my perspectives. While I thought I was doing quite well with responding to life's challenges, the self-enquiry lens of the PhD worked like Jiminy Cricket on the shoulder of Pinocchio (Collodi, 1883). I was nudged to acknowledge being out of integrity, railing against reality or trying to take control of the process. My encounters with others and their life situations emphasised that the only power I have is to change myself. It made me stop to think before speaking.

This became a material dilemma when I was offered the opportunity to take a deployment in Malawi and, after saying an initial yes, three days later I called to turn it down. I had reflected and acknowledged that I needed time to process what I had learned and internalised through this PhD process. Through the researching, reading and writing, I had not only confronted the failures of the system and all its critics, but also reflected on the value and growth processes I had undergone over the years. I realised that I had not yet come to terms with how to be within a faulty system over which I had no power, but within which I could still do some good work. Documenting, reflecting and analysing the instances where I was able to do some good work despite the chaotic environment made me realise that I had integrated those learnings. There was therefore much less duality between my personal and professional selves, and I needed time to think about how this impacted on the kind of contribution I wanted to make to the sector. I could not just go back and fall into a familiar pattern of work.

Overall, the process provided me with time and space that I have never had before as the single parent of four children, having to work and study while they were growing up. This time allowed me to distil my life's work and experiences into a deeply reflective and conscious piece of work that I hope will inspire others.

I have not encountered another study that has been conducted of this nature, either from an autobiographical perspective or from the perspective of transformation and inner-well-being in the humanitarian aid sector. My unsuccessful search for inspiration to guide myself through the humanitarian workspace is what enthused me to embark on this study. The goal was to bring the emerging paradigm of mindful inclusiveness into this area from the unique perspective of personal experience. It took courage to examine myself within the humanitarian aid context, to realise a deeper perspective about the inner

workings and hidden mechanisms behind the decision-making processes and underlying power politics that I, as a humanitarian aid worker, undertake when I am deployed. It was imperative to observe this from within to better examine the intricacies and complexities of the position of humanitarian aid worker and the role that self-transformation plays as an agent of social transformation. I believe that providing an anthropological look at this position as an actor in this field will help to further the development of the focus on self-transformation and inner-well-being for humanitarian aid workers, no matter their position.

My knowledge of the emerging fields of self-study and autoethnography was vastly expanded through this process. I learned how to use those approaches and found immense value in the experiences, trials and tribulations of other autoethnographers and researchers on the topics. Their experiences guided me to build on the foundations of self-study and autoethnography to include critical feminist phenomenology, as well as Hindu and Buddhist practices, and draw on theories of non-separation and non-duality to form the approach of this qualitative study. Through mining and searching for commonalities, insights and articulations of my thinking within those fields and approaches, I compiled edifices and platforms to guide, direct and support the insights from my reflexive process. Meaning was derived from personal life experiences recorded in a reflexive journal I kept during deployments, documenting daily occurrences, feelings and thoughts. Journals and diaries from the past were sourced as well as photographs and old photograph albums. Conversations with significant others also formed part of the data-collection process. These tools were scanned and reflected upon to draw out significant experiences that could be analysed to demonstrate the principles and concepts emerging from the literature reviews.

Researchers agree that developing meaning in qualitative research is an emergent and iterative process, and it is likely that researchers will find things they had not set out to find (Thornton, 1993). As I developed the framework for the research based on my experiences as a humanitarian aid worker and conducted the literature reviews on each sub-question, my analyses changed, and my perspective shifted. New meanings surfaced from my personal reflections on the data and provided new understandings and viewpoints to be developed. I had to allow the themes to surface from the material.

I had originally wanted to focus on my experiences as a woman and the gendered nature of my experience in the humanitarian sector, but this was slowly subsumed by the broader issues of coloniality and power. I was drawn into reflecting on my own struggles with coloniality of thinking and the power of the expertise culture. This forced me to look inward and examine morals and ethics from a new perspective, influenced by exposure to the work of Arthur Kleinman (2007), Rességuire (2018) and Slim (2013), among others, as discussed in Chapter Four. Their work and my personal experiences and reflections assisted my realisations on morality, the sources of moral values and what guides my personal value system. I thus interrogated the way I make crucial decisions when working in the field and realised how much more influence my socialisation and experiences had on those decisions than the codes and principles that I was duty-bound to through my professional contract.

The three years of reading, reflection and analysis pushed the boundaries of my understanding, not only of the humanitarian sector and of myself, but also of the emerging paradigms that are working towards a convergence of worldviews from East to West to Africa, albeit not directly in the field of humanitarian aid work. While it was not the objective of this work to unpack non-duality, which is the perspective of non-separation, it became clear that this is the underlying orientation of my work supported by other complementary perspectives.

Working within a university in the West and being challenged to explain, elucidate and deconstruct Eastern or non-Western knowledge, I was confronted with yet another dilemma: should I explore and bring forth the links between the non-dual perspective and post-humanism? In brief, post-humanistic discourse critically questions the concept of the human and counters the overemphasis on the subjective in humanism, brings in the role of others like plants and animals and prioritises social practices over individuals. Thus, many ancient spiritual traditions are in tune with the posthuman approach (Ferrando, 2016). Posthumanism does not recognise humans as being exceptional, nor does it see them in their separateness from the rest of beings, but in connection to them. In such an interconnected paradigm, the well-being of humans is as crucial as the one of non-human animals, machines, and the environment (Vasudev, 2016; Tolle, 2005; Chopra, 1993).

One of the main characteristics of philosophical posthumanism is its emphasis on a post-dualistic understanding of existence. Ferrando (2016) goes to great lengths to highlight the influence and contribution of Eastern traditions and feminist thought to posthumanism. She goes so far as to claim that humans have always been posthuman. My struggle with this was not that bringing posthumanism into the thesis would not add immense value to the scholarship, but that I did not want to fall into the trap highlighted in Chapter One of this thesis of basing a definition of 'human' on 'white knowledge' (Fanon, 1963). I thought that it could be misconstrued that the ancient practices of non-dualistic inquiry, such as Advaita Vedanta and the traditions of Jainism, Hinduism, Buddhism, yoga and Tantrism, are only credible if they are defined by the post-modern, Western critical theories of 'posthumanism'.

I also had to grapple with the fact that, within posthumanism, there are different schools of thought. Some, like Kurzweil (2005), speak of transhumanism and claim that, in the coming century, human beings will evolve into an unrecognisable species, radically altered by implants, biohacking, cognitive enhancement and other bio-medical technology. Others, like Haraway (1991), from the perspective of critical theory, argue that the fusing of humans and technology will not physically enhance humanity, but allow us to see ourselves as being interconnected rather than separate from non-human beings. Whether there is appreciation for the concept of posthumanism or not, scholarship in this field is in full expansion in the West (Braidotti, 2013).

However, before jumping onto the bandwagon of posthumanism, it is important to note that it is not new. Eco-feminism (a term coined by Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974), for example, takes issue with the oppression and domination of not only women, but also of all beings, human and non-human, and advocates for a holistic approach, particularly with the environment (Shiva, 1988). Posthumanism also shares striking points in common with the ancient spiritual traditions of Jainism, Buddhism, Advaita Vedanta and yoga as well as the traditions of the 'first people' in Africa and the Americas. The principles of pluralism and multiplicity of viewpoints (Sethia, 2004) are emphasised and reality is perceived differently from diverse points of view, so that no single point of view can be regarded as the complete one.

This ability to see the other person as no longer the 'other' but as identical to our own self, underlies the capacity for empathy and sympathy with the other that operationalizes ahimsā[12] *(Koller, 2004, pp.86–87).*

Nondualism is therefore attracting an increasing interest from scholars working to bridge modern knowledge and ancient wisdom. In Western science an awareness of interconnectedness has emerged that is in tune with the posthuman approach, which rejects Cartesian dualism. This is largely due to the ground-breaking work (in the West) by Capra (1975), which highlighted the parallels between the worldviews of modern physicists and Eastern mystics.

These seismic shifts in the West mirror the ancient traditions that emphasise the fact that significant social changes require deep shifts in consciousness: evolution is to be preferred to revolution. In this respect, the growing popularity and the global impact of yoga on contemporary Western society is significant. Singleton and Byrne (2008) perceive this as a collective desire for transformation, based on the experience of existential and social empowerment offered by the practice (Nevrin, 2008). In the non-dual tradition of yoga, as well as in the post-dualistic tradition of the posthuman, self-transformation corresponds to the transformation of the entire plane of being. In a way, it can be likened to the closing of a circle, where ancient traditions, ideas, thoughts and practices on inclusivity, oneness, holism and mindfulness are connecting to the other end – the modern, exclusivist process that characterised the full human being as a white, male, physically abled, heterosexual and propertied subject (Ferrando, 2016).

That this wholeness thinking is not new is perfectly demonstrated by the stories of the 'first people' of South Africa, known as 'Bushmen' or Khoesān (also Khoisan). Keeny (2010) writes that these ancient people, known to be the first inhabitants of South Africa, lived in total harmony with nature. The sounds of the birds, animals and insects provided clear messages of what was transpiring in the environment without the need for modern technology. A

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[12] *Ahimsā* is a Sanskrit word which literally means 'not to harm' and is considered one of the main principles of Jainism, in which all life forms are treated with equal respect.

significant practice of their culture was to apologise to a dying animal each time one was killed to eat. The apology was for the unfortunate necessity that the animal had to die so that others may live. This apology could take an hour and the animal would only be eaten once they were convinced that the animal's spirit was satisfied that the killing was necessary and justified. Where once these people and their practices were regarded as primitive, there is an emerging global awareness of the need to have a similar respect for all beings, human and non-human.

Ashoka, the Indian emperor (268–232 BCE), is another example of ancient wisdom that the West is waking up to today. Ashoka is well known for his edicts carved in rock, which are still visible today. Through these edicts he urged his subjects to revere life in all forms and preserve the environment. Ashoka believed that the state had a responsibility not only to protect and promote the welfare of its people, but also its forests, wildlife and environment. Hunting certain species of wild animals was banned, forest and wildlife reserves were established, and cruelty to domestic and wild animals was prohibited (Keuning, 2015). These are indeed progressive ideas coming from an emperor in the 3rd century BCE, and this demonstrates, as mentioned in the Christian Bible, that 'there is nothing new under the sun' (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

What I May Have Done Differently

Reflecting on the journey from where it began, there are some things I may have done differently if it were possible to know then what I now know. For example, I may not have chosen to do this type of study in the United Kingdom (UK) given the challenges that presented themselves during this process. Since South African culture is riddled with colonial legacies of language, traditions, social norms and practices, I should be forgiven for thinking that I would find the UK a more familiar and easier to understand context than the United States of America or anywhere else in Europe. Knowing Shakespeare, speaking English and having the ability to recite the poems of William Wordsworth was little if any preparation for living and studying in the UK. It was as foreign and unfamiliar as any other place outside of South Africa. The effort to address some of the extremely costly, bureaucratic requirements to be an international student challenged me not to become resentful of Britain's historical ties with South Africa. This was all the more distressing for me as I waded through the history of

the arrival of Indians in South Africa. I was re-connected most poignantly to my Indian ancestors and what they were forced to endure under the cruel, exploitative indentured labour system and the racial inequality and segregation for more than a century.

Summary

This chapter describes and justifies the approach taken to review the literature and research evidence and conduct an adaptation of autoethnographic, phenomenological, self-study research. It provides details about how the literature reviews and reflexive and analytical autoethnography were carried out, including the strategies employed to meet the requirements of the different forms of autoethnography that were employed, which include methods taken from self-study and indigenous research.

It justifies the presentation of materials alongside the critiques of the humanitarian sector as 'epiphanies and insights'; that is, recollected moments of significant impact on my life, which transformed and shifted my way of being and thinking to allow better negotiation of the intense situations I had encountered in my work. These are presented in the following chapters as answers to the six sub-questions that flow from the main question, 'What needs to change for the humanitarian aid system and its processes to become more compassionate, empathetic and transformational?'

This chapter also discusses the advantages and limitations of taking the autoethnographic methodological approach and presents some of the challenges of carrying out this undertaking in the context of the United Kingdom, former colonial master of South Africa. I reflect on what I may have done differently, especially since wading through the past was an evocative experience given the colonial history, the experiences of apartheid and my life experiences as a woman and single parent.

In brief, the methodological approach is woven mainly from self-study, autoethnography and phenomenology, with elements from indigenous research and the theories of non-duality. It also integrates a feminist perspective throughout.

Autoethnography and self-study are relatively new research methodologies that, from a review of the methodologies available, and with phenomenology, I believe are most suited to be included in this type of non-

traditional research. They draw on personal history and reflection and analyses of personal life experiences combined with critical, relevant literature reviews.

Basically, in the ancient traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism and Daoism, the method of seeking is centred in self-enquiry. The self-enquiry method aligns closely with the approaches discussed in this chapter. I see this weaving together of methods taken from different methodologies as a tapestry. A tapestry is weft-facing, meaning that, unlike other forms of weaving, when you look at the final picture, you do not see the warp (the vertical threads) that hold up the weft. The picture that you see is supported by strong vertical threads (warp) that are invisible, but are the pillars that hold up cross threads (weft). Together they form a thing of beauty.

CHAPTER THREE:
WHAT IS MY CONTEXT? WHAT DO I KNOW? THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE HUMANITARIAN CONTEXT AND ITS WAYS OF KNOWING

Introduction

To sustain the flow, this chapter begins with a recapitulation of how this thesis is organised. It begins with an Introduction, which provides an overview of the thesis to demonstrate how this work is connected to and grounded in health and well-being. Chapter Two contains a discussion of the methodologies and methods used in the study, as well as a discussion of the advantages and limitations of those methods and methodologies. Chapters Three to Six cover the terrain of the topic of transformation in the humanitarian sector, weaving literature, theories and experiences of working in the humanitarian aid sector into a conceptual framework that forms the foundation for Chapter Seven, which puts forward the emergent methodological direction.

The research itself, using methodologies and methods from self-study practice, autoethnography, critical feminist phenomenology and theories of non-duality, consists of a self-enquiry into personal processes and experiences of transformation supported by reflections, consultations and observations of humanitarian programming and practice.

Six elements of an emergency mission merge to build the theoretical framework of the study and answer the principal question, 'What needs to change for the humanitarian aid system and its processes to become more compassionate, empathetic and transformational?' As outlined in Chapters One and Two, the elements are framed as guiding questions:

1. ***What is my context?*** In the first part of Chapter Three, I look at the complexities of the context from a historical perspective to understand all the underlying factors of the context in crisis.

2. ***What do I know?*** What knowledge do I have to do this work and where does it come from? The second part of Chapter Three delves into ways of knowing, which impact on ways of being and doing. More deeply, it asks, 'What knowledge do I have to do this work and where does it come

3.   ***What is my operational framework?*** Through awareness and understanding of the moral and ethical frameworks that guide my decisions, I understand what underlies how I cope with uncertainty and danger. Chapter Four explores the notion that internalised moral and ethical codes are what form the basis of critical, life-changing decisions, not overarching principles, standards or codes of conduct.

4.   ***What am I expected to deliver?*** Against the background of the complexity, what should I do? Chapter Five examines the structure of the delivery context and what a humanitarian aid worker is expected to deliver.

5.   ***Who am I?*** Chapter Six unpacks the process of realising that self-transformation is a life-long process leading to wisdom and inner well-being.

6.   ***What is my outcome?*** Chapter Seven pulls together the discussions and experiences put forward in Chapters Three to Six and focuses on what could be done differently to fill the gaps identified from the literature and from personal experience. Using discussions on knowledge sources, the complexity of context, the moral and ethical dilemmas and the unrealistic expectations of the system as a platform, it attempts to put forward a strategy for a different way of working.

Chapters Three and Four undertake to meet the study's first objective, which is to conduct a critical review of top-down Western approaches to humanitarian work. Chapters Five and Six assume the second objective, which is to conduct a critical review of humanitarian aid practices and support systems. Interwoven is the emergent process of personal transformation, which is fully explored in the discussion in Chapter Seven.

To begin with, this Chapter Three endeavours to answer my first question, 'What is my context?' A crucial part of understanding the context in which humanitarian aid is conducted relates to the second question, 'What do I know?'

Complexities and challenges of the humanitarian aid system

The global governance mechanisms that have been established under the banner of the United Nations have grown since 1945 into a mammoth, many-tentacled octopus. The humanitarian aid system, although itself a

monolith, is but one of these tentacles. Since the end of the Cold War, it has grown from $25 million a year (in the mid-90s) to $22.5 billion a year in 2018 (GHA Report, 2018).

The countries in which this system is operating during crises are my contexts, and the lenses with which I perceive and understand these contexts are my work experiences in such locations and my personal background of nationality, ethnicity, gender, position, status and beliefs.

In this chapter, I do not attempt to explain the nature of the humanitarian context, but to engage with what lies beneath and behind it and what influences the current terrain facing the humanitarian actor. The reason I take this stance is that, if you dig deeply enough into the background of the contemporary crises affecting the regions in which I have worked, including Asia, Africa and the Middle East, you will find that much of it is the legacy of their blood-soaked colonial pasts. The struggles that freed these countries from their colonial shackles were based on high ideals of good life and dignity for all. They did not fail. They were destroyed, undermined and co-opted by colonial masters to prove that they could not survive without colonialism (Fanon, 1963).

This is the messy situation that forms the basis of the humanitarian context today, as highlighted below by Aththo (2002):

> *Then in the 1940s something called 'independence' happened. Then we also heard about a thing called 'development'. Our 'national leaders' tried to 'civilize' us and 'develop' us. As a result, we lost our livelihoods as well as our culture. Governments tried to bring us to heel using laws and regulations. We never had laws. We only had Sirith (customs). Laws are made by those who want to violate them. Sirith on the other hand, cannot be 'broken'. They can only be maintained. Both the natural world and our people were protected by these Sirith. What no one was successful in safeguarding through laws and regulations, we protected through our Sirith. All we ever wanted was to protect our customs, our culture and livelihoods. All we ask is that we are left alone* (UruWarige Wannila Aththo, leader of the most ancient people in Sri Lanka, Green Network of Sri Lanka, 2002).

The world of aid is complicated and poses a nightmare of uncertainty and danger to humanitarian actors. Since the bombing of the Twin Towers in the USA on September 11, 2001, humanitarian responses have become more militarised, and more recent political uprisings have demanded even tighter security measures. With some of the ongoing conflicts all over the world spanning more than 20 years, one wonders why these measures are even named 'humanitarian' or 'emergency' and why responders are sent in to assist at great cost with very low impact.

In using the term 'actors', I am including all who work and impact on this sector, including donors, celebrities and missionaries. As discussed in this chapter, changing the system from what it is to what we need it to be requires all who impact on it to be part of this change.

A significant contributor to the instability of this highly volatile system is the high rate of staff turnover. Emergencies are defined as short-term missions, so people come in and out at high speed. Many also leave after a few years of work. There are documented accounts of individual depression and burnout (Surya *et al.*, 2017). Many acknowledge that, while they do feel that they make a difference, they also know that sometimes their actions make things worse. Others say quite openly that the humanitarian system is ineffective and does not learn from its mistakes, but covers them up to appease donors (Edwards, 2017). The citizen journalism project 'What went wrong?' (www.whatwentwrong.foundation) video-graphs and records the countless instances where humanitarian projects have failed. 'Why do we do it?' one might ask.

Studies have demonstrated that motivations to work in this sector are many and varied, ranging from income to faith to building moral character. One prevailing motivation is to respond to people in need (Rességuier, 2018). Since humanitarian work is ultimately a pragmatic activity, pragmatic arguments are quite fitting. However, they are based on different levels of self-interest in contributing to making the world a better place for those who matter to us, regardless of how effectively we are managing to do it (Barnett, 2011a).

Against this background of a chequered history, from the blood-soaked colonial past to the competitive, turf-protecting, mandate-driven present, the humanitarian actor must work to broker peace, deliver relief and assistance, protect human rights and facilitate social transformation. It is a tall order indeed.

One of the issues contributing to this highly complex web of structures, power and personalities is the lack of historical, institutional and operational memory. In recognition of this fact, some humanitarian actors have begun to encourage historical research, with the idea of using history to shed light on the present. Valerie Amos (in Davey *et al*., 2013, p.1), a former Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and emergency relief coordinator, is famously quoted as saying that 'to shape our future, we must understand our past'.

In this chapter, looking at the past is not put forward as an answer to any of the difficulties faced today, but as a reflection on the enormous complexity of the sector. It is an attempt to present a view of the terrain upon which the humanitarian worker must implement a set of practices while being exhorted to adhere to standards and principles that have emerged from this history.

This complexity is the foundation of the question framing this thesis: What is the role and personal process of transformation as an agent for social transformation in a humanitarian context?

This question is based on the notion that personal transformation is a neglected but essential piece of the transformation puzzle within this complex and diverse humanitarian aid system.

Knowledge and power

A discussion on knowledge and power is an important piece of this critique as well as in the exploration of transformation of self and society. To begin to critically examine the humanitarian aid systems and processes and to discover how the process of personal transformation relates to social transformation, I also examine in this chapter knowledge, where it comes from and what power it gives me as a humanitarian aid worker. Since knowledge is a significant element of what forms culture, knowledge systems must be examined to understand the current culture of expertism, hierarchical thinking and overly bureaucratic structures that plagues the system. This is what sustains the top-down approach in present-day operations, despite all attempts to move to more participatory, localised approaches. The second part of this chapter discusses this in more depth.

According to the Hindu tradition, there are two types of people, seekers who do not know that they are seeking and seekers who know that they are seeking (Vasudev, 2019). I am a seeker who knows that I am seeking, and I

start from Socrates' premise (circa 470–399 BC): 'All that I know is that I know nothing.' The realisation of 'not knowing' is an important one for a researcher because, if I had the answer, this study would not be necessary. 'If we knew what it is, we are searching, it would not be called research,' said Albert Einstein (1879–1955).

Thus, this study asks, 'What is the knowledge system that underpins humanitarian policy and practice? Why is European philosophy 'philosophy', but anything outside of that, be it African or Asian, 'ethnophilosophy'? Why do we think of 'culture' as a system influencing people outside of Europe and North America, as if the practices in these countries are not cultural, but somehow universal? What does 'universality' really mean? Does it actually mean Euro-North American? Why do we even refer to practices, methodologies, etcetera emerging from non-European cultures as 'indigenous'? Is European cultural practice not indigenous?

Subsequent to the following study of the context in which humanitarian aid workers operate, I examine knowing, the sources of knowing and different methods of accessing knowledge from different perspectives. I start by exploring wisdom and knowledge, highlighting the tensions between different knowledge systems. I examine inner knowing and not-knowing through self-enquiry, demonstrating the internal process and impacts of underlying biases and power dimensions of historical, political and geographical elements of wisdom and knowledge.

Learning from The Past – The History of Humanitarian Assistance

In *Dead Aid*, Dambisa Moyo (2010) argues that development assistance is not merely a waste of money, but a cause of Africa's persistent poverty. Rejecting what she describes as 'orchestrated worldwide pity', Moyo also has a stark message: '[A]id has been, and continues to be, an unmitigated political, economic, and humanitarian disaster' (in Merino, 2012, p.191). This view is robustly supported by many scholars and is important to understand if we want to effect change. As Peter Walker and Daniel Maxwell (2009, p.13) put it: 'Understanding the history of humanitarian action helps understand why it is the way it is today, and helps identify how it can, and maybe should, change in the future.' Waldman and Noji (2008) call for practitioners to become as familiar as possible with the mistakes made and the lessons learned. This requires that we go back to before the 19th century, which is often the place marked as the

beginning of humanitarian history, as starting there would restrict the ability to make comparisons across periods and obliterate the blood-soaked colonial past that forms the backdrop to the emergence of humanitarian efforts.

In a broad cultural, political, philosophical and practical sense, 'humanitarian' action can be traced through hundreds of years of history, across the globe. Two of the most widely cited forces are religious belief and the articulation of laws of war, although these are not mutually exclusive. Christian ideas of charity have been particularly important in Europe and North America, and scholarship has emphasised the importance of charitable gestures in other religions, notably the tradition of *zakat* in Islam, one of several ways in which Islamic duty involves assisting others (Ghandour, 2002; Benthall & Bellion-Jourdan, 2003; Krafess, 2005). Laws of war or limits on the acceptable conduct of war were adopted in ancient Greece and Rome, articulated in *The Art of War* (5th century BC), ascribed to Sun Tzu in Warring States China, promoted by Sultan Saladin in the Middle East in the 1100s, taught to Swedish soldiers by Gustavus Adolphus in the 1600s and recognised in the tenets of Hinduism, Islam and Judaism (Cockayne, 2002; Sinha, 2005; Solomon, 2005).

Colonialism and imperial expansion provided a context for missionaries to come in and offer amelioration of the suffering of, firstly, mission members and, later, the colonised, while pursuing their proselytising agendas (Barnett & Weiss, 2008; Nkomazana & Setume, 2016). Skinner & Lester (2013) call for further studies and point out:

> *It is not a simple matter of resemblance – how contemporary humanitarian action appears to echo the patterns and ambitions of earlier imperial 'projects' – but that the two phenomena are ultimately bound together in a series of mutually constituting histories, in which the ideas and practices associated with imperial politics and administration have both been shaped by and have in themselves informed developing notions of humanitarianism* (Skinner & Lester, 2013, p.731).

Famine codes practised today were established by the British colonial rule in India in the early 1880s. Colonial practices thus have an important and complex relationship with contemporary humanitarian action.

Shashi Tharoor (2016) takes us back even further in history in his exposition of what Britain did to India. He writes that when the East India Company was established in 1600, Britain accounted for 1.8 per cent of global gross domestic product and India for 23 per cent. India was one of the richest and most industrialised economies. In 1750, India and China together accounted for nearly three-quarters of world industrial output, but India 'was transformed by the process of imperial rule into one of the poorest, most backward, illiterate and diseased societies on earth by the time of our independence in 1947' (Mallet, 2017). By then, India's share of world GDP was just 3 per cent, while Britain's was three times as high. Tharoor's (2016) most damning argument is that the British policy of divide and rule, as well as the colonialist obsession with rigid classification, entrenched the previously loosely defined distinctions between Hindus and Muslims, as well as between Hindu castes and between Sunni and Shia Islam, and so set the stage for the violent 'shambles of that original Brexit' — the departure of the British from India — and the subsequent militarisation of the new-born nation of Pakistan.

> *The creation and perpetuation of Hindu-Muslim antagonism was the most significant accomplishment of British imperial policy: the project of divide et impera would reach its culmination in the horrors of Partition that eventually accompanied the collapse of British authority in 1947 (*Shashi Tharoor in Mallet, 2017).

This is a grave charge, and a well-argued one. For many years, Tharoor himself was known as an eloquent spokesperson of the United Nations. In fact, he nearly became secretary-general, finishing second to Ban Ki-moon in 2006. But he has not liked what he has seen and is vocal about his disdain for the selective amnesia of the Euro-North-American community in relation to its brutal rise to power.

Walter Rodney (1972) put forth an economic analysis of how Europe engaged in an unequal relationship with Africa and subsequently exploited the continent, country by country, and specifically how this instance of colonialism differed from other parts of the world. He posits that Europe and Africa had a dialectical relationship in which Europe's development was dependent upon the underdevelopment of Africa. He argues there is an intimate and causal

relationship between Europe's growth and Africa's decline or, at best, stagnation in terms of development. Thus, Europe's capitalist growth can only be correctly and fully understood in relation to the concomitant exploitation of Africa and colonialism.

Not only does Rodney (1972) open the topic of the colonial exploitation of Africa, but also, he brings pre-colonial and pre-European-slave-trade Africa to life. He puts together a biting criticism of Europe's interaction with Africa, starting in the 15th century with trading – both the slave trade and the trade in goods. When European powers grew as a result of the profits from trade, they carved Africa into its current state and entered the continent to force greater and greater production of things that would increase profit for the Western markets. Banks, industries and nations prospered using underpaid, sometimes forced African labour. Meanwhile, African civilizations fell apart and education came to a standstill. An entire continent was impoverished, and its dignity and self-respect destroyed. With oppression and liberation as Rodney's main concerns, he 'delves into the past', as he writes in his preface,

> *…only because otherwise it would be impossible to understand how the present came into being. . . In the search for an understanding of what is now called 'underdevelopment' in Africa, the limits of inquiry have had to be fixed as far apart as the fifteenth century, on the one hand, and the end of the colonial period, on the other hand* (Rodney, 1972, p.xiii).

Although first published in 1972, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* remains an important account of how European capitalist imperialism exploited Africa, leading to the uneven development and humanitarian strategies we see today. Neil Smith (2008) points out that capitalism creates unevenness within itself, and this is reflected in the unevenness of the system around the world, but also in social inequalities – rich and poor, cheap and expensive housing. In addition, in a powerful comment, Smith (2008, p.211) points out that the uneven development of capitalism is at the heart of imperialism: 'uneven development, thy name is war.' Unusually for an academic, Smith was optimistic that things can change and encouraged a revolutionary vision.

Reflecting on and analysing my experiences, I pondered on Neil Smith's (2008) statement that, to create that revolutionary vision, we need revolutionary people who understand the past. However, I have searched to no avail for a roadmap to enact that revolutionary vision to achieve transformation in humanitarian and development contexts.

The Personal Reflections later in this chapter elucidate the challenges faced by a humanitarian aid worker in terms of working out the 'how' of enacting a revolutionary, transformative vision. It is not a question of right or wrong; it is about using reflexive self-enquiry to guide one to a confident judgement on what needs to be done.

However, let me begin by critically examining knowledge, where it comes from and what power it gives me as a humanitarian aid worker. As mentioned above, knowledge is a significant element of what forms culture; therefore, knowledge systems must be examined to understand the current culture of expertism, hierarchical thinking and overly bureaucratic structures, which are part of the humanitarian aid system at present. This culture is what sustains the top-down approach in present-day operations, despite noble intentions to move to more participatory, localised approaches (DuBois, 2018).

Systems of Knowledge

Wisdom

In comparison to many other cultures, such as in the East, the modern Western mindset is based on a rather narrow epistemology and ontology, which insists that the truth is external and that, to understand the whole, it must be broken down and studied in pieces. In this way, we will have more control over life and events rather than living in uncertainty. Zelinsky (1975) discusses the phenomenon as science becoming the religion of the 20th century. Huston Smith (1989, p.109) points out in his critique of postmodernism that 'the will-to-control . . . is what we need to correct.'

This fixation on control is one component of the modern scientific mindset, which Zohar et al. (1994) summarise to describe the limitations of the Western cosmology. Zohar et al. see it as a worldview that emphasises the absolute, the unchanging and the certain; breaks the whole into isolated, separate and interchangeable parts; creates an unbridgeable gulf between human beings and the physical world; underlines a cult of expertism and

specialisation; promotes a single point of view with one reality, which in most cases is the reality determined by the more powerful; supports excessive bureaucracy in the need for control; and has no explanation for why human beings can be altruistic and selfless (pp.26–28) and choose to devote their lives to helping others.

Despite the years of anthropological and ethnographic studies of ways of knowing and full acknowledgment by philosophers and academics that there are multiple co-existing worldviews, power dictates which worldview – which way of knowing and gaining wisdom – will be valued and mainstreamed as the 'global' or 'universal' system and imposed upon those at the lower end of the equation. Since alternatives to the reductionist, mechanistic way are still devalued and denigrated, 'inner knowing', or intuition, and the more relational aspects of knowing find little space in this paradigm where power calls the shots.

For many professions and individuals who rely on intuitive knowledge (for example, in midwifery practice), this source of wisdom remains unacknowledged (Davis-Floyd et al., 1996). However, there has been an upswing of interest in different ways of knowing that emphasises the relational aspect of human life. Merleau-Ponty (in Bannan, 1967) speaks of witnessing in every minute the miracle of related experiences, and yet nobody knows better than we do how this miracle is worked, for we ourselves form this network of relationships (p.373).

Davey et al. (2013) write about the history of humanitarianism as being rooted in the Western, and especially European, experiences of war and disaster, which spread across the world and are now in a range of operations responding to needs in situations of conflict and natural disasters. These operations include supporting displaced populations, working on risk reduction and preparedness, early recovery, livelihoods support, conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Davey et al. (2013) go on to say that, while the humanitarian gesture – the will to alleviate the suffering of others – is centuries old and genuinely global, without an understanding of the origins and history of this system, it is bound to fail. The fiascos described in this working paper are many and varied. These authors extensively trace the history in order to provide a basis for effective change of the humanitarian system, highlighting the failure of the system to be accountable to the affected population and to include them in co-creating their recovery from crisis. They recommend that both historians and

current humanitarian actors work together to tackle the key issues that have defined practice and thinking over time and which shape responses today – issues such as the tension between professionalism and voluntarism; the role of faith, not only for 'faith-based actors', but also in a range of communities implicated in humanitarian action; the relationship between state and non-state actors; the historical reality and evolution of debates around principles; or the effect and legacy of historical and cultural forces such as nationalism, colonialism, globalisation, extremism, reformism or progressivism. The authors make relevant and notable recommendations, but, unfortunately, offer no methodological direction. They do not offer the 'how to' for practitioners – how to do things differently – nor do they explain what inclusion and accountability actually mean, operationally speaking.

This is the fundamental challenge facing the humanitarian worker: what do all these principles, standards, policies and discussions translate to in tangible action steps? What then of wisdom? Does knowledge automatically turn into wisdom?

From the West to the East, wisdom is regarded as 'the ability to discern or judge what is true, right, or lasting.' Knowledge, on the other hand, is 'information gained through experience, reasoning, or acquaintance.' Knowledge can exist without wisdom, but not the other way around. One can be knowledgeable without being wise. Knowledge is knowing how to use a gun; wisdom is knowing when to use it.

Marcel Proust (1871–1922) speaks incisively through his protagonist, Elstir, about regret and the attainment of wisdom:

> *We do not receive wisdom, we must discover it for ourselves, after a journey through the wilderness which no one else can make for us, which no one can spare us, for our wisdom is the point of view from which we come at last to regard the world. The lives that you admire, the attitudes that seem noble to you, have not been shaped by a paterfamilias or a schoolmaster, they have sprung from very different beginnings, having been influenced by evil or commonplace that prevailed round them. They represent a struggle and a victory* (Proust, circa 1913)*.*

Siddhartha Gautama, more widely known as the Buddha (in Batchelor, 1998), goes further to say that it is possible to transcend this anguished, sorrowful world of experience, and this transcendence is what is known as wisdom. He suggests ethics, meditation, philosophy, science, art and poetry to find the way to wisdom. The Buddha's sceptical and pragmatic teaching, although almost 3,000 years old, still rings true in the contemporary world. He said:

> [D]o not be satisfied with hearsay or with tradition or with legendary lore or with what has come down in scriptures or with conjecture or with weighing evidence or with liking for a view after pondering over it or with someone else's ability… when you know in yourselves . . . then you should practise and abide in them (The Buddha, Kalama Sutta quoted in Batchelor, 1998).

Basically, the Buddha said, 'Don't believe it; test it and find out for yourself, and then practise it.' This is not so different from what we are taught in the natural sciences, but there is a difference in the way we find the truth. The Buddha's way is to go within to challenge yourself, to deeply question your beliefs, to notice your conditioning and your automatic, habitual thinking and connect the mind and the body through understanding the sensations that come and go. Through this process, there will be an awakening to what truth is for you, so you may live your life with dignity, integrity and authority. Above all, he said, no one – no animal or thing – should be harmed in the quest for the truth or in the practice of what comes out of it.

The influence of power and knowledge

The word 'power' comes from the vulgar Latin word potere, which means 'to be able'.[13] However, power means much more than being able. The dynamics of power shape and influence all relations. DuBois (2018) explores these dynamics in depth is his book on the basics of humanitarianism.

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[13]   Refer to www.etymonline.com.

To gain a deeper understanding of power and knowledge, subaltern theories of power from the five broad paradigms outlined by Keahey (2019) are most helpful. These theories of power encompass the colonial and feminist paradigms of power. Gandhi (1998) describes postcolonialism as examining the role of Western epistemology in propagating power relations that objectify and exploit the subaltern 'other'. Change is viewed as a process of reclaiming the state of being different or, as he puts it, 'cultural alterity'. Mendoza (2015) discusses decolonial feminism as exposing the collusion of colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy as a sociohistorical system of oppression. Change from this perspective will come about by rejecting colonial race and caste logic. Intersectional feminism notes that a matrix of domination is established through identity-based axes of power, with change viewed as a process of building solidarity across the nuances of diversity (Collins & Bilge, 2016). The subaltern discourse identifies the research arena as an important site for enacting transformation in terms of shifting a fundamental source of power – knowledge. In particular, African scholars are forming 'multi-paradigmatic research perspectives' that bring local worldviews into scholarship (Chilisa et al., 2017, p.327).

Altruistic, selfless acts towards people in crisis are thus underpinned by a complex web of power, commerce and proselytising zeal, which is most likely the genesis of the crisis itself. Global change, like crisis, is the norm. As Dabashi (2015) says, 'The world at large, and the Arab and Muslim world in particular, is going through world historic changes – changes have produced thinkers, poets, artists and public intellectuals at the centre of their moral and political imagination – all thinking and acting in terms at once domestic to their immediate geography and yet global in its consequences.'

One of the major challenges in changing practice lies in the attitudes and mindsets of humanitarian aid workers whose knowledge, expertise, capacities and skills are underpinned by dominant Western epistemologies without critique or acknowledgement of the power dynamics. By examining the tension between Western knowledge systems and other systems, we can begin to unpack the repetition of history and why humanitarian workers are ill-prepared to facilitate effective, transformative change without deeply examining their personal origins, mindsets and the knowledge system from which they are drawing their practices.

Guggenbühl-Craig (1971) suggests that this constitutes the 'dark side' of the profession and emphasises that all people in the helping professions who harbour a desire to help humankind out of crisis and suffering must deeply examine their own origins, histories and motivations. They should not just be well-educated workers who believe they can practise their professions like engineers, purely technically and objectively. They must be prepared to examine themselves and their own internal processes as they attempt to help others.

The tensions between knowledge systems

Since the international humanitarian aid system has its roots in Europe, it is safe to assume that all that it does is underpinned by Western epistemologies; that is, Euro-North-American knowledge systems that guide behaviour, attitudes and actions, including public policy, standards-setting and codes of conduct. The Western epistemologies are presented as universal and therefore unchallenged, regardless of the fact that such universality is highly contested as a product of the 'Enlightenment' period, when Europe emerged from what Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) defines as humankind's release from its self-incurred immaturity: '[I]mmaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another.' The Enlightenment era included a range of ideas centred on reason as the primary source of knowledge and advanced ideals such as liberty, progress, tolerance, fraternity, constitutional government and separation of church and state (Zafirovski, 2010, p.144; Outram, 2006). This era, marked by the resolute conviction that rationality, the scientific, empirical method and reductionism lead to certainty, control and complete understanding of the world and how it works, set the stage for the European superiority of knowledge and thinking. This was accepted without any knowledge or acknowledgement that other civilizations had developed beyond 'immaturity' some eons before.

Although ways of knowing have been challenged and re-examined with time and progress, it is still a critical point to scrutinise if we want to acknowledge our 'dark' side, as Guggenbuhl-Craig (1971) recommends, and understand our own attitudes, behaviours and actions as well as what drives the decisions of the humanitarian system as a whole.

What we know is that there is a consistent lament from various sources, including the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance ('ALNAP'), of humanitarian work being implemented purely technically, with not enough contextual understanding, let alone meaningful participation from the affected population. Despite numerous attempts to shift that way of working, the ponderous wheel of change has been extremely slow to turn, and we find that the challenges outlined in the history of the humanitarian system (Davey et al., 2013) are still occurring today and repeating themselves persistently.

As a humanitarian aid worker from the global south, I have witnessed in many diverse contexts limiting attitudes and behaviours displayed by highly educated international humanitarians towards their local counterparts. Their good intentions to serve humanity are undermined by conscious and unconscious condescending and/or patronising attitudes towards the culture, behaviour, knowledge, wisdom and different ways of knowing and being of the affected population. This denigration of knowledge systems that do not subscribe to the mainstream Euro-North American tradition (see footnote 6) creates tensions and sometimes resistance and non-cooperation from the beneficiaries or national co-workers. As in colonial times, it sometimes results in self-denigration by the nationals and an overall dismissal of other-indigenous (that is, other than Western) and contextual knowledge and wisdom. Rich, valuable and more effective ideas, wisdom and practices are lost to the humanitarian service providers because of this. Examples have been well-documented in the recently established 'What Went Wrong' project.[14]

Michael Dunn (2016) elucidates the tension between Western and other-indigenous knowledge systems, maintaining that Western knowledge systems are built upon the ideas of positivism, which is the belief that the most trustworthy knowledge is information acquired by the five physical senses and verified by logical, scientific or mathematical testing. Knowledge that does not come about in this way is regarded with a great deal of suspicion. Eastern and African knowledge systems, as well as other indigenous systems, tend to view knowledge as much more subjective and so are not as prescriptive as to how it

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[14]   See https://medium.com/the-what-went-wrong-foundation.

is acquired. In other words, there are diverse ways of being in the natural world with diverse experiences to appreciate and respect.

Dunn (2016) explains that years of oppression by colonising powers involving wide-scale conquest and slavery forced changes to people's ways of living that expropriated their knowledge systems. This resulted in local, other-indigenous or contextual knowledge being side-lined, even denigrated and, at worst, deliberately suppressed and eradicated.

Where other-indigenous knowledge is given any airtime, it is usually in the form of arts and crafts and a rather condescending portrayal of history. This, according to Marie Battiste (cited in Dunn, 2016), perpetuates notions of other indigenous peoples as historical and local, not contemporary and global with a knowledge system that has value for all.

Steve Martinot (2010) claims that we all live within a multiplicity of colonialities, subjected in both body and mind in our labours, sexualities and genders, but, most importantly, subjected to the hegemonic mind – the white, masculinist, nationalist, chauvinist mind that constitutes and is constituted by coloniality. Eurocentrism functions as the ideological valorisation of Euro-North American society as superior, progressive and universal. In reality, it represents white supremacy, capitalist profitability and Euro-North American self-universalisation.

Coloniality of knowledge

Taking a deeper look into this phenomenon, we see that debates have raged over many years about decolonisation, and a wide range of scholars, artists and social activists around the globe have elaborated on this extensively (Mbembe, 2001). Mignolo (2011) calls into question the idea that knowledge is disembodied and independent of any specific geohistorical locations. His main argument is that such belief has been created and implanted by dominant principles of knowledge that originated in Europe since the Renaissance as another expression of power. To build a universal conception of knowledge, he maintains, Western epistemology (from Christian theology to secular philosophy and science) has pretended that knowledge is independent of the geo-historical (Christian Europe) and biographical conditions (Christian, white men living in Christian Europe) in which it is produced. As a result, Europe became the locus of epistemic enunciation, and the rest of the world became the object to be

described and studied from the European (and, later, the American) perspective (Mignolo, 2018). Force as power is therefore redundant, when Euro-North American knowledge systems are universal and render invisible all other systems.

