

Bildung and the road from a classical into a global and postcolonial concept

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In this article I want to show how a European classical form of bildung has developed in our time into something we can call a postcolonial, or a new global form of bildung. Bildung is a contested concept; different parts of it are used for the purpose at hand. The very aim and meaning of bildung is to humanize what is often considered to be an instrumental education and society, governed by goal-rationality or goal-means efficiency. When searching for meaning in educating people and for the purposes of our activities, bildung is often the answer, both in history and in our time. The intensity of using the concept come and go, and there are always different interpretations of what we can mean by the very concept. *Bildung* is originally a German word which really cannot be properly translated into English. If it could be, it would be something like liberal education or liberal arts, one of the traditions that adopt this European concept. Today there are at least three different versions of the concept that are described and discussed in books, articles, and at conferences. One is the classical German tradition that has Vilhelm von Humboldt and Berlin University as its most common name. A second is liberal education, today mostly known in the way Martha C. Nussbaum has developed this Anglo-Saxon classical tradition. A third is the concept taken from the hermeneutic tradition, where H.G. Gadamer writes about interpretation and understanding in terms of excursion and return, or bildung as a journey. What is common for these three versions is that different attempts are made to relate this Western or European tradition to other cultures and

horizons of interpretation. This presents the opportunity to start a discussion about a global form of *bildung*, beyond the Western tradition. With the classical German tradition as a point of departure, there is an idea from Goethe's concept of world literature, a postcolonial thought of different particular traditions, or literature genres, reflected in each other. In liberal education there is Nussbaum, still with motivations in Western tradition. She is open to studying other cultures, being critical of one's own, and developing narrative imagination. The hermeneutic tradition is open to the foreign, even in its conception of interpretation. Here there is a relationship between the acquainted and unacquainted, or seeing one's own in that which is foreign and the foreign in that which is one's own. In this third understanding of *bildung*, attempts are made to formulate what schooling of world citizens can mean¹.

In these three versions of *bildung* there are certain attempts to take the concept out of a limited national or Western tradition and search for an understanding of what we might mean by a global form of *bildung*. In this broad discussion the postcolonial field makes many contributions to the ambition of including all parts of the globe. *Bildung* is in its original form a part of the Western Enlightenment. The reverse of this tradition is colonialism and subordination of other people in the name of the white man.

First I will describe the main components of the concept of *bildung* – what we can mean by this manifold and contested concept. Secondly I will describe what we can mean by the postcolonial. Thirdly I show how we can understand the core problem, the relationship between the universal and the particular. Fourthly I discuss what we can mean by a global concept of *bildung* including “the other”, or other cultures and parts of the world.

¹ Gustavsson, 2013

What is the meaning of bildung?

From the start bildung referred to the formation of a human being, expressed in the metaphor of the sculptor carving out a form from raw material. This “forming” became in the Latin world *formatio*, and was taken into the French language as *formation*. Bildung is in this sense the formation and self-formation of the human being. From the Renaissance and up to about 1800, bildung was informed by two key elements – *a free, endless process which originated from the Greeks*, and *a picture of the ideal, Imago Dei borrowed from Christian mysticism*². As a free process it means that it starts from where we are and what we are, and involves a potentially endless personal process of development. In the classical tradition the ultimate ideal is what the process leads to. This is transformed from the ideal image of God, into a certain type of human being, the ideally educated man, such as Leonardo da Vinci or Wolfgang Goethe. In popular education this goal is transformed into common social goals for popular movements about democratic society, justice, and equality. These two elements, the free process and the ideal picture, or a goal, can be followed throughout history in different versions. They are also a key to analyzing the transformations of bildung in space and time.

