The Ecological Challenge of Peace Education
A Plea for a New Comprehensive Peace Education

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The ecological challenge does not just mean the challenge of ecological problems and crises. Rather, it refers to the epistemic challenge of developing a new way of thinking, a new relationship to "nature" and thus also to the human world, which could be described as *eco-relational peace*. This text traces the paths that peace education has taken over the last half century in developing such a way of thinking.

Two paradigms in dealing with the ecological challenge

Two well-known literary texts from the German-speaking world serve as a starting point for discussing our perception of the ecological challenge.

In the poem *To Those Born Later* (1934-38) by Bertolt Brecht, a few lines have become famous and are often quoted:

"What kind of times are they, when
A talk about trees is almost a crime
Because it implies silence about so many horrors?"[1]

Almost exactly 100 years before him, in 1836, the playwright Georg Büchner wrote his fragment *Woyzeck*, in which the following strange episode can be found. The children ask their grandmother for a fairy tale and she begins to tell it:

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[1] Bertolt Brecht, German, trans. John Willett, Ralph Manheim and Erich Fried, Bertolt Brecht: Poems 1913-1956, Routledge, Chapman and Hall.
https://www.ronnowpoetry.com/contents/brecht/ToThoseBorn.html

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"Once upon a time there was a poor child who had no father and no mother, everything was dead and no one was left in the world. Everything dead, and the child went out and cried day and night. And since no one was left on earth, it tried to go up to heaven and the moon was giving it such a friendly look, and when it finally got to the moon, the moon was a piece of rotten wood and so it went to the sun and when it got there, the sun was a wilted sunflower and when it got to the stars they were little golden gnats, stuck there like the shrike sticks them on the blackthorn, and when it tried to go back down to earth, the earth was a knocked-over pot and it was all alone and it sat down and cried and it's sitting there still and it's all alone."[2]

These two passages express two opposing views on how the relationship between humans and the biosphere is conceived. Brecht represents the classical Western paradigm of the separation of the human world, here in a Marxist variant. A conversation about trees has nothing to do with a conversation about politics. The one – the self-evident, not to be questioned further – is nature, the other – the essential – is human society and the injustices that prevail there and must be overcome through political criticism and political practice. People are well aware of nature and its eternal cycle, but it forms the backdrop and refuge and at the same time serves as a resource for human prosperity. Human society, the "real" history, the history of class struggles and other conflicts, is detached from this. A retreat to nature is seen as a betrayal of the tasks of human development towards greater justice. It is classical anthropocentric political thinking that still dominates today. It exists in different variations, and today it also underlies all concepts for containing the climate crisis simply by technological means, without changing our lifestyle.

For Büchner, on the other hand, the poet and physician, this separation of nature and culture is abolished – by a catastrophe, namely the fact that nature relinquishes its role as a silent accessory and self-evident prerequisite for human life. Human "ontic certainty" must be lost when the previous self-evident aspects of nature, which are in fact the basis of human life, cease to exist. Only then do we realize how much we depend on these seemingly eternally constant self-evident conditions. From this perspective, the common destiny of humanity comes to the fore and the profound contradictions between groups of people lose their contours. Above all, the idea of humans as autonomous beings, independent of their environment, loses all meaning. In Büchner's work, a new paradigm shines through, initially ex negativo, which has only been slowly gaining acceptance since the end of the 20th century – planetary thinking as a oneness with all living beings. It is the human-made threats to the conditions of human life that lead to this new insight:

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[2] https://animus-inviolabilis.tumblr.com/post/150289184957/grandmothers-story-in-georg-b%C3%BCchners-wozzeck

Climate change challenges this ontic certainty of the earth that humans have enjoyed through the Holocene epoch and perhaps for longer. Our *everyday thoughts* have begun to be oriented—thanks again to the current dissemination of geological terms such as the Anthropocene in public culture—by the geological fact that the earth that Husserl took for granted as the stable and unshakable ground from which all human thoughts (even Copernican ones) arose actually has always been a fitful and restless entity in its long journey through the depths of geological time. (Chakrabarty, 2021, p. 180)

What we took as the immobile—in human time—background to human action is now changing because of human action and endangering humanity. (Chakrabarty, 2021, p. 183)

Charkrabarty concludes: "The political eventually will have to be refounded on a new philosophical understanding of the human condition" (Chakrabarty, 2021, p. 196). This "new understanding" is new from a Western perspective, but in reality it ties in with centuries of indigenous approaches ignored by the West, for whom this Western human-nature divide never existed and which are now being taken up by postcolonial and decolonial pedagogy.

In any case, it is remarkable that the new thinking can be found in the much older text, which makes the text written 100 years later look rather old. This is also an indication that, alongside the mainstream of anthropocentric thinking, there is also a long tradition of alternative thinking in the Western world that thinks of nature and the human world as related. These often buried traditions also need to be traced, especially today, when ecology has become a key issue that also has a decisive influence on peace education.

The general purpose of peace education and the ecological challenge

". . . the general purpose of peace education […] is to promote the development of an authentic planetary consciousness that will enable us to function as global citizens and to transform the present human condition by changing the social structures and the patterns of thought that have created it. This transformational imperative must […] be at the center of peace education. It is important to emphasize that transformation, in this context, means a profound global cultural change that affects ways of thinking, world views, values, behaviors, relationships, and the structures that make up our public order. It implies a change in the human consciousness and in human society of a dimension far greater than any other that has taken place since the emergence of the nation-state system, and perhaps since the emergence of human settlements" (Reardon, 1988, p. x).

