Creating Place-Based Waldorf Festivals

An Ethnographic Study of Festivals in Two Non-European Waldorf Schools

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Introduction

A discussion is taking place within the Waldorf academy concerning if and to what degree the international Waldorf movement has overcome an inherent danger of Eurocentrism (Boland, 2015). Almost 100 years ago, Waldorf schools started out as schools with a strong Christian heritage, located in European countries. Today, there are Waldorf schools on every inhabited continent of the world. Many of these schools were founded with European support concerning finances, materials, teacher training, and curricular content. The latter also included Eurocentric Waldorf content and corresponding Waldorf traditions. These were often directly adopted rather than adapted or metamorphosed to match the local situation. In addition to traditional Waldorf content, this transfer also included traditional European Waldorf festivals, although local nature and seasons, as well as culture, often diverged considerably from those of their European origin.

In an ethnographic study, conducted as part of a master's thesis at the Rudolf Steiner University College in Oslo, I have explored the processes that two schools on two different continents underwent in order to overcome Eurocentric Waldorf festival traditions. In this paper, using some parts of my research, I will describe the reconceptualization of those festival traditions and the subsequent development of place-oriented new localized forms for the celebration of Waldorf festivals.

Both investigated schools are located south of the equator. One school – Kusi Kawsay – is situated in Pisac, in the Sacred Valley of Peru. It has an indigenous Andean background. Its educational goals are geared towards raising indigenous children's knowledge and awareness, as well as their self-confidence, with regard to their history and culture. The other school, the Nairobi Waldorf School, founded by Europeans, is situated in Kenya's capital, Nairobi. It serves a colorful multitude of children and their parents, from a widely diverse range of cultural and religious backgrounds, in a dedicated manner.

One important feature of an ethnographic study is the immersion of the research field in the social setting over a period of time. Thus, the researcher can thoroughly experience the social reality of the investigated community (Bryman, 2012). I was able to spend two weeks in Kusi Kawsay and three weeks in Nairobi Waldorf School. My immersion in the two schools had a considerable impact on me and on the outcome of my thesis. In this article, I intend to share some vivid impressions of the everyday living conditions experienced in these two schools. I used the ethnographic tool of thick descriptions as "a vehicle for communicating to the reader a holistic and realistic picture" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 113). Besides observations in the field, I conducted qualitative interviews with experienced teachers in order to obtain answers to the research questions. A further goal of the study was to generate concepts for other non-European or religiously diverse Waldorf schools that might similarly aim at developing locally-oriented annual festivals.

My findings suggest that the creation of new festivals in the schools took place within three areas, by way of a cultural, natural or traditional approach. The festivals in Nairobi Waldorf School were developed through the metamorphosis of traditional Waldorf festivals with a mainly Christian background by responding to the cultural needs of the multi-religious school community (cultural approach). The festivals in the kindergarten of Nairobi Waldorf School developed out of a process of close nature observation (nature-based approach). Kusi Kawsay festivals are new in relation to the types of festivals known in Western-oriented or European Waldorf schools. However, in a true sense, they are ancient festivals drawing on archaic Andean wisdom and agricultural rituals, adapted to the possibilities and necessities of a contemporary indigenous school community and aiming at developing the indigenous students,'' self-esteem and free thinking (traditional approach). All three of these approaches offer possibilities for the development of place-oriented, locally contextualized Waldorf festivals.

Festivals and Festival Creation

The reconceptualization of festivals and their subsequent realization posed theoretical questions. They ranged around the general background of festivals, the occasions in which they are celebrated, their

components and elements. For the question of components and elements of festivals, in addition to their possible effects on participants, I found some beneficial aspects in Ritual Theory.

Overcoming Eurocentric influences has been of concern in research areas where Western knowledge systems met with more holistic indigenous knowledge systems. It is a central issue in the field of indigenous knowledge.

In search of an extended understanding of the subject, I studied Rudolf Steiner's perspectives related to festivals and festival creation. I concentrated mainly on a cycle of lectures where he presents a trans-religious and global approach.

Ritual Theory

Ritual theory points out to rituals as possible elements of celebrating festivals. Many authors even consider rituals as being the main constituent elements of festivals (Bell, 1997; Durkheim, 2013; Quantz, 1999; Van Gennep, 1960). Recent scholars, like Bell (1997) and Grimes (2014), hold that it can be a legitimate and socially important process to develop new rituals in accordance with circumstances of individual place, time, and needs. It can add up to a conscious elevation of human acts and interaction and can create aesthetic and transforming orders of ritual elements (Grimes, 2014). Such rituals can culminate in an experience of superior meaning, especially when symbols, as carriers of values, are integrated in ritualistic performances, "thereby embedding values in webs of significance" (Grimes, 2014, p. 319). They can create such strong feelings that participants might even label them as sacred, religious, or spiritual (Grimes, 2014). Rappaport (2013) describes three levels of meaning in rituals, where he indicates distinction for low-order meaning, similarity for middle-order meaning, and unification for high-order meaning. His description of the latter is especially interesting.

> High-order meaning is grounded … in the radical identification or unification of self with other. It is not … intellectual but is, rather, experiential. … High-order meaning seems to be experienced in intensities ranging from the mere imitation of being emotionally moved in ... the course of a ritual to those deep numinous experiences called 'mystical''. Those who have known it in its more intense forms may refer to it by … phrases as 'The Experience of Being'. (Rappaport, 2013, p.71)

The medium for experiencing high-order meaning, which can include even the cosmos and the divine, is participation. Rappaport's highest level of meaning indicates that ritual creation could represent a significant part of the development of new festivals in Waldorf schools, since one of the intentions in Waldorf education is to recognize the spiritual aspects of life.

Further questions emerged in relation to the festivals celebrated in Kusi Kawsay. How can I gain cognitive as well as emotional access to those ancient festivals that, at first sight, seem so very different to our Western consciousness? Is it possible to reach Rappaport's quoted level of high-order meaning of unification, or at least something similar in relation to these ancient festivals? To answer this question, I found helpful aspects in the concepts of indigenous knowledge.