Analysing the mechanisms that produce this acceptance of universality and invisibility is what Maldonado-Torres (2007, p.1) terms 'decoloniality' and the 'decolonial turn'. The quest to understand this is rooted in struggles against racism, imperialism and sexism, among others (Mignolo, 2009). These authors and others like them campaign for the recognition of the intellectual production of marginalised, invisible people as thinking, not only as culture or ideology (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). Decoloniality aims to epistemologically transcend and decolonise the Western canon and epistemology (Grosfoguel, 2007; Mignolo, 2011). From Africa, freedom fighters and thinkers like Aime Cesaire, Amilcar Cabral, Franz Fanon, Kwame Nkrumah, Walter Rodney, Thomas Sankara, Steve Biko and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o have put forward strong cases for decoloniality for more than five decades.

What is coloniality?

Maldonado-Torres (2007) maintains that coloniality is different from colonialism, where colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation rests on the power of another nation, which makes that nation an empire. Coloniality, on the other hand, refers to longstanding patterns of power that emerged because of colonisation and define culture, labour, inter-subjective relations and knowledge production. It is the legacy of colonialism that lives and breathes in the way we think, what we aspire to, what we read, and the criteria and standards we set for academic or artistic performance and products. As modern subjects we live it all the time, every day, consciously and unconsciously (Maldonado-Torres, 2007).

Decoloniality and de-Westernisation have been part of debates in every sphere of human activity, notably by the Africans named above and also by Paulo Freire, Augusto Boal, B. M. Hegde, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Shashi Tharoor, to name a few others. Since humanitarian assistance is the topic of this study and is a system that aims to address the suffering of human beings after a crisis, how does coloniality manifest here?

The system itself is a composite one made up of thematic clusters that touch on every aspect of life, particularly politics, education, health and well-being. The call for decoloniality and de-Westernisation has impacted almost every human institution, but has not been applied with any vigour to the international humanitarian aid system – yet it is a critical response mechanism after a crisis. Since the system is involved in reconstruction, rehabilitation and restoration, this provides a perfect opportunity to 'decolonise' policies, structures, cultures and practice. Most importantly, it provides an opportunity to rethink the way we are being and conducting ourselves in delivering humanitarian assistance so that it is relevant, emancipatory and life changing.

We are compelled to ask, what then are the knowledge systems that underlie the policies and practices of politics, education, health and well-being upon which we build our response to a crisis? How can we critique the discourses and practices that have underpinned our responses to emergencies over the years and explore the implications of a 'decolonial turn' for our work as humanitarians? What do we mean by 'coloniality'?

The term 'coloniality' used here refers to the continuity of colonial forms of domination after the end of colonial administration (Mbembe, 2015; Grosfoguel, 2007; Maldonado-Torres, 2007). Coloniality exists in the realms of power, knowledge and being. Power, knowledge and being are interrelated, but, for the purposes of this investigation, knowledge, being and practice are of concern. Coloniality of knowledge refers to the way Eurocentric knowledge systems are privileged over other knowledges and epistemes (Molestane, 2015; Mignolo, 2007). Knowledges outside the bounds of Western modernity are often ignored, marginalised or repressed. Therefore, our very own understanding of the social world remains largely colonialised without us even being aware of it. Western knowledge remains common sense and hegemonic. Our framework as practitioners and our ways of being, speaking, listening, knowing, relating and seeing are rooted in Euro-American ideals informed by Western knowledge systems. The very structure and fabric of our way of thinking and working are mired in a history of whiteness and coloniality. Decolonial perspectives thus point to these colonial continuities embedded not just in the epistemic foundations, but also in the actual practices; for example, the saviour and the saved, the knower and the ignorant, the powerful aid worker and the powerless

beneficiary. This is what emerges when we apply coloniality to the humanitarian aid system.

Since Western norms and ideals have constructed our ideas of what is good, ideal and normal, it is important to acknowledge our constitutive myopia to other forms of seeing, knowing and being in the world that do not fit what we recognise through the frames of references to which we have become accustomed. Lewis Gordon (2011) reminds us that our epistemic ignorance prevents us from listening to possibilities that, for example, are not framed by Cartesian (rationality), teleological (focusing on a foreseeable end goal) or universal reasoning (the idea of only one possible rationality). These are essential categories we have learned through our Western-style schooling and education.

The basic tenets of Western knowledge should not be seen as all good or all bad, but we should recognise that they are historically situated and vastly limiting if universalised through our projects, as they prevent the imagination of other possibilities.

The geo- and body-politics of knowledge

The second issue we need to come to terms with is that of location, or the locus of enunciation, as pointed out by Mignolo (2002) and Maldonado-Torres (2005). They both ask why Western knowledge is considered neutral, universal and removed from location, while other knowledges are considered provincial and situated. They question why Euro-centric epistemology has carefully hidden its own geo-historical and bio-graphical locations and become objective, totalising and universal.

The task for us, they say, is to disrupt this universalism by recognising that Western knowledge and our current methods of practice stem from certain historical and social realties that are, in fact, provincial to Europe or North America. We need to recognise that there is no epistemic tradition from which to arrive at truth or universality. Perspectives and insights of critical thinking from the context must also be taken seriously and must shape the way we create policy and practice.

Feminists have long argued for the concepts of standpoint and location. There is now a growing argument within the humanitarian system for localisation and serious engagement with populations affected by crises. Decoloniality

invites us to stand back and allow the affected community to think from where they are as the first step towards the decolonisation of the mind – ours and theirs – not from some abstract universalism, which in fact is non-existent. For example, Africanity (Chinweizu, 1987) emphasises the importance of working from the standpoint of Africa as a theoretical lens and privileges Africa as the starting point of subjectivity. Archie Mafeje in Adesina (2008, p.134) has called this 'endogeneity', which is a 'scholarship grounded in and driven by the affirmation of African experiences and an intellectual standpoint derived from a rootedness in the African conditions.' It calls for a privileging of perspectives, insights and knowledges flowing from the context without necessarily discarding the progressive aspects of the Euro-North American epistemologies. It is not about closing the door to Western knowledge, but about re-centring to the context and its experiences and knowledge.

A decolonised and de-Westernised approach

Chiumbu (2017, p.1) puts forward a two-fold decolonised and de-Westernised approach: (1) the deconstruction of existing methodologies and methods that (re)produce the coloniality of knowledge; and (2) a reconstruction/reinvention of practice.

Tuhiwai Smith (1999) warns that decolonising methodologies and methods require a purposeful and deliberate approach to transforming the institution of the deep underlying structures and taken-for-granted ways of organizing, conducting and disseminating research knowledge. We are urged to account for the positionality of ourselves as aid workers in relation to the field site/crisis context and the people being assisted – in essence, looking more broadly at the geopolitics of knowledge (Mignolo et al., 2018; Mignolo, 2002). At the same, this approach could enable local/marginalised communities to analyse their own lives and forces us as aid workers to acknowledge this as valid knowledge (Zavala, 2013).

Participatory methods and feminist methodologies have achieved some of the practice advocated for by such an approach, but there are still many questions that need to be asked and answered, such as: What are the implications of de-centring or decolonising methodology? What does this imply in terms of humanitarian agendas, needs analysis, project cycles, funding, cooperation, evaluations, case studies and project implementation? How do

requirements of decoloniality clash with ethical applications, regulations and guidelines? How can new forms of doing be mobilised (for example, full participation, transparency, influence on project, decision-making, self-analysis, action-research methods of assessments, testimonies and so forth)?

Western culture is not unique or universal

Amartya Sen's (1999) cultural critique questions the claim that the primacy of political freedom and democracy as a contemporary value came from the Western liberal culture. Closer study and scrutiny of philosophy and literature leads to the discovery that many components of democracy are found in the writings of Asian traditions.

Sen (1999, p.233) asks that we consider the importance of personal freedom for a good society contained in these claims: (1) personal freedom is important and should be guaranteed for those who 'matter' in a good society; (2) everyone matters in society and the freedom that is guaranteed for one must guaranteed for all. This idea, Sen goes on to say, is indeed espoused in Aristotle's writings, although he excludes women and slaves; likewise, it is valued by the Mandarins and the Brahmins.

Sen breaks down the concepts of freedom and rights into components to investigate whether these are absent in Asian traditions. He argues that they are very present and quotes Ashoka and Confucius, among others, who emphasised tolerance, freedom and equality both as public policy and as a guide for personal behaviour. Akbar 1 (the third Mughal Emperor, 1556–1605) is another excellent example of an Islamic ruler who promoted tolerance of diversity and co-existing religions and human rights at a time when the Western world was persecuting its citizens. It is not truthful, therefore, to equal intolerance with Islamic behaviour.

The conclusions that Sen derives are that valuing freedom is not confined to Western culture and that the attachment to cultural traditions is not in opposition to but attached to justified fears resulting from Western, 'white' supremacy, coloniality and the denigration of cultural traditions, knowledge and wisdoms. Sen raises the plea to expand our capacity by learning to understand, accept and enjoy products from other cultures and move away from Eurocentric thinking. Stereotyping non-European cultures as conservative and rigid denies the progressive and free thinking of cultures in which, long before the Christian

era, there were discussions on atheism, agnosticism and scepticism. In fact, Persian statesmen, artists and intellectuals had formulated ideas that anticipate modernity ages before the European Renaissance eventually came about and reshaped Europe. Intellectual discussions abounded in India as well, and Sen (1999) mentions Carvaka, Lokayata and Buddhism as evidence that scepticism and its tolerance is not a uniquely Western phenomenon.

Change vs transformation and the concept of inclusive consciousness

Following on from Amartya Sen's (1999) assertion that concepts of freedoms and rights are not uniquely Western and that embracing other forms of knowing and knowledge from other cultures can only enhance our capabilities, it is important to take the time to understand how transformation and change are portrayed from perspectives other than the mainstream, Eurocentric perspective. Although this section uses explanations from Sadhguru of the Isha Foundation, a growing movement across the globe for shifting mindsets towards self-transformation, these are not confined to his thinking. Many scholars from the East and the West like Carl Jung (1875–1961) and Paramahansa Yogananda (1893–1952) offer similar explications on Eastern and Yogic traditions. However, for accessibility of language and ease of understanding, I draw on the most contemporary work, that of Sadhguru (Vasudev, 2016).

Eastern philosophy and Yogic Science, as explained by Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev (2016) in his book on 'Inner Engineering', make distinctions between right intent and right emotions, attitudes and actions and inclusive consciousness. To avoid misunderstanding between the Yogic Tradition and Hatha Yoga that is currently practised in the West as a form of exercise for physical health, Sadhguru (2016) goes into in-depth explanations of Yogic Science as a scientific tradition based on extensive research of the body, mind and spirit over generations:

> The word 'yoga' literally means 'union'. When you experience
> everything as one in your consciousness, then you are in yoga. To
> attain to that unity within you, there are many ways . . . Hatha
> yoga means you start with the body . . . then you move to
> the breath, then to the mind, then to the inner self . . . they are
> only different aspects. They are not really different types of yoga.

In fact, we address all of them at once. It is important that in a very balanced way all of them are addressed at once, as one unit. Otherwise, if you work just with the body, it is only preparatory in nature. So, there is really no division as such. Yoga is a union of all these (Isha Foundation, 2019).[15]

These are important distinctions from a humanitarian worker's perspective because much of our work is about changing behaviour and attitudes. In the Eastern tradition the distinction is characterised as mistaking the flower for the soil or mistaking expressions for the sources. By changing attitudes, we are not changing consciousness. In the wisdom of the Eastern traditions, transformation is about changing consciousness, of which attitude is just a small aspect.

Sadhguru (2016) goes on to say that changing attitudes can be positive and beneficial, but it is not truly transformative because change means that some residue of the past remains, whereas transformation means that none of the past remains. Therefore, to create a new world, one should only learn from the past what is relevant, like practical skills and material things. The past, says Sadhguru, cannot teach one how to be in the present. He maintains that the person we are now is a fresh complete life by itself, which does not need to learn from the past, except for the technical skills like engineering. This complete life-consciousness that we now are is the source of intentions, actions and thoughts. Attitudes are consequences of these, and we need to understand that source in order to fix those consequences.

If we accept this philosophy, then we can accept the notion from this tradition that we have four dimensions of the mind, not just one. These four dimensions are the intellect, the identity, the memory and the pure intelligence. However, as Sadhguru (2016) explains, we have placed only one of these dimensions, the intellect, at a very high level and use that one dimension to try to understand everything. The Euro-North American legacy of coloniality is that most of us who are Western-educated, whether north or south based, operate from the premise of 'I think therefore I am' (Descartes, 1596–1650). Eastern

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[15] See https://isha.sadhguru.org/yoga/new-to-yoga/types-of-yoga/.

philosophy takes issue with that immediately and says that using the intellect to understand everything means that it will dissect everything into a million pieces. The sharper your intellect, the more pieces it will dissect the world into, and it cannot be stopped because that is the nature of the intellect. It is excellent for understanding the material nature of life and for survival, but one cannot know everything this way beyond the limitation of physicality.

Sadhguru clearly emphasises that one cannot dissect another person to know them. The European impact has been to elevate our thinking to a level where thinking is supreme; thus, we lose control of our minds and they direct how we feel, our attitudes and our intentions, when in fact the intellect is only one aspect of the mind.

From this perspective of intellect, everything must be logical and follow a certain norm of logic. It does not allow for different forms of logic that may not look the same to every person. Sadhguru (2016) uses the example of trying to use a knife to stitch a piece of cloth. It cannot work and will just cut it to shreds. There are other tools for that; the knife is not the only tool that we have. It is therefore important to see the intellect as a sharp knife, poised to cut, chop and dissect. It is its only function.

The next dimension of the mind, from the Yogic tradition, is about identity and identifying as a cosmic being – a universal being – before identifying with the body and other forms of identity. This form of identification is critical to this tradition because it means that your life experience will not be limited just by the identification of the body or race or gender, but you will understand that nothing happens without everyone being involved as a cosmos. This is further explicated in Chapter Two in the sub-section 'Wholeness, Non-separation, Non-Duality and Theory U' as non-duality, quantum theory and so forth. The Yogic tradition explains that it is limited identities that push people to die for what they believe in, as in the case of religious fundamentalists or political insurgents, who truly believe they are doing the right thing based on this limited identity and belief. This cannot be understood intellectually because, again, that would be taking the knife to it, and will further divide it up to try to understand this aspect of intelligence.

Instead, in the Yogic tradition, Sadhguru (2016) and others like him (Giri, 2009; Chopra, 1993) encourage one to have an experience of other aspects of intelligence. The next dimension of intelligence is the huge silo of memory that

we have access to as human beings and which is expanded upon in Indian philosophy. They speak of eight types of memory that allow one to do everything almost automatically and to know things. Then there is the aspect without memory, which allows limitless possibilities because it is not bounded by memories. However, the central message from the Eastern traditions is that to find answers one must go inward and consistently practise whichever self-reflection or self-enquiry method one chooses to use. In the East, meditation is perceived as one of the most powerful methods of self-reflection.

You have to do your own work;
Enlightened Ones will only show the way.
Those who practise meditation
will free themselves . . . (Dhammapada[16] 20.276)

I pause here, as the point of bringing in the Eastern, Yogic thinking is to demonstrate that there are wisdom and knowledge systems that go beyond the five senses that frame Western thinking. There are numerous examples of great leaders who brought about significant social transformation linked to their personal transformations, like Emperor Ashoka of India, also known as Ashoka the Great (circa 269 BCE–232 BCE), whose enlightened rule and concern for his citizens was based on his personal inner awakening, marking the most notable transformation of any political leader. Nelson Mandela (1918-2013), imprisoned for 27 years, walked out of his incarceration not just physically free, but free from resentment, hatred and thoughts of revenge.

Therefore, there is a strong case for connecting Eastern and Western wisdom, knowledge and experiences. Dipping into the deeper dimensions of human intelligence is possible from the Yogic perspective, and from this we have the possibility to expand from the intellect and allow new, fresh ways of being and doing to emerge.

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[16] The Dhammapada is a collection of sayings of the Buddha in verse form.

Personal Reflections: What is My Context?

These reflections on the experience of being a beneficiary, firstly, and the struggle to define a role, secondly, demonstrate the complexities of the sector. They highlight the issues of power and powerlessness and the depth of the dilemmas within the complex context that a humanitarian aid worker confronts while on a humanitarian mission.

The powerlessness of being a beneficiary

During a period of unemployment after I got divorced, when I was struggling to feed and clothe my four children, I heard from a cousin of a scheme to assist unemployed people that the tricameral apartheid government in South Africa had instituted, based on ethnicity. Although this government had not been supported by the majority of black South Africans, we were stuck with it, and, out of desperation, I decided to apply for the assistance. Image 4 below illustrates the centrality of my role with these four young people and their total dependence on my ability to provide for them while they were still at school.

Image 4: My four children and I (1997)

(© Anusanthee Pillay)

I was carefully screened, and I met the criteria for as long as I remained unemployed. In other words, I could only benefit from this scheme as long as I was vulnerable, destitute and helpless. If I started to help myself, I would lose the benefit.

It was incredible, but it was not hard to see the underlying philosophy. It was not to facilitate well-being, but to demonstrate that the people were being helped and the beneficiaries were showing gratitude. To add insult to injury, the food vouchers could only be redeemed at a small, makeshift shop that stocked only the very basic commodities and foodstuffs at very high prices. It meant that the voucher did not go very far. My children and I lived on coffee and peanut butter sandwiches for a few weeks. I complained to the government department with a strongly worded letter and they changed the system to allow us to buy from a supermarket chain, but, a week later, my benefits were terminated. When I queried it, they said that they had visited my home while I was out, which confirmed to them, without verification, that I was probably working and therefore did not meet the criteria. The fact was that I had found a part-time job for a very small salary which in no way covered our expenses.

That was my first-hand experience of being a beneficiary of a corrupt system based not on the intention to facilitate well-being and recovery, but on ticking a box to show that money was going to the poor, who had to stay poor for the system to succeed.

Confronting commitment and obligation

The first thing that always confronts me when I start a new mission is the question of what I am committed and obligated to do in terms of duty. It is a question I must ask myself, since the terms of reference for the position are usually so broad that they could mean anything or nothing. I therefore am challenged to work this out for myself, and it can be a tricky business. I am also always aware that the situation will call me out to respond, and that also confronts me with the question 'how far do I go?'

The following is an account of this dilemma in one such deployment. While it demonstrates the complexities of the context discussed in this Chapter Three, it also points to the moral and ethical dilemmas discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

When I arrived in my deployment country, I met with several people representing different aspects of development and humanitarian assistance. This all happened much more quickly than usual after arrival in a new country. It usually takes a few weeks to make connections. This time, it was within days.

When I entered the office on Monday morning, after a day alone in the hotel, I had my first surprise upon encountering someone I had met more than ten years previously. The second surprise was receiving an invitation within a day of arriving to meet an unknown person, who introduced himself as an engineer working on clean energy for IDPs. I agreed to meet with him and discovered that he was the husband of the deputy chief of mission of an embassy. They were very welcoming and invited me to a South Indian restaurant for a delicious dinner of *masala dosa*.

I also met the humanitarian coordinator immediately, and at the first meeting with OCHA discovered two people I had met before in another deployment. I seemed to have arrived at a good place where the connections were happening effortlessly.

This feeling was re-enforced when I met with the managers in the office. They came across as very open and friendly, and we had an animated discussion, even though I was 30 minutes late. When I mentioned to the head of office that she had a good team, she sniggered and said that this was only the surface and that there were vile undercurrents at play. I sighed internally and wondered why I had thought it would be any different. Every place I have worked in the UN has had this problem of backbiting, putting each other down, sniping, sniggering and forming internal factions and power blocs.

Over the weekend, my old friend invited me to lunch and poured her heart out about her intense disillusionment with the UN, an organisation she had held in high esteem and waited her whole life to join. She said that she has been targeted for negative attention by the deputy head because she was from a different country and had been brought in by the former head of office, who was from the same country as her own. She had also come in as higher-level member of staff than the deputy and was running the biggest project in the office. She sounded sad, angry, afraid and defensive. She was sure that the head and the deputy were in cahoots in their dislike of her, and she felt isolated. I listened and tried to console her with stories of similar experiences to try to reassure her that this was common and not to be taken personally.

During this visit, the head of office called and invited me to dinner. She is also someone I had known previously, and she had initially invited me to stay with her. After I arrived, I sensed some reluctance on her part for me to move in, so I opted to remain in the hotel. It turned out to be a good decision because, when I met her, she confessed her reluctance due to the office politics. She then poured her heart out about the same deputy and the office filled with unhappy staff because of this person. She felt attacked, misunderstood and unsupported by her staff. She had been in office for eight months. I tried to console her with the same ideas about not taking it personally, and we discussed the importance of people taking responsibility for their happiness and state of being rather than projecting and expecting it to come from others. Although she agreed intellectually, I sensed that she was so unhappy with the way things were that it was too difficult to look inwards and see what was happening with her. I did not feel confident enough to facilitate anything beyond listening and acknowledging her unhappiness.

'What is my obligation here?' I wondered. I went back to the hotel and pondered that question. I called my old friend and told her that she should not worry about the office situation because it seemed that her perception was not accurate. I was not sure what else to tell her without getting embroiled in the situation. We met a day later, and I assured her that the head of office was aware of the complexity of the internal politics and was not blaming her. She seemed relieved, but then I wondered if I had done the right thing. Was I colluding with the situation or helping? What role should I be playing? Where was the entry point for me to help both of them to see things differently?

The question about obligation was uppermost in my mind when I opened the network channels on Facebook and saw how many people were confessing about wrongdoing they had witnessed and done nothing about, which had haunted them ever since. This was coming out in reaction to the Oxfam scandal on sexual abuse and exploitation during the humanitarian response to the earthquake in Haiti. I was struck by the theme of obligation that I was discerning from this. What are we to do if we see something that we know we can do something about? My concern was about receptivity. Would this group be receptive to intervention?

Just like the people who did nothing because of fear of rejection by the system, I too am aware that I (a) am afraid of being regarded as a flake

(rejection); and (b) will start something that I am not sure I have the skills to implement or to complete.

What am I talking about here? It is what Sadhguru, the contemporary sage from India, says repeatedly: misery does not originate externally. It is totally and solely created and maintained internally. This I have realised for myself many times, and I have recently had profound insight into the inner misery I created in reaction to the situation away from home. When it is not what I want, when it is not how I think it is supposed to be, then I am miserable. When I take full responsibility for my state of being, I can come out of the misery completely and be happy, regardless of what is happening around me. I can also do what I can do, based on my capacities and skills, free of misery.

On Sunday evening, another old friend from many years before responded to my email and took me to dinner at her house. It was good to see her after a such a long time, and I recalled her strength and ability to manage the difficulties of the American organisation we had both worked in many years ago. She looked unchanged by the years and introduced me to her group of friends. I struck up a conversation with them and was surprised to hear many deep insights about human nature coming from one of them. I was surprised because it shattered my illusion that such people do not exist in everyday life. This man said that all the misery and inequalities that people encounter come from greed, not power. Food for thought. I went home, and it sat with me. Greed. This is what Buddha calls craving and aversion. The hunger for attachment, the craving for experiences, things, situations and people that will satisfy that hunger and the aversion to anything that comes in the way of that satisfaction – that is the origin of the misery.

So, again, what is my obligation? Was I supposed to be an evangelist for inner reflection and *Vipassana*? Should I talk to people, offer meditation classes, or talk about how to facilitate inner peace, happiness and wisdom? It made me want to laugh at myself. How dare I even think I had that capacity? I do not think I have it at all. I am such a novice at this whole thing myself. That night I put on the Dhamma app on my phone with SN Goenka chanting and guiding *Vipassana* meditation, and I promptly went into a deep sleep.

This is a dilemma I face constantly with my friends, my children and people in general. I see how they are creating and maintaining their misery and then blaming it on something external. What can I do?

Recently, a friend lost her son to a stabbing incident in South Africa. I cried with her when we talked about it, imagining the death of my own son. How can I tell her that her pain is internal and caused by her attachment to another when I have those same attachments? I have no answers to this.

I thought about how easy it would be to say to someone who is lamenting about something, 'Take a deep breath, sit quietly for a minute and tell me what you are thinking and feeling.' I could facilitate them to see that the misery was coming from their thinking. I do not trust that I can do it successfully and fear that they will get angry. So, I say nothing and listen. And sometimes I collude with them, just to make them feel a little better in the moment. I know that it is a band-aid.

The confrontation with the mind is harder, and it does make people angry, even me. When I want collusion, someone telling me anything different makes me angry. These days I have enough awareness to quickly realise the truth about why I got angry – because they were trying to help me see the truth of the matter – the truth being, as Sadhguru (2016) says, that I am taking myself too seriously because, as a mortal human being, in the grand scheme of life, I am a speck of dust. I am a minute particle that will not stop anything if I ceased to exist. It is a sobering thought that brings up a fear in me of ceasing to exist. Yet, it is inevitable that I will cease to exist one day and reminding myself of that inevitability is not morbid or depressing; it is being in touch with reality. It means that I can live every day knowing that existence and being alive is all that there is. The rest is human mechanics, which are cyclical, and which continue with or without me.

This is a realisation that I must come to, not an intellectual knowing. I watch the television and see the constant shows of people killing each other willy-nilly: guns blazing, knives, bombs, fists with all sorts of weapons being created to kill and destroy. Then there are the romantic ones of people searching for love. It speaks loudly of that internal hunger that is driving all of this. How do I step out and remain out? And what then?

That last question is the biggest fear, I think: what then? If I let go of all the craving and attachments, all the misery and fear, what will I be? Who will I be? Will I die? Disappear in a puff of smoke and just be gone forever? Where did Sadhguru's wife go, she who learned how to manage herself to such an extent that she left her body at will? Where did she go?

What then is my obligation to others? Why am I even here? I have no idea. And that is the truth.

I wrote down my thoughts, questioning my commitment and obligation, shortly after arriving, and, a little while later, I met M and I knew why I was there. I understood my obligation to work with M and to offer her some way to understand her story and thus herself. My experience over the years of working in the humanitarian sector on gender analysis and gender mainstreaming have demonstrated that, with all the good intentions, we are failing to address the real issues that underlie gender inequalities. Feminists, including myself, have written copiously about how gender has been divorced from patriarchal power in the humanitarian world and has emerged as an activity toward gender equality, translated as 'everyone must have the same, regardless of sex, age or creed'. Despite the advocacy, the humanitarian sector persists in focusing on saving lives, giving scant attention to gender equality, let alone gender transformation. The talk of creating resilience and giving back power to the affected communities is just that – talk. Without real transformation that brings about a new social order, where no residue of the past remains, and a world exists that is transformed from unequal gender power relations, resilience, participation and empowerment cannot be achieved in any real sense. While the old order of patriarchal power is alive and well, women and girls remain at the margins, being even more severely violated. With the current shift of attention to issues affecting men and boys, the hope that gender mainstreaming and gender analysis would be used as key policy tools for transformative change is as elusive as ever.

I met M at a gender focal-point meeting and was struck by her tireless work to help women wherever and whenever she finds them in need of assistance. She asked for my help with a young woman who had had acid poured on her face and body and was in a dire strait at the hospital. She had been gang-raped by her ex-boyfriend and his friends because her family had refused his marriage proposal. M garnered support for this woman and went to the hospital every day to check on her. This is how I came to know what M does.

She told me that she was an orphan and that she lived off the inheritance left to her and her younger sibling by their mother. She graduated from the university as a radiographer but has not worked in that field yet. She then tried to start a small business to get an income and use the proceeds to finance a

local group working with internally displaced women. The idea was to offer skills training and food assistance for women and their children, to help them break out of the debilitating cycles of helplessness they find themselves in as internally displaced people.

I was intrigued and asked her, 'Why are you doing this, M? You could have left this dangerous place and made a life for yourself and your brother somewhere safe. Why did you stay here to help women?'

This is M's story[17] (see Appendix C):

My father died when I was five years old, and we lost everything. My mother, who had just given birth to twins, was beaten by the family and called a witch, and we were pushed out of the community. One of the twins died due to malnutrition, and my mother took a cleaning job to support us. She wanted to protect us and so accepted a marriage proposal from a wealthy man.

For a while, all was well, and my mother finished school and got a better job. Then my stepfather started coming into my room when I was 17 years old. My brother and I would fight him off. My mother did not believe us until she caught him peering through the door at me while I was taking a bath. When she confronted him, he beat her and me.

I was unconscious for days. We had to leave without support from anyone and lived in a makeshift home for two years.

I was 20 years old when my mother died from the HIV infection she got from my stepfather. We were thrown into abject poverty, and I took a job as a housemaid to feed myself and my brother, who was 15 at the time. After a while, the man of the house started harassing me sexually, and, when I refused, he complained to his wife that I was trying to seduce him. She beat me mercilessly, the scars from which I still bear today, and we were flung out.

We went back to the makeshift house. I started doing any job I could find: plaiting hair – anything that would keep us from starvation. Life became such a struggle that, one day, out of utter desperation, my brother and I decided that we should just end it all and commit suicide. Just before we could do that, a

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[17] A version of this story was published by ACCORD in its *Conflict Trends* magazine, Vol 2, August 2018. The full article is attached as Appendix C.

lawyer got in contact with me, saying he had been looking for us for months to tell us that our mother had left quite a lot of money for us. Our lives changed dramatically, and we went back to school.

At the same time, the crisis hit the frontline area where the insurgents were attacking, and I started hearing stories of how women were being targeted. I wanted to help. I really felt their pain and wanted to give what I could to make a difference to whoever I could. I started a small business and used the profits from that to finance an organisation that would help women get back on their feet after being forced out of their homes by the conflict. I could not bear to see them suffering in the same way we had suffered.

M went on to tell me about a small group of internally displaced women she works with for the same reasons. This group was not receiving much attention, so M went to talk to them. She talked to a group of 20 women and asked them how they came to be internally displaced, how their lives were now in the camps and what their hopes were for the future. Most of the women said their husbands had been murdered by the insurgents and at least half of them had witnessed the murders. Many of them had lost their children to the insurgents' forced conscription. Those whose husbands were still with them said they were experiencing high levels of domestic violence. Most of the women said they did not have a voice in the camp and were not participating in any peace-building. They had little if any sources of livelihood and felt hopeless, with suicidal thoughts. Their frustration was that, although they were receiving humanitarian aid, they were traumatised by what they were going through and what they had seen. They did not see a positive way forwards for themselves or their children. They felt that, with a little assistance, they could do so much more and could form support groups and participate in rebuilding their lives.

M called me later that week and cried over the phone, saying that it was the first time she had had the opportunity to unburden herself, the first time anyone had ever been interested in hearing her story, and she felt relieved and lighter. I cried too, just knowing that I had helped her in some small way and that my being there had a purpose.

Analysis: Do No Harm and Dealing with the Power Shadow

'Do no harm'

Although this issue is of critical importance and has the potential for a negative impact on the work that we do as people who help others, it is largely under-researched and not well integrated into the training curriculum of professionals across the spectrum of health and social services. In fact, as pointed out by Guggenbühl-Craig (1971), most professions serve the health and well-being of others in one way or another. However, it is important to bear in mind that as humanitarian workers we are poised to deliver a very deliberate attempt to alleviate the suffering of those affected by a crisis that has impacted on their lives and limited their ability to help themselves. This puts us in a position of power where, without awareness of that power and consciousness of our own shortcomings to manage ourselves with that power, we can do great damage and cause harm to those that we desire to help.

The concept of 'do no harm' is well known in the humanitarian and development aid sectors, yet very little is researched and written about exactly what it means to an individual humanitarian worker. We are asked to analyse the situation, and, in the case of women particularly, we try to mitigate against causing harm by exposing the women to further violence. But what of our own biases, cultural backgrounds, relationship issues, sexualities, egos, childhood traumas and so forth? It is taken for granted that everyone will know to 'help' themselves before they attempt to help others, and this is where the problem lies.

If we come from the position of an 'expert' who knows better and can administer help as a technical service, we are unable to see, as Guggenbühl-Craig (1971) quotes from the Christian Bible, 'the beam in our own eye as well as the mote in the other' (Matthew 7:5).

The aim of writing of my experiences is chiefly to inspire the reader not only to do more research on this subject, but to turn inward and examine herself. I have thus used my own experiences to showcase the process of transformation that inward-looking can stimulate. In so doing, I have highlighted the conditioning that we have been exposed to, which creates blockages to our abilities as helpers and could be seriously damaging in terms of the power that we wield from our positions.

Having grown up in a colonised country and educated to be contemptuous of non-Western traditions and philosophy, I am compelled to examine myself and ask, 'What helps me to see the blind spots created by my educational background?'

I have outlined the issues of knowledge and coloniality above to emphasise that we are not blank slates coming into a situation with technical expertise. We emerge from cultural backgrounds and have been indoctrinated in one way or another to think, behave and act in certain ways.

Mignolo (2009), among others, calls us to become inspired by new possibilities through what he calls 'epistemic disobedience', so that we disrupt the known and challenge ourselves. Guggenbühl-Craig (1971) would have asked that one looks inward and challenge not only our epistemologies externally but also internally, to examine our motives as to why we chose this type of work, which confronts us daily with some of the worst atrocities of humanity or disastrous impacts when humanity is overwhelmed by natural hazards.

In responding to my internal question, there are several factors that emerge as to why I did not remain stuck in one way of seeing and interpreting things. My mother, educated in Tamil literature, exposed us from an early age to the *Thirukkural* (classic Tamil text consisting of 1,330 couplets dealing with the everyday virtues of an individual – secular ethics)*,* which provided a foil for the externally focused, Western way. This is a treatise on how to live life with integrity and ethics, with strong attention to the fact that one is an individual within a community of others, thus advising prudence, eco-friendliness, mindfulness, thoughtfulness of others and many other recommendations for living life with inner peace and happiness. It gives a guide on how to go within and audit oneself daily without guilt and fear of admitting mistakes and trying again. That this was written thousands of years ago yet is still relevant in today's world and applicable to any context is remarkable, to say the least. More importantly, it helps me to understand the value of a multiplicity of sources of knowledge that one can draw from if exposed to them. As part of my education,

I studied psychology and the concept of *Ubuntu*[18]. I also participated in self-growth programmes such as the More-to-Life programme, *Vipassana* and Inner Engineering, stemming from different philosophies and practices. All of these Western, Eastern and African sources and practices remain significant as the foundations from which I can draw inspiration to remain open and curious in my daily life.

Dealing with the 'power shadow'

By my encounter with M I am reminded of the vulnerability with which our beneficiaries turn to us for support. Had I not been exposed to such vulnerability in myself, worked with it and understood it, I would not have been able to offer M any support or insights into herself whatsoever.

While working with M, I became aware of how I was being triggered over and over to remember the abuse I had encountered. I realised the benefit of the work I had done to increase my awareness of the past and how it might cause reactions that may be inappropriate to someone else's experience. I might, for example, push M away or over-compensate. Instead, I was able to notice the reaction inside myself, see what it was and immediately let it go. It meant that I could come back to a place of calm and inner well-being in order to be present and attentive to M and what she was confiding in me.

Having had this experience a few times before, this time I was able to do it in the moment. At other times I may have had to create some space to do that work inside myself before being able to be present.

Guggenbühl-Craig (1971) explained this at length in his work on this topic and talked about dealing with the 'power shadow' – not seeing the other as the weak, helpless 'patient' and yourself as the powerful 'doctor', but regarding every life as a work of art and being willing to engage in mutual 'healing', as it were. This willingness to 'plumb the depths of one's soul' and see it as the greatest adventure of all adventures creates people who are able to perform an incalculable service to humankind and to themselves. It is through repeated

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[18]   *Ubuntu* is the essence of being human and the fact that one cannot exist as a human being in isolation. It speaks about interconnectedness and generosity. 'Connectedness' means that what one does affects the whole world (Tutu, 2004). See Chapter Seven for more details.

confrontations with all the 'shadows' that we carry from our backgrounds, our education and our experiences that we learn that, while we may not be 'delivered from evil', we can learn to manage it and engage with others as equals with humility, love and respect, rather than as experts with false arrogance, causing destruction wherever we go.

Personal Reflections: What Do I Know?

I arrived in a neighbouring country in Africa one summer, excited to have finally decided and committed to living there with my partner after many years of living apart. My trepidations of the difficulties of being in a country not as developed as South Africa were alleviated somewhat by a friend's advice to 'manage it like you would manage a deployment to a hardship duty station'. So, I packed my comforting items like coffee, spices and little 'feelgood' items.

However, I was not prepared for the full extent of the situation and the challenges it would present to me. Living in a small, two-bedroomed cottage at the back of the main house was a family of nine people (two adults and seven children ranging in age from 14 years to 1 year old). The little children were forced to be outside most of the time due to the lack of space or play facilities inside the tiny house. The yard was huge and lush, with an abundance of fruit trees and a large swimming pool. However, the broken cars, piles and piles of junk under a tree and mounds of rubbish slightly hidden by a hedge were an eyesore, a health hazard and, frankly, downright dangerous for little children. It harked back to the days during the apartheid era where, as children, we were forced to play in the streets because of the lack of development of play facilities for 'non-whites' and chased each other among the broken glass, rubble and dirt. The swimming pool was unfenced, and I watched in horror from the window as the children ran around it, wondering what would happen if one of them fell in. I am not a swimmer, so felt helpless to save them if I needed to do so.

Gender issues raised their heads and stared me in the face as I saw the burden of caring for the boys falling onto the older girls. I know that it was because they were older, but the irony of them being girls and listening to them scolding and caring for the boys as if they were their surrogate mothers and not their siblings was unavoidable.

While their own mother was an intelligent, young woman, she was 34 years old and had birthed six of the seven children, the eldest of 14 years being

a niece whom she adopted. The mother made no comment on the traditional, stereotypical gender roles of caregiving and being in service to men that the girls might be heading towards, and I too said nothing. For her it was functional; there was no other way. I was struck by the challenge of raising it without offering alternative support to her to take care of the four little boys. The 14-year-old could be seen most of the time after school with the baby on her hip. It was her job to put him to sleep and stop him from crying, something he seemed to do a lot of during the day. In fact, the screaming, laughing and crying coming from the back yard was constant. To nap one afternoon, I had to put on earphones and music on to drown out the shrill cacophony of children – it sounded like living in a schoolyard.

In addition to this panorama of social issues, the house itself was in a bad state of disrepair. The guttering outside needed replacing, the house badly needed to be painted and the white walls inside were covered in muddy-brown handprints, shoe-scuffs and finger marks. The carport had been turned into a makeshift store-room of junk, broken items and debris, as well as a place to dry clothes. It was the first thing you saw as you drove in – another eyesore. In other words, to me, it was just a mess.

Inside the house was no better. The guest toilet was broken – the water ran constantly, the kitchen taps and sink wobbled and the cupboard underneath the sink teemed with tiny cockroaches. When I complained to my partner, his sister laughed out loud and said, 'You need to make friends with them. They are part of the kitchen.' I nearly died.

The backdoor was so broken and dirty that I took a picture of it to show to friends and family as an indicator of how things were. This or something else finally prompted my partner to replace it with a new door. I wondered about the symbolism of that gesture. A new door – my presence there bringing new possibilities? Was he ready for a new life with me? Had he changed the door to our relationship, perhaps? I was clutching at straws.

However, that door was the gateway to the backyard, and once that door was opened, big, fat, green flies swarmed in and covered the table and any food that might have been on it. I spent a good part of each day swatting the flies and spraying lethal DOOM insect spray all over the kitchen for short respites, keeping the door closed even in the stifling heat. I covered everything with a net, but the flies managed somehow to get under the cover if I was not vigilant.

We hung flypapers on the ceiling, and they were soon covered in black 'raisins', which did nothing to slow down the fly population.

And then there was the pregnant cat, ferociously hungry and jumping onto the table, the sink and even the stove if she thought she could get more food. She afterwards given birth to seven kittens. Oh! the horror of going back and sharing the space with even more living beings.

Other family members occupied the spare bedroom, not visiting but using the house as a base to do whatever they needed to be doing in the city. They lived in the Congo and in the USA and came to sort out business affairs. They were comfortably ensconced without any responsibility to clean, cook or fix anything in the house – kind of like non-paying lodgers in a free boarding house without rules or expectations.

I felt deeply challenged. I questioned myself daily. Am I seeing this from a bourgeois, middle-class, South African perspective? Am I missing the benefits of close family ties and communal living, which is unconditionally accepting? The irony and contradictions of this did not escape me. Here I was the individualist, guarding my personal space and feeling violated by the lack of boundaries and the 'free-for-all' mentality while critiquing in my PhD the imposition of individualist, materialistic, Western values and systems on communities.

I wondered if I was seeing only the pitfalls and not what was working. Was I supposed to intervene? Who was I to intervene, anyway? Would raising their awareness to the dangers of the situation make it better? Or would it serve to create dissatisfaction without solving the problems? Did I dare to say anything without offering to pay for it to be improved or without being willing to stay there for a longer time and see the changes through? The questions plagued me because I was preparing to take a deployment to another country for six months and was starkly aware that, however bad the situation was, I did not have to be there. I had options. The family at the back did not.

I spent most of the time while I was there in the kitchen, cooking, baking and making sweets for the children to while away the time. It made me realise that, when I am feeling out of place, the kitchen becomes my home, being the place where I feel most comfortable. It also means that I am not engaging with anyone, I do not have to talk to anyone and find out how they are coping with their lives, but I am still connected because I am feeding them. Everyone loved

the smells and the delicacies coming out of the kitchen. It was a way of being there and keeping myself protected from any knowledge of anything that might be too upsetting for me to continue to be there without acting. For the month that I stayed there, I did not venture into the backyard and consciously avoided seeing how the family at the back were living. I wondered how they took baths, where they sat down to eat as a family and where and how everyone was sleeping. Was this what I did when on deployment in a hardship duty station? Did I close my eyes to atrocities because I could not bear to see things I may not be able to do anything about?

When I went back to South Africa, the thought of going back there was daunting. I wanted to be with my partner, but the ease of living in South Africa with all amenities and facilities nearby made it a difficult choice. It gave me a different perspective on the 'arrogance' of the Westerners coming to work in Africa and Asia and their blindness and lack of understanding of our ways.

My last entry into my journal ends with 'I know nothing.' As I continue with the journey, the more deeply I realise that 'I know nothing' means that what I thought I knew turned out not to be so and what I know is not facts and figures; it is a deeper inner knowing about something that is not simple to articulate. It was just a knowing of how it is and the peace that comes with that kind of knowing. Some may call it wisdom. I experience it as a sense of inner peace. I wrote it down so that I could come back to it when I have forgotten and slipped back into an old pattern.

