

Decolonizing Waldorf curriculum: a benign hermeneutic approach

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Summary

This paper addresses the question of decolonizing the curriculum and takes a benign hermeneutic approach, which means trying to understand Steiner from a well-intentioned rather than a skeptical perspective. It explains what decolonizing a curriculum means and offers a new iteration of four types of decolonization, of which the fourth is specific to Waldorf education. It briefly summarizes what the Waldorf movement has done to date (and what it generally has not done). It also tries to clarify the distinction between racism, being racist and racialism (the use of race theory that isn't critical race theory). The paper reviews the response to accusations of racism by various authors taking an apologetic stance towards Steiner, suggesting that these have often been inadequate. I suggest that some of the work identifying racialist ideas in Steiner's work are justified, whilst other critiques of anthroposophy (and by association Waldorf education) are distinctly skeptical and do not see any redeeming features. I take a closer look at the work of Perry Myers, who has looked at Steiner's work from an academic perspective of a German Studies scholar, and whose work can be considered a benign interpretation - Myers concludes that Steiner was no racist but entirely committed to human well-being. My own conclusion is that Steiner's central focus was on promoting his vision of how a science of the spirit in a materialistic age can renew society, culture and improve human wellbeing. To this end he developed a grand narrative of cosmic, world and cultural evolution, including forces antagonistic to this process, with the decisive turning point in world history being the Christ Event and Mystery of Golgotha, after which redemption is possible. His account of cultural evolution, which includes races and peoples with specific missions within the whole process, culminates in German national culture. Within this culture a universal ethic of self-formation based on a spiritual path of schooling can be nurtured (as outlined in his Philosophy of Freedom). Unfortunately, this narrative involves an account of cultural evolution that uses an anachronistic model of teleological, hierarchical, higher development, that involves phases and stages through which races and cultures develop or lose their potential for spiritual emancipation. It is also Eurocentric and suggests that other existing religions and world view have been superseded. The reception of Steiner's of grand narrative by anthroposophists has mainly been to accept the whole system without question and have hitherto been unwilling to seriously query any parts of it. The effect of this stance on people of colour, women, on other groups who have suffered marginalization in many Western societies, is not welcoming and is a hindrance to some people sending their children to a Waldorf school and it is an ongoing invitation for both journalists, social media users and academics to criticize both anthroposophy and Waldorf education.

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Foreword: A conference of diversity

*And all who come before My splendour see/Themselves, their own unique
reality...Though you have struggled, wandered, travelled far,/It is yourselves you see
and what you are.'*

From The Conference of the Birds (منطق الطير, Manṭiq-ūṭ-Ṭayr) by Farid ud-din Attar
in 12th Century

At the end of their journey through the seven valleys of the Quest - Love, Knowledge, Detachment, Unity, Wonderment, Poverty and Annihilation - the 30 birds (one was lost) came to the long sought for Simorgh, who turned out to resemble them. The birds took flight together, but the journey was different for each of them. Attar tells us that the truth is not fixed, "it evolves as we evolve. Those who are trapped within their own dogma, clinging to hardened beliefs...are deprived of the journey" (Sholeh Wolpé, 2017, translator of the Conference).

The journey to a diverse and free world is an ongoing quest that evolves as we evolve along the path. Creating conditions for a truly diverse society is one of the implicit aims of Waldorf education. It is time to make this fully explicit.

Introduction

Decolonizing is a complex, multifaceted phenomena of our times and is part of the long road to freedom, as Nelson Mandela would have put it. It is a journey that Waldorf education also has to make, whether it likes it or not. In this Working Paper I will try to apply a benign hermeneutic approach (and explain what that is) to understanding the variants of decolonizing, why Waldorf needs to decolonize and what this implies for the relationship of Waldorf education to its founder Rudolf Steiner and anthroposophy. What it doesn't do is offer alternative content for the curriculum or show how schools can engage in this process. To some extent I have already published on this (Rawson, 2020, Bransby and Rawson, 2022a). I have also written about what decolonizing means for me personally and as a teacher (Rawson, 2021, 2023, and several articles in German, 2021, a, b & c, 2022b). I have also summarized for English-speaking readers some key ideas of postcolonialism in Waldorf Working Papers some of what I published in German. In the appendix I formulate some questions that might help schools in the process of decolonizing.

This paper is written from the perspective of a practicing Waldorf teacher, a stakeholder, someone with an interest in the quality of the education and with the belief that Waldorf education has the potential to do good in the world in ways that make a difference and not only to small selective groups within society. Because Waldorf schools are always embedded in the wider discourse and local contexts and changing conditions that affect the way children and young people learn and develop, teachers cannot avoid the issues of diversity, inclusion and social justice. They cannot just assume that their current practices in the classroom and school community are inclusive and enable diversity. One cannot simply say, Waldorf is intrinsically non-discriminatory and inclusive, and its curriculum is free of any socially and culturally inappropriate content. Waldorf education needs to be pedagogy that critically reflects on its origins, on its practices and in particular, its tacit, unconsidered assumptions and habits of thinking and acting. It also needs to continuously evaluate its practice in relation to its values and be effective in modifying what needs changing.

Relying on what Steiner said or did a century ago is no longer sufficient, not least because some of Steiner's assumptions and statements about race, culture, languages and the spiritual mission of the German culture cannot go unchallenged today. It is important to address these issues openly and honestly and understand the implications of this aspect of Steiner's work and the effects this can have on many people who otherwise are interested in and even committed to Waldorf education, but especially people of colour, people who feel marginalized by white majorities or because of their social status. Much of the democratic world is concerned by what is termed decolonizing – a complex multifaceted concept, the

meanings of which needs to be teased out – though there is a sizable minority who see this as a threat to them. It is tangled up with identity politics, which Waldorf education is not free from. For some within the Waldorf community the term ‘decolonize’ seems exaggerated and unnecessary, it irritates and annoys. My answer is that this is nothing compared to the effects of discrimination, marginalization, exclusion, denial, institutional racism and unconsidered white privilege. It’s a discomfort we need to take upon ourselves before we can claim to be an education towards freedom.

If we critically interrogate our practices, beliefs, assumptions and the effect these have on others and find everything to be as it should, then we have not wasted our time. Waldorf teachers need to get used to answering difficult questions. It’s not the terminology that counts, what matters is that Waldorf teachers understand the core values and intentions of the education and organize their practices accordingly. What, for example, do we individually really mean when we refer to Waldorf as an (*the?*) education towards freedom? I think we would find quite a range of answers if we were really honest and open. It is hard enough to define what we mean by Waldorf when we say this school is, or is not Waldorf? If we agree that some things that Steiner said are not only unacceptable today, but apparently wrong, what implication does this have for the relationship between Waldorf education and Rudolf Steiner and anthroposophy?

Most national and international Waldorf school federations have already distanced themselves from these aspects of Steiner’s teachings (see below). However, not all schools in Germany, for example, have clear anti-discrimination statements on their websites. The Anthroposophical Society has not been so quick to distance itself, and would rather explain, justify and minimize their significance. More importantly, not all schools have started the process of decolonizing, which starts with distancing itself from those statements in Steiner’s works that are racist, but goes much deeper, peeling away the layers of unconscious assumptions, attitudes, the messages being given by the curriculum content and the composition of the teaching body. Groups such as Alma Partners in North America have started consciousness raising workshops with schools and the bodies such as AWSNA and the SWSF in the UK have prioritized the issue. Schools and federations, however, generally only tend to react once they are publicly criticized.

If some things that Steiner said are not acceptable from the perspective of the values that Waldorf education stands for today, this changes our relationship as Waldorf teachers to Steiner and anthroposophy. It means we have to take a differentiated view, if we are not to lose the significance of the many important insights that Steiner had, that are not tainted by racialism. The challenge for Waldorf practitioners today is finding a dynamic balance between explaining and justifying Steiner – and thus traditional Waldorf practice – and carving out new positions on race, culture, diversity, interculturality that are our own and

relate to the world we live. I refer to this process as a *post-Steiner* discourse (see Waldorf Working Papers 8 parts 1 and 2).

The Waldorf movement needs to understand that the privileges that go with being alternative and independent schools come with responsibility for addressing these issues, not only because the local education authorities require us to, or under pressure from parents and critics, but out of our own insight. We will only arrive at this insight when we have taken the time to explore the depths and breadth of the postcolonial experience and its literature. Most of us are unlikely to arrive at these insights on our own, and we get very little help from Steiner or anthroposophy or the anthroposophical movement, which has only very recently been prompted into self-reflection. We will have to find ways to reflect on our curriculum, interrogate the assumptions within it and our own unconsidered and tacit dispositions. That is the task of deconstruction within a critical pedagogy.

If we get it right, Waldorf education may be able to make an even greater contribution to making the world a better place to live in. If we believe that Waldorf education has a spiritual task for humanity, it needs to recreate itself in the present conditions. If not, it will be just another reform movement that ran out of steam. As Olúfemi O. Táíwò (2022) suggests, beyond decolonization is a philosophy of human being that is beyond the impact of colonialism, which cannot ever be denied, is the possibility of a philosophy devoted to human wellbeing that does not reject everything that was produced within colonial cultures, but rather looks towards an approach that acknowledges the universality of certain ideas and values their translation locally. Táíwò writes, “freedom is not a cultural thing, it has no byline, it does not answer to the dictates of geography” (2022, p.222). This is a vision that comes close to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's (2012) notion of *globelectics*, and a Waldorf education, reconstituted to apply common generative principles to local contexts.

I am aware that as an old, white, European man, my position in writing this chapter is ambivalent. I am sensitive to the issue that many people of colour or indigenous people insist that only the colonized, people of colour or indigenous people can write about decolonizing with any authenticity, and I encourage those within the Waldorf community to do so. However, I also know that it has been hard for marginalized people to take a stand within the anthroposophical and Waldorf movements. This not a new phenomenon; in one of the few documented cases, Paull and Harvey (2023) remind us how the ‘Great Anthroposophical Purge’ in 1935 marginalized Marna Pease and the British biodynamic movement, which was the forerunner of the organic farming movement in the UK, and Paull (2020) has shown that Elizabeth Vreede among other women suffered a similar fate. Johannes Kiersch (2018) has also addressed the struggle for ascendancy within the Anthroposophical Society and the ownership of the true legacy of Steiner, a story that is adequately accounted for by Max Weber's (1970) theory of charismatic leadership (see also Waldorf Working Papers No.11) .

The focus here on decolonizing curriculum has to do with my reading of the term curriculum, which as I have explained elsewhere (Rawson, 2021) follows Bo Dahlin's (2017) definition of curriculum as everything that has a pedagogical effect on the learning and development of children and young people. That includes, among other things, what is taught, who teaches it and why and the learning culture of the school, in particular what is referred to as the hidden curriculum, that is the unintended messages conveyed by pedagogical practice.

In what follows I apply an approach of benign hermeneutics to the question of decolonizing Waldorf education.

What is a benign hermeneutics?

Hermeneutics is the social science of interpretation and is closely associated with the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (2013). As I discussed in my recent book (Rawson, 2021, pp.161-2), there are very different ways that texts can be interpreted. One can accept a text uncritically out of a conviction that the author was right and telling the truth. In the case of Steiner, we are dealing with disclosures of spiritual truths. A modification of this first position would be to add the proviso; disclosures which await verification by future observers (to paraphrase McDermott (1987, cited in Barfield, 1987). McDermott goes on to suggest that scientists or indeed anyone lacking the powers of spiritual insight can note the extent to which observable phenomena not only correspond to but are illuminated by the insights of Spiritual Science. In other words, the validity of the ideas can be 'tested' in relation to their fruitfulness in helping to interpret and understand pedagogical phenomena. In the context of Waldorf education, both of these positions are usually taken by people wishing apply Steiner's ideas in practical, professional life as teachers. Below I discuss ways in which teachers can do this systematically and scientifically.

The next position along a spectrum of hermeneutic approaches to Steiner (and skipping over those who read Steiner out of personal interest) are the positions taken up by the academics who are studying Steiner and Waldorf not as practitioners but because these belong to their field of inquiry (esoteric studies, history of religion, educational philosophy, child psychology, studies in children's spirituality, arts in education etc.). The first position is benevolent (Skagen, 2020) or empathic hermeneutics, which means that the scientist tries to put herself in the position of the author, tries to understand what she meant and why she is saying this. Johannes Kiersch cites Terje Sperby on the character of such a well-meaning and productive criticism;

Applying the 'principle of charity' does not imply that one shies away from identifying problems. Rather, using this principle acknowledges that the strongest

concept of an idea or a position is one that can be subjected to the most effective critique (Sperby, 2020, p. 32 cited in Kiersch 2021, p.43)¹.

This approach starts with an assumption that the author was serious, was not a charlatan and believed what she wrote to be meaningful. Beyond that is an assumed position of neutrality, though there are good reasons to believe that this positivist understanding of knowledge is actually untenable, despite vigorous professional claims to the contrary that many postmodern and poststructuralist scholars such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Deleuze and Felix Guattari among others have questioned (see St. Pierre, 2004, 2014). Scholars such as Helmut Zander (2008, 2019) and Peter Staudenmaier (2010, 2022) claim to be disinterested scholars, neutrally reporting on what they find in Steiner's works. Staudenmaier brings masses of 'evidence' in terms of text passages from multiple authors to illustrate his thesis that certain elements in anthroposophy aligned with fascist and Nazi ideology and that some anthroposophists were tempted by these two movements. To my knowledge no one has seriously engaged with Staudenmaier (an American who apparently can read German fluently enough to identify weaknesses in English translations of Steiner), whose claims and data cannot easily be dismissed and need to be answered. Zander's core thesis is that Steiner, a historian of religion, was a plagiarist and opportunist and displays deep prejudices against everything. These scholars can be positioned as practicing a hermeneutics of suspicion (Felski, 2012). They are looking for evidence to denigrate, diminish and demolish their subject. At the same end of the spectrum, but not in the academic field are the regular attacks by Humanists, who see it as their mission to denounce anything that smells of irrationality (Dehmelt, 2023). Much of the recent critiques of anthroposophy and Waldorf education in the media in Germany take this stance, seeing these somehow as a threat (to whom is rarely explicit). Neither Waldorf education nor anthroposophy seem like significant threats to anyone, relative to all the other risks people face today. I have referred to this as an adversarial hermeneutic of polemic (Rawson, 2021).