The main idea in the humanism of the Renaissance is that human nature is free to be anything, an angel or a beast, and as such is distinctly different from other species in nature, which are limited by their instincts. In neo-humanism from 1760 onwards, the formation of human nature takes its influence from the classical Greeks, the ideal picture of human culture, in philosophy, in arts, in politics, and as an ideal of living in harmony with oneself and society. In most periods and places one of these elements of bildung, a free endless process or a goal, has been dominant. In the Romantic era the free genius was considered to have created him/herself in a totally free process. When bildung was institutionalized, it was mostly transformed into the ideal of the true educated man, limited to a certain content, for example one who read the

² Gustavsson, 1991

right kind of books, mostly the classics. From here we still have today the tradition of speaking of bildung as a special canon of works. In some historical moments, the two parts of the concept have been wisely balanced, and these have been the most fruitful periods in the history of bildung. This was the case in Germany, in the time of Vilhelm von Humboldt, and when the tradition of Swedish popular education was created a hundred years later, from 1880 and for a few decades thereafter. The creators of the ideas of popular education had the ambition to combine the free search for knowledge and human development with the ideals and goals of popular movements. Everyone had a right to participate, in order to create democracy and a just society³.

There are many writers and philosophers within this neohumanistic tradition. They wrote about bildung in different ways. Gottfried Herder, one of the first, saw bildung as a common people with a common language and cultural heritage, expressed in folktales and peoples' culture. This nationalist, or essentialist, understanding was taken over by N.F.S. Grundtvig in Denmark, in the liberation from German oppression. Friedrich Hegel took bildung out of this national limited understanding of bildung and presented bildung in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* as a journey, starting in Greek antiquity, through a phase of fragmentation and alienation, and ending in a new era when the state and society was in harmony. The individual and humanity develop in the same phases, but humanity is limited here to the Western culture.

This is an example of how an idea can be expressed in a certain time, perhaps for us too limited and marginalizing, but carrying the seeds of something new later in history. Hegel formulated the first idea of recognition of the other in the same work, and I shall return to this.

Today we find the descriptions and discussions about bildung, as mentioned, in at least three different versions. The first and most dominant is the *classical*, with roots in the German idealistic tradition, mostly connected to Vilhelm von Humboldt and

³ Gustavsson, 1991, 1996

Berlin University. The main aim of a university here is to research, because most of all knowledge is unknown and research has to be free, both from the market and the State. This is called *lehr- und lernfreiheit*, students' and teachers' freedom to form their own studies. When attempts are made in our time to humanize an instrumental education this tradition from Humboldt is the one usually used. A second version is *liberal education*, mostly institutionalized in the English and American colleges and some universities, with great books and general knowledge as the main features. Recurrent attempts are made to give a rebirth to these dimensions of education. The best-known example is an attempt made by Martha C. Nussbaum to include studies of other cultures and school critical minds. A third version formulated in recent times is *bildung* connected to the hermeneutic tradition, *bildung* as a journey, an excursion and return. We start from an already known and familiar home, and travel out into the foreign and the unknown, coming back with broader horizons, or a richer interpretation and understanding of the world⁴. This is developed by the Danish philosopher Peter Kemp, with the intention of schooling world citizens⁵.

What is the meaning of “postcolonial”?

In 1940, a time of ongoing decolonization, many countries in Africa, Asia, and South America fought themselves free from colonial political powers. This was a long-term course of events both before and up to South Africa's liberation from apartheid, one of the last emancipations. One of the first writers of postcolonial tradition was Franz Fanon, who was born in Martinique and studied in France. At that time there was a renaissance of Hegel's doctrines, and especially of his dialectics of Master and Bondage. Fanon's book *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* (1952) takes this into a dialectic of the colonizer and the colonized. It is a study of a black man's experience of colonialism and Europe, where he formulated the so-called postcolonial paradox: either I demand that others do not notice my skin color, or I want them to notice

⁴ Gustavsson 1996, 2007

⁵ Kemp, 2010

it. The problems he formulated are still timely; how are identities created in a global society? How are racist stereotypes created and maintained? The ideas and texts of the postcolonial period have their background in liberation movements from colonialism. Decolonization did not mean that the colonial ideas, subordination, and oppression left either the colonial powers or the colonized countries.

A next step in the development of the postcolonial ideas is the influence from Foucault and poststructuralist philosophy. Edward Said wrote about how “The Orient” was created by intellectuals in the West, and in the same way Valentin Mudimbe wrote about how the picture of Africa as primitive was created as justifying colonialism⁶. They both show how East and West were constructed as dichotomies in relation to each other. Language as social practice is used by Spivak and Bhabha with the intention to show how discourses shape how we consider the differences between races and groups of people.