A month later I arrived back there after rushing to and from the Consulate service to register my visa application. It was hectic, and I rushed also to pack two huge suitcases with the idea of leaving things there so that it would be my new base upon returning from my mission. After being there in the December, I felt convinced that I could make it work somehow. When I arrived at the airport, my first disappointment was that my partner arrived with his sister because his car was in for repairs, so immediately there was no intimate time with him in the car. I hid my disappointment and felt a wave of intense dislike flowing out towards her. We arrived at the house and I was met by the smell of the cat and her seven new-born kittens. I ignored it and opened my suitcases to hand out the gifts and treats that I had brought with me. Despite my inner reaction, I included the sister and gifted her with shoes and costume jewellery.

The next days were up and down. The family made it clear that their needs and demands on my partner's time would not be usurped by mine, and it all came to a head around his birthday. I felt incredibly reactive, undermined, powerless and hurt. I hit back by staying away from the birthday celebrations and refusing to participate, telling myself that they had started it, so my behaviour was justified.

In the days after that I complained bitterly to anyone who would listen about how immature his sister was to compete with me. I told them stories of all the little things she did to show that she was more important to him than I was. They gasped, and I felt vindicated. It was an impossible situation, they all agreed. We talked for ages about the vagaries of the family. I felt happy that we had something to bond over, but afterwards I felt uncomfortable. I swept the discomfort aside and continued with the assignment to find more reasons to complain. There was no hot water and no washing machine; the kitchen was untiled and hard to keep clean; the flies, the cockroaches and the children were constantly in and out. Within it all, I continued to bake cakes, fry donuts, make popcorn and buy ice-cream for the children. They were the ones I knew how to deal with and were easy to please.

I vacillated between fitting in with my partner by going to play cards with him and his friends and struggling to find my place in the house with his dominating sister.

Disaster struck, and a brother had to be admitted to hospital. My partner started spending hours away, dealing with the crisis, and I fought bitterly to deal with the feelings of rejection and side-lining that this created in me. Once again, the family had ensured that I was not a priority. I battled internally and felt my enthusiasm to be there ebbing away. I spent hours alone playing games on my phone and iPad or hanging out with the children. They loved that I had so much time for them and massaged my feet and brought fruit from the garden for me as treats while I sank into the hole of misery.

Then a friend sent a message and I called her. We talked in the language of the More-To-Life[19] programme (see Chapter Seven for more details

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[19] More-To-Life is a global, educational non-profit organisation that offers personal and social transformation processes and tools through experiential courses.

of this programme) that we had both been involved in for years – about being reactive and about the unprocessed life-shocks (triggers of discomfort) and how they were piling up. We talked about how unable I felt to get to clarity because of the bombardment of life-shocks. There was no space to process them, so I was justified in reacting. She was sympathetic and kind, agreeing with me to some extent to calm me down. Then she said, 'Why not find the Brahma Kumaris[20] like you did in the Philippines?' It hit me like a slap in the face. I woke up. We ended the call and I suddenly had clarity of the separation I was creating in myself. I have inserted Image 5 below to give a hint of that peaceful experience.

Image 5: The Brahma Kumaris movement: About finding inner peace (2014)
(© Anusanthee Pillay)

My inner vision was suddenly crystal clear. There was no excuse for not processing life-shocks. There was no excuse for indulging in mind-talk about how terrible life in this place was and how it was not suitable for me or how I was being rejected and side-lined. There was no excuse for harassing my partner to be something and to give me something that would make me happy.

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[20] The Brahma Kumaris is a spiritual movement that originated during the 1930s in India. The organisation is affiliated with the United Nations and is known for the prominent role that women play in the movement.

It fell away like a thick veil – a clearing of the mist, an opening of the curtain to reveal the drama being enacted on the stage. There is nothing and no one to hold onto when there is no separation. The misery was mine alone. I created it, and I could remove it. I had given myself permission to separate, to indulge in believing my thoughts and speculations to be true and acting on them. Acting out. Behaving like a spoilt brat. My partner had nothing to do with it. The location had nothing to do with it. Wherever I went, I carried it within me. It was nothing new, yet it was crystal clear.

I detached, and I unhooked myself from the misery and the demands and the conditions and the yearning. Suddenly, in that split second, I was free from the misery that comes from separation. If I own the reaction and deal with the trigger that opens a store of thoughts and feelings of abandonment, separation, rejection and unworthiness, it loses power and disappears. In that moment, the knowledge that I had gained over years and years of searching turned into knowing, into an inner peace – some sort of wisdom. The knowledge that it was all within would often irritate me because I wanted others to collude with me, not point out the truth. That knowledge turned into a clear vision. An insight. *Vipassana*.

I went to find the Brahma Kumaris in this place, and meeting with them helped to cement my insight. They said:

> *We are focused on the body. We work through the sensations of the body and what it wants and forget that, without the spirit using the body, the body is useless and dies. The spirit is indestructible. Connect with the spirit and it will take care of the body and together you will journey in peace. Find that Inner Peace that is there within you. No need to look anywhere else.*

I remembered the Inner Peace workshop (see Image 5 above) in the Philippines and how I had experienced a similar epiphany. That time is was after doing the tree of life exercise during the Inner Peace weekend workshop and seeing how I had everything within me but was consistently bombarded by life events. They called the good things 'the fruit'. Life situations were like insects coming to eat the fruit. 'What is your insecticide?' they asked. 'Use your inner peace, your virtues of honesty, integrity, etcetera to drive them away.'

Drive what away? I saw the insects as thoughts. More-to-Life said the same.

> *Life-shocks (unwanted life events) will trigger mind-talk. Use your inner wisdom to see that the thoughts are not all real and true. Separate out the fantasy, the fabrication, the speculation and deal only with the reality. The truth.*

Buddha said that we are hooked on the sensations of the body, craving the good ones and having an aversion to the ones we do not like. The craving creates an aversion and the aversion creates craving. Through meditation we can step out of the cycle and stop the craving. For me, meditation helps, but is not the way I snap out of the separation. It happens in a moment of clarity that is triggered by something that is said, that I read or that I suddenly understand. Every day I read the words of wisdom from the Buddha sent on email. A few days before I had read a saying about having a limitless heart towards all beings. I do not know why I had that experience of clarity in that moment. It just happened similarly to the experience four years earlier. It had stayed for a while, but then slowly eroded as I slipped back into the old patterns of thinking. Something must have remained, however, because I woke up and snapped out of separation to reconnect with myself.

Analysis of awakening from superiority

The experience described above was an awakening to the pitfalls of knowledge and education that created a sense of superiority in me towards others who do not fit the profile dictated by my conditioning. Even though I thought I was working consciously with others, with awareness, the experience made me realise that there are always 'hidden spots' that will only become visible through constant self-enquiry, reflexivity and awareness.

As a humanitarian aid worker, political activist, feminist and candidate for a PhD, I have grappled in practice and in thinking with the how-to of interventions in crisis situations. My struggle has been to find ways that do not undermine, disempower or superimpose values and judgements onto the situation. The critique that I have engaged with in thinking and reading for my PhD is based on how the humanitarian aid world is anchored in Western

philosophy, and that mainstream, and how universality is a cover for a worldview that is not universal, but essentially European/American. This means that the way interventions are implemented often invalidates local culture and longstanding practices. I am informed by my personal experiences of living through apartheid and the legacies of British and Dutch colonialism.

The impositions and value judgements of these systems created self-loathing mindsets that serve to this day to warp the ability to have healthy relationships with non-Western culture. It is either rejected altogether or over-valued, including all the harmful traditional practices. I realised that I too am caught in this trap, and the struggle I had with the discomfort of being in another country demonstrated that. Without the self-enquiry and willingness to take responsibility for my inner state of discomfort, I would continue to operate from those limiting paradigms of my Western education and comfortable, first-world lifestyle in South Africa and be totally unable to perceive the situation in a different way.

Emerging Themes and Questions

The humanitarian system, over many years and with each succeeding leader, has embarked on ambitious missions to transform the system to be more 'fit for purpose' in a rapidly changing global environment. It has come up with new modalities, policies and structures, hoping to reclaim the glory it once enjoyed.

This constant reform process has done little more than create intense staff insecurity and fear, as well as entrench the hierarchical structure. When cutbacks are made, it is the lower-level operational staff who are sloughed off, leaving the top-heavy management structure intact. The Humanitarian Policy Group ('HPG') has for years now been advocating for seismic shifts in structures and processes for the system to be fit to respond to contemporary needs. At best, what has happened is that change processes have resulted in a more and more dissatisfied workforce and unnecessary confusion all round, with poorly implemented change initiatives leaving much damage in their wake. We are consistently in a state of 'unfinished business of organisational transformation', as described by Sachs and Kundu (2015) on their website.[21]

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[21]   See https://www.thoughtworks.com.

Scholars such as Vora (2015) and Sachs and Kundu (2015), writing on organisational transformation, are clear that organisational shifts cannot happen without a shift in organisational culture, and that culture is not created by policies, training, rules or campaigning. It comes about as a result of behaviours exhibited by the teams and individuals within the organisation. Communal lunches and coffee parties will not do it. A transformed culture will only be established over time, during which the hierarchy flattens, and through expressed actions and reactions, not through fancy-sounding theories of change, mission statements and log frames that are disconnected from the behaviours of individuals. Assessments, checklists, score cards and box-ticking are generally the tools of the day within the humanitarian system. These fail to address other high-impact processes like budgeting procedures, recruitment and performance-evaluation processes (Vora, 2015).

Figure 3 is a visual representation of two types of organisational structures (Sachs & Kundu, 2015). To me, the left represents what the humanitarian system is, and the right represents how it sees itself. It represents a huge mismatch between reality and perception and may largely be what limits progress on meaningful reform. The question that it raises for me is, what will it take to move to the right side, and who will do it? How will we develop the behaviours needed to transform the culture?

On one side of Figure 3 (the left side), we see a typical structure of an organisation with a clear strategy towards reaching its goal, which is the bottom line. All the preceding steps, ending at the goal of profit, are the means to the end result. If the goal is achieved, the organisation is deemed successful and the steps towards it will only be evaluated if the system fails to reach the goal. Sachs *et al.* (2015) term this 'the 19th century management model' and recommend the right-hand side '21st century model of management' that is human-centred and that works towards a purpose rather than profit. Ironically, non-profit organisations from the 19th century were more likely to be operating like the right-hand side model, but pressure from donors coming in since the early 20th century to professionalise and operate like a business forced most of the larger non-profits to adopt the left-hand-side steps. This was based on the assumption that, if business was successful in making profits, those same steps would work to achieve the purpose of a non-profit in the same way. However, business has now woken up to the fact that this model is failing them, with high

staff turnover rates and low productivity. Business experts like Sachs and Kundu (2015) and Vora (2015) now advocating for radical changes towards those processes once denigrated as too 'fluffy' to produce results in the non-profit sector is quite a turnaround.

The challenge for the humanitarian system is to look at itself and identify the steps that need to change, to change them but also to ensure that there are processes and mechanisms to bring the people along with the change. The big question is, how? The proposition of this thesis is that changing the structure, or the guiding policies, does little to change the people who need to implement the ideas. As Figure 3 demonstrates, the steps to profit are the means to an end, whereas the steps to purpose are processes, principles, values and relationships. The achievement of this side relies on empowered people with transformed attitudes who have moved away from the other side of 'anything goes as long as we reach the goal'.
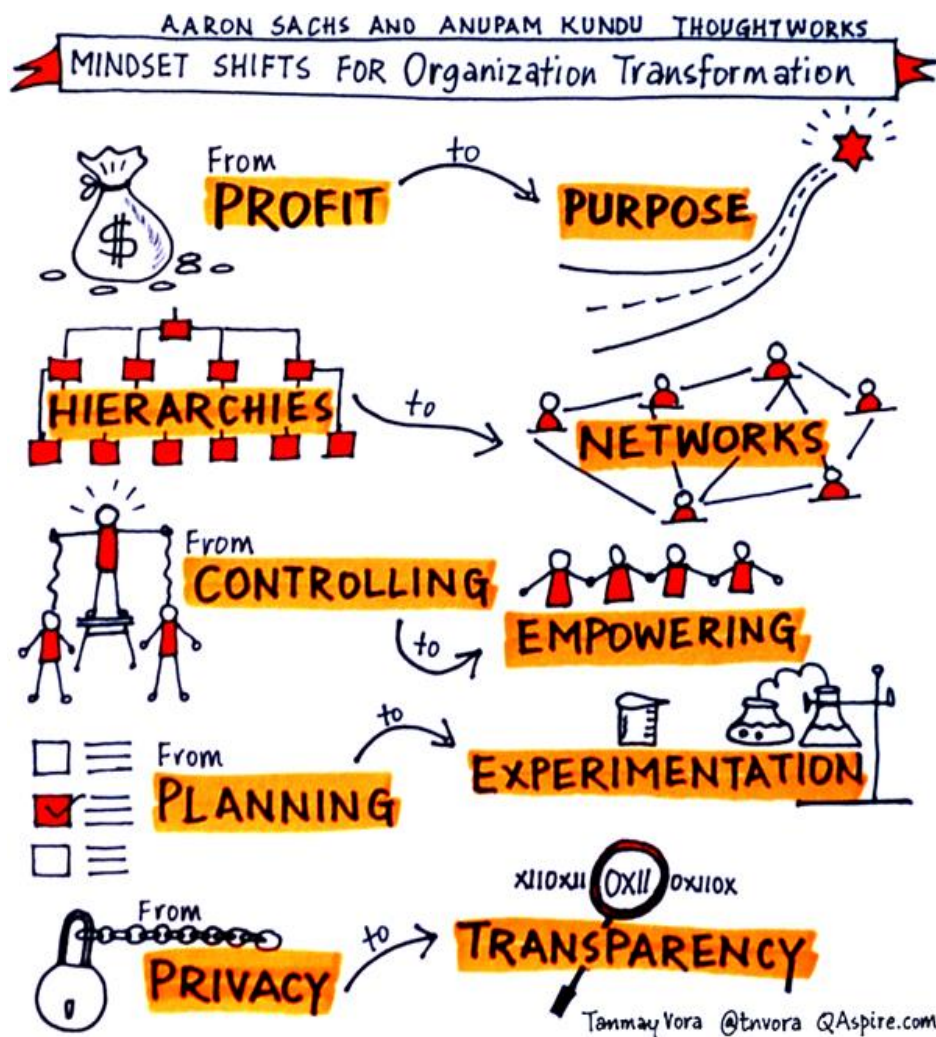

Figure 3: Organisation Transformation
(Source: aspire.com)

One of the ways to achieve this is by recognising the validity of alternative knowledge systems to the systems we unquestioningly accept as the mainstream. These knowledge systems are now beginning to be acknowledged as holding ancient, tested wisdom and practices that we can draw on to complement our current approaches

The robust element that emerges from this chapter is the depth of inward looking that is required to fully explore and acknowledge power and privilege that stems from adhering to Western epistemological underpinnings if one is to avoid entrenching the coloniality of knowledge. From literature to personal experience, it raises the focus to a conscious awareness of 'not knowing' and unravels the idea of the 'expert knower' by demonstrating how helpless and powerless one is in the face of the complexity, uncertainty and danger of everyday life.

By associating with the different methodological schools, the methodology of this research goes beyond autoethnography or traditional self-study. It demonstrates a method of self-enquiry that is not only about analysing life events but is also about tapping into higher levels of consciousness that contribute to the experience of transformation. It is a non-judgemental enquiry that can be likened to the quotation 'There is darkness; but if darkness is, and the darkness is of the forest, then the darkness must be good' (Kopp, 1976, p.139).

What is also clear from this chapter is that the notion of non-separation is an emergent theory that is popping up all over the place (see Chapter Seven for details on mindfulness), far from its origins in philosophy and religion. We are therefore well-placed in the humanitarian sector to take heed of this and not remain in the backseat of the move towards embracing new ideas. That reform and transformation is needed is evident. The question that remains unanswered is how to translate this into tangible action.

Summary

This chapter attempted to engage with what lies beneath and behind the humanitarian sector, which influences the current terrain facing the humanitarian actor. It achieved the objective of critiquing the Western-orientated, top-down approach and answered the question 'What is my context?' It put forward the

argument that contemporary responses to crisis situations are part of a legacy of the colonial past.

It is against this complicated, complex and diverse background that the humanitarian actor must work to broker peace, deliver relief and assistance, protect human rights and facilitate social transformation. One of the issues contributing to this highly complex web of structures, power and personalities is the lack of historical, institutional and operational memory.

Looking critically at the past was not put forward as an answer to any of the difficulties faced today, but as a reflection on the enormous complexity of the sector, elucidated as the foundation to answering the question of whether self-transformation is an agent for social transformation. It argued that this is a neglected area of study and an essential piece of the transformation puzzle within the humanitarian aid system.

Through the review of key literature and personal experiences, the need for a revolutionary vision was mentioned, as well as the need for a roadmap to enact this vision. The personal experiences brought forth reflexive self-enquiry on working in this context and the role of self-awareness.

Additionally, this chapter looked at the underlying knowledge system of the humanitarian aid system to expose its current Eurocentric/North-American moorings, from which policies, standards and practices of the system are drawn. The exclusively Western, Eurocentric/North-American basis for formulating policies, setting standards and informing practice models, including the criteria for funding allocations and the monitoring and evaluation of aid delivery, was shown to be highly problematic.

It discussed power and its relation to Western epistemologies, noting that the contexts within which the humanitarian aid system is operating are still struggling to free themselves from colonialities of knowledge.

It examined the resultant clash and tension between systems of knowledge that result in low-level resistance to the assistance and confines the humanitarian worker to limited ways of thinking and being.

It highlighted recommendations from reformists of the system for humanitarian actors to tackle the issues of the effect and legacy of historical and cultural forces such as nationalism, colonialism, globalisation, extremism, reformism or progressivism on humanitarian operations, among many other issues contributing to the failure of the system.

These discussions brought forth the idea that Western thinking on democracy and personal freedom is not unique or new and that thinking and philosophising about social systems and how to freely respond to life have been part of every tradition around the globe. It is critical to note that this is not a static critique of Western knowledge systems, but an attempt to advocate for a broadening of the current wisdom and knowledge of the humanitarian sector to include more ways of knowing that go beyond the repositories of what is conventionally used to formulate policy and practice.

As part of the discussion on ways of knowing and drawing on knowledge systems, this chapter has elucidated the ontological and epistemological framework of this study. It has provided an explanation of the life experiences, different frameworks, sources of knowledge and wisdom that this study draws on to investigate transformation in the humanitarian sector in an attempt to answer the research question. Through reflection and analysis of personal experiences, it has demonstrated the impact of inner separation and coloniality of thinking and the misery they cause when left un-investigated.

Autoethnography, self-study and reviews of literature and personal experiences also laid the foundation for reflexive thinking on the history of humanitarian aid, the knowledge, power and privilege of the humanitarian aid worker and the role of self-enquiry as well as the external context in which knowledge will be employed – what does it look like and what do we need to know about it to be effective as aid workers?

In addition to knowledge systems, various frameworks of morals and ethics underpin the humanitarian aid system and its processes, as well as the decisions aid workers make in difficult situations. These are discussed further in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR:
WHAT IS MY OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK?
MORALS AND ETHICAL FRAMEWORKS THAT GUIDE DECISIONS IN THE FACE OF UNCERTAINTY AND DANGER

Introduction

The discussion thus far has attempted to paint a picture of the landscape of humanitarian aid as a complicated, intricate mesh of power, economics, history and politics. Underpinned by the limiting epistemologies of the West, which are the basis of its operational policies, principles, standards and codes of conduct, the system provides the humanitarian aid worker with a confusing operational framework with which to guide her practice. This confusing and often contradictory system has attracted harsh criticism from many quarters.

The discussion in this chapter follows on from the discussion in Chapter Three of the complexity of difficult contexts and the intricacies of problematic underlying knowledge systems and power. It examines the operational frameworks that humanitarian aid workers employ to make decisions and guide their practices. It asks, 'Whose conceptual framework of morality is being employed, and which ethical framework will be used as a practical guide for the humanitarian aid worker?' This chapter critically examines the moral and ethical frameworks and principles that theoretically guide humanitarian aid work and aims to meet the first objective of this thesis – critiquing the humanitarian aid system to illuminate the aspect of personal transformation. Results from the autoethnographic research process are then presented to illustrate the drivers of moral and ethical choices in times of danger and uncertainty.

The rise of the #MeToo campaign[22], which pointed fingers at the humanitarian system and the entry of UN Women into the humanitarian sector

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[22] The #MeToo Campaign (or #MeToo movement), also known by a large variety of local and international alternative names, is a movement against sexual harassment and sexual assault. The movement spread in October 2017 as a hashtag on social media in an attempt to demonstrate the widespread prevalence of sexual assault and harassment, especially in the workplace.

(circa 2012), among other factors, raised the alarm that the policies and practices of the international humanitarian system, coordinated by the United Nations, needed some serious discussion and changes.

As is the wont of the global system of AID, when there is a problem, a meeting is called. Thus, the Word Humanitarian Summit came about in 2015. To those of us working within this system, morals and ethics as a topic was urgent. For many of us, not only was the humanitarian system failing to meet the growing need to respond to increasing and new forms of crises emerging and continuing all over the world, north and south, but also the list of moral and ethical failures was mounting. It was enough to spark the start of a citizen journalism project mentioned above (What Went Wrong) and trigger many articles and internet blogs on the violations of morals and ethics within the system. While the summit set out to 're-inspire and reignite our common humanity' (WHS, 2015, p.iv) and to provide tools for an improved humanitarian ethics (Mattei, 2014; Slim, 2015), not much discussion was held on what these moral aspirations meant and how they translated into the actual motivations and experiences of humanitarian actors. Most importantly to me, the summit did not unpack the underlying philosophies of the international humanitarian system, which dictate the principles, standards and values that drive the action.

Morals and Ethics – Concepts

Before going into the discussion, it is important to acknowledge that this is a highly contested terrain. Many philosophers argue that it is not possible to have universal morals and ethics, while others, like Hauser (2006), would have us believe that human beings have instinctive moral codes that have evolved over time. From the Western perspective, there are certain definitions of the concept that are widely used and put forward as universal in the humanitarian sector.

Morals are defined in the English language as standards of behaviour – principles of right and wrong, noted, for example, in the phrase 'the corruption of public morals', with its origins in late Middle English, the Latin *moralis*, from *mos, mor-* ('custom'), (plural) mores, or 'morals'.[23] The Ten Commandments

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[23]   Refer to https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/moral.

from Christianity form the basis of many of the morals of the Westernised world: 'honour your father and mother', 'do not murder', 'do not commit adultery' and 'do not steal' are well known. Morals can be construed as 'the set of standards and values, of manners and customs in a certain group of people at a particular time' (Verweij, Cloin & Tanercan, 2000, p.1). In theory, this morality, with its set of obligations or duties, might be very different in another society that nevertheless holds the same ethical principles. However, morality in the normative sense entails that there exists a universal morality with a right set of general rules that all rational agents can accept as binding. This, of course, remains a contentious issue in moral philosophy.

Ethics is concerned with right and wrong and principles and obligations that govern all actions and practices of institutions and individuals in society. This assumes that any action or lack of action by individuals or institutions that affects directly or indirectly human beings involves ethics (Thomson *et al.*, 2005). Ethics in an organisation or group are normative in the sense that they include the articulation of principles and obligations that members of that group should follow, the virtues that they should acquire and considerations about how following these will impact others.

Thomson *et al.* (2005) define moral judgements as either judgements of obligation or judgements of value. The former concern what we do in any given circumstance. Sentences that speak to judgements of obligation include words such as 'duty', 'ought', or 'right'. Examples in the defence sector might include 'your duty was to protect your section', 'you ought to do what is necessary to prevent any collateral damage' or 'it was not right to open fire without command'. Judgements of value, on the other hand, do not concern themselves with what is the correct thing to do. Instead, they speak to what is good or what has value. 'Freedom is good' or 'art is the only thing that has intrinsic worth' are considered judgements of value because they do not oblige us to one action over another. Judgements of obligation and judgements of value are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Indeed, an ethical theory can promote a notion of what is good or what has value that then requires us to act.

A fundamental question in the study of morals and ethics is whether we can identify universal, objective moral truths that cut across cultures, geographic settings and time. At the most foundational level, the answer might be yes. As Aristotle noted, ethics is not a science, but an art. However, consider the

methods used for moral decision-making. What constitutes a reasonable, responsible method, and who gets to choose it?

Aristotle and Confucius each constructed an ethical system based on virtue (Sim, 2007). Aristotle's anticipated result was individual happiness and Confucius's was harmony. For Aristotle, happiness consisted of the search for truth. Confucius looked to create a system that put an end to civil chaos. Although both systems relied on reason and control to achieve their ends, Aristotle placed the locus of ethical behaviour on individuals, but he held that a moral upbringing and good political governance also contributed to the formation of moral character. Confucius saw this locus in the family, which provided the basic pattern of relationships for personal and professional life. Reason prevailed throughout, as in the cultivation of a more just and humane person. If we see Aristotle as representing Western morality and ethics and Confucius as representing the East, it provides a basis to discuss what this means from these two perspectives.

Kwang-Kuo Hwang (2015) writes that Eastern moral systems entail the ethics of community or the ethics of divinity, which emphasises the importance of fulfilling one's duties or attaining to group goals. In contrast, Western morality highlights an individual's right of choice with utilitarian consideration, rather than any enforced social demand of deontological concern. Negative duties are universal moral codes in most human societies, while positive duties are specific to non-Western societies, which are experiencing transformation to preserve their core values under the impact of Western individualism.

Compared with Western ethics of autonomy, Hwang (2015) proposes that ideas about individual rights are relatively uncommon in traditional Eastern moralities. Even moral discourse arguing for negative duties in Eastern moral systems are proposed not on the premise of protecting individual rights, but in consideration of maintaining social order or for religious reasons. For example, the act of killing others violates the principle of benevolence known as *ren* in Chinese. Ren, the requirement that all people carry out their moral duties to significant others in their intimate societies, is the most fundamental moral rule for maintaining harmony in society. This is true for Buddhists, Islamists and Hindus, as well.

Hwang (2001) goes on to say that ancient Chinese approach to morality is comparable to Chinese medicine: the aim is to secure a harmonious situation

for the whole, not the individual part, which is problematic. Consider this traditional Chinese story of Bian Que, a doctor in the Warring States period (5th– 3rd c. BCE) who was renowned for his ability to heal even the deadliest disease. He was asked by the King of Wei why he was so much better than his two brothers, who also happened to be doctors. He responded as follows:

> *My first brother heals sickness before it even develops, so his methods appear hidden, his science art and he is known only within our village. My second brother deals with illnesses while they are minor, preventing sickness from getting worse and returning the body to health. I deal with sicknesses when they have reached the level of disease and threaten to destroy the organism of which they are a part. This requires numerous medicines, and skill and knowledge in their use. For this reason, my name has become famous throughout the kingdom and I have been asked to be physician to the king, yet my first brother has the knowledge to deal with sicknesses before they arise, and my second brother is able to treat them at an early stage and prevent them getting worse. Though my fame has spread throughout the land, their knowledge is greater.*

In like manner, Hwang (2001) describes the most efficient 'ethicist' in classical Chinese thought as one who does what she does without anyone noticing. She aims at securing harmony within a group, at the prevention of moral problems, and when she excels in her performance, she manages to prevent difficulties before they even develop, so that no one ever knows that they could have arisen. Western ethics, on the other hand, again parallels Western medicine in that it tends to wait until problems emerge and only then aims at eliminating them. Western ethics demands a rational explanation and rigorous, logical, conscious resolution. The focus is on principles and standards to guide actions, and, similar to Western medicine, the action to solve the problem of the part may cause damage to the whole. The strength of the Western approach is the ability to isolate the problem and carry out rational, methodological procedures necessary to cut through it.

The strength of Western ethics, however, should certainly not be understated. It presides over the ability to identify in a reasonably 'objective' manner who is in the wrong and who in the right in each case, and hence is adept at protecting the rights and interests of an individual who is, at least in principle, regarded as being on equal footing with everyone else. Certainly, cultural, political and personal factors can and often do cloud the issue, but, in this respect, it is undeniably superior to the Eastern approach, which tends to be rather poor at protecting the particular interests of the individual and may even be disposed to sacrifice them for the sake of social stability or harmony.

Another weakness of the Eastern way could be said to be the emphasis on selflessness. In certain circumstances such a disposition may be quite unhelpful, even harmful, when individuals sacrifice their lives for the good of others; for example, as soldiers in wars or accepting inhuman violations without resistance for the good of others.

Nevertheless, while a more analytical focus on the self and individual actions may be needed in the Eastern way, the Western approach could also do with more holistic and preventive considerations that would serve to expand the rather short-sighted individual vision still dominant today.

Morals and Ethics in the Humanitarian Sector

It seems evident that humanitarian organisations should be organised around moral frameworks. After all, the purpose is to contribute to transforming a negative situation into one that is better and to respond to the needs of people whose ability to recover from the negative situation is compromised. Is this not inescapably a moral task? However, humanitarian organisations are guided by mission statements or statements of purpose, and the moral foundation is implied, not conscious, articulated or agreed upon. There are often debates as to whether missions are or are not morally justified. As stressed by Van Arsdale (2006), addressing the human rights of refugees is generally accepted to be a moral imperative, but not all humanitarian missions are so unanimously accepted. For example, programmes to address female genital mutilation, family planning, abortion, promoting abstinence to control AIDS infection, the marriageable age of girls and child labour are all issues for which different cultures and individuals have strongly held beliefs, customs and practices. Who decides which arguments are more moral? Whose conceptual framework of

morality is being employed and which ethical framework will be used as the practical guide?

Van Arsdale (2006) argues that it is evident that national and international humanitarian relief personnel work in very complex contexts, often with shortages of resources; competitive, discordant, internal group dynamics; a collapse of the external social fabric; and huge internal and external socio-cultural diversities.

These workers often must make life-and-death decisions and confront morally difficult situations. This includes conflicts between personal norms and institutional rules or the need to choose between actions that may be potentially harmful to the beneficiaries and/or to themselves. It is therefore not surprising that relief workers and organisations require ethical guidance in the form of policies, codes of conduct and so forth.

Hugo Slim (1997) and Matthew Hunt (2014) call for increased attention to both ethical and moral role models and underline that this is a research area that needs further study. They maintain that the moral problems confronting humanitarian agencies exist on three levels. Firstly, there are the broad strategic questions about whether they are going to respond to a particular disaster, how much aid they are going to provide and how to balance the multitude of crises competing for their attention. Secondly, at the operational level, there are a series of challenges related to the nature of relationships between organisations and host governments, many of which are ethically suspect at best. There is also the trade-off between quality and quantity, and efforts needed to ensure the security of their staff. Finally, there are difficult decisions that individual aid workers must make during day-to-day operations that involve interacting with local populations, such as determining which patients to prioritise during medical triage.

Megan Braun (2012) emphasises that theoretical principles do not always translate well to practical disciplines. Aid workers do not always have the luxury of constructing hypotheticals; they are most often individually confronted by the harsh facts of reality and an environment in which the morality of the situation and the ethical course of action are not always clear or easily executed.

Lars Löfquist (2017) promotes the use of a model of virtue ethics (Utilitarianism). He contends that virtue ethics paints a realistic picture of morally

difficult situations and that ethical standards can be used as pedagogical tools for developing virtues. This challenges organisations to discuss critically the purpose of relief work and to communicate examples of modest virtues to staff to stimulate continual advancement towards moral excellence. On the other hand, Van Arsdale (2006) offers a theory of obligation (Kantianism) as a moral framework suitable for organising humanitarian assistance. This theory takes issue with the concept of human dignity as opposed to fairness and proposes finding the overlap between principled guidelines and achievable actions, calling it 'pragmatic humanitarianism'. It ensures that those serving do not treat those being served as 'the Other'. It mandates fairness in the accessibility of resources and the distribution of assistance. It also affords researchers and policy makers a clear-cut 'operational platform' from which to embark on their analyses (and critiques) of these endeavours.

A study by Anaïs Rességuier (2018) on humanitarian morals introduces two different aspects of humanitarian morality: the moral culture of the humanitarian sector and the moral sense of humanitarian actors. This study evaluates these two sides of humanitarian morality with respect to two central elements: fundamental humanitarian motivation (that of concern for the person in need) and relationships within this realm. Based on a concern about the increasing bureaucratisation and professionalisation of the system, it highlights the moral agency of humanitarian actors using the notion of moral sense in contrast to a moral culture composed of normative expectations. Through interviews with actors, it establishes that engaging with people in need is the most common underlying motive of humanitarian work and therefore concludes that moral sense is more powerful a determinant of decision-making than moral culture. It is about the exercise of one's freedom – one's own agency – in the context of humanitarian action. As Foucault said, 'What is morality, if not the practice of liberty, the deliberate practice of liberty?' (Bernauer *et al.*, 1988, p.3).

Decisions when Faced with Moral Dilemmas

The argument for a deeper focus on 'moral sense' as opposed to 'moral culture' (Rességuier, 2018) is intensified by the work of Arthur Kleinman (2007). Kleinman's study reveals, through the unsettling stories of a few men and women, some of whom lived through some of the most fundamental transitions of the 20th century, how malleable moral life is when faced with uncertainty and

danger. He documents the stories of an American veteran of World War II, tortured by the memory of the atrocities he committed while a soldier in the Pacific; a French-American woman aiding refugees in sub-Saharan Africa, facing the utter chaos of a society where life has become meaningless; and a Chinese doctor trying to stay alive during Mao's cultural revolution, discovering that the only values that matter are those that get you beyond the next threat. These stories highlight for Kleinman (2007) how central danger and uncertainty are to our worlds. His approach to morals and ethics exhorts us to examine who we really are as human beings when confronted with the uncertainty and dangers of our times.

This fits with Rességuier's (2018) findings that moral and ethical decisions are not wholly determined by principles and standards but are more significantly guided by the internalised morality and ethical frameworks that individuals have constructed for themselves.

Kleinman's (2007) stories bring out the notion that human beings act on what they realise matters most to them in conditions of danger and when all that they value in their lives is being challenged. Rességuier (2018) documents that humanitarian actors are motivated by a myriad of personal reasons, including earning money, so their moral senses, which form the bases of decisions, will not be consistent as a group. Caught up in existential moral experiences that define what it means to be human, Kleinman's characters, he finds, are 'a deep mixture of often contradictory emotions and values whose untidy uniqueness defines the existential core of the individual' (2007, p.10).

Personal Reflections

The following reflections on one experience speak to the research question about the role and processes of self-transformation as an agent for social transformation in the humanitarian context (see Chapters One and Two). From childhood to adulthood, life presents uncertainty, dangers and dilemmas. The transformation processes that are established as life lessons in the discussion that follows are what we use to form the foundations of personal moral and ethical frameworks, as demonstrated by Kleinman (2007), when confronted with these dilemmas.

Satyam – The Truth

Growing up during apartheid meant that there were very few, if any, forms of public facilities for entertainment and play for children. The playgrounds, cinemas, restaurants and amusement parks were all for 'whites only'. This was a familiar sign all over the city on park benches, in government offices, in banks, in the post office, in hospitals and in shops. In fact, in some places the sign said, 'Whites only. No dogs allowed', which we looked at with amusement and rage. The impudence of the apartheid system was always astounding. It did not matter of what social standing or financial means one was at that time. Apartheid was the great leveller and we were equally excluded. This image of my family below (Image 6) shows our middle-class background and, again, the formality and mix of Eastern and Western culture in our attires and poses.
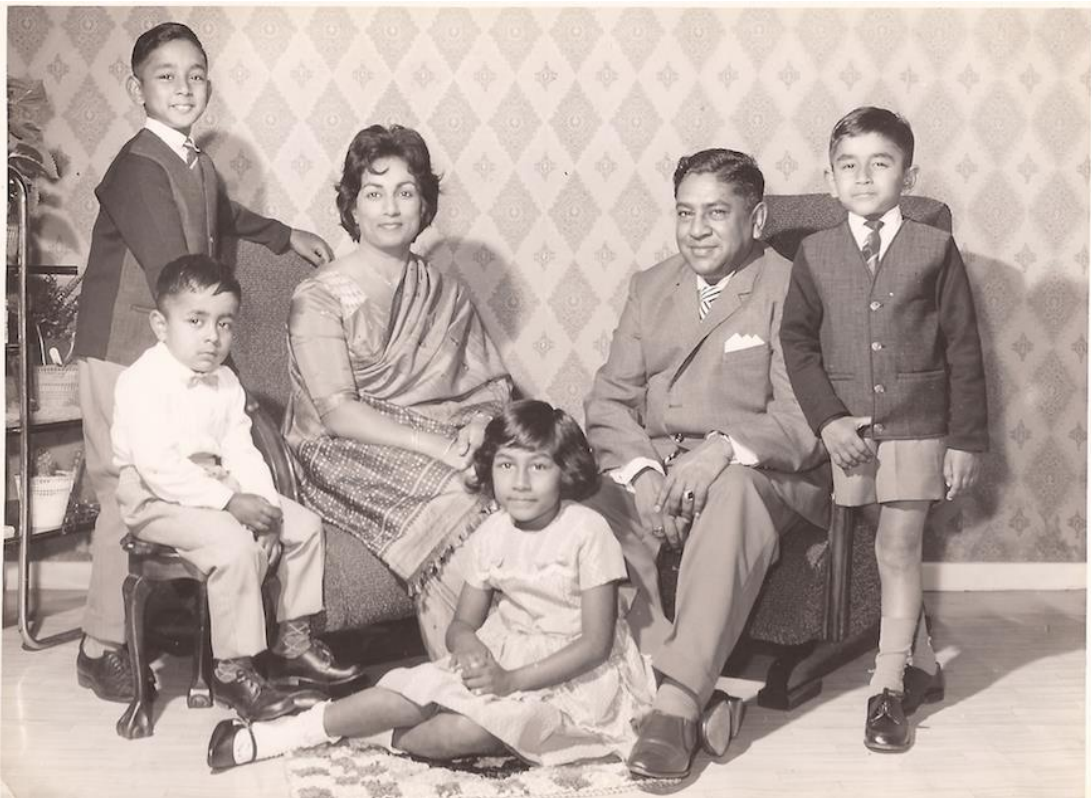
Image 6: My parents, my brothers and I (1965)
(Pillay Family Archives/© Anusanthee Pillay)

We had great fun, anyway, playing in the potholed streets around our houses. We played games with unique names like *Kennetjie, Skaloolie* and *Boerewors* with sticks and balls, and, as a family, my brothers and I had many board games like Monopoly, Scrabble, Cluedo and Risk that we played for hours

on end. We played together all week, and then on Sundays we parted, each going to their place of worship. Our family went to the Tamil Hindu temple, which my father was part of establishing with his brother-in-law, who came directly from India and spoke no English, only Tamil. Our neighbours went to the Catholic Church and the Mosque down the road. On special occasions we went to one another's places. My cousins next door were Catholic, so they came to the temple on Diwali and I went with them to church on Christmas Eve. We did not think or talk about it; we just accepted it as the way we lived – no questions asked.

From each of these religious and cultural systems, we learned different things and also the same things: have respect for elders and do not lie, steal, cheat or disobey your parents. From the Hindus, we learned the concept of *Satyam,* or the Truth. If anything was in doubt, we would swear '*Satyama'* to convince the other that it was the absolute truth. This word was used by everyone in the community, not just the Hindus, and even the workers in my father's shop would say it as the last exclamation for convincing someone that something was not a lie. With the teaching of Satyam (mainly from my mother, who was one of the few people in the community who could read and write in Tamil) came the concept of Karma. Although these concepts were never fully discussed with us children, we had some understanding that speaking the truth was essential; otherwise, Karma (consequences) would kick in. I understood Karma as the law of cause and effect – 'every action has a reaction' – and that nothing I ever did would be without consequence. What follows is one such experience, occurring at an early age and internalised as part of my 'moral sense' as discussed in the literature on moral culture in this chapter.

One day, when I was about eight years old, my father, who was often hungover from over-indulging in alcohol, was sleeping, and I went into the room to get something. He had a pile of coins next to the bed, and I decided to take some of them. It was so easy that I took many, enough to buy many treats in those days. I went off to the corner shop and bought comic books, which we loved to read, for all my brothers. I came home and generously handed them out.

My father woke up, counted his money and realised that some of it was gone. Alternatively, he may have seen me taking it when I thought he was asleep. Whatever the case, a big hoo-ha developed in the house, and, perhaps as a tactic to make me tell the truth, he started accusing my little brother of stealing. Up to that point, I stubbornly refused to admit that I had done it, but

when my brother was in danger of being beaten for this deed, I confessed. My father cried at that point, and I was shocked. Was it such a terrible thing that I had done?

My mother returned from the shop where she had been all day, covering for my father. She was furious and rushed to get the broom to beat me. My father stopped her, saying that it was okay because I had told the truth and did not need to be punished. The shame I felt was not about taking the money; it was about lying about it.

Analysis: Internalised Morals and Ethics

Having moved on from that experience, I can now reflect from a distance and realise that this incident serves as a subtle reminder of which path to take if ever there is such a dilemma. I am acutely aware that every action has a consequence (Karma) and that accountability for any and all actions is not to be escaped. Although I am not afraid to take risks, I weigh up the pros and cons and take decisions based on whether I am comfortable with the intended or unintended possible consequences.

What I have learned from being exposed to Eastern thought is that human experience is related through the body, mind and spirit. Through my physical body and my five senses I perceive the world of matter and objects; through my mind and body I experience the world of emotions and feelings; through my intellect I comprehend my world of ideals and ideas; and through the spirit I am conscious and aware of these experiences.

Many years later, at the age of 40, spurred by uncertainty, discomfort and a deep well of misery that I could not eradicate, I signed up do participate in the More-to-Life programme. Based on Eastern and Western practices for self-transformation, this programme teaches processes and tools to discern the difference between what the mind has conjured up out of fear and past experiences and the reality or truth of the situation. Through this programme I became more convinced about the insights offered through the Indian principles of *Satyam, Karma, Ahimsa* and *Brahmacharya* and through all the teachings of Krishnamurti, Swami Vivekananda and Pramahansa Yogananda. These were books in our house that I had read growing up and only partially understood. I understood more when I experienced the *Vipassana* meditation of ten days of silence and, finally, even more when, triggered in therapy with my Western-

based psychologist, I experienced a profound 'letting go' of some of the debilitating fears and insecurities I had carried with me since childhood.

Reflecting on social activism and individualism

When I was 24, my younger brother, who was involved in anti-apartheid politics and activism, encouraged me to join the women's movement. I had little to no understanding of feminism or the politics of race, class and gender raging in the country at the time. My older brother had given me Krishnamurti and Jung to read, and my head was full of thoughts about transcendence of my life's miseries. This was something completely different, so I went to a few meetings and got utterly bored as the conversation just swept over my head. I was heavily pregnant with my fourth child and thought mainly of my constant hunger.