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With this already classic definition, the doyenne of US peace education, Betty Reardon, sets a high standard and opens up a broad horizon. Peace education is described as a change in consciousness that has what it takes to qualify for a social transformation towards peace. This striving for transformation is the "imperative" from which further concrete work is derived. This peace transformation is described as a break with existing world views and the existing world order of immense significance. The agents of change are therefore global citizens who are characterized by a planetary consciousness, because "peace education is the enactment of the cosmopolitan ethic" (Reardon & Snauwaert 2015, 188). The term "authentic planetary consciousness", on the other hand, already aims beyond this, at least according to today's understanding, and also includes, beyond human society, an awareness of the wider natural world in which we are embedded and of which we should consider ourselves a part.

The complexity of peace education tasks is reflected in a variety of pedagogical directions, sub-areas or topics that are integrated into the goal of education for a culture of peace: Non-violent education, conflict transformation, civic education, global citizenship education, anti-racism, gender-equitable education, human rights education, decolonial thinking, transculturality, social learning, etc. Meanwhile, the issue of "peace and ecology" is increasingly taking on a key role. This is a topic that has long been discussed in the context of the diverse aspects of peace education, but whose elementary and central importance, as well as its contradictory nature, only recently seems to have come to the fore, both in society as a whole and in peace education. Cause what is new, is that ecology is no longer just a *topic*, but has become a *category* of peace thinking and thus, of peace education as well. In the following, I will argue that the problem of ecological peace is now a core problem of peace in general.

Betty Reardon also took this development into account in the foreword to the new edition of her book *Comprehensive Peace Education* (2021) when she defined three "imperatives" that are closely linked: the *gender imperative*, the *weapons imperative* and finally the *Earth imperative*.

In order to explore this *Earth imperative* in particular, the integration of ecological thinking into peace education over the last 50 years will be examined in a historical outline. This will be followed by a reconstruction of some of the cornerstones of the history of ecological thinking towards peace, up to the "postcolonial challenge – postcolonial opportunity", which not only adds a further dimension of depth to our ecological thinking, but also radically renews it. This brings us back full circle to peace education, which I would like to see as "comprehensive" in the fullest sense.

Ecological approaches in peace education since the 1970s

Peace education, which established itself as a scientific (sub-)discipline in the 1960s and 1970s at the latest, built on the critical concepts of peace research of the time in its understanding of nature and the world. These will therefore be examined here first.

In general, the idea prevails that from the 19th century at the latest and well into the second half of the 20th century, the ideology of *progress* (in the sense of Brecht's poem) dominated not only among the protagonists of capitalism, but also among their left-wing and socialist opponents, while ecological ideas were at most to be found among past-oriented romantic critics – apart from exceptions such as Henry David Thoreau. The French philosopher Serge Audier (2017), on the other hand, has shown that there has been a marginalized and often fought tradition of political ecology since the beginning of the industrial age, which was characterized by socialist currents and established a link between emancipatory ideas and concern for nature.

A new ethic of responsibility

This political ecology received strong new impetus after 1945 – initially as a reaction to the dropping of the two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which catapulted humanity into a new era. From now on, it was realized, a reorientation of human relations was necessary under penalty of the extinction of (not only) the human species. The most consistent, relentless philosopher of this new age is undoubtedly Günther Anders. No one has insisted as ruthlessly as he has on the novelty of the situation created by the invention of the atomic bomb. And no one has emphasized the irreversibility of this situation as clearly. Because the nuclear threat can no longer be reversed, and that changes everything.

> "However long this age may last, it is 'The Last Age': for there is no possibility that ist 'differentia specifica,' the possibility of our self-extinction can ever end – but by the end itself. (...) [Thus,] there is but one answer: although at any moment The Time of the End could turn into The End of Time, we must do everything in our power to make The End Time endless" (Anders 1962, pp. 493-494).

"Hiroshima" has become a world condition. The omnipotence that lies in the ability to destroy all human life is changing the paradigms of ethical and political action. From now on, society must be transformed in such a way as to prevent the terrible from ever happening. As Hans Jonas shows – going beyond Anders – this imposes an ethic of global responsibility on us. It is required because we have the opportunity to act differently, because our ability to make

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decisions has increased and because we are forced to make our choice. *The imperative of responsibility* (Jonas 1985) becomes more important as our potential to shape the world increases. Hans Jonas justifies his "Ethics for the Technological Age" with the enormous increase in power of modern societies after the Second World War. This power must be contained and controlled by the people themselves. This is not just about humanity as such. Jonas assumes a continuity of all forms of living nature and breaks with the traditional Western dualism between humans and non-human living beings. For the Congolese philosopher Raymond Matand Makashing, however, Jonas' philosophy of nature is still reductionist and limited to an isolated planet Earth (Makashing 2020).

An ethics of global responsibility, as represented by Anders and Jonas, is also decisive for peace education, which received a strong impetus with the founding of UNESCO after 1945. Thus, overcoming fascist and racist thinking as well as militarism and a sense of ecological responsibility are – in principle – linked from the very beginning. However, historical hindsight also shows that environmental education and peace education – both within and outside the UNESCO context – have essentially developed alongside and independently of each other, although from the 1970s onwards there were also gradual, more or less consistent attempts to perceive and conceptualize ecological issues as part of the peace problem.

The suppression of radical eco-pacifist approaches

One of the reasons why an integration of the two directions of attention – to put it boldly: peace with nature, peace in the human world – was not thought of and practiced for a long time, or not consistently, is certainly due to the inadequate understanding of the interconnectedness of humans and nature outlined at the beginning. Even ecologically sensitive approaches have often not abandoned the reduction of "nature" as a resource for humans. This prevalence of a capitalist growth ideology (to this day) probably explains why a critical eco-pedagogy as a comprehensive socio-critical concept has not been able to establish itself on the international stage.

