The relativistic attitude in development: reflections on the implementation of the Ethiopian multinational Constitution

L'attitudine relativistica nello sviluppo: riflessioni sulla implementazione della Costituzione multiculturale etiopica

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1   Over the last few years, the Italian Association for Applied Anthropology (SIAA) has promoted theoretical, methodological and epistemological explorations on the various ways anthropologists can today engage in actual social processes. In several keynote speeches, roundtables and interventions it was shown that decades of critics to the practice of international development led to the adoption of corrective measures for keeping local variations of context, cultural diversity and identity issues into consideration (Bassi, Riccio 2018). Building on the analogy with the consolidated anthropological tradition of respect for peoples' specific institutions and norms, resource tenure systems and values it was suggested that 'relativistic approach to development' could be a good terminology to juxtapose the new tendency to the old but still prevalent development practices solely based on consideration for economic growth and the universalistic modernizing vision (Bassi 2018). In this article the relativistic attitude in development is first defined and then considered in terms of compatibility with the Ethiopian multinational Constitution[1]. Ethiopia is, in fact, at a key political turn, marked by the award of Nobel Peace Prize 2019 to its current Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali. In 1995 the country adopted the *Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia* (FDRE Constitution). The FDRE Constitution is very advanced in terms of introducing multi-party democracy and protecting international human rights. It is also well known for its strong multi-national orientation and provisions for self-determination of the 'nations, nationalities and peoples'. New Regional States and administrative sub-divisions were demarcated along the spatial

distribution of the linguistic groups of Ethiopia. However, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) has been ruling the country adopting non-constitutional practices, abusing human rights and imposing a developmental agenda fully in line with the economic growth ideology. Only in 2018, after many years of popular protest, the EPRDF has committed to open up to effective multi-party democracy and respect for human rights.

2 I suggest that under these new political winds the international itinerary of critics to the growth-based development paradigm can inspire the ideological and policy shift that is required for a more effective implementation of the FDRE Constitution. The multinational orientation of the FDRE Constitution, with strong provisions for self-determination, is in fact deeply rooted in the political history of the country and awareness about the need to consider and respect the multiplicity of culture and group identities. This national experience mirrors the demands that many peoples and communities worldwide have articulated in the field of development and consolidated in international law. The relativistic turn in international law is centred on the notion of group's self-determination, but with the shift in the meaning of the concept from the political emphasis on decolonisation and secession — often referred to as 'external' self-determination — to providing differential institutional space and decisional capacity in development and policy, within existing States, or 'internal' self-determination (Anaya *et al.* 2009: 58-79; Quane 2011; Waller 2018). By introducing relativistic development measures the country can design governance instruments that will hopefully help to redress the serious abuses that minorities, pastoralists and small-holding farmers had in the past to face under the EPRDF's centrally planned and centrally controlled developmental agenda.

3 I will introduce this article with reference to the background of the current political change in Ethiopia. I will then present the international critics to growth-based development, the paradigm that has deeply informed the working ideology of the ruling party in Ethiopia. The notion of paradigm is used to structure the different lines of critics and their outcomes in development practices and in international law. This elaboration provides the basis for discussing the compatibility of the relativistic attitude in relation to the different development paradigms. The last part is again dedicated to the Ethiopian case. It illustrates the growth–based policy adopted by the country, with the effect of producing cases of serious abuse of minority rights, in full contradiction with the constitutional provisions for group rights.

1. The 2018 Ethiopian 'crossroads' and the new political winds

4 In 1999 Leenco Lata published the book *The Ethiopian State at the Crossroads*. He recalled the authoritarian tradition of modern Ethiopia during both the imperial (mid-19th century to 1974) and the socialist phases (1974 to 1991): the peripheral peoples were subjugated by the national elites that were in control of the central State's apparatus. This produced the historical phase of ethno-national struggle, marked by protracted armed conflict. The armed organisations were led by urban educated elite but, in line with Maoist ideology and strategy, were operating in the countryside by building support among the rural class. Differently from China, the Ethiopian Empire was only built during the 19th century, in result of a historical process parallel to the

construction of the European colonialism in Africa[2]. The dominant State elite came to be identified with a single national identity, which was able to co-opt peripheral elites by imposing the adoption of the dominant language and other identity markers. However, the rural masses remained excluded from education and access to the modern State's opportunities, retaining their pre-imperial languages and collective identities. This difference explains why ethnic-based military organisations operated in the different regions of Ethiopia, each adopting the specific language and values. Lata's book is especially dedicated to the 1991 transition. The ethno-national organizations that had contributed to overthrow the socialist dictatorship in 1991 formed with other opposition groups the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE, from 1991 to 1995) to enhance democratization of the country, respect for human rights and self-determination of the different linguistic groups of Ethiopia. These are the key principles that have been adopted in the 1991 Transitional Period Charter of Ethiopia and that in 1995 were consolidated in the FDRE Constitution. The three largest organizations engaged in the TGE were the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) that later took the leading governmental role in Ethiopia, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) that in 1993 managed to organise the referendum for the independence of Eritrea, and the of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), one of the organizations representing the Oromo, the largest nationality in Ethiopia[3]. Unfortunately, the hope for democratization dissolved as the EPRDF brought the country into a *de-facto* one party system.

5   The EPRDF was formed by the TPLF before 1991, by coopting individuals from other nationalities and constituting them in formal national parties federated to the TPLF. Scholars have highlighted the use of the double standard strategy of claiming liberal democracy for international consumption, while practicing 'revolutionary democracy' in the country, a working ideology based on the notion of a 'vanguard' party leading the development process, with a centralistic approach and State-controlled economic planning. This was achieved by establishing the coalition party's control over the governmental institutions through elections, while the ruling coalition itself was internally dominated by Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)[4]. Suppression of political rights and of independent civil society was used to avoid the emergence of competitive political parties (Lata 1999; Tronvoll 2000; Pausewang et. al 2002a; Vaughan, Tronvoll 2003; Bassi 2014; Abbink 2017). The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), being very popular among the Oromo and very competitive in the electoral arena, was pushed into underground activity already during the TGE. Sympathizers, elected members and leaders of other political parties were later exposed to various forms of persecution and abuse (Clapham 2002; Pausewang *et. al.* 2002b; Aalen, Tronvoll 2009; Gudina 2003; Bassi 2014; Arriola, Lyons 2016: 79-82).

6   Leenco Lata was one of the earliest intellectuals to fully disclose the ruling party's ideological background and the political devises the TPLF used to exercise centralistic and authoritarian control. Already in 1999 he used the 'crossroads' metaphor to claim that effective democratization and decentralization was the only alternative to the collapse of the Ethiopian State. From 2014, after further deterioration of the political rights, the movement of the students and youths of the Oromia Regional State — known as *Qeerroo Bilisumma Oromoo* (the Youths of the Oromo Land) — escalated their opposition into what can be considered the largest 'Arab Spring' style protest in the word. Reference to the Arab Spring is here made to mark the shift of the struggle from