Indigenous Knowledge

From the 1960s to the 1970s, a critical discussion evolved within many development aid projects about the negative impact of development aid on the independence of the local populations (Schimpf-Herken, 1979). The Western helpers, their academic counterparts and also the indigenous peoples, themselves, became aware of possibly negative aspects of development aid projects, destructive to the communities' mental, social, and economic independence and to their ancient wisdom systems. This growing consciousness and discussion eventually led to extensive research in the field of indigenous knowledge (Hart, 2010; Huaman & Valdiviezo, 2014; Morrow, 2009).

A further goal of this study is to generate concepts for other non-European or religiously diverse Waldorf schools that might similarly aim at developing locally-oriented annual festivals.

One of the central notions critically scrutinised in the context of indigenous knowledge is the concept of Eurocentrism. The academic suppression of the indigenous peoples' knowledge had previously occurred in all continents, where the white race had invaded and taken over the land and ways of life of the local peoples. Today, scholars with indigenous roots

emphasize the heavy weight of dominating western knowledge systems and their reductionist pose of only accepting certain aspects of logic, reason, and research as valuable scientific criteria, thus denying broader local ways of knowing (Dei, 2010; Maurial, 1999).

These broader ways of knowing are a typical feature of indigenous knowledge. They are related to individual locations or geographical spaces and their unique circumstances of climate and landscape, where specific human cultures have developed with encompassing knowledge systems (Dei, 2010; Hart, 2010). These comprehensive ways of knowing are characterized by a mutual connectedness between all visible and invisible beings of the specific place (Hart, 2010; Kawano, 2011). Some of their features are also described by using the concept of spirituality (Dei, 2010; Hart, 2010). Hart characterizes social reciprocity as one of the central values of indigenous knowledge, indicating an honoring of all parts of the universe and a giving-back to all forms of life. Reciprocity is a quality that indigenous people especially address via ceremonies and rituals (Hart, 2010). Coming from ritual theory, Bell (1997) explains that newly-developed rituals always appropriate old and familiar elements and patterns from former rituals, adapting them to new purposes with possibly holistic objectives.

> These rituals [and] celebrations … not only express a concern for respecting and safeguarding the earth but also attempt to redefine the human and natural worlds as one interrelated community for whom recognition of its interdependence is intrinsic to the health of the whole.
>
> (Bell, 1997, p. 237)

Bell is thus describing a quality which has belonged to indigenous societies ever since and which is also a concern of Waldorf education. Boland (2015) is aware of the importance of such an approach for the future of the endangered ecosystems of the earth. Coming from Waldorf education, he has performed a study with a group of indigenous Maori students in New Zealand, intending to raise awareness to the possibilities of dialogical synergies between indigenous people and Waldorf education. Within the context of a real transformation of Eurocentric Waldorf contents and traditions, Boland (2014) uses the picture of "sticking wings on a caterpillar and calling it a butterfly" (Boland, 2014, p. 8). He touches upon the question whether related changes are profound or superficial when the contents have not gone through a real metamorphosis.

Rudolf Steiner: Thinking with the Cycle of the Year

Overcoming Eurocentric influences has been of concern in research areas where Western knowledge systems met with more holistic indigenous knowledge systems. It is a central issue in the field of indigenous knowledge.

In *The Cycle of the Year as Breathing Process of the Earth*, Steiner (1985) views annual festivals less in a Christian religious setting and more in a seasonal and global context. He describes how inner motifs of the annual festivals in the northern hemisphere are coinciding with seasonal experiences. For example, 'resurrection', as part of Easter, coincides with the blossoming in spring after a cold winter. In these lectures, Steiner also compares the earth's rhythmical life with human physiological processes: on the one hand with those of sleeping and waking, and on the other with those of breathing. "It is not a breathing of air of which we speak, but the breathing in-and-out of forces, of which we can get a partial idea if we contemplate the plant-growth during the course of the year" (Steiner, 1985, p.12). Furthermore, Steiner interrelates these two different areas of the earth's breathing and wake-sleep processes. He later links those forces with the cosmic Christ-being, which has united with the fate of the earth in the Mystery of Golgotha in a global and trans-religious sense. Steiner (1988) further describes Christ as being an inseparable part of the inhalation/waking (autumn-winter) and exhalation/sleeping (spring-summer) processes of the earth.

He extends his perception to the metaphor of these forces wandering through the earth like a comet tail:

> [W]hile in the north the Earth-soul goes outward to the stars, and – so to speak – shows itself for spiritual perception like a comet-tail, reaching out to the sky, the Earth-soul at the same time in the other hemisphere is retiring into earth *and it is Christmas*. And vice versa, in the time when

> the Earth-soul retires into the earth here, on the other side the comet-tail is reaching out into the cosmos. This is occurring at the same time.
>
> (Steiner, 1988, p. 107; emphasis added)[1]

Steiner is stating here that a cosmic connection between winter and Christmas exists. This can be interpreted in such a way that Christmas in the Southern Hemisphere does not coincide with Christmas in the Northern Hemisphere, a possibility which has been a debated topic in anthroposophical circles for some decades (Anderson, 1993; Majoros, 2009; Suwelack, 1975). This question, of course, is an important issue for festival creation in Waldorf schools in the Southern Hemisphere (Majoros, 2009). Steiner (1985) further describes how people in ancient times lived with a different consciousness than today. They did not yet know our type of logical thinking but experienced nature in a dream-like holistic awareness. With regard to the process of festival creation, Steiner goes even further and suggests that contemporary festivals should be created out of a dynamic understanding of nature. He denominates this dynamic process "thinking with the cycle of the year" (Steiner, 1985, p. 40). In another moment, Steiner (1980a) uses a striking metaphor: "We have to learn to overcome the abstract perception of nature and reach a tangible cognition of nature. Our Christianity has to be broadened by being infused […] with a sound paganism" (Steiner, 1980a, p. 89). Paganism (German: *Heidentum*) in Steiner's time was a concept similar to the contemporary term 'indigenous knowledge'. Steiner's indication also points to the possibility of a dialogue with mutual benefit between the anthroposophic academy and indigenous knowledge.