The Club of Rome's report *The Limits to Growth* from 1972 provided the first empirical basis for the need to take the environment seriously as a factor in all human activity. Just how intertwined ecological issues are with political rule and economic power was demonstrated at the 1974 UN conference in Cocoyoc (Mexico), which focused on the environment and development. The final document, the *Cocoyoc Declaration*, was probably the most radical document critical of capitalism ever adopted by a UN organization. It identified the neo-colonial dominance of the North as the cause of permanent poverty in the South and called for a fair global economic order. Economic growth is only justified if it serves the needs of the masses of people. The already visible ecological problems could not be solved by the markets, but only through the

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political efforts of all states, under the guidance of a reformed UN. The Declaration was rejected in its entirety by the USA immediately after its publication. Instead, the guiding principle of "sustainable development" became the paradigm of environmental policy. (Bernier 2011) This guiding principle quickly became the subject of criticism: Wolfgang Sachs, for example, calls "sustainable development" an "oxymoron" and comments sarcastically: „In trying to square the circle, the question was: how can we protect nature while keeping on competing and growing economically?" (Sachs 1999: xii).

This also had an impact on the education sector. Education for Sustainable Development – in its mainstream version as a reconciliation of capitalist growth and environmental requirements – gradually became synonymous with environmental education in general and displaced critical eco-educational approaches. This also made it rather difficult to connect with peace education. UNESCO's *Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*, adopted in 1974 and still authoritative today, does not yet contain any ecological reflections. At least UNESCO did publish a bibliography, *Threat of modern warfare to man and his environment*, in collaboration with the International Peace Research Association (IPRA) in 1979.

However, the discourse on sustainability that already existed at the time, starting with the UN *World Conference on the Human Environment* in Stockholm in 1972, developed in parallel with or without reference to peace and human rights education. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) was promoted in the *Brundtland Report* of 1987, anchored in *Agenda 21* at the Rio Summit in 1992 and finally established as the "educational wing" of environmental policy at the *World Summit on Sustainable Development* in Johannesburg in 2002. It was implemented with the UN *Decade of Education for Sustainable Development* (2005-2014) and the UNESCO Future Strategy ESD 2015+ as well as the Roadmap.[3] The *Agenda 2030*, the global *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) of 2015, once again upgraded ESD, but also established a clear connection to global citizenship education (GCED), peace education, human rights education, etc. (Target 4.7) UNESCO also took up its efforts to perceive these "political pedagogies" in their entirety and their contexts in full since the 2010s – as a link between GCED and ESD, which in principle also included peace education. However, within the peace education community, efforts to integrate environmental and peace education go back much further. This will be outlined here by highlighting a few significant publications.

The practice of environmental and peace education (1986)

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[3] For a comprehensive account of the history of ecological education in the UN context see Sauvé et al. 2017.

In times of Greenpeace (founded in 1971) and the founding of the originally ecological and pacifist party *Die Grünen* in Germany (1980), peace education in German-speaking countries also endeavored to consider ecology and peace as related. A trend-setting publication was the three-volume anthology *Praxis der Umwelt- und Friedenserziehung* [Practice of environmental and peace education] (Calließ & Lob 1986-1987). However, despite the double title "environmental and peace education", these two areas remain strictly separated in the publication. One volume is dedicated to environmental education and the other to peace education, while the first volume of this comprehensive three-volume reference work deals with the basics. But even in this volume, which is expected to be primarily a synthesis, the two areas are initially developed separately. Only just over 100 pages of this 850-page book are devoted to "interrelationships". In the following two volumes, however, there is no sign of this interweaving.

The most interesting contribution in this book is probably that of a natural scientist, Klaus Müller, who is the only one to clearly state "how much our relationship to these dimensions of life (environment and peace, WW) *must* change if we want to survive in continuity with previous history". (1987, 687, emphasis in original) "By reaching or overplaying the limits of nature's regenerative capacity with the forces we mobilize against it today, this feedback is capable of dragging us into the abyss of dying self-regulation. [...] *Having a living environment and maintaining world peace is increasingly afflicted with the same highly abstract dimensions of a non-visible challenge*" (ibid., 688, emphasis in original).

As it is precisely this abstractness that is a problem for peace education, Müller sees the way out in the concrete, tangible close-up, where the problems may not show themselves in all their magnitude, but where they are quite undeniable.

"Peace, the environment *and* the inner world themselves require a fundamentally new integration in people's understanding of the world, because it is the inner world where the environment and peace meet. Peace with nature and peace with ourselves are two sides of the same coin" (ibid., 694, emphasis in original).

Müller's strength lies in his precise differentiation of the problems of perception (and thus the pedagogy) of the issue, although he also refers almost exclusively to ecological questions and omits questions of political power. Although he does not lack a reference to the historical development of today's dilemmas, he does not include any critique of imperialism or colonialism.

Comprehensive Peace Education and beyond (1988)

As mentioned, Betty Reardon's *Comprehensive Peace Education* is a landmark publication for entire generations of peace educators worldwide. The sharp criticism of the war system, which is supported by militarism and patriarchy, is

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striking. But there is also a focus on the totality of nature. In response to the war system, Reardon identifies three basic values, which she defines as planetary stewardship, global citizenship and humane relationship. She states:

> "The value of *stewardship* calls on us to foster in our students a consciousness of their relationship to the whole natural order and their responsibility to assure the health, the survival, and the integrity of the planet. It calls upon us to recognize our physical as well as our ethical relationship to our planet home, so that Earth itself and the integrity of Earth is the fundamental and central value of all education, but most particular of peace education." (Reardon 1988, 59, emphasis in original)

The valuable and pioneering aspect of this approach is precisely the combination of the ecological, political and social dimensions of human coexistence and thus the integration of these dimensions in peace education, even if this approach was not yet very well developed at the time.