the rural to urban context, mobilisation made in name of the political values of freedom, democracy and human rights that are shared as global ideoscape[5], and the adoption of pacific but persistent protest through public demonstrations and social media communication. This shift was made possible by social change induced by larger access to education and new forms of urbanisation since the 1991 political transition. Nearly two decades of multinational federalism and the possibility to officially use the national languages have changed the perception of the State, turned from a repressive and exploitive apparatus in the hands of a single national group, to a space where inter and trans-national political coexistence is possible if certain rules are adopted and implemented. Accordingly, the opposition's discourse on State secession has progressively been replaced by the demand for proper implementation of the FDRE multinational and federal constitution. Relevance of national identity is a background element that differentiates the Ethiopian protest from the Arab Spring. In the Oromo case the plea for democracy is rooted in their own pre-imperial and pre-modern value system[6]. Throughout the phase of the armed struggle the *gadaa* institution became a dominant symbol of political distinctiveness, representing the Oromo democratic attitude in opposition to the Ethiopian autocracy (Legesse 1987, 2000; Baissa 1994; Baxter 1994; Bassi 1996). *Gadaa* is a system of generational classes that during the imperial phase was ostracised by the State, but survived in the peripheral pastoral areas, especially among the Borana section of the Oromo (Legesse 1973; Baxter, Almagor 1978; Bassi 2005). After the introduction of federalism, in this area it received explicit attention by both national and international institutions for governance related to development and control of inter-ethnic conflict (Watson 2001; Tache, Irwin 2003; Bassi 2012). Throughout the rest of Oromo-land it went through a process of intensive revival, both tolerated and supported by the regional government. In 2016 *gadaa* was enlisted in UNESCO intangible cultural heritage as an 'indigenous democratic socio-political system'. The customary leaders of the revived *gadaa* of the Maccaa-Tuulama took responsibility to revive the *Irrechaa* harvest festival, in the area of Bishoftu, in central Ethiopia (Megerssa, Kassam 2019: 145-147). The ritual progressively attracted larger number of Oromo pilgrims, independently of their Muslim or Christian faith, including students and educated people from the urban centres, up to several million per year[7]. The *Irrechaa* has thus acquired the *de facto* role of national re-foundation festival of the Oromo nation.

7   While the ritual and symbolic manifestations have been tolerated, direct political opposition in public demonstrations was for many years violently confronted by the federal government. The repression was extremely harsh in terms of killings, mass detention, torture, and mass expulsion from schools and universities[8]. The exercise of unnecessary State violence was facilitated by the application of counter-terrorism law against peaceful protesters and by the establishment in 2016 of the state of emergency. Solidarity with the *Qeerroo* grew among the public; the movement's demand for democracy and respect for human and constitutional rights was popularised. The protest expanded to other Regional States and a shutdown strike in Oromia in March 2018 showed the capacity of the protest to paralyse the economy of the country. The Oromo Peoples Democratic Organization (OPDO), the Oromo component of the EPRDF, took a stand in opposition to the rest of the ruling coalition party. Lemma Megersa, President of the Oromia Regional State, and his Deputy Abiy Ahmed exercised the constitutional power assigned to the Regional States: they opposed the land policy and the security measures that were highly unpopular in the Oromia Regional State. In

public speeches they rehabilitated the *Qeerroo* movement, presenting their demands as legitimate and rejecting the federal rhetoric that was depicting them as terrorists. It is only at that point that the EPRDF — faced with the Syria and Somali-like scenario of a fully delegitimised military government challenged by a highly committed opposition in a country that could also institutionally break along regional lines — engaged in a process of internal renewal. At the 'crossroads' for democratisation or disintegration, in 2018 the Ethiopian government seemed to have chosen the first option. For the first time a member of the OPDO was appointed Chairman of the EPRDF and, soon thereafter, Prime Minister of the Ethiopian Federation. Abiy Ahmed immediately launched a programme of political reform. Political prisoners were released and diaspora opposition was re-admitted in the country. He committed to open up to free and fair elections. To mark discontinuity, the OPDO changed its name to Oromo Democratic Party (ODP). Ethiopia finally accepted the peace agreement that was internationally negotiated with Eritrea after the 1998-2000 war. In October 2018 Sahle-Work Zewde was appointed President of the Federation, currently the only female Head of State in Africa. In the academic field, in July 2019 for the first time the Oromo Studies Association (OSA) — the large diaspora-based academic association that has over the last decades been providing the main forum for Oromo studies — could organize its annual international conference in Ethiopia[9].

2. Critics to growth-based international development

8   International development originated after the Second World War as an attempt to promote economic growth in countries under the American and Western sphere of influence. It mainly consisted in technological and know-how transfer from the developed to the developing countries, and infrastructural development. Economic growth was the explicit objective, to be achieved by market-led mechanisms and to be measured in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This approach is clearly based on economic theory. It can be seen in continuity with the sociological theory and practice of modernization, implying deep transformation in all societal sectors. In the African context modernization is normally considered to be the outcome of colonialism, with the passage from traditional society to modern Statehood. With the accomplishment of de-colonization this social transformation was considered to be achieved, and economic theory replaced sociology as reference for policy.

9   Economic growth is still considered a central objective of international development, but serious critics to the early practices soon emerged. The first line of critics grew within economics. The early phases were dominated by Keynesian economics, implying the leading regulatory role by the State in laying the conditions for economic growth and providing services to the population, with large numbers of public employees. The negative side effects included massive debt crisis in many countries, concentration of power in central bureaucracies, shift towards the single-party system, patrimonialism[10], lack of accountability, corruption, and, especially, shortcomings in the main development objectives, including failed achievement of economic growth and failure of many 'technology transfer' projects. In the Eighties the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) — the main international organisations in charge of international development — developed a reform package for countries affected by the debt crisis, known as *Washington Consensus.* It was based on neo-liberal

thinking, with a swing from state-led economy to policies based on the benefits of the international market. It supported the adoption of measures of liberalization and deregulation to promote inflow of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and to stimulate export (Bellù 2011: 25-31; Gore 2000). The *Washington Consensus* package also demanded macroeconomic stability by addressing fiscal deficit. Plans to reduce national debt were imposed as conditionality to granting of further international loans. This implied the disengagement of the State as provider of services, with negative impacts on employment, poverty and marginality. From the Nineties the WB and IMF addressed this line of critics by promoting the adoption of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) at country level. The PRSPs introduced attention for microeconomics alongside macroeconomics (World Bank 2001).

10 From the Eighties conditionality on international loans was also applied on the base of 'good governance', considered a pre-condition for success of the growth measures. The aim was to control corruption, to promote democratization and administrative decentralization, accountability and responsivity of State institutions to citizens. Today the World Governance Index provides a unified framework to measure good governance at country level.

2.1 The beneficiaries' 'invisibility'

11 I have so far outlined the main features of development as practiced based on the central notion of economic growth. From the ethical side, the assumption is that everybody would anyhow benefit of it by the trickle-down effect, as theorized by Rostow in his model of the stage of economic growth and development (1960). The public is induced to believe that poverty will be eradicated, whereas evidence shows that under this approach minorities and marginal groups — those who do not have access to credit, knowledge, information and strong social networks — tend to remain excluded from the benefits. In many cases, they are directly impacted by specific intervention through dynamics that have sometimes been called the 'collateral' or 'unforeseen' effects of development (Malighetti 2005; Zanotelli, Lenzi Grillini, 2008: 17; Olivier de Sardan 2015: 10). The disadvantaged categories are 'invisible' in the documentation inherent both specific projects and policy, and they are thus excluded from any consideration. They are only identified through research initiatives and channels of political expressions that are external to the planned development process. In the Ethiopian context they are the Ethiopian farmers displaced from their lands under the policy of land investment, urbanization and industrialization, or the peoples of the lower Omo Valley whose agropastoral livelihoods have probably been destroyed by the construction of the Gibe 3 dam (Carr 2017; Turton 2018). As recalled by David Turton in relation to the social impacts of the Gibe 3 dam, Michael Cernea, an expert of the World Bank, has raised international attention on the existence of development-displaced persons, estimated in 15 million people every year globally (Cernea 2008: 20). This estimation doesn't include those who are not physically displaced but who lost access to land and resources (Turton 2018).