There are different forms of ideas produced in the postcolonial field, expressed from different parts of the globe. The most dominant writers and philosophers, such as Spivak and Bhabha, come from India. Mudimbe comes from Africa, and Mignolo from South America. It is a common problem to describe colonized people in essential terms. This has been a tendency in the early movements of Negritude in Africa and in the Indian movement in the Andes⁷. There is a need to formulate one’s own identity against the colonizer, the dominant European. Essentialism has been criticized by many postcolonial writers, who consider it to be a tool to describe the subordinated in stereotypes or as having special natures. Spivak has called this *strategic essentialism*⁸. On the other hand, though, it expresses a need to formulate a clear identity against the colonizer.

⁶ Said, 1978; Mudimbe, 1994

⁷ Aman, 2014

⁸ Spivak, 1993

The critical point for many is the question of knowledge. There are different modes and formulations of knowledge in terms of indigenous knowledge directed to the Western monopole on the definition of knowledge⁹.

Homi Bhabha identifies two different discourses of the multicultural. One in particular says that we live in a society consisting of homogenous groups that are different and separated from each other. South Africa was and still is such a society. Another discourse is universal and defines the differences in relation to a normative center, like the melting pot society. There are also differences within a group, without a center, and similarities between groups. Groups of people are constantly changing and the society is more and more described as a hybrid society. *Hybridity* means that identities are changing and a process of translation is taking place between differences. What traditionally is considered to be fixed identities is changing in a world of migration and diaspora. In the process a *third space* is activated, showing the differences in change. In the spaces between differences both in groups and between groups, something new and unforeseeable emerges¹⁰.

For most of the writers in the field it is not a question of either uncritically agreeing or adherence to the Western values, or rejecting values such as democracy or human rights. Instead it is to criticize the selective applications, or powers of interpretation of these values.

The universal and the particular

There is, as we have seen, both in the concept of *bildung* and in the postcolonial field, a play or a problem on the relationship between what we generally can call the universal and the particular, or sometimes the local and the global. The universal is expressed here in terms of human rights, criteria for social justice, or certain values, and the particular is expressed in terms of diversity and differences. This problem is treated in many ways

⁹ Mignolo

¹⁰ Bhabha, 1994

in the social sciences. One way to formulate the need for both is to say that the global without the local is empty, and the local without the global is blind¹¹. This is the central point in contemporary research and discussion about what is called globalization, cosmopolitanism, or a multi- or intercultural society. If we look expansively at the field of social sciences and philosophy, we can identify some representations for the universal. The universal is then described in another way than the traditional European concept of universalism from the Enlightenment, formulated after the critique of the power over other cultures, and the reverse of this tradition in colonialism¹². The criticized form of universalism was and is the universalization of the European. He calls it “universal universalism” – or a universalism including all people on the globe. But there are representations of the particular as traditions, differences, and diversity. It can be in terms of communalism, identities, or defense from different minorities in relation to the Western power or norm.

Representations of the universal

Universalism has been understood for a long time as the Western Enlightenment’s values spread over the world. This has been a part of the colonization of other peoples and cultures, represented as civilizing efforts. But in social sciences today, after a hard critique of the form of universalism, other forms which include all people have been created. Different traditions, however, use different vocabularies to express what is meant by the universal and the particular. One common usage is to say moral universalism and ethical particularism. Here the moral refers to Kant’s universal form of moral thinking, formulated in universals.

In the fields of social sciences and philosophy there are some representatives of the universal rights and values, in terms of democracy. Jürgen Habermas has a universal criterion for democracy – that those people affected by a decision should have been participants in making that decision. This means that neither tradi-

¹¹ Beck, 2004

¹² Wallerstein 2006, Fanon, 1971

tion nor authority should be decisive for the result, but rather the rational arguments. This form of communicative democracy has been posited as an alternative for those who wish to democratize parliamentary democracy. It is rational; rational conversations are the way to solve common problems¹³.