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Processes of Investigation

For this ethnographic study, I spent two weeks in the field in Kusi Kawsay and three in Nairobi Waldorf School. I took over professional tasks in the schools during my visits and became involved in the schools' life from the outset. I was included into the teachers' communities as a welcomed colleague. These circumstances enhanced the immersion, which is a central feature of ethnographic participant observation (Murchison, 2010). In my study, I used thick descriptions as an ethnographic method for conveying to the reader a vivid and interesting picture of the ethnographic field (Geertz, 1973; Bryman, 2012). "Thick description is a vehicle for communicating to the reader a holistic and realistic picture" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 113). However, the largest share of the specific findings in both schools was acquired via semi-structured interviews. In Kusi Kawsay, I participated in a festival on the first morning of my arrival, and directly afterwards I was informally but extensively explained details of the world view and background of the Andean Cosmovision. Both experiences laid the foundation for a fruitful and dense research process during the two weeks.

In Nairobi Waldorf School, my three-week stay also offered broad experiences and relevant findings. I was invited to visit each kindergarten group and primary class and assist in teacher mentoring. The final experience of those three weeks was the school's most central annual festival, which enabled me to participate in the whole process of its planning and performance.

I was quite overwhelmed by the social injustices prevailing in the Peruvian and Kenyan societies and their strong influence on the life of my Waldorf colleagues in both schools. They live under difficult life circumstances, with little comfort, and it took me some effort to maintain an adequate researcher's attitude, to be open and empathetic while not getting too involved with the teachers' difficulties, keeping the purpose of my stay in mind. This is a common challenge with participant observation in ethnographic research (Murchison, 2010). One advantage for ethnographic research in the international Waldorf field was that I have thorough knowledge of anthroposophy and have worked in Waldorf education in Germany, Switzerland, and Spain for many years. Another bonus was that I speak fluently both official local languages, Spanish and English. Therefore, I was always able to communicate with people without the aid of a translator. These personal advantages presented yet another specific researcher's perspective, similar to the above related

1 All translations from the German are by the author.

problem of closeness and distance in an ethnographic research process: as an experienced Waldorf teacher, I was an insider, but in experiencing the schools' and local Waldorf teachers' very different cultural backgrounds, I was an outsider. Baak (2016) describes this configuration as an "inside-out/outside-in researcher" (Baak, 2016, p. 31) who is in a continual process of shifting between these two positions.

In both schools, I interviewed three teachers who had been part of the founding process of the school and/or part of the process of festival transformation. In Nairobi Waldorf School, the teachers of the two kindergartens and the teachers of primary school had undergone different processes in the development of new forms of festivals, while in Kusi Kawsay, school and kindergarten are celebrating the same festivals. Therefore, in Nairobi Waldorf School, one of the interviewees was an experienced kindergarten teacher. This facilitated access to valuable information of the specific kindergarten festivals that, later, turned out to be important for the scope of my findings.

In the analysis of my empirical material, I transcribed, coded, and categorized the semi-structured interviews inspired by Grounded Theory methods (Bryman, 2012) with the goal of providing insight into the processes of festival creation in both schools; its conditions as well as its outcome.

KUSI KAWSAY SCHOOL

History

The Kusi Kawsay (Quechua for Happy Life) Waldorf school in Pisac, Peru, was established in 2007. The initiative grew out of a group of Indigenous Andean musicians who had been working together for 19 years. They had studied and recognized the devastating influence that Spanish colonialism, and the Catholic Church, have exerted on the Andean culture, an influence that resulted in very low self-esteem and a severe loss of dignity and culture within the local indigenous population. Self-esteem and dignity, explained one teacher, "…around here are no common concepts, because many people don't even know they should have something like dignity." Until today, indigenous children and adults have been facing strong racism in contemporary Andean public schools and society. According to the interviewees, everything related to the Indigenous Andean culture is still being defamed. The founding of the school was in response to these negative cultural conditions. The founders felt that an appropriate pedagogy would be found in Waldorf education and thus based the school on its principles. Today, Kusi Kawsay's classes range from kindergarten to 9th grade with mainly indigenous children; some non-indigenous and international children are enrolled.

The Way to School in Pisac

Pisac is situated 3,216 meters above sea level and requires great physical effort from unaccustomed foreigners. I pass small lanes with stone and adobe buildings, built in traditional Andean style. The sight of dark interiors hints at the poverty hidden within. Closer to the center of town, there are more signs of tourism. Pisac is a favorite destination of esoteric tourism because of its proximity to the sacred places of the ancient Incas. I draw closer to the plaza where the famous market takes place. From there, I start to ascend the stairs to the school. It is situated in an archaeological park, which hosts a holy Inca sanctuary 1,000 meters higher. I see children and youngsters hiking and parents guiding their young children on the steep path up to the school grounds. I enjoy the tremendous view across the town of Pisac and part of the Sacred Valley.

School Grounds

Entering through the massive wooden gates, my view suddenly falls to the grounds of the school beneath. It lies there, nestled into the mountainside with an extensive view over the surrounding mountain landscape. The little cabins with thatched roofs, built traditionally with adobe, together with the ascending rocks of the mountains almost form a circle. It looks cozy and I feel invited to come down the wide stairs, made from natural stone. Every primary class is hosted in this circle and has a little cabin of its own. Secondary classes and the kindergarten are a little secluded.