2.2 The emergence of alternative development paradigms

12 The negative impacts of growth-oriented development on the disadvantaged communities and on the environment produced several waves of critics, leading to a

number of parallel outcomes. On the one hand, some scholars came to the conclusion that the concept of development should altogether be rejected, as implied in alternative propositions such as theories of post-development, degrowth and decolonization. Such theories include heterogeneous elements, being partly rooted in the vison and experiences of social and environmental movements, self-help organizations and indigenous peoples, and partly derived from highly elaborated analyses of development discourse and practice, as in the post-development studies (Escobar 1995; Ferguson 1994; Malighetti 2005).

13   One the other of hand critics and activity by civil society, practitioners, advocates, movements, think tanks and scholars opened up institutional space, a process facilitated by the consultative mechanisms established by the organizations of the UN system and other international organizations (Tommasoli 2013: 215-217). This is not a linear and coherent process of change, but rather the accommodation of multiple visions and considerations that run hands-to-hands with the development of human rights under international law. New paradigms of development emerged, each being rooted in different disciplinary domains and implying different objectives, to be achieved by different methodological approaches and measured by different sets of indicators (Colajanni 2018). Based on an earlier classification (Zanotelli, Lenzi Grillini 2008: 15-16), Bassi has suggested to reduce the high articulation of the development approaches to four main paradigms, each supported by different organisations and interest groups, and financially competing with one another in the international arena: a) economic growth; b) social equity; c) environmental sustainability, and d) approaches whereby beneficiaries take an active role (Bassi 2018).

Table 1. Schematic representation of the main paradigms of development (based on Bassi 2018)

DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM	MAIN DISCIPLINARY DOMAIN	MAIN INDICATORS
Economic growth	Macroeconomics *Later*: • microeconomics + political sciences	• GDP *Later*: • World Governance Index
Social equity	• Sociology • Amartya Sen's theories	• Human Development Index
Environmental sustainability	• Environmental sciences	• Biodiversity, pollution and climate indicators
Beneficiaries' active role	• Development studies • Applied, engaged and militant Anthropology • Engaged and militant sociology	• Emic and holistic indicators on conditions of life of specific communities or social groups

14   The social equity paradigm marks the beginning of consideration for problems of social exclusion and marginality. Two phases can be identified. The *basic needs* approach consists in providing minimum conditions of life to any individual, independently of economic growth (Streeten 1981). The *human development* approach is instead rooted in various theoretical propositions by Amartya Sen (Fukuda-Parr 2003). It consists in assuring the positive capacity of individuals to act in society. Development should therefore address those societal conditions that produce individual's deprivation of entitlements and categorical inequalities, with special attention to the institutional

factors related to health, education, security and human rights. UNDP has developed the Human Development Index to measure the progress achieved by States in the relevant sectors.

15 The environmental paradigm has a different genesis. It did not emerged from critics within the field of international development, but from public concern about the sustainable use of the world's resources, reinforced by scientific evidence provided within the environmental and life sciences. Specific binding treaties have internationally been adopted and new international organizations have been established, such as the Secretariat of the Convention on Biodiversity (UNCBD), the Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the United Nation Environmental Programme (UNEP), a dedicated UN agency in charge of promoting environmental programs. International development had to come to terms with this paradigm, at least at the rhetorical level, as shown by the frequent use of oxymoron to indicate approaches that keep it into account, such as in 'sustainable development', 'green economy' and 'banking nature' (Demaria, Kothari 2017: 3-5; Bassi 2018).

16 The paradigm based on the beneficiaries' active role has it focus on the methods and the procedures to implement development. It reverses the fundamental failure of the growth paradigm to qualify the beneficiaries. Under this new paradigm, specific disadvantaged peoples, local communities or social groups are explicitly acknowledged as beneficiaries of the development initiative. They are thus changed from an imagined, invisible community to actors that take direct role in designing, implementing and assessing development. 'Participatory development' is one of the known approaches under this paradigm. It has its origin in the consequence of the *Washington Consensus*, since the latter implied the transfer of the responsibility for provision of key services from the government to NGOs and CSOs (Mohan, Stokke 2000: 247-8). Due to their proximity to local communities, NGOs and CSOs introduced new methodological approaches. In general, they introduced the principle that the identification of the development activities should be based on the community's needs and priorities. But there are many graduations in the degree of participation. According to Participatory Rural Appraisal and the correlated methods that have been popularized by Robert Chambers, facilitators apply specific techniques to rapidly extract information from the community for planning. Participatory Action Research instead engages researchers with the community on themes relevant to the latter; the generated knowledge is communicated back to the community to enable them to independently plan and monitor the development initiative (Sabelli 1994). To address structural problems, advocacy and empowerment have been applied to enable disadvantaged communities to influence policy outcomes and decision making.

17 Another cluster of approaches and techniques came out of the harsh experience that many indigenous peoples had to face with State policy and development, problems that have pushed some anthropologists to use the notion of 'ethnocide', originally formulated as a way to indicate a form of cultural genocide (Jaulin 1970; Kuper 1981: 30-33). Ethnocide is not a legal category, but rather a way to indicate various processes, including in development, by which a people is deprived of access to the resources they need for their livelihoods, up to endanger their survival as an identity group (Palmer 1992). Decades of national and international political engagement by the indigenous movement led in 1989 to the adoption of the *Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention* (ILO

169) and in 2007 the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP). The rights recognised under these instruments are in many ways revolutionary, since they define the centrality in decision making of a group with its own collective values. This is especially evident from elements such as the procedure of the Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), and the recognition of collective territorial rights, customary law and customary institutions. The corresponding development approach was labelled 'ethno-development' by Rodolfo Stavenhagen (1986). Self-determination in development is one of the leading principles of this approach, consisting in fixing procedural rights by which the disadvantaged communities are given the possibility to plan their own development and to evaluate the development projects that can affect their life, their values and the environment from which they depend upon.

18   Such strong rights were only recognised to Indigenous Peoples. A long debate took place about which communities can be recognized as such, especially in the African context (Bassi 2017). Some important international organisations have extended the application of the FPIC to communities that are not internationally recognized as indigenous. For instance the International Fund for African Development (IFAD) requires all actors funded by IFAD to apply the FPIC in the implementation of all projects that are likely to affect land access and/or use rights of communities (IFAD 2015). IFAD has also adopted a strong pluralistic land tenure policy by which customary, informal and collective tenure of small-holding farmers must seriously be taken into account (IFAD 2008; IFAD 2014). More recently, IFAD has developed specific guidelines to enable experts and organisations to apply the same principles in the context of pastoral development (IFAD 2018).

19   The 2008 global rush for investment in industrial agriculture was backed by the narrative of economic growth and modernization. In line with international policy aimed at promoting FDI, it started with full support by the global financial organisations. However, it soon became clear that it was also leading to massive dispossession of small-holding farmers. It accordingly received full attention by advocacy organisations, think thanks and the UN organisations in charge of monitoring the right to food (Hall *et al.* 2015; De Schutter 2009; Cotula *et al.* 2009). The organised action by associations of farmers and their international supporters led in 2018 to the adoption by the UN General Assembly of the *Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Area*s. This instrument does not go as far as to recognize the FPIC, but it anyway establishes strong processes of consultation with the farmers, protects customary rights and collective resource tenure, recognizes local values and knowledge and establishes the principle of food sovereignty. It is clearly designed on the model of indigenous rights in establishing a degree of self-determination for the possibility of the peasants to influence policy and decision making, and to self-define their preferred food and agriculture systems.