Learning Peace: The Promise of Ecological and Cooperative Education (1994)

This book emerged from the joint *Project Ecological and Cooperative Education* (PEACE) of American, Russian, and Norwegian scholars, which began in 1988, shortly before Soviet perestroika. The common concern for the future of the environment and thus the living conditions of humankind overcame the ideological barriers between East and West. This cooperation dates back to 1982, when the Scandinavian peace movement organized a peace march from Stockholm to Moscow, where the unity of the world and planet Earth was the focus of attention. And so Eva Nordland, the driving force behind this initiative, states in her introductory contribution: "Today humanity has arrived at a turning point in its history" (Nordland 1994, 18). In view of the pressing ecological problems (she explicitly mentions global warming even then), great educational efforts are needed for "a transformation of life-style and culture" to "establish a safer basis for life on Earth and a future for humankind" (ibid, 19).

Betty Reardon, who drew a parallel between ecological violence and sexist violence in her 1988 book *Sexism and the War System*, sees this project as crucial for the ecological expansion of her concept of peace education. In her article *Learning our Way to a Human Future*, she writes: "The relationship between humanity and planet Earth is emerging as the most significant of all global security issues" (Reardon 2015, 138).

Education for a Culture of Social and Ecological Peace (2004)

Anita Wenden, a lifelong pioneer of the ecological cause, has founded numerous initiatives together with her husband Frans Verhagen, such as the platform

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Earth and Peace Education International (www.globalepe.org), and not least the anthology *Education for a Culture of Social and Ecological Peace* (2004). She states programmatically:

> "[…] it may be concluded that since the Earth is the primary context and essential foundation of all social activity, a comprehensive social peace can neither be achieved nor sustained if Earth rights are not respected. Conversely, a society which allows humans to benefit equitably form what their rights allow is essential if ecological sustainability is to be achieved" (Wenden 2004, 6).

Her approach is to propose an integrative values education as the core of an ecologically conscious peace education. "[...] the values that should be the core components of a perspective for analyzing and evaluating social and ecological realities, that is, *nonviolence, social justice, ecological sustainability, intergenerational equity, and civic participation.*" (Wenden 2004, 21, my emphasis) Remarkable is not only the compilation of the key topics, but also the choice of words – *ecological sustainability*, instead of the problematic term *sustainable development* propagated by the UN and UNESCO.

Wenden refers to the *Earth Charter*, which was developed and supported by a number of recognized personalities, but which was never approved by the UN and therefore did not become a UN document:

> "As never before in history, common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning. Such renewal is the promise of these Earth Charter principles. […] This requires a change of mind and heart. It requires a new sense of global interdependence and universal responsibility. We must imaginatively develop and apply the vision of a sustainable way of life locally, nationally, regionally, and globally. Our cultural diversity is a precious heritage and different cultures will find their own distinctive ways to realize the vision. We must deepen and expand the global dialogue that generated the Earth Charter, for we have much to learn from the ongoing collaborative search for truth and wisdom." (Earth Charter International O.J., 48)

However, it must be asked whether the Charter itself does not address the globally effective social contradictions that stand in the way of an actual socio-ecological transformation too little. Although it contains references to unavoidable "tensions between important values." (ibid.), it nevertheless merely calls for cooperation between all forces: "The partnership of government, civil society, and business is essential for effective governance." (ibid., 49)

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Interim conclusion: important insights, but not quite at the point yet

The importance of the ecological issue as a social problem has long been recognized in peace education, and direct references to peace issues, such as the devastating effects of armaments and war on the environment, were made early on. A few publications have also identified deeper connections – the link between militarism, patriarchy and capitalism as causes of the destruction of nature and of political violence. Apart from the aforementioned flagship publications, however, ecology is not exactly the focus of peace education research. A look at the last five volumes of the *Journal of Peace Education* (JPE, 2020 to 2024) shows that the topic of peace and nature only takes up a very small amount of space.[4] However, issue 1/2025 is entirely dedicated to the topic of climate crisis and peace education, which probably indicates a change in awareness.

And only a few approaches recognize nature not only as a *topic*, but as a *category* of political thinking that would enable a redefinition of the political and thus an actual integrated ecological peace education.

Obviously, peace education has long lacked an epistemic critique of the presuppositions of our thinking about nature and culture, and in this context also a critical and decolonial interpretation of the Western human-nature relationship in particular. Only gradually has the insight gained acceptance: "Ultimately what is required of us is the overcoming of the entrenched dichotomies between nature and culture that prevent us from grasping the coevolutive systemic relationships that cut across such conceptual domains." (Bousquet 2015, 198)

In my observation, this integration of postcolonialism, ecology and peace education has only developed since the turn of the millennium. New ecological approaches in Western philosophy were decisive for this, but even more so the impulses of decolonial ecology and pedagogy.

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[4] Peace and nature is only addressed four times in total, and in none of the four articles is it the main topic: *Peace Education for the Anthropocene? The contribution of regenerative ecology and the ecovillages movement* (1/2020) by Ana Margarita Esteves mainly deals with the difficulties of transplanting the ecovillage idea from Tamera (Portugal) to Israel/Palestine. The articles on *Yogi peace education* (3/2020) and *Tagore's pedagogy* (1/2021) also each contain a short section on peace and nature, while the editorial by editor Ed Brantmeier in issue 1/2023 (*Transformative Aspirations for Peace Education Research*) describes commitment to "equity, decolonization, and to the Earth as central foci to peace education pursuits" (Brantmeier 2023, 5). A survey done by Brantmeier et al. (2024), covering the period from the beginning of the journal to 2023, comes to similar conclusions: "Notably, environmental issues (12), cultural diversity (12), and gender inequality (12) do not show up in high frequency in titles, abstracts, and key words. Ecological sustainability (10) and Indigenous people (7) are also topics that are underrepresented topics in the Journal of Peace Education 2004–2023."