Reconceptualization of Waldorf Festivals in Kusi Kawsay

General Impulse for and Process of Festival Development

The school's developmental process led to a growing awareness, among the founders, that some of the traditional Waldorf elements were quite Eurocentric. Not all of them complied with the Andean Cosmovision and life circumstances. According to the interviewees, it was hard for the experienced Waldorf founding teacher from far away to include the Andean contents into the curriculum. Moreover, they felt that

it was difficult for this teacher to convey the principles of Waldorf education in such a way that the teachers could have used them as a basis for the development of an Andean curriculum: "She showed us the fish but didn't teach us how to do the fishing." Therefore, the association had to start the difficult and tedious work themselves. They began to develop a specific Andean curriculum, based on Waldorf principles, especially the celebration of annual festivals that had previously been strongly oriented in European Christian festivals. Since festivals are central to the Andean Cosmovision, the school festivals had to be fully reconceptualized and renewed. The Andean agricultural calendar played a central role in this process of revision.

Andean Agricultural Calendar as Basis of Kusi Kawsay Festivals

One interviewee described how, in the process of colonization, great parts of the rich agricultural traditions in the Andes have been destroyed: the original diversity of edible plants had been wiped out, to be replaced by commercial monocultures, serving a globalized agricultural industry. In addition, the attitude of deep reverence towards Pachamama (universe), with all its related rituals throughout the year, had been attacked by the church, depicting them as heresy. As a consequence, one of the goals of the Kusi Kawsay founders was to restore their people's relationship with Mother Earth (Alpamama) and the Universe (Pachamama). They went to the indigenous communities, further up in the heights of the surrounding mountains (over 4000 meters), that had not yet been wholly influenced by the church and contemporary society. Talking to the old people there, the school's founders collected and reactivated the traditional agricultural festivals and rituals that were connected to the year's seasons. Those they were able to revive belonged to a solar-oriented agricultural calendar. "For us it was a strong goal to activate and practice the calendar as a little community, while taking away all the colonial varnish, taking away the saints, calling the festivals by their ancient names." Afterwards they had to adapt the festivals in a pedagogical way.

Initially, they celebrated the festivals outside the school only with the adults. Then they would come to the school and celebrate the same festival in a pedagogically-appropriate way with the children. The teachers prepare the festival during the weeks prior to the festival. They dedicate one part of the classes to the upcoming festival, reciting, singing, and practicing rhythmical exercises that help the children to connect with the specific festival. At the festival itself, the teachers select a central motif or value of the festival and talk to the children about it in an age-appropriate manner. One interviewee specifies: "Deepening the festivals, we had to go through a process to adapt these dates to a pedagogical language, to a pedagogical function."

There are seven festivals/rituals being celebrated over twelve months and in relation to the agricultural activities and natural conditions of the respective ancestral periods or seasons. According to the interviewees, there are two seasons in the Andes of Peru: the season with rain (November-March) and the season without rain (April-October).

The Celebrations and their Main Elements

The main elements of the celebrations are food, music, and dance. Those elements vary in type and intensity according to the season and occasion. For example, there are typical instruments used for the season in which the wind is the focus of people's consciousness. Other important features of some festivals are specific traditional clothes or a bonfire. All festivals are enriched by presentations from the adults for the children (and parents) or vice versa.

Pukllay: Celebrated towards the end of the rain season (March), the main motif is the abundance and fertility of all beings in nature; one of the very important and beloved festivals that continues for days.

Cosecha: Harvest, celebrated in April in the period of fall. The children harvest what they have grown in their garden patches, accompanied by adults playing music.

Chakana: Celebration of the constellation of the Southern Cross on the 3rd of May. It is also the anniversary of the founding of the school. It represents a good example of the school community trying to return original significance to a festival, since this date had been taken over by the church, long ago, as the 'Day of the Cross'.

Inti Raimy: Midwinter festival between 19th and 23rd of June, dedicated to nourishing the sun. Indigenous people from other local and far away American communities are invited to share this important festival. In the local understanding, the sun is now far away, small and weak and the 'little sun, the baby sun' has to be nurtured and warmed with the heat of extensive communal

dancing and a bonfire. It also is the beginning of the Andean New Year.

Ofrenda a la Alpamama: The Offering to Mother Earth in August (see description below)

Tarpuy: Sowing, celebrated in September, beginning of spring. Old people from the communities come down to the school and bless the seeds, which the children then put into the prepared ground with the help of the adults.

Las Machulas: A November celebration of and for the ancients, their own ancestors as well as the first mythological mankind who, according to Andean mythology, lived in the light of the moon. The ancients are responsible for the rains, now supposed to develop to their full capacity.

Ofrenda a la Alpamama / Offering to Mother Earth

It is August and winter in Peru. The *campesinos* (peasants) are contemplating the coming time of sowing. With deep empathy, they sense what they experience as the neediness of *Alpamama* (Mother Earth), who gave so many gifts to them during the last year: fruit, vegetables, and other gifts. They sense to what extent *Alpamama* has thus given away its strength and vital energy. The sun seems to have gone far away from *Alpamama* and cannot warm it. So the people feel they have to help the weak earth to prepare for the next sowing and growing period. This is what they strive for with that old ritual, called *Ofrenda a la Alpamama*. It is an example of the main Andean value of reciprocity.

An old *abuelo* (grandfather) is sitting on the ground in the central place between the cabins. The school community is sitting on the ascending stone stairs in front of him, looking and listening in silence. The old man puts a wooden cloth on the ground in front of him and folds it in a ritualistic manner from all four directions. He then holds the folded cloth in front of his face. With reverence, he breathes into it three times. Now the cloth is passed from person to person. Each individual consciously breathes into it three times. Each breath is connected with good wishes and thoughts for *Alpamama* and the school Kusi Kawsay.

After the cloth has returned to the *abuelo*, he unfolds it. The four corners are now pointing into four directions. On one side of the cloth is a pile of leaves from the traditional healing plant of the Inka, the coca. On the other side is a big heap of small parcels, wrapped in colorful paper.