20   Parallel to the growing role given to local and indigenous community is the attention for indigenous and local knowledge in relation to agriculture, health, environmental protection and other fields (Nakashima 2010; Sillitoe 1998). Local and indigenous knowledge is often merely considered for its technical content, despite its broader ontological and epistemological implications related to specific worldviews and articulations of values (Sillitoe *et al.* 2002; Kassam 2002; Buffavand 2016; Megerssa, Kassam 2019: 260-283).

3. Human rights as ethical dimension of international development

21   The discussion on the fourth paradigm highlights the correlation between internationally agreed human rights and international development. As noted by Rodolfo Stavenhagen

> most human needs have been framed in modern times as legitimate rights to which citizens can aspire, and which society at large has an obligation to respect and provide for. Johan Galtung has suggested that most of the human rights that appear in international legal documents (the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights, and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights) respond in fact to some basic human need (Galtung 1994) (Stavenhagen 2003: 7).

22   International development has thus increasingly been considered the instrument to address human needs. This trend is especially evident from the Sixties onwards, with the adoption of binding and non-binding legal instruments that on the whole are generally indicated as second and third generation human rights. The former include the right to development and gender issues, while the latter are more clearly related to collective rights by minorities, with explicit recognition of rights of collective access to natural resources in connection to both livelihoods and identity, customary institutions and law, recognition and protection of local and indigenous knowledge, and procedural rights in development processes, that are required to assure the protection of the mentioned rights.

23   Human rights can thus be regarded as the agreed consensus among States about what should be achieved as part of the global efforts to assure minimum conditions of life to all people. As such, they provide the ethical dimension of international cooperation for development (Bassi 2018).

24   With the adoption of the *Millennium Declaration* by the UN General Assembly in 2000, and the definition of the *Millennium Development Goals,* recently re-formulated into the *Sustainable Development Goals,* international cooperation for development has more explicitly been expressed in the form of international treaty. These latest initiatives respond to the need to introduce coherence in a field that over time had become highly fragmented and heterogeneous, with diverse and competing visions, objectives, methodologies, outcomes and organizations — including within the UN system — supporting one or the other approach.

25   One of the key consequences of linking development to human rights is that all international actors — especially the various agencies of the UN system — have the obligation to respect all human rights, thus producing hybridization across paradigms (Bassi 2018). By this process the World Bank and other international organizations that finance public and private investment were forced to adopt operational guidelines that keep procedural rights into account, governments had to develop legislation and policy in line with third generation human rights — often incorporated in legislation on environmental and social impact assessments — and corporations and other private investors may voluntarily conform to best practices under the heading of responsible business.

4. Defining the relativistic attitude in development

26   'Relativism' is a general label applied to a variety of philosophical positions about the existence and the nature of universal truths. It is generally agreed that resurgence and explicit discussion of relativism is the result of the debates that stemmed out of the colonial western encounter with other cultures, values and world-views and of the theories and speculations generated by the modern discipline dedicated to their study. Relativistic positions that are directly derived from anthropology are normally qualified under the denomination of 'cultural relativism', which is internally variously classified based on different criteria, some crosscutting philosophical studies, others reflecting the different prevalent paradigms in anthropology. In this last respect it might be useful to recall Sillitoe's three long-term epoch-defining 'phases' of anthropology. Each is characterised by a different modality of interaction between the researcher and the studied actors. The second half of the nineteenth century was the 'armchair-observer' phase. "There was no firsthand interaction": anthropologists "relied on reports and correspondence with colonials, missionaries and travellers, together with published and archival records". In the twentieth century the 'informant phase' started: anthropologists engaged in long term field research "and, so far as possible, joined in peoples' lives to further our understanding of humanity". Today we have entered the 'collaborator' phase, whereas the natives are fully involved in the research initiative, "seeing outsider anthropologists as collaborators in jointly defining and tackling problems" (Sillitoe 2018: 31-32).

27   The armchairs phase was dominated by the evolutionary model; framed as it was into the notion of 'progress', it assumed the moral superiority of western culture. In sociology, political science and, later, development studies this was mainly expressed by theory of modernity. This is still an ethnocentric theory (Sumner 1908), but the armchair-observers, by formulating the anthropological notion of culture, introduced 'cultural determinism', the idea that social and psychological characteristics of specific groups are produced by cultural rather than racial differences. This statement implies what Spiro qualifies as 'descriptive relativism', the idea that "the variability in social and psychological characteristics across human groups is relative to — depends on — cultural variability" (Spiro 1986: 256). To properly speak about 'normative' cultural relativism — an intellectual position normally opposed to both ethnocentrism and cultural universalism — anthropology had to enter into Sillitoe's second anthropological phase, when direct interaction between the researchers and the natives produced new understandings of the internal logics of the cultural and social manifestations of specific human groups. This passage is normally attributed to Boas and his American anthropological school, but it also characterised the British structural-functionalism. Boas took a strong stand against all ethnocentric positions and against any assumption of superiority of western culture and thinking. By stressing the complexity of kinship systems, arts and languages of native peoples he rejected evolutionary theories and the notion of progress. Within normative relativism Spiro distinguishes between a 'cognitive' and a 'moral' component. The former has to do with the way to perceive reality and the field of knowledge: "the truth claims of descriptive propositions are relative to the cognitive standards of the cultures in which they are embedded" (Spiro 1986: 260). This component especially developed during the nineteenth century with linguistic and cognitive anthropology, ethno-science and

studies of symbolism. It is directly relevant to development issues, since the experience and perception of environmental and social reality directly inform human behaviour and response. In its extreme version, cognitive relativism qualifies science as a form of ethno-science. Since we are here dealing with relativism applied to the level of production of knowledge, Spiro speaks about 'epistemological' relativism. In anthropology it is associated to Geertz' hermeneutical approach and to post-modern anthropology, a school that rejected the possibility to engage in cross-cultural speculation or in the search for general theories of culture (Spiro 1986). It might be noted that by this epistemological formulation economics and, with it, the growth-based development paradigm are disqualified as universal science whose assumptions have the authoritativeness to regulate all human groups. Also, when 'natives' are fully involved in the research phase, as implied in Sillitoe's third phase, they are engaged at the level of production knowledge and have the possibility to bring entirely alternative visions to global attention. Indeed, as mentioned, there are today formulations that are entirely alternative to the growth-based paradigm (Groenfeldt 2013), but I would suggest that they have not yet fully entered into the practice of international development due to the fundamental nature of the latter: in order to activate its implementing mechanisms a degree of trans-cultural understandings is required. As well illustrated by debates related to the indigenous 'ontological turn' in Latin America, they rather still belong to the realm of politics (Mancuso 2018: 181-247).

28   Many authors equate cultural to moral relativism *tout court*, often also generically addressed as 'ethical' relativism. This is the form that prevailed in Boas' writings and that was later explicitly formulated by members of the cultural school of anthropology he founded in USA (Benedict 1934; Herskovits 1948). Moral cultural relativism has to do with evaluative judgments of right and wrong: "the claims of ethical propositions are relative to the moral standards of the cultures in which they are embedded" (Spiro 1986: 260). Accordingly, there are no universal criteria of evaluation and "any judgment on behaviour patterns, cognition, emotions and the like of different social groups [...] must be relative to the variable standards of the cultures that produce them" (Spiro 1986: 261). This assumption underlies Boas' claim for full tolerance towards non-Western cultures. However, since it directly deals with what is ethically acceptable, it also challenges the foundation of international human rights, their assumed universality and the claim for trans-cultural applicability. This problem immediately came up in 1947, when UNESCO called for contributions to the formulation of the *Universal Declaration on Human Rights*. The American Anthropological Association (AAA) approved and delivered the *Statement on Human Rights* (Executive Board 1947). This document was probably mainly authored by Melville Herskovits, one of the most prominent Boasian relativists, and it is considered a sort of manifesto on moral relativism (Engle 2001: 539). It was highly critical towards the centrality of individual rights in the draft Declaration and its formulation based on Western values:

> How can the pro-posed Declaration be applicable to all human beings, and not be a statement of rights conceived only in terms of the values prevalent in the countries of Western Europe and America? (Executive Board 1947: 539).
> The individual realizes his personality through his culture, hence respect for individual differences entails a respect for cultural differences. There can be no individual freedom, that is, when the group with which the individual identifies himself is not free. There can be no full development of the individual personality as long as the individual is told, by men who have the power to enforce their

commands, that the way of life of his group is inferior to that of those who wield the power (Executive Board 1947: 541).