Within this tradition, Seyla Benhabib is one of those who has formulated the relationship between the universal and the particular:

I will insist on *the necessary disjunction as well as the necessary mediation between the moral and the ethical, the moral and the political*. The task is one of mediations, not reductions. How can one mediate moral universalism with ethical particularism..... The tension between universal human rights claims and particularistic cultural and national identities is constitutive of democratic legacy. Modern democracies act in the name of universal principles, which are then circumscribed within a particular civic society¹⁴.

For Benhabib, people's narratives are important for communicating a wider meaning than rational arguments alone.

Another representation of the universal is what has been called the *capability approach*. The economist Amartya Sen and philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum have formulated a precondition for democratic development. It is not enough to have the right to participate; one must also have the capability to participate in society. This is an argument for education and schooling, also transformed in practice around the world. For Sen, parliamentary democracy is the basis for development, but it has to be extended to include people's potential to develop their capabilities. For Nussbaum, ethical values are formulated in lists of what every human being needs to live a good life¹⁵. This precondition for democracy is based on an Aristotelian understanding of human potential and human flourishing. I have used it myself with the intention of defending Swedish popular education against neo-

¹³ Habermas, 1992

¹⁴ Benhabib, 2006, pp. 19f32

¹⁵ Nussbaum, 2000

liberal arguments for utility and human capital. It entails a wider understanding of what utility this activity has for society.

Cosmopolitanism has for a long time been a response to the fact that we as humans are living on one common globe, in one universe, in a single cosmos. The very idea of being a citizen of the world and not of the local area has long been linked to the Cynics and Stoics in the West, and to many other modes of thought in other parts of the world. The problem is that many representatives of cosmopolitanism project their own local or particular ideas and identities onto the whole globe, and onto others. In the educational field the Danish philosopher Peter Kemp gives an historical view of the idea of citizens of the world. The core definition is produced with the help of mimesis in three steps – Mimesis 1 is the pre-narrated, or pre-understood life, Mimesis 2 is our narrative or understanding here and now, and Mimesis 3 is the new understanding we gain when we have taken part in other stories, creations, or forms of life. The ambition here is to take educational understanding out of the narrow national or local space for the education of world citizens¹⁶.

Another more general cosmopolitan solution is suggested by Kwame Appiah in *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (2006). Appiah was born in Ghana and educated in England, and is now a professor of philosophy in the U.S. As a philosopher he is unusual in the way that he explains his thoughts with stories, many from the double experience of Ghana and the U.S. He uses cosmopolitanism instead of globalization and multiculturalism, the first being too much of a market strategy, and the other too much of a disease which has to be cured. The main answer for Appiah is conversation over different borders, to be open to new experiences. Having obligations to others includes taking seriously the value of individual human lives. Universal concern for others and respect for legitimate differences can often clash, so cosmopolitanism can be the name not of a solution but of the challenge. Some values are universal and others local. We are different but the lesson is that we can learn from each other's

¹⁶ Kemp, 2010

differences. We live as in a shattered mirror and this means that we can find parts of the truth everywhere and the whole truth nowhere. No little piece of the mirror can reflect the whole. But to think that my little piece is my truth and your little piece is an equal truth – that is to say, relativism – is the same as saying that we live in different worlds. The meaning of conversation is to learn from each other, otherwise there could be silence. There are overlaps in our vocabulary of values which make conversation possible, but that does not mean that we can always come to an agreement. Thin universal values become thick when they apply to local contexts. The particular is in the universal. The answer is contamination between differences. Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* is a good example of hybridity, impurity, and intermingling. The main ingredients of cosmopolitanism are pluralism and fallibilism. The first is to realize that there are many values worth living by, to hope that there are different values to live by, and to know that we cannot live by all of them. The second is to realize that our knowledge is imperfect, provisional, and subject to revision in the face of new evidence.

The particular

In an attempt to analyze two particular concepts, European bildung and African Ubuntu, both in terms of difference and unity, I can recognize similarities and differences. Read in a hermeneutic tradition of transposing the particular to the universal, the understanding of bildung can be widened if it is related to other parts of the world. In searching for points of transition and dialogue between traditions, established borders can be disrupted in the act of conjoining, and both bildung and Ubuntu allow a reconsideration. It is in the space between the familiar and the unfamiliar, the particular and the universal, that possibilities for new understanding emerge.