Each participant silently walks up to the coca leaves, chooses the three most beautiful, arranges them fan-shaped in both hands and proceeds over to the other side of the old man. Again, the participant breathes three good wishes for *Alpamama* into the leaves. The old man now arranges them, with great care, onto the cloth. Everyone participates in this ritual. Repeatedly, the a*buelo* opens one of the small packages and arranges the contents carefully onto the leaves. In this way, an increasingly complex half-mandala slowly appears with ingredients that have directly or indirectly been derived from Mother Earth; seeds and grains, noodles, fruits, flowers, wool, threads, dyes, stones, minerals, and more.

In the end, the cloth is folded carefully and tied with a special ribbon. The children are told that now the grandfather will go to a secret place in the mountains to burn the wrapped offering. Its content with its manifold good thoughts and wishes will go to *Alpamama*. Smoke and ashes will transmit the gifts of the ceremony to her, so that she can develop new strength for the upcoming agricultural season.

From 'Celebrating the Agricultural Calendar' to 'Freedom of Thinking'

It is central to the teachers of Kusi Kawsay not to educate the students to be followers but to be curious and interested in exploring the world and to develop the capacity of free thinking. They pursue this goal via two paths. Being raised in an atmosphere of respect and dignity is one of them. An interviewee expressed his expectations of the students' development:

> As a result of having learned to know personal respect in school, they will experience a very strong center of dignity within themselves in a society in which they basically are not respected. They will not accept being denied respect in their life. I don't really know what they will do, but I know that they will be free thinkers.

On the other hand, the Kusi Kawsay teachers see a great potential for developing free thinking in the universality and neutrality of the agricultural calendar itself:

> The Andean is universal, like the Celts or the indigenous peoples in Australia or South Africa. Those are the same things: they are talking about

> the same. So we are not promoting an Andean religion. We only say: observe everything in nature!

They go one step further and describe how they understand nature observation to foster free thinking. Love and caring for the earth include getting close to its phenomena by careful observation. The observation of natural phenomena leads the students to "what really is" and thus – at least partially – to a direct path to free thinking. This conviction has been guiding the school founders and teachers in the investigation and revival of ancestral festivals.

NAIROBI WALDORF SCHOOL

Nairobi Waldorf School is an offspring of its precursor, Rudolf Steiner School, in Mbagathi, Nairobi, founded by Germans for the Massai children living in this area of the capital of Kenya. Nairobi Waldorf School is located in Karen, a wealthy quarter of Nairobi, and includes a kindergarten on campus and another outside the campus. Parents and students of the Nairobi Waldorf School reflect the many different cultures that live in Nairobi: families from all continents, with four different world religions and members of 15 of the 42 Kenyan tribes. All possible shades and colors of skin are represented in what one teacher called a "rainbow school". Today, the school includes seven kindergarten groups, and the primary school teaches from first to seventh grade. East Africa still does not have a Waldorf upper secondary school.

The Way to School in Nairobi

Travelling in the car, belonging to the Kenyan family with whom I am staying, we have passed several gates and barriers, fragile hindrances set up against possible terrorist attacks. Soon, bigger streets are bringing us closer to the school. There is dense traffic, the main streets obstructed by the crowded van-like small public transportation buses, honking. At the roadside there is no asphalt but ditches to collect the rain. In between are small dirt paths, trodden by hundreds of passers-by. Some are dressed in business attire, others wear colorful African robes. Then there are Massai herdsmen, wrapped in red cloth, walking slowly behind their bony cows. When we approach the school, we enter one of the most luxurious quarters of Nairobi with shiny mansions in park-like flourishing surroundings.

In front of the school grounds, big iron barrels are lined up in a double curve shielding the massive iron gate, one of the measurements taken after credible terrorist threats. Passing through the barrels' pathway to the gate, we are greeted by two friendly guards who check every car. Later I am told that, not having permission to carry firearms, they have bows and poisonous arrows in a little cabin at the side of the entrance. This is just one example of Nairobi Waldorf School's specific living conditions.

School Grounds

The first impression is its depth and breadth: lawns with green elephant grass, children's tall swings and, hidden among trees and bushes, the little cabins for the kindergarten and primary classes. Towards the end of the school grounds, a big, formerly white tent – transformed by wind and weather – attracts the eye. This is where daily lunch is taken and it is also the space where the school gatherings and the festivals take place, substituting that which, in richer schools, would be the canteen and assembly hall. The kitchen is a small, modest building where several cooks are preparing lunch. A large quantity of the food and the water for washing the dishes is being prepared outside on an open fireplace, a favorite meeting space for the many maintenance helpers and guards of the school.

Reconceptualization of Waldorf Festivals in Nairobi Waldorf School: Cultural Approach in the Primary School

General Impulse for and Process of Festival Development

In the process of the school's growth, its German founders gradually left while more and more Kenyan teachers started to teach. A transition process began, initiated by teachers and parents. The starting point was an insight regarding the cultural and religious diversity of the school community and the concern of making all these different people feel well-integrated in the school. One teacher spoke about the process:

> …very diverse group of people, who came in with a lot of different traditions, a lot of different cultural practices, a lot of different religious beliefs. We had to find a way to accommodate all of these people and still not lose the identity of a Waldorf school.

The identity of a Waldorf school was *one* concern but the socially integrative aspect was even more of a focus: "What is it that is going to bring us together?

What one thing can we do as a school to make us feel united and bring a feeling of togetherness?"

The concept of togetherness can be seen as an imaginative description for the central impulse of Nairobi Waldorf (primary) School's community, especially in referring to the development of new annual festivals which, until that point, were thoroughly oriented towards the typical Central European Waldorf festivals with an explicit Christian background.

In search of a true motif for a festival that would unite the multi-religious school community (also including atheists) in an experience of togetherness, the teachers investigated the central festivals of the four main religions (Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Christianity). They discovered *light* as an encompassing motif of these four religions' most important annual festivals: Divali, Eid al-Fitr, Hanukkah, and Christmas, and chose it as the motif for a new central annual festival. They called it the Festival of Light. From then on, the teachers looked anew, every year, for a multicultural or trans-religious storyline representing a path from darkness to light. The story should enable the teachers to artistically include elements of all main religions and cultural traditions in a theatrical presentation of all classes.