29   As outlined by Engle, such position entails two elements, tolerance towards cultural difference, and preference for collective over individual rights (Engle 2001: 539-541). Not only these claims were not incorporated into the final version of the UN *Universal Declaration on Human Rights*, but the Statement itself came under attack both outside and within anthropology, on the ground that some of its content might be taken to imply acceptance of evident abuse of individual rights in name of a specific group's different value system (Engle 2001: 542-547). To get out of the 'embarrassment', and to overcome the uneasy position of those anthropologists who were also engaging as human rights activists, in 1999 the AAA delivered a second *Statement on Human Rights.* This version establishes the compatibility of universalism with sub-national collective rights by recalling the "universality of the human capacity for culture". It fully endorses the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the associated implementing international legislation, but it also expands

the definition of human rights to include areas not necessarily addressed by international law. These areas include collective as well as individual rights, cultural, social, and economic development, and a clean and safe environment (American Antropological Association 1999).

30   As noted by Engle, careful readings of the two AAA statements on human rights show more continuity of what is usually assumed, since the 1974 Statement was emphasising an aspect that was not address in the UN Declaration, but it never denied the need of respect for individual rights. Similarly, both the Boasian and structural-functionalist schools — commonly associated to normative relativism — by adopting the comparative approach on cultural issues did not reject the possibility to build a unitary discourse and to formulate generalisation on culture. With different emphasis, they shared a basic idea on the universality of human experience and the assumption of "psychic unity of mankind", by which every culture is a variant of a universal culture pattern (Spiro 1986: 261, 264; Hatch 1997). Today, many anthropologists tend to accept the compatibility of a required relativist attitude with universal statements (Hatch 1997; Gellner 1982; Dundes Renteln 1988). Specific articulations of culture, values and norms tend to be considered in the context of larger cultural and normative domains, theoretically framed in the legal and political concepts of pluralism (Herskovits 1973) or multiculturalism.

31   Just as anthropologists refined their position on relativism, international law progressively adopted relativistic legal instruments (table 4). With the adoption of second and, especially, third generation human rights, international law incorporated the principles expressed in 1947 AAA Statement and the collective and cultural rights that have been made explicit in the 1999 AAA Statement. This shift in international law did not probably take place because of anthropological influence, but, similarly to the passage from Sillitoes' first to second anthropological phases, because of the growing awareness about the shortcomings of the individualistic/universalistic approach to human rights, and direct engagement and interaction of organisations of indigenous peoples and local communities in the international, regional and national arenas. Thus, nearly a century after the 'colonial' anthropologists advocated for consideration of African traditional land tenure (Malinowski 1929) and other anthropologists of the same British school engaged in spelling out the customary institutions and customary

law of specific human groups, the UN adopted the declarations on indigenous peoples and peasants that changed what is remaining of those elements into human rights.

32   While the issue of compatibility of relativism with international human rights has received relevant scholarly attention (Donnelly 1984; Dundes Renteln 1990; Donnelly 2007: 282), the same cannot be said about the 'relativistic attitude' in international development. This is rather surprising, considering the discussed interdependency of development with human rights and the dualism between universalism and particularism that characterises current practices of development. As recalled by David Mosse, today international development

> has a commitment both to the principle of difference and to similarity (Corbridge 2007, p. 179). Its narrative of progress implies that difference is a deficit to be overcome, whereas its narrative of emancipation implies that difference is sovereign self-determination and thus present equality (Rottenburg 2009) (Mosse 2013: 228).

33   By 'relativistic attitude' in development I am not suggesting the existence of a specific and coherent set of objective, methods and indicators to implement planned development. Rather all four paradigms have, in line with changes in human rights and at different degrees, increasingly been influenced by the relativistic attitude (Table 2). By relativistic attitude I mean giving consideration to the relevance of specific articulations of culture, formal or informal norms and local conditions, in ways that impact the implementation of development (Bassi 2018: 81).

Table 2. Development approaches classified by their relativistic attitude (adapted from Bassi 2018: 81-82)

CUTURAL UNIVERSALISM Context and culture differences are seen as irrelevant to the development process	DESCRIPTIVE (WEAK) RELATIVISM Context and culture differences are considered key factors of development planning, with cross-cultural approach	NORMATIVE RELATIVISM Context and culture differences determine the development agenda
ECONOMIC GROWTH PARADIGM • Economic growth • Technology transfer • Infrastructural development • Developmentalism • Good governance • Micro-credit		
SOCIAL EQUALITY PARADIGM		
• Basic needs	• Human development (recognition of categorical inequalities) • Gender issues	
ENVIRONMENTAL PARADIGM		
• Biodiversity conservation: Protected areas • Sustainable development based on various forms of commoditization of nature • Promotion of green economy	• Biodiversity conservation: collaborative governance in protected areas • Sustainable development; agricultural development in favour of small-holders, with various forms of land conservation, organic farming and environmental labelling	• Biodiversity conservation: ICCAs-Territories of life • Sustainable development: peasants and pastoralists centred agricultural development, with recognition of common holding, customary tenure, mobility...
BENFECIARIES' ACTIVE ROLE PARADIGM		
	• Participatory development	• Ethno-development and other approaches based on self-determination in development • Self-reliance • Endogenous development • Communitarianism

34   The economic growth paradigm is obviously rooted in a fully universalistic vision (Column 1 in table 2). Relativism emerged in development when issues of social equity were considered (column 2 in table 2). Addressing inequalities, in fact, means to

analytically identify social boundaries for designing affirmative action and other corrective measures. In the human development approach difference is given consideration for action that is anyhow conceived and designed from the outside, by the planners, based on a universally agreed set of objectives. This is only a descriptive, or weak, form of relativism, not necessarily implying beneficiaries' differential cultural patterns. The relativistic attitude is here recalled in a mere analogical sense, by giving relevance to the differential way specific groups experience mainstream society, which may eventually lead to differential adaptive behavioural patterns[11]. It is only with the fourth paradigm, when the beneficiaries were delegated some of the decisional power that normative relativism came to the fore. With this stronger form of relativism, cultural specificity influences or dictates the development agenda (Column 3 in table 2).

35   Table 3 highlights how the methodological approaches and attention for different types of knowledge reflect the relativistic attitude in development.

36   Table 4 shows the direct correlation between the different types of human rights instruments and the various approaches to development. It highlights how the relativistic attitude is the direct outcome of second and third generation human rights, backing descriptive and normative relativism respectively.