The one good thing about those meetings was that there would always be free food, and that was a big incentive for me to go. I listened and marvelled at the articulate women saying intellectual things that were making little sense to me. A year later, I remembered it all when the violence in my home escalated and I found myself running out of the house in the middle of the night with a tiny baby. The personal is political, they had said. Violence against women is not a personal problem; it is a scourge on society for which society must take responsibility. It unconsciously spurred me to take some action, although that was not until a few years later, after I had left the situation, moved to another city, then to yet another city and, finally, at the age of 33, confronted all that had happened to me in that violent, turbulent relationship. Then I consciously chose to join People Opposing Women Abuse ('POWA') to learn how to counsel women in abusive relationships and work with the organisation to end violence against women.

Here is where I learned what 'the private is public' really meant. Activism to change society meant that individual rights were suspended, and the focus was on the well-being of others. I volunteered initially to work on weekends and at night to take calls from women in abusive relationships. Before that, I attended a six-month lay-counselling course run by two psychologist volunteers at POWA. The message was clear. Being a feminist activist meant personal sacrifices for the greater good, and it was a constant battle in the NGO world to find the balance between individual rights (to vacations, to a decent wage, to

childcare, to medical insurances, etcetera) and the cause (end violence against women and racism).

The cause always won in those days, although the same cannot be said in today's world. NGO staff are encouraged to put their individual needs first (especially in the northern countries), while beneficiaries wait to have their needs met. 'Out of office' is a common response if you try to call any staff during their summer breaks. Without the social-change politics, it is a job, and individual rights are paramount. Rybaczuk (2009), in her study of why a social movement failed in the USA, concluded that unbridled individualism was the underlying issue that destroyed the cohesion of the movement. She argues that a social movement needs consistent commitment to the ideals of the cause, which are bigger than the individual. A focus on self-fulfilment and self-interest leads to an undermining of this commitment, which, in the case that she studied, led to the utter breakdown of the movement and the failure to reach the intended outcome.

Emerging Themes and Questions

Moral culture, moral sense, the individual and the collective

I was very confused for a long time about Western and Eastern thinking concerning the individual and society. If the Western approach puts the individual at the centre and the Eastern/African approach puts society at the centre, why is there no space in the Western way for self-transformation, whereas the Eastern way is so focused on the individual needing to transform through all the meditation practice and yoga?

It took some time to understand that the Western approach is about individual rights and freedoms, while the Eastern and African ways are about society first and then the individual. In the latter, the individual rights can be overturned for the good of the society. My growing understanding is that, while Western morals and ethics are very individual, there is no acknowledgement or space for the power of the individual who must implement the moral principles. Western thinking creates a culture of morality without any system or mechanism for creating moral sense in the individual, as discussed in the literature. There is an assumption that everyone will adhere to the moral culture and that every individual agrees with it and will comply without question.

That this is problematic is well documented. As is well-known, Jan Smuts, the South African prime minister, played a leading role in drafting the preamble to the Charter of the United Nations[24] (1945), which declared that the peoples represented in the world body were determined 'to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small'(p.1). South Africa was a founding member of the UN, and Smuts signed the charter on behalf of South Africa. He seems to have thought that the emphasis on human rights at the UN would have no bearing on South Africa's policy of racial segregation, as that was an internal matter. When the Government of India raised the issue of the treatment of people of Indian origin in South Africa at the UN in 1946, Smuts insisted on the primacy of Article 2(7) of the charter, which said, 'Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorise the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state.'

If the 'moral culture' is not enough, how will the individual develop the 'moral sense' to decide and act in accordance with the culture? In the Western system, there is little room for developing and transforming each person individually to gain the internal morality and ethics necessary to make ethical decisions. The only way that the Western system tries to enforce it is through punishment. Naming, shaming, blaming and punishing externally is done. Over time, we see that this does not work. Particularly with crimes against women, my experience has been that punishing the perpetrator does not stop the phenomenon of violence against women. It is not possible to legislate change, so violations of the moral principles and standards set by Western society are mammoth and growing. At the same time, there is a growing understanding that work must be done to change behaviours and attitudes for societal change to

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[24] The Charter of the United Nations was signed on 26 June 1945 in San Francisco, at the conclusion of the United Nations Conference on International Organization, and came into force on 24 October 1945. The Statute of the International Court of Justice is an integral part of the Charter. See https://www.un.org/en/charter-united-nations/.

happen, but the foundational philosophy that is guiding the behaviour is ignored. For as long as the individual rights are so elevated and for as long as the individual is separate from the society and the environment, there is no accountability for the impact on others and on the environment of striving for individual rights and freedoms.

What the Eastern way offers is the acknowledgement that the individual is symbiotically connected to the collective, and, therefore, the health of the individual determines the health of the collective and *vice versa*. In this way of thinking, external punishment for violations is not always necessary as there is a built-in system of consequences that is taught based on precise studies of human existence. It may not be immediate, and it may appear that the violation is being done with impunity, but the Eastern philosophy dictates that it will always have a consequence.

In the Western view, the individual is prior and more fundamental than society, which is perceived to be an artificial construction designed to meet the needs of the individual (Hwang, 2001). When it fails to meet the individual's needs, it must be reconstructed and redesigned. According to Dworkin (1977), all moral codes cover personal rights, duties and social goals. Morality is premised on natural rights rather than on duties or social goals, and free will and the right to liberty are natural, fundamental and inescapable. Of course, there is also the duty to respect the rights of others, and everyone is encouraged to strive for the rights of all human beings (Dumont, 1986). There are negative duties (what one should not do, such as kill or steal), and violating these moral codes is considered evil. Positive duties are subject to the right of choice, and any positive action is admired as a personal virtue, so performing positive social obligations can cause tensions with personal liberties (Gilligan, 1982).

In sharp contrast, the Hindu, Chinese, Islamic or Eastern moral systems can be described as duty based. Unlike typical Western dualism, most Eastern philosophies are monistic; that is, they advocate that human life is an inseparable part of the world and one is not an independent entity standing in opposition to the external world. In Chinese culture there are the concepts of Yin and Yang. In Confucianism a family is conceived of as the body of a human being, and each role represents a part of the body (Hwang, 2001). Hinduism is also premised on the functional interrelatedness of the entire universe. What is important for this discussion is that the Eastern moral systems do not impose

mandatory features only on the negative duties of omission (do not do this or that), but also on the positive duties of commission (you must repay favours, be kind, show gratitude, honour guests, etcetera). These obligations ensure the smooth functioning of society rather than protect the rights of individuals (Ahmed, 1993; Ali, 2006).

While the negative duties may be the same for both Western and Eastern ways, the goals are completely different. Globally, with inter-cultural exchanges and the rise of technology, change is occurring in both systems. In the West we are seeing a rise in the recognition of social harmony through individual transformation and positive duties of commission (promotion of mindfulness and meditation practices and caring for others), and in the East and Africa, due to capitalism and Western education, we are seeing more emphasis on individual rights (leaving home before marriage or choosing to be single) and less on social obligations (like caring for elderly parents or supporting siblings to get an education).

A complex web

What emerges from the literature, the personal reflections and the discussion presented in this chapter is that the operational framework of any individual is a complex web of morals and ethics shaped by the learning and experiences of that person, which gives them moral senses. This is what they will employ in the face of danger and uncertainty, and they are hardly likely to consult a manual or handbook on best practices in those situations. Awareness of what this operational framework is composed of and some idea on how to deal with oneself in dangerous situations is the area of transformation that needs attention. Figuring out one's own morals and ethics is a struggle, but without this understanding there can be no understanding of the motivations of others. Implementing an ethical framework that is removed and separate from the self (in the form of principles, standards, policies and even human rights) and the community one is serving is meaningless.

Summary

This discussion followed on from the discussion in Chapter Three of the complexity of difficult contexts and the intricacies of problematic underlying knowledge-systems and power. This chapter examined the operational

frameworks that humanitarian aid workers employ to make decisions and guide their practices. It asked, 'Whose conceptual framework of morality is being employed, and which ethical framework will be used as the practical guide?'

Humanitarian-relief personnel work in very complex contexts, accompanied by shortages, high levels of competition, discordant internal politics and wide-ranging diversities. In addition, an alarm has been raised that the policies and practices of the international humanitarian system, coordinated by the United Nations, need some serious discussion and changes. For many, not only is the humanitarian system failing to meet the growing need to respond to the increasing and new forms of crises emerging and continuing all over the world, north and south, but also the list of moral and ethical failures is mounting.

The WHS attempted to address this alarm and set out to 're-inspire and reignite our common humanity and to provide tools for an improved humanitarian ethics' (WHS, 2015, p.iv). However, not much discussion was held on how the morals and ethics promoted there translate into the actual motivations and experiences of humanitarian actors. Most importantly, it did not unpack the underlying philosophies of the international humanitarian system that dictate the principles, standards and values that drive the action.

This chapter looked at these issues and reflected from my personal experience on the drivers of moral and ethical behaviour. It attempted to define morals and ethics, noting that they may differ from one society to another. If Aristotle represents Western morality and ethics and Confucius represents the Eastern, the comparison provides a basis to discuss what this means from these two perspectives. A discussion on these perspectives highlighted the similarities and points of departure. It pointed to studies that refer to different aspects of humanitarian morality – the moral culture of the humanitarian sector and the moral sense of humanitarian actors – concluding that moral sense is more powerful a determinant of decision-making than moral culture. Kleinman's (2007) study reveals through the unsettling stories of a few men and women how malleable moral life is when one is faced with uncertainty and danger. It shows that moral and ethical decisions are not wholly determined by principles and standards, but by the internalised moralities and ethical frameworks that individuals have constructed for themselves.

Through the reviews of literature and personal experience, this chapter has demonstrated how moral culture does not necessarily turn into a moral

sense that matches the standards and principles of the culture. It showed how theoretical principles do not always translate well into practical disciplines, and that, since aid workers do not always have the luxury of constructing hypotheticals, they are most likely to act on what they realise matters most to them in conditions of uncertainty and danger.

Against the background of these discussions on the complexity of context, knowledge, power and moral senses, what is the humanitarian aid worker expected to deliver? This is the topic of the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE:
WHAT AM I EXPECTED TO DELIVER?

Introduction

To understand what is presented in this chapter, it is important to recall from Chapter Three that the international humanitarian system is underpinned by the same Western knowledge system that produced colonialism and that continues to produce a culture of expertism and a top-down approach in which the fortunate go out to help the less fortunate. It is also necessary to retain an awareness that the struggle to emerge from the aftermath of devastating colonialism and coloniality still riddles the humanitarian context.

Following on from Chapter Four's enquiry into the individualised, internal moral and ethical frameworks used by workers for guidance, which may or may not match the standards and practices expected by the system, the following two chapters attempt to meet the second objective of this thesis, which is to conduct a critical review of humanitarian aid practice and support systems. To that end, this chapter unpacks the practicalities facing the humanitarian aid worker to answer in practical terms the question 'What is a humanitarian aid worker expected to deliver?' It looks at the structure, the terms of reference, the expectations and the reality of the situations that humanitarian aid workers find themselves in. Finally, through presenting the results of self-enquiry and reflexive analysis, it links personal transformation with social transformation.

Humanitarian aid workers are despatched to manage and develop emergency response programmes within designated geographical areas that have been subjected to war, disasters from overwhelming natural hazards or other environmental or developmental problems. It is significant to note that the common perception of 'rescue' – direct action, saving lives and ministering to wounded victims of war and disaster – is rare for the international aid worker. The main reason for this is that the affected populations are usually the first responders to any crisis (O'Keefe, O'Brien & Jayawickrama, 2015) and direct responses are more effectively done through local partner organisations. The international organisation may be the channel for the funding, but the on-the-ground engagement with the affected population is done directly by national actors. Therefore, while the rhetoric states that the international humanitarian system is responding to life-saving needs, in fact the system actually works

either from countries at peace (those neighbouring the crisis-affected country) or in the aftermath of a disaster, when the immediate danger has passed. It is far more common that formal humanitarian action functions more as a surrogate when state services or community structures fail to cope with immediate needs. In conflict situations, humanitarians deal less with the direct consequences of warfare than with the often-combined consequences of displacement, loss of livelihoods and the retraction of government services.

The International Humanitarian Structure

Much of the involvement of an international humanitarian worker falls within the Humanitarian Programme Cycle ('HPC'), which is based on coordination and information management. The key elements of the HPC are as follows: needs assessment and analysis, strategic response planning, resource mobilisation, implementation and monitoring, and operational review and evaluation. In other words, it is a typical project cycle based on the way that humanitarian aid is supported.

After a crisis has been identified, humanitarian response plans and flash appeals are created for donors to support certain projects. The international humanitarian system, coordinated by the United Nations, manages this cycle, which was designed for an emergency response lasting less than one year. Currently, the average humanitarian cycle is seven years, and some last longer, such as in Somalia and Afghanistan, where they have run for 27 years and 17 years respectively. This has led to much debate about what an emergency is and when a humanitarian mission becomes development.

What is most significant about the way this system is structured is that the HPC that produces the humanitarian response plan, or the flash appeal, is geared towards financial mobilisation and accountability rather than action. The formulation of the response plan barely ends before the next cycle begins, and so the fast-paced, emergency rhetoric of the international system is not about rushing to the affected areas to save lives; it is about rushing to get to the next part of the cycle in order to raise the funds. It has become a marketplace and is driven and managed like a marketplace. It is white-male-dominated and set up to run like the military without the discipline, structure and values of the military. Instead, it is framed by humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, independence and impartiality.

I have been a trainer and advisor in the humanitarian system for many years, and these principles are perceived as vague signposts to something that people know means something good but are never sure whether they are doing correctly.
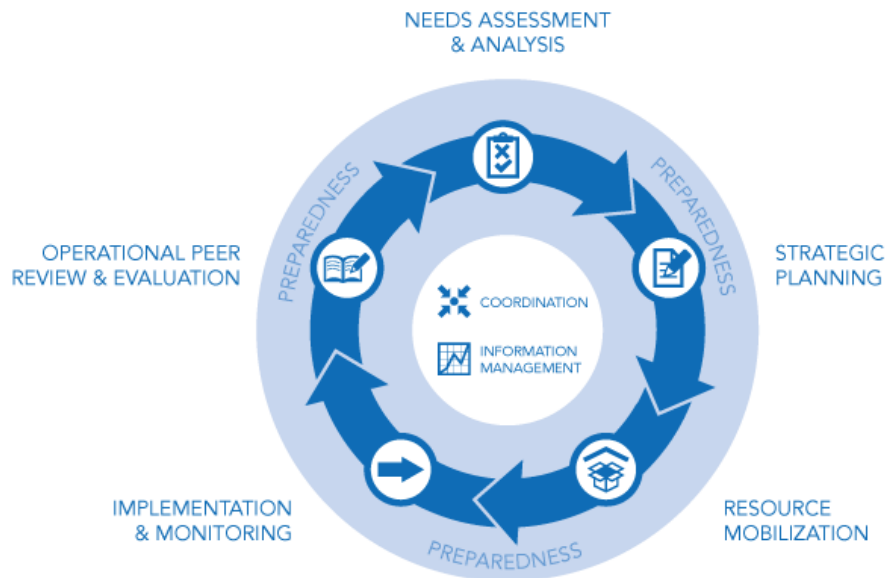
Figure 4: The Humanitarian Programme Cycle
(Source: HumanitarianResponse, 2019)

The humanitarian programme cycle ('HPC') represented in Figure 4 is an operational framework developed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to support the transformative agenda, which is discussed in Chapter One. The HPC sets out the sequence of actions that should be taken to prepare for, plan, manage, deliver and monitor collective humanitarian responses. It applies directly to inter-agency responses in emergencies linked to disasters and to working with internally displaced people or responding to a crisis that has overwhelmed the national response system.

The five elements of the HPC are meant to be coordinated in a seamless manner, each phase building logically on the previous one. The key to its success depends on effective coordination between the participating agencies. This coordination is led by an entity set up to do only this, which is the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ('UNOCHA').

The process for implementing the HPC is meant to be a way of working that builds on what humanitarian organisations have learned from past

experience. It should, therefore, enhance decision-making and improve outcomes at the field level. The development of this model was a result of a review that recommended a shift from well-designed 'appeal' documents for donors and headquarters towards more collaborative, collectively owned and evidence-based planning. It was meant to bring the focus to that national level and take it away from external audiences. Recent reviews (Du Bois, 2018) have demonstrated that this has not worked as well as predicted; hence, the New Way of Working and the focus on localisation that emerged from the World Humanitarian Summit.

The deliverables of an international humanitarian aid worker are set around this HPC and articulated in a job description or terms of reference. The specific responsibilities of an individual will vary according to the nature of the emergency or the situation on the ground. However, whatever the specialist area, the typical terms of reference will include many of the following, which I have seen in my own terms of reference and on many of the jobsites such as ReliefWeb, ALNAP and DevNet:

- rapidly assessing emergency situations;

- working closely with staff located within the area or other emergency departments;

- coordinating and supporting the work of volunteers;

- managing budgets;

- managing the implementation of emergency activities and monitoring their effectiveness;

- producing response reports, recommendations and proposals for emergency interventions;

- developing and monitoring objectives;

- liaising with United Nations agencies, INGOs, NGOs, government officials, colleagues, etcetera;

- recruiting/managing local/national staff;

- organising induction, support and training for volunteers/other aid workers;

- implementing, overseeing and ensuring strict adherence with security/safety procedures;

- ensuring knowledge of and compliance with appropriate national and international procedures, policies and regulatory codes;

- making representations to donors, local authorities and humanitarian community members;

- organising capacity building in specialist areas for colleagues and partners; and

- producing funding proposals.

A very significant omission, which is glaringly obvious if you look, is engagement with the affected population. Throughout an HPC, it is implied that, somewhere, there will be some engagement of some kind (through the assessment phase, the monitoring phase or the review phase). What is clear is that there is top-down engagement throughout. There is no space to integrate meaningful engagement on an equal basis, decision-making, feedback or direct input into the HPC by the affected population.

This list, alongside those that include qualities such as good interpersonal and effective communication skills and the ability to work with diverse people, has good aspects and is done with the well-intentioned purpose of finding the right people who can work within the cycle to deliver the aid effectively. Why then, as many critics have pointed out, do things go so wrong?

From my personal perspective, the marketplace model upon which these lists are based, and which drives the recruitment process, works as a silencing strategy. The heavy emphasis on systems, bureaucracy, processes, paperwork, tests and checks silence the fact that human beings, overwhelmed by the system, often hire the people they know or who are recommended by others. The list is generic, so it silences the contextual needs and the experience of the people in that context who may need something tailored to their context. It silences the fact that there is resistance and that the people may not want the international community in their country. However, as long as the list is ticked, and the funds come in to support the HPC, it is deemed to be working – even when it is evident to all that it is not.

How to Become an Aid Worker

Image 7: During safety and security training for a field operation in Somalia (2013)
(© Anusanthee Pillay)

There are routes to becoming an international humanitarian worker for both university graduates and school leavers. Specialist knowledge is important, and, for graduates, high-level degrees in subjects such as medicine, engineering, languages or social sciences can be useful. Despite this, strong competition for a small number of opportunities makes relevant work experience, proficiency in the English language and knowledge more important than academic qualifications. Substantial paid or voluntary emergency-and-development work experience is almost always necessary. Image 7 above shows me in typical protective gear (bullet-proof vest, helmet and radio), preparing to go out on a mission in a conflict context.

Still, many humanitarian workers will recount that they had no intention of being in this field and just 'fell into it'. For people from the northern hemisphere, there are countless opportunities to 'fall' into international humanitarian work through volunteering with agencies, paid and unpaid internships, junior programme officer positions offered by wealthy, first-world governments and simply being in the right place at the right time. This is not so easy for people

from the other side of the globe. For people in the southern hemisphere, it is about having expert knowledge, skills, many years of experience and public recognition at the national level. Sometimes it is about who you know in the international system.

Ivan Illich, in his speech[25] titled 'To Hell with Good Intentions' in Mexico (20 April 1968), was bitingly sarcastic about the 'good intentions' of international humanitarian workers from the north. Although what he said was in a historical epoch, it is still resoundingly and alarmingly relevant to contemporary humanitarian scenarios. He argued that those people the volunteers/ humanitarians aim to help may not all need or want their aid. Illich (1968) supported this by noting the differences of culture; for instance, the two groups may be educationally, linguistically and financially unequal, so it is ludicrous to assume that imposing 'alien' ideas, knowledge and judgements on the affected community is what the inhabitants actually want or need. He went on to compound the idea by suggesting that most international workers come from a comfortable and privileged lifestyle, knowing only that lifestyle, which has treated them favourably, and they come to their missions with little to no understanding of the lived realities of the people they have come to serve. He harshly depicted them as being on 'vacations' to spread their way of being to 'newly discovered poverty'. He urged them to focus on the needy in their own countries rather than imposing themselves on others.

What Do We Do?

Against the background of a rapidly changing international system that no longer provides direct action, but which mainly works to support an overwhelmed state system or to replace a dysfunctional or failing state system, and working with colleagues with varying levels of commitment and motivations, what exactly does the individual do? What does he/she need to know?

Until very recently, there were no courses offered for humanitarianism at universities. It is often said that there are only two jobs that one can get without

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[25]   See http://www.swaraj.org/illich_hell.htm.

any formal qualifications: politician and humanitarian. This is an added complication to the whole messy business of saving lives and delivering aid to the needy. The definitions of 'humanitarian' range from 'front-line responder' to 'Angelina Jolie'. This lack of definition adds to the difficulties of developing an effective system.

What are we expected to deliver and achieve in such a context? If I had to describe what I have seen in the many emergency settings I have worked in, from the Pacific Islands to Central Asia and to North-West Africa, the best I can come up with is 'highly stressed, frenetic hyperactivity without clear focus or tangible results.' This is confined to the expat workers running around the office, checking, controlling, advising, shouting and kitting up for flying visits into the 'deep field', where the affected population is to be found. I have seen national actors staring as if we were TV shows on fast-forward. The national actors, be they NGO workers or community-based workers, calmly go about their business, picking up their lives and assisting others who need help. There is little if any meaningful interface between the two sides.

A typical example of this is when, on one mission, a call came from a civil-society organisation leader about a woman who had been attacked by several men and was critically ill in hospital without support. Acid had been poured onto her. The whole system went into a panic. No one knew exactly what to do. Finally, an individual decided to go and see how she could help and connected the person to a local organisation who could help. Another time, in Liberia, a woman died giving birth. Maternal mortality is a huge issue in the region. The matter was brought to us and, since we did not have services for children, we appealed to the international community working with children. Again, panic ensued as each one decried responsibility, passing it on to the other. Eventually we raised money internally, got the child adopted by a local woman and supported the care of the baby for some time.

This disjuncture between the international and national humanitarian workers, as well as the competitive distances between clusters, creates a mismatch of aims, objectives, expectations and outcomes of any given humanitarian response. This was well documented through the 2004 tsunami response in Asia (Cosgrave, 2007), the 2010 Haiti earthquake (Binder, 2013) and the 2015 Kathmandu earthquake (Cook *et al.*, 2016). There are many emerging stories from the responses in Syria, Yemen, South Sudan and the

Central African Republic. This is not to conclude that there are no achievements, gains or lives saved, but, overall, the failures are overwhelming and, more importantly, the lessons are not being learned or visibly implemented. Each humanitarian crisis often has a fresh cohort of actors flying in, without necessarily having that information. What was learned from past mistakes is documented at a global level, discussed abstractly within policy organisations, but does not flow automatically to the practical level.

Figure 5 shows the thematic clusters that the system creates to enhance coordination, minimise overlaps and duplication, and encourage collaboration and sharing of resources. The Cluster Approach was applied for the first time following the 2005 earthquake in Pakistan. This sparked a reform process in 2010 that led to the development of the Transformative Agenda and the HPC (IASC, 2011), where the IASC principals agreed on the need to strengthen the Cluster Approach. The aim of the Cluster Approach was to strengthen system-wide preparedness and technical capacity to respond to humanitarian emergencies and provide clear leadership and accountability in the main areas of humanitarian response. At the country level, it was to strengthen partnerships and the predictability and accountability of international humanitarian action by improving prioritisation and clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of humanitarian organisations. Figure 5 shows the UN Agencies that are usually the lead agencies for each theme (cluster) in any given emergency setting.

In reality, while coordination does happen, what is more prominent is a high level of competition for resources between the UN agencies and the INGOs, concomitant turf wars and the protecting of mandates. The pressure on agencies to show that they are achieving their stated goals is so high that, in one mission where I worked, the 'bad blood' between two agencies had reached such a high level that the donor agency forced them to draw up a memorandum of understanding on collaboration before they would fund them. The nationals found it hilarious that all this was being done on their behalf, while very little of that funding would actually reach them, apart from those employed within the organisations.

Personal Reflections on Working in the System
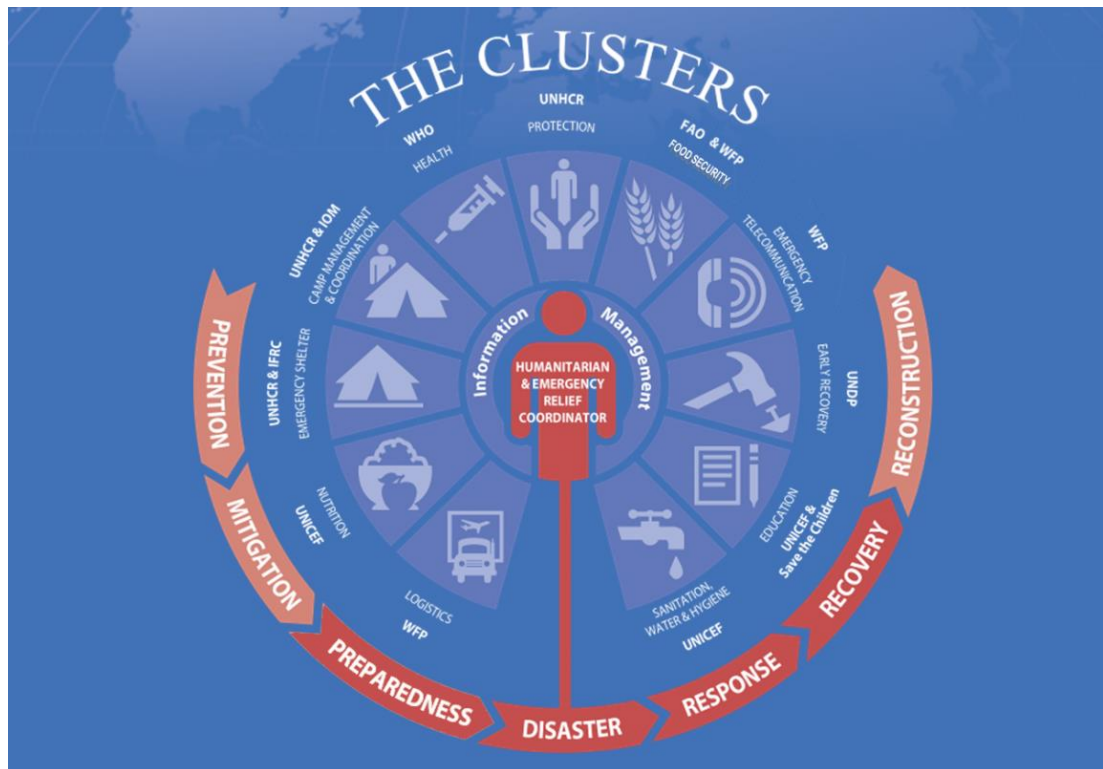
Figure 5: The Cluster System
(Source: UNOCHA, 2019)

Coming from the NGO sector and having high respect for the United Nations and all that it stood for, I was very unprepared for the complexities of the job when I went on my very first mission to Liberia. I was employed as a short-term consultant to UNIFEM to work as a gender advisor to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (August 2008 to December 2009). I was sent a terms of reference document with some guidance on what was expected in a timeframe of four months. The following is an account of some of that experience, which took 18 months to complete. I have used Image 8 below of myself with the then-president of Liberia to indicate that I survived the experience and, in fact, thrived.

The community dialogue process in Liberia

Image 8: Former President of Liberia Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and I (2011)
(© Anusanthee Pillay)

In 2008, fresh from learning new tools for self-transformation through the More-to-Life programme of the Kairos Foundation, I arrived in Liberia. I was slightly overwhelmed as this was my first longer-term international assignment and I was to be there for four months. I was placed with UNIFEM, a United Nations project under the UNDP, which dealt with gender issues. I was to be seconded to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia ('TRC') under the Gender Portfolio of one of the commissioners.

It was a challenging assignment from the outset. After weeks of emails back and forth about travel and accommodation, I arrived in Monrovia. I was met by a young man, a newly arrived intern, who dropped me off at a dingy hotel and left. I could not reach him the entire weekend after that day. I was terrified. My room was below basic, airless and dark, with a bucket and a cold water tap for bathing, suspicious-looking bed linen and no other facilities of which to speak. I wanted desperately to get onto the next flight and go home. I did not know where to go for food or whether I was in a safe part of town (it

looked like the most unsavoury part of Johannesburg, where I would never dare to go), and I had no one to ask.

At breakfast the next morning, I met a kind-looking woman. The breakfast itself was a thick slice of white bread, an overboiled sausage, a boiled egg and instant coffee with milk powder. I ate what I could, which was not much. The woman told me that she was with an NGO working on educating girls. She offered to take me with her to lunch. It was so hot and humid, and we walked for ages until we got to a Lebanese restaurant set outside with rustic tables and chairs on a dirt floor. She said that it was one of the best, and, years later, I would think back and know what she meant. The food was good. I determined that if no one came to get me the next day, I would take a taxi to the airport and just go back home.

I was collected the next morning by a UN vehicle and so began what grew from four months to 18 months in Liberia, working with the TRC as gender advisor. This story of my arrival was just the first of many challenges to my sense of comfort, order, logic and integrity. I had to learn to navigate not only through a culture that defied anything I thought I knew about the way things work, but also through a system that was beyond dysfunctional. There was no head of office, and the agency was being managed by a consultant. I had no supervisor. The terms of reference had been written two years before I arrived and were outdated, as the TRC was winding down. I had no job description. I was taken to the government office to meet the minister of gender. She was not in, so I met with her deputy. I did not go back to meet the minister, thinking that meeting her deputy was enough. This mistake came back to haunt me because the minister took it as a personal affront and tried to get me sent out of Liberia.

Two weeks after my arrival, I was invited to attend a conference in Cape Town, South Africa. I jumped at the chance to go home for a week, despite Liberia being a 12-hour journey away. At the airport, the UN driver connected me to the leader of the Women's Coalition, who was heading off to the same conference. That started a mutual mentorship and life-long friendship, and the idea of doing some innovative, creative work with women was born. Unfortunately for me, this work deepened the rift with the minister of gender, who was a sworn enemy of the Coalition leader.

This was just the tip of the iceberg of the messy politics of post-conflict Liberia. It is a long and tumultuous story that had me in all sorts of pots of

boiling water. If not for the community women, who took me under their wing and took care of me even when my payments were lost in the UN system, I would probably have gone back home, defeated by the unending list of discomforts and challenges. Image 8 above, of me standing with the then-president of Liberia, is a visual testament to my emergence intact from all the challenges of my experiences in Liberia.

Working with the women gave me a chance to practise all that I had learned in the More-to-Life programme, in India and during my community psychology training (see Appendix D). I set up a coaching programme with them and used all my newly learned life-coaching skills to work with limiting beliefs and self-doubts. We then set up a group coaching, mentoring week to prepare for a process we had designed to reach women in all four corners of Liberia. I facilitated this process and used every exercise, process and method that I knew to work creatively and transformatively. The group was very open and willing to try new things and to fully participate. From my psychology training I used exercises for self-reflection; from More-to-Life I used methods that were about examining thinking and feeling; from yoga I used breathing exercises that I had learned in India; and from the group I learned how to practise them in the context. There were twelve women and three men, and by the end of the week we had formed a tight group, connected and willing to go out and engage with women.

Together we designed a programme, and the group called on all their networks to bring 150 women together in four locations. We travelled across the length and breadth of Liberia and stayed in the strangest places – further challenges to my comfort zone and acceptance of what was 'normal' in terms of eating, drinking and sleeping, not to mention washing and toilet facilities.

Because we had used a transformative learning approach for the team-building process, the group decided that we should use the same approach with the women. We had shared experiences of the war, practised deep listening skills and breathing techniques and done team-building exercises. We used that to prepare a guide for the engagement with women that we called 'Community Dialogues' and translated the guide into Liberian English. The group wanted to replicate in the dialogues the way the workshop had been done, using compassion, understanding and a focus on relationship building.

Over the next few months, extending way beyond the four months and requiring my time to be extended, we travelled and dialogued with over 600 women. The meetings were far more intense than we could have anticipated. Many more women arrived to participate than we had catered for, and from the first meeting of over 200 women, the guide kept changing and adapting to suit the numbers and needs of the groups of women and the facilitators. The participants said that they 'felt' the genuine concern and support from the team of facilitators and felt cared for and listened to, and that the team had modelled the behaviour that they were wanting from them. As the women poured out their hurt, shame, guilt, terror and sorrow from the war, the team worked hard to hold the space for them, often leaving the room quietly to sob outside. I was kept busy with feedback and evaluation sessions during the breaks to maintain the mutually supportive environment. The next day, we were surprised when the women came singing and dancing into the room, saying they felt 'lighter' and were ready to talk about what was next. The first dialogue process formed the pattern of the next three, and we were better prepared for them, although each one had its unique character.

Analysis: Linking Self-Transformation to Social Transformation

This process demonstrated the parallel working of self-transformation and social transformation. Without the entire team going through the process that we then offered to the participants, it would not have been possible to create that compassionate, empathetic, caring dynamic of engagement. The group called what we had created together 'a transformational community peace-building approach' and hoped to continue to build on it (see Appendix D). For me, it was an affirmation that the inner work I had been doing could be translated into work with others, not just individually but also in groups. My inner work had kept my sense of well-being intact despite the consistent challenges. My colleagues and friends frequently commented that, in a country where loud, dramatic speech and behaviour was favoured, I had a calm, peaceful way of speaking and working. It was a new way of perceiving myself through their eyes.

Emerging Themes and Questions

The literature and my experience highlight the challenge of delivery that humanitarians face. Within the situation described, I was confronted with an

uncoordinated, unmanaged system that had little to no understanding of the local politics of the country. This placed me in jeopardy and jeopardised the project in which I was engaged. It also threatened the people with whom I was working.

Working without a proper job description or clearly spelled-out terms of reference meant that no strategic thinking went into this assignment, and, therefore, there were no clear deliverables set out. Humanitarian aid workers are often the ones propping up an increasingly shaky system, as demonstrated by the responses to the Nepal earthquake, the Syria conflict, Yemen, South Sudan and many others. The WHS tried to address these shortcomings, but, like all these policy conferences and meetings that are held to find a way to make the system more effective, it did not look at the individual motivations, capacities and levels of consciousness needed for transformative work.

What are they, and how can we develop capabilities, capacities and inner resources so that transformation becomes a reality and does not remain a metaphor or an aspiration? This is discussed more in the next chapter. Perhaps one should consider the suggestion made by Jiddu Krishnamurti (1996), that all jobs carry the same monetary value. This might address some of the issues of hierarchy, power and mismanagement, in that the person applying for the job will be motivated only by the love of the work itself and not the reward.

Summary

In Chapter Three it became clear that the international humanitarian system is underpinned by the same Eurocentric knowledge system that produced colonialism and that continues to produce a culture of expertism with a top-down approach in which the fortunate go out to help the less fortunate. Awareness was raised in Chapter Three of the fact that the struggle to emerge from the aftermath of devastating colonialism and coloniality still riddles the humanitarian contexts. Chapter Four covered the moral and ethical challenges this presents for a humanitarian aid worker, and this chapter unpacked the practicalities of delivery amid the contradictions within the system.

This chapter went on to discuss what humanitarian aid workers are sent to deliver and how they deliver. Contrary to popular perceptions of direct action, the international aid worker was shown to be rarely at the coalface of humanitarian action. It is far more common for formal humanitarian action to

function more as a surrogate when state services or community structures fail to cope with immediate needs. This chapter also stressed that much of the involvement of an international humanitarian worker is about technical management of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle. It highlighted the debates around when the situation stops being an emergency, when it goes into recovery and when it becomes development, which brought out the marketplace competition for funding. It went on to critique the 'good intentions' of aid workers and show how these may be at odds with the people they have come to assist, accentuating the lack of a definition of who or what humanitarians are and what they are expected to deliver. Personal experience from different contexts was presented to reflect on these delivery dilemmas and how reflexivity, self-awareness and willingness to work with what the context presents is a way to get beyond these issues.

The next chapter delves more deeply into the concept of transformation and self-transformation, to take a closer look at what these mean and how they can be employed.

CHAPTER SIX:
WHO AM I?
SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION AND
THE HUMANITARIAN WORKER

Introduction

It is no measure of health to be well adjusted to a profoundly sick society (Krishnamurti, 1970–1986).

There is a fundamental criticism of the IMF/Washington consensus approach: It does not acknowledge that development requires a transformation of society. . . . something that budget accountants focusing solely on revenues and costs simply could not understand (Joseph Stiglitz in Ferri, 2003).

Human beings are not only the most important means of social development [;] they are also its profoundest end. Being a fine piece of capital is not the most exalted state that can happen to a human being (Amartya Sen, 1998, p.734).

If aid is about contributing to social transformation or even facilitating it, who are the people who must do it? As a humanitarian aid worker, I am challenged to ask myself the questions from Chapters Three, Four and Five to finally arrive at the question 'Who am I?'

The preceding chapters laid out the decidedly subjective dependence on human beings to give material expression to the lofty, complex and diverse humanitarian ideals that abound in the system. Who are these individuals, and am I one? What do I know about myself? What *can* I know about myself and how do I go about it? Against the background of complex, contradictory contexts; limiting underlying epistemologies; moral and ethical nightmares; and top-down, silencing operational strategies, can I be the one to facilitate adequate processes that will contribute to social transformation?

This chapter continues the critical review of humanitarian aid practice and support systems in accordance with the second objective of this thesis and moves the discussion more pointedly onto the topic of transformation and the

humanitarian system. It critically examines literature on transformation by asking about the concepts of transformation that have emerged in the literature, the differences and similarities between these concepts and which are suitable for specific research approaches. It then asks what this implies for the challenges of understanding and promoting transformative processes. Finally, it presents the results of the autoethnographic self-enquiry to further answer the question 'Who am I?' within the humanitarian aid system and its processes.

Transformation and the Humanitarian System

Consistent with the aims of my thesis, my first question, before answering 'Who am I?', is, 'What is transformation?' A review of the key literature on the topic of societal transformation reveals that, although the need for societal transformation has been established, there is little consensus on the conceptual basis of transformation. While there is general agreement on the idea of transformation as a major, fundamental change, where some would go so far as to say that 'transformation is change without residue of the previous state' (Vasudev, 2016), as opposed to minor, marginal or incremental change (Kapoor, 2007; O'Brien, 2012), there is little consensus regarding the features that make change in human social systems transformational. There is also, therefore, debate on what the qualitative difference is between change and 'non-transformational' change (Berkhout 2013; Brown *et al.*, 2013; Mustelin & Handmer, 2013).

There are similar debates around whether transformation is desired. Some see it as a consequence of collapse and therefore negative (Butzer, 2012), while the perspective of others (Folke *et al.*, 2010) is that the ability to transform is an essential element of functioning systems. Scholars like Beddoe and Jackson (2009) view it as an effective means of promoting social sustainability and prosperity. In the humanitarian sector, transformation overlaps with other concepts such as resilience, adaptation, transition, critical transition and durable solutions or sustainability (Park *et al.*, 2011; Pelling, 2011; Sheffer, 2009), and there is considerable debate emerging around the overlap and the distinctions between these concepts and transformation. For some, like Pelling (2011), there is a sharp distinction between transformation and resilience, while for Folke *et al.* (2010), transformation is a fundamental characteristic of a

resilient system and mechanisms that need to be implemented to advance transformational change processes.

Agrawal *et al.* (2012, p.330) go further to say that 'precision in language and understanding can translate into more useful targeted analyses and interventions.' Tanner and Bahadur (2013) are highly critical of this lack of conceptual clarity and empirical grounding. They maintain that this opens the way to being co-opted by those who defend the status quo against radical social change and, in many cases, it is applied purely metaphorically. Scholars such as Strunz (2012), Thompson (2007) and Agrawal *et al.* (2012) warn against the risk of the concept becoming a fashionable buzzword that has too many different meanings and, most importantly, hinders the understanding of the social processes and interventions.

In seeking to address these issues, key literature was reviewed with the following four questions in mind (as outlined in Chapter Two):

1.   What concepts of transformation are emerging in the literature?

2.   What are the differences and similarities between these concepts?

3.   Are some concepts particularly associated with, or considered more suitable for, specific research approaches?

4.   What does this imply for the challenges of understanding and promoting transformative processes?

Feola (2013), among others, finds that the term 'transformation' is frequently used merely as a metaphor. When transformation is not used as a metaphor, he maintains that different concepts are employed that differ with respect to system conceptualisation, notions of social consciousness and outcomes. He puts forward several questions: in what ways is transformation a useful concept? Does its value lie in inspiring research and action as a powerful metaphor, or does it have an analytical value to support the understanding of the processes and mechanisms that trigger social transformation?

The lack of consensus about what it is and what it should be is the topic of research and debate in the social sciences and beyond. When do we call change transformational? We do need to answer the important questions on what transformational processes entail. These questions are critical, since there are demonstrated arguments for the need for fundamental changes in the way

the humanitarian system interacts with emergencies and crises around the world.

Critical analyses of the international humanitarian aid system, loosely connected as it is, has led to the conclusion that the system as it stands is not fit for purpose (HPG Report, 2016, p.41) and needs to be completely overhauled. This report views the 'malaise' in the humanitarian community as resulting from the fact that humanitarian action is unable to separate itself from the spaces that are assigned to it by politics (p.7). This critique is not a new and it has spurred new practices, reforms and changes over many years, all of which have not made old problems go away. Some might argue that the failure of the reform is caused by a lack of understanding of the dysfunction (Collinson, 2016), while others might say that there is no real will to change at all and that the only reason there is even a debate about this is that the system has become monolithic – a kind of self-governing 'oligopoly' of mainly Western donors and large international and non-governmental aid agencies (HPG Report, 2016, p.7) – and, at the same time, unsustainable and self-sustaining. It is perceived by southern states to be a moral cover for northern states and humanitarian agencies to secure their own interests, be they political, organisational or individual (Jindal School, 2014 p.4).

Such harsh and unkind critiques of the system abound and have pushed system reform from humanitarian charitable relief to a mix of relief, life-saving and long-term developmentalism called 'working in the nexus' (OCHA, 2017; Chandler, 2001). This 'New Way of Working' (2017) calls for transformative developmental outcomes (Donini & Gordon, 2015) like localisation, protection of human rights and peacebuilding, including addressing sexual violence and mainstreaming gender and diversity issues. A more recent proposal from Marc DuBois (2018) calls for a complete transformation of the architecture, but also for an unmooring from:

> …*deeply engrained inequities of the western charity model –*
> *plastering hierarchies such as rich/poor or developed/needy and*
> *giver/receiver or saviour/beggar* [and I would add expert/victim]
> *upon nations, communities and people* (DuBois, 2018, p.8).