In the field of democracy there are critiques of universalism, especially of Habermas's universalism, formulated clearly by Chantal Mouffe and her concept of agonistic democracy, taking place in a decentralized society. The idea is that conflict and passion are

important features of a democracy¹⁷. This represents an understanding of democracy against a view of the citizen as an egoistic individual and society as a result of the different views involved coming together in consensus. In the same way, we can find certain representatives for the particular in social sciences and philosophy. The main characteristic here is giving priority to communalities or identities, often defined in opposition to modern traits of Western universalism. The point of departure here is that all parts of the world, including Europe, represent the particular in a way, or that no part has any license to represent humanity, or the universal¹⁸. Habermas criticizes traditional hermeneutics for its ethical particularism, in contrast to what he calls the moral, expressed in Kantian terms. The particular in hermeneutics consists of communalities for interpretation. This can be used politically in many different ways. It can be used as a defense of traditional hierarchical values. It can be a defense of the province, the nation, the tribe, or the religious group. It can be a defense of the right to develop one's own particular identity against what can be considered to be the norm, for instance the white, middle-class, heterosexual man.

The communitarians formulate these group-specific ideas, forgetting the common human identity and describing certain groups of people in essential terms. This essentialism has been criticized for its tendency to culturalize human behavior or qualities. Translated into postcolonial thought, it has been a useful tool for investigating the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. The very word diversity, understood as describing a multicultural society consisting of different homogenous groups, is replaced here by difference. Difference leads to hybridity and a third space, where it is impossible to group people and attribute characteristics and behavior to a specific group¹⁹

¹⁷ Jezierska, 2011

¹⁸ Chakrabarty, 2008

¹⁹ Bhabha, 1994

The other

There is a common source of bildung and the other – Hegel’s *The Phenomenology of the Spirit* (1807). Hegel was totally caught up in a Western tradition, for instance he ignored Africa in the development of the world spirit. But on the other hand he created the concept of the other, which serves as a theme throughout history to give voice to the oppressed. The other is formulated by Hegel in terms of lordship and bondage. The context is the creation of our self-consciousness, which is created when it is being acknowledged by another. When a

...self-consciousness is faced by another self-consciousness; it has come out of itself. This has a two-fold significance; first, it has lost itself, for it finds itself as another being; secondly, in doing so it has superseded the other, for it does not see the other as an essential being, but in the other sees its own self²⁰.

This is the point of departure for the whole story of recognition. This relationship is necessary both for the lord and the bondsman; they hold each other in chains, both in a struggle to death, and mediated in recognition. This idea is continued in the Marxist relationship between the capitalist and the worker, in the feminist relationship between man and woman²¹, and in the postcolonial relationship between the colonizer and the colonized²². The common solutions to the problem of oppression, emancipation, or liberation are, as we know, revolution, or eternal historical struggle. Hegel regarded the possibility of liberation as being the bondsman realizing him- or herself in the material world, through work with physical exertion. The master is dependent on that, and is for this reason more dependent on the bondsman than vice versa. Paris in the 1930s- and 40s is said to have experienced the first postcolonial wave. Through Kojév’s re-interpretation of Hegel, both Beauvoir (*Le Deuxième Sexe*), and Fanon create their versions of the reason for, and the liberation from, oppression. This is the first time Africa is recognized from a postcolonial perspective in Europe. Fanon writes in his *Peau Noire, Masques*

²⁰ Hegel, p.111

²¹ Beauvoir

²² Fanon

Blancs that he believes in a new form of humanism, beyond the categories put forward by colonial powers. At the same moment as the colonizer sees himself as the owner of the true humanism he is denying it, because to be true it has to apply to every human being. At the same moment as the colonizer demands “Western” universal values, he has revealed them as particular. Fanon believes in a true humanism and a new form of universalism. The way to achieve it is not to deny the other, but to recreate the inter-subjective relations. To deny the humanness of the colonizer is to deny oneself. The means of achieving this is by using dialogue and diplomacy, the re-codification of established values, and as Spivak later formulated, by using “a never-ending critique of what you cannot deny human rights”.