The Celebration of the Festival of Light in December 2014

It is the evening of the Festival of Light and the last day of school before the long summer holidays start along with the season of the short rains and cooler weather.

People, guided by little lanterns, are streaming to the festive tent. The rains have stopped for the moment. The tent is beautifully decorated with white veils and handmade foil stars swaying from the tent's roof in the light evening breeze. This year, the teachers have decided on an Irish storyline.

The presentations start late, due to the heavy traffic congestion in Nairobi's streets. Finally, one class after the other quietly enters the festive tent, starting with the upper 7th grade and ending with class 1. Students and teachers are dressed in clothes from one of the cultures, tribes or religions of the school's parent body. We see the 7th grade in Indian clothes, the 6th mirroring British attire, the 5th in Muslim clothes, and the lower grades in various African robes. The story of this year's Festival of Light unfolds, told by a story-teller who is a teacher at the school. In between the various parts of the legend, each class does a presentation, highlighting the story with dance, music, song and recitation, touching upon various aspects of Jewish, Asian, Christian, and African religions. Almost at the end of the presentation, all students and teachers together perform a Muslim song, conducted by a Muslim teacher. At the end of the whole event, a buffet is waiting outside in the dark and the night ends in chatting.

Further Central Festivals and their Main Elements in Nairobi Waldorf (Primary) School

Two other important festivals in Nairobi Waldorf School were developed by transforming the Christian motifs of Easter and Michaelmas. The festivals' all-embracing humane motifs are accentuated. Both festivals are geared towards the children and not towards the parents.

EASTER BRUNCH

During the week prior to the festival in April, the children are experiencing a lesser form of fasting with only small breaks for snacks. The school kitchen is cooking little and modest food. The money thus saved is donated to a big refugee camp. On the day of the celebration itself, each class is preparing a beautiful table with home-made food for another class. Children, teachers, and all of the many school helpers are having brunch together. This festival is an example of the ongoing development of the festivals in the school community: it took some years until consciousness had grown to also invite all the janitors, the cleaning women, and the uniformed guards. Renouncement and ensuing giving, sharing a meal and passing the candlelight to one another are universal symbolic gestures to which atheists can also relate.

FESTIVAL OF COURAGE

The Festival of Courage is celebrated in September. It still demonstrates considerable similarity to the way Michaelmas is celebrated in European Waldorf schools. The story of George and the Dragon is told, with emphasis on the universal virtue of courage. In the extensive school grounds, the teachers have prepared challenging tasks for the pupils. The children find various activities that make them struggle with feelings of reluctance and possibly even anxiety. They have to activate their individual willpower to overcome those inner hindrances. From year to year, they manage to succeed in more challenging tasks,

thus experiencing their own personal growth and expanding self-confidence.

Transformation Creates Togetherness: Cultural Approach to Festival Creation

The main motive of the Nairobi Waldorf School's teachers for its festival transformation was the integration of the multicultural parent-body to a strong community with which everybody could identify. Festivals were reshaped as occasions where awkwardness related to ethnic and religious differences yield to experiences of connectedness. They have reached this goal via the transformation of the festivals' Christian motifs while emphasizing trans-religious all-encompassing motifs of humanity.

Reconceptualization of Waldorf Festivals in Nairobi Waldorf School: Nature-based Approach in the Kindergarten

General Impulse for and Process of Development

In Nairobi Waldorf School kindergarten, the effort to overcome Eurocentric festivals was initiated by an Australian mentor who experienced an inconsistency in the way the Nairobi kindergarten teachers were celebrating the festivals. Sensing a pedagogical need to align the young child's seasonal nature experiences with his or her kindergarten festival experiences, she initiated the process of developing new festivals, together with the local kindergarten teachers. For two years, without any further intentions, the teachers performed nature observations and wrote them down in a journal. Every week, in the conference, they exchanged their experiences. After two years, the mentor asked for possible motifs in these nature observations relevant to possible new festivals. One of the teachers described what then happened with regard to Easter time in April:

> And now when it came to taking it from looking and writing to the next step: what can we do with that in terms of the children and something to celebrate? – It was like a magic, it was really jumping out of the page.

During January, February, and parts of March, everybody suffers from the exhausting heat of a long period of extremely hot weather. Even business goes down. Then, in mid-March, the time of the long rains begins. The stinging sun hides behind clouds and pouring rain with lots of shadow. The sun comes out only for short moments bringing along colorful rainbows. "In this time, because there's so much shadow, as soon as the sun appears with the water – then rainbows! Immediately! So many rainbows with this heavy rain!" the teacher described. So, emanating from observation, rainbows naturally appeared as a motif for a festival celebrated in the beginning of March.

Further Central Festivals and their Main Elements in Nairobi Waldorf Kindergartens

RAINBOW FESTIVAL: Beginning of April (see above)

LANTERN FESTIVAL: June (winter), celebrated similarly to the European Lantern Walk in November

SHAMBANI FESTIVAL: Beginning of July, at the end of the long rains, the gardens are abundant with fruit and vegetables. *Shambani* means garden in Kishwaheli. It is a festival of harvest in a double sense: One day there is a celebration for the children who will enter primary school. They harvest what they have learned so far. The next day, the vegetables in the gardens are harvested and cooked into a collective meal.

FLOWER FESTIVAL: Beginning of October, when the short rains begin (springtime). Flowers are blossoming, especially the violet Jacaranda trees, shedding carpets of flowers onto the school ground. The festival is celebrated inside and outside.

FESTIVAL OF LIGHT: Celebrated at the beginning of December, before the long summer holidays. It is celebrated in a similar way to the primary school festival (see description above).