DuBois is highly critical of the Western characterisation of non-Western countries as being incapable of self-government and in need of everlasting aid. He goes so far as to say that the humanitarian principles, the pillars upon which the entire architecture rests, are deeply Western-biased and fail 'to ensure the transformative promise of humanity' by defining people as helpless, poverty-stricken victims (2018, p.1).

To start this process, it might be useful to adopt Feola's (2013) recommendation not to use transformation as a mere metaphorical buzzword, where any change process is termed 'transformative' for funding or publishing purposes. He advocates using an analytical approach that recognises the differences between the concepts of transformation and, through a rigorous process of informed dialogue, considers the complexity of transformative change from a variety of angles.

Against this background of resounding calls for transformation of the system, where does the humanitarian worker come in? How are untransformed people with human shortcomings, individual ambitions, educational and cultural biases, hierarchies – the list is endless – to effect this transformation that is being called for? Nowhere in DuBois's proposal, or any other proposal for reform, for that matter, is there a mention of the people who are to make the transformation happen. While the recommendations he makes are extremely laudable, emphasising mutual, respectful and transformative exchanges, assisting, learning and developing between north and south on an equal basis, he does not say who will implement these magnificent ideas. My tongue-in-cheek response to the silence is to wonder if there is an expectation that a magical community of enlightened beings will fly in from a highly evolved planet to make those recommendations happen? What of the fact that all those biased, non-transformative, top-down policies and practices were written and implemented by human beings? How will those human beings change to align with the parameters of the amazing new system he proposes?

Herein lies the rub. If individuals must transform for the system to transform, there should be some awareness and acknowledgement that this process is an essential part of social transformation. The question remains, *how*?

This is not a novel idea at all, and the link between self-transformation and social transformation is well documented. It is, in fact, one of the striking

features of Indian history, which was given global force by the activism of Mahatma Gandhi, who said, 'I am here to serve no one else but myself, find self-realisation through service to these village folk' (1961, p.5).

Ananta Kumar Giri's (2009) study on self-development and social transformation is a close look at how ordinary people get drawn into deep social and ethical projects alongside their own processes of self-transformation. He writes extensively and in great detail about the *Swadhyaya* movement in India, which was formed to foster ethical, economic and social development. *Swadhyaya* espouses what Giri calls 'practical spirituality', which is essentially a self-reflection process during which one silently meditates on one's own behaviours, motivations and plans, without judgement, but with a critical eye to assess where one is in life, what direction one is moving in and what changes need to be pursued to lead to a more fulfilling self and life.

Max-Neef (1991) writes about the inability of political models and development styles to connect with personal development. Human beings are reduced to consumers, clients, beneficiaries, affected populations or collateral damage, which does not allow any space for personal growth, development or transformation, for that matter. Yet Max-Neef, among many others, finds that social development/transformation and personal development/transformation are inseparable. He goes further to say that a 'healthy society should advocate above all the development of every person and of the whole person' (1991, p.59). Our wish to change the world, he maintains, is a great paradox because, in reality, we can only change ourselves. Finally, he supports the notion that many wise sages (including Socrates) have posited since ancient times: that if we simply manage to transform ourselves, something amazing, fascinating and wonderous may happen to the world.

So, who am I?

Personal Self-Transformation: The Concept

The argument, thus, is that, for social transformation to occur, regardless of how it may be analysed and defined, a parallel/prior/concomitant process of self- or personal transformation is required. We are taught through Western education that there are observable, measurable, objective and immutable principles that govern the physical world. Thus, we strive to gain knowledge and mastery of these so that we can control the world to our ever-increasing advantage, as

promised by Francis Bacon (1561–1626), who famously said, 'The end . . . is the knowledge of causes, and secret motions of things; and the enlarging of the bounds of human empire, to the effecting of all things possible.' As a cultural engine of modern life, Bacon's promise has arguably no intellectual competitors. Indeed, for many it has become something of a religion in and of itself.

However, our Western logic breaks down when faced with phenomena posing irresolvable paradoxes, such as the Balinese children who walk on fire. How is it possible to dance on the coals without even a blister, while beneath those coals pigs and pineapples are roasting? Pearce (1980) writes that it is not possible to have it both ways, yet the children demonstrate it physically before our eyes. To examine such an inexplicable phenomenon, the problem that confronts us is which conceptual paradigm we would use to make sense of it. Markley and Harman (1982) would say that different conceptual paradigms would provide differing standards for evaluation and it is therefore not possible to prove that one is better than the other. Some, like Kuhn (1962), might say that the Western paradigm of reality is no longer able to accommodate the frontiers of human knowing and questions are being raised about what lies beyond the frontiers of such theorising.

A review of key literature reveals that personal/self-transformation is perceived as a multi-dimensional concept that has implications for many disciplines, particularly those working on transformative social-change initiatives and processes (Wade, 1998). Dictionaries and thesauruses such as Roget's and Webster describe transformation as a conversion, a metamorphosis or evolution. Although change and evolution do occur within transformation, these terms do not embrace the complexity of the concept, especially if we align with Newman's (2000) concept of expanding consciousness. Contemporary wisdoms on transformation (Sadhguru and Chopra, amongst others) retain the notion that change occurs where belief systems remain intact, whereas 'transformation' describes a form of rebirth (Ferguson, 1980). These profound shifts in perceptions produce expanded states of consciousness. It goes well beyond problem solving or healing of trauma, and is about evolutionary transformative experiences, where each unique step dictates the next (Newman, 2000; Carpenter, 1994; Ferguson, 1980).

In the health sector, the theoretical perspective of transformation is addressed in Newman's (2000) theory of health as expanding consciousness. Newman's theory embraces the *process* of transformation where the stages of evolution of consciousness parallel the phases of the transformation process. She outlines the process as beginning at a critical choice point in the evolutionary spectrum, and, at this point, a relationship is begun. The expansion of consciousness occurs when the individual becomes aware that, for healing to happen, old ways of thinking and acting are no longer working. This awareness of self-limitation is what sparks the process of inner growth and transformation (Wade, 1998). The goal of this process is self-transcendence. Wade (1998, p.715) posits a definition derived from the literature:

> *[P]ersonal transformation is a dynamic, uniquely individualized process of expanding conscious-ness whereby an individual becomes critically aware of old and new self-views and chooses to integrate these views into a new self-definition.*

This notion of evolutionary transformation (Markley & Harman, 1982) can be understood more clearly if one considers the development of the capacity to use language that is latent and hidden within a new-born child. No examination of the physical or mental capacity of the child will reveal this hidden potential that will unfold with time. The Persian prophet of the last century, Baha'u'llah[26], poses another example – that of the potential fruit that is hidden within the fruit tree. The tree, he explains, can be cut into a thousand pieces, and no trace of the fruit will be found. But in the proper season and given the necessary environmental conditions, the capacity of the tree to bear fruit will manifest itself and there will appear, gradually, the buds, the blossoms and eventually fruit (Baha'u'llah, 1971, p.155 in Bopp, 2012).

Bopp (2012) suggests that the evolutionary transformation of individual human beings can be summarised as being engaged in a perpetual process of emergent becoming through an evolutionary process that is fundamentally a

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[26] See http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/c/BWF/bwf-9.html.

cultural and spiritual process. This process is expressed in many dimensions of human activity, from personal to political, indicating that a wholistic approach to understanding is necessary. If one is a conscious participant in this process, the course of human development will be impacted upon and one could contribute to transforming the world (Pearce, 1980).

Many scholars view this evolutionary process as something that pushes the individual into a clearer, more expanded vision of their life and of the world (Ferguson, 1980; Stern, 1993). This view has been in existence since ancient times and is expounded in Eastern mystical thought as well as by Plato (424/423–348/347 BC), Freud (1856–1939) and Jung (1875–1961). It is viewed as an opening of the consciousness to wider dimensions, uniting the heart and the mind (Ferguson, 1980, p.68). Some writers assert that it goes beyond even the heart and the mind to elevate the consciousness to an awareness of that consciousness (Vasudev, 2016). Taber (1983) speaks of unfolding the neglected potential of human consciousness with an awakening that brings a new passion for life and a greater sense of power and freedom (Wildermeersch & Leirman, 1988; Loder, 1981).

Personal Reflections: Who am I and What is Transformation?

As discussed, although Western education and methods of analysis emphasise that the physical world is governed by observable, measurable principles, our logic breaks down when faced with phenomena that cannot be fully explained. Some of the more baffling phenomena give a clue to the boundless, limitless world of possibility when we venture into the unknown. The metamorphosis from the worm to the butterfly is one such natural phenomenon (Figure 6).
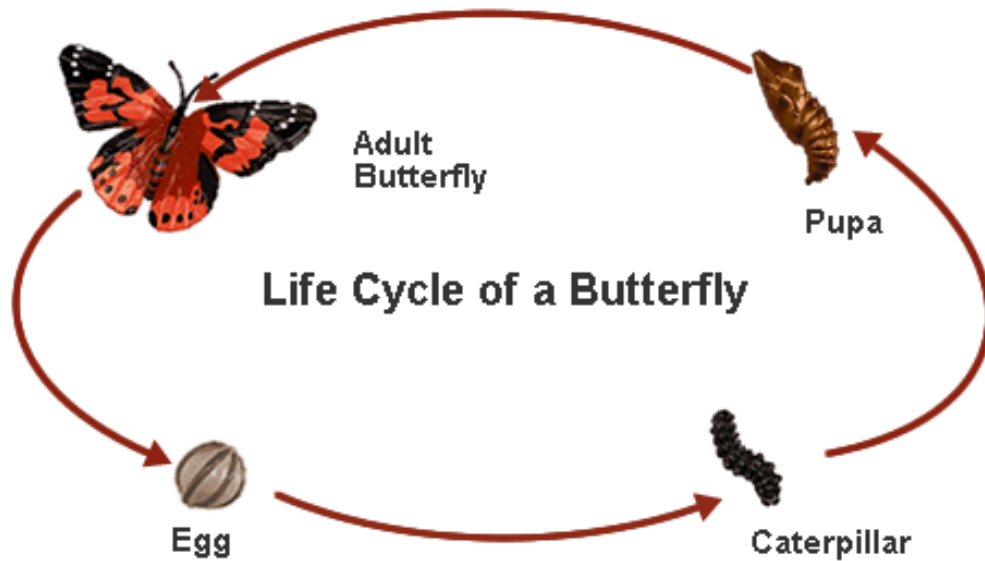
Figure 6: Life Cycle of a Butterfly
(Source: Wikipedia/Imagevet.co, 2019)

This is a favourite metaphor of mine. It illustrates what self-transformation looks like to me. I learned about this as a child in biology class at school and was fascinated by the process. We were taught that, when a caterpillar has eaten up to several hundred times its weight each day, it gets bloated and hangs itself to sleep. Its skin hardens and then, deep in the caterpillar's body, tiny things biologists call 'imaginal disks' begin to form. Not recognising these, the caterpillar's immune system attacks them. But they keep coming faster and faster, and then begin to link up with one another. Eventually the caterpillar's immune system fails from the stress and the disks become imaginal cells, leading to complete destruction of the caterpillar's body and to the building of the butterfly!

I can relate to this process when I think of my own life experiences, which required that my old ways of thinking and being be eradicated for something new to emerge, leaving only memories of the old. My experiences taught me, like the butterfly process, that life does not follow predictable timings and events. It follows often unknown rhythms that, if interfered with, can cause much harm. I remember reading about Nikos Kazantzakis, author of *Zorba the Greek* (1946), who described an incident in which he discovered a cocoon, attached to the bark of an olive tree, just as the butterfly was making a hole and attempting to emerge. Impatient to see the outcome, he bent over it tried to speed up the process by breathing on it. It worked, but the butterfly emerged

prematurely; its wings crumpled and stuck to its own body. It needed the sun's perfectly balanced warmth, not the man's impatient breath, to transform it. Moments later, after a desperate struggle, the butterfly died in the palm of his hand. 'That little body,' he wrote, 'is the greatest weight I have on my conscience' (Kazantakis, 1946, p.121).

As a middle-class, Western-educated person, I was not formally taught to understand or embrace the more figurative disorder of life. I struggled with the messiness of relationships, unfinished conversations, incomplete projects and unreachable deadlines. I obsessed for most of my younger life over the imperfections of my life and searched for ways to arrive at a beautiful, perfect, orderly life. It produced crippling anxiety as I struggled for control. Time and age revealed that everything can come undone and that this messiness is an integral part of life. It is, in fact, not messiness at all, but the natural order. As I get older, I still rail against the disorderliness of life by making to-do lists and proofreading my emails. However, more and more, I realise that it is not the lists or the untidiness that is the problem; it is how I am being with the 'messiness'. When I accept it, welcome it and work with it, I notice the movement and the energetic flow that happens, bringing an outcome that I cannot predict and is not necessarily what I want it to be. When I resist the outcome and try to force it to change into what I want, all that transpires is that my body protests and I struggle with sleeplessness, headaches and nausea in the pit of my stomach. And still the flow of life moves on, and what happens, happens, with or without me.

My self-transformation pathway

My life experiences of being a feminist and working as a humanitarian have less to do with a philosophy or ideology and more to do with my life's journey as a woman within a rich, diverse South African culture and being part of the experiences of and the struggle to end apartheid. In this writing I present a collection of narratives from my past, with reflections on those narratives to understand how my every day, lived experiences of navigating my context as a woman shaped who I am and how I relate to the world. Exploring my experiences in this way gives meaning to the work I do in the humanitarian sector because I have learned that, for me to work effectively without falling into resentments, blaming and projecting inner pain and discomfort onto others, I have to change inwardly. Thus, I came to the idea that, if individuals changed, the structure and

behaviour of society would change. It sounds like common sense, but, as my father often said, the problem with common sense is that it is not common. Those working on transforming society and those working on transforming themselves are not often the same people or working together in the same place. Therefore, the two sides may not meet, nor is there the space for them to converge operationally.

Because of this, I embed my work in the notion that to fully transform a society we must be working towards an inner transformation as individuals; that is, taking full responsibility for ourselves and how we behave. I am convinced that my life experiences support this notion, and, for this reason, I reflect here on experiences throughout my life and how they impacted on me to the point where my commitment and dedication to work with women and for women as a feminist and gender specialist has become a state of being as well as a political position.

My story as told here is made up of events that have significantly affected the formation of my values and how I live my life. I present them as a series of awakenings, which I see as the process of developing practical wisdom.

I begin with an event that shaped much of the course of my life, creating a significant trajectory for my life path that has led me to where I am today – an activist, advocate and analyst for improving and transforming the lived realities of women's lives, especially the survivors of sexual and gender-based violence in emergencies or crisis contexts, be they natural-hazard or conflict related.

Awakening to being female

Image 9: My older brother and I (1959)
(Pillay Family Archives/© Anusanthee Pillay)

I was told many times by family members and teachers that, for a girl, I was surprisingly bright. My mother said that I was the brightest of her four children. I am the second child of four, having a brother two years older than me and two brothers one year and four years younger than me. Image 9 above shows me as a one-year-old with my older brother. I use it here to highlight the constant gendered comparison with my brothers from an early age. My father was a quiet man, but prone to heavy drinking and violent outbursts. He died suddenly at age 56 when I was 14 years old. My mother was (and still is, at age 90 in the year 2019) a dominating, assertive and aggressive woman who had great difficulty in showing affection.

This incident happened when I was three years old. My younger brother and I were left in the care of a young 16-year-old boy who worked as a messenger in my father's shop. The details of the event are blurred and all I remember is him touching me sexually and talking to my younger brother in the dark room. I felt no pain and did not resist. Later, I realised that something terrible had happened because of my mother's reaction. I do not really know how she discovered what had happened, but I remember her looking at a cloth and saying, 'This is what he used to clean himself.'

Later, I watched through the living-room window as my father whipped him with a *sjambok*[27] in the yard. I felt terrible and decided that it was all my fault. My mother seemed so angry with me for allowing this to happen and would not let me play outside with my brothers or go anywhere alone with them. She never explained, but I felt her deep shame, anger and humiliation. I felt soiled, dirty and no longer loveable and perceived my mother to have abandoned me.

Reflection on this experience

The event profoundly affected my relationship with my mother, and the incident hung like a shadow over us. I felt punished by her for letting this happen to me. I realised, many years later, that her reaction to the incident was her way of trying to protect me from further harm, but I was unable to understand that then, and I perceived her behaviour as blame, constant criticism and rejection. I thought I was being punished for a situation I could not understand nor challenge at the age of three. My mother's perceived rejection and abandonment of me at that time created a deep well of powerlessness, humiliation, shame and rage that, time and again, rose up to contradict my self-worth and my values of compassion, connectivity and trust as an adult.

As these emotions were triggered by other life events, I struggled with hierarchy, power and authority throughout my childhood and early adulthood. I had trouble accepting instruction from others and struggled at school and in my early work life as these contradictions reared their heads again. This experience laid the foundation for me to learn about power, to love myself and others – to develop compassion for others and to understand vulnerability. Politically, it was through this event and its subsequent concomitants that I awakened to being different to boys and men – to being female and to understanding that the world was a different place for my brothers than it was for me.

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[27] A long, tapered whip commonly used by South African police at the time, during political riots for crowd control.

Exclusion through inequalities of gender and race

Understanding myself as female was only the beginning, and what I lived through before I understood it intellectually was the experience of identities that are interlocked with the system of oppression and are mutually constitutive and reinforcing. Roth (2013) describes it as inequalities that entangle and occur simultaneously. Crenshaw (1991) coined the term 'intersectionality' (mentioned in Chapter Two). What this means in the lived experience of life is that discrimination and exclusion are not just based on one identity – for example, being female. For me, in South Africa at that time, it was also about being one of a minority ethnic group, of being dark-skinned, of belonging to the Hindu religion and not mainstream Christianity, of living where we did and so on. The reflection that follows is the lived experience of that which begins in the family.

I woke up one Saturday morning and found the house unusually quiet. I was about six years old. I ran outside, and there was my mother, hanging washing on the line. My father had taken my brothers to watch the Formula One races at the racetrack and did not think it was a place for women and girls. My mother did not seem to care, but I was devastated. Why had I been left behind? And why was I not supposed to like car racing? This was the beginning of many exclusions, and I felt an impotent rage explode inside myself that I could not express or even understand; I just knew it was wrong. All I could say was, 'This is so unfair.' My value for fairness and justice for women was born at that moment, and although I fought against this injustice without much success in my family, I never gave up. Through adolescence it showed up as utter rebelliousness if I felt that I was being treated differently from my brothers, and it once had me climbing out of a window to attend a midnight movie that I had been forbidden to go to because it was for boys only.

While I fought this solo battle for equal rights in the family, I was yet to discover that it was not the only inequality that I had to endure. Although I was born into apartheid South Africa, as a child we lived in separate communities and my experience of racial inequality was confined to listening to my parents' political talks. Our overcrowded, understaffed, under-equipped schools I accepted as normal, since I could not compare them to a better place. We were clothed and fed, and the fact that there were many places that we could not enter as 'non-white' people meant little to me. I accepted my life as I lived it.

Then, when I turned 11, I started menstruating and my mother decided I needed to wear a bra. She took me shopping at the largest department store, called *Garlicks*, where my father had an account. To my utter embarrassment and horror, it turned into a shouting match between my mother and the white shop assistant, who refused to allow us to use the fitting room. They were for 'whites only' a phrase that was common on signs all over South Africa at the time. I felt so humiliated, and, while I shared my mother's outrage, I somehow felt more embarrassed than angry. My father called the manager and I heard him ask if our money was a different colour. I now understood the talk of racial inequality, and over and over I would face this rejection and humiliation. I felt excluded and longed to be white, blonde and blue-eyed – to be part of the mainstream. I was different at home, being the only girl child, different at school, being part of a small minority of children of Indian origin, and different in society, being 'non-white' and 'inferior' to the white ruling class.

How did this affect me and impact on my value system? I developed an understanding of what it means to be excluded. While it undermined my confidence and self-esteem, it developed my commitment and passion for inclusion and participation. Eventually I learned to celebrate my dark skin, and, as South Africa changed and became a democracy, dark skin became more 'politically correct' as the perceptions of black and white shifted. I use the term 'politically correct' because dark skin is still not desirable and 'skin whitening' solutions exist everywhere, in almost every culture outside of Europe and North America – but that's another story.

In South Africa in 1994, political power changed hands and I realised the ephemeral nature of perceptions. The changes from exclusion to inclusion, however, did not always cater to women. We still had to fight for, among many other issues, a pro-abortion law and a domestic violence act, so I found space in the women's movement. Within this space I found a small piece of the world where I was seen, heard and acknowledged. From there I could campaign publicly for the inclusion and participation of all women, not just me, at all levels of society.

Struggling with power, authority and violence

Underpinning discrimination and exclusion is unequal power, and with unequal power comes violence (discussed in Chapter Three). C. Wright Mills (2000, p.171) claims that 'the ultimate power is violence'.

At 15, in the penultimate year of high school, I met my husband-to-be, who was 24 years old. I was at a cultural event that my mother had initially refused to permit me to attend. I had begged to go and was finally allowed to stand at the door handing out flowers. I had met him before as my brother's friend and a member of our cultural group. He was new to our town, and all the girls were interested in him because of his charm and well-dressed, fashionable style. I had never had a boyfriend and, until then, had considered myself too ugly because of my dark skin colour and my secret of what had happened to me. He seemed mildly interested, and I innocently teased him while pinning a flower to his lapel. He saw it as an invitation, kissed me expertly and I was done for – obsessed as only a 15-year-old teenager can be.

In an extreme act of rebellion against my mother, I dropped out of school and got married and pregnant at the age of 16. I was determined not to fulfil my mother's expectation that I would do what she had been denied. She had not been allowed to go to university and her marriage was arranged for her by the family. Ironically, I created precisely the situation I was railing against. My husband, also a victim of racial inequality combined with poverty and single parenting, was also deeply angry, but he expressed it differently. While I turned the anger inward, he projected his violently onto me and combined it with excessive indulgence in drinking and gambling – more and more as time went by. After three children were born (Image 10 below), I divorced him at the age of 23, thinking that I could somehow do something different with my life. Alas, the abusive dynamic between us just got stronger, and he returned and stayed for five more years, with more and more violence.

Image 10: Me aged 21 (1980)
(© Anusanthee Pillay)

There are many stories within this story, fuelled by my deep fear of rejection and the societal stigma of being unable to keep my marriage as a good woman should. Those 12 years played out all the contradictions between, among others, the rights of freedom, justice, independence, equality, inclusiveness and participation and the need for love, affection, belonging, acceptance and connection.

A voice within me woke up and, one day, after 12 years of violence and the acceptance of perpetual turbulence, which had me running out of the house at 3 am with a tiny baby, sleeping outside in the garden, attempting suicide and requiring stitches to the head, I packed up and took the children to Durban. I was, however, still unable to hear my inner voice, and when he followed me to Durban, I took him back. This time it was brief. After more intense violence, he battered me on Christmas day 1988, and the inner voice spoke to my beaten image in the mirror and said, 'ENOUGH!' For the first time, I went to the police and got a peace order to prevent him from returning.

I discovered that there was nowhere to go for help other than some faith-based groups. They told me to pray and that the responsibility for keeping my

children and my husband happy was mine. My inner voice refused to listen, and a wise social worker at the marriage counselling centre I went to finally confirmed that I had no debt to pay and counselled me to leave.

I walked forward and landed in Johannesburg in a better paid job, with part of a university degree completed. Some wisdom had come alive within me. While the next few years were not easy, I never went back to the despair, no matter how low I fell into the fear that crouched like a small animal within me. A belief in my inner strength had been awakened and, with it, a determination emerged to make a better life for myself.

I found this poem by Mary Daly (1973), which helped me to understand what had happened and where I was then.

Woman the Healer

A woman's place is set, like a tightly woven net

She's chained to her position like a dog

And if by chance or fate she should happen to escape

She's a menace to the keepers of tradition

So if you have the gift to heal but forget which way to kneel

Get ready for a man-made inquisition

In the witching hour you come to your power

You feel it deep within you

It's rising, rising

And you think it's a dream 'til you hear yourself scream

Power to the witch and the woman in me.

Turning rage into action

The rage that I felt because of the injustices in my life was indescribable. Nothing I said or did could redeem me from being just a girl and just not good enough. I felt deeply disempowered, which developed into an outrage at all forms of injustice. I defended any child at school who was wrongly accused or attacked by others, even at great risk to myself.

I reacted strongly if I caught a whiff of injustice and formed a strong drive and passion for justice, especially for victims of unwarranted or manipulative attacks. The rage that I thought was debilitating and that gave me nightmares of violently pushing people down flights of stairs found an outlet in the movement

to end violence against women. I channelled that rage into writing, speaking out, campaigning and working with other women trapped in abusive relationships (see Appendix B). It was, at last, appropriate and constructive.

Joining the women's movement

'You will be stronger for this experience,' someone once said, but I doubted that I would survive the pain. However, I did come out stronger, and one day I knew that the crouching fear was standing up straight and I was looking him in the eye. I joined the organisation called People Opposing Women Abuse ('POWA') and could feel the ground firm up underneath my feet. Suddenly, all that I had experienced up to that point had immense value and formed a clear basis for making a difference and helping others.

I counselled women in abusive relationships, appeared on television, using my personal experience to show what was happening to women all over South Africa and, indeed, the world, gave talks at conferences and finally went to Beijing in 1995 as a representative for South African women at the UN Fourth World Conference on Women, which created the Beijing Platform for Action. From POWA I went from strength to strength and expanded my experience and skills to deal with violence against women, sexual and gender-based violence, women's rights and gender mainstreaming. I entered the world of aid, development and human rights. I moved from being a secretary and administrator with a smattering of financial expertise to a human rights activist specialising in the issues of violence against women and, later, gender. I went back to school at night and studied for a further ten years until I attained a Master of Conflict Management; I was then accepted to pursue a PhD (which I am completing through this process) and, although I changed jobs many times, I stayed with the issue of violence against women through to the co-founding of a Women's Support Centre in my home town of East London. I now work as an international senior gender advisor seconded to the United Nations in relation to humanitarian response operations around the world. I have worked in southern Africa, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Fiji, Somalia, the Philippines, Nepal, Afghanistan, Iraq and Nigeria (see Appendix B). Image 11 below of the Philippines straight after Typhoon Haiyan hit the country is a strong illustration of the dire contexts of my deployments.

Image 11: The aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines (2013)
(REUTERS/Athit Perawongmetha)

Over the years of working as a feminist activist from East London to Beijing, I became aware that no matter what we learned about what was needed to change for women to be treated equally and with honour, dignity and respect – no matter how much we changed the structures, the laws and the institutions – we, the people, continued to perpetuate the system that upheld the inequalities because we did not always know how to change *ourselves*. Female activists undermined each other; we fought among ourselves for recognition and space; we were often not happy for each other's successes and were sometimes unwilling to assist others to climb the success ladders.

Why is that? I think that we struggled to totally reject all that patriarchy embedded within us and tried to succeed within that framework. We were also impacted by our experiences, so that without continuous inward examination, learning and growing, we failed to stay connected to the ideology of feminism, which calls for collectivity, participation, inclusiveness and solidarity. However, what I realised is that nowhere in the ideology, the theory or the analyses of feminism are there methodologies and methods on *how to practically be* those principles and sustain being that way.

Feminist theory offers little guidance on how one is to get beyond the lifelong experience of shame, rejection, humiliation and violence. How does one

not fall into the power traps and use power to undermine, suppress and oppress others? How does one even see that it is happening? To deal with those questions I learned about mindfulness – called 'noticing' – in a self-leadership programme; I went on the 10-day *Vipassana* (Insight) meditation retreat; I listened to Sadhguru's talks and went to his ashram in India to find answers. I found methods that, when regularly practised, sharpened my self-awareness until I began to notice immediately when I reacted to an incident, be it a word, an action or a life-changing event. Once noticed, there are tools for dealing with that reaction and getting to the truth. What is really happening? What is the truth beyond the fear, the judgments, the interpretations, the speculations and the expectations?

I changed the way I did my feminist work all over the world and imbued it with the practices of listening, mindfulness, meditation and self-reflection. This was so connecting and inclusive in ways that I could not have imagined. It touched and shifted the lives of other women. I established lifelong friends in every corner of the globe that I visited.

Reflection on those experiences: Inclusiveness

I can now understand that these experiences awakened the values of inclusive relationships; responsive practice; trust, love and respect for self and for others; and for living life creatively. I can also see myself as a 'living contradiction', in that I was not able to live those values until I worked on myself and understood, accepted and overcame the limitations that my past experiences created in the daily practice of my life. My ontological commitment and passion for positively changing the lived realities of women's lives is directly linked to my early experiences and continues to impact on the way that I work as a humanitarian. Therefore, from my experience I conclude that the most important humanitarian act I did was towards myself – which enabled me to work as a humanitarian based on those values mentioned.

The first humanitarian act is towards the self

> *aththa deepa viharatha, aththa sarana ananna sarana*
> *Be a refuge to yourself. Only you can be your saviour; no one else.*
>
> The Buddha – *Maha Parinibbana Sutta*[28]

While I worked externally on the issue of violence against women and girls using my experiences of abuse and violence to guide and motivate me, it was still an immense struggle to find peace within myself. After my husband and I finally separated, I found myself searching in relationships, in jobs and in studies for something that would fill the void I felt within myself. I did yoga, read books and joined all sorts of self-help initiatives, spurred on by the teachings from my mother's rather harsh but somehow sensible 'pull up your socks' doctrine. She (my mother) had lived through the riots against Indians in Durban, South Africa and had benefited as a girl from Gandhi's strong advocacy for education for boys and girls. She was quite learned in Hindu philosophy, could read and write in her mother tongue, Tamil, and considered herself quite educated at all levels. Her passion was to act and perform, and she was the small town of East London's 'non-white' community's most accomplished stage performer. My father, although an avid reader of philosophy and mysticism, did not speak much at all. However, he collected books, and I waded through Lobsang Rampa as a young girl, barely 12 years old, trying to find answers. So, my quest for inner well-being was born very early on, perhaps because of the unease that I constantly felt and could not speak about to anyone.

While all this was going on internally, I joined the world of NGOs, leaving the racist, exploitative private sector behind, and put my energies in the world of development aid in the gender-equality sector. I realised that, within the struggle for freedom from the oppressive white minority, there was another struggle that I

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[28] The *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* is Sutta 16 in the *Digha Nikaya*, a scripture belonging the Sutta Pitaka of Theravada Buddhism. It concerns the end of Gautama Buddha's life and is the longest sutta of the Pāli Canon. Because of its attention to detail, it has been resorted to as the principal source of reference in most standard accounts of the Buddha's death.

had experienced, which was the struggle to end violence against women and to free women from the bondages of the patriarchal ideology of male superiority and dominance. Domestic violence was not on the struggle agenda, and women's rights and freedoms were not part of the larger freedom agenda yet. It was the black woman's triple burden, and we realised that the first responders to our crisis had to be ourselves. We were the best people to work on our own situation as we were the experts of our own lives.

As women we fought to be heard and taken seriously, while learning at the same time about being black in a white world. We read Frantz Fanon (1925–1961) and Steve Biko's (1946–1977) writings about this and learned to be highly suspicious of the development actors flooding in to 'help' us. We tried to understand and practise the principles of *Ubuntu* (explained in detail in Chapter 7) and to embrace an 'African' identity, reclaiming what was indigenous and African as valuable, as a backlash to Europeanisation by the colonial masters. In my personal life I also had the influence of Eastern philosophy, the *Thirukurral*, the *Thevaram*, and Hindu and Buddhist thinking.

The point of this is that I was fortunate enough to be exposed to multiple identities and, through no fixed identification with one way of being, thinking and acting, I was able to develop an identity that Sadhguru calls 'cosmic'. Songs have been written about being 'a child of the universe' and these, I think, are an allusion to not belonging to anything and therefore having nothing to protect or to fight and kill for or die for. I cannot say that I am as elevated as that, but I do feel that the ability to connect with diverse groups of people at whatever level they are comes from this low-strength identification and ability to see all sides through the prism of self-awareness.

Letting go

In June 1998 I joined a group of three women activists (L, J and R) to make the first presentation of a shadow report on violence against women to the Committee for the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women in New York. I had just begun a relationship with a man 15 years younger than myself and two years older than my eldest son. I was on the edges of my comfort zones. I had also just finished the course work for my Master of Community Psychology and was in a senior position at the University of the Witwatersrand, where I felt unsupported. I therefore arrived in New York

with a high level of discomfort and panic about next steps. In my journal on 22 June, I wrote:

> *The discomfort I am feeling about not really believing in what I am doing any more and the panic about not having done my dissertation chapter and not being at work . . . The stories (wrong, unsatisfactory) about the problems at work do not make me feel better. I should have known that G [colleague who loves to gossip] would enter into all the crap at the office. I want to just run away from it all.*

The feeling of general discomfort with myself made me paranoid that others were ignoring me, and I withdrew into myself. My best friend at the time (referred to as L), whom I had mentored to get out of an abusive relationship and worked alongside to start a vibrant organisation in our hometown, was part of the group. She was friends with all of us, and I interpreted her divided attention as negative towards me. It brought out deep feelings of unworthiness and rejection, and I was miserable inside.

One evening, we all decided to go to a Broadway show and chose the play *ART*, which was on at the time and had rave reviews. It starred an actor I was very familiar with from the TV series *M*A*S*H*, Alan Alda. It was a brilliant, very funny show, yet I did not laugh like the others. Walking back with one of the others (J) later, I talked about my feelings of discomfort and afterwards wrote in my journal:

> *Just came back from seeing ART, a Broadway show. It was good, quick and well done. Yet it did not inspire spontaneous laughter that the others seemed to be enjoying. It was funny, yet I did not laugh. Walking back with J gave me a chance to talk to her and explore the feelings of uncertainty that have plagued me this year and which this trip seems to bring out in me. I started off feeling in sync with L around her relationship and now feel on a different plane to her altogether. Not only to her but everyone and everything. It's part of this process of feeling out of sync with myself my values ideas and everything else. All is being*

challenged and throwing me into such confusion. And uncertainty.
Am I arrogant that I cannot feel right or okay about lobbying
people and getting them to listen to me or be persuaded by my
viewpoint? I feel like I am licking their backsides and that is totally
repulsive to me. Yet I have done it and do it in other contexts.
Perhaps I don't feel strongly enough about this forum for lobbying
as J said. I myself know I just have to stay with this and see where
it takes me. I do not want it to be in control and yet it is so hard to
let go and just allow things to happen.

The comedy *ART* that we saw raised questions about art and friendship and concerned three long-time friends, Serge, Marc and Yvan. Marc was the mentor of Serge and considered himself the expert of art, and Serge did not take decisions about art without him. One day, Serge indulged his penchant for modern art and bought a large, expensive, completely white painting. Marc was horrified, and their relationship suffered considerable strain as a result of their differing opinions about what constitutes 'art'. Yvan, caught in the middle of the conflict, tried to please and mollify both of them. Marc concluded that, while Serge once valued his input and guidance, he eventually went out of his way to gradually replace him in influence and company. Marc wished that Serge had become a mutually empowering friend after all this time, while Serge was bitter about Marc seeming to have owned his character for the entirety of their friendship. The play was, of course, about many other things concerning the friendship between these three men, but the thing that stood out for me was the changed role of the mentor and how uncomfortable that made him.

Many months after returning from New York, L and I met in our hometown. I was still a board member of the organisation that we had started together and through which I had mentored her to understand the work against violence against women and to take the leadership role while I went onto the board of directors. This experience in New York sat like an elephant between us until one of us mentioned it and the ice was broken. We reflected on the fact that neither of us had laughed the way the others had laughed during the play and why this was so. It was a revelation to us both that we each had had the same thoughts at the time – that the play was about our relationship. We laughed then, deeply, and it strengthened our friendship. We reflected on how

our roles had changed over time and I realised the discomfort I had felt about letting go of the power and control and moving out of the way gracefully to let her do things her own way. I had insisted, from the start, that I would stay in the background, yet I had felt slighted when she received sole credit for starting the organisation, which became very successful over the years. It was a classic example of the mentorship dilemma, and, over time, I made peace with it. In fact, I appreciated the satisfaction it gave me internally to know that I had made a difference somewhere in a significant way without being externally recognised.

Many years later I went to see her, and we talked again of this experience. She said:

> *You changed my life. I tell everyone this story that I called you and you asked, 'What do you want to eat?' I could not decide. Then you said, 'You are like an abused woman. You don't know what you want. You can't decide for yourself. You have no opinions. Demand your preference.' I answered: 'OK, make chicken curry for me.'*

She talked also of the time I said she was a blank slate and gave her books to read when she first started working on violence against women. She talked of the role I had played in shaping and supporting her to start her organisation and how, in the beginning, she was totally unable to do anything without talking to me. We laughed again as we remembered how seeing the play *ART* together in New York in 1998 had helped us to move forward.

Analysis: Multiplicity of Worldviews Opens the Path to Transformation

The question you, the reader, may ask is this: 'Why were you able to embark on this self-transformation path and not get swallowed by misery and despair?' My answer is that, upon deep reflection on that question, I came to realise that alongside my Western, analytical education and training I was also exposed to other worldviews. My mother's vibrant Hinduism, my father's philosophical books and the multi-cultural Christian, Islamic and Buddhist friends and families within our community all taught me that self-transformation is not only possible, but fundamental to the purpose of human existence. The peaceful co-existence

of different knowledge systems, worldviews and spiritual paths taught me to look for similarities and to find commonalities from which I could build relationships. In addition, the apartheid system pushed us to Marxism, and there I learned that Marxist-humanism talks of reconstitution through creative work in and upon the world. It says that human beings are basically good but can be corrupted and become greedy because of power imbalances that, if corrected, will release human potential. Finally, through Paulo Freire (1968) I learned the pedagogy of liberation and the methodology of action and reflection.

While struggling with early motherhood and an alcoholic husband, my brother gave me Aldous Huxley, Krishnamurti, Ken Wilbur and Carl Jung to read. This literature gave me an insight into spirituality as an integral part of human nature. It was the combination of all these philosophies, theories, ideas and strategies that created a thirst in me – a searching and a never-ending quest for inner well-being for myself and for others.

Emerging Themes and Questions

Transformation is first and foremost an inner process. For a system to transform the people within it, each must be open and willing to undergo the necessary change. Transformation is not a goal; it is process, and it is continuous. Ultimately, the realisation for each individual must be that the only change that is possible is changing the self. That's where it begins. A mother is not a mother because she gives biological birth, but because she makes the conscious decision to totally include another human being in her life. This description is what the concept of inclusiveness is alluding towards. Similarly, the humanitarian worker going on a mission to care for affected populations is not there just to implement policies and frameworks and spend the budget, but to collaborate. They should be able to collaborate in an inclusive way from the wisdom of their past experiences. This can only come about through self-enquiry, self-transformation processes and their own sense of inner well-being.

Summary

Against the background of resounding calls for transformation of the system, this chapter looked at what transformation is and the role of individual aid workers to bring about this process. It asked four questions of the literature on transformation:

1.   What concepts of transformation are emerging in the literature?

2.   What are the differences and similarities between these concepts?

3.   Are some concepts particularly associated with, or considered more suitable for, specific research approaches?

4.   What does this imply for the challenges of understanding and promoting transformative processes?

The review of the key literature on the topic of societal transformation revealed that, although the need for societal transformation has been established, there is little consensus on the conceptual basis of transformation. There is also debate on what the qualitative difference is with 'non-transformational' change and similar debates around whether transformation is desired, as some see it as a consequence of collapse and therefore negative. In the humanitarian sector, transformation overlaps with other concepts such as resilience, adaptation, transition, critical transition and durable solutions or sustainability, and there is considerable debate emerging around the overlap and the distinctions between these concepts and transformation.

Scholars find that the term 'transformation' is frequently used merely as a metaphor and perceived in some quarters as a moral cover for northern states and humanitarian agencies to secure their own interests, be they political, organisation or individual. Such harsh and unkind critiques of the system abound and have pushed system reform from humanitarian, charitable relief to a mix of relief, life-saving and long-term developmentalism called 'working in the nexus'. Recent proposals call for a complete transformation of the architecture and an unmooring from the deeply ingrained inequities of the Western charity model and are highly critical of the Western characterisation of non-Western countries as being incapable of self-government and in need of everlasting aid.

Recommendations for the way forward emphasise mutual, respectful and transformative exchanges, assisting, learning and developing between north and south on an equal basis, but, while laudable, they do not offer methodological direction in terms of tangible action steps.

Scholars conclude that the wish to change the world is a great paradox because, in reality, we can only change ourselves – thus calling for self-transformation as a key agent of social transformation. The literature reveals that self-transformation of individual human beings can be summarised as a

perpetual process of emergent becoming through an evolutionary process that is fundamentally a cultural and spiritual process and can awaken a new passion for life with a greater sense of power and freedom.

From the reflections and analyses of personal experience so far, some direction towards a methodology emerges, which is further elucidated in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN:
WHAT IS MY OUTCOME?
AN EMERGENT METHODOLOGICAL DIRECTION

Introduction

This chapter embarks on a way forward, building on the previous chapters. It picks up on the Human Scale Development (Max-Neef, 1991) and Capabilities approaches (Sen, 1985) mentioned in Chapters Three and Six and introduces the Power Systems Approach (Green, 2018) and the concept of *Ubuntu* (Tutu, 2004) to look at how the aid system's move towards a more inclusive, bottom-up approach is progressing and to spotlight the missing piece of self-transformation at the individual level. This chapter draws the different threads together to offer an outcome and conclusion summarised in more detail in Chapter Eight.

Picking up from Chapter Six, it details the self-transformation processes mentioned therein and in Chapters Four and Five. Finally, it builds on the Community Dialogues Process discussed in Chapter Five to feature the integration of self-transformation processes into the work for social transformation that was first attempted in Liberia.

This convergence of the first six chapters brings out a methodological direction as the strategy for inclusive, mindful humanitarian practice. This is offered as an alternative, bottom-up model for humanitarian practice that emerged from self-reflection and critical analysis of my experiences, supported by key literature.

An important note at this point is to take into consideration that the concept of mindfulness is fast becoming a cliché in the Western world. In this world it has been detached from its spiritual framework and is being used in different ways, such as for enhancing productivity in workers. For me, mindfulness is about establishing 'spiritual'[29] practices for constant and consistent self-awareness of how one is 'being' at any given moment. Either in the moment or from reflexive processes, through mindfulness one develops the

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[29]   I use the word 'spiritual' for want of a better word, since 'spirituality' has also become a hackneyed, misinterpreted term associated with religiosity. What I mean by 'spiritual' is substantive, deep and meaningful, not a superficial practice aimed at making higher profits or keeping the workforce calm and manageable.

capacity to acknowledge internal reactions, personal motivations, interests and biases to be fully responsible and authentic in one's thinking and actions. This is fully discussed later in this chapter.