A new understanding of nature and the place of humans

From the wealth of (Western) authors who should be mentioned here (such as Rachel Carlson, Jacques Ellul, André Gorz, Ivan Illich, Bruno Latour, Alain Lipietz, Maria Mies, Michel Serres and Karen J. Warren), I will single out Edgar Morin and Philippe Descola because, in my opinion, they have contributed in a special way to a paradigm shift in thinking about the "human-nature relationship" (even this term still expresses an attachment to the old paradigm).

I consider Morin's early critique of the juxtaposition of nature and culture and the consistent embedding of humans in the natural environment, as we also know it from indigenous and pre-modern philosophies, which Morin summarizes with the concept of the earthly and planetary community of destiny, to be an important approach.

Edgar Morin and human nature

The French philosopher and sociologist Edgar Morin was perhaps the first to not only reject the analytical separation of nature and culture, but also to systematically attempt to prove the "uniduality of humans", the inseparability of cultural and biological factors, in the development of homo sapiens on the basis of scientific findings and to draw the necessary conclusions for world view, culture and politics.

In his comprehensive anthropological study *Le paradigme perdu: la nature humaine* [The lost paradigm. The human nature] (1973), a synthesis of all the findings of the relevant sciences at the time, he describes the process of independent human development as both a biological and a cultural process. It was only made possible by the interweaving of these two factors.

> "At a stroke, the old paradigm that opposed nature and culture collapses. Biological and cultural evolution are two aspects, two poles of a connected and interfering development of the overall phenomenon of becoming human." (Morin 1973, 100)

He consequently describes humans as "biocultural living beings": "The human being is fully human because it is at the same time fully natural and fully cultural" (Morin, 1994, 24).

This also has consequences for Morin's political understanding of nature, in which he is probably also one of the first to combine cosmopolitan and planetary perspectives. In preparation for his manifesto *Homeland Earth* (Morin & Kern, 1993 [1990]), he combines cosmopolitan and ecological visions into a dramatic appeal:

> "It is no longer time to merely state the ecological catastrophes. Nor is it time to give in to the idea that the development of technologies alone

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could provide a remedy, let alone that it could remedy the major undesirable developments that threaten to disrupt the planet and the biosphere for good. The saving leap in development can only come about through a huge upheaval in our relationships with humans, other living beings and nature. An ecological consciousness of solidarity must replace the culture of competition and aggression that currently dominates global relations." (Morin, 1989, p. 1)

He consistently speaks not only of a global (human) community of destiny, but also of an earthly community that connects humans with the entire biosphere:

> "Becoming aware of the earthly community of destiny must become the key event of our century. We are in solidarity on this planet and with this planet. We are anthropo-bio-physical beings, children of this planet. This is our homeland, Earth." (Morin, 2015, p. III, our emphasis)

Morin's proof of the inseparability of nature and culture, both in the historical development of the human species and in social life, is an essential basis for a new understanding of nature, according to which humans are not masters of nature, but merely part of animate and inanimate nature. This makes his worldview compatible with newer, mostly post-colonially informed holistic concepts of nature that seek to overcome anthropocentrism. His catchy image of *Homeland Earth* also points in this direction, whereby it must be emphasized even more strongly than the author himself that the earth is not only the home of all humans, but of all living beings that inhabit it (Morin & Kern, 1999).

Philippe Descola: Beyond nature and culture

The French anthropologist Philippe Descola is also an important pioneer in overcoming the separation of nature and culture. He shows that this separation is by no means shared worldwide, but that it is a typically occidental way of thinking. This leads Descola to the cultural relativization of our scientifically based view of the world. This insight that our understanding of nature is not a universally valid one, but is specific to the West, is doubly relevant, and not only, because "the opposition between nature and culture is not as universal as it is claimed to be. Not only does it make no sense to anyone except the Moderns, but moreover it appeared only at a late date in the course of the development of Western thought itself, in which its consequences made a singularly forceful impact on the manner in which anthropology has envisaged both its object and its methods." (Descola, 2013, p. xviii)

Philippe Descola places the time of this thinking at the beginning of the 18th century, "when nature ceased to be a unifying arrangement of things, however disparate, and became a domain of objects that were subject to

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autonomous laws that formed a background against which the arbitrariness of human activities could exert its many-faceted fascination." (Descola 2013, p. xv).

And he refers, albeit rather sloppily, to a connection to colonialism: "While the Moderns were discovering the lazy propensity of barbaric and savage peoples to judge everything according to their own particular norms, they were masking their own ethnocentricity behind a rational approach to knowledge, the errors of which at that time escaped notice" (Descola, 2013, p.xv).

According to Descola, the epistemes of the modern view of nature developed in the wake of (and we add: in support of) European and later Western expansion, and they ultimately made it the dominant worldview worldwide. As an anthropologist, however, Descola is also interested in all other worldviews, and the idea that indigenous thinking can help to overcome the strict Western separation of culture and nature also resonates with him.