Other scholars with a greater claim to 'neutrality' (though no one today would make this claim in a peer-review humanities article) include Perry Myers, an American Professor of German Studies, whose interest is in the development of the classic notion of *Bildung* (his first major work compares Steiner's understanding of *Bildung* with Max Weber's, Myers, 2004) and cosmopolitan religious empires from 1875 to the 1920s (2021), like Theosophy that shared a common rejection of materialism, embraced evolutionary theory and a faith in universalistic spirituality. Whilst identifying colonialist, racist and orientalist elements in Steiner, Myers sees Steiner as well-intentioned and locates him within an international historical context. Other scholars such as Ansgar Martins (2012) and Israel Koren (2022) are critics of Steiner, but who do so from a more explicitly obviously critical position, focusing

¹ The terms benign or well-intentioned interpretation, or principle of charity, as far as I know first used in hermeneutic analysis by Wolfgang Künne (1990) *Prinzipien der wohlwollenden Interpretation*. In Künne (Ed.) *Intentionalität und Verstehen*, pp. 212-236. It has a longer history in philosophy and religious studies.

strongly of Steiner's racial theory, whilst acknowledging the positive aspects of Waldorf education.

Thus, we can show the spectrum of critical positions in relation to interpreting anthroposophy and Waldorf education, as follows:

maven...apologist...neutral...benevolent interpreter...skeptical interpreter...hostile opponent



Figure 1. the spectrum of Steiner's reception

Maven is a Yiddish word for 'one who knows', e.g. about the Talmud, like a connoisseur. A Steiner maven is a devoted expert in what Steiner said about anything and can explain almost any aspect at length (Peter Selg can be described as a Steiner Maven). Mavens are usually not critically reflective, because they are convinced of the great significance of their field of study and only find explanations within that body of work.

When looking at studies on Waldorf education, we have the usual apologetic accounts that explain Steiner's ideas. This makes up most of the secondary literature on Waldorf education. These texts may attempt to contextualize Steiner but frequently do so by cherry-picking better known ideas or even terminology that appears to align with Steiner's approach. This includes references to Piaget's sequence of cognitive development, although there is an extensive literature critiquing Piaget's work (see Burman, 2017). Another example is the enthusiasm for term salutogenesis. Few of the references to salutogenesis give much impression that the authors have actually read Antonovsky's original work or the extensive secondary literature on it (Mittelmark, 2017). Another problem that exists in the academic reception of Waldorf education is that most academic literature in recent years has been published in German, which is in effect inaccessible to most scholars, and there is practically no cross-referencing between the English and German language literature. I summarized the outcomes of published research to date in the chapter of my recent book on the academic reception but the non-academic literature on Waldorf, such as it is, rarely take note of academic literature.

Again we have an ambivalence about who can research Waldorf; insiders are not trusted and outsiders may lack the insight into what it all about. Geuenich, who has published critically about Waldorf, puts his finger on the point when he points out that,

the general problem of studying Waldorf education is that it is very difficult to explore single aspects separated from their embedding in the anthroposophical view of the world and the human being that constitutes them. The world view flows comprehensively into the conception and design of teaching at Waldorf schools and reaches from the principles to the details. (2009, p.133).

That is also exactly the point from the perspective of Waldorf education, in which anthroposophy flows through everything. Indeed, Geuenich cites Carlgren, in his book *Education Towards Freedom*, one of the best-known books on the education in the world, saying,

Waldorf education is not just a sum of pedagogical methods but rather an attitude to life, a way of being and acting that is reinforced by the fact that all the teachers in a collegial body of teachers are committed to anthroposophical path of spiritual schooling and the meditative study and assimilation of Steiner's anthroposophical anthropology (Carlgren,1983, p322).

Staudenmaier claimed in 2010, that was no serious academic research on Steiner from within the anthroposophical community, saying that Lindenberg (2013) comes the nearest to it. That may have been the case then, but there are now two peer-review academic journals *Research on Steiner Education* (RoSE) and *Steiner Studies*, which do not distinguish between insider or outside but choose articles on their merit. There is also a growing literature on Waldorf in mainstream publishing houses like Routledge, Springer and Peter Lang. The problem is, what makes someone an insider? One would expect an academic book on trees to be written by someone with the expertise and interest. This probably also means they are also an enthusiast for trees. Anyone who is awarded a doctorate, is assumed to be able to exercise criticality in their chosen field. Therefore, there can be no such thing as a thesis written "with a notably sympathetic and forgiving tenor" as Staudenmaier (2010, p33) suggests of three PhD theses on Steiner. Staudenmaier should know that, unless he is casting doubt on the rigour of his own PhD, and he generously cites various PhD theses in his thesis, that he claims align with his stance. Practitioners researching their own practice is a well-established academic method (see Elliott and Lukas, 2008, Herr and Anderson, 2015, Altrichter, Posch & Spann, 2018)). There are rules to ensure criticality that any academic or student writing a Masters' or doctoral thesis will know. Why should Waldorf teachers or other anthroposophical professionals be any different.

Of practitioners have a different perspective on practice than those observing from outside, which is why practitioner research is so important. They will know the difference between espoused theory and live experience in practice. They will also know that Waldorf education (or anthroposophy) is more than the parts described in texts. Dietrich Esterl (2003), a teacher over many years at the Uhlandshöhe Waldorf school in Stuttgart, made the point that even if a school reproduces all the forms that are typical to a Waldorf school, it would not mean that Waldorf education was being practiced. He says, it depends on the spirit of the school to

whom the teachers are accountable. As a former colleague, I recall him often saying, “we are not a Waldorf school, one can only become Waldorf”. Insiders know what he meant. But this is a difficult argument to observe from outside and it makes it harder to discuss the theory or the practice without either taking an apologetic or a critical stance.

What does it mean to decolonize curriculum?

The phrase ‘decolonize curriculum’, was probably first coined by students at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, in 2015 as part of the *Rhodes-must-fall* campaign to get rid of the statue of Cecil Rhodes, the English colonist and ‘founder’ of the British colony of Rhodesia (today Zimbabwe). The campaign was against institutional racism at the university. The term ‘decolonize curriculum’ is now used as an assemblage of related ideas rather than a sharply defined concept.

Decolonizing arises from postcolonial experience, in which the effects of historical colonization are worked through. Colonizing today refers not only to the political and economic subjection of people through a colonial power, such as the United Kingdom, today it stands for all ways of limiting people’s freedom through the impositions of another’s will, be it that of persons, institutions or governments. It also stands for imposed forms of knowledge that deny other intuitive, postformal (Gidley, 2016) or indigenous ways of knowing. Education is colonizing when it doesn’t respect children’s ways of being, doesn’t allow them to realize their potential and seeks to shape them into externally prescribed forms. It also includes ignoring or making harmless the full extent of historical forms of colonization and the marginalization of certain people or groups of people on the grounds of their skin colour, culture, social class, religious faiths or gender and sexual orientation. Colonizing means asserting the hegemony of a particular view.

Decolonizing curriculum is widely understood to mean that:

A curriculum provides a way of identifying the knowledge we value. It structures the ways in which we are taught to think and talk about the world. As education has become increasingly global, communities have challenged the widespread assumption that the most valuable knowledge and the most valuable ways of teaching and learning come from a single European tradition. Decolonizing learning prompts us to consider everything we study from new perspectives.

It draws attention to how often the only world view presented to learners is male, white, and European. This isn’t simply about removing some content from the curriculum and replacing it with new content – it’s about considering multiple perspectives and making space to think carefully about what we value. Decolonizing learning helps us to recognize, understand, and challenge the ways in which our world

is shaped by colonialism. It also prompts us to examine our professional practices. It is an approach that includes indigenous knowledge and ways of learning, enabling students to explore themselves and their values and to define success on their own terms (Open University, 2019, 3-4).

It also means addressing the effects of colonialism both in the past and in contemporary society, since,

Colonialism continues to have an effect in the political present. Jihad, hunger, war, migration, environmental crises -none of these hard issues of today can be understood without colonial history. It is no coincidence that jihad is based where colonial wars were once fought...Or in those ghettos of the global North where the descendants of the colonized live today. Nor is it a coincidence that migrants moving to the North come predominantly from its former colonies...Colonialism has even become generalized...Its essence is subordination and plunder of foreign peoples, namely their raw materials and labor...Its methods also include unfair trade, exploitation of low social and environmental standards in poor countries, or mass tourism, insofar as it touches on economic, ecological or sexual exploitation...(Gero von Randow, Die Neuvermessung der Welt, in DIE ZEIT Nr. 32, 2. August 2018. MR translation)

Anthony Mangeon, in his Foreword to Diagne & Amselle's book *In Search of Africa(s)*, outlines the meaning of postcolonial and the activity of decolonizing as follows:

(Franz) Boas emphasized how the advent of a truly scientific point of view would only be achieved by correcting these forms of conceptual myopia and, in particular, by getting rid of teleological illusions that viewed the White man as an empire within an empire, and his culture as the destination if not the destiny of all other cultures, ordained as these were to follow the path his model traced from barbarism to civilization, from tradition to modernity, from community to individual, from despotism to democracy

Postcolonial thinking in its turn denounces this Eurocentrism as well as the binary oppositions and purely linear evolutions that it established between 'the West and the Rest'. But decolonial thought goes further insofar as it does not simply plead for 'epistemological plurality', that is, the recognition of traditional cosmologies and epistemologies as having the dignity of forms of knowledge every bit as legitimate as Western scientific-technical rationality. It shows that these kinds of knowledge, often local, indigenous or 'native', are today highly valued, desired and more and more often appropriated by the Western economic and industrial powers themselves, in the context of new transformations of global capital, moving from exploitation of 'natural capital' (raw materials and the products derived from them) to the exploitation of a 'human capital' which now values knowledge, skills and experiences of diverse social actors (Mangeon, in Diagne & Amselle, 2020, p. xiii)

Iterations of decolonization

Closer reading of the literature suggests that there are various iterations of decolonization. Táiwò (2022) refers to *decolonization 1* to refer to the process of making a former colony into a self-governing entity by decolonizing its forms of governance, economy, culture and so on. *Decolonisation 2* refers to insisting on a former colony to rid itself of all traits of the colonizing power and culture, including all ideas, material, social and linguistic artefacts, institutions simply because they existed during the colonial period, on the grounds that they hinder emancipation. Táiwò's main argument is that this makes no sense and assumes that there are no universal human values, ideas, or political structures worth striving for. He says this iteration of decolonization robs Africans and other former colonial people of agency, by preventing them from freely choosing social practice and forms, whatever their origin. It is necessary to look at the historical origins of colonialism from what we might call 'people-grab' and 'land-grab', in which people who had the power simply took the people and or the land and its resources and exploited them, such as in Africa and the Caribbean. Then there is settler-colonization in which the aboriginal inhabitants were treated much like the natural world, which was cleared, ploughed, fenced in or out (in on reservations, out from fertile land) and then 'cultivated' (for example in those terrible institutions like residential schools and mission schools). In settler-colonies, a European way of life was reproduced under different conditions and ultimately urbanized and linked through mass transport. Often these settler-colonies fought for and gained their independence from the colonial 'mother' land but generally retained the same capitalistic and colonial power structures. The emergence of specific cultures in settler-colonies or former colonies followed its own trajectory, mostly ignoring indigenous culture.

In colonies such as India the cultural British-ization was overlaid on top of long-standing cultures and social structures, which were frequently instrumentalized by the colonizing power, such as the caste system. In all these iterations of colonization, the period of colonization and much of post-colonization forms a historical-social-cultural phase in its own right. Relations between the colonizers and colonized were close but resembled the relations there have always been between humans and domesticated animals. The colonized were in effect often treated both as wild and as domesticated animals. Thus, colonization brought about a form of human existence, a kind of hybrid. Pioneers of postcolonial thinking like Frantz Fanon (1952/2019) called for re-humanization of all humans, not a reversal of roles. As long as people are not accorded the possibility for realizing their full human potential, colonization continues in another form. As Sekyi-Out put it, discussing Fanon's work, "And truly it is a question of unleashing the human being...From the beginning, the central question for Fanon was always that of releasing possibilities of human existence and history imprisoned by the colonization of experience and the racialization of consciousness" (1996, p. 17, cited in Táiwò, 2022, p 42.)

The struggles to end both external and internal settler-colonization led to postcolonialism and the process of undoing the effects of colonialism is carried out through decolonization. However, part of this process includes recognizing that there was cultural complexity before colonization and during colonialism there were usually ongoing and intimate interactions between the colonizers and colonized, which have led not only to hybrid ‘mixed race’ people but mutual cultural appropriation. The West has no hesitation appropriating art, music, fashion styles, food and so on from the colonized and the former colonized not only continue the dominance of colonial languages, literature, education systems, and sometime legal systems in their independent countries, though there is a strong movement to resist this too. From a Western perspective today, we are beginning to discover that the Global South not only has art and music that interests us, but epistemologies and philosophies too, such as the Southern African notion of Ubuntu, or the growth of interest in indigenous knowledge. The cultural exchange that lies behind these relationships in something that Waldorf education should focus on- the simple message that people have always borrowed from each other what they thought was useful and that no cultures are hermetically sealed.

In South America an approach called decoloniality (in Spanish *decolonialidad*) has developed that is characterized by a wish to detach from Western rationality and modernity and reconnect to indigenous knowledge from pre-colonial times (Quijano, 2007). This approach is influenced by the Frankfurt School of critical analysis yet is very much about action and doing, that is creating situations in which indigenous and decolonizing ideas can be lived. Decoloniality distances itself from decolonization, which is seen as focused on shifting power from the colonizers to the colonized. Decoloniality is about generating a new consciousness and new forms of knowledge, community, solidarity and practice. Táiwò (2022, p. 16) is critical of this approach, because in his view, it is backward looking and ignores the realities of capitalism and colonialism. However, it is an approach to which Waldorf education could align itself at the local level, and to some extent some Waldorf projects in Argentina, Brazil and Columbia are seeking to do this.

In any history curriculum, it is essential that students learn about both decolonization 1 and 2, because it is impossible to understand the world today without this. I suggest, however, that there is a decolonization 3, namely, the task of decolonizing the Global North, including former colonial nations, settler-nations and the big dictatorships including Nazi Germany and the current ones, Russia and China, which also have their colonial histories up to the present and also practice various forms of internal marginalization of ethnic and gender minorities and manifest deep-seated racism. Many former colonial countries now have large populations of migrants from their former colonies or who were encouraged to come as *Gastarbeiter* (immigrant labour) to support economic growth. Racism is alive and kicking throughout the world and it is the task of *decolonization 3* to address this, particularly in education. A recent podcast on the #waldorflernt platform (in German) involved an interview with two Waldorf colleagues of colour in Berlin, who have started offering workshops on countering racism in

Waldorf education. Their experiences are testimony, like that of Alma Partners in the US, that there is considerable work to be done. They even suggest that many parents of colour currently avoid Waldorf schools because of what they have heard about Steiner's racism, stories of people's experiences in overwhelmingly white Waldorf kindergartens and schools and the lack of sensitivity for the problem on schools' websites. The same they say applies to potential teachers of colour. This is particularly crucial since it is fairly clear, that the message sent by all white teacher faculties is clear.

If *decolonization 3* means engaging with everyday racism and institutional racism and discrimination, in a wider sense it includes deconstructing all forms of social and cultural exclusion (including the demonizing of refugees and illegal immigrants, rather than understanding the reasons for their leaving their homes and any possible causes that we are responsibly for, such as the European Union agriculture policies etc.) and denial of people's rights to choose their gender and life-style identities.