Transcending Nature Observation: Natural Approach to Festival Creation

One interviewee related the 'big relief' for all living beings after the hot summer period, marked by the arrival of the long April rains. The description resembled an experience of physical and inner rebirth: "So it's again a different kind of death and resurrection. I mean, everything has died with the sun and then the rains come and life appears." She depicted the rainbow and its colors as a symbol for this experience. I asked her if the teachers' Christian background influenced the process of finding motifs for the festivals in kindergarten and if they appeared to have in mind more overarching motifs like the birth of light, death, and ascension? She immediately answered: "No, it just came out of nature." Still, this interviewee specified,

it only happened when the teachers started to reflect on the observed natural phenomena. I asked her if she saw some spiritual or transformational aspects in her nature experiences. After a long, thoughtful pause, she answered:

> What nature is experiencing is mirrored in us. So this thirst and heat and dryness, we have it also; we can relate to it in a spiritual way. We can take it to a higher level. It takes the will of a person to want to transform it. With the human will and awareness, we can lift it to these other levels where we can find things that connect us.

In this interviewee's opinion, the multi-colored rainbow served as a metaphor for uniting all different strengths and weaknesses in an integrative community in which nobody should feel excluded. She explained that, in this context, spirituality reaches beyond religion, tribe, and "all these physical differences." It is uniting people, transiting everything, as she explained but she did not want to use the word 'God' for it, not to exclude atheists.

What the interviewee thus described was an evolution, which is possible in a nature-based approach to festival creation. It can develop from nature observations and nature experiences to experiencing related personal dispositions. Then, in a last step, the reflective meta-process of searching for images, concepts, or metaphors within these observations can culminate in numinous experiences of all-encompassing connectedness and wholeness.

Dialogue and Interconnectedness: Touching the Sacred in Festivals and their Creation

Looking at a deeper level beyond the observed processes of the schools' festival renewal, a concept emerges, permeating all three approaches towards festival creation: this is the concept of *dialogue*.

The founders and teachers of Kusi Kawsay entered into a process of dialogue with the elders in the high Andean mountains where some of the last Andean cultural treasures have been preserved. The dialogue was twofold: on one level it focused on the reestablishment of the agricultural calendar and subsequent nature-observation processes, on another level it focused on the festive rituals themselves. Both levels of dialogue resulted in a close receiving and giving dialogue with nature and *Pachamama* (universe), which is represented in the encompassing Andean concept of reciprocity between visible and invisible beings.

The dialogue of Nairobi Waldorf (primary) School teachers advanced on a social level by awareness of and listening to the subtle needs of the school's multicultural parent-body. Parents were included in the process of creation and performance, especially of the Festival of Light. The example of the ongoing development of the participants of the Easter Brunch shows that this dialogue is a continual process in the social realm of Nairobi Waldorf School.

In the Nairobi Waldorf School kindergarten, the close nature-observation process led to new experiences for the teachers: "I had lived there all my life but I had never known what really happened in nature," one interviewee stated. The nature-observation processes demonstrated the quality of close questioning and listening. The answer came when the question about suitable motifs for creation of new kindergarten festivals was posed. The motifs "just jumped out of the pages."

The dynamics observed at Nairobi Waldorf School kindergarten appear to correspond to Rappaport's (2013) classification of three levels of meaning (distinction, similarity, and unification): the first step of nature-observation involves observation and description of tangible phenomena. This means that, for two years, the teachers were engaged in the level of low-order meaning (distinction).

> We see the 7th grade in Indian clothes, the 6th mirroring British attire, the 5th in Muslim clothes, and the lower grades in various African robes.

In the second step, when the question about possible motifs for the development of locally adequate festivals was raised, the motifs 'jumped out'. The process of reflecting on the observed phenomena with colleagues led to the level where a sensation of inner meaningful connection was rising; this relates to what Rappaport describes as middle-order meaning (similarity).

Rappaport defines the third level of meaning as *unification*, which in the Nairobi Waldorf school appears to have been reached when the experience of *rainbow* and the motif of *color* meaningfully 'jumped out'. This was described by one interviewee as an experience of

oneness and connectedness of universal character – a description corresponding to Rappaport's features of a high-order meaning and its experience of identification and numinous union.

Rappaport is not alone in identifying a connection between rituals, festivals, and festival creation, on the one hand, and a type of numinous experience, on the other. Grimes (2014) characterizes one aspect of the process of festival creation as a formation of webs of meaningfulness. He claims that it can lead to the same quality of encompassing experiences, which participants might label as sacred, religious, or spiritual. The creation and celebration of the Festival of Light in the Nairobi Waldorf (primary) School offered that possibility. One interviewee described experiences in relation to this festival:

> And that was beyond any religion, but you see the light in it, because the children, the innocence they have, the ability to experience things in the present so much, is really the light we would like for a better world. […] It creates light for a better world. So that was […] very cosmic – cosmic is the word I'd like to use.

Both authors, Rappaport (2013) and Grimes (2014), describe experiences of an elevated level of consciousness that might also be called interconnectedness. Their reflections, in addition to the interviewee's quotation above, seem to reach into a state that Durkheim (2013) called 'the sacred'. Apparently, ritual, festival creation and their performances, as well as experiences within indigenous knowledge systems, can inspire a state of connectedness, which the interviewee above did not want to call 'God' out of respect for atheists. However, if festival creation in non-European Waldorf schools can link into this sphere, it will gain access to a spiritual dimension, which – although Schieren (2014) calls it a "touchy subject" – is still a relevant dimension of Waldorf education.

Besides such transcendent aspects within the development of new Waldorf festivals, quite mundane prerequisites are relevant and related to overcoming the original implementation of traditional European Waldorf festivals.

Overcoming Waldorf Eurocentrism: Concepts from Indigenous Knowledge

In the past, in many cases, the founding processes of Waldorf schools situated far away from Europe were strongly influenced by the Central-European Waldorf movement. Similarly, much of the content taught at Waldorf schools was related to traditional Waldorf contents and festivals. Those influences were necessary for transmitting the basics of Waldorf education. At the same time, they contained an inherent conflict, since they often did not relate to local, non-European culture, tradition, and environment.

A conscious attitude of liberation and quest for transformation is required of the local teachers in order to initiate the processes of adapting the European content to the local culture.