Table 3. Types of knowledge, methods and techniques in relation to the relativistic attitude in development (adapted from Bassi 2018: 81-82)

CUTURAL UNIVERSALISM Context and culture differences are seen as irrelevant to the development process	DESCRIPTIVE (WEAK) RELATIVISM Context and culture differences are considered key factors of development planning, with cross-cultural approach	NORMATIVE RELATIVISM Context and culture differences determine the development agenda
ECONOMIC GROWTH PARADIGM		
SOCIAL EQUALITY PARADIGM		
ENVIRONMENTAL PARADIGM		
	BENFECIARIES' ACTIVE ROLE PARADIGM	
• Scientific and technical knowledge • Top-down approaches • Positivist methodologies	• PRA, RRA and correlated participatory techniques • Participatory action-research • Bottom-up approaches • Empowerment and advocacy • Environmental and social impact assessments	• Local and indigenous knowledge • Agro-ecological approach • FPIC and other strong procedural provisions • Bio-cultural protocols • Participatory action research and collaborative research • Empowerment and advocacy • Conscientisation

Table 4. Some selected human rights instruments backing the relativistic attitude in development (adapted from Bassi 2018: 83-84)

CUTURAL UNIVERSALISM Context and culture differences are seen as irrelevant to the development process	DESCRIPTIVE (WEAK) RELATIVISM Context and culture differences are considered key factors of development planning, with cross-cultural approach	NORMATIVE RELATIVISM Context and culture differences determine the development agenda
FIRST GENERATION HUMAN RIGHTS • Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) • International covenants on civil and political rights (1966)		
ECONOMIC GROWTH PARADIGM: Good governance component	*Respect for first generation human rights is considered a precondition for enforcement of second and third generation human rights*	
SECOND GENERATION HUMAN RIGHTS • International Covenants Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) • Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979)		
SOCIAL EQUALITY PARADIGM: Basic needs	SOCIAL EQUALITY PARADIGM: • Human development (recognition of categorical inequalities) • Gender issues	*Third generation human rights were developed to assure, under specific constraints, implementation of second generation human rights*
THIRD GENERATION HUMAN RIGHTS • International covenants and declarations on tribal and indigenous peoples (ILO 169, 1989; UNDRIP, 2007) • Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005) • United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (2018) • Procedural rights in development • Policy Framework for Pastoralism in Africa (2010)		
The economic growth paradigm has incorporated procedural rights either in the form of binding social and environmental assessments or as voluntary guidelines and responsible business	BENFECIARIES' ACTIVE ROLE PARADIGM: • Participatory rural development	BENFECIARIES' ACTIVE ROLE PARADIGM: • Ethno-development and other approaches based on self-determination in development • Self-reliance • Endogenous development • Communitarianism • Pastoral development (IFAD approach)
MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT DECLARATION (MILLENNIUM GOALS) (2000) *Economic growth + basic needs + women's equality*		
MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT DECLARATION (SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS) (2015) *The relativistic approach is possible in relation to some of the goals*		

5. The developmental phase of the Ethiopian State

37   In considering the post-socialist Ethiopian experience we are moving from the international to the national field, hence into a context marked by different institutional settings. Yet, the considerations so far made about growth-based development and relativism seem highly relevant. It is in fact clear that political history of Ethiopia led to the adoption of a constitution that in many ways is aligned with the requirements of the relativistic approach to development. I am here recalling some of them:

a. adoption of multi-party liberal democracy, with explicit reference to the fundamental political rights;

b. substantial provisions about human rights protected under international law, including the possibility to open cases at national level based on violation of international treaties to which Ethiopia is a party but that are not yet adopted in national legislation (Ziegler 2005: 11; McDougall 2007: 7, 18, 27);

c. specific protections for the land rights of farmers and pastoralists;

d. introduction of multi-national federalism and self-determination in line with the diversity of 'nations, nationalities and peoples' in the country; these groups are defined by communality of culture, language and identity; self-determination refers to both political sovereignty through the definition of the administrative spaces, and to development through administrative devolution of decisional capacity in planning and policy.

38   As mentioned, in the course of the recent history the FDRE Constitution was not really implemented, especially concerning the elements marked a) to c) above. The conditions of serious abuse of both fundamental political rights and minority rights were addressed by several scholars (Tronvoll 2008) and human rights organisations. They have been reported in several official UN reports (Box 1).

39   In an open access article Bassi (2014) specifically addressed the issue of minority rights in Ethiopia. He challenged the opinion that occurrence of ethnic clashes along administrative borders — a problem that is still affecting Ethiopian politics — failed democratisation and abuse of minority rights are inherently linked to the multinational federal constitutional model (Abbink 2006, 2009). This vision is especially critical about the assumption that Regional States and lower level administrative spaces should be designed based on the national or ethnic identity of the residents, a solution that gained to the FDRE Constitution the derogative attribution of 'ethnic federalism' (Turton 2006; Cohen 1995). This brought about the idea of the exclusive association of a territory with a specific linguistic group (Clapham 2002; Abbink 2006; Hagmann, Mulugeta 2008). Since linguistic communities were territorially intermixed both in towns and along the area of contact between major 'nationalities'. In the process of designing the new administrative spaces and demarcating their borders ethnic conflict emerged in the form of inter-ethnic violence, State repression, and ethnic cleansing (Kefale 2004; Fiseha 2007: ch. 5; Tache, Oba 2009; Bassi 2010)[12]. Bassi suggested that in local actors' perspective absolute power by the ruling party coalition and failed implementation of measures of protection of minorities within each administrative space are the elements that made the struggle for obtaining one's own 'ethnically' connoted political space or being included in it a crucially motivating factor for individuals and their ethnic political entrepreneurs. He thus rejected the critics towards the adopted constitutional models, on the ground that the problem rather lays in failed implementation of complementary key components of the FDRE Constitution, especially respect for fundamental political and minority rights (Bassi 2014: 47, 68).

40   The abuse of political and minority rights run parallel to heavy modernization and accelerated growth policy, achieved with strong international financial support and by mobilizing the country's human resources. The identified priorities under the *Growth and Transformation Plan I* (2010/11-2014/15) and *II* (2015/16-2019/20) were industrialised agriculture, hydroelectric development, infrastructure, education and promoting private investments in industry and construction. This involved strong and direct intervention by the State, with large numbers of governmental employees. This policy led to outstanding results in terms of GDP, with economic growth above 10% protracted for more than 10 years.

41   We can immediately recognize the elements of the Keynesian phase in international development, including the side effect of establishing a *the facto* one-party system, other problems in the political field, and implications in terms of growing public debt. There are also elements of the neo-liberal phase, with legislation capable of attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), more evident in industry and international land investments. The country also adopted the World Bank-supported Poverty Reduction Strategy. However, what we haven't seen — at least until the 2018 political turning point — is an equal attention for the theme of 'good governance', the element that in contemporary international thinking is considered the necessary complement of economic growth policies.

42   Curtailed democracy and economic growth find mutual consideration in theory related to the 'developmental State'. Based on literature review, Bassi singled out the Leninist and Stalinist ideological components and the influence of the Chinese experience on Revolutionary Democracy, the working ideology of the ruling coalition that, due to its Marxist background, is incompatible with multi-party elections (Bassi 2044: 53-59). Tefera Negash Gebregziabher has identified specific ideological turning points in the ruling party's discourse and rhetoric. When the TPLF took over the central State power, it met the expectations of western diplomacy by announcing the transaction from Marxism-Leninism to Revolutionary Democracy. The 2001 TPLF' internal crisis marks the passage to developmental State rhetoric, fully endorsed after the 2015 elections (Gebregziabher 2019: 474-479). In essence, the Developmental State is based on achieving economic growth through rationally planned mobilisation of financial and human resources, by initiative of the modernising political elite. The international market is a strategic output, but, differently from neo-liberalism, the State has a key role to play. Several variants of the Developmental State have been identified. Some are compatible with multi-party democracy, while in some other cases it proved to be efficient in terms of growth results even in absence of democratic practises (Fiseha 2014). Although the Ethiopian politicians made explicit reference to the democratic developmental model of South Korea and Taiwan (Gebresenbet 2014: 66), praxis and ideological continuity positions the Ethiopian case into the second group (Fiseha 2014). Academic discourse has correlated Ethiopian developmentalism to the 'securitisation of development' that took place in highly authoritarian African States, such as Ethiopia and Rwanda (Fisher, Anderson 2015; Goodfellow 2017). In Ethiopia poverty has been represented by the ruling party as an "existential threat", to be challenged through growth-based development, "a means to ensuring the continued survival of the Ethiopian state and its people" (Gebresenbet 2014: 68). This rhetoric justified the 'securitisation of development', including measures of suppression of free-press and legislation against civil society (Gebresenbet 2014: 69-71).