Ultimately, this chapter answers the final question: 'What will be the outcome of my work?'

Answering this question should lead to the development of a framework or workplan for the humanitarian aid worker, no matter who they have been sent to work within the emergency context. This should stem from an inner health and well-being perspective. It will provide a way of evaluating what has been done, whether it was successful or not and what criteria to develop as indicators of that success. Sometimes the deployment focus is on the system itself and the target group is co-workers or decision-makers, not necessarily the community. In my experience, it is not often that international humanitarian workers take direct action with the affected population, as was discussed in the previous chapter.

In this thesis, I have answered the question 'What do I know?' by detailing various ways of knowing and not-knowing and realising that, when entering a humanitarian context, what I know and do not know are also political and influenced by power, privilege, time and space. It is important, therefore, for me to be aware of my knowledge and sources of knowledge, the power they give me and where they might situate me in the context with regard to the people with whom I have come to work. Next, I looked at the context in terms of how I understand it – not just contemporary facts and figures, but its history and what its population might be dealing with in terms of colonial legacies. I then asked myself what morals and ethics would guide my decision-making to work in this complex system filled with uncertainty and danger. I examined what it is that I am expected to deliver in terms of setting priorities and how they are framed. Finally, I looked inward at who I am and what I needed to become in order to make something of what I had set out to do. I now take a detailed look at what I aimed to achieve in this study, in terms of an outcome.

How Aid is Currently Delivered

As discussed in Chapters Three and Five, humanitarian aid spans a wide range of activities, including providing food aid, shelter, education, healthcare and protection. The majority of aid is provided in the form of in-kind goods or assistance and sometimes in unconditional and conditional cash and cash

vouchers. It is important to note that humanitarian aid is delivered through a wide range of actors, including the affected people themselves. The range of actors includes aid workers sent by bilateral, multilateral or intergovernmental organisations such as the United Nations. Locally, it includes civil society, local informal first responders, the diaspora, businesses, local governments, military, and local and international NGOs. All play crucial roles.

Aid is typically provided through essentially two delivery methods: budget support and project modality. Budget support can be to specific projects and programmes and/or to the budget of the recipient government. Projects are supported through the sector approach to work with partner countries, other donors and stakeholders. This is described in Chapter Five. The delivery modalities do not proscribe specific methodology for delivery, since the sector approach works through partner organisations to promote local ownership. These are good intentions that, as described throughout this thesis, are not always effective and are often damaging. For example, in conflict settings it is well documented that aid can exacerbate conflict by inadvertently aiding armed militia through aid stealing.

Many efforts have been undertaken to improve humanitarian aid, including several interagency initiatives to improve accountability, quality and performance in humanitarian action. Five of the most widely known initiatives are the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action ('ALNAP'), Humanitarian Accountability Partnership ('HAP'), People in Aid, the Sphere Project and the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability. Recently, the Transformative Agenda (IASC, 2011), the New Way of Working (UNOCHA, 2017) and the Grand Bargain have been formulated.

None of these initiatives provide any methodological direction to the humanitarian aid worker on how to deliver aid against the fine principles, standards and policies. This is largely due to the framing of humanitarian aid as fast-paced, quick action to save lives in an emergency setting, with no time available to work out a way to do it that fits the context.

The same is not true in the development aid sector. Numerous initiatives have been experimented with, developed and recommended on how to deliver development aid. Again, there are many pitfalls in this sector, given that the colonial legacies, Western knowledge systems and top-down bureaucracies

dominate there as well. However, some thinking has gone in to how to do it better from more sustainable perspectives.

Both development and humanitarian aid workers strive to facilitate change and to restore or establish well-being. If we reduce this to the basics, we are trying to satisfy the needs of human beings who have been affected by the crisis within a particular context. Thus, taking a look at some development approaches to facilitate change and well-being can form a basis for this discussion on how to go forward methodologically with humanitarian aid.

Max-Neef's Human Scale Development (1992) and Amartya Sen's Capabilities Approach (1985) provide good examples to use as a basis for this discussion. Both approaches give a full description and explanation of the way to achieve well-being based on the satisfaction of certain needs. Duncan Green's (2016) field guide to social activism is another approach that is worth examining. Finally, the African philosophy of *Ubuntu* adds a fourth dimension with a strong focus on relationality:

> *A person is a person through other persons. None of us comes into the world fully formed. We would not know how to think, or walk, or speak, or behave as human beings unless we learned it from other human beings. We need other human beings in order to be human* (Tutu, 2004, p.25).

Although the word '*Ubuntu*' is a derivative of a South African language isiZulu saying, '*Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu*', translated as 'A person is a person because of or through others' (Moloketi, 2009, p.243; Tutu, 2004, p.25), it is present all over Africa in different languages, but with the same meaning. Nelson Mandela (in Oppenheim, 2012), describes *Ubuntu* as a philosophy that guides people to ask themselves whether what they are doing will empower others. He saw it as a universal truth, a way of life based on treating others well because without them you do not exist. The main principles are compassion, reciprocity, dignity, humanity and mutuality in the interests of building and maintaining communities with justice and communalities (Poovan, Du Toit & Engelbrecht, 2006, pp.23–25).

Ubuntu transcends the narrow confines of the nuclear family to include the extended kinship network that is omnipresent in many African communities.

It is a life orientation that is in opposition to individualism, competitiveness and unilateral decision-making. The *Ubuntu* philosophy covers a wide range of social responsibilities such as caring for the elderly, community before individuals and respect for all forms of life. It is a system and life orientation that is transmitted over generations through stories, aphorisms, role models, guidance from elders in the community and accepted practices of living passed on from generation to generation. To learn about how to live this way of life, one can extract the principles and find ways to live them and teach them to others. Embodied within the *Ubuntu* theory is the African notion of humaneness (Hanks, 2007; Janz, 2009) which, in turn, structures all behavioural expressions of human functioning, including health and well-being. The African philosophy of *Ubuntu* allows an understanding and definition of health and well-being from an African worldview perspective – a perspective that is missing from Western health and well-being discourse.

What I am looking at is the *how* question when it comes to implementation. How do we operationalise these approaches to an outcome that goes beyond satisfying the physical needs? What needs to happen to consider the human being who is tasked to deliver the outcome or to facilitate the community to deliver the outcome for itself?

Examining Human Scale Development and the Capability Approach

In contrast to the traditional idea that human needs are subject to trends and vary to a large extent, Max-Neef (1992) posits that fundamental human needs are the same in all cultures and in all historical periods. Moreover, he maintains, they are finite, limited in number and classifiable, not insatiable, as has been thought over time. His central thesis is that human development is about people, not things. Like Amartya Sen, he talks about quality of life as the indicator, rather than the gross national product based on people's ability to satisfy their fundamental needs or, as Sen (1985) describes, their access to the means to satisfy these needs.

Matrix of Needs and Satisfiers from Max-Neef's Human Scale Development

The Matrix of Needs presented in Table 2 was developed to examine needs and satisfiers for development (Human Scale Development). It is important to note that, while the needs are stable over time and space, the

satisfiers included in the matrix at the intersection of existential needs and axiological needs will differ considerably when filled in by individuals or groups from different cultures at different times in history.

The 'Being' column contains personal and collective attributes, which are expressed as nouns. The 'Having' column contains institutions, norms, mechanisms, tools (not in the material sense) and laws that can be expressed in one or a few words. The 'Doing' column contains personal or collective actions that can be expressed as verbs. The 'Interacting' column contains locations and environments (as time and space).

**Table 2: Matrix of Needs and Satisfiers
(Source: Manfred Max-Neef, 1991, p.32)**

Fundamental Human Needs	Being	Having	Doing	Interacting
Subsistence	physical health, mental health, equilibrium, sense of humour, adaptability	food, shelter, work	feed, procreate, rest, work	living environment, social setting
Protection	care, adaptability, autonomy, equilibrium, solidarity	insurance systems, savings, social security, health systems, rights, family, work	cooperate, prevent, plan, take care of, cure, help	living space, social environment, dwelling
Affection	self-esteem, solidarity, respect, tolerance, generosity, receptiveness, passion, determination, sensuality, sense of humour	friendships, family, partnerships, relationships with nature	make love, caress, express emotions, share, take care of, cultivate, appreciate	privacy, intimacy, home, space of togetherness

Fundamental Human Needs	Being	Having	Doing	Interacting
Understanding	critical conscience, receptiveness, curiosity, astonishment, discipline, intuition, rationality	literature, teachers, method, educational policies, communication policies	investigate, study, experiment, educate, analyse, meditate	settings of formative interaction, schools, universities, academies, groups, communities, family
Participation	adaptability, receptiveness, solidarity, willingness, determination, dedication, respect, passion, sense of humour	rights, responsibilities, duties, privileges, work	become affiliated, cooperate, propose, share, dissent, obey, interact, agree on, express opinions	settings of participative interaction, parties, associations, churches, communities, neighbourhoods, family
Idleness	curiosity, receptiveness, imagination, recklessness, sense of humour, tranquillity, sensuality	games, spectacles, clubs, parties, peace of mind	daydream, brood, dream, recall old times, give way to fantasies, remember, relax, have fun, play	privacy, intimacy, spaces of closeness, free time, surroundings, landscapes
Creation	passion, determination, intuition, imagination, boldness, rationality, autonomy, inventiveness, curiosity	abilities, skills, method, work	work, invent, build, design, compose, interpret	productive and feedback settings, workshops, cultural groups, audiences, spaces for expression, temporal freedom
Identity	sense of belonging, consistency, differentiation, self-esteem, assertiveness	symbols, language, religion, habits, customs, reference groups, sexuality, values, norms, historical memory, work	commit oneself, integrate oneself, confront, decide on, get to know oneself, recognise oneself, actualise oneself, grow	social rhythms, everyday settings, settings which one belongs to, maturation stages

Fundamental Human Needs	Being	Having	Doing	Interacting
Freedom	autonomy, self-esteem, determination, passion, assertiveness, open-mindedness, boldness, rebelliousness, tolerance	equal rights	dissent, choose, be different from, run risks, develop awareness, commit oneself, disobey	temporal/ spatial plasticity

Max-Neef (1991) proposed a different way of looking at development. By putting the satisfaction of fundamental human needs at the heart of development, he advocates community-based action research, which is likely to provide the necessary insights for people-orientated development. In Max-Neef's view, 'development is about people and not about objects' (Max-Neef *et al.*, 1991, p.16).

This framework, as presented in Table 2, offers a fundamentally different approach to development than traditional developmentalism and neoliberal monetarism, in which development always concerns the accumulation of economic goods. It is described as:

> *focused and based on the satisfaction of fundamental human needs,*
> *on the generation of growing levels of self-reliance, and on the*
> *construction of organic articulations of people with nature and*
> *technology, of global processes with local activity, of the personal*
> *with the social, of planning with autonomy, and of civil society with*
> *the state* (Max-Neef *et al.*, 1991, p.8).

To determine which developmental process allows for the greatest improvement in people's quality of life, we must assess the possibility that people have to adequately satisfy their fundamental human needs. The crucial question, then, becomes, 'What are those fundamental human needs, and/or who decides what they are?' (Max-Neef *et al.*, 1991, p.16).

This question highlights the issue of power. The model assumes a power symmetry between participants that might not be the reality. If there is asymmetry of power, as is often the case in development and humanitarian

contexts, the more powerful party could make decisions to its own benefit. Critics of this approach are concerned with conceptualising practical tools and approaches to address the three core limitations of the framework: cultural relevancy, asymmetric power relations and the assumption of cost-benefit analysis based on rational thinking (Abu-Nimer, 2013, p.183).

This brings us back to the question of the human beings participating in this endeavour, who, if one scrutinises the 'Being' column of the model, must fulfil that profile by having the attributes outlined in just one of the columns on understanding, for example, which asks for critical conscience, receptiveness, curiosity, astonishment, discipline, intuition and rationality of the person. How might this come about and be operationalised so that those attributes are present and employed by all parties for a successful outcome?

Similarly, the Capability Approach in Figure 7 looks at quality of life and what individuals are actually able to achieve. This quality of life is analysed in terms of the core concepts of 'functionings' and 'capability'.

- *Functionings* are states of 'being and doing' such as 'being well-nourished' or 'having shelter'. They should be distinguished from the commodities employed to achieve them (just as 'bicycling' is distinguishable from 'possessing a bike').

- *Capability* refers to the set of valuable functionings to which a person has effective access. Thus, a person's capability represents the effective freedom of an individual to choose between the different functioning combinations – between the different kinds of life – that she has reason to value. In later works on this approach, instead of being referred to as a single capability set, writers refer to capabilities and freedoms. This allows analyses to focus on sets of functionings related to particular aspects of life; for example, the capabilities of literacy, health or political freedom (Nussbaum, 2014; Pogge, 2003; Stewart, 2001).

Figure 7 outlines the core relationships of the Capability Approach and
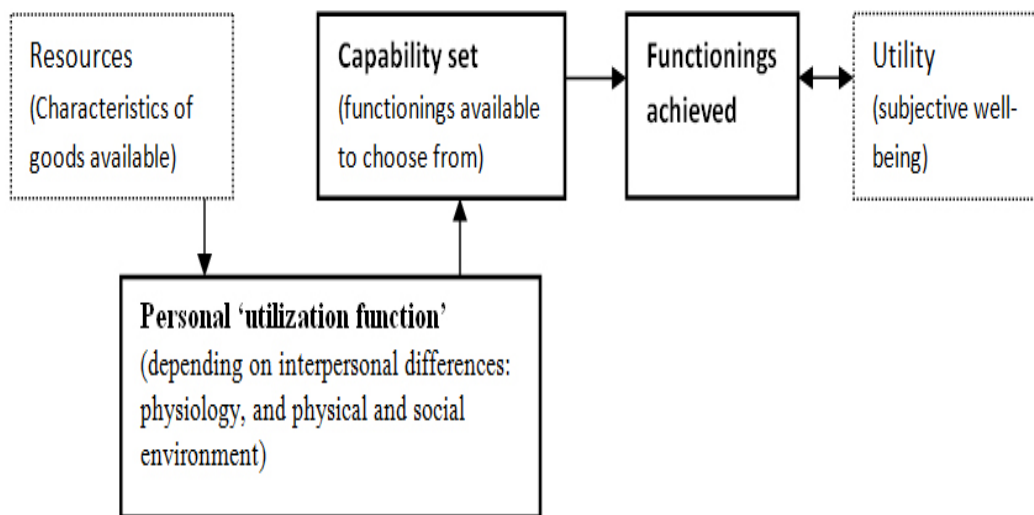
Figure 7: Capability Approach
(Source: https://www.iep.utm.edu/sen-cap/Accessed 30 April 2019)

how they relate to the main alternative approaches focused on resources and utility. Resources, for example, a car, are considered to be an input, but their value depends upon an individual's ability to convert them into valuable functionings such as driving. That depends, for example, on their personal physiology such as health, social norms and physical environment such as the quality and availability of roads.

An individual's capability set is the set of valuable functionings to which an individual has real access. Achieved functionings are those they actually select. For example, an individual's capability set may include access to different functionings relating to mobility, such as walking, bicycling, taking a public bus and so on. The functioning they select to get to work may be the

public bus. Utility is considered both an output and a functioning. Utility is an output because what people choose to do and to be naturally influences their sense of subjective well-being (for example, the pleasure of bicycling to work on a sunny day).

However, the Capability Approach also considers subjective well-being, such as feeling happy, as a valuable functioning in its own right and incorporates it into the capability framework. The approach is concerned with people's abilities to live lives that they have reason to value, which incorporates an ethical evaluation of the content of their options. It is particularly concerned with grasping the dimensions of human well-being and advantage that are missing from standard approaches. This relates to its concern with tracing the causal pathways of specific deprivations and with how exactly different people are able or unable to convert resources into valuable functionings.

This approach has been criticised from several different angles. The most well-documented set of criticisms relate to the issue of how this framework is operational (Sugden, 1993, p.1953). The first of these criticisms concerns the identification of valuable capabilities. Several commentators have criticised Sen for failing to supplement his framework with a coherent list of important capabilities (Williams, 1987, p.96; Nussbaum, 1988, p.176). Others have argued that Sen goes too far in terms of insisting that certain capabilities simply are valuable (Sen, 1992, p.40), given the extent of disagreement among reasonable people about the nature of a good life (Sugden, 1993, pp.1952–1953).

The Capabilities Approach points towards inner health and well-being with the notion of subjective well-being. However, it also implies that the attainment of that subjective well-being is externally generated by access to resources and sets of capabilities and functionings. Adding self-transformation processes as functionings enhances the approach towards higher capabilities and subjective well-being outcomes. However, the question of how to operationalise this functioning remains a challenge.

The Power Systems Approach

Duncan Green, in his book *How Change Happens* (2016), developed an approach called the Power Systems Approach ('PSA'), which is a model that I have found comes closest to my experiences of facilitating social transformation. He based his work on the work done on women's rights and empowerment, which locates changes processes according to the nature of the institution (informal to formal) and the locus of the change sought from individual to systemic.
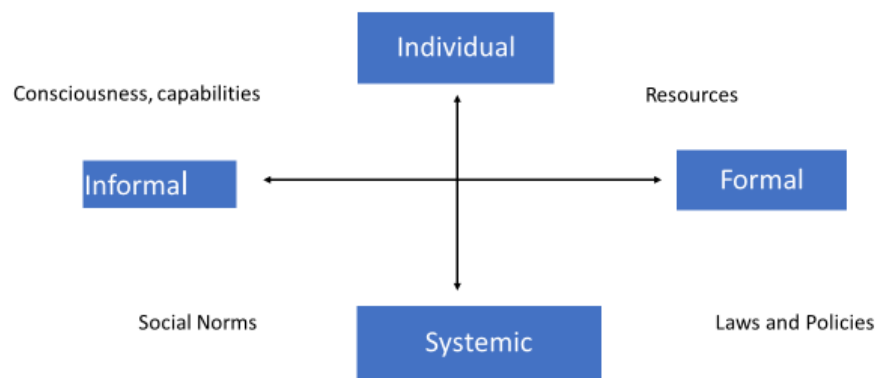
Figure 8: Domains of Change
(Source: Rao, Sandler, Kelleher and Miller, Gender at Work:
Theory and Practice for 21st Century Organizations, Routledge, 2016)

The Women's Rights and Empowerment Framework shown in Figure 8 highlights the impact on the individual of institutionalised discrimination (systemic) found in laws, policies and social norms. The formal side of systemic impact is visible through laws, policies and resources, while the informal side of social norms, consciousness and capabilities, among others like attitudes and access, are less visible.

The authors of this framework found that practitioners typically neglect the left-hand side – that is, the informal side or the less visible side. The diagram reminds one to look at change in terms of all four quadrants and stresses that change needs to happen at all levels. It is a useful framework to map out where the effort is needed for the change to occur.

Green (2016) builds on this framework by adding a power analysis in which he emphasises that, in order to generate social change, we first need to understand how power is distributed and can be re-distributed between and within social groups: the emancipation of women, the spread of human rights, the power of poor people when they get organised and the shifting power relationships behind the negotiations around the international economic system. The PSA model tries to situate those power struggles, as highlighted in Chapters One and Three, within complex systems that are continuously changing in unpredictable ways, affecting and being affected by diverse factors like social norms, negotiations, campaigns, lobbying and leadership. What he has attempted to put together is a step-by-step guide for social activism.

The aspect that is of interest to this study is the left-hand side of Figure 8. If we are serious about facilitating such 'bottom-up' participatory approaches, which involve meaningful participation and equality of power and decision-making, it requires a fundamentally different way of working and, therefore, a fundamentally different type of facilitator. Again, the question is how to build that capacity.

Why these approaches?

These approaches, including the philosophy of *Ubuntu*, are examples of a move away from the top-down approaches favoured by development and humanitarian actors, which reinforce the dependency of the colonial past, as has been discussed in this study. I have chosen to investigate the four approaches (Max-Neef's Human Scale Development, Sen's Capabilities Approach, Green's Power Systems Approach and *Ubuntu*) as representatives of the many and varied approaches being employed in the field of aid. These approaches can easily be applied to the humanitarian aid sector, especially now with the New Way of Working initiative, which recommends merging the two sectors through a focus on working within the humanitarian development Nexus[30] as opposed to the way that agencies erect walls between their

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[30] The New Way of Working (2017): the trend of humanitarian appeals lasting an average of seven years pushed donors, NGOs, crisis-affected states and others at the World Humanitarian Summit to discuss ways to bring new urgency to the long-standing discussion around better connectivity between humanitarian and development efforts.

humanitarian aid and development work – mainly for reasons that have nothing to do with the real needs of the affected people. These reasons range from arcane administrative and financial procedures, to pressure on donor governments from domestic constituencies, to a lack of agreement between aid agencies and leaders about how aid should be provided (Refugees International, 2012). Nevertheless, applying any of these approaches is not the cure for the ills of the humanitarian aid sector.

A fundamental requirement to apply any or all of these approaches is for the people implementing to understand them and to have internalised the underlying principles that cut across them all. They are the principles of, among others, oneness, love, respect, integrity, honesty, communality and care for others above themselves. Writing up models and approaches that encompass all these ideals does not guarantee that they will be implemented in the way that they were intended. It is, for example, well documented that many companies and organisations who have taken on the principles of *Ubuntu* in South Africa also have a reputation for being corrupt and ill-treating their workers (The Economist, 2019). All these approaches exhort the participants to 'know themselves' and imply that high levels of self-awareness are needed. However, not one of them provides details or roadmaps on how to reach that level. Every individual within the organisation must somehow develop the capacity to transform themselves towards giving material expression to those ideas; otherwise, they are just ideas.

Challenges in Relation to the Proposed Framework

I have restricted the research scope of this thesis to an intensive focus on the humanitarian system and humanitarian aid processes represented by key literature. The research is further limited to the influence of incidents, experiences and significant role-players recalled from memory to surface the learning and understanding that emerges from personal experience. This process of delimitation is, of course, characteristic of research.

In keeping with the scrutiny of the intimate, I have utilised phenomenology, autoethnography, self-study, self-reflection and self-enquiry to investigate the complexity of the questions that my study proposes from the literature and from my personal experience. Although these techniques are sometimes regarded with scepticism and considered to be of limited value by

some academics with a more Western, scientific orientation, it is precisely their engagement with the personal and the researcher's presence that makes them potent. In this scenario, they facilitate insights into the intimate processes of learning and living with uncertainty and danger and how this personal process is far more powerful a driver for decisions in these times than external codes, principles, norms and policies.

Although we are individuals, we are part of a larger social body aligned with other societies. As such, I believe that my findings may be extrapolated.

The challenges within a 'bottom-up' project

In 2016, as part of a group assignment for a course, we had to develop a project to show that we understood humanitarian project design. As a group we decided to be innovative and develop a project based on an experiment done by a small NGO in the Philippines. This was a project for which the funders and facilitators handed over complete control and decision-making to the community, offering a lean, skeletal advisory panel to assist with technical issues. The experiment itself was touted by the NGO as a success, but, interestingly, not much has been heard about that approach in the humanitarian sector.

However, we used that approach to design a fictitious project. Writing up this project, the team argued for weeks about how much control we could realistically give the community, and we struggled to articulate how we would prevent nepotism, corruption, favouritism and other such issues. What would we do about exploitation and violence against women, and what if the community was not trustworthy? We realised that this type of work would require facilitators who would be able to transcend everything they had ever learned about how to do projects. While this was an exercise and not a real situation, all of us doing it were practitioners, and it made us acutely aware of how easy it is to say these things and how difficult it would be in reality to trust the community to make decisions and handle the funding, allow them to make mistakes, be there as a mentor and facilitator and not to take over, guide and not direct, be able to handle conflict and, most importantly, be trusted and accepted by the community.

Therefore, all the attributes that are essential for the community's fundamental human needs to be satisfied must also be attributes of the

facilitators (or they must be people with the potential for those attributes to be enhanced and satisfied as part of the project process).

Going back to the Human Scale Development matrix, the question it poses for me is, *how* does a humanitarian worker develop the attributes for 'being' in themselves as well as tools and processes for facilitating 'being' with their targeted groups? How do they get to inner equanimity, self-esteem, care and assertiveness, to list a few? The list that I have created from my personal experience would include humility, power, confidence, recognition of the humanity and divinity of the other, honesty, authenticity, self-awareness, respect for life, affection towards self and others, and a sense of unknowing or not knowing.

I have outlined, throughout this study, how my exposure to different ways of knowing, being and doing created a thirst for an understanding of life's expressions. My search led me to self-awareness and an understanding that, when I accept that I am one hundred percent responsible for my state of being, I have full control and am liberated from dependence. I understand, in those moments, that freedom means freedom from reaction to the external world and a shift to responding to life as it is.

This way was initially expressed in the teachings of the Buddha, but, since then, many other spiritual, self-development, self-help and psychological counselling practices have developed along those lines. If life is impermanent, uncertain, dangerous and constantly changing, the only control one can have is with oneself. This way advances the notion that well-being is firstly a focus on inner well-being and having the capabilities, tools or functionings (whatever fits, depending on the approach) to facilitate one's own inner well-being and transformation. Following this way means that one never blames other people or external events for one's inner turmoil. Using the tools, methods and processes of self-awareness, self-enquiry and self-transformation, one can shift the turmoil and arrive at an understanding that brings freedom from the turmoil and a sense of inner well-being.

Through my experiences in Liberia mentioned in Chapter Five, I gained first-hand experience of this and of how, if one can to bring together practices pf spirituality, self-development and self-enquiry from the vast library of self-transformation that exists into the world of aid and assistance, one can and

does have significantly different impacts that are sustainable over time and space.

Up until the year 2000, I was a single parent, working in various NGOs and participating in various activist projects in South Africa. While I was successful in my career, my work and managing to feed and clothe my children, I failed miserably at intimate relationships and blamed it on my violent marital experience. I often felt angry about it and was unable to think of relating to my ex-husband in any way other than absolutely minimally and negatively. I would not do anything else for fear of giving him a message that I condoned his past violent behaviours.

In November 2000, through the struggle of managing a recalcitrant staff member, a friend introduced me to the Life Training Programme, as it was called then. It is now known as the More-to-Life programme. I decided to attend it, thinking that I had nothing to lose, and did not investigate what it was about at all; I just went along on the recommendation of the trusted friend. I was trusting particularly because she was a McKinsey[31] consultant (a highly respected management consulting firm) and would not be recommending any mumbo-jumbo.

It turned out to be a self-development programme designed to facilitate personal and social transformations by offering experiential courses to help awaken one's inner power, purpose and potential. It was initially a weekend that, using incidents from one's own experience, demonstrated how the mind works in interpreting those events as negative or positive and creating a reaction to the incident, blaming it for the state that the mind goes into based on whether the event was desired or not. I was fascinated not only by the premise on which it was based but by the real, experiential shifts that I had, which helped me awaken to how I had interpreted life events that were holding me in bondage, a prisoner of my own making. It put me on the path to understanding that letting go and moving through difficulties of life was not condoning or excusing them but accepting the reality that they had happened and that there was no way to change what had happened. Full acceptance of the reality was

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[31] McKinsey & Company is an American worldwide management consulting firm. It conducts qualitative and quantitative analyses to evaluate management decisions across public and private sectors, and is widely considered a most prestigious management consultancy.

not condoning it; it was a way to achieve inner equanimity and let go of the reaction to the event. This was life-changing for me. I had been trapped for years in the prison of the past, and even when I wanted to break out, society kept me there. 'You cannot let him get away with it,' they would say of my ex-husband. 'He must be punished.' I did not feel that within myself and often felt very sad and sorry for the part I had played in the messy relationship we had created. However, this was not allowed. He was to blame, and patriarchy was to blame, and I had to stand firm in my resentment of him, patriarchal society and whoever else had aided and abetted my misery.

This programme taught that resentment is about drinking the poison and waiting for the other person to die. I confronted the damage that holding on to that resentment had caused in my life, as well as all other resentments, including the ones I held towards my mother, who had, in my perception, aided and abetted my misery. I had been unable to forgive, and what I learned was that firstly I had to forgive myself. While holding onto the resentment towards others, I was hardest on myself for being so stupid, for allowing such things to happen to me and for not taking better care of myself.

A few years later I encountered Byron Katie, a woman who, in her early thirties, was severely depressed. For almost a decade she spiralled down into rage, self-loathing and constant thoughts of suicide. For the last two years she had often been unable to leave her bedroom. Then, one morning in February 1986, she experienced a life-changing realisation that she calls 'waking up to reality'. She says:

> *I discovered that when I believed my thoughts, I suffered, but that when I didn't believe them, I didn't suffer, and that this is true for every human being. Freedom is as simple as that. I found that suffering is optional. I found a joy within me that has never disappeared, not for a single moment. That joy is in everyone, always.*

She had somehow come to the realisation that what had been causing her depression was not coming from the external world but was based on her own thinking and what she believed should or should not be in the world around her. Instead of hopelessly fighting with reality, she could question her thoughts, and, by accepting reality as it is, she could experience joy and freedom. As a

result, a bedridden, suicidal woman was instantly filled with love for everything life brings.

Byron Katie's process of self-inquiry by questioning limiting thoughts set her on a path to develop a process she calls *The Work*[32]. She has now taught it publicly since 1986, and many people report that it has transformed their lives.

Despite the international acclaim of these programmes, I have not met one single individual in the humanitarian sector who has ever heard of The Work or the More-to-Life programme. Not one. While this does not mean that there are no humanitarian aid workers who are self-aware or practising some of these approaches, it does indicate that is not prominent. It is also evidence of the two worlds operating as siloes, not visibly or intentionally connecting with each other.

My brother brought Byron Katie to South Africa in the early 2000s, and I attended her workshops. They were yet another tool for moving forward out of the limiting beliefs and compulsive thinking that were the cause of my suffering.

Byron Katie and the More-to-Life programme appealed to my Western-educated, analytical intellect. Both programmes were logical and went step by step through a process that was easy to understand. There was an event and then there was a reaction. What did the mind do with the event?

Once I learned how to use the tools, I could dissect the process of the mind and see that it was taking me to places that were the cause of suffering and misery, where I wanted to change what had happened by over and over again insisting that it should not have happened or should not have been that way. It is hard work and requires one hundred percent honesty and authenticity and constant vigilance – alertness to the workings of the mind.

I wondered if there was a way to internalise this that was not about dissecting the mind's process. I was drawn to investigate from an Eastern perspective and, as previously mentioned, found *Vipassana* and the Yogic Tradition. *Vipassana* can be translated as 'insight' – a clear awareness of exactly what is happening as it happens. The individual uses her concentration

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[32]   *The Work* process is freely available on the internet and Katie (as she calls herself) runs various talks, workshops and schools to facilitate people to free themselves. See www.thework.com.

as a tool by which her awareness can chip away at the wall of illusion that cuts her off from the living light of reality. It is a gradual process of ever-increasing awareness into the inner workings of reality itself. The idea is that, after much practice, finally the walls of illusion will completely fall away and usher the practitioner into enlightenment.

Vipassana is the oldest of Buddhist meditation practices. The method comes from the *Satipatthana Sutta,* translated as the 'Discourse on the Establishing of Mindfulness',[33] a discourse attributed directly to the Buddha. *Vipassana* is a thorough and gradual cultivation of mindfulness or awareness. It proceeds piece by piece and carefully directs the student to an intense examination of certain aspects of his own existence. The meditator is trained to notice more and more of his own flowing life experience. It is a gentle but extremely systematic technique based on an ancient and codified system of training the mind to be more and more aware of the experience of life. It is attentive listening, mindful seeing and careful testing. The goal of *Vipassana* meditation practice is to learn to see the truth of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and selflessness of phenomena.

Some of this practice has emerged in the Western world in recent times, and in the United Kingdom there is now the practice of Mindfulness-Based Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy ('MCBT') (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Since cognitive therapy, behavioural therapy and mindfulness have all been shown to be effective, they have been combined into MCBT. Mindfulness is used in this therapy to return the client to the present-moment experience, whatever it may be – pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. It encourages the person to allow themselves to return their attention to the difficult experience with a sense that it is all right to experience the emotion or sensation and focus on the present moment. It combines the ideas of cognitive therapy with meditative practices and attitudes based on the cultivation of mindfulness. The heart of this work lies in becoming acquainted with the modes of mind that often characterise mood disorders, while simultaneously learning to develop a new relationship to them. MBCT was developed by Zindel Segal, Mark Williams and John Teasdale,

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[33]   See https://www.vridhamma.org/research/Vipassana-%26-Psychotherapy.

based on Jon Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program[34]. It is important to note that some commentators argue that the history of mindfulness should not be confined to emerging only from Buddhism and Hinduism, as mindfulness also has roots in Judaism, Christianity and Islam (Trousselard *et al.,* 2014). However, it is noted that most modern Western practitioners and teachers of mindfulness learned about mindfulness in the Buddhist and Hindu tradition. This should not be taken as a denial of mindfulness's roots in the other religions, and Leisa Aitken, a clinical psychologist and practising Christian, is one example of a practitioner who covers this in her work.[35]

Yoga (first mentioned in Rigveda, 1500 and 1200 BC) is another practice that has become extremely popular in the West, even though it is often the *Hatha* Yoga (physical well-being) that is focused on. Yoga and mindfulness can also be directly related, as physical yoga practices incorporate mindfulness. Some mindfulness meditation practices such as the body scan are very similar to yoga, as they both involve awareness of one's body. There is a much overlap between mindfulness and yoga, both historically and presently. One study examined the levels of mindfulness in people who practise yoga (Gaiswinkler & Unterrainer, 2016). The study found that people fully involved with yoga practice had higher levels of mindfulness than people who were only slightly involved or not involved at all.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (mentioned earlier in relation to MCBT), learned about and studied mindfulness under several Buddhist teachers including Thich Nhat Hanh (himself an influential and popular figure in Western mindfulness). Kabat-Zinn is credited with influencing the acceptance and integration of mindfulness into Western science to establish the Centre for Mindfulness at the University of Massachusetts Medical School and the Oasis Institute for Mindfulness-Based Professional Education and Training within it. This is also where Kabat-Zinn (2003) developed his Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction ('MBSR').[36]

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[34]   See www.mcbt.co.uk.
[35]   See https://hope1032.com.au/stories/tag/leisa-aitken/.
[36]   Mindfulness-based stress reduction ('MBSR') is an eight-week evidence-based programme that offers secular, intensive mindfulness training to assist people with stress, anxiety, depression and pain. It is a practical approach that trains attention, allowing people to cultivate awareness and therefore enabling them to have more choice and take wise action in their lives.

What I discovered through participating in the ten-day silent meditation retreat at the *Vipassana* Centre in Somerset West, South Africa is that the basic concepts of the More-to-Life and The Work were very similar to what the Buddha taught thousands of years ago. More recently, I participated in the online Inner Engineering Programme of the contemporary *guru*, Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev from Tamil Nadu, India. Sadhguru's teachings are not dissimilar. Self-enquiry, self-questioning, self-awareness, mindfulness, accepting reality in each moment, equanimity, craving and aversion are all part of his teaching, which, simply said, is that the source of misery and happiness is one hundred per cent emanating from within oneself and not created externally. This is not to deny that unwanted incidents do happen. Life experiences of uncertainty and danger continue to happen consistently, but the choice to be happy is always there as an option. Accepting life as it unfolds and 'responding' to life events rather than 'reacting' are central to of all those programmes and teachings. Krishnamurti promoted self-enquiry, Buddha speaks of accepting impermanence (*anicca*), Sadhguru exhorts one to take one-hundred-per-cent responsibility for everything, More-To-Life teaches one to notice the mind, and Byron Katie asks one to question the mind.

Whichever practice one adopts, the point is to practise it and integrate it into daily life. Although all these practices are present in both the East and the West, they are siloed into spiritual practice, therapy and psychology, while business, development and humanitarian aid (among other professional categories) continue to be practised as separate, disassociated bodies of work.

Of the three sectors mentioned, business is slowly cottoning on to the benefits of integrating self-transformation practice. Across a widening swath of the American corporate landscape, meditation, yoga and other such practices are emerging as new techniques toward the harvesting of profit. A growing body of research (Goodman, 2013; Bhandari *et al.*, 2009; Hall, 2009) suggests that yoga and meditation may reduce the stress that tends to assail bodies confined to desks for hours at a time. Companies are investing in the notion that limiting stress will translate into fewer employee absences, lower healthcare costs and higher morale, encouraging workers to work more. Bhandari *et al.* (2009) conclude in their extensive review on the implications of corporate yoga that yoga is a cost-effective, eternal and universal means for workplace wellness

and excellence that needs to be included as an indispensable part of corporate culture.

However, Bhandari *et al.* (2009) and companies implementing yoga practices like Google have stripped meditation of any hint of Eastern spiritual provenance and described it as 'cultivating emotional intelligence' or 'EI'. While this may not be ideal or as is intended for individual enlightenment, it is perhaps the beginning of the integration that this study seeks to promote.

However, in the humanitarian sector, such practices are not yet on the radar. As this study has detailed in Chapters Three and Four, the humanitarian sector is a catch-all venue characterised by fast-paced, top-down, resource-heavy operations focused on saving lives. There is no specific training required to become a humanitarian worker, and I have encountered a vast array of diverse competencies, levels of intelligence, capacities and skills from every corner of the globe. One such person I met while working on a disaster response said that she was stunned by her appointment, as she admitted to having no relevant skills for the job she was hired to do. She focused on entertainment and finding a romantic match and developed a reputation for throwing the best parties on the typhoon-affected islands. Such profiles of international humanitarians are well documented

Someone once said that everything that does not work everywhere else is flung into the humanitarian space. Along with the outdated philosophies and policies that guide the work, it does indeed seem that this might be so. Yet, the possibilities are immense for integrating self-transformation practice into this sector.

Personal Reflections on Integrating Self-Transformation into Humanitarian Aid

As mentioned in previous sections, my first attempt to integrate transformative practice into humanitarian work was in Liberia. I had been practising the More-to-Life tools and Byron Katie's process, The Work, for about nine years. In 2003, I participated in the week-long 'Way of the Warrior' – an advanced course offered by the More-to-Life programme. In 2006 I attended the weekend workshop with Byron Katie. While I had been doing all this inner work, my work life remained separate and the politics and shenanigans of this life finally overwhelmed me. In 2008, I resigned from my full-time job as the manager of a

peacebuilding programme and was offered a short-term consultancy to work in Liberia.

Not knowing with whom I was to work gave me courage to put all nine years of spiritual practice into my work. I engaged in a mentorship with one of the More-to-Life practitioners and, through Skype, talked through my fears, plans and ideas. That was part of my inner preparation.

Realising that I was clueless about the context, the people, the culture, the history and the needs, I decided to read, listen and observe. I admitted to myself that I did not know anything. I spent the first month doing only that, hardly speaking to anyone and building my confidence to engage. By listening, observing and asking questions, I learned what was needed and, rather than going in with any preconceived ideas, I offered whatever capacity I had that could meet their needs. Since I was there to work with women and bring women into the Truth and Reconciliation Process, I sat in women's organisations and humbly offered to help them formulate their strategic plans, since this was something I knew how to do, and it was a big need for them, which they could not afford to hire someone to do. It was a win-win situation. I learned all about how they operated and what the dynamics were inside the organisation, their relationships with government and their roles in society. They, in turn, learned how to organise themselves strategically. Most importantly, we built up an equal relationship of mutual trust, respect and inter-dependence. I learned how to speak to them in language they could understand so that they could hear what I had to say, and I learned how to understand the language that they spoke so that I could hear what they were saying. They learned to accept me into their fold as I sat with them, ate with them and shared with them the day-to-day difficulties of parenting, relationships and surviving in a demanding, uncertain and dangerous world.

This solid relationship created a foundation that has stood the test of time and space. In 2016, eight years after first arriving in Liberia, I returned on another assignment and found all those relationships as intact as when I was there previously. The entire group gathered, and we had a wonderful day of feasting and reminiscing about our time together.

From these relationships, which were based on recognising each other first as human beings and then on who we were and what we stood for, we were able to co-create the project described in some detail in Chapter Five. More

people were brought in, and we put our heads together and came up with the idea for the Community Dialogue Process to involve women in the TRC. I told them about the inward focus I had been working on, and they enthusiastically agreed to try it in a one-week workshop. I used every process I knew that fitted the brief, which was to equip us to go out into all the communities of Liberia to talk to women about their experiences of the war.

During this one week, we focused on raising our consciousnesses by looking deeply inward into who we were, what we wanted to do, why we wanted to do it and what we hoped to achieve as an outcome. All of it was individual, inner work based on some of the More-to-Life teachings, some of Byron Katie's questions, some mindfulness practice and some yoga breathing techniques called *Pranic* exercises, which I had learned on a short visit to India in 2003 during my internship at the Sustainability Institute in Cape Town, for my MPhil degree. The group was excited to try new things and said that it was the first time in their experience of working that this type of practice had come into the workspace. They were all committed Christians and had been taught that religion and work did not mix. We had lively discussions about what this meant and how difficult it is to compartmentalise life.

After we had the one week of inward work, we started thinking of a methodology for the work with the women. The group felt that the inner work was so powerful, we should integrate it into the work with the women. We then spent a week together, thinking about it conceptually and then designing an implementation plan.

We decided to gather women from all of the 16 counties of Liberia into four gathering spots at the intersections of the counties. It meant traveling the length and breadth of the country through the rainforests. The group was slightly anxious about this new method, so we incorporated three review sessions per day. These were done mid-morning, afternoon and evening when the group would have a check-in to ensure that we were all still on the same page, and they could speak about the experience of the sessions. These proved to be important steps to keep the process flowing, since the meetings were intense and painful for all. I was reminded that the members of the group had also experienced the wars in Liberia, so this was very personal; they were not objective outsiders. The group was able to share what they were experiencing in these review sessions, and, knowing that these sessions were built in and

coming up, they were not blindsided by the atrocities and painful experiences shared by the women.

The entire project took four months to complete. Thinking back on it now, it had some funny moments. In one of the groups, a young American woman, who helped us with the funding for the project and became part of the group, joined us on the journey. Interestingly, she had been in Liberia for about a year before I arrived and had not been able to gain entry into the women's groups before this. Working in this way, she was fully accepted. On the trip she decided to eat the peanut butter locally made and sold on the pathway. She became violently ill and missed the last dialogue session, which was set deep in the forest area in the last town of Liberia. The group found it hilarious and laughed at her good-naturedly, since even they do not eat the ground peanuts until they are fully cooked. A good sense of humour was an essential element, and there were many hilarious moments that we still laugh about when we meet.

Of course, there were conflicts too. As I was a trained conflict mediator, the American woman and I, the only two non-Liberians of the group, had our hands full mediating the conflicts and disagreements that erupted. It was amazing to see how the inner work helped to restore peace. On one occasion the whole group turned on one member and listed a whole range of negative qualities about her and what she had done. We listened and let them say everything they wanted to say and asked her not to respond. When they were done, we did our breathing exercises that had become a daily practice and then I asked the group if all they had said about the person was all that they saw about her. We asked them to list other qualities about her that they knew of. Then we asked the person to say if anything that had been said had a grain of truth in it. Was there anything she could own as even having some slight truth to it? In this way, all sides were heard, and all aspects were explored, negative and positive. The conflict was defused, and the person reintegrated into the group.