I would also add a *decolonization 4* to the list, and this is specifically for Waldorf institutions. This includes heightened awareness of the first three iterations but requires an active critical pedagogy (Kincheloe, 2008) based on practitioner reflection and research to identify the unconscious, unconsidered, tacit assumptions, habits of thought and affect, and the implicit expectations that inform Waldorf practice. This includes content of the curriculum such as the stories that we tell children (what gender and family roles are privileged? do people of colour play any role in society? What figures are identified as evil? how colonialism is dealt with in history? How are other cultures and languages positioned? what literature is read and does immigrant literature play any role? And so on). It includes the models of child development that are taken for granted and the implicit norms that belong to these (see Waldorf Working Papers No. 8 parts 1 & 2, for a discussion of the problems relating to models of child development). In a study on the relationship between class teachers and their pupils, Till-Sebastian Idel (2013, 2014) found out that a third of children did feel understood by their class teacher. The study concluded that many class teachers unconsciously have an image of what constitutes a good Waldorf pupil- a model that Idel calls romantic and is characterized by the child looking up to the teacher, wanting to learn and being receptive to what the teacher brings. If a pupil did not conform to this model, the teacher's attitude towards them made them feel unseen, not accepted and not understood. The outcome of this study was presented in the Waldorf press as affirmation of the class teacher role. Idel expressed surprise that the Waldorf movement did not find the statistic of one third of students unhappy serious enough to modify their teacher education programme. Perhaps in the meantime they have, but I doubt it. My personal experience suggests that the romantic view of children and emerges in seminar tutors the longer they have been out of the classroom.

Decolonizing in a Waldorf settings

Part of the deconstruction work that belongs to decolonization 4 is looking critically at the relationship of current practice to practice traditions, to Steiner and to assumptions based on the anthroposophical model of child development (both Steiner's original texts and the secondary literature), including assumptions about the parallels between human evolution and the development of children today. Indeed, the whole notion of the correlations between development and civilization, of lower to higher development, to the neoliberal assumptions about development in the Global South need to be taken into account and not naively transported as if these perspectives were fact (see Burman, 2017).

There is no doubt in my mind that Waldorf education is not intentionally colonial in any of the senses referred to above, in its intentions. I also think that we can assume that Waldorf schools everywhere aspire to be non-discriminatory and that they are committed to being socially and culturally inclusive, promoting social justice, being democratic, being multi-cultural and seeing the individual and not the generic type in the person. Many members of the Waldorf community may wonder why the question of decolonizing even arises and will claim that no one in Waldorf education has ever tried to colonize anyone else.

The problem arises between aspirations and the lived experiences of some teachers, students and parents. The experiences of Alma Partners, a group of mainly people of colour, indigenous and queer backgrounds, who were founded in 2020 to help Waldorf schools in North America to work on their curriculum and practices in relation to the issues of diversity, social inclusion and equity (<https://www.almapartners.net/about>), is that this work is needed, and that applies to all countries with Waldorf schools. This and my own experience affirms why Waldorf schools and kindergarten need to address the issues belonging to decolonization 4.

There is widespread evidence that white people everywhere, and especially well-educated middle-class white people, tend not to recognize their privileged position generally. This phenomenon has been explored in recent years by a number of authors (Haruna-Oelker, 2022, Bhopal and Myers, 2023, Malik, 2023, Eddo-Lodge, 2018, Diangelo, 2021). There is a critical discourse about the concept of 'white privilege', which originally arose out of discussions about how race and social class are intertwined and how middle-class blacks have risen up the strata of class, distancing themselves from poor blacks, and why and how the state of *not-experiencing discrimination* which should be considered normal, is identified as a privilege. The very nature of 'white privilege', however, is that it is unconscious among whites.

There is no reason to believe this is not the case in Waldorf schools, which are predominantly white and middle class (except in Asian countries, where social class, caste or wealth play the

dominant roles). The problem of racism is complex because two overlapping assumptions get in the way. On the one hand many middle-class white people assume they are not racist, but invariable are to some extent, and on the other hand they make assumptions about the universality of human rights. But like race, equality is also a construct that had to be invented historically and is still something we have to learn. Social inequality is bound up with and overlaps with racial discrimination and both exist unless we actively do something about it. We all live with this paradox, which partly explains our sense of unease and our defensive reaction when the topic comes up. As Kenan Malik comments.

We live in an age in which in most societies there is a moral abhorrence of racism, albeit that in most, bigotry and discrimination still disfigure the lives of many. We also live in an age in which our thinking is saturated with racial ideology and the embrace of difference. The more we despise racial thinking, the more we cling to it. It is like an ideological version of Stockholm syndrome (Malik, 2023, p.20)

Therefore, even if we intend Waldorf education to be inclusive and non-discriminatory, we still have to do something – perhaps many things - to bring this about. The first thing we need to do is become aware of the nature of the problem, and that is the aim of this monograph. We need to be aware of what elements in the curriculum may be deemed in need of decolonizing revision. We need to be aware of how we stand in relation to Rudolf Steiner’s views on culture, evolution of culture, cultural epochs, race, folksouls, spirits of language and German Nationalism. As noted above, this poses questions about the relationship between Waldorf education, Steiner and anthroposophy. We also need to know how to go about auditing and changing curriculum. At the same time, we need to focus our attention on ways in which we can enhance the support we already give to students to enable them to learn how to transform their potentialities into intercultural capacities. We also need to interrogate what we mean by inclusion, which I address in a companion piece.

The point is that race, racism, social class, privilege and discrimination are hugely complex fields in which Waldorf is a tiny niche, perhaps a hot spot at the intersection of other, bigger social and cultural tectonic plates. This niche is also not homogenous. Even though the Waldorf community is relatively small, it has a complex structure, including a small number of Waldorf teachers who identify as anthroposophists, those who explicitly don’t and (probably the majority) who are not really interested in anthroposophy, do not actively work with anthroposophy and rarely if ever read Steiner and yet in order to have influence, be published or teach in Waldorf teacher education, is helps to be seen as committed to Steiner and anthroposophy.

Waldorf schools in the Global South and former colonies, or in settler-nations (such as the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa etc.) need to consider in what ways they are adopting Eurocentric elements of curriculum and how dependent they allow themselves

to be on mentors from Global North countries (e.g. in Europe, the US, Australia etc.) to become. Obviously, the first Waldorf schools in a country will be heavily reliant on outside advisors and mentors and we know how long it takes to build up a quality teacher education process. Mentors too need to be aware of the extent to which they are cultivating dependencies and how much they are transmitting the practices they know, rather than helping new schools find their own from the very beginning. This needs to be a dialogic process, conducted at eye-level. My many years of mentoring outside of Europe (or indeed within Europe) have sensitized me to the extent that mentors usually share their personal convictions as if they were *the Waldorf way*. I do this all the time. I have learned, however, to use my role as a mentor to direct inexperienced teachers (usually with no or little training) to the generative principles on which Waldorf practices are based, rather than telling them “this is how we do it”. I have written about some of these generative principles in my recent book (Rawson, 2021). There is no training and there are no criteria for being allowed to mentor schools

Why are Waldorf schools only engaging with this topic only now?

Over the past decades there have been periodic public accusations of racism within Steiner’s works. These were usually refuted, and life went on. After all Waldorf is an area of public life and media attention is short-lived in the news cycle. Online, websites offer accounts of people ‘damaged’ by association with Waldorf schools, but the internet is a jungle and it requires dedicated perseverance to join up the fragments to imply a system. During the Covid pandemic, however, many people associated with the Waldorf movement, particularly in Germany, were publicly identified with skeptical, anti-vaccination positions, with refusing to accept public health regulations, and supporting various conspiracy theories. The Covid-19 pandemic has catapulted anthroposophy and by association Waldorf education (alongside medicine, biodynamic agriculture, Weleda natural cosmetics, the DM drugstore chain and so on) back into the public eye of the curious media looking for good stories or scandal and conspiracy. On top of this outreach disaster, some anthroposophists since the Russian invasion of Ukraine have even expressed the views that, while his methods may be brutal, Putin is implementing what Steiner predicated as the next cultural epoch (which, ironically will be characterized by love and spirituality). I personally heard such views during a visit to Dornach for a short conference in September 2022. Whilst there has always been a small number of anthroposophists devoted to one or other prophet of anthroposophical visions of the future (see Kiersch, 2018), social media and the internet generate a much greater audience for these ideas today.

As research by the Info-3 magazine has shown (Dehmelt, 2023), the attacks on anthroposophy and Waldorf are driven by a relatively small group of people committed to opposing all forms of what they see as unscientific irrationalism and sectarian. Anthroposophy and its practical fields of application are a threat (though to whom is rarely explicit, given the vastly greater threats to democratic, liberal society presented by totalitarian

states, Wladimir Putin, neo-liberalism, the capitalist right-wing media, religious intolerance, global warming, xenophobia etc.). At another level there are academic accounts of Steiner's works, which raise serious questions about Steiner's theory of race, which I address below.

The accusations of irrationality and esotericism touch a raw nerve among anthroposophists because Steiner wanted anthroposophy to be seen as a science of equal value to, complementary to and acknowledging conventional science. Anthroposophy is undoubtedly esoteric, and as Johannes Kiersch (2010, 2021) has argued, the esoteric has since become a subject for academic research, but also that by treating much of anthroposophy as exclusive, only for an elite few, for those belonging to a special group with a karmic relationship to Steiner, early leaders in the anthroposophical movement created an atmosphere of secret knowledge. The occult, certainly in English has long had a dubious connotation, linked to people like Alistair Crowley, Tarot cards, and black magic, though figures such as Annie Besant who was also a socialist, campaigner for women's rights and anti-colonist, were much more socially and culturally acceptable in the English-speaking world.

One of Steiner's main works was translated *Occult Science*, also now called Esoteric Science. Occult was perhaps not such a helpful translation, but the literal translation of *Geheimwissenschaft* as secret science may have been even less helpful. In fact, the German word *geheim*, which means secret also means private, intimate, confidential and trusted. Goethe was appointed *Geheimrat* or minister to Duke Carl August ruler of the (small) Grand Duchy of Sachsen-Weimer-Eisenach in 1775. The *Geheimrat* was the confidant of the Duke. Steiner's term *Geheimwissenschaft* was both a science of the occult, in the sense of dealing with things we cannot perceive with our senses, and which is also intimate, in that this science was based on introspection, of reading what manifests in the inquirer's inner life. As one can see, this somewhat complex explanation shows how it is necessary to adequately translate and explain Steiner.

However, being labelled esoteric today is by no means the kind of PR disaster it might have been in the past. Despite the skepticism that certain media (e.g. serious broadsheet newspapers, public service broadcasters) hold towards the esoteric (something King Charles in the UK and his media managers have had to deal with over many years because of his interest in anthroposophy and biodynamic farming), the general public since the emergence of the New Age movement has long been dedicated to all kinds of alternative therapies, spiritual practices and beliefs. There are well-respected academic journals devoted to spirituality and organizations such as the Collaborative for Spirituality in Education, based at Columbia University and the Awakened Schools Institute show that spirituality has long since become mainstream. If anything, Waldorf education is lagging way behind in this movement, by virtue of its historical reticence to be associated with esoteric and religious themes. The slogan today in the education world is, spiritual but not religious. I read this Waldorf caution and even embarrassment that Waldorf be too openly associated with spirituality as caution in

the US, where schools may not teach religion, and in Europe, a wish to not appear too far from mainstream. Now spirituality is mainstream, Waldorf will have to run to catch up.

Regarding the decolonizing question, however, as far as I know, my online article on the Waldorf Resources website (Rawson, 2020a) was the first Waldorf publication to address the question of decolonizing the curriculum (or even re-contextualising). It is very pragmatic and does not discuss the wider implications, or indeed why decolonizing may be necessary. Before that, I had published papers on adapting Waldorf curricula to local contexts (e.g. Rawson 2016, 2019). Neil Boland (2015, 2017, Boland and Munoz, 2021) has been drawing attention for some time to the need to adapt curriculum to non-European cultures, drawing closely on his experience in New Zealand, where schools are required to include the Māori language and culture. I have been publishing papers on my blog (www.learningcommunitypartners.eu) that address adapting Waldorf to local cultures and given talks on this in India, China, Taiwan, South Africa, and the Philippines.

In Germany the intercultural Waldorf school movement started following the founding of the *Intercultural Waldorf School* in Mannheim in 2002 and is slowly growing. Somewhat paradoxically, it appears that it requires the founding of schools with an intercultural profile, rather than all Waldorf schools being in themselves intercultural. Even this well-established, Intercultural School is having problems attracting diverse staff and students. Nobody has a clear answer (and not many are looking for one) to the question as to why most (but not all, which poses a number of questions) Waldorf schools in Germany are not as multicultural as the local population, though the lack of a diverse teaching body has to be part of the answer. For some, Waldorf schools are too Christian, for others, not Christian enough (confessional schools are popular in Germany).

When the Black Lives Matter movement took off internationally after the well-publicized death of George Floyd, and Waldorf movement in the US was shocked into taking action, the *Research Bulletin* of the Waldorf Research Institute offered a whole issue on the topic (2021, Volume 26 (1)). The same year, the Steiner Schools Fellowship in the UK devoted a whole Easter conference with the title *Equality, Diversity and Community* to the topic, with speakers from the US and South Africa and workshops on decolonizing. Certainly no one who participated in the conference, which opened with a presentation by an American colleague Heather Scott on *Experiences of De-colonising the Waldorf Curriculum*, will be in any doubt about the necessity of the journey or its destination. In the German Waldorf movement, the *Journal for Waldorf Education* published two articles by me on decolonizing in 2021, and 2022 and in 2023 a book of articles on the subject. The first reflected on the how the early Enlightenment philosopher Anton Amo, who was taken as a child into slavery and raised and educated in an aristocratic German court as an experiment, forgotten by immediate successors including the great Friedrich Schiller and how texts about African American experience are appropriated for state exams to demonstrate intercultural competence. The

second article summarized postcolonial thinking for Waldorf teachers (I have made some of this available in English in the Waldorf Working Papers series.

So, what has been done? The honest answer is very little. Teachers outside of Europe have been modifying their Waldorf curriculum to take account of their local culture, though very little has been published on this. A few individuals have been reflective about the Eurocentric nature of the curriculum and have published articles (Neil Boland and Martyn Rawson), groups like Alma Partners have been founded to address the problem. Some Waldorf Associations have issued statements asserting their commitment to diversity and countering all forms of discrimination. The Pedagogical Section in Dornach held a small colloquium in September 2022 to look at interculturalism (but not decolonizing the curriculum). A regular online meeting (the diversity group) has deepened the exchange between Alma partners, and colleagues from Europe, New Zealand and South Africa. In 2023 Professor Michael Zech launched a research project to review and revise the history and cultural studies curriculum, with an international dimension, to which this monograph is a contribution.