Bildung in transformation

Bildung has become a central concept in modernity, mostly used in the neo-humanistic tradition to widen and develop what is known as the *hard Enlightenment*²³ with a wider understanding of reason than instrumental reason, including values, personal development, and ethics. It is in this version that we find an individualistic concept the bildung of the personality. Today the classical concept of bildung is used in many ways in the educational system, mostly as a means of widening the understanding of knowledge and education. *The classical* is rooted in the humanistic tradition with the development of the personality as the aim, i.e. relating knowledge to personal and human growth. Vilhelm von Humboldt used it as a tool in the development of universities into research institutions, from having previously been mainly career-oriented institutions. Free search for knowledge had free institutions as a prerequisite, free from the market and the state. In the development it became elitist and in the school system had a strong emphasis on classical and cultural heritage, originating from the classical Greek and Western traditions. Today it is expressed in the canon tradition, with great works here again focusing on Western classics²⁴. The opposite is expressed in terms

²³ Liedman

²⁴ Bloom, 1991

of identity politics in terms of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. Expressed in Foucauldian terms it is the white, middle-class, heterosexual male who carries the power while marginalizing other identities. In a book I published in 2007 there were contributions which transformed bildung in both high tech-cultural and postcolonial terms. Here, the humanistic subject does not exist; cyberspace, cyborg, and the internet stand are in focus. The postcolonial interpretation of Goethe's concept of world literature is formulated in terms of different literature from different parts of the world mirroring each other²⁵.

The basis of understanding bildung as a journey, or interpretation and understanding is what Gadamer expresses with a quote from Hegel: "To find your own in the foreign and the foreign in your own"²⁶. The idea of bildung in the version I use has the same source, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which can be interpreted as a journey, an excursion, and return. Humanity (limited to the West for him) makes an excursion from its origins in Athens in 400 BCE, however it becomes alienated in its relationship with bildung, and in the search for its return home in the reconciliation between the individual, the civil society and the state. It has to do with alienation, how we from our own interpretations, the acquainted, open ourselves up to the unknown and foreign. In terms of experience we leave our familiar "home", go out into the world and meet new experiences, and then come back to a new home, making new interpretations because we have encountered something new out there. This relation between the known and the unknown is a crucial question. From an ordinary hermeneutic point of view we widen our horizons when we assimilate the foreign and unknown into what is already understood. The too often misunderstood metaphor Gadamer uses for opening, to set the former interpretation in play, is simply play (spiel). To take a step further, we have to *make the already acquainted foreign to us* in order to take in a new interpretation. Here lies the transformation of the hermeneutics which opens up the postcolonial horizon. It is in *the space between* where a new interpreta-

²⁵ Lövlie & Jonsson in Gustavsson, 2007

²⁶ Gadamer, 1985

tion is made, in the translation, where creativity and imagination opens for new possibilities. The German and Swedish words for experience are *erfahrung*, and *erfarenhet*, the root being “fahr”/“far”, which means to go out, to travel. The story of excursion and return can be multi-faceted and rich. In the Western tradition we have them in the Odyssey and in the Bible. The Odyssey can today be interpreted critically, in terms of gender and in postcolonial transformations. It is a story told and retold. The lost son in the Bible can refer to gaining understanding of oneself by initially losing oneself. The classical story from the last century, James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, is a story of an antihero, losing himself during a day in Dublin in colonized Ireland. In postcolonial literature the stories are other stories, treating the problem of belonging to an unstable, ambivalent world, the enigma of the arrival, to be hybridized. This double experience adds richness to these narratives. We can find the story of excursion and return in stories from the Andes, from African legends, and from India. Is it a universal way to tell the story of the human being.