Boland (2015) refers to such European influence on non-European Waldorf schools as a "hidden curriculum" and asks: "Is there a tension between the hidden curriculum of 'traditional Waldorf' content and the child's lived experience in her environment?" (Boland, 2015, p. 199). Such European influences were not able to stimulate the will and capabilities of the local professionals to develop locally-shaped Waldorf forms and adapt the imported contents to local living conditions. A conscious attitude of liberation and quest for transformation is required of the local teachers in order to initiate the processes of adapting the European content to the local culture. Concepts taken from the field of indigenous knowledge are helpful in understanding various aspects of the liberating processes followed by the researched schools in their creation of new, locally-inspired Waldorf festivals.

Morrow (2009) describes the concept of Eurocentrism, in general, as the demand for universal validity of Western philosophy, values, and science. Can we speak of Waldorf Eurocentrism? Is there a claim made, perhaps implicitly, for the universally applicable mode of all contents and forms of Waldorf education everywhere in the world? Boland (2014) thinks so; he also adds that some of the adaptations that took place in non-European Waldorf schools might only be a type of "sticking wings on a caterpillar and calling it a butterfly" instead of a true metamorphosis of contents and forms (Boland, 2014). In contrast, the processes of festival creation in Nairobi Waldorf (primary) School, especially in the case of the Festival of Light, were characterized by such a process of metamorphosis: light, as a common motif of the most central annual festivals of four world religions, was taken as an

all-inclusive concept to be celebrated in the place of the former Christmas celebration.

Wiredu (1995) and Dei (2010) use the notion of 'conceptual decolonization' for freeing concepts from their Western anchor and way of interpreting the world. The Kusi Kawsay teachers performed this conceptual decolonization in their festival creation processes. They freed themselves from traditional Waldorf festival concepts by searching and restoring ancient, almost lost, culturally valuable Andean festival traditions.

"Careful local contextualization and … respect for local life worlds" are concepts that Morrow (2009, p.72) believes to be important for overcoming Eurocentrism. In the long process of close nature-observation, the Nairobi Waldorf School kindergarten teachers developed consciousness about details in – and respect for – their surrounding nature. Then – out of pedagogical insight – they contextualized these observations into the developmental needs of a small child and carefully established locally contextualized festivals.

Summarizing Experiences

Creation of new Waldorf festivals in accordance with local cultures and communities requires a special, liberating attitude from a non-European school community to free itself from the weight of European influences. Entering into a dialogical approach, it offers access to various levels of relevant experiences, which move from a mundane level up to a transcendent, interconnected level. The related processes signify a valuable step for Waldorf communities in gaining individual access to the essence of Waldorf education: "The observant listening to that which the world is demanding is the attitude in which Waldorf teachers want to kindle their feeling of responsibility" (Steiner, 1980b, p. 111).

Conclusion

This article gives insight into a study conducted by an internationally experienced and engaged Waldorf teacher as part of a Master's thesis at the Rudolf Steiner University College in Oslo, Norway. The purpose of the study was to investigate the processes that two non-European Waldorf schools, Kusi Kawsay in Peru and Nairobi Waldorf School in Kenya, had gone through to transform or replace the traditional European Waldorf festivals, thus aiming at contributing ideas and knowledge for other schools in similar situations. Three approaches to the creation of new festivals in the two Waldorf schools emerged in the course of the ethnographic study. They might offer some guidelines for other non-European Waldorf schools, which – within their school community – have decided on a reconceptualization of their annual festivals.

Traditional Approach: Using Tradition for Development of Free Thinking

The founders and teachers of the indigenous Kusi Kawsay Waldorf school investigated their local ancient traditions and implemented the agricultural Inca sun calendar as the basis for their festival celebrations, centered around a close and reciprocal relationship with nature. Returning to the valuable sources of their own culture increases the often suppressed self-esteem of the indigenous children. The teachers' intention was to use the close connection of the ancient festivals with nature processes, as well as related exact nature observation processes, to develop growing independent judgement in their students and ultimately the capability of free thinking.

Cultural Approach: Integrating Diversity

The goal of the festival transformation process in Nairobi Waldorf School was the conscious integration of all multicultural and religiously diverse members of the school community into common celebrations with which everybody could identify. The school community searched for the all-encompassing motifs in the existing European-Christian festivals and in the religious traditions of the four world religions represented in the school community. In effect, the school developed celebrations with which atheist parents can also identify while still including transcendent and soul-nourishing forms and rituals. In an ongoing dialogue within the school community, they maintain the awareness for improvement.

Nature-based Approach: Thinking with the Cycle of the Year

Nairobi Waldorf School kindergarten's approach to festival creation was using nature observation as a focus. The teachers performed the process of close nature observation for at least two years. This process coincides with what Rudolf Steiner (1985, p. 40) claimed to be a necessary path of the contemporary renovation of festivals, calling it *thinking with the cycle of the year*. The phase of nature observation was followed by the search for related motifs that might serve for festivals created out of careful local contextualization.

All three concepts need an attitude that can be referred to as a *dialogical approach*, either with nature or within the school community. I suggest that this dialogical approach is a central prerequisite for and the basis of each successful process of festival creation or transformation in Waldorf schools.

Limitations and Further Research

This study provides insight and knowledge as to how two schools have proceeded with festival creation. Experiences of other schools with different possible ways of festival creation would expand the picture and our knowledge about this topic.

Further research could address the Christian aspects of Waldorf education. Waldorf festivals can be, and often are, an expression of Christian orientation. Must this be the case? How are we to understand these aspects in a pluralistic society? How did Rudolf Steiner explain the Christian orientation of Waldorf education and to what extent can this be transformed to fit other cultures and religions?

Last but not least: one important question that emerged from this study and offers possibilities for further research stems from the search to overcome Waldorf Eurocentrism; it asks: What would be the possibilities for dialogue and mutual enrichment between the Waldorf and the indigenous knowledge movement?

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