The work on decolonizing Waldorf practice is very much at the beginning, which poses the question; why did it take the Waldorf movement so long to address these issues? The answer, I suspect, has two sides. On the one hand, with few people of colour with the Waldorf movement (speaking for Europe, the US and Canada) asking critical questions, there was little pressure to address the issue. On the other hand, since the Waldorf community takes it for granted that it is inclusive, open to diversity and in no way colonial, there has been no reason to doubt existing practice. However, periodically allegations of Steiner's racism, and by association, Waldorf education's complicity, have been publicly raised. For those who have responded up until now, the feeling is; we have explained Steiner's relatively few indiscretions and assured ourselves that he may have used inappropriate language on occasion but that he was not racist (or antisemitic), rather the opposite. Below I cite in some detail what the issues in Steiner's writing are.

Waldorf has never been very self-critical, rather its gesture has been to nurture, protect and defend the education, which has of course been necessary. It is after all, it is an *other* education that is frequently 'othered' or ignored by mainstream. It is actually more radical than mainstream and public education authorities have been aware of and its representatives have on the whole been good at disguising this fact in how they present the education publicly. In most countries it has existed in a small niche that has not threatened anyone, and it has benefited from mostly benign neglect- it has been left to get on with it. Only where it enters the mainstream or gets big enough to be noticed, that it attracts attention, which is often hostile through lack of understanding, prejudice against the esoteric, and the usual collection of individuals who fall out with it (including parents that any education system would find hard to cope with). The internet has websites that collect bad experience stories of

parents and former students, though, relative to the big majority of satisfied students (as amply empirical evidence shows in alumni surveys in Germany, Switzerland, Sweden and the USA). This short account, however, is not much for an international movement that is over 100 years old.

The response of national Waldorf federations to accusations of racism and racialism

The Waldorf movement has been jolted into action by the Black Lives Matter campaign, which has prompted some Waldorf teachers to speak out. The German Waldorf movement, which has the largest number of Waldorf schools (currently 255, with over 9,000 students and 600 kindergartens) and the highest public profile has responded to accusations of racialism, by making statements about its commitment to diversity.

Across the international Waldorf movement some federations have acknowledged the need to commit their schools to anti-discrimination policies. The Association of Waldorf Schools in North America (AWSNA) make their position clear.

AWSNA recognizes the historic and ongoing impact of racism on our continent and the injustice and discrimination faced by Black, Brown, Indigenous and People of Color. We understand that racial justice in education is a journey of both moral and educational imperative. As such, we take seriously our responsibility to bear witness to what is happening in the world, to center the voices of color in justice work, and to change the course of inequities by identifying and breaking down structural racism in all forms within Waldorf education... Racism, explicit or implicit, stands in direct conflict to the fundamental principles of Waldorf education. We commit to working to address any dehumanizing or disparaging aspects of our history and practices.

(from the Mission Statement of AWSNA²)

The British and Irish schools see things similarly,

The Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship (SWSF) acknowledges the injustice and discrimination faced by people of colour in the UK and around the world over multiple generations. We recognise the immense damage this has done and the impact such discrimination continues to have on the members of those communities as regards being treated equally and pursue their hopes and dreams in life freely.

It is fundamental to the ethos of Steiner Waldorf education that we be engaged in a continual process of enquiry, self-education and self-reflection both as individuals and

² <https://www.waldorfeducation.org/awsna>

as organisations. At SWSF we have been going through such a process in discussing issues of racism. This statement is a result of this process...

We will also support schools to incorporate anti-racist and inclusive approaches throughout the curriculum and in their work with families. We will encourage them to include pupils in this process, integrating knowledge, understanding and recognition of racism and how to build an inclusive society as part of their education³.

The intentions of the German Stuttgarter Erklärung (Declaration)⁴ are very much the same. There is acknowledgement among these three national federations (and probably many others whose languages I cannot read) that Waldorf schools want to take a stance against racism and discrimination in all forms, and that students should be taught to understand racism and how to counter it. Some even go so far as to admit that some of Steiner's texts contain statements that by today's values can be interpreted as racist. They distance themselves from these. An example is the statement from the Council of Anthroposophical Organizations in North America

Rudolf Steiner, founder of anthroposophy in the early 20th century, offered profound insights that support the value and development of each human being. These inspirations inform our organizations' histories and worldview. Yet, we also acknowledge that Rudolf Steiner made statements that reflect harmful assertions regarding race and ethnicity. Racism, explicit or implicit, stands in direct conflict to the fundamental principles of anthroposophy. We take responsibility for and commit to working together to address any dehumanizing or disparaging aspects of our history.⁵

The SWSF writes that:

Rudolf Steiner provided insights, indications and understanding of child development that form the basis of Steiner Waldorf Education as it has developed in the UK today. It is an education philosophy that puts at its heart respect for the unique nature of each human being. However, there are some statements in Steiner's work which we acknowledge are racist and we wholeheartedly repudiate them. They sit in contrast

³ <https://www.steinerwaldorf.org/anti-racism-statement/>

⁴ <https://www.waldorfschule.de/ueberuns/printmedien/broschueren/erklaerungen/stuttgarter-erklaerung>)

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<https://resources.finalsite.net/images/v1623085762/waldorfeducationorg/s1t1kprcc98efjk13vxh/CouncilofAnthroposophicalOrganizationsCommitmenttoRacialJusticeEquityandSocialTransformation.pdf>

with the bulk of Steiner's work which puts at its heart the equal value, dignity and potential of each human being and do not reflect the values of this organisation or the wider Steiner Waldorf Education movement in the UK.

We acknowledge that we have a responsibility to do all we can to address issues of racism particularly in our work with schools and the children and families they serve. Any effort to exclude or disparage specific groups of types of people, including through unconscious action, is contrary to the fundamental ethos of Steiner Waldorf Education.

We recognise that our own organisation and the Steiner Waldorf education movement in the UK lack diversity. We are working to change that situation and undertake to monitor and regularly review our progress in doing so. We are committed to becoming an inclusive organisation and will support schools to take on and develop ways of promoting equality and diversity in all aspects of running a school.⁶

These are by any measure unambiguous and honest statements. Yet, I believe we need to go further, both in understanding why decolonizing is necessary and how to go about it. The Anthroposophical Society has been slower than the Waldorf movement any acknowledgement that their founder Rudolf Steiner may have made mistakes.

Racism or racialism? Steiner's relationship to race

The Black scholar W.E.B. DuBois (1903, in his book *The Souls of Black Folk*) distinguishes between racialism, the view that there are generic biological, psychological and social differences between groups of humans that are inherited and distinct to particular races. Some authors (e.g. Asante, 1998) would describe this as scientific racism. Racism is the belief that there is a hierarchy of races and that some are superior to others. Critical race theory is a relatively new academic field that started out exploring racism bias in the legal system in the US and now more widely looks at how perceptions of race and ethnicity are reflected in politics, social media and public opinion and are not just expressed by individual prejudice. It is a form of critical theory, and thus originally quite academic. One of its main ideas is that of intersectionality, which refers to the way people are disadvantaged by a number of generic and personal factors, such as race, gender orientation, social status. In recent years ring wing politicians have sought to ban any teaching of critical race theory in schools because they fear it shows white people in a negative light.

In the US the term race is widely used even though it has no biological or cultural reality (Young, 2020). There is more genetic variation within the so-called racial groups, as between

⁶ <https://www.steinerwaldorf.org/anti-racism-statement/>

them. The term is used to identify people according to their ethnicity, physical attributes and cultural alignment and of course, how they identify themselves. Thus, terms like black or white are not colours, like blue, but rather social constructs used to identify people.

There have been a number of refutations of racism in Steiner's works (e.g. Selg, et al, 2021, Rose, 2013, Brüll and Heiserkamp, 2008, van Baarda, 2009, Bader, et al. 2002) arguing that Steiner's comments have been taken out of context, that he couldn't possibly have been racist because his basic position was that race, gender, religion, ethnicity and social class are unimportant and need to be overcome in order for the individual to develop to a higher level governed by the I, or spiritual core of being. The purpose of such statements is to refute or explain away accusations of racism. They range from maven to apologetic on our spectrum of Steiner reception above. The tone is sometimes defensive, even offended and bemoaning the fact that these matters have long since been clarified and it is unreasonable that they keep resurfacing, especially in the popular media, along with general accusations that anthroposophy is unscientific, esoteric, irrational, and promoted by conspiratorial sectarians.

It depends to some extent what we define as racist, and the distinction between racialism and racism above might be a helpful analytic tool. The van Baarda Commission took the definition of racist in Dutch legislation at that time (1996). The recent document from the leadership of the Goetheanum (Selg, et al, 2020) refers to the UNESCO definition of racism, by citing a reference to Robert Rose (2013) rather than the original *Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice* from 1978⁷, which contains a much more detailed analysis than that given in the document. Racism is a complex phenomenon (Geulen, 2021, Malik, 2023), and as Susan Arndt (2021) points out, is difficult to talk about without reproducing it (for example by using words that have a racist meaning, including words such as white or black and of course race itself- Arndt's solution is to avoid all words with racist connotations and just using initials like N or R). Racism is about othering people, which also includes not listening to their voices, denying their feelings, having better arguments, telling people what they should think about us. We should also not forget that “*“race did not give birth to racism. Racism gave birth to race”* (Malik, 2023, p. 23). Europeans invented racism and imposed it on the world and even if we didn't participate in that, we need to signal that we share a cultural and personal responsibility for not reproducing it. In particular German scholars contributed to this (see Eigen & Larrimore, 2006).

It is true that Steiner more than once declared that paying attention to race was a hindrance to spiritual development. He said that,

In our own epoch the concept of race will gradually disappear along with all the differences that are relics of earlier times. Thus everything that exists today in connection with the races are relics of the differentiation that took place in Atlantean

⁷ <https://en.unesco.org/about-us/legal-affairs/declaration-race-and-racial-prejudice>,

times. We can still speak of races but only in the sense that the real concept of races is losing its validity (Steiner, 1978, p.158).

He stated that;

Nothing is more designed to take humanity into its decline than the propagation of the ideals of race, nation, and blood. Nothing is more likely to prevent human progress than proclamations of national ideals belonging to earlier centuries which continue to be preserved by the luciferic and ahrimanic powers. The true ideal must arise from what we find in the world of the spirit, not in the blood (1993, p.186).

In spite of such statements there is no doubt that Steiner also had a theory of race. In his *Philosophy of Freedom* (published in 1893) he characterized race as follows; “Each member of a totality is determined, as regards its characteristics and functions, by the whole totality. A racial group is a totality and all the people belonging to it bear the characteristic features that are inherent in the nature of the group. How the single member is constituted, and how he will behave, are determined by the character of the racial group” (Steiner, 1963, p.203). He goes on to say that individuals can emancipate themselves from this condition.

Race was crucial to Steiner’s central idea about evolution. Drawing on the idea of evolution as he saw it, which was broadly based on Darwin’s approach, or rather Haeckel’s version of it, and drawing on theosophical theory (such as the works of Annie Besant, and in particular Madame Blavatsky’s *Secret Doctrine*) he developed his own version. It was Ansgar Martins (2012) who drew attention to the paradox at the heart of Steiner’s overall system. He identifies two central strands running through Steiner’s work: evolution and freedom. The first strand takes the form of a grand evolutionary narrative. In his most comprehensive exploration of world evolution, *Occult Science: An outline* (recently published as *An Outline of Esoteric Science* (2002), Steiner offers multiple descriptions of the evolutions of worlds through various stages towards the present and into the future. He mainly focusses on the evolution of the human being and it is a story of humanity being guided by hierarchies of spiritual being and elites towards a higher development. One could add from a decolonizing perspective that it is a paternalistic and non-democratic vision.

Running throughout this strand is the impression that, unlike Darwinian natural selection, a kind of cultural selection occurs that favours those cultures that follow the true path towards realizing the will of the spiritual world that ultimately leads to the central event in world history, the Mystery of Golgotha, in which God incarnates as a human being and after leaving the physical realm again enters the life processes of the earth, thus enabling the redemption of human life and nature. After Golgotha, civilization continues along an evolutionary trajectory that leads to the cultural epoch of the Consciousness Soul, characterized by the emergence of a new consciousness that starts with the mind seeking reality in the empirical world through thinking, rather than perceiving reality intuitively in perception. The previous epoch, that of the Intellectual Soul, was characterized as the perception of concepts, whereas now the

mental process is a productive, active one of bringing forth concepts to explain our experiences.

The philosopher Owen Barfield (1988) describes humanity's original state as one of participation in world processes. This led to a systematic retreat into mental activity and a loss of a participatory consciousness. However, with the emergence of the Consciousness Soul, which involves a rigorous deconstruction of assumptions, the thinking person can begin to co-create reality by matching concepts with percepts (i.e. the mental images we form of our sensory experiences) to given them meaning. The consciousness soul enables empathy, which as Edith Stein (1917/1989) has shown, is our embodied experience that the other is an embodied sentient being. It is not the idea of the other, or our reaction to the other that is important but our ability to experience the other- and this applies not only to people but to nature. Steiner uses the term devotion (see Kiersch, 2021).

For those readers who cannot read German and the detailed analysis by Ansgar Martins (2012), Israel Koren's (2022) article summarizes many of Martins' points as well as adding his own interpretation, that even Steiner's I-Philosophy of Freedom has racist undertones, because it sees race as an earlier stage of development through which the I can emancipate itself over a series of incarnations. This argument carries with it the inevitable assumption that other individuals of other races have either failed to make this inner development or are not yet ready to do so. Koren points out that this is what the Baarda Commission, Robert Rose and the Frankfurt Memorandum in their defense of Steiner fail to recognize. He accuses them of reducing Steiner's race theory to a marginal theme alongside the far more important message of the potential universalism of the I-development.

The racial nature of 'higher developments' even finds its expression in Steiner's educational works, albeit long before the Waldorf school was founded. In his book *The Education of the Child in the Light of Spiritual Science* from 1907, Steiner brought the two strands of evolution and his I-philosophy together. He is referring to the function of the I within the 'lower members' of the human being, the physical, life and astral bodies. He makes the analogy that the I civilizes the lower bodies;

This Body of the I is the vehicle of the higher soul of humankind... We may recognize its nature if we compare human beings at different stages of development. Look at an uneducated savage next to a typical European, or again compare the latter with a person of high ideals. All of them have the faculty to say 'I' to themselves; the body of the I is present in them all. But uneducated savages, with their I, follow more the passions, impulses, and cravings. More highly developed people say to themselves, "certain impulses and desires you may follow", whilst others are held in check or suppressed altogether. Idealists have developed new impulses and new desires in addition to those originally present. All of this has taken place through the working of

the I upon the other members of the human being (Steiner, 1996, 10-11, trans. George and Mary Evans)

A benevolent interpretation would be that Steiner is saying that some people control their impulses by having ideals and the ethical agency to control their own behaviour. He calls this civilized behaviour. The problem is the un-reflected reference to the average 'European' as opposed to the uneducated savage, which is a blatantly Eurocentric and racist statement. This is not a slip of the tongue of misheard phrase in a lecture- the text is after all published in a book, before that as an article in the *Luzifer-Gnosis Magazine* that he edited. There we have the paradox in a nutshell. Shortly before this publication, in his lecture on the *Occult Significance of Blood* (1983/2015) Steiner rhetorically asked, "To what extent are uncivilized peoples capable of becoming civilized? How can a Negro or an utterly barbaric savage become civilized? And in what way ought we to deal with them?" He does not offer a positive answer.