As I described before, the community dialogues were very well attended, and the women appreciated the style of engagement, which they said was deeply engaging and felt genuine. We completed the four sites, analysed the work we had done and did a public presentation in the town hall, inviting all and sundry to come and listen to what we had done. Although we ran into clashes with the Government, who accused us of competing with them and trying to

show them up, our meeting was very well attended, and I was invisible in the background, preferring to give the stage to the Liberians. It was their story to tell and I was later introduced when the whole group went up. When we were choosing who would present the findings, it was clear that any one of us could do it. There was no one who did not know everything we had done, how we had done it and what the outcome was. We based our choices on the best speakers, and everyone was involved in putting the presentation together.

I spent almost three years in Liberia and had ongoing relationships with this group, even though I was working in a different organisation. Our work overlapped, and we held many gatherings to reconnect and share experiences during that time. Finally, the time came to say goodbye to Liberia. In December of 2011, I held a farewell gathering, and some of my newer expat friends remarked that there were a feeling of genuine love and connection among the many friends who had come to say goodbye. The work there continues, and I am still in touch with many of the people there as a friend, a confidante and a resource – sometimes for advice, sometimes for assistance and sometimes as a gateway to connect them to others in the network around the world. One of the women from the original group joined the organisation I went on to work for and took over the leadership after I left. I mentored her for two years while I was there, and she is still leading that organisation, which was localised by the German mother organisation.

I realised through this work trajectory that it is entirely possible to use self-transformation practice to deepen, enhance and authenticate project processes, no matter what the project. It became evident that the humanitarian context was actually a perfect place to use such processes, since it is intensely dependent on individuals and personalities to drive and influence these processes, whether they are facilitators or participants.

The self-transformation processes need to be integrated into the work and not added on or done separately. If integrated, they become part and parcel of the entire process and are not then perceived or assessed separately. It is important to start with an inward process based on the qualities of humility, power, humanity, authenticity, self-awareness, respect for life, affection and unknowing. By doing this, those working together start more or less on the same page and bond on a level that is different to connecting around a goal. It is a

bond based on deep sharing and connecting that transcends religion, culture, time and space.

Practising benevolence towards others

Image 12: With the Indian All-Female Peacekeepers in Liberia and Monika Hauser, founder* of medica mondiale *and recipient of the alternative Nobel Peace Prize (2011)
(© medica mondiale/Used with permission)

Recently, a colleague ('MS') reminded me of a time that we worked together and how we managed to survive working with the government of the country that we were in at the time. Image 12 above, with Monika Hauser and the Indian Peacekeepers, emphasises the complicated nature of our work in Liberia and the many different levels we had to straddle. We were having inordinate struggles with a certain government official, and each of us had individually experienced very negative interactions with her. MS was working inside the government department that this politician headed, so she had to deal with her daily. I was working on gender issues with the United Nations and she was not appreciative of the work I was doing, so she publicly snubbed me and tried to humiliate me. She also tried to stop my contract with the UN from being renewed. MS recalled how this government official had tried to embarrass her in front of the department staff, at which point she was reduced to tears. She remembered how we arranged to meet later that day to console each other and

rant about the unfair treatment. We were angry, sad and scared and vented our feelings by wishing all sorts of miseries on the minister.

MS reminded me of how, after a while, I said, 'Why don't we practise the *Metta* prayer?' (These are intentional good wishes and a sense of benevolence for oneself and others done through meditation.) 'Let us wish all the good things we want for ourselves; then let's extend it towards her.' I told her about another time when I had been attacked by a colleague and done the same thing, with very positive results, realising that wishing ill on others only leads to misery for ourselves. MS, being a Hindu from India, was open to doing this meditation, so we agreed to do it for a time over the following weeks. Before long, the misery left us, and we continued with our work in a happier frame of mind, not dependent on being happy or sad because of what others were doing. We supported each other to stay positive and happy in our work, and every time something happened that affected us, we did more meditation.

A few months later, as politics go (and they were volatile in this country), the official lost her position as she fell out of favour with the president. We watched her power crumble and disintegrate and felt at peace, knowing that we had not wished this upon her, nor had we wasted our energy on negative thoughts and plotting to get even. Our lives continued, unaffected by the change.

Applying the emergent principles

Moving on from the Community Dialogue Project, I went on to work at the German organisation *medica mondiale*[37] in Liberia. The principles that emerged from this process in Figure 9 – inclusiveness, authentic relationships, co-creation, co-designing and implementing, co-ownership and letting go through releasing each other yet maintaining an ongoing connection – formed the foundation of the work in this organisation.

This was an international organisation set up to address sexual violence and violence against women in the aftermath of the conflict. It had struggled to find ways to establish good systems, and, even though the work was successful

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[37]   *medica mondiale* is a German-based, international feminist organisation responding to sexual and gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict countries around the world.

and appreciated, the organisation was teetering on the edge of collapse due to internal strife among the local staff and the internationals, amid reports of corruption, mismanagement and undisciplined behaviour.

I went in as the new head of mission and set about establishing the principles of inclusiveness by clearing the backyard, planting flowers on every patch of soil around the office building (which also housed my living quarters) and consulting the staff on colours to paint the building inside and out, as well as on painting signs on the gate and around the building. I made the place beautiful and worked on establishing relationships by eating lunch together. That worked very well, and soon our organisation became known as the place to visit at lunchtime, since we had a cook and a kitchen. Co-creating, co-designing, implementing and co-owning all flowed naturally from there.

Everything was going well until my daughter came to spend a few months working as a volunteer. Up till then, although I had been having some problems with the international project manager in terms of her ability to work in the forest areas outside of the capital, where there were scant facilities and not many other internationals, they were not major. However, she was young and not much older than my daughter. The two of them hooked up and stayed together in the project area. When my daughter returned, she told me how she had run into some scary difficulties, being left alone while the project manager returned to the capital. It affected me, and I tried to apply all my learnings to myself to deal with the project manager fairly. I struggled, but we talked. It was a bit tense between us after that. Soon the relationship deteriorated until she was barely functioning. Whatever I did, she reacted and withdrew. I set a system in place, tried to guide her to do the work, set up monitoring calls – it all failed.

Finally, I called for help from a trainer with the More-to-Life programme, and she came to run a workshop with all the staff. I knew that it would help with staff dynamics and for deepening relationships with the staff, but my main motivation was to find a way to get another perspective on my relationship with the project manager. The trainer worked with us for a few days and set up coaching sessions to work with people individually. She came to me one evening and said, 'Let's work on what happened with the project manager.' I agreed, sure that I had nothing to hide, and was open to getting to a better place. I went through everything that happened, but she kept pushing me to see

something. 'I just don't see it,' I said. 'I did everything that I could possibly do to make it work.'

'Look again,' she said. I just did not see where she was going. Finally, she shouted out, 'Can't you see that you have become a cold-hearted bitch?' She had never spoken like that before, and I was shocked. And then I saw it. I had closed my heart. Although I was doing everything the right way as a manager and leader of the organisation, I had shut her out. She could feel it and therefore could not respond. The trainer asked me where else I had done that in my life, and I realised that this was the way I had protected myself from the attacks from my mother. I shut her out so that I could not be hurt, and it had become the way I dealt with anyone who threatened me. In this instance, the project manager had threatened my daughter, and my protective instinct had made her into a threat to me too. Therefore, I had closed my heart to her in the same way.

Although it was too late to repair the relationship with the project manager since she had resigned, I learned something about myself that day that has not left me. It is a flag that reminds me that, no matter what the other person says and does, it is always my choice as to how I will be. Knowing that I had a habit of closing my heart towards a perceived threat made it something to keep in my awareness for the next time. I have not forgotten it.

An Emergent Methodological Direction

I offer next a diagrammatical representation in Figure 9 of the flow of principles that I learned through my work in Liberia, which have been tried and tested in different contexts from Fiji to Somalia, Afghanistan, Nepal, Iraq and Nigeria. These principles are guides or signposts to a shift in the way of working and can apply to relationships and situations in life outside of work. Thus the convergence of the previous six chapters in this chapter, establishes a methodological direction for an alternative, bottom-up model called 'a strategy for inclusive, mindful humanitarian practice', which is essentially the outcome of this PhD thesis.

This is a way of thinking and being that influences doing. It is only possible through consistent reflexivity and self-transformation practice. This strategy is not new, nor is it unique, and I have outlined some of the approaches that carry many of these elements with them. There are many other models and

theories that have been developed that encompass these elements. The closest one that I have encountered is Theory U (Scharmer, 2009), which is a theory and practice of the U process designed to shift the essence of leadership. This confirms that what has distilled from my experience and practice are in fact emergent paradigms that I hope will facilitate social transformation in this fragmented, marketplace-driven landscape.

Figure 9: Strategy for Inclusive Mindful Humanitarian Practice

Figure 9 outlines five phases of engagement: Inclusiveness, Authentic Relationships, Co-Creation, Co-Design and Implementation and Co-Release. Each phase, presented as a flow from beginning to end, for the purpose of visual representation, overlaps with each other and contains principles, values, attitudes and actions that are consistent and continuous.

Although appearing in the first phase, the most important principle of the model that emerges from my experience is humility. Humility, as I understand it, is knowing and accepting that I do not know. Things are always much more complex, messy and diverse than anticipated, so going in with any notion of certainty is bound to create a barrier to understanding the context. Humility ensures listening, understanding, not knowing and respect for what others know

and do. It is about the willingness to not be the expert and to learn from everyone, even from a child.

> *Humility is not a peculiar habit of self-effacement, rather like having an inaudible voice, it is a selfless respect for reality and one of the most difficult and central of all virtues* (Iris Murdoch, 2001, p.93).

Humility must be accompanied by curiosity. A genuine eagerness to know and learn is an essential quality.

Inclusiveness is next, and what it means in this context is learning how things are working and making them your own. This is about moving from being an outsider to an insider, about non-separation, and about identifying with humanity and not with individual notions of identity. Honesty is critical here, and it is not honesty with others; it is about honesty with the self. To quote Sadhguru (2016), it means 'no bullshitting' yourself. Clear, incisive honesty is needed. This way establishes equality. There is no expert; there are different capacities and skills to share, and the focus at all times is on *how to be* rather than *what to do*. When the 'how to be' is done right, the 'what to do' comes naturally; then you do what you know how to do and what you can do – whatever is within the realm of possibility. Whatever is not possible, whatever cannot be done, cannot be done.

As discussed in the preceding chapters, self-awareness, self-knowledge and an understanding of what the self is and is not and can and cannot do are crucial to implementing this strategy in any meaningful way. It is not possible, as has been established through personal experience and the insights from there, to achieve inclusiveness without consistent reflexive practices. It also requires, as discussed in Chapter Three, that there be full and meaningful acknowledgement of the power and privilege we bring and are given by the position we hold. As a humanitarian aid worker, we automatically are in a position of superiority with some power 'over' the beneficiaries as the one who holds the key to the aid process. Knowing and being aware of this and finding ways with others to work inclusively is what will make the work a joy, a privilege and a responsibility (Vasudev, 2016).

From here we will get to know all the actors in the humanitarian drama and how we can work with them as a full participant.

The next phase is developing authentic relationships based on the recognition of the humanity in others. This means going beyond how to work with others or how to meet people to form a network. In reality, it never works like that. It means being open, letting others in and letting yourself connect by sharing information, listening, being willing to help and be helped, and moving prejudices, barriers and social conditioning aside through awareness of being part of the environment and seeing others as interconnected, not separate. This can be done through the mechanics of offering skills and capacities, by finding entry points for engagement and by humbly offering to assist. Oftentimes it involves engaging in activities that are not on the pre-identified list, but which will deliver much more than a ticked box. It will establish a connection and move to the goal of acceptance on both sides. You will feel part of them, and they will feel part of you. Photographs of my children and grandchildren, put on my wall to keep my spirits up, were often the humanising factor that drew people to talk to me about their children and grandchildren. When acceptance is established, co-creation can begin.

Summary

This chapter followed the trajectory of the research question, 'What needs to change for the humanitarian aid system and its processes to become more compassionate, empathetic and transformational?' and answered the final sub-question on the outcomes of the humanitarian aid worker's efforts.

Aligned with the focus of the study, the methodology allowed for a self-reflexive, heuristic process whereby knowledge emerged from experience, a process that enables one to learn for oneself. It facilitates possibilities for transformation on the part of the author as well as of the reader. This relates to Heidegger's (1972) metaphor of the path and the clearing, and the rise of authentic language. The process of introspective self-analysis forms a substantial part of the practical component.

Different to the previous chapters, which reflected on the past, this chapter embarked on a way forward. It laid out some groundwork on how aid is currently delivered and discussed a few selected models to demonstrate how the aid system is attempting to move towards more inclusive, bottom-up ways of working to spotlight the missing self-transformation pieces at the individual level. It was a convergence of the six chapters that established a methodological

direction for an alternative, bottom-up model called 'a strategy for inclusive, mindful humanitarian practice'.

Mindfulness is described as establishing practices for constant and consistent self-awareness of 'being' and 'doing' at any given moment. This chapter noted that the movement towards this type of practice is based on the work of many scholars, thinkers and philosophers from all over the world who say that self-enquiry, self-questioning, self-awareness, mindfulness and accepting reality in each moment brings equanimity and that craving and aversion (wanting and not wanting) is the source of misery. They also posit that the feeling of happiness one hundred per cent emanates from within oneself and is not created externally.

From personal experience and insights, my conclusion was that it is not possible to achieve inclusive, mindful practice without consistent, reflexive practices. Knowing and being aware of this and finding ways to work with others inclusively is what makes the work a joy, a privilege and a responsibility.

The following, final chapter summarises this thesis and offers final reflections, insights and conclusions.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

This study has provided a highly personalised, contextualised account of a humanitarian aid worker's path through a dangerous and uncertain world. The purpose of the research was to take an inward glance at a humanitarian aid worker and to answer the question, 'What needs to change for the humanitarian system and its processes to become more compassionate, empathetic and transformational?' An autobiographical perspective and self-inquiry process lent themselves to taking a deeper look at the workings of the humanitarian aid system from an insider's perspective.

This personal account of a self-transformation process is intended to demonstrate the value of self-reflection as the basis for a more engaged and reflexive humanitarian aid system. It will allow other humanitarian aid workers to reflect on their own current or future careers in this sector, to grow and to develop their own, contextualised understandings not only of the complexities of the sector, but also of the possible pathways across it through their transformative work within the system, with the affected populations and within themselves.

What This Study Found

To answer the research question, I deconstructed it into six elements formed as sub-questions, which covered:

1.   historical legacies of context (Chapter Three);

2.   aspects of power and knowledge (Chapter Three);

3.   moral and ethical guides to doing the work (Chapter Four);

4.   the technical structure of the humanitarian aid system (Chapter Five);

5.   personal and social transformation (Chapter Six); and

6.   the goal or outcome of humanitarianism (Chapter Seven).

Key literature on each of those topics was reviewed and supported by analyses of the autoethnographic data from self-enquiry, personal reflections and journal entries.

From the literature on the underlying knowledge system of the humanitarian aid system, Chapter Three found that the humanitarian system

operates from a purely Western knowledge base within contexts that are still struggling to free themselves from the debilitating and undermining legacies of colonialism, one of which is the colonialities of knowledge (Mignolo *et al.*, 2018; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Mbembe, 2001). The resultant clashes and tensions confine the humanitarian worker to limited ways of thinking and being and cause resistance from the beneficiaries. Reformists of the system (Du Bois, 2018; Feola, 2013) who call for radical changes and point out the failures are either destructive and polemic or impractically idealistic. They do not offer methods, models or approaches to guide the humanitarian worker to more effective ways. The reviews also confirmed that Western thinking emerging from the Enlightenment era, which included a range of ideas centred on reason as the primary source of knowledge and which advanced the ideals of liberty, progress, tolerance, fraternity, constitutional government and a separation of church and state (Zafirovski, 2011, p.144; Outram, 2006), is still widely promoted as a universal idea and not as geopolitical, cultural, European-based thinking.

Within the humanitarian sector and against the background of the impact and legacy of colonialism and the consequential power imbalances between the global north and south, the scientific method and the practice of reductionism is advanced unquestionably as global, mainstream and universal. The humanitarian sector continues to uphold this same Western-centred idea of world order despite the robust challenges to it and shifts in thinking from the revolutionary Frantz Fanon, Steve Biko, Hamid Dabashi and others mentioned in this thesis. The literature also revealed unequivocally that maturity of intellectual thinking occurred in non-Western civilisations some time before the West reached that stage during the Enlightenment. It also found that universalisation of Western epistemologies is the post-colonial way to entrench Western power and coloniality of knowledge (Mignolo *et al.*, 2018; Chilisa, 2017; Majefe, 2010; Battiste, 2004), to maintain the current dominance and power of what some would characterise as the 'ailing' global north (Narayan, 2017).

Through an investigation of personal experiences, the impact of coloniality of thinking and the misery it can cause if un-investigated came to the fore, as well as the lost opportunities to gather and learn from the rich and valuable wisdom of existing local practices, thereby readdressing the existing power dynamics. Chapter Two provides methodological expression to exploring and presenting these personal experiences and highlights many of the tensions.

Experiences of personal struggles with devaluing the knowledge of others with less Westernised knowledge and education, as well as the blunders enacted when local practices and history are not taken into account become apparent (such as not knowing or acknowledging the local, historical methods of surviving recurring natural hazards, where the external intervention destroys the capacity of local resilience).

The discussion in Chapter Three further revealed that the exclusive Western, Eurocentric and North-American basis for formulating policies, standards and practice models was highly problematic. The struggles to impose these policies and standards on resistant and complex contexts is compounded by the lack of historical, institutional and operational memory brought about by the high staff turnover and inadequate methods of disseminating lessons learned from past mistakes. From the administrative and policy levels to the practical, operational levels, what showed up clearly was the lack of political will to address the unequal power dynamics.

The dissertation highlighted the highly complex and diverse nature of the humanitarian contexts within which a humanitarian aid worker must bring about positive results. It indicated that the failures and shortages of the highly competitive, discordant system that emerges is well documented and that serious reform and transformation of the system is advocated for by many critical thinkers. However, the need for a roadmap to enact the revolutionary vision called for by some authors confirmed the findings from personal experience that it requires changes on more levels than the structural. The personal transformation of the humanitarian aid worker came forth as an essential element of the much-needed reform if the system is to rise to meet the current challenges. The personal reflections on my experiences of knowing and not knowing and on my own knowledge sources demonstrated the inner impact of Eurocentric coloniality of thinking, of embedded ideas of superiority and the misery caused to others when there is little self-awareness about those sources of knowledge and issues of power and privilege of the humanitarian aid worker, as opposed to the beneficiary population. The reflections taught that one is highly influenced by where one is socialised, and by whom and what (geopolitical context), and awareness of that is essential to be compassionate, empathetic and transformative.

Morals and ethics were also explored, and Chapter Four found that, once again, universality was contested. Although from East to West there are similarities, it found that the moral sense of humanitarian workers that is gained from personal experience and socialisation is a much more powerful determinant of decision-making than moral culture. Therefore, the provision of principles, standards and codes of conduct do not guarantee moral behaviour, however it is defined, in the humanitarian sector. As Kleinman's (2007) studies show, moral and ethical decisions are not wholly determined by principles and standards, but by the internalised moralities and ethical frameworks that individuals have constructed for themselves. This was supported by studies on moral culture and moral sense, which found that, when faced with life-changing decisions in the humanitarian context, people are guided by their moral sense, not the moral culture (Rességuier, 2018). This was also confirmed by reflections on my personal experience of early childhood socialisation continuing to influence me and direct my decisions when it comes to moral dilemmas and times of crisis, rather than adhering only to external policies on moral and ethical behaviour.

Examining literature and experiences on the delivery of humanitarian aid in Chapter Five exposed the top-down culture of expertism and superiority that is prevalent in the system. Since international humanitarian work rarely expects direct action with beneficiaries, the humanitarian worker finds herself stuck at the technical management level, which is a marketplace of competition for funding. The need for self-management is emphasised in this chapter.

Interestingly, although there are resounding calls for transformation of the system to address the challenges and shifting terrain, there is little if any consensus on the conceptual basis of transformation (Berkhout, 2013; Brown *et al.*, 2013; Mustelin & Handmer, 2013). There is also much debate on what the qualitative difference is in 'non-transformational' change and similar debates around whether transformation is desirable, as some see it as a consequence of collapse and therefore negative (Butzer, 2012). In the humanitarian sector particularly, the confusing definitions of 'transformation' are compounded by the overlaps with other concepts such as resilience, adaptation, transition, critical transition and durable solutions or sustainability. Scholars find that the term 'transformation' is frequently used merely as a metaphor and perceived in some quarters as a moral cover for northern states and humanitarian agencies to

secure their own interests, be they political, organisational or individual (Agrawal *et al.*, 2012; Feola, 2013; Strunz, 2012; Thompson, 2007). Such harsh and unkind critiques of the system abound in the literature and have pushed system reform from humanitarian charitable relief to a mix of relief, life-saving and long-term developmentalism called 'working in the nexus'. Recent proposals call for a complete transformation of the architecture and an unmooring from the deeply ingrained inequities of the Western charity model, and are highly critical of the Western characterisation of non-Western countries as being incapable of self-government and in need of everlasting aid.

Recommendations for the way forward, particularly from Du Bois (2018), emphasise mutual, respectful and transformative exchanges, assisting, learning and developing between north and south on an equal basis, but, while laudable, they do not offer methodological direction in terms of tangible action steps. This thesis posits that critique and recommendations for change, however well-researched, do little to transcend the challenges. Practitioners are left with the dilemma of how to operationalise concepts that will bring about the desired outcome mentioned in the many different approaches that proliferate the development field, a few of which are exemplified in Chapter Seven. Particularly perplexing is that, to facilitate the changes, people with transformed mindsets are required to deliver the process. In addition, many scholars conclude that the wish to change the world is a great paradox because, in reality, we can only change ourselves. Self-transformation thus emerged as a key agent and a critical element of social transformation.

It is not possible to state unequivocally that transformed practitioners will guarantee transformation of others and the context. However, what this thesis postulates, and what is discussed fully in Chapter Six, is that, without a process of self-transformation in place as a crucial component of transformation, the chances of facilitating shifts in entrenched power relationships towards the humanitarian ideals of social transformation are extremely small. At the very least, the ones implementing the lofty policies, principles and standards should be mining wisdom and insights from self-reflection to catalyse positive change.

Scholars reviewed in this study also emphasised that, while modern society has engineered the most advanced technological era, it has failed to engineer human beings at the same high level. This is what 'Inner Engineering', mindfulness and personal transformation are all about (Vasudev, 2016; Kabat-

Zin, 2003; Krishnamurti, 1978; Yogananda, 1946; Buddha, c. 563/480–c. 483/400 BCE). The literature revealed that self-transformation of individual human beings can be summarised as a perpetual process of emergent becoming through an evolutionary process that is fundamentally a cultural and spiritual process and that can awaken a new passion for life with a greater sense of power and freedom. Material selected from the self-reflection process demonstrated the parallel of self-transformation and social transformation, where understanding and working within the local context were vital components. It created an environment that links to what this study asks in terms of compassion, empathy and transformation.

My investigation through literature and personal experience on the topic of transformation in Chapter Six uncovered and accentuated that personal self-transformation is a key factor and plays a critical role as an agent of social transformation, without which there cannot be any facilitation or advancement of positive social-change processes. Chapter Six found that transformation is first and foremost an inner process. For a system to transform the people within it, each must be open and willing to undergo the necessary change. Therefore, transformation is not a goal, but it is process and it is continuous. It emphasises that each individual must realise that the only change that is within one's personal control is changing the self. Deep personal reflections on the trajectory of my own life and all the challenges and motivations that I experienced were presented to demonstrate the life-long, ongoing process of reflexivity that enables me to practise humanitarian work in the way this study is working towards.

From the literature on Western, Eastern and African epistemologies, approaches and concepts, an emergent methodological direction was proposed in Chapter Seven. It brought together the common principles from those worldviews to form an inclusive, mindful strategy for humanitarian aid work. This provides a basis for further research questions and offers a foundational guide for humanitarian practice. In fact, this guide can be adapted to any service sector, since it is based on principles that guide the user on how to be rather than on what to do. While this may seem a modest contribution in terms of shifting an entrenched culture of limiting, Western-based humanitarianism, it not only offers a basis to challenge current discursive practices, but also opens up the way for current innovative theories of learning, leadership, management and facilitation, some of which are mentioned in Chapter 7, to enter the humanitarian aid system.

Recommendations: Next Steps

This thesis significantly contributes to current discussions, debates and reflections on the current state of the international humanitarian system, with the added depth of personal experience. There are several ways that this research has expanded my scope and will effect change in the areas of work, practice and personal development as well as in the humanitarian sector. Within academia, I am interested in engaging with higher education programmes in Africa as well as Asia and the Middle East. South Africans, due to many years of apartheid isolation, are not as engaged in international humanitarian work as much as many other Africans. There is therefore a huge opportunity not only to encourage engagement in this sector, but also to offer programmes that foster theories and discourse on the emerging paradigm of practice from this thesis. This would develop a basis to engage at the policy level and influence policies towards transformative practice.

Since the current humanitarian system does not facilitate personal transformation of individuals nor does it provide the space for personal growth and development from an inner health and well-being perspective, there is a dire need for policy shifts to strengthen institutions that provide the human resources to the system. I am, therefore, interested in engaging with institutions of higher education for training, research and evaluation while facilitating personal transformation. At the practice level, my ongoing work with community groups will expand to develop field-based training and facilitation processes to advance transformation from the personal to the society.

As demonstrated in this thesis, particularly in Chapters Six and Seven, it is possible for the Humanitarian Aid system to embrace new ways of working even while responding to immediate practical needs. From humility and respect for multiple ways of knowing, the system can and should adapt to mindfulness of being, inclusivity and power-sharing ways of working, whether it is an emergency or a long-term development situation. Many of these ideals are laid out in Du Bois (2018) as recommendations for outcomes that capture a reflexive humanitarian aid system that responds to emergencies from the bottom up. If the focus could shift from only external outcomes to include the inner health, well-being and self-reflexive practice of the implementers and facilitators of those processes, we may discover that the realisation of the external ideals is actually within reach.

I would also be intrigued to promote more self-study and autoethnographical works in the field of humanitarian aid. What are the experiences of other humanitarian aid workers, and what means do they employ to maintain inner health and well-being? Is it possible that there are others who see the open spaces in this sector for different ways of working that are not only from the Euro-North American paradigms? I expect my research to encourage others to be confident to do this type of research and to tackle the issues that are bogging the system down into ineffectuality. Questions should be asked on what it means to be an inclusive, mindful humanitarian worker. How can it be contextualised? In which contexts might it not work? What should trainings of humanitarian workers that encompass self-transformation practice and goals look like? Who should do it? What institutions do we need to produce more caring, empathetic individuals willing to examine themselves?

Furthermore, I anticipate that this research will provide some inspiration to others to embark on explorations and undertake processes for enhancing the self-transformation and inner well-being of humanitarian aid workers. This emerging trend of focus on transformation and inner well-being in other sectors, such as development and health, is far from the radar of the humanitarian sector, despite the well-documented accounts of its need. Perhaps the time has come to bring it closer and join the movement sooner rather than later, as is the wont of the system. It is not about being right or wrong; it is about developing deep, mindful reflexivity of thought and action to make confident judgements and contribute to creating a new breed of mindful humanitarian actors. If we move a centimetre towards this goal, this research would have served its purpose.

Final Reflections: Using Self-Reflection To Tell the Story

The demands placed on the modern-day humanitarian actor are increasing at great speed and can be overwhelming. There is scant research available on what these challenges truly encompass, and recommendations to reform and transform the sector hardly take the individual actors into account. Much more insider research is needed, not only to document the failures of the system, as is the tendency, but also to evoke professional growth and understanding of the complexities that impact on inner well-being and therefore on the capacity and motivation to deliver aid effectively.

From the reviews of literature, I gained an in-depth understanding of the humanitarian sector and how it operates. It is important to note that deconstructing the humanitarian sector in order to understand and highlight the gaps is not the same as destroying it. Throughout the reviews on literature I encountered vicious, unkind polemics of the sector. While I agreed with the facts and the technicalities of the failures they portrayed, I do not agree with the sentiment, particularly because some critiques against the system are often fundamentally dishonest and driven by competition for material gain rather than an authentic desire for positive transformation of the system. Deconstructing to reconstruct, reshape and move forward in an inclusive way is what I propose. I consistently found, however, that even where reconstruction was put forward it did not factor in the transformation of the human beings tasked with implementing and giving material expression to the ideals. What this research has contributed is exactly that – a material expression of humanitarian ideals (that thus far have never been spelled out) to humanitarian aid workers in relation to how they should be with themselves and with others in ways that express the principles upon which humanitarian work is based.

A self-narrative thus presents a prodigious opportunity to examine the challenges and experiences of a humanitarian aid worker and invites the reader into a little-known and much-glamorised setting that hardly lives up to the media hype. Reflecting on personal experience as data greatly enhanced my own understanding of the culture within which I work and how I am being while in that setting. It allowed me to reflect deeply and honestly on the traps I fall into, which impact on my inner well-being, and how that then plays out in my relationships with others. It gave me the opportunity to take a somewhat objective look at very personal and intimate matters, which are my own responses to uncertainty and danger and how I overcame them – or failed to do so.

Mahatma Gandhi's (1869–1948) practice of brutal honesty in reflecting on his practice has always impressed me. He was one who strongly advocated that personal transformation went hand-in-hand with social transformation. He said:

> *If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man [or woman] changes his [or her] own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him [or her] . . . We need not wait to see what others do. Be the change that you wish to see in the world.*

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APPENDIX A:
LETTER FROM THE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
(2 JUNE 2017)

UNIVERSITY of York

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SCIENCES

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Dr Stephen Holland
Chair, Health Sciences Research Governance Committee

www.york.ac.uk/healthsciences

2 June 2017

Ms Anusanthee Pillay
PhD Candidate
Department of Health Sciences
University of York
YO10 5DD

Dear Anu

Transformation as a personal process – experiences of a humanitarian aid worker

Your project was considered by the HSRGC at the meeting on Monday 15 May; I then wrote to you on 16 May, explaining that the committee was unable to review the project because the submission did not include the relevant information. I then met with yourself and your two supervisors on 18 May to discuss a redrafting of the submission. Subsequently, a redraft was sent to me on 19 May; I gave fairly copious written feedback, on the basis of which the submission was redrafted. I then had a lengthy conversation with one of your supervisors, Janaka Jayawickrama, about the project and how to proceed.

Over the course of these interactions the exact nature of the project has been clarified. You are undertaking 'autoethnography' in a variety of ways: by purely personal reflection, in particular on your own transformation; by reflecting on your

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experiences and relations in the course of your work in organisations in the field; and by reflecting on your experiences and feelings when conversing with people to whom you are very close. None of this is best thought of as research in the sense familiar from Health Sciences, so these activities do not require HSRGC scrutiny or approval.

In particular, neither you nor anyone else will be asked to undergo anything outside of their normal activities. For example, you will not be undertaking field work additional to your usual work schedule solely for the purposes of the PhD; nor will you be interacting with those close to you in any way that is out of the ordinary. Rather, the idea is that you – and those with whom you interact – will go about your usual business, but you will reflect on your experiences in a distinctive 'autoethnographical' way.

Furthermore, I am convinced that, as your supervisor puts it, 'Anu's research will not put herself or others at harm' (email from Janaka, 2 June). All your field work activities are undertaken independently of the PhD and under the auspices of the UN, so there are no additional risks to yourself or others incurred by being a PhD student. And the personal interactions with people close to you do not incur any risks to yourself or others since they amount to the sorts of conversations you would expect to have with significant people in your life anyway.

On the basis of this, I am writing to confirm that the project falls outside the remit of the HSRGC. As such, it does not need committee review or approval. However, if the nature of the study changes in any way you think might bring it within the purview of the committee, do not hesitate to get in contact with me.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Holland
Chair: HSRGC

cc.   Janaka Jayawickrama
*   Karl Atkin*

APPENDIX B:
CURRICULUM VITAE OF ANUSANTHEE PILLAY (JUNE 2019)

Anusanthee Pillay (Anu)
008 Earls Court, Killarney, Johannesburg
43 2nd Avenue Telephone: +27 11 6462513
Mobile: +27823759454
Email: anu.pillay@gmail.com

Summary: Gender and GBV Specialist focused on increasing effective gender / GBV responsiveness in programming through analysis, mainstreaming, research, capacity development, monitoring, evaluation, review and advocacy. Works at a senior professional level (P5) as content specialist / advisor / trainer, as well as at senior management level as organizational leader. Extensive experience at national, regional and international levels on the design and implementation of Gender Equality Programming, Gender Transformation, Women's Empowerment, GBV Programming, Psychosocial Support Services, Self-Care and Inner Well-being in Development and Humanitarian sectors in Africa, Middle East and Asia. Country specific experience in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Liberia, Nigeria, India, Philippines, Fiji, Nepal, Afghanistan and Iraq.

SELECTED RELEVANT PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Senior Gender Capacity Advisor (GenCap Roster)
Managed by the Norwegian Refugee Council Oslo and the UN OCHA Support Unit, Geneva. Funded through NRC by various donors including Norway, Sweden, USAID, Canada, Australia

Roster members are seconded to the United Nations on request and hosted by requesting agencies to provide technical support during and post humanitarian crisis, work includes monitoring and evaluating, assessments, and policy development and implementation. Secondments included: Afghanistan, Fiji, Nigeria, Nepal, Philippines, and Somalia.

The overarching goal is to assess how well gender is integrated into the humanitarian responses. Through evaluations and assessment, my work has centered around understanding how gender policies and commitments are being translated into the work that is being carried out by the humanitarian system. This includes but is not limited to extensive evaluations and reporting, as well as action plans and implementation of recommendations stemming from evaluations.

Fiji   *2 May 2012 to 30 November 2012*
Seconded to UN Women to work as Inter-Agency Gender Advisor. Coordinated all agencies to work on response to flood in Fiji and to build capacity of Fiji and surround islands to respond to disasters from a gender perspective. Evaluated the

humanitarian response to the floods of 2012 and produced a qualitative review of the response from a gender and gbv perspective.

Somalia   ***18 February 2013 to 30 January 2014***

Seconded UN OCHA to coordinate gender integration in the response to the Somalia conflict and famine disaster. An evaluation of the Somalia Humanitarian Response from a gender, gbv perspective acknowledged policy gaps. Coordinated GBV sub-cluster and Gender Unit of UNDP to collaborate to produce gender strategy and gbv mainstreaming to address policy gaps, including capacity building strategy.

Afghanistan   ***10 August 2015 to 20 November 2016***

Seconded to UN Women to evaluate responses to Afghan conflicts by cluster. Initiated two large evaluations. One on the humanitarian architecture to structure in coordination mechanism for gender equality programming and the other to provide evidence for more integration of gender into crisis response. Evaluation conducted on crisis response to Kunduz from a gender perspective. Report written and disseminated to cluster leads to advocate for better integration of gender concerns into next phases of emergency response.

Philippines   ***February 2014 to March 2015***

Seconded to UN OCHA in Manila after Typhoon Haiyan in 2013. Humanitarian response analysis from a gender perspective, coordinated and facilitated an evaluation of the response to the Typhoon producing a comprehensive Gender Analysis. Used this as the basis for extensive capacity building, turning the policy into guidance and tool for enhanced gender equality programming.

Nepal   ***April 2015 to June 2015***

Coordination of all actors working in the emergency to ensure that responses were aligned in their service delivery from a gender perspective in the immediacy of the humanitarian response post-earthquake of April 2015.

Consultant and Advisor   **September 2017 to November 2017**
Masimanyane Women's Rights International
South Africa

Advised and compiled desk review for a three-year project titled *"Community based approach for preventing Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)."* Multi-country project implemented in nationally identified districts within the participating countries of South Africa, Ghana, Uganda and Mozambique.   The project's planned effect(s) on the society (Impact) is/are: Improved state and community responses to VAWG, by building strategic capacity to exact state accountability and reduced impunity in the participating countries.

Consultant to NRC IRAQ   **May to September 2017**
Gender-based violence Capacity Development
Consultant to NRC Iraq

Short-term consultancy to assess capacity and skills of GBV service providers, produce report on status and develop self-care / wellbeing training and capacity building process and materials for SGBV case workers in Erbil and Kirkuk. Including WHO's PM+ method and Concepts of Care.

Gender Advisor   **August 2008 – July 2009**
UN WOMEN and the Liberian TRC
Seconded to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia by UN Women New York, to evaluate and ensure that policies were being implement throughout the work of the commission. Assess capacity of women's organizations to engage and initiated project to engage women in TRC process. Collected data on women's submissions to the TRC and produced 100-page report on women in the Liberian conflict.

Lead Evaluator   **February to June 2008**
UN Women Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission
Commissioned by UN Women New York through the Centre for the Study of Violence in South Africa to lead an evaluation on UN Women's engagement with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to assess their impact on women's participation in the peace process. Travel to Sierra Leone for in-country interviews and data collection to review and evaluate UNIFEM's engagement with the transitional justice process and the TRC in Sierra Leone. Produced 50-page report.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE IN LEADERSHIP ROLES
Leadership and management roles in large NGOs and University entailed ongoing monitoring and evaluative knowledge and skills for internal maintenance of coherence and stability of organizational strategy, planning and programming and also to comply with donor requirements.

Head of Mission
Medica Mondiale Liberia, 2010 – 2012
Long term community based programme to empower women through addressing and preventing sexual and gender-based violence in Liberia.

Peacebuilding Programme Manager
Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation   **2006 – 2008**
Multi-disciplinary, institute involved in research, policy formation, community interventions, service delivery, education and training, as well as providing consultancy services. The primary goal of CSVR is to use its expertise in building reconciliation, democracy and a human rights culture and in preventing violence in South Africa and in other countries in Africa. My programmed worked across Southern African countries (Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Angola) to evaluate peace-building mechanisms in each country and coordinate collaborations amongst the four countries.

Regional Representative Southern Africa
Ashoka Innovators for the Public, 1999 – 2004
Global association of social entrepreneurs i.e. changes makers creating systems and solutions for the world's most urgent social problems. Ashoka searches and selects leading social entrepreneurs and provides them with living stipends, professional support and access to a global network of peers in 70 countries. My role as regional representative was to assess the socio-political landscape of Southern Africa for a deep understanding of the terrain in order to make sound judgements on whether the projects being presented were innovative and compelling enough to meet the needs of the region.

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EDUCATION

Doctor of Philosophy (Candidate)
Transformation in Humanitarian Affairs
University of York 2017-2019

Post-Graduate Certificate
International Humanitarian Affairs
University of York 2015-2016

Master of Philosophy (cum laude)
Conflict and Conflict Management
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University 2001-2003

Diploma
Participation and Gender
University of Swansea 1999

Bachelor of Arts (Honours)
Psychology
University of Johannesburg 1995-1996

Bachelor of Arts
Communication and Psychology
University of South Africa 1988-1994

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AWARDS
1992   US Leadership Exchange Programme (4 months in US)
1996   Winner of MaAfrika Award 1996 for contribution to EVAW in South Africa
1999   British Council Higher Education Award (4 months in UK)
2003   Ford International Fellowships Programme (IFP) Fellow (3 years)
2004   MPhil Degree awarded Cum Laude
2017   Oppenheimer Memorial Trust Scholarship PhD

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APPENDIX C:
ARTICLE IN *CONFLICT TRENDS* (ISSUE 2, 2018)

HARNESSING GENDER TRANSFORM-ATIVE OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN HUMANITARIAN CRISES: A FIELD NOTE FROM NORTH-EAST NIGERIA

BY **ANUSANTHEE PILLAY**

Introduction and Background

Originally protesting the corruption and inequality produced by state structures and calling for a return to a "purer", more Islamic way of life, Jama'atu Ahlis Sunnah Lida'awati Wal Jihad (JAS, translated as "People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad") – commonly known as Boko Haram – emerged in north-east Nigeria in 2005. Over time, the protest morphed into declaring control over territory, setting off bombs including through "suicide" bombers, forced recruitment, kidnapping and violence against women and girls, including sexual violence and forced marriage.[1] As with all asymmetrical[2] conflicts, those profoundly affected are the civilians. This conflict has

Above: Boko Haram is responsible for much of the violence and conflict in north-east Nigeria, since it emerged in 2005.

affected over 14 million people, with an estimated 20 000 killed, about 2 million displaced and over 200 000 having fled to neighbouring states and countries.[3] Borno State has been the epicentre of the conflict, with the neighbouring states of Adamawa and Yobe severely affected. These three states host 92% of internally displaced persons (IDPs), with females accounting for 52% of the IDP population. While 10.2 million people are estimated to be in need, there are varying levels of vulnerability within the affected communities, which are frequently defined by age and sex.[4] Vulnerability assessments show that female-headed households, for example, are at higher risk of sexual and physical violence, and are also more likely to experience rape, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation – engaging in survival sex with humanitarian aid workers, security forces and community members who have access to food, shelter or non-food items. This is compounded by the fact that the social fabric – including supporting mechanisms and institutions – has collapsed and is unable to provide protection to the most vulnerable, such as the elderly, women and children. In addition, abductions, particularly of women and girls, have become a trend. While many girls are ultimately returned, they face stigma and

discrimination when they try to reintegrate themselves and any children born as a consequence into their communities. This leaves them severely traumatised and isolated, which has led to further negative outcomes – even, in some cases, to the extent of rejoining their abductors.

Humanitarian assistance from the government, the international humanitarian community in the form of the United Nations (UN), international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), local NGOs and civil society organisations (CSOs) has become crucial to saving lives, meeting basic needs and protecting the human rights of IDPs, including host communities with already limited resources. However, much scope exists to expand the gender-responsiveness and inclusiveness of the current humanitarian response efforts by all these actors to effectively address disparities in the needs and vulnerabilities of all women, girls, men and boys. As a gender equality specialist for humanitarian affairs on standby[5] to support humanitarian crisis response efforts, I was brought in for six months to address this gap. Based in the north-east at the epicentre of the crisis in Nigeria and hosted by the UN, my work is to support the actors in the humanitarian response to collect

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Women wait outside a barricade for food rations at an internally displaced persons (IDP) camp on the outskirts of Maiduguri, north-east Nigeria (June 2017).

information and analyse it according to the distinct needs of the women, girls, boys and men of all ages who are affected by the crisis. This is to ensure that the affected communities can access and benefit from assistance and support that caters to their different needs and experiences, with particular focus on highlighting the needs and experiences of women and girls.