BOX 1. Official United Nations reports on serious minority rights abuses in Ethiopia, delivered between 2006 and 2010

CRC. "Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties under Article 44 of the Convention. Concluding Observations: Ethiopia", United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. Forty-third session, CRC/C/ETH/CO/3, 1 November 2006.

McDougall, G. "Implementation of the General Assembly Resolution 60/251 of March 2006 entitled 'Human Rights Council'. Report of the independent expert on minority issues. Addendum. Mission to Ethiopia (28 November-12 December 2006)", United Nations Human Rights Council, Fourth Session, A/HRC/4/9/Add.3, 28 February 2007.

CERD. "Consideration of the Reports Submitted by States Parties under Article 9 of the Convention. Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Ethiopia", United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Seventieth Session, 19 February to 9 March 2007, CERD/C/ETH/CO/15, 20 June 2007.

CERD. "Consideration of the Reports Submitted by States Parties under Article 9 of the Convention. Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Ethiopia", United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Seventy-fifth session, 3-28 August 2009, CERD/C/ETH/CO/7-16, 7 September 2009.

CaT. "Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties under Article 19 of the Convention. Concluding Observations of the Committee against Torture. Advanced Unedited Version. Ethiopia", United Nations Committee against Torture, Forty-fifth session, CAT/C/ETH/CO/1, 1-19 November 2010.

43   Ethiopia thus adopted a developmental Sate model whereby economic growth compensates lack of democracy and abuse of human rights as source of political legitimacy (Fiseha 2014; Gebregziabher 2019: 477). Several scholars have also highlighted how centralism and top-down governance associated to the Ethiopian developmentalism are incompatible with the federal project and its decentralised administrative structure (Gebresenbet 2014: 69-71; Gebregziabher 2019: 477, 479).

44   Some of the consequences of the Ethiopian developmentalism include inequalities that are common in most developmental States, and others that are specific to conditions of human rights abuses: harsh conditions for salaried workers; uncontrolled environmental pollution with serious health impacts on local communities; lack of transparency in access to credit, with internal unbalance and unclear connections between party's members and investors; within the FDI approach and the inherent liberalisation of the economy, a large share was enjoyed by domestic investors with unequal distribution, while investment in land took place at different scale in the different Regional States; unbalanced implementation of Poverty Reduction measures in the different Regional States. As already recalled, the impacts have been particularly heavy on farmers, pastoralists and ethnic minorities, those whose livelihoods are more dependent upon customary and collective land rights (Bassi 2014), and who are acknowledged to be dependent upon the dedicated procedural protections established with third generation human rights.

45   Some specific governmental decisions can be singled out as especially detriment to minorities and marginal groups. In terms of governance, special mention goes *to Charities and Societies Proclamation No. 621/2009*, through which civil society's independent action in both monitoring human rights abuses and engaging in local processes for the protection of community's collective and procedural rights was curtailed (Bassi 2014).

46   In terms of land rights — in contradiction with comma 5 of art. 40 of the FDRE constitution — the FDRE *Rural Land Administration and Use Proclamation*, gazetted in 2005, together with other proclamations on private investment, paved the way to the great 'land grab' phase that affected large numbers of small-holding farmers in several Regional States of Ethiopia. More specifically, it contains provisions that allowed the private appropriation of very large extensions of land the resources customarily used by the Ethiopian agro-pastoralists, with no or insignificant compensation:

>   Preamble: "Whereas, it has become necessary to establish a conducive system of rural administration that promotes the conservation and management of natural resources, and encourage private investors in pastoral areas where there is tribe based communal land holding system.
>   Art 5 (3): Government being the owner of rural land, communal rural land holding can be changed to private holdings as may be necessary.

47   Such articles should be read in combination with two policy documents on pastoralism. The 2002 *Statement on Pastoral Development Policy* states that the main objective of pastoral development is "transforming the pastoral societies to agro-pastoral life complemented by urbanisation" (FDRE 2002a). The priority is on "voluntary sedentarisation along the banks of the major rivers" to promote the shift "from mobility to sedentary life, from rural to small pastoral towns and urbanization". In a complementary document, the "immense natural resources potential" of the rivers in

the pastoral area for irrigation and energy developments is acknowledged (FDRE 2002b).

48   The combined effect of these provisions can be seen in relation to the construction of the Gibe 3 dam along the Omo River. Dam construction has been considered one of the country's developmental sectors that best illustrates Ethiopian authoritarianism and securitisation of development (Fantini, Puddu 2016; Woldegebrael 2018). The Gibe 3 dam was constructed for hydroelectric development, but it also produced the effect of regulating the flow of water through the year. This prevents the occurrence of the regular flooding that was the basis of the livelihoods of several peoples downstream. These small ethnic groups speak diverse languages and used to practice a combination of flood retrieve cultivation —along the banks of the river, in oxbow lakes and in the large flats — pastoralism, fishing, hunting and bee husbandry. Regular flooding was crucial to producing biomass and maintaining the gallery forest in an area that ranges from semi-arid to arid, hence it was also crucial for wildlife, bees and livestock. Not only the suppression of regular flooding is likely to have produced serious impact on their livelihoods, their customary territory has also been directly leased out for large scale investment in irrigated agriculture and for sugar cane production (Kefale, Gebresenbet 2014). The social and environmental impact assessments were implemented in ways that did not satisfy international standards (Bassi 2014, Carr 2017, Turton 2018; Woldegebrael 2018). The productivity of flood retrieve cultivation was not considered. A field-survey implemented in 1992 by SNV (Netherlands Development Organisation) shows that, thanks to regular flooding, the Omo delta not only could sustain a dense population, but also produced a relevant grain surplus of sorghum to supply the local market in the food-deficit South Omo region (Bassi 1993: 28-30). An ethno-historical research implemented in the lower Omo Valley shows that the added environmental value of flooding over the centuries attracted waves of scattered environmental refugees that, by adopting common institutions, were able to build the collective identities that we see today (Bassi 2011). The environmental elements that sustained the possibility of these peoples to exist with their own differential languages, institutions and identity, and the informal economy that has been keeping them alive were not given consideration in the Gibe 3 development process, with the consequence that peoples like the Daasanach, the Kara, the Muguji/Kwegu, and, possibly, the Nyangatom, the Mursi, the Suri (Abbink 2018) and the Mela (Buffavand 2016) are likely to be today at the verge of ethnocide. This is indeed a paradigmatic case of 'invisibility' of people under the economic growth paradigm of development.