> "Many so-called primitive societies invite us to overstep that demarcation line –societies that have never imagined that the frontiers of humanity extended no farther than the human race and that have no hesitation in inviting into their shared social life even the most humble of plants and the most insignificant of animals. Anthropology is thus faced with a daunting challenge: either to disappear as an exhausted form of humanism or else to transform itself by rethinking its domain and its tools in such a way as to include in its object far more than the *anthropos*: that is to say, the entire collective of beings that is linked to him but is at present relegated to the position of a merely peripheral role; or, to put that in more conventional terms, the anthropology of culture must be accompanied by an anthropology of nature that is open to that part of themselves and the world that human beings actualize and by means of which they objectivize themselves." (Descola, 2013, pp. xix-xx)

At the same time, Descola also emphasizes the advantages that the clear distinction between nature and culture has brought:

> „We need at least to give dualism credit not only for its wager that nature is subject to laws of its own but also for its formidable stimulation of the development of the natural sciences. We are also indebted to it not only for the belief that humanity becomes gradually civilized by increasing its control over nature and disciplining its instincts more efficiently but also for certain advantages, in particular political ones, engendered by an aspiration toward progress." (Descola, 2013, p. 80)

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And he goes even further by explicitly refusing to make a political and ethical connection between the dualism of nature and culture and the development of colonialism and imperialism.

> "Dualism is not an evil in itself and it is ingenuous to stigmatize it for purely moral reasons in the manner of ecologically friendly philosophies of the environment or to blame it for all the evils of the modern era, ranging from colonial expansion to the destruction of nonrenewable resources and including the reification of sexual identities and class distinctions" (Descola 2013, p. 80).

Descola thus finds himself in clear opposition to representatives of a decolonial ecology, even if the latter can undoubtedly draw on many of the findings of his research. The declared aim of decolonial ecoscience is to shed light on the connection between colonialism and the understanding of nature. The Caribbean author Malcom Ferdinand, for example, postulates a causal relationship between an understanding of nature as a resource for human despotism and colonialism. In this sense, he believes that the ecological question can only be solved if it is linked to the question of decoloniality, and that decolonial thinking is precisely the way to think ecologically adequately today.

First of all, this concerns the perspective and contextualization of today's ecological problems: "We should be thinking of climate change as part of a much longer series of ecological catastrophes caused by colonialism and accumulation-based society," also emphasizes the Canadian writer, spoken-word artist, and indigenous academic Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2019). However, this also applies to our basic understanding as humans in relation to the whole of nature, of which we are a part. Ecofeminism (d'Eaubonne, 1974) and postcolonial ecology have made a significant contribution to illuminating this connection. Here is a summary by Sharon Stein:

> "The foundational modern colonial separation of human beings from 'nature'/'the environment', and the presumed superiority and authority of the former over the latter is what allowed for the objectification of the latter into property (i.e., land and 'resources'), and the subsequent extraction and appropriation of that 'property' for profit" (Stein 2019, p. 201)

Malcom Ferdinand and decolonial ecology

Malcom Ferdinand's basic idea is: "The ecological crisis [...] comes from a certain way of inhabiting the earth, from some believing themselves entitled to appropriate the earth for the benefit of a few." (Ferdinand, 2020, p. 1)

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According to Ferdinand, colonialism played and continues to play a decisive role in this: "Colonial habitation is a violent way of inhabiting the earth, subjugating lands, humans, and non-humans to the desires of the coloniser" (Ferdinand, 2020, p. 2). This view goes beyond a mere critique of capitalism: "While colonization and slavery were also driven by capitalist rationales, these processes were above all based on a colonial world view that invented a hierarchy between races and different lands of the globe" (Ferdinand, 2020, p. 2). According to Ferdinand, there is a double "rupture", the *ecological* and the *colonial rupture*, the two central lines of division that need to be addressed.

The *ecological rupture* results from the dualistic juxtaposition of nature and culture, environment and society, establishing a vertical scale of values placing humans above nature. It also means a horizontal homogenization. The terms 'planet', 'nature' or 'environment' make real existing hierarchizations between humans and animals, but also between humans, disappear. According to Ferdinand, the discourse of the Anthropocene in particular has promoted this uncritical view once again. Anti-colonial thinkers, on the other hand, fought against this early on, but were hardly noticed in the Global North. Only since the 1960s have *ecofeminism*, *social ecology* and *political ecology* made this rupture an unmistakable topic and criticized it.

> "The colonial fracture separates humans and the geographical spaces of the Earth between European colonizers and non-European colonized peoples, between Whites and non-Whites, between the masters and the enslaved, between the metropole and the colonies, between the Global North and the Global South." (Ferdinand, 2022, online text no pagination)

Afrofeminism and decolonial thinking are changing the situation, but the real ecological issues of the world remain in the background. This creates a double deficit:

> "Yet, by leaving aside the colonial question, ecologists and green activists overlook the fact that both historical colonization and contemporary structural racism are at the center of destructive ways of inhabiting the Earth. Leaving aside the environmental and animal questions, antiracist and postcolonial movements miss the forms of violence that exacerbate the domination of the enslaved, the colonized and racialized women." (Ferdinand, 2022, online text no pagination)

Thus there would be a false alternative – either neglecting the ecological question or adopting the theories of the North, of (colonialist or colonialist-blind) ecology. According to Ferdinand, the solution is to combine the struggle for an ecologically sustainable way of life with the struggle against the exploitation of oppressed groups, especially indigenous populations: "Yet

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understanding that destruction was possible thanks to the exploitation of indigenous peoples means recognizing these peoples' need for justice, as well as demands for slavery reparations." (Ferdinand, 2020) Ferdinand refers to postcolonial/decolonial approaches to ecological thinking that have been largely unknown to us since the 1970s, such as the *First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit* in Washington in 1991.