While the conflict situation seems to have had severe negative impacts on the lives of women and girls, it is important to note that in the north-east of Nigeria they have been subjected to patriarchal oppression and gender-based violence for eons before the current conflict situation. Historically, while colonialism brought many changes, it did little to challenge patriarchal structures in the north, and independence altered even less. In fact, contrary to the southern states, Borno and 11 other northern states enacted a more restrictive version of Sharia law[6] in 2003 and further reinforced the patriarchal norm of male superiority to women. Women's freedoms and rights were further limited, and they do not usually own land or their homes. Polygamous marriages were also recognised in the laws of the 12 northern states, as opposed to federal law, which does not recognise such unions.[7]

It is also important to acknowledge that like women all over the world, women in north-east Nigeria do have agency and many are breadwinners and providers, marketeers in the marketplace or from their homes, and also engage in farming. Some work in offices, in the government, in the police force and even in the army. However, their status in society is still

defined by marriage and child-bearing. Even today, the guard company servicing the humanitarian system in the north-east has an unwritten rule that married women cannot be employed as guards, and any woman employed as a guard must resign if she gets married. The expectations and roles of women and girls in north-east Nigerian society have thus been at the centre of debates by the male-dominated political and religious elites and civil society, including women activists, long before the conflict began. This tension provided an opportunity for the insurgent movement to attract followers by using women and girls as the standard of moral behaviour. So, while the current conflict situation in the north-east may have begun over disputes between the north-eastern states and the federal government that escalated into territorial conflict, the battle is being waged through the bodies of women and girls. Boko Haram invokes religious authority to back up its claims that the behaviour of women and girls is central to the re-enforcement of moral behaviour and calls for tighter restrictions on all females, while offering religious education and financial empowerment to women to win them over to its way of thinking.[8]

Thus, the patriarchal ideology of oppression and subordination of women and girls that existed before the conflict has been a major factor in the attention paid to women and girls within this crisis situation, and in the battle between Islam and "the West" to gain traction in north-east Nigerian society. This ideology is fuelling the insurgency, and humanitarians working on the response cannot ignore the high levels of different forms of violence against women and

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girls within this crisis. However, they must fully understand the historical conditions that have shaped the lives of women and girls and have rendered them more vulnerable to abuse and attacks from the insurgents, while also noting that insurgency and counterinsurgency have dramatically changed the lives of thousands of women and girls. The disruption of society and the demands of the insurgency have cast women and girls into new roles outside of the domestic sphere – for example, as fighters and supporters of the conflict. In addition, with the loss of their husbands to the conflict, many more find themselves with new responsibilities as sole breadwinners and decision-makers for the remaining family.

Out of the nearly two million people displaced internally in the north-east, more than half are women and girls. Maiduguri alone hosts over 250 000 of these IDPs.[9] Although it has never been captured, it is repeatedly attacked, which further displaces those already displaced. The ongoing displacement throughout the north-east is driven by the indiscriminate killing and maiming of civilians and destruction of towns, villages and livelihoods by the insurgents and military alike. Further complications arise from the fact that the lines between victims and perpetrators are completely blurred. Women and children left behind are the siblings, wives and mothers of the forcibly or voluntarily recruited male insurgents, and the security forces are hard-pressed to know what to do with the thousands of survivors who are linked to the insurgents through these relationships. Combined, these factors have created a harsh humanitarian crisis, featuring massive food shortages, serious health issues, sexual and gender-based violence including kidnappings, the use of women as fighters and suicide bombers, and women and girls engaging in transactional sex with camp and security officials in exchange for goods or favours. This situation has become so acute that it is creating early and forced marriages of young girls as a negative protective mechanism. It is also apparent that this crisis has generated serious long-term risks for the positive recovery of north-east Nigeria.[10]

THE DISRUPTION OF SOCIETY AND THE DEMANDS OF THE INSURGENCY HAVE CAST WOMEN AND GIRLS INTO NEW ROLES OUTSIDE OF THE DOMESTIC SPHERE – FOR EXAMPLE, AS FIGHTERS AND SUPPORTERS OF THE CONFLICT

Addressing Gender Issues in a Humanitarian Response to the Crisis

Since the Beijing Conference in 1995, the integration of the feminist political aim to liberate women from patriarchal oppression has been through the mechanism of gender mainstreaming. The political aims of gender mainstreaming are to make women visible and remove the blindness of

A significant proportion of displaced people in north-east Nigeria are women and girls.

programming that manifests as an invisibility of the distinct needs, vulnerabilities, voices and presence of women and girls. Women's repression in the private sphere also remains unseen and unaddressed. In the humanitarian sector, the purpose of gender mainstreaming is seen to be integral to bring about gender-sensitive responses and to address gender-based violence in crisis situations. This is done through gender analyses of needs, adaptation of activities taking gendered dimensions into account, and encouraging the participation of women and girls at all levels of humanitarian response programmes.[11]

My experience, over years of working in the humanitarian sector on gender analysis and gender mainstreaming, has demonstrated that even with all good intentions, we consistently fail to adequately address the real issues that underlie gender inequalities and are challenged to make the work sustainable and transformative in the long term. To bring gender dynamics and issues to the fore in the largely male-dominated humanitarian sphere, the feminist political project on gender equality was made palatable to the mainstream and delinked from patriarchal power relations. Feminists, including myself, have written copiously about how this delinking from patriarchal power in the humanitarian world

Some of the displaced women that Mariam talked to about their experiences and lives in camp.

translates into providing immediate relief in the situation and addressing differences based on gender, by ensuring that all those affected by the crisis are treated equally and fairly. We are often unable to unearth and address the underlying issues that created the inequality in the first place, or the power politics of why such inequality exists – that is, the ideology of male superiority and female inferiority. Thus, women and girls as equal human beings remain obscured and are largely regarded as victims,[12] and patriarchal power relations that subjugate and subordinate women and girls remain intact. In addition, since humanitarians claim an immediate priority to save lives before any analysis is done on the status of men and women in crisis situations, it is difficult even to persuade them that there are differences in the impact and experiences of women, men, girls and boys – or that there are underlying factors that create deep-seated inequality and abuse, which could be transformed through the actions we take to address the crisis. There are multiple transformative opportunities in gender mainstreaming actions, but without understanding and implementing them, the humanitarian community talks at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, which came up with the "New Way of Working",[13] focusing on resilience and engaging communities through localisation, is in danger of remaining just that – talk!

Without transforming gender power relations, the factors mentioned in the New Way of Working – resilience, participation and empowerment – cannot be achieved in any real sense. Mercy Corp's 2014 study on resilience found that gender integration is a critical component in resilience programming – but, more importantly, it is "impossible to build resilience in households and communities without also addressing systemic gender inequality".[14] The key word is "systemic", meaning that the humanitarian sector needs to go far beyond providing relief based on gender differences. They must dig deeper into the underlying root causes of the inequalities they encounter, and address these effectively. While patriarchal power is alive and well, women and girls will continue to be at the margins, being even more severely violated. At present, we are faced with further challenges by current campaigns from men's groups to include the violations of men and boys under the concept of gender-based violence. This is another challenge, which cannot be discussed in this article – but suffice to say that it further obscures the impact of patriarchal norms on women and girls and makes the hope that gender mainstreaming and gender analysis will work as key policy tools for transformative change for women and girls as elusive as ever.[15]

Conversations with Mariam[16]

I met Mariam at a meeting I had called of all actors in the north-east and based in Maiduguri who were working on gender-related issues. I was struck by her tireless work to help women in need of assistance wherever and whenever she finds them. She asked for my help with a young woman who had acid poured on her face and body and who was in a dire state at the hospital. She had been gang-raped by her ex-boyfriend and his friends, because her family had refused his marriage proposal. Mariam garnered support for this woman and went to the hospital every day to check on her. This is how I came to know what Mariam does. She told me that she is an orphan and that she lives off the inheritance left to her and her younger sibling by their mother. She graduated

from university as a radiographer but has not yet worked in that field. She started a small business to get an income and is using the proceeds to finance a local group working with IDP women. The idea is to offer skills training and food assistance so that women and their children can break out of the debilitating cycles of helplessness they find themselves in as IDPs. I was intrigued, and asked her: "Why are you doing this, Mariam? You could have left and made a life for yourself and your brother in a bigger city, or even outside Nigeria. Why did you stay here to help these women?"

Mariam related her story as follows.

My father died when I was five years old, and we lost everything. My mother, who had just given birth to a set of twin boys, was beaten by the family, called a witch who had killed her husband, and we were pushed out of the community. One of the twins died due to malnutrition and my mother took a cleaning job to support us. She wanted to protect us and accepted a marriage proposal from a wealthy man.

For a while, all was well and my mother finished school and got a better job. Then my stepfather started coming into my room when I was 17 years old, and my brother and I would fight him off. My mother did not believe us until she caught him peering through the door at me while I was taking a bath. When she confronted him, he beat her and me. I was unconscious for four days. We had to leave without getting any support from anyone, nor any justice for the abuse. We lived in a makeshift home for two years. I was 19 years old when my mother died from an infection she got from my stepfather. We were thrown into abject poverty and I took a job as a housemaid to feed myself and my brother, who was 14 at the time. After a while, the man of the house started harassing me sexually and when I refused, he complained to his wife that I was trying to seduce him. She beat me mercilessly, scars of which I still bear today, and we were thrown out and went back to the makeshift house. I started doing any job I could find, plaiting hair… anything that would keep us from starvation. Life became such a struggle that one day, out of utter desperation, my brother and I decided that we should just end it all and commit suicide. Just before we could do that, a lawyer got in contact with me, and said that he had been looking for us for months to tell us that our mother had left quite a lot of money for us. Our lives changed dramatically, and we went back to school.

At the same time, the crisis hit the north-east, and I started hearing stories of how women were being targeted. I wanted to help. I really felt their pain and wanted to give what I could to make a difference to whoever I could. I started a small business and used the profits from that to finance an organisation that would help women get back on their feet after being forced out of their homes by the conflict. I could not bear to see them suffering in the same way we had suffered.

As long as patriarchal power remains a factor, women and girls will continue to be at the margins.

REUTERS/AFOLABI SOTUNDE

Women have demonstrated their capacity to do more than just be passive recipients of aid.

Mariam went on to tell me about a small group of IDP women she works with. This group did not receive much attention, so she went to talk to them. She talked to a group of 20 women and asked them how they came to be internally displaced, how their lives were now in the camps and what their hopes were for the future. Most of the women said their husbands had been murdered by the insurgents, and at least half of them had witnessed the murders. Many of them had lost their children to the insurgents' forced conscription. Those whose husbands were still with them said they were experiencing high levels of domestic violence. The majority of the women said they did not have a voice in the camp and were not participating in any peacebuilding activities. They had little, if any, sources of livelihood and felt hopeless, with suicidal thoughts. Their frustration was that although they were receiving humanitarian aid, they were traumatised with what they were going through and with what they had seen. They were also not included in planning or decision-making about issues that affected their lives. They did not see a positive way forward for themselves or their children. They felt that with a little assistance, they could do so much more and could form support groups and participate in rebuilding their lives.

The following are two stories from this group that Mariam translated from the local language and shared with me.

Falmata's Story

Falmata is 33 years old and has six children. This is what she revealed.

Four years ago, Boko Haram came to our local government area (LGA), Damboa. They were killing and kidnapping, but it had not gotten to our ward at that time – not until five days later, when they stormed our house and killed my husband. We were able to sneak away at night by playing dead. They burnt our house and rendered me and my children homeless. We trekked for days before we were able to get to Maiduguri, and we have been staying at this camp since then.

All the years I have been staying at the camp, I have been catered for by humanitarians, I feel safe. I have been fed and sheltered, and they also created a health facility for us to be able to treat and examine ourselves. There are schools, too, but nothing can take away the pain I feel every day. The camp might be safe, but it is not a suitable place to raise a child. There are a lot of vices happening around the camp. I am scared my children won't have a proper upbringing if we continue to stay here in the camps. We have minimal access to information, and women are usually restricted from gaining access to the peace process or any conflict resolution. The only way we could get information would be if my husband was part of the decision-makers or he was there when the decision was being made, then he could tell me. Another way is maybe a friend's husband is present, and then the information is passed down till I am able to get it, or maybe through rumours.

I can say for a fact that where peace topics are discussed or issues relating to the well-being of society, women are not allowed in such places. The people allowed are the heads of the state or the community leaders; in fact if a woman is seen present, they are tagged (labelled) as prostitutes, and this could cause a permanent mark on her name and might even hinder her from getting married in the local area.

My hope and wish is for peace to return to my country. I want to be able to sit amidst people and talk without being scared of bomb explosions. I wish and hope for my children to have a better life than I did.

I also want to get a job so as to be able to provide for my children and myself. We plead for the government and heads of local government to help us get a source of livelihood. We want to get a source of livelihood, so we can stop depending on people for help and assistance.

I really don't know what the future holds, but I keep praying for things to get better.

I can also contribute to peacebuilding at the camp level, if there is a group formed by fellow women where we all can sit and share our stories, and we advise each other on the hazards of violence.

Asabe's Story

Asabe is 20 years old with three children. This is what she related.

One morning, we started hearing sounds of gunshots and bomb blasts. I came outside and saw many people coming towards my house with guns and shouting. They were shooting at men and forcing the women to get into a van. It took me time to process what was happening, but as soon as I was able to understand that we were under attack, I ran into the compound and was calling on my family to come out and to look for a way to escape. But, the Boko Haram men were already at the doorstep and there was no way to run away. We were able to hide in the sewer pit with the children, but my husband wasn't so lucky; he was slaughtered and then they set our house on fire and left. I was able to escape with the children alongside many people. We all trekked for days before we got to Maiduguri, and then we were accepted by the government and given a place to stay in the camp. My children and I have been in the camp for four years now. When I got to the camp, I was given shelter and food, and my children were enrolled in a school here in the camp. I am very grateful. I also want to beg the government, as well as humanitarian aid, to teach us a skill, so as to be able to fend for ourselves and our families in the long run. I go out to beg so I can support my children.

I am not comfortable with begging but I have no choice; my children are my priority and I am determined to make sure I put food on their table. I am not at peace. I am depressed, but I have no choice but to be strong for my children. Staying here in the camp has not been easy at all. The environment is not conducive for me and my family. Over the radio, we do hear the government stressing on empowering women, but it's never done. During these discussions, issues of gender-based violence are never addressed. We are treated poorly and men are usually considered before us, even in the camps. I do not have any hope for my life being better, I just pray for my children to have a better life than me.

I also wish I could get a job, so as to enable me to cater for my children. I just wish for peace and the ability

for women's voices to be heard. I wish we could be taken more seriously and treated with respect, both in and out of the camps. Women should be included in peace talks; we should be given the ability to help in conflict resolution. Small groups of women with an elected female leader from the camp should be set up to enable our voices to be heard. We want our voices as women to be heard, we want peace to reign and we also want the ability to be able to speak in public and contribute to conflict resolution with others. A major discussion still left out is the issue of gender inequality; we are being tagged [labelled] for competing with men, but all we want is the ability to help too, which we are deprived of.

The Opportunity within the Conflict

Listening to Mariam's story of how patriarchal power relations impacted on her young life, and from the stories told by the small group of women she works with, it is evident that protecting women in the immediate setting by, for example, putting locks on the latrines to keep them safe, is a far cry from what they need and want in such a situation. Through listening to the women's personal narratives, it is clear that the intense conflict in the north-east has created a humanitarian crisis. This crisis has resulted in huge loss of lives and disrupted education and livelihoods, while separating and destroying communities. Yet, we also realise that within this tragedy lie opportunities to transform gender norms and contribute to a transformation that goes beyond immediate relief and equal treatment. To effect lasting change requires a deliberate effort, where humanitarian practitioners understand the gender dimensions and undertake interventions that not only provide equal and equitable relief, but also work towards transforming the lived realities of women and girls[17].

Women can and do engage in non-violent conflict resolution in the north-east, and have demonstrated their capacity to do more than just be passive recipients of aid. There are many organisations and individuals such as Mariam, who have worked within the religious restrictions on women to improve their socio-economic status through training, education, health and humanitarian services, micro-enterprise and advocacy. Some have been active against domestic violence, female genital mutilation and child marriage. For example, the Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA)[18] played a major part in the successful defence of Amina Lawal, who was condemned to death under Sharia law in 2003.

These women are conscious that while immediate protection and humanitarian issues need to be addressed, the overall condition of the daily reality of women's lives will not change without addressing the longer-term issue of transforming gender power relations. Such motivated women and women's organisations should be nurtured to participate fully in humanitarian decision-making and coordination

processes and systems. This will harness and advance the potential for transformation, inherent in the disruption of established gender norms, to find a way out of patriarchal, systemic inequalities and oppression.

Conclusion

Women and girls in north-east Nigeria continue to suffer appalling violence and abuse that add to the burdens of stifling patriarchy. Nigeria's recovery of insurgent-controlled territory has not necessarily alleviated women's suffering. In a deeply divided, traumatised society, the patriarchal system fuels new forms of violence, exclusion and coercion, particularly against those suspected of complicity with the insurgents.[19] The reality of women and girls' lives is that under a patriarchal system – be it within a conflict or in "peace" times – women and girls are consistently subjugated, oppressed and violated. Humanitarian assistance must do more than apolitical gender mainstreaming. It must take into consideration the historical context of gender discrimination rooted in law and cultural practice, and note how the insurgency has further affected women in various ways – from sexual abuse to lost economic opportunities. Development and reconstruction plans must be based on a gendered analysis of the conflict and pre-existing gender inequalities. Finally, women and girls need support not only to gain more control over their lives, but also to become actors and decision-makers in reconstructing the north-east. The tragedy of conflict and challenges of recovery and reconstruction are strong arguments for efforts to meet women's immediate needs, but also to harness their power as agents of change. ▲

Anusanthee (Anu) Pillay writes in her personal capacity as an International Gender Specialist with experience from various humanitarian contexts of conflict and natural disasters, gained over the last 10 years around the world.

Endnotes

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5 The Gender Standby Capacity Project (GenCap) – an Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) initiative created in 2007 in collaboration with the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) – seeks to facilitate and strengthen capacity and leadership of humanitarians to undertake and promote gender equality

programming to ensure that the distinct needs of women, girls, boys and men of all ages are taken into account in humanitarian action at global, regional and country levels. Gender specialists on standby in this project are deployed to support any humanitarian operation on request from a humanitarian country team.

6 *Sharia* in Arabic means "the way", and is more accurately understood as referring to wide-ranging moral and broad ethical principles drawn from the Quran and the practices and sayings (*hadith*) of Prophet Muhammad. These broad principles are interpreted by jurists to come up with specific legal rulings and moral prescriptions. The body of legal rulings that emerges from the interpretation of Sharia law is commonly referred to as Islamic law, or as *fiqh* in Arabic. The Conversation (2017) 'What Sharia Law Means: Five Questions Answered', Available at: <http://theconversation.com/what-sharia-law-means-five-questions-answered-79325> [Accessed 27 May 2018].

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15 *Ibid.*

16 Aliyu Mariam is a women's rights activist in Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria. She contributed immensely to this article by sharing her story and the stories of the women she works with in the IDP camps in Borno State. The organisation she started is called Learning through Skills Acquisition Initiative (LETSAI), which is a youth-led organisation that works on gender-based violence and the empowerment of women.

17 Percival, Valerie and Theobold, Sally (n.d.) From Gender Blind to Changing Minds: Five Steps to Building Back Better in Humanitarian Action. In *Building Back Better* Available at: <http://www.buildingbackbetter.org/resources/2017/11/10/from-gender-blind-to-changing-minds-five-steps-to-building-back-better-in-humanitarian-action> [Accessed 1 May 2018].

18 Women's Rights Protection and Advancement Alternative (WRAPA), a Nigerian non-governmental organisation, successfully represented Amina Lawal in 2003 and prevented her death by stoning. Amina Lawal was a divorced woman who was sentenced to death by stoning by a Nigerian Sharia court for her alleged commission of *zina* (unlawful sexual intercourse) – a capital crime under the recently adopted Shari'a penal code of Katsina State in northern Nigeria. Since women are not allowed to argue in Sharia courts, WRAPA contracted with barrister Aliyu Musa Yawuri to represent Amina Lawal in her appeals.

19 ICG (2016) op. cit.

APPENDIX D:
ARTICLE IN *CONFLICT TRENDS* (ISSUE 2, 2009)

Above: Liberian women, from different counties, pose with some team members following the Bong County dialogue held at the Phebe Hospital compound near Gbarnga.

EVALUATING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE AND GOVERNANCE: A COMMUNITY DIALOGUE PROCESS IN LIBERIA

WRITTEN BY **ANU PILLAY** AND **LIZZIE GOODFRIEND**

Introduction

One of post-conflict Liberia's first major tasks in its struggle to rise from a debilitating conflict that in essence spanned more than 20 years, was to implement a transitional justice process. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) formed a significant part of this process, and is one of the major mechanisms meant to help Liberia reconstruct and transform itself from an unequal, conflict ridden society into a full-fledged democracy with the participation of all its diverse inhabitants. The TRC was mandated by the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA), which came about through a hard-won battle with most major warlords at the Accra Peace Conference in 2003.

As part of its mandate to promote national peace, security, unity and reconciliation, the TRC was tasked to investigate and elicit the root causes of the war from 1979 to 2003, to identify the main perpetrators and, most importantly, to produce an extensive report that includes strong recommendations for the future well-being of the nation, paying special attention to the experiences and needs of the women and children of Liberia. Although the TRC made many efforts to reach communities throughout Liberia, civil society organisations working on the ground reported that some members of the general public – even those based in Monrovia (the capital city of Liberia) – indicated that they were not only unaware of the mandate or value of the TRC process but also did not fully understand the concept of transitional justice and how they could participate in the process.

It is widely understood that the brutal and inhumane conflict impacted on the entire population of Liberia, but

impacted differently on women, men, boys and girls. It adversely affected the progress of women and girls in Liberia, mainly because sexual violence was widely and indiscriminately used as an instrument of war. Women were repeatedly subjected to rape and gang rapes, including violations perpetrated with various foreign objects. Those who were not brutally murdered experienced and/or witnessed unimaginable acts of sexual brutality, mutilation, cannibalism and torture. This was meted out by all the many warring factions, including fellow civilians and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) peacekeepers. Issues of protection, security, tradition and culture silenced many of these women, and limited their participation in the TRC process as well as in accessing healthcare and other services. Additionally, the opportunity the transitional justice process offered to highlight gender issues had not been exploited to its full capacity. Women were still largely underrepresented in most of the peace processes, and

Planning

The original concept for the project was developed by three Liberian NGO leaders, including the director of the coordinating group (WONGOSOL) and the UNIFEM gender and transitional justice specialist. Conscious that this had not been done before as part of the transitional justice process in any other country, the group was determined not to miss the opportunity to incorporate women's needs and demands more fully into the TRC process. Given some of the criticisms of Liberia's TRC operations, and the fact that it was beginning to draw down and enter the report-writing phase, the time seemed appropriate and critical to offer a civil society-led, independent assessment of the types of recommendations that Liberian women wanted. An initial concept paper, which was shared with donor agencies, quickly garnered support. Financial support was committed by the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), UNIFEM and Urgent Action Aid, with the ICTJ and UNIFEM offering

WOMEN WERE STILL LARGELY UNDERREPRESENTED IN MOST OF THE PEACE PROCESSES, AND HAD NOT FULLY GRASPED THE FULL EXTENT OF THE CONTRIBUTION THAT THEY COULD BE MAKING

had not fully grasped the full extent of the contribution that they could be making.

Against this background, a consortium of women's organisations under the umbrella of the Women Non-government Organisations (NGO) Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL) – with advice and encouragement from the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the TRC gender unit – came together in September 2008 to organise a series of nationwide community dialogue meetings with women. The idea was to evaluate the TRC process from a gender perspective, to discuss seven of the key pillars of transitional justice and to take an in-depth look at community and individual responsibility for healing and transforming Liberian society. The dialogue meetings also aimed to elicit concrete recommendations from Liberian women on the seven transitional justice pillars to inform the TRC final report, and to form a monitoring group on the implementation of these recommendations at the conclusion of the TRC. The term "dialogue", as used here, describes a "frank exchange of ideas for the purpose of meeting in harmony"[1] to encourage women to have open conversations. The meetings were run as a facilitated conversation among the participants, rather than as a series of panel presentations or question-and-answer sessions.

additional technical support throughout the project.

The project document consisted of a series of four community dialogues, one in each of Liberia's four regions – north-western Liberia (Bomi, Gbarpolu and Grand Cape Mount counties), central Liberia (Bong, Lofa and Nimba counties), eastern Liberia (Maryland, Rivergee, Grand Kru and Grand Gedeh counties) and southern Liberia (Montserrado, Grand Bassa, Margibi, Sinoe and Rivercess counties). Approximately 100 women would be convened, representing a diversity of women across all counties in each region, in an easily accessible regional city. WONGOSOL member organisations and TRC coordinators in each of the counties would be called upon to mobilise the women to attend the meetings.

Each dialogue was planned to begin with an opening ceremony at which relevant government, the United Nations (UN) and international non-governmental organisations (INGO) representatives, including the county superintendents, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) gender advisors and TRC commissioners would be asked to speak.[2] Participants would then be divided into four groups of 25 women each, with a mechanism to ensure that the women were separated from their friends and families or community groupings. The goal was not only to create space for women from different counties to get to know each other, but also to allow women to feel free

During the workshop the women practised listening skills by telling stories whilst sitting back-to-back, thus learning to listen without the help of non-verbal cues.

to speak without being inhibited in the presence of family members. The dialogues also aimed to heal divides, and to begin to foster and strengthen reconciliation amongst some of the estranged ethnic groups.

Conversations within each of the break-out groups would be facilitated by a team of three individuals – one facilitator, one documenter and one counsellor for each group. The agenda would open with a discussion of the TRC itself, offering women the opportunity to share personal stories as well as eliciting feedback on the TRC process. The rest of the first and second days would be spent explaining and initiating conversations on the seven key transitional justice issues: truth-telling, reparations, memorialisation, institutional reform, prosecutions, amnesty and reconciliation. At the end of the first day, the project planned to offer more space for women to share their stories and, at the end of the second day, an evening activity would be hosted for the women. The third morning would be spent soliciting recommendations on each of the issues discussed in the previous days, before a closing ceremony. After lunch, the women would depart with enough daylight to travel back to their homes safely. The two technical

advisors to the project, from UNIFEM and ICTJ – and the only non-Liberians on the team – would act as process monitors, observing each group and providing feedback during debriefing sessions that would be held at each meal break and/or as needed.

At the end of the four dialogues, a comprehensive report of the project's main findings and recommendations would be prepared, and a validation meeting would be organised in Monrovia, drawing on many of the mobilisers and participants from each of the dialogues. After the validation meeting, the report would be ceremoniously handed over to the TRC, and the organisations involved in implementing the project would conduct a media and advocacy campaign to publicise the project's findings.

Preparing

In preparing for these dialogues, the coordinating team was conscious about the need to avoid duplication of efforts that would result in wasted resources and fatigue among female participants of these types of events in the counties. Therefore, the first step was to conduct a mini survey of civil society organisations, UN agencies and government ministries to learn what else was being done with regard to community events in these regions and/or on the topics that were on the agenda for discussion. The intent was both to alert partners to the project as well as to ascertain what activities were already being planned in the same areas, so as to avoid overlaps and identify ways to complement existing initiatives where possible. WONGOSOL partnered with member organisations Liberian Women in Media Action Committee (LIWOMAC) and Voice of the Voiceless (VOV) to conduct this survey, in collaboration with the UNIFEM advisor, for a period of one week. The survey team did not find that there would be any overlap at this time, and went ahead with planning.

The coordinating team then brought together a facilitation team made up of four facilitators, four counsellors and four documenters, to implement the dialogues. Three alternate members were added to the team to allow for clashes in scheduling. A skilled and dedicated 15-member team was thus put together from member organisations[3] and taken through an intensive preparation workshop facilitated by the UNIFEM advisor, which was designed to accomplish four interconnected goals:

1. build team cohesiveness;
2. acquaint the team with the dialogue agenda and plans;
3. create a guide for the fieldwork to be undertaken in a consistent way; and
4. teach the facilitation team some techniques to build stronger relationships amongst themselves and with the women, and to deal with the trauma they were likely to encounter.

This workshop laid the foundation and set the tone for the dialogues. A transformational learning approach[4] was used to practice the dialogue process with the team, and for the team members themselves to share and work with their own experiences of the war. They were taught activities to deepen active listening skills, breathing techniques to centre the self in the midst of heightened emotions and teambuilding exercises to bond the group. A field guide was then developed, which outlined in detail the form the dialogues would follow. The team also worked to develop simple language in Liberian English, with which to define the different transitional justice concepts that the project would speak to and seek input on. This language was included in the guide, to help the facilitators explain each concept during the breakout groups.

This workshop proved to be an important milestone in the implementation of this project in that it not only bonded the team very successfully, but it awakened them to their role as facilitators. It helped them to remain cognisant of their state of being, and to take full responsibility for themselves during the dialogue process. Additionally, it helped them to understand that transformation is a process that begins with the self, and this then impacts on others and the context – and that these three processes overlap at all times. It laid the foundation for the way that all interactions occurred in the group: with compassion and understanding, focused on relationship-building and the process of engagement.

Implementing

Once the preparations were complete and funding from ICTJ, OSIWA and UNIFEM committed, the mobilisers were set in motion and letters were sent out inviting people to the first dialogue, held in Bomi County.

Day One

The first day was far more intense and traumatic than had been anticipated. Many more women had arrived to participate than were expected, and this put quite a strain on the accommodation, the catering and the venue facilities. As the process began, Group D had to be split into two groups, because it was just too large to facilitate a genuine conversation between the participants. The groups began with getting to know each other and finding partners and pairs, but it soon became evident that the women really wanted to use the space to tell their stories. The field team met during the lunch break and had a quick debrief. They had not anticipated that this would happen and had in fact, on the contrary, thought that the women would be reluctant to tell their stories of the wars. The team decided then to allow the process to evolve, and to hold the space open for the women to tell their stories in whichever way they wanted, even privately with the counsellors outside the rooms. The team also decided to swap roles when necessary, since the burden of listening and feedback was too much for one person to manage all day.

Dancing allowed the women the opportunity and space to celebrate each other.

The success of this method was noted in the feedback from the women, who "felt" the genuine concern and support from the team. They said they had felt cared for and listened to, and that the team had modelled the behaviour that they were wanting from the participants. The entire day was spent with the team focused on active listening, and the women poured out their hurt, shame, guilt, terror and sorrow that the events of the war had triggered. The stories were very hard to hear, and team members found themselves becoming quite emotional, sometimes sobbing with the women and even needing to leave the room to sob quietly outside. The stories were graphic and gruesome, but the women needed to voice them in order to participate fully. There were horrific stories about being raped with blades, being gang raped, being forced to witness children and other family members being beheaded and killed, and being forced to participate in various sickening acts. The stories went on late into the night.

Day Two

After the stories of the first day, the mood on the second day was surprising. The sombre women of the

previous day had transformed into an energetic group that was ready to discuss transitional justice and ways forward towards recreating their communities and healing the nation. The women willingly came forward in the focus groups with suggestions, ideas and comments about the pillars of transitional justice, about how they wanted their communities to be and what they thought they could do about it. This went on the entire day, and a rich set of recommendations were collected for the TRC report, including suggestions for reparations, memorialisation and reconciliation.

Day Three

This day ended on a high note with the midday meal, and with the women singing and dancing, expressing their joy at the chance to participate in a way that was honouring and which valued their contributions. An unexpected outcome of the process was that women spontaneously started making individual commitments for what they would do when they went back to their communities as peacebuilders. Group evaluations confirmed that the women had benefited a great deal from the process, and the only dissatisfaction they expressed involved some of the logistical arrangements.

Learning

There was much learning, both substantive and process related, that occurred from and through the dialogues.

Process

The first dialogue in Bomi County set the tone for the next three dialogues, and a number of lessons from the first process were incorporated into a revised agenda. The group discussions at the next and all subsequent meetings began with an open space for storytelling, which lasted the entire first day. Time was allocated on the third day for the women to develop group action plans and to make individual commitments. A more flexible agenda was created to allow and encourage the women to intersperse recommendations and storytelling into the middle of the transitional justice conversations, whenever they felt moved to share. A final social event in the form of a dance was also included, at the end of the second day, to help lift the mood and provide the women with the space to celebrate each other. Logistical changes were made to improve the flow of the dialogues: a dedicated logistics person was identified to travel with the team in order to free the facilitators to focus on the discussions; a childminder was hired in each location to free the participants with babies and young children from needing to focus on childcare; and the documenters were asked to record the stories and biographical data of the women telling them more rigorously. For the last two dialogues, a pre- and post-dialogue questionnaire was handed out to monitor and evaluate what knowledge women had gained from the process.

Though the dialogues were all run in more or less the same style and format, each meeting had its own character. In Bong County, the women were all lodged in the same compound: nursing school dormitories that were vacant during a school break. This allowed for more group cohesion and a wonderful continuation of sharing and bonding into the evenings, though it kept the women isolated from the community to which they had travelled. In the rest of the dialogues, women were hosted by families in the area, and they reported that they were pleased to have made new contacts and friends from a different part of Liberia. In Grand Bassa County, the meeting rooms were spread across a large public space, and so the women within each break-out group seemed to bond more with each other because they were separated from their friends with whom they had travelled. In Rivergee County, the dialogue agenda was condensed into two days, with the logistics shifted to the morning of the third day. This created an atmosphere of focus and efficiency, and was a natural evolution for the team because it was the last of the dialogues and, by that point, they were very comfortable with the material and process.

Content

Some broad determinations about the experiences of Liberian women during the conflict, based on the anecdotal evidence and stories shared by the women, can be made. Their recommendations and suggestions for the transitional justice mechanisms were recorded and summarised.

Violations Suffered by Liberian Women

The most common violation recounted by the women was the killing of innocent family or community members. The killings were often witnessed by the women directly and, in many cases, happened in very gruesome ways. There seemed to be a gendered pattern to the killings, with male children and adults being more frequently murdered than their female counterparts. There are likely many reasons for this, but several women who indicated that they had come close to being killed, also said that they had been spared because of some recognition of their role and value as women. For example, one woman from the dialogue in Buchanan revealed that, as a soldier was about to kill her, another soldier intervened, saying: "You see all the children the woman got? Who will take care of them?" Another woman said she was spared because one of the rebels said: "Leave the woman; we are all born from women."

Rape or gang rape was reported by women in every break-out group in all four dialogues. Statistics from other sources suggest that nearly 80% of Liberian women have experienced some form of sexual violation[5], and these findings are corroborated by the stories the women shared with the project team. Several women told of other women and girls who had died as a result of rape. The rape or gang rape survivors revealed that they are living with the long-term side effects of these rapes, including health problems and economic difficulties.

Additionally, the women shared many stories about their homes being destroyed – often through fire – during the course of the conflict. The other most frequent violation that the women experienced was being captured or conscripted

and subsequently forced to act as porters, sex slaves and/or bush wives for different fighting factions. This seemed to be a systematic practice of all the fighting factions.

It is also worth mentioning that, in the immediate wake of killings, there seemed to be a frequent – though not regular – pattern of cannabilism and forced cannibalism. There were several stories of hearts being cut out and eaten by fighters, but also of women being forced to cook and/or eat parts of their dead loved ones.

Women and men were, of course, victims of a wide variety of other abuses. These included wounds inflicted by bullets, cutlasses, razor blades and other implements. Pregnant women who were killed, then had their babies cut out following "bets" made by the fighters about the sex of the baby. A few women in each dialogue had been handicapped as a result of the war – either made blind or having lost the use of their legs, arms or hands. They additionally talked about the humiliations that they suffered at the hands of different fighters. Many of the women had been separated from family members, including children, and still did not know the fate or whereabouts of some of their loved ones.

Comments and Recommendations from the Women

TRC. Many of the women reported that they had not heard of or did not fully understand what the TRC was all about. These comments were from the women who had not participated in the statement taking. Those who knew about it, but who did not participate, said they did not want to speak for fear of all their hurt coming out in public. Others were scared of being victimised by the ex-combatants who lived in their villages and towns. Some of the women felt that participating in the TRC was a waste of time, since it would not return their lost family members to them and because they believed that many of the warlords were lying to the TRC about their participation in the war. Those who did participate said they felt that the TRC would help to bring peace.

Truth-telling. There was general support for truth-telling, with many women saying that it would lead to community healing, bring unity and help them to forgive one another and rebuild their lives and a new Liberia. They also felt that it would bring individual healing, release frustration and worry and clear consciences if done in the way the dialogues were being held. This was important, because they felt safe and free to speak in this forum. They indicated that holding onto "bad feelings" and memories was not good, and they talked of how they could teach this to their churches, family members and children. They raised many concerns that truth-telling did not seem to be happening consistently at the public level and through the TRC.

Memorialisation. The women in all the counties wanted some sort of monument to be built to remember the dead, with some wanting the names of the affected people recorded on it. Some suggested that it be done at county borders or at the sites of major massacres. There was a strong request for a day of mourning from all the groups, with some suggestions that it take the form of rituals, festivals or feasts.

Prosecutions and Amnesty. There was some support for the establishment of a war crimes court, but broader consensus on the need to hold the warlords or heads of fighting factions accountable for their part in the wars. There were some who said that punishing anyone was of no use, because it could not bring back the dead or that it may cause more conflict, but the voices for some sort of accountability were louder and many. Many felt that there should be jail time, hard labour or community reparations like rebuilding the homes they were responsible for destroying. They also suggested that the properties and bank accounts of these warlords should be seized and used for development in the communities they violated. The women felt strongly that the government of Liberia should only consider conditional amnesty for those who told the whole truth, who showed authentic remorse and who asked for forgiveness. There was universal support for total amnesty for child soldiers, and pardons for those who could prove that they had been forced into fighting against their will.

Development. The women asked for connecting roads between the towns and the counties to be built, especially from the farms to the markets. All the women asked for building materials to be subsidised, so that they could rebuild their homes themselves. They also asked for better access to microcredit, especially agrocredit, to support agricultural businesses. They pleaded for the decentralisation of facilities from Monrovia to the counties in the form of schools, hospitals, vocational training, clinics and universities or branches of the University of Liberia.

Reparations. The women also requested free healthcare for all women who had been violated sexually and otherwise. Widows, the disabled and other victims needed to be recognised and empowered to take care of themselves. All Liberians who were in the war were in need of psychosocial support, and they felt that this could be done at the community level using different methods, including traditional methods of support such as women traditional healers for counselling or reconciliation, and cleansing rituals.

Institutional Reform. The participants called for more women to be included in the security sector (army and police), and that just the presence of women would help in

the reform of these institutions. The practice of bribing officials must be stopped, and strong measures taken against anyone caught accepting bribes. The women felt that this could happen if there was protection for the "whistle blowers". They also indicated that no warlords or anyone with a record of corruption or abuse should be allowed into a government or official position.

Reconciliation. Community-level reconciliation, through the use of various traditional forums to encourage communities to discuss reconciliation and resolve old disputes, was recommended. The women suggested the use of "palava huts" (round tables or indabas) and other regular community meetings to do this, under the leadership of county officials or local leaders. A national suggestion was that the government should establish a national programme to promote community reconciliation, and that peacebuilding skills should be taught in schools.

Throughout the process, the project team also heard some very uplifting and encouraging reports. Women not only shared what they had suffered, but also the ways in which they had tried to overcome some of their problems. They told of courageous acts to rescue their and others' children, and of survival. Leadership, cooperation and community were emphasised. In many of the groups, women also pledged to support those among them who wanted to run for community and county political positions. In one of the dialogues, two sisters who had not seen each other for nearly 20 years were also unexpectedly reunited.

Concluding

Though each dialogue did suffer from its own particular challenges – usually relating to disbursal of transportation allowances or other logistical issues – the women were overwhelmingly positive in evaluating the dialogues. Across the country, women consistently communicated the same things to the facilitation team:

- they welcomed the opportunity to share their stories in a compassionate environment – after which they felt "lighter";
- they appreciated that the team had taken the concepts "to their level", and that conversations had been in Liberian English, with interpreters identified for those women who felt more comfortable in their indigenous language;
- they were grateful to have built new and lasting friendships with women from other parts of the country – particularly through the practice of pairing women early in the breakout groups, in a way that they might not have from a more traditional workshop format; and
- they felt confident that this was the beginning of a longer-term healing and reconciliation process.

However, they also emphasised that, though the experience had been a good one for them, they hoped that this was not a once-off event or process. They stressed the need for follow-up to take place, and their desire to see the final product of the entire process in the form of some kind of accessible report. They also asked for help in meeting some of their immediate needs. The dialogues concluded with a commitment from the team to ensure that some follow-up would indeed take place in the near future.

The team has recognised this dialogue process as being a replicable model for community mobilisation and transformation that can be adapted as a framework for almost any type of content. Its focus on relationship-building, using transformational tools rather than an emphasis on content dissemination or extraction, made this a unique process for the Liberian context. The intentional flexibility and continuous feedback system allowed an organic flow that reached out to people at their level of comfort and understanding. There is great interest and motivation to increase capacity for this transformational community peacebuilding approach, and to continue to use it for the follow-up process and for other initiatives. ⚑

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Endnotes

1 The Free Dictionary (online), Available at: <www.thefreedictionary.com/dialogue> Accessed in May 2009.

2 Opening ceremonies are a common feature of Liberian events and, while they are often time-consuming, they are an important ritual, especially at the community level, for credibility and symbolic support. They complement traditional rituals, which allow space for leaders and dignitaries to express that whatever is about to take place is occurring with their knowledge and encouragement.

3 Liberian Women in Media Action Group, Voice of the Voiceless, Aiding Disadvantaged Women and Girls, Society for Women Against Aids in Africa, Security Sector Working Group, Muslim Women for Peace and Development, Women Care Initiative, Women in Peacebuilding Network, the TRC and Wongosol staff.

4 This approach was developed by the Kairos Foundation's More to Life Progamme (<www.moretolife.org>). Anu Pillay is a student of this programme and a licenced More to Life coach.

5 This is a generalisation from the monthly statistics presented by Medicin Sans Frontiers and other service providers that are partners to the Joint Programme on Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV) in the Ministry of Gender in Liberia, and which are currently coordinating and collecting data on SGBV in Liberia.

ABBREVIATIONS

ACCORD	African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes
ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance
DFID	Department for International Development (United Kingdom Government)
GBP	British Pound Sterling (currency)
GDP	gross domestic product
GHA	Global Humanitarian Assistance
HiAP	Health in All Policies
HPC	Humanitarian Programme Cycle
HPG	Humanitarian Policy Group
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee (for coordination of humanitarian assistance)
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
MIHA	Master of Science in International Humanitarian Affairs
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
POWA	People Opposing Women Abuse
PSA	Power Systems Approach
RS	Indian Rupee (currency)
TAP	Thesis Advisory Panel
UN OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USA	United States of America
WHO	World Health Organization
WHS	World Humanitarian Summit

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