6. A hope for the future

49   The Ethiopian political history led the country to adopt its current multinational and democratic constitution. However, the coalition party that has been ruling since the 1991 transition has so far prevented the emergence of multi-party democracy. The government has adopted a highly centralistic, growth-based and top-down development approach that runs opposite to the decentralised decision making implied in the federal model. The serious abuses against minorities, farmers and pastoralists that have characterised the developmental phase confirm the general critics that have since long internationally been raised against to the growth-based development paradigm, rhetorically implying wellbeing for all, but in practice marginalizing certain

disadvantaged categories. The international experience led to the adoption of international human rights instruments that introduced corrective measures. They consist in refining the development objectives, methodologies and approaches, in this article schematised in terms of distinct and competing, but also mutually influencing, paradigms. I have tried to show how the emerging paradigms of development have progressively been informed by the relativistic attitude, meaning to make decision according to the experience, conditions and culture of specific human groups.

50   When, from 1991, Ethiopia embraced the liberal-democratic model it also decided to adopt a constitution assuring respect for its articulated cultural diversity. However, this model has been criticised for the supposedly divisive potential associated to the definition of ethnically connoted administrative spaces. In this respect the international shift of emphasis from external to internal self-determination seems highly relevant. Internal self-determination means to improve the capacity of minorities and identity groups to influence policy and decision making within existing States. It is, clearly, a direction opposite to the developmental ideology, policy and practice still prevailing in Ethiopia, but a possibility that under the current political winds is fully conceivable. If the potential for ethnic conflict has to be controlled, respect for minorities both at federal level — towards the 'nations and nationalities' of the country and other minorities, including farmers and pastoralists — and within each Federal State — towards the 'peoples', smaller linguistic groups and urban minorities within the regional State — seems a necessary step to take. The provisions for self-determination contained in the FDRE Constitution have already highly contributed to get out of the large scale and protracted armed struggle that has characterised the socialist phase. A further step into implementing all components of the FDRE Constitution is now required.

51   The FDRE Constitution contains reference to the possibility to apply international treaties to which Ethiopia is a party even in absence of their adoption into national law. It delegates the power to establish and implement policy to the Regional States. It already gives consideration to customary law, and nothing prevents the different Regional States and administrative subdivisions to better implement the constitutional provisions for self-determination by establish their own consultative mechanisms, in line with third generation human rights. The extraordinary heritage of customary institutions gives the country the potential to incorporate them in governance. The *gadaa* institution, with the role it played in inspiring the youths that brought the country to the current political change and by its potential to connect to each local rural community in the areas where it is operative, is a case in point.

52   Nearly three decades of Revolutionary Democracy and developmental policy have produced problems with farmers, pastoralists and ethnic minorities that cannot easily be solved. Third generation human rights and best practices in international development provide indications for redressing them. For instance, the UN *Declaration on the Rights of Peasants* is highly relevant for land grabbing and pollution of waters. In relation to pastoralism, the African Union has adopted the *Policy Framework for Pastoralism in Africa* (African Union 2010) that, along with the mentioned IFAD guidelines (2018), gives direction for changing current policy. The Gibe 3 dam is already constructed. Its environmental damage is irreversible, but much can still be done in terms of social impact. The following suggestion by David Turton is highly telling:

> [...] a targeted and well funded programme of compensation, livelihood reconstruction and benefit sharing should be put in place. Amongst other things, this should focus on ways of integrating irrigated agriculture with subsistence herding. Above all, and given the knowledge, experience and expertise of the affected people, they should be the ones to take the lead in arriving at the most effective solutions and in planning specific strategies, with the government and NGOs playing a supportive and facilitating role (Turton 2018: 61).

53   At this crucial crossroads, the Nobel Peace Prize is a symbol of the good direction of the current political change, but also an invitation to the international diplomacy to assist Ethiopia and to the country's politicians to continue along the democratization path, by respecting and implementing all human rights.

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NOTES

1. This article was first elaborated as a presentation for the 2019 Annual Conference of the Oromo Studies Association. I wish to express my gratitude to Aneesa Kassam for feed-back on the earlier version of this paper.
2. Since the 1990s, intellectuals and scholars from the Oromo diaspora have adopted the notion of 'domestic colonialism' to illustrate the condition of domination that peripheral peoples had to face during both the imperial and the socialist periods (Holcomb, Ibssa 1990; Jalata 1993).
3. Being the former Deputy Secretary of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), Leencoo Lata personally engaged in that process.
4. The TPLF maintained full control over the coalition by choosing candidates, managing the internal career, keeping internal security and imposing the working ideology. This lasted at least until the death of the Prime Minister of Ethiopia Meles Zenawi, in 2012.
5. I am here adopting the terminology introduced by Arjun Appadurai (1990: 299-300).
6. Gemetchu Megerssa and Aneesa Kassam have recently published the most comprehensive account of the Oromo philosophy and value system (2019).

7. This reconstruction is based on information and media news collected by the author during various visits to Ethiopia and, more specifically, during triangulated informal talks made in Bishoftu in November 2018.

8. Data on the movement and on its repression were provided during the last OSA conference and are likely to be further disseminated in the near future.

9. Despite being the largest native linguistic group in East Africa and probably the second largest in Africa, the Oromo and their history have highly been understudied due to political marginalization within Ethiopia. This motivated the establishment of OSA.

10. In Africa privileged patrimonial relations along ethnic lines have often fuelled sense of exclusion and ethno-national armed struggles.

11. Oscar Lewis' 'culture of poverty' provides an example of adaptive cultural response.

12. The well documented case of conflict for the demarcation of the Somali-Oromo border shows that ethnic conflict has also been fuelled by Federal Government engagements in support of one or the other side on the basis of opportunistic needs within the federal political arena (Bassi 1997; Tache, Oba 2009; Bassi 2010).

ABSTRACTS

Under the development approach that targets economic growth as its sole objective the marginalised groups may seriously be impacted. The developmental policy adopted since 1991 in Ethiopia illustrates it in relation to small-holding farmers, pastoralists and ethnic minorities. At the international level, alternative development paradigms have evolved along with progress in human rights. This article shows that the corrective measures have been informed by a growing 'relativistic' attitude, consisting in giving consideration to the relevance of specific articulations of culture, formal or informal norms and local conditions. The relativistic attitude is first defined and then considered in terms of compatibility with the Ethiopian multinational Constitution, adopted in 1995 but never really implemented. Under the pressure of the *Qeerroo* movement the ruling coalition in Ethiopia is today opening up to democracy and effective decentralisation. There is today a concrete possibility to revise the country's developmental policy, in line with the Constitution and respecting second and third generation human rights.

L'approccio allo sviluppo che considera la crescita economica come unico obiettivo può produrre degli effetti deleteri sui gruppi marginalizzati. Lo sviluppismo adottato in Etiopia dal 1991 illustra questo punto con riferimento ai contadini, ai popoli pastorali e alle minoranze etniche. La riflessione internazionale sullo sviluppo e il progresso nel campo dei diritti umani hanno portato all'emergere di nuovi paradigmi. L'articolo mostra come le misure correttive siano state caratterizzate da una crescente attitudine 'relativistica', che consiste nel dare considerazione alla rilevanza di articolazioni particolari di cultura, norme formali o informali, e condizioni locali. L'attitudine relativistica è prima definita e poi considerata in relazione alla compatibilità con la Costituzione Etiopica, adottata nel 1995 ma mai messa realmente in pratica. La pressione del movimento *Qeerroo* sta inducendo la coalizione al potere ad aprire effettivamente alla democratizzazione del paese e alla decentralizzazione. C'è quindi una concreta possibilità di rivedere anche le politiche sviluppiste, in linea sia con la Costituzione sia con i diritti umani di seconda e terza generazione.

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Keywords: development paradigm; relativism; Ethiopia; developmentalism; Gibe 3
Parole chiave: paradigma dello sviluppo; relativismo; Etiopia; sviluppismo; Gibe 3

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