The argument that Steiner modified his position and dropped his explicit theory of race unfortunately doesn't really add up. In 1921 René Maran's novel *Batouala*, was awarded the Prix Goncourt as Book of the Year in France, and even the New York Times wrote a positive review. In the Foreword, the author wrote;

Colonial life ... is gradually degrading. Rare are the colonials, even among the civil servants, who cultivate their spirit. They do not have the strength to resist the atmosphere. One becomes accustomed to alcohol... These and other ignoble excesses lead those who excel in them to the most abject cowardice....

The story of *Batouala* tells of a village chief who is in a crisis because he realises that the society he has always lived in is living its last days and that the white man (the coloniser) does not respect him. The book adopts a lively style that is both humorous and serious and reflects the values of the people who lived in Central Africa (what is today Chad and the Central African Republic), where Maran originally came from. Though not recognized as such at the time, today we can see that the book contains elements of magical realism that we are now familiar with from African writers such as Amos Tutuola, Ben Okri and Chinua Achebe and Maran is critical of both White and African societies.

In a lecture to building workers on the construction site of the Second Goetheanum, Steiner commented on Maran's book and the phenomenon of the Negro novel. He tells the workers that had recently seen in a book shop in Basel, the latest manifestation of the 'programme' by which Negroes were gradually entering civilization.

Everywhere Negro dances are being performed, Negro dances being hopped. But we now even have the Negro novel. It is totally boring, dreadfully boring, but the people gobble it up. Yes, I am convinced, if we get more of these Negro novels and we let

pregnant women read them, then we don't need to bring Negroes to Europe in order that mulattos (half-breeds) emerge, because we will soon have a large number of grey children with mulatto hair and the appearance of mulattos in Europe through the purely mental activity of reading Negro novels! (GA 348, p 189, MR trans.).

If this was intended humourously, it does not sound ironical, as if he were criticizing popular racist views. It sounds more like is making fun of the rumours that women can get pregnant through listening to African music. But in doing so, Steiner still uses stereotypical racist tropes. Selg *et al* (2021, p. 16) refer in passing to this and other racist passages in the so-called 'Workmen Lectures' for non-anthroposophical building workers on the building site of the new Goetheanum, whose questions Rudolf Steiner answered apparently answered spontaneously. The suggestion that the comments were spontaneous and in response to questions from 'non-anthroposophical workers', does not make them in any sense less racist. Steiner was at the height of his international fame, in Dornach he was the person everything revolved around. He knew that every lecture – indeed every private comment - was being documented. He did not accidentally say something inappropriate, nor do I think he was pandering to the populist sentiments and prejudices of the workers. The whole tone of the lectures gives the impression that he gave them with great enthusiasm and enjoyed being able to address a wide range of questions. This particular lecture, which was no more 'off the cuff' than many others, for which he only made cursory notes in preparation, shows that race was still very much part of his overall worldview.

In the same lectures in March 1923 to workers Steiner offers an account based on Goethe's theory of colour (GA 349, p.53-54), already mentioned above, in which the spiritual character of the races is related to their skin colour and this is related to the geographical and climatic conditions. That is, he says, why it is nonsense that Negroes live in Europe, they don't belong here. The 'Negro' – and it is significant how Steiner generalizes and lumps together a very large part of humanity with multiple cultural identities by a single label- *the Negro* – merely by virtue of 'his' skin colour, is characterized as being dominated by their instincts and drives- "everything internally is truly cooked and what fans the fire is the hindbrain...the Negro is more disposed to running and outer movement, which is driven by bodily urges...". The text goes on to elaborate a phenomenology of skin colour and its relationship to the environment and how this manifests in psychological types. He speaks of Negroes, not only being fiery within but also being,

...terribly clever and [having an] attentive eye. He looks clever and very attentive. You could easily take that as a contradiction. But that is the way it is: When the nerve of the eye sits in front (see drawing on p. 56), the nerves go straight into the hindbrain; they cross there. So the nerve goes into the hindbrain and because the

Negro has a particularly well-developed hindbrain, that's why he looks so smart, that's why he's such a clever observer of the world.⁸ (MR trans.)

“That is the way it is.” Even allowing for the vagaries of translation and reconstructing his lectures, Steiner’s tone leaves little room for doubt or other possible explanations. The white race, by virtue of its white skin, reflects cosmic light, which stimulates our forebrain and prompts thinking and makes white people open to the whole world. The white people are therefore the most emancipated from cosmic processes and therefore more prone to materialism. As cited above, we have seen that Steiner draws the conclusion that the Japanese are capable of copying European technical inventions and skillfully reproducing them but are unable to create them. This is their nature, he says, with great authority. In the rest of the lecture, he goes on to characterize the other brown and red races, but I will not go into this. The point I wish to make, is that Steiner is manifestly not talking about ancient times, as apologists often claim, but making a general point to show how bodily psychological traits are related to the environment and influence the character of peoples. Emancipation is both necessary and possible, though for non-white people this will be more difficult. In Steiner’s worldview the white, European race is both physically more emancipated from nature/biology and spiritually more capable of development. He was making this claim more than three years after the Waldorf School was founded. In the same way that his universalism was idealistic and general rather than specific in its application, so too was his theory of race and culture. It wasn’t directed towards any specific people and he did manifestly believe that every human being is capable of higher development.

Let us take another example. On 14th February, 1923, in a conference with the teachers in the Waldorf School, Steiner refers to the occupation of the Rhineland by the French Army which contained regiments with soldiers of African origin. This caused a public scandal in Germany, partly because of the occupation but mainly for racist reasons. Public media were concerned that exposing German women to black soldiers, will leave behind them countless ‘mulattos’. The English translation tactfully edits this passage from the Conferences out leaving a footnote referring to the Rhineland occupation⁹. In the German version there is no inhibition in reporting Steiner’s comments. He is talking about the decadence of the French language, which, he says, is spiritually almost dead. He then refers to the cultural brutality of bringing Africans to Europe as a terrible act that the French were doing to other people and too their

⁸ “sondern er hat auch noch ein furchtbar schlaues und aufmerksames Auge. Er guckt schlaue und sehr aufmerksam. Das konnten Sie leicht als Widerspruch auffassen. Aber das ist so: Wenn da vorne der Nerv des Auges sitzt (Zeichnung S. 56), so gehen die Nerven just ins Hinterhirn hinein; die kreuzen sich da. Der Nerv, der geht also ins Hinterhirn und weil der Neger das Hinterhirn besonders ausgebildet hat, deshalb guckt er auch so schlaue, deshalb ist er ein so schlauer Beobachter der Welt „(GA 349, 54-55)

⁹ Peter Staudenmaier (2010) lists a whole series of recent translations of Steiner in which the editors have simply removed contentious references to race or anti-semitism, and in some cases whole lectures without any editorial comment that this has happened. Staudenmaier refers to these versions as bowdlerized.

own culture. It was affecting French blood in an incredibly negative way that will only hasten the decadence of the French language¹⁰. Nevertheless, French should still be taught in the school, if only to show that the education does not respond in a knee-jerk way to current political events. At this point in the discussions Marie Steiner adds the comment that that the French language allows no access to spiritual experience, whereas in Italian this is still possible. It is hard to read into such comments anything other than snobbishness and cultural prejudice.

Ways of responding to Steiner's racialist theory

The general view of the official anthroposophical responses to accusations of racism/racialism (e.g. van Baarda, 2009, Selg, et al, 2020 etc.) is that they make up only a tiny part of Steiner's complete works, that the statements are taken out of context, that Steiner was against racism and antisemitism, stood for the emancipation of women and that he changed his position later (with the implication that he should be given credit for doing that). What these arguments do not take into account, as critics such as Ansgar Martins (2012) and Koren Israel (2022) have pointed out, is that race is part of Steiner's overall account of human and cultural evolution, which is a key part of his overall system. Building on both theosophical accounts of root races and the submersion of Atlantis and Darwin's (via Haeckel) theory of evolution, Steiner wants to show that humanity's relationship to the spiritual world has changed over time. There are two aspects of races that are important, firstly that they represent different streams of humanity, some of which are more capable of evolving to higher levels of civilization than others, and secondly that biologically, humans, like animals, were originally determined by the conditions of their natural environment. Steiner chooses to focus on skin colour. Natural selection is a convenient metaphor for showing how some peoples are more suited than others. Evolution in Steiner's interpretation offers the idea that neither the cosmos nor humanity is fixed but can change, and he argued that physical selection prepares the way for a kind of 'spiritual' selection, in that a particular group of humans develops faculties that enable 'higher' development. Each race (and these with early cultures and cultural epochs) represents a stage of development in his system and later individuals can gradually emancipate themselves from biological determinism, their race and later culture, so that the free individual can emerge.

The argument that Steiner modified his race theory in later years is unfortunately contradicted by the famous lectures for the workers on the 2nd Goetheanum building site. The question is why would he give such a lecture in 1923 if he had moved on from his theosophical

¹⁰ "Es liegt dies vor, daß gegenwärtig die Franzosen dasjenige, was ihre Sprache als Leichnamssprache aufrechterhalten hat, das Blut, auch noch selbst verderben. Die schreckliche Kulturbrutalität der Verpflanzung der schwarzen Menschen nach Europa, es ist eine furchtbare Tat, die der Franzose an anderen tut. Sie wirkt in noch schlimmerer Weise auf Frankreich selbst zurück. Auf das Blut, auf die Rasse wirkt das unglaublich stark zurück. Das wird wesentlich die französische Dekadenz fordern. Das französische Volk als Rasse wird zurückgebracht". (GA 300b, p 282)

influences? It is also clear from the Workers lectures that he is not only referring to ancient periods in prehistory and early cultures. Take for example Steiner's biologically-determinist and thus racist explanations (in GA 349, referred to above) as to why the European 'race' is more emancipated from the bodily processes than 'yellow', 'red', 'brown' or 'black' skinned races (each of these terms indicates how generic Steiner is being, thus contradicting his own advocacy in the *Philosophy of Freedom*-see below) and therefore more capable to developing spiritually. He is not talking about ancient times but his day;

Europe is always the starting point for everything that develops what is human, particularly as it involves how we relate to the outer world...the Japanese will therefore develop all European inventions, but they will not discover them themselves (GA 349, p. 59).

This is not simply a sentence taken out of context, it is part of a detailed discussion that builds on previous presentations of racial theory. According to Steiner, the white race is least dependent on the physical cosmos and therefore provides less resistance for the spirit and soul. Steiner then follows this thought up with the suggestion that because these geographical-biological differences are a fact, people all over the world are dependent on each other. Economic geography would suffice to make the important case for human interdependence across borders and geographical regions! Why does Steiner use race as an argument for human cooperation of the kind he describes in his book *World Economy* (1973)?

The text goes on to offer generic characterizations of the 'red Indians of North America', who were, according to Steiner, originally African Negroes who have changed their skin colour by moving to a new continent and in the process of doing so, have begun to become 'useless'. Following the current state of knowledge, all human species originated in Africa and the immediate ancestors of the indigenous population of the Americas came from northeast Asia, East Asia and northern Eurasians. There then follows a comment about Americans today who are incapable of developing anthroposophy out of their own spirit, in contrast to Europeans. It is unclear whether he is speaking about Native Americans or European migrants. Either way, the white race is the race of the future, that is capable of being creative out of the spirit.

Perry Myers' benign interpretation of Steiner

I've already mentioned Perry Myers and American German Studies scholar who has written on Steiner (and Max Weber's) attempt to reclaim the humanist notion of *Bildung* from the scientific materialism of their day. In his most recent work, he has also shown how spiritual ideas from India and the East more generally merged with theosophy and other esoteric movements in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to counter materialism, colonialism and capitalism. Annie Besant (1847 -1933) is one of the best-known proponents of this. She was a British socialist, champion of workers and women's rights and was active in promoting Indian and Irish independence. She was also a Freemason and theosophist, and appointed Steiner as Leader of the Theosophy Movement in Germany and Austria. She is mostly known

in the Steiner reception as the adoptive mother of the young Krishnamurti and the person who claimed him as the Second Coming of the Christ. This makes her persona non grata for anthroposophists. But she is not only an interesting context for Steiner, but for a stream of spirituality that is also important.

Steiner was also connected to Margaret McMillan, whose school for poor children in Deptford Steiner visited and whose book *Education Through the Imagination*, published in 1904 was in Steiner's possession. She was Christian Socialist, campaigner for women's rights and belonged to a similar tradition Annie Besant. McMillan spoke at Steiner's education course in Ilkley in 2023, though the collected works edition of Steiner's lectures makes no reference to her (except at the start of the first lecture, "The Chair was taken by Miss Margaret McMillan, who gave a stirring address, and Dr. Steiner followed on"., GA. 307). Philip and Glynis Woods (2008) have explored an interesting link between the tradition of spirituality that originated in the Nonconformist movement in the UK in the 17th and 18th centuries, which was closely linked to ideas of inclusive democracy that influenced early social reformers such as the educationalist, feminist and political philosopher Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797, she was also the mother of Mary Shelley). It seems to me that there is a feminist strand leading to anthroposophy that is waiting to be researched, thus far held back by the tradition of seeing Steiner as a self-contained genius, rather than as part of a tradition. Significantly, Steiner's closest feminist friend Rosa Mayreder, with whom he was very close whilst writing the *Philosophy of Freedom*, later became skeptical of his charismatic style of lecturing (as I have discussed in Rawson, 2023, c, Waldorf Working Papers No.8 parts 1 &2).

Myers links Steiner both to the British theosophical movement but also emphasizes his commitment to German cultural nationalism. In a paper published in the *Journal of European Studies European*, Myers addresses these aspects of Steiner's ideas. He makes the point that many German scholars and cultural figures in the 19th and early 20th centuries drew on the Orient as a source of literary inspiration and religious renewal. He argues that Steiner was seeking to establish a 'colonialism based on a psychological type purportedly outside race, class and ethnicity' (2006, p. 390), yet in doing so he practices Orientalism in Said's sense by selectively re-interpreting the Bhagavad Gita and elaborating a discourse that "designates Western cultural traditions as superior" (ibid.) and thus promotes a form of intellectual colonialism. Though he describes Steiner as a well-intentioned humanist "and would-be humanitarian" (ibid.), "his Orientalism selectively interprets and re-contextualizes cultural meaning with biased discursive purposes and thus naturalizes a colonist world-vision in a more subtle way than assumed for Western, and more specifically German, forms of colonialism" (ibid.).

Myers also explores Steiner's ideas for a threefold social renewal and highlights his stated intention, as expressed in his appeal "*An das deutsche Volk und an die Kulturwelt*" (to the

German People and the Cultural World), to the crucial role of the German nation (a term that was not identical to Germany as a state) in renewing Europe through a new German identity based on the Enlightenment values of reason, humanism and universalism. He failed, as did many other, to recognize how exclusive vision this was. Myers summarizes Steiner's position as follows:

Thus Steiner and others failed to fulfil those Enlightenment precepts so critical to the *Bildungsideal* because of their tacit reliance on a totalizing, raw Hegelian vision of historical change that saw the next stage of history rooted in the West... Steiner's solution appealed to the many self-formed citizens who sought new kinds of community for resolutions to their loss of distinction as a community value, as their nation dissolved into the political and economic chaos of Weimar and post-war Austria. Steiner had simply assumed that a revitalization of human spirituality in his world-vision would create an involuntary conduit for individual agency in the community and new state forms....

...Steiner's willingness to express such cultural chauvinism manifests 'civilizationism', particularly in attitudes (regardless of how well-meaning) towards difference, towards the cultural Other, in a way that still haunts contemporary Western perceptions of the world. That is, such a view of other cultural traditions, which selectively interprets and recontextualizes cultural meaning with biased discursive purposes, embodies a colonialist world-vision and can open the door to abusive social and political practices and adherence to authoritative word (Myer, 2006, 411-2).

Following Myers, Steiner's colonial attitude differs from political and economic colonialism because it is psychological and religious/spiritual in intention. It involves an occult scientific cultural appropriation of, example the Indian Bhagavad Gita, which Myers says Steiner uses to promote his vision of German national identity, which is presents as superior. Myers suggests that Steiner, who he describes as a well-meaning humanist and would-be-humanitarian, "selectively interprets and recontextualizes cultural meaning with biased discursive purposes and thus naturalizes a colonialist world-vision in a more subtle way than assumed for Western, and more specifically German forms of colonialism" (2006, 389).

In doing this Steiner takes a decisive step away from traditional Christianity and the classical antiquity as the foundations of the German *Bildungsideal* (the theory of self-formation through engaging with culture), by providing a new set of universal ideals. This new universalism is distinctly European, white and specifically culturally German and is deemed superior to older oriental forms and is presented as a unifying cultural/spiritual force in contrast in emergent nationalisms. He uses this Hindu source to illustrate his theory that the divine world with its anthropomorphic Gods and Christian Biblical Trinity and should give way to a universal spiritual structure that is no longer 'up there in heaven' but accessible to every individual through her own creative thought processes. Myers argues that Steiner

“sought the solution to the purported sociocultural disintegration of Austria-Hungary in the reconstitution not of a state, but through the ideals of ‘self-formation’ that had linked socio-cultural status with spiritual fulfilment throughout the nineteenth century “(ibid, p. 396).

In Steiner’s interpretation, the Bhagavad Gita, marks a significant transition in the overall evolution of human consciousness that was to culminate in the ‘Christ Impulse’ and the inner connection that Steiner saw was between the Bhagavad Gita and St.Paul. As Steiner formulates it, “Thus we see the existence of a unified plan throughout world history; how Orientalism prepared it” (Steiner, 1960, p.27). Although Steiner saw the West as superior, Myers judges that Steiner is “no racist in his decisive turn toward German culture. He did not judge the question of the need for spiritual ideals to be an ethnic question, but rather one of individual nobility and self-acknowledgement of historical precedent and current affiliation within the community and the world” (ibid, p.397). Nevertheless, in his Orientalism Steiner represents a form of colonial consciousness, albeit unlike that of political and economic colonialism.

Myers concludes,

Though Steiner was certainly a well-meaning humanist and would-be humanitarian, his Orientalism selectively interprets and recontextualizes cultural meaning with biased discursive purposes and thus naturalizes a colonialist world-vision in a more subtle way than assumed for Western, and more specifically German, forms of colonialism (2006, p.1).

In Myers’ (2004) analysis of Thomas Mann, Rudolf Steiner and Max Weber he looks at the way these three important figures engaged with what Weber called the disenchantment of the world through rationalism and intellectualism, as well as the loss of fraternal relations between people. All three saw the Idealist notion of Bildung or self-formation as a pathway back to a meaningful community. All three, in his view, along with most of the German intelligentsia, including most anthroposophists (not least because they were in a sense paralyzed by Steiner’s vision), during the Weimar years failed to realize that they had to offer more than just spiritual orientation, hope and understanding to counter the emergence of fascism. Steiner, in Myers view,

simply assumes that the reconstitution of individual self-formation, the parity of power structures within the social organism will result. This implies that access to power in the political sphere follows a set of parameters that are in harmony with the spiritual essence of the community, an aggregation of self-formed individuals. Herein lies the value of Steiner's work...He offers a heightened profile of the problematic *gebildete Bürger* in German at the beginning of the twentieth century as the Germans sought to reformulate their identity constructs in such a way to re-establish agency in the community after established institutional structures (e.g. the

church or science) and social constructs (e.g. the proletariat in its classical form) were swept away in World War 1. (Myers, 2004, S.127)

In other words, anthroposophy was too little to turn the incoming tide. And this was not helped by anthroposophists clinging to the charisma of Steiner and his works, and like Hamlet's dilemma, "whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing end them" to quote Shakespeare's Hamlet (Act 111. Scene 1).

Staudenmaier (2010, p.27) is not as forgiving and criticizes Myers for this judgement, even though Myers does accuse Steiner along with many of his contemporaries for not realizing that their talk of German cultural nationalism would not always be understood in Idealist terms. Steiner himself distinguished between a spiritual nationalism and one-sided chauvinism, and this informed his well-known criticism of the American President Woodrow Wilson's policy of promoting the self-determination of peoples. He frequently criticized the emergent nationalism of many of the peoples within the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, but he obviously saw the spiritual mission of the German Nation as of a different order. If a person could experience the soul of a nation, its historic and karmic mission, then this would have a positive effect (GA 207). Again, his focus of argumentation is that if one ignores the spiritual dimension of life- in this case the spiritual dimension of nation of people – and only look to the materialistic side of things, that is through biological inheritance or blood relations, bad things will happen historically (Steiner talks about this in lecture 7, GA 200).

Was Steiner only a child of his times?

It may be argued that Steiner was influenced by the historical times he lived in, by the social circles he moved in and aspired to be part of (the impression of Steiner often being an outsider, whilst seeking recognition comes strongly through the main biographies, including his own autobiography). This can be negatively interpreted, as Zander does by accusing Steiner in effect of being a plagiarist. This reminds me of early criticism of Shakespeare in the famous text *Greenes Groatsworth of witte bought with a million of Repentence*, 1592, in which the authors allude to Shakespeare as: "an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his Tygers hart wrapt in a Players hyde, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blanke verse as the best of you: and beeing an absolute Iohannes fac totum is in his owne conceit the onely Shake-scene in a cuntry". Or it can be benignly interpreted as Steiner biographer Kaj Skagen (2020) does, who shows Steiner as someone diving into the works of different authors, identifying intensively with them, learning from them and then moving on having been changed through the encounter- much as any major artist such as Rembrandt or David Hockney have done. Skagen shows in brief few years how Steiner went through phases of evolutionary ideas through his connection to Haeckel, anarchistic ideas through his engagement with Nietzsche and some kind of deeply spiritual experience of Christ. Likewise,

Steiner's various changes in roles, from Goethe scholar, academic and philosopher, journalist and bohemian, lecturer at the Workers Institute in Berlin, theosophist, artist, dramatist, architect, and then the final phase as leader of an international movement applying anthroposophy to education, medicine, agriculture can be seen as opportunist or linked by a braid of strands weaving through them all. All of these strands pursue the goal of applying spiritual science to make the world a better place. The core strand is the emergence of the possibility of evolving and developing human faculties capable of spiritual consciousness. The narrative involves, as we have seen, acknowledging and where possible countering the forces that oppose this higher development. Everything he published or publicly iterated was directed towards this end, even his unfinished autobiography, which is structured to frame the narrative of the 'scientist of the invisible' (Shepherd, 1961), rather than share his personal experiences.

In spite of his incredibly wide reading and willingness to write and speak about a bewildering array of topics, Steiner had his blind spots, or at least he was less interested in some things and these remained in the shadows, not totally absent but also not grabbing his attention and engaging his will. In an age when anthropology and ethnology, as a scientific byproduct of the Enlightenment interest in classifying everything and as a byproduct of colonialism, was emergent, with wide coverage in the press and the expansion of ethnological museums and exhibitions, Steiner showed little interest. He evidently wasn't really interested in other non-European cultures *per se*, in the way that Franz Boas, Ernst Cassirer or Claude Levi-Strauss were. Comparison with Boas, born in 1858 in Germany, is instructive, since Boas was a contemporary with similar interests in evolution, but through his lengthy contact with native peoples had a very different view of race, culture and evolution. He argued for cultural relativism rather than essentialism and favoured close observation and contextualization as a basis for knowledge rather than ideology or abstract theory and was a campaigner against racism. For Steiner, other and earlier cultures or races were steppingstones along the pathway to higher development. Races and cultures are treated in a very generic sense, with hardly any differentiation. For Steiner, race theory was a means to an end, namely that of highlighting the significance of a spiritual scientific perspective and illustrating a teleological motif of emancipation in human cultural history, one that can be identified as an evolution of consciousness, emerging out of a biology of freedom (Rosslenbroich, 2014) and how this manifests in history as the trend towards individuality. Other cultures were lumped together into regional groups. He wasn't even particularly interested in contemporary racial theory or scientific anthropology.

Nor does he appear to have shown much interest in the plight of colonial peoples. There were extensive reports on the German colonies in the media and black people from the colonies who were visible on the streets of Berlin, where Steiner lived for many years. Colonialism was central to the "Wilhelminian discourse on national identity and to the country's understanding of itself as a world power" (Perraudin and Zimmerer, 2011, p.2) and was a

prominent feature in the popular media, journalism, travel literature, advertising, public statues and popular iconography, assisted by new technologies (including film). Yet Steiner makes barely any reference to it.

Steiner did not attend, nor make any reference to the First Universal Race Congress in London, at which over 2,000 scholars, journalists and intellectuals from the West and even from non-European cultures (e.g. from India, Indonesia, Africa, Native Americans etc.) met in London for a four day anti-racist conference. Germany was represented by 28 leading figures including the sociologists Ferdinand Tonnies and Max Weber, the biologist Ernst Haeckel and Franz Boas (by then working in America) as well as Paul Natorp the philosopher, all opponents of race theory, (as well as major figures from the USA and other countries) (see Stifter, 2000). The introduction to the record of Proceedings (over 500 pages of papers on a various aspects of the subject) the editor wrote:

Nearer and nearer we see approaching the day when the vast populations of the East will assert their claim to meet on terms of equality the nations of the West, when the free institutions and the organized forces of the one hemisphere will have their counterbalance in the other, when their mental outlook and their social aims will be in principle identical ; when, in short, the colour prejudice will have vanished and the so-called white races and the so-called coloured races shall no longer merely meet in the glowing periods of missionary exposition, but, in very fact, regard one another as in truth men and brothers. Are we ready for this change ? (Interracial Problems. Papers from the First Universal Races Congress, London 1911. Record of the Proceedings ed. G. Spiller, from Introduction) desire for greater acquaintance, Citadel Press 1970).

One of the participants wrote.

The superstition of the superiority of the whites and their cultures and of the inferiority of the people of colour and their civilizations was thoroughly refuted by countless speakers at the Congress; the very person of many "coloured" speakers and participants formed a brilliant argument against the thoughtless "inferiority" theory. What extraordinary efficiency there is in these eminent blacks, yellows, browns and reds, in these Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Turkish, Persian, African scholars, professors, doctors, statesmen, legal researchers, etc.! But the great mass of non-whites also got their due, in that "white" speakers repeatedly came to their defence and emphasized that even the lowest-ranking primitive peoples are superior to us in many things, that they are mostly good-natured, accommodating and trusting in themselves and as a rule are only corrupted by prolonged contact with greedy, selfish, inconsiderate "whites" (Katscher, 1911. cited in Stifter, 2000, 61 trans. MR).

This is somewhat at odds with the argument that Steiner was in tune with the times he lived in. If these 2000 delegates in London were against racism and racialism, an astute observer and commentator of the news, Steiner must also have known that there were other views that the racial theories he continued to refer to ten years later.

Another example relates to the presence of German colonial events in the news. Between 1904 and 1910, the so-called Herero War in the German colony that is now Namibia occupied the public and political imagination to great extent. Quite apart from what the Herero and Nama experienced through genocide; the German public was deeply shocked for different reasons. As David Ciarlo (2011) puts it,

By the time of the Herero War, virtually every person in Germany saw commercial imagery on a daily basis. In fact, many more Germans saw illustrated advertisements than scrutinized the half-tone photographs in the new illustrated tabloids (*Illustrierte*). Advertising imagery circulated not only in tabloids, but also papered city walls and *Litfaßsäulen*, decorated window displays, and adorned cardboard packaging that was carried back into the home...(p.70).

The omnipresence of references to colonialism and *Kolonialwaren* in *Kolonialläden* (colonial consumer products in shops that specialized in them) highlights the shock that came with news from the war. It influenced the so-called 'Hottentot Election' of 1907, where nationalist parties gained seats through the racial nature of the threat to German identity. The uprising was seen as a threat to the new growth of entrepreneurial interests in colonial goods. A panorama presentation of the Herero uprising was opened in Berlin, and Hagenbeck, the well-known zoo owner in Hamburg sent 1,000 camels to support the war. Satirical magazines such as *Simplicissimus* often critical articles on British and German colonialism, though their cartoons also drew on racial stereotypes. Photographs of African captives in chains in concentration camps were published. The popular nationalist narrative was one of threat to German identity (and commerce) through an uprising of savages. Steiner does not appear to have responded to these events except to highlight the problem in the colonies of mixing racial blood (in his lecture 25.10.1906 in Berlin, GA55, *The Occult Significance of Blood*, recently re-published in English 2015).

The 18th and 19th Centuries brought classic Western works of classification of human types (e.g. Carolus Linnaeus *Systema Naturae*, Blumenbach's *On the Natural Variety of Mankind*, see also Eigen & Larrimore, 2006, *The German Invention of Race*), and by the end of the 18th Century the concept of race had been established (Arndt, 2021, Geulen, 2021) in European thinking, though at the same time ideas about relative equality (excluding women, men without property, slaves etc.) were also taking root. Sankar Muthu (2003) has argued that these notions of equality were beginning to undermine ethnocentrism and justifications of colonialism. Muthu cites three thinkers who represent this counter movement, the French philosopher and encyclopedist Denis Diderot (1713-1784), Immanuel Kant, who underwent a

conversion in his thinking, having been one of the founders of racial theory and Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), who was a student and later rival of Kant's. Herder identified a paradox that existed in Enlightenment thinking. On the one hand he was convinced that "all humankind are only one and the same species" (Herder, 2016, pp.140-1, cited in Malik, 2022). He specifically included the Native Americans, Africans, insisting that they should not be oppressed or murdered and opposed both slavery and colonialism. However, universal human qualities are distributed amongst the people of the earth in their geographical regions. As Malik notes,

the fundamental unit of human existence was, for Herder, the Volk. This is usually translated as 'the people' or 'the nation' but has a deeper, more spiritual connotation. What made each *Volk* unique was its Kultur; its particular language, literature, culture and modes of living...the unique nature of each Volk was articulated through its *Volksgeist*- the spirit of the people refined through history. The relationship between the individual and the collective was expressed not through a political contract but in a spiritual union" (p.60).

This description shows us how much Steiner was indebted to Herder, particularly the link to each specific language and the spirit of each language. Furthermore, Herder saw himself in the position of defending German *volk-ness* against the imperial ambitions of the French. He was also strictly against migration, because this muddied the purities of the Volk. Despite his commitment to equality and universal human qualities, his cultural relativism led him to express deeply racist views about Africans, whose physical constitution predisposed them to boiling passions caused by the burning sun, a powerful sensual disposition and lack of intellect, thus linking physical traits to character traits – in ways we find Steiner repeating in his Workers Lectures.

By the beginning of the 20th Century, however, whilst racial differences were widely considered "real, incontestable and profound. And yet, scientists found it impossible to define what they were. Every measure of racial difference, from the shape of the skull to the character of blood types, was shown to be changeable of differentiating one race from another" (Malik, 2021, p.49). In fact, many anthropologists even then acknowledged that racial types only exist in the mind (e.g. Franz Boas).

At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th Centuries it was much easier to distinguish social class because each person was allotted a specific place in society, and this largely defined one's identity. Marx identified the new industrial proletariat and Steiner also used this classification. But there were also clearly held views about the inferiority and sub-humanity of certain groups, such as Jews, Roma and Sinti, and Muslims. Marx had a very Eurocentric view, as did Steiner, though Rosa Luxemburg, with whom Steiner was closely associated was a pioneer of postcolonial thinking.

As a Jew, a woman, and a socialist revolutionary, Rosa Luxemburg was in a unique position to think about the meaning of Marx's ideas from the vantage point of disenfranchised segments of the world in or out of Europe. As a Jew, she was the internal other of Europe; as a woman, its gendered alterity; and as a socialist revolutionary, its nightmare (Hamid Dabashi, 2018).

Lea Ypi (2022) points out that Rosa Luxemburg was one of the pioneers of the study of racism and cultural appropriation and this approach was part of her analysis of capitalism, in which where exploitation and racial subordination are mutually reinforcing. She outlined this in her book *Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy*, which was based on her lectures at the Berlin Workers Institute. In her in-depth analysis of cultural history, which in contrast to Marx's Eurocentric perspective, she included studies of the Inca empire, British India, French Algeria, and Russia. She saw the contact of non-European peoples with European civilization as an encounter with advanced capitalism, which destroys those societies from the inside out by tearing apart traditional structures and relationships in a very short time, allowing not opportunity for adaptation. She wrote articles about the genocide of the Herero and Nama people in the German colony of Namibia and criticized the SPD leadership for failing to oppose colonialism.

Wilfried Jaensch (Becker and Jaensch, 2010), who taught for many years at the Waldorf Seminar in Berlin, offered the view that what connected Rosa Luxemburg with Rudolf Steiner, who worked with and for her for five years in *The Workers Educational Institute* in Berlin, was a commitment to freedom, even for people who think differently to oneself. They were also united in the belief that the future lay in education for working class children that enabled them to become autonomous individuals- the motto of the founder of the Institute Wilhelm Liebknecht was *Bildung zur Freiheit*- education towards freedom. Jaensch commented (personal communication) that Steiner was deeply moved by her murder in early 1919 and sought spiritual inspiration from her. A benevolent view of Steiner is that his approach to freedom differed only in its form of expression to that of Rosa Luxemburg. When asked by a member of the Council of the Workers Institute whether theosophy was consistent with socialism, Steiner replied,

I am sure that you will come more and more to recognize that theosophical work is not opposed to socialist work, but that both belong together like the letters of a book and the meaning of the book and the sense of the book. As little as this sense contradicts the other, as little does theosophy contradict socialism. And the latter would probably also be a fool who would have the sense without the letters." (Steiner, *Mein Lebensgang*, p. 392).

I imagine Steiner identified himself with his huge mission to an extraordinary extent, that may have sometimes appeared to those who knew him as obsessional. Though he was obviously charismatic and often expressed himself with great self-certainty, even sometimes

with arrogance and could be very dismissive of other thinkers - at least in the transcripts this tone sometimes comes over- he was also obviously a complex, paradoxical human being. The mission was so important and was perceived by his followers as such that everything else was secondary, friends, wives, colleagues and their feelings. We know Steiner was close to various Jews, whether he ever knew anyone of colour is unknown to me. They were certainly present and visible in Berlin where he spent much time. He must have noticed the discrimination and prejudice that burdened these people's lives.

One telling episode is recounted by Steiner himself in his autobiography (Ga 28, p. 193). Steiner lived with family of Ladislav and Pauline Specht in Vienna as house-teacher of the four children and as confidant of Pauline (as we can see from their correspondence). The Spechts were Jewish, though not orthodox, as were many of the intelligentsia of Vienna such as Sigmund Freud, who co-authored the pioneer paper that launched psychotherapy with Joseph Breuer, who was the Specht's family doctor.

Steiner wrote an article in which he portrayed the mission of the Jewish people as failed. Steiner emphasized that he was simply reporting what he saw as fact. Ladislav Specht expressed his astonishment and hurt that Steiner could write such negative things about Jews as a whole (the German word *Judentum* means Jewishness) yet live intimately with a Jewish family. Steiner writes, that the man was wrong because nothing personal influenced his judgement, and Specht couldn't see this. Steiner reports Specht as rejecting this and saying "after this article the man who teaches my children is no friend of the Jews (*Judenfreund*) and that this now changes his relationship to the family. Interestingly, Steiner then comments that the task of educating his son, Otto, was his destiny and notes that both he and Specht could not deny that something tragic had now occurred. What does this exchange tell us. We know only Steiner's version of the story (though Pauline Specht's letter to Steiner after he left the family emphasize what a loss this was to her personally and to the family). Steiner clearly felt that what in his perception was an objective, factual insight into the nature of the Jewish people and its cosmic mission, was clearly more important than the effect his printed words would have on the people around him, not least in a climate of growing antisemitism in Vienna at that time. Secondly, we know how significant Steiner's experiences teaching Otto Specht were for his understanding of human development and later for Waldorf education. He knew what he was learning from this experience. We could interpret this skeptically and say Steiner was using the family for his personal development (and his correspondence with Pauline also shows that he was also benefited from the insider access it gave to Viennese cultural life). The benign interpretation is that he was aware of the paradoxes and was doing his best for the child whilst sticking to his principles and to his judgement.

What I learn from this is how Steiner and many of his anthroposophists were so convinced of the judgements about other races, cultures and individuals that they did not take into account the effects this might have on people who are directly involved. Ladislav Specht is a representative for all the individuals who feel misunderstood and marginalized in the grand

narrative of anthroposophy. The importance of the mission, the heroic, charismatic playing down the personal dimension (never Steiner's strong suit), seems to me a male position, one taken by many pioneers within the Waldorf and anthroposophical worlds in which the work came first, wife and family second, and when the personal intervened it was read as destiny and karma. The female version includes the dedicated spinsters (nun-like in deference to the priests) who served the cause, quietly got on with the actual work, whilst the leading men strutted and fretted their hour upon the stage. Fortunately, these tropes are all long since history and have been replaced by the brave new inclusive world of diversity!

There is no doubt that Rudolf Steiner was a key figure in the 20th century but he was not of course the only one. There have been a number of figures of global stature and significance in the sciences, arts, philosophy and politics- we can debate who is on our own top ten list. The question is whether Steiner can be judged by the same criteria, or perhaps more aptly, can his life and works and legacy be interrogated like all the others. Since anthroposophy is not a religion, it and its founder need to be treated like any other set of idea and their application in social life. It may be that Steiner was the 'sage of the age' as some of his followers believe, but that does not exclude him from critical study. He wanted anthroposophy to be treated like a science and peer-review is very much part of the process (though some would no doubt claim that Steiner was 'peerless').

Avoiding binary solutions

The antithesis of racism can be seen as individualism. One of the main reasons why some anthroposophists find it so hard to accept that Steiner may have made racist statements is their commitment to Steiner's *Philosophy of Freedom*. Steiner's interest in evolution (in his view the only problem with Darwin and Haeckel's theory of evolution was that it didn't go far enough- as he puts in the *Philosophy of Freedom*), is what leads to his use of race and culture theory. Yet at the pinnacle of his evolution theory (though in Darwin's sense there was and can be no pinnacle) is the possibility and necessity of freedom. Evolution has led humanity to the possibility of the development of the spiritual core of the human being, the I or das Ich, towards a state of freedom, or ethical individualism.

What did Steiner mean by a philosophy of freedom? He himself suggested that his *Philosophie der Freiheit* be translated as *A Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* (see the Foreword to 1963 edition, p 9), which gives a better idea of what he meant. Only in thinking as spiritual activity does the human being have the possibility to emancipate herself from other determining factors such as social class, ethnic origins, gender, socialization and so on. Steiner's philosophy culminates in ethical individualism; the ability to base one actions on one's own insight and this insight is based on a knowledge generating process that is at the core of Steiner's theory of knowledge.

Put very simply, Steiner's theory of knowledge says we construct representations (mental images) to represent what we experience through our senses and then we make sense of this perception by intuitively matching this with a concept. In Steiner's words,

thinking approaches the given world structures as an organizing principle... Thinking first lifts out certain entities from the totality of the world-whole. In the given nothing is really separate; everything is a connected continuum. Then thinking relates the separate entities to each other in accordance with the thought-forms its produces, and also determines the outcomes of this relationship" (1963, p. 349).

There are, I believe, three levels to this process. This first is the immediate recognition of the meaning, for example, of body language, gesture or facial expressions. We appear to be able to 'read' the intentions of our interlocutor before we take in and reflect on the meaning of their words. The second level is the affect that we have, when we perceive events. The affect is what non-materially or virtually arises in the mind when life or something external impinges on our sense organs.

The body infolds the effect of the impingement – it conserves the impingement minus the impinging thing, the impingement abstracted from the actual action that cause it and actual context of that action. This is a first order idea produced spontaneously by the body: the affection is immediately, spontaneously doubled by the repeatable trace of an encounter, the 'form' of the encounter... an infolding, or contraction, of context... (Massumi, pp. 31-2).

The affect is the result of the impingement and the idea of the affect. This too leads to an imaginative response which we embody as affect. The third mode is the act of knowing that emerges in our consciousness when we bring percept (and affect) and concept together.

Through our I, as spiritual core, we can access the world of concepts. The knowledge process or process of knowing leads us to create what counts for us as reality.



Figure 1. Steiner's theory of knowledge showing how we co-create reality in our cognition

This reality is an individualized version of a more general reality because the concepts we draw on to make sense of our percepts are embedded in the cultural lifeworld we are part of, and in Steiner's terms the spiritual world. Our ability to understand is based on relating what we know (through the process described above) to a wider context of other realities. Ideas are not in themselves absolutely true, but their validity increases to the extent that we are able to fruitfully relate them to a wider context.

Steiner's ethical individualism is therefore both epistemological and ethical, in fact, it is an ethical, relational epistemology. The point about Steiner's theory of knowledge is that it says we are not passive observers of the world around us, but the human being is "the active co-creator of the world-process, and cognition I the most perfect link in the organism of the universe" (1963, p. 298). That means our relationship to the world - if we allow it to be - is intentional and relational.

What the individual at any given point in time is, as Steiner put it, is "the sum of ideas which are effective in us, the content of our intuitions" (1963, 131). This an interesting turn of phrase; "ideas which are effective in us". Effective means that they have an effect; ideas affect us and change us. When we internalize them and link them with our percepts, they affect our actions and we act, not on only on the basis of our gender, race, social class,

religion, or what we have been socialized or encultured to do, but out of our understanding of reality.

In his early book *Theory of Knowledge* (1968) Steiner is still talking about *Volksgemeinschaft*, meaning the ethnic/cultural group individuals are born into and, as we would say today, within which they are socialized. He is talking about the fields of inquiry for scientific study that takes the spiritual dimension into account, starting with the inorganic world governed by the laws of nature, and proceeding to the organic, which methodologically requires the heuristic notion of the type. In the social sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) the conceptual model is the individual who develops personality (as studied by psychology) and the individual's relationship to the community. Each individual, however, manifests as a member of a people (Volk) and therefore we need to study the nature of such *Völker* or ethnic groups and how they organize their political life. Each Volk has its own character, and each is embedded in the totality of an eternal entity that Steiner refers to as an eternal body of reason. At the highest level of knowledge, the human being acts in freedom, based on individual will; "the human being acts not because he should but because he wills it". As he puts it, the ground of the world, the ideas underpinning it, has been poured into the spiritual being of each human being, which is therefore the source for freedom through knowledge.

In his *Philosophy of Freedom*, Steiner speaks not of *Völkergenossenschaften* (races as cultural entities) but refers to the generic categories people belong to, such as ethnicity, social class, gender. He specifically points out that the generic- and the example he gives is sex; "almost invariably man sees in woman and women sees in man, too much of the general character of the other sex and too little of the individual" (Steiner, 1963, 200). He added,

In practical life this does less harm to men than to women. The social position of women is for the most part such an unworthy one because it is in many respects it is determined not as it should be by the particular characteristics of the individual women, but by the general picture one has of women's natural tasks and needs. A man's activity in life is governed by his individual capacities and inclinations, whereas women's is supposed to be determined solely by the mere fact that she is a woman...(Steiner, 1963, p.200).

He wrote that in 1894 and saw no reason to amend it in 1918, when he published a revised edition. His point was not just against stereotyping, but that thinking about people generically obliterates individuality. Yet, at the same time, Steiner obviously saw individuality as identical to universality. What we all have in common is our I-ness. How we come to I-ness is the same pathway for everyone, by developing the ability of spiritual or intuitive cognition. From the perspective of the person, ethical individualism means the individual bases her actions on her own spiritual insight as an autonomous being. What Steiner was saying, in the words of Gertrude Reif Hughes, was;

All human beings are ‘I-beings’. Our uniqueness is what we have in common. Paradoxically, the realities and processes by which we individuate are universal ones. Understanding the paradox of this shared uniqueness is absolutely basic to Steiner’s project. Steiner intends to demonstrate that human beings have a unique capacity that is largely unexercised. This capacity is freedom, and it takes the form of cognition or knowing, performed by a process of uniting concepts with perception in an experienced perceiving. That process is called thinking (2012, 248).

Ethical individualism, as Gertrude Reif Hughes says, “requires individual activity”. The opposite to the individual is not society as a collective, but the generic- race, gender, social class, religion etc.

What Steiner called ethical individualism is in a sense a tautology; ethics relates to our moral values that are enacted and are fundamentally relational (it makes no sense to act ethically except in relation to something or someone), whilst individualism today generally is taken to mean the preeminence of the individual and her freedom of action. Individualism has a bad reputation in neoliberal times, which valorize the egotism and narcissism of self-help, self-determination, self-management, self-reliance, autonomous, the self-promotion of the Me-generation, which is essentially competitive and exclusive. This cluster of values can easily become nationalism, xenophobia and intolerance, rejection any form of social regulation (like laws that seek to regulate and thus promote public health, ecological resilience, safe working conditions, fair pay, by using taxes to provide for those in need). Individualism is akin to egotism and self-interest. We know from experience that self-regulation furthers none of these things in any meaningful way).

Both strands in Steiner’s thinking, the evolutionary, cultural line of thinking and the idea of freedom have to do with the relationship between humanity and the spiritual powers, the individual and society or community, and thus also the relationship of the particular to the general or universal. The paradox lies in the nature of the spiritual world, as Steiner portrays it. As a monist he takes the position that there is only one world and no duality between spirit and material world. The material world is a manifestation of the spiritual and studying the material world should reveal its underlying spiritual dimension. Yet this process is somehow hierarchical, with higher spiritual being as the driving forces of life on earth. This spiritual dimension has to metamorphose through what Steiner refers to as the Mystery of Golgotha, when God became mortal and then entered the life processes of the physical world. Though, apparently life continues to be guided by higher spirits (e.g. angels, archangels, archai). The human being as part spiritual being (and symphony of the creative word or Logos) and part unredeemed lower being (which the spiritual core has to educate or ‘civilize’). The spiritual world is, however, also dependent of the deeds of human beings in developing their spiritual conscious, as indeed is the material world (following Steiner in the lectures of the First Teachers’ Course , 2020).

Human beings, apart from certain individuals who have reached a higher level of development, are embedded in a Volk, a people, which has its own individual character, mentality, language, and way of relating to the world. At the same time, following Steiner, whole historical periods covering about 2,500 years are characterized by a particular stage of consciousness, which manifests particularly in certain *Völker* or peoples. Eventually these cultures become decadent, which is itself a racist assumption because it lumps together a whole population with a negative attribute and implies a higher or purer form which has lost its state of perfection. Decadence suggests a loss of stringency, purity, moral uprightness, it implies a fall from grace, an overblown, wasted, gone to seed, even a parody of a purer form of culture. Thus a few cultures make progress, and the rest are decadent, backward, primitive or simply savage and can no longer contribute to the upward path of humanity to higher development. Is it a coincidence that all cultural paths lead to Middle Europe, and from there in the future to Russia? Those who find this summary one-sided or objectionable can look up the references that Ansgar Martins (2012) quotes at length. I am not talking about isolated sentences taken out of context, I am referring to a grand narrative of cultural evolution.

Steiner's central message was that the unique personality of the individual is the source for emancipation from all external material and spiritual forms of determination. Human evolution marked a significant paradigm shift for the world because step by step human beings have been able to emancipate themselves, first as a species, then as social groups and societies and ultimately as individuals. Evolution has been a trajectory towards emancipation, and each step along this path has involved new formation. Darwin and Haeckel's theory of the evolution of species served Steiner as a bridge, which once crossed meant humanity was separated from the divine powers of the spiritual world, which was the source of all knowledge, available through grace and revelation, and set humanity on a path to progressive independence from biological determinism. Within cultural evolution this process could speed up because each generation could build on the achievements of the previous ones.

Through his theory of knowledge, the individual has the possibility for creating a source of ideas that give the person access to the being of things, and indeed the things acquire their meaning- Steiner would say their being- through human thinking. This idea is not original and builds on similar ideas put forward by the Stoic philosophers, Pythagoras, some Neoplatonists, mystics (like Jakob Böhme), and philosophers Schelling, Hegel, Nietzsche and others (Skagen, 2021). Following Steiner, the human mind can unite and integrate the separated reality mediated by our sense, which divides appearance from meaning (hence Barfield's 1988 account of this as 'saving the appearances'). Thus, the idea of the things is at the same time their being, and the medium that mediates this unity is the spiritual being of the person- the Self (in German *das Ich*). This process that is both scientific and mystical only occurs when the person has developed the ability to think in this way, by transforming cognition into the direct experience of reality (e.g. by following Steiner's various methods of contemplation and meditation).

As a non-philosopher, I see two potential problems with this account, that do not question its plausibility, but rather some tricky side-effects. The first is the overemphasis on the individual and the risk of individualism and the neglect of the role of sociality in the whole process, and by neglecting (but not denying) the social dimension, this opens the door to collective hypnosis and generic processes of identity work. Neoliberalism has elevated and privileged individualism in ways that possibly even Steiner did not anticipate. Today's school curricula, the focus of marketing and all the neoliberal policy technologies of performativity, managerialism and belief in the regulatory powers of the market- all of which pursue internal and external capitalist colonialism.

It is significant that Steiner wrote in his *Philosophy of Freedom* that freedom means,

to live in love of the action and to let live, having understanding for the other person's will...if human nature were not fundamentally social, no external laws could make it so! Only because individual human beings are one in the spiritual part of their being, can they live out their lives side by side" (1963, p. 181).

The assumption here is that in our spiritual being, which is beyond race, tribe, nation and sex (to use Steiner's categories) are we able to share the same reality. What makes us universal is, to repeat what Gertrud Reif Hughes said (cited above), is our uniqueness and that through the activity of this individuality, we participate in the apprehension of the same ideas. It is also significant that Steiner's most important corrective to individualism is his social ethic:

"The healthy social life is found when in the mirror of each human soul the whole community finds its reflection and when in the community the virtue of each one is living."

This hugely important idea was not the subject of a whole lecture cycle, or even a single lecture, but was written into the private notebook of the sculptor Edith Maryon in November 1920. This idea is not far from the core idea of Ubuntu, *I am because of who we all are* (as Desmond Tutu famously expressed it) and from the European version in the works of Edith Stein, Martin Buber, Hannah Arendt and Immanuel Levinas, who articulated similar views of human ethics and ontology. Though anthroposophical institutions like Camphill communities and Waldorf schools have emphasized the importance of community, and in the case of Waldorf teachers, the notion that if the individual teacher has the strength to connect to her higher self, and if each can open up to what the others contribute, collectively we can build a receptive organ for what the future is bringing (see so-called College Imagination at the beginning of the First Teachers' Course). Nevertheless, with Steiner's repeated emphasis on the free individuality, the integrated nature of community remains somewhat abstract. The impression I have of Steiner's free individuals can be expressed in this model.

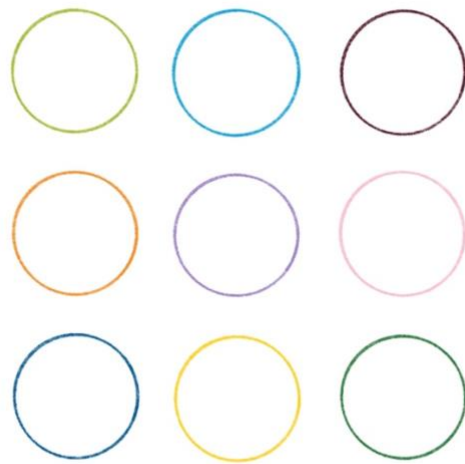


Figure 2. Unique individuals alongside each other.

The connections between them, arising out of past and present interactions can be portrayed as follows.

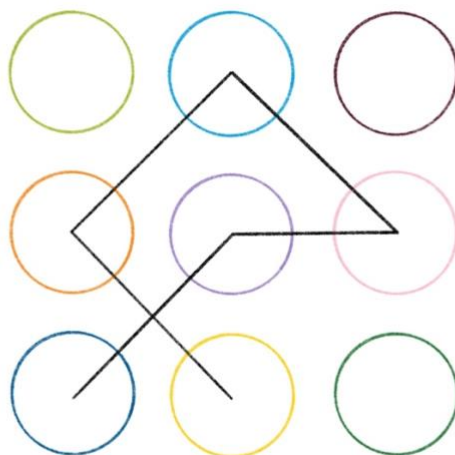


Figure 3. The relations between unique individualities

I am suggesting that Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of becoming and learning through participation in communities of practice, offers us a helpful heuristic for understanding the relationship between the individual and the generic, in which Steiner sees the necessity of the individual overcoming the generic in order to become free. In the model I am suggesting,

rather than the individual overcoming the generic, she embraces the generic in its context and becomes a person within that community. I do not feel I was born into a specific ‘race’ with generic qualities (stereotypical British?) but I have always been a member of multiple communities. Each individual but is not limited to a single community. In fact, it is the boundary crossings from one community to another that really highlights and brings forth unique individuality. Today we would refer to this as intersectionality, the ability to belong to several discrete, overlapping or fully integrated generic categories; woman, person of colour, German speaking with a father who was born in Ghana, journalist, feminist, mother, binary, author and activist (like Hadija Haruna-Oelker). The challenge in this state of multiple belongings is to become free in each, or at least to work towards autonomy by maximizing one’s agency in navigating one’s individual biographical trajectory in response to one’s biographical interests and the needs of the community(ies). It’s not easy to illustrate this but the following graphic shows some aspects in a two-dimensional way.

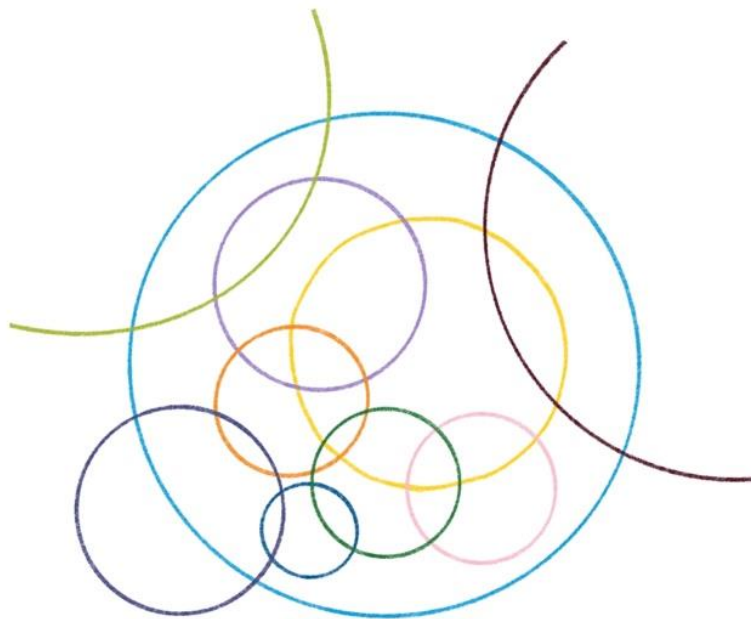


Figure 4 The unique individuality within different and overlapping communities of practice.

An integrated, social version of relationships show the unique individuals as belonging to multiple communities of practice, in which each person has different roles, though each is an expression of an integral Self. We always belong to multiple communities and cultures, within which we come into being as individuals in the first place. I am an I because you are I and we meet in communities in which we share practices, languages, habits of mind and ways of being. An integrated community- a society- consists of many interrelated people who work

to realize Steiner's social ethic in how relate to other and who are interest in and accepting of the difference of others.

Conclusions

Waldorf education needs to be decolonized but this does not put the whole of the education in question. The relationship to Rudolf Steiner and anthroposophy needs recalibrating, not dropping (see also Waldorf Working Papers No 8 parts a & b). Rudolf Steiner did use racist theory to underpin his overall approach and from today's perspective this needs to be acknowledged, which most Waldorf federations already do, and more importantly, individual schools need to review their curriculum and school practices to ensure that students are getting a true picture of how racism developed and how it affected millions of people and how the consequences of colonialism and slavery have blighted peoples lives and still does. That is, they need to learn in age sensitive ways about decolonization 1, 2 and 3. That is the area of curriculum focus. *Decolonization 4* is primarily a question for teachers to consider in relation to school cultures.

Though I find the paper I published in 2020 on the Waldorf Resources website on decolonizing crude and poorly grounded in argument (it simply says; we need to decolonize the following areas), it was an important marker in starting a wider process. Just to remind the reader (and myself), this idea came from my longstanding interest in how Waldorf curriculum is and can be adapted to different times and places. My suggestions for how to go about decolonizing have been published elsewhere (Bransby & Rawson, 2020) and much more material will be forthcoming through the German/international project on revising the history and culture curriculum that was launched in September 2023. But these can only be suggestions. It is absolutely vital that Waldorf teachers are sensitized to the questions of decolonization, inclusion, social justice and diversity in their teacher training and all teachers should attend continuing professional development in this area. They should also develop and assess their curriculum as part of the ongoing professional development and quality assurance.

Decolonization (1-3) is a series of stations on the journey to emancipation, one could also say the journey to freedom that Steiner also sought to enable. Anthroposophy as Steiner developed it was not an end in itself but a pathway to the spiritual in the world via the spiritual in the human being. Riding our institutions and ourselves of unconsidered assumptions, prejudices and blind spots is part of the process. Identifying and weeding out the unwanted parts of Steiner's works and how these have directly or indirectly found their way into Waldorf practice is a necessary task. Doing and signaling that we do it is important.

Hand in hand with decolonization should be a step away from binary solutions -generic (race, gender, language, whatever) or individual and a celebration of individual identities in all their diverse and unique combinations of influences. This calls for a degree of humility, but its

much easier and more rewarding once the first steps have been taken. There are models of community through prehistory (actually in prehistory and much of history there are only models of community) and history that need emphasizing so that our students can appreciate that a heterogenous community freely entered into has a qualitative difference. My own school has teachers from Iran, Palastine, Greece, Hungary, Russia, Scotland, Brazil, Columbia, Peru, Spain (not surprisingly Spanish is taught as second language). The generic is a factor but not the decisive one, in fact I suspect that personality types and gender play a far bigger role, or at least add another dimension. Religion plays absolutely no role that I have ever noticed, and neither does gender or sexual orientation (which are in no way hidden). But this is a school in a cosmopolitan quarter of a big diverse European city. In another location this constellation of people may be experienced in very different ways. Decolonizing is a way of understanding this dynamic.

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