A classical notion of *bildung* is to travel to other countries and cultures in order to widen horizons, experience, and understanding. *Bildung* as a journey has developed today into a concept where travel is a metaphor for human interpretation of the world, for understanding and personal development. There is a hidden concept in the works of Hans Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, which describe *bildung* as travel, or an excursion and return, and into a concept of education for a world citizen. Gadamer’s work *Truth and Method* (1960; 1989) takes its point of departure from a few humanistic, classical concepts, and names *bildung* as the most important, the most productive and influential concept of the 18th century. His ambition is to give the humanities a new framework, and he develops the tradition of hermeneutics in its modern shape. The key words to understanding *bildung* as a journey are the known and the unknown, *the acquainted and the unacquainted*. The individual travels, metaphorically speaking, from the already known, and from there we make an excursion and open ourselves to experience the unknown and foreign. We return and what we come back to is a new home, because of the new experiences we have made in opening ourselves to new

interpretations. This is linked to central concepts in the tradition of *bildung*, where dialogue, understanding – to be open to something new, to relate ourselves to the world we live in are important. This concept of *bildung* I have introduced in the Nordic countries²⁷. The Danish philosopher Peter Kemp, also partly inspired by Grundtvig, took this concept of *bildung* as a point of departure for forming the idea of the world citizen. I had built this concept of *bildung* on Hans Georg Gadamer myself and on the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur. Here, the connection between the individual and the social is re-established; a good life with and for others, in just institutions, are the code words here.

Literary representations of the postcolonial

World literature has most often been seen as an established body of classics, or masterpieces, or multiple windows on the world. Goethe is one of the classical authors in the classical tradition of *bildung*, and he holds these concepts together. One of his most famous and discussed concepts is world literature, and what he could mean by that. It is in his conversations with his disciple Eckerman that he most clearly expresses what he means. He said that:

...poetry is the universal possession of mankind, revealing itself everywhere and at all times in hundreds and hundreds of men.... I therefore like to look about me in foreign nations, and advise everyone to do the same. National literature is now a rather unmeaning term; the epoch of world literature is at hand and everyone must strive to hasten its approach... from the numerous national and local literatures there arises a world literature.²⁸

This can be transformed into today's discussion of *bildung* and the understanding of world literature. Damrosch takes "world literature to encompass all literary works that circulate beyond the culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language". It is in this sense not so much a canon of works, but rather "a mode of circulation and reading".

²⁷ Gustavsson, 1996

²⁸ Damrosch, 2003, p.

It is in literature that we find the core and complexity of both *bildung* and the postcolonial. The traditional understanding is that Goethe meant the spreading of the great classical books out to other parts of the world, whereas a postcolonial interpretation says that world literature is where *different forms of literature from different parts of the world are reflected in each other*²⁹. This means that all literature is particular, but when works are mirrored in each other we can talk of world literature. *Bildung* here is widened to encompass the whole world. This new interpretation opens possibilities to transform the concept of *bildung* into a true global concept. The literature, philosophy, and social science produced in this field open up new understandings both of the other and of ourselves. The universal is not immediately related to the West or Europe; indeed a new understanding of the universal in relation to differences and diversity, is opened up. There are exemplary literary works which can be labeled as postcolonial. Hybridity is illustrated in Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, where the main persons are transformed in the space between London and Bombay. The novel creates transformations and discusses the interpretation of the holy Koran, both in Bombay and in London, and over time. A good example is Tayeb Salih, who in *The Season of Migration to the North* turns Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* upside down. The story starts in a village in Sudan and goes via Cairo to London, where the conqueror uses his talents to seduce woman, and back to Sudan. The story ends with the same horror, as in *Heart of Darkness*. This focus of literature has resulted in research and discussions about reinterpretations of what can be called world literature and how we can treat them generally, even Western classics, or literature generally in relation to different backgrounds.

Reflections and connections

In the concept of *bildung* there is a main idea, that the human being can develop his or her humanity when relating to other human beings, or to the human creations in humankind. From the founding and in the historical development of *bildung*, there are

²⁹ Jonsson, 2007

categories of human beings excluded from the field of bildung – woman, slaves, workers, immigrants. For a long time bildung was reserved for middle-class men. But in the development of popular education in the Nordic countries we can see how first the working class, then the women, and last the immigrants fight for their right to gain entrance into