We could thus arrive at an altogether different understanding of ecology, an environmental justice and postcolonial ecocriticism that includes a critique of environmental racism, ecological imperialism and green orientalism. Ferdinand describes this vision in expressive poetic images. He contrasts Noah's Ark, understood as Western, and the slave ship with the world-ship as an ideal of the future. It would offer encounters that make it possible

> "to forge *interspecies alliances* where the cause of animals and the demand for the emancipation of the Negroes are seen as common problems. These encounters are only possible if a bridge of justice is built across the environmental and colonial fracture, making non-humans count politically and legally as well as seeking justice for the colonized and the enslaved. This bridge of justice opens up the horizon of a world: a worldly-ecology." (Ferdinand, 2022, online text no pagination, emphasis in the original)

This *worldly-ecology* has a philosophical background, but it is also a political and educational concern:

> "Starting from the constitutive plurality of humans and non-humans on Earth, of different cultures taking the world as an object of ecology, brings back to the fore the question of the *political composition* between these pluralities, and therefore the question acting together as well. This political approach to the world, in the Greek sense of polis, removes ecology from the single question of the *oikos* (economic and environmental) because, even if Earth is indeed strewed with houses, fertile spaces for life and exchanges with it*, the Earth, however, is not our home*. If these ecumenes are fundamental, then the Earth cannot be adequately represented as one single *global oikos*." (Ferdinand, 2022, online text no pagination)

Postcolonial ecological (peace) pedagogy

As we have seen, peace education has had ecological issues in mind since its modern constitution as "critical peace education" (e.g. Wulf 1974, Haavelsrud 1974). However, it was still a long step to the realization that the problem of ecological peace today is the problem of peace in general. This does not mean that the focus should now only be on ecological problems (such as the climate

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catastrophe), but much more fundamentally that the basic issues of human society, including peace culture and world peace, must be seen and addressed in a wider context of the natural environment. Just as postcolonial thinking provides decisive impulses for this, it is also a postcolonial-inspired pedagogy that provides the foundations for peace education in order to develop an Eco-Relational Paradigm for Peace. The focus of this pedagogy is mainly on peace issues such as anti-racism, global citizenship education and a critique of education for sustainable development. The research collective *Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures*, led by the Brazilian educator Vanessa Andreotti (working in Canada), has made a name for itself in this area.

"The modern-colonial habit-of-being"

The analytical link between a political and an educational approach to this complex of topics is the "imperial mode of living" (Brand & Wissen, 2017/2021), or, in the terminology of the authors around Andreotti, "the modern-colonial habit-of-being" (Stein 2019, p. 198). It is the idea that social change towards peaceful, just and ecologically compatible behavior is not simply a question of insight. "We do not just have a knowledge problem – we have a 'habit-of-being problem'." (Ibid.) Violent and environmentally damaging behavior is not only anchored in our consciousness (culture of violence), but is also supported by our way of life. "The concept of the imperial way of life connects people's everyday lives with social structures" (Brand & Wissen 2017, p. 46).

The "imperial way of life", which is also an androcentric and patriarchal way of life, is based on the fact that "everyday life in the capitalist centers is essentially made possible by the shaping of social conditions and natural conditions elsewhere." (Brand & Wissen 2017, p. 43) Precisely because this way of life is so all-encompassing, it is also so invisibly and seemingly "naturally" anchored in our everyday lives. The everyday nature of this way of life is also one of the subjective obstacles to overcoming it and eliminating the neo-colonial world system on which it is based. In addition, it is also subjectively affirmed by the majority of people in the North, even if they are only partially its beneficiaries: "However, the structural compulsion towards an imperial way of life, which sometimes causes suffering and destruction elsewhere, is not necessarily perceived as such, but in many cases as an expansion of opportunities for action. For many people, the imperial way of life means the possibility of a subjectively fulfilling life." (Brand & Wissen 2017, p. 55).

For educational work, this means that it cannot primarily focus on imparting knowledge, but must actually work in a transformative way: "We contend that the predicament we face is not primarily rooted in ignorance and thus solvable with more knowledge, nor primarily rooted in immorality and thus solvable with more normative values; rather, it is rooted in denials that stem

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from harmful desires for and investments in the continuity of the securities and satisfactions promised by modernity-coloniality." (Stein et al. 2022, p. 274)

"Education for the end of the world ... as we know it"

A new, postcolonial and ecological (peace) education thus begins with a critique of education. It traces racist, sexist, (neo-)colonial and violent elements of education systems and also of critical emancipatory pedagogies. They take particular aim at education for sustainable development, as prominently expressed in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals of 2015. In target 4.7, in numerous UNESCO documents (as well as in many national education plans), it is regarded as a guiding principle and is often understood as the basic idea of critical political education (which also covers the area of peace education). (See critically Sauvé et al., 2017) Stein et al. (2022), on the other hand, ask:

> „What are we seeking to 'sustain' with the sustainable development paradigm, and why? Broadly speaking, this paradigm both presumes and aspires not only to the conservation but also the expansion of the house modernity built, that is, a global system premised on: an economic system organized by capitalism, a political system organized by nation-states, a knowledge system organized by universal and totalizing reason, and a relational system organized by utility-maximizing and social-mobility aspiring individuals. The sustainable development paradigm does not consider the externalized costs that make the continuity and expansion of this system not only violent and harmful, but likely impossible, given the biophysical limits of the planet."

As an alternative, they propose a transformative education based on the fact that we need a different way of thinking, living and working, in other words, that "the end of the world as we know it" has come:

> "Thus, instead of asking how we can reorient education to support sustainable development, we ask what kind of education could prepare people to face the impossibility of sustaining our contemporary modern-colonial habits of being, which are underwritten by racial, colonial, and ecological violence. In other words, rather than reimagine 'education for sustainable development' we consider how we might imagine 'education for the end of the world as we know it.'" (Stein et al., 2022)

The research collective *Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures*, which works a lot with indigenous communities, is also developing appropriate didactics for pedagogy in the Global North:

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"[…] we offer two pedagogical frameworks that may support the interruption of harmful recurring patterns and that invite a visceral sense of responsibility 'before will' (Spivak, 2004). Through learning to grow up, we might also learn to 'show up' differently to do the collective work that is needed in the face of numerous overlapping global challenges." (Stein et al., 2022)

As far as these patterns are concerned, it is specifically a matter of confronting the three central denials that are firmly anchored in Western culture as "desires for the continuity (sustainability) of this modern-colonial habit of being":

"(1) *Systemic colonial violence* that underwrites the maintenance of the dominant system, which is premised on racialized and gendered extraction, exploitation, and expropriation. This denial leads to the belief that violence is either external to or exceptional within the system, or otherwise occasionally justified in the service of a larger purpose (e.g. progress, development);
(2) *Ecological unsustainability* of the dominant system, which is premised on unending growth and consumption that ignores the planetary limits. This denial leads to either outright refusal that climate change is real, or the search for solutions to climate change that can be found within the existing system (e.g. green consumerism, carbon trading, green jobs, technological innovation, environmental protection legislation);
(3) *Condition of entanglement*, which is premised on framing relationality as a willed choice rather than a fact of our collective existence on a shared planet. This denial leads to either outright refusal of entanglement and assertion of individualism and unrestricted autonomy, or else framing relationships either through utilitarian (utility-maximizing), or self-congratulatory (e.g. enactments of moral responsibility) means." (Stein et al., 2022, p.)

As these explanations show, postcolonial pedagogy, like peace education, is concerned with the identification and reduction of violence. It opens our eyes to forms of violence as well as to specific historical events and current problem areas that have often been ignored up to now. Its particular significance certainly lies in giving the concept of "peace with nature" a comprehensive meaning. According to this new understanding, this choice of words (which implies a fundamental separation of humans and nature) will then also have to be questioned. The term *eco-relational peace* proves to be much more appropriate.

Outlook: On the way to an eco-relational comprehensive peace education

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Post-colonial, violence-sensitive eco-education also offers good preconditions for the core concerns of peace education, such as non-violent conflict transformation, removing images of the enemy, criticism of the culture of violence and war, peace as a value and as a lived practice, etc. In terms of content, peace education can only rely to a limited extent on the standard-setting international documents of the international community (UN, UNESCO, etc.). By their very nature, these are politically negotiated texts that represent compromises between very different actors.

As pleasing as it is that the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Target 4.7 mention "human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity", it is primarily – as with the SDGs as a whole – about (education for) sustainable development, and thus about an impossible reconciliation of capitalist-colonial economic practices and consideration for the preservation of the natural foundations of life, which are usually addressed as "resources" (i.e. again anthropocentric-utilitarian).

As far as UNESCO is concerned, the 2023 revision of the 1974 Recommendation mentioned at the beginning and still authoritative today has now also opened up to ecological requirements and reads "that there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development." With this in view, the document states (n) as one of the "guiding principles": "Raise awareness of the increasing interdependence of individuals, communities, societies, countries, natural resources and ecosystems, and cultivate an ethic of global citizenship and shared responsibility for peace, human rights and sustainable development for the benefit of all, within planetary boundaries." (UNESCO, 2023, p. 8)

UNESCO's most recent peace education document (which is not binding, however), *Peace education in the 21st century. An essential strategy for building lasting peace* (2024), makes a number of links between war and environmental degradation. Although it retains the terminology "education for sustainable development" as a field of peace education, it sets its own accents in its choice of words when it speaks of "environmental integrity", sets the task of "developing awareness of relationship of self to others and all living systems" and lists "structural violence, including poverty, lack of ecological security, inequitable economic development, environmental racism, decolonization, and lack of access to education" as challenges (UNESCO, 2024, 13)

The *GENE Declaration on Global Education* (Dublin Declaration) of 2022, the follow-up text to the *Maastricht Declaration* of 2002, is, so to speak, a bridging document between a purely scientific or civil society statement and a political statement. GENE (Global Education Network Europe) is the European network of Ministries and Agencies with national responsibility for policymaking, funding and support in the field of Global Education. This text will therefore be subject to higher expectations and stricter standards. The core statement reads:

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Global Education is education that enables people to reflect critically on the world and their place in it; to open their eyes, hearts and minds to the reality of the world at local and global level. It empowers people to understand, imagine, hope and act to bring about a world of social and climate justice, peace, solidarity, equity and equality, planetary sustainability, and international understanding. It involves respect for human rights and diversity, inclusion, and a decent life for all, now and into the future.

Global Education encompasses a broad range of educational provision: formal, non-formal and informal; life-long and life-wide. We consider it essential to the transformative power of, and the transformation of, education.[5]

Even if no direct reference is made here to colonialism or the continued impact of colonial structures and mentalities, this definition offers good opportunities for linkage. In contrast to the SDGs, there is talk of "social and climate justice" and "planetary sustainability", for example, and reference is also made to the need for the "transformation of education". The provision that global education "enables people to reflect critically on the world and their place in it" is in turn well suited to the task of becoming aware of one's own "modern-colonial habit-of-being" and its denials.

In 1988, Betty Reardon published her work *Comprehensive Peace Education*, discussed at the beginning of this article. It has long since become one of the most influential books on peace education ever published. Something like this cannot be repeated. However, it would be an important task for the peace education community today, almost 40 years later, to once again work on a comprehensive overview of the rationale, goals and methods of peace education that incorporates the post-colonial, ecological and feminist impulses that have emerged in recent decades.

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[5] https://www.gene.eu/ge2050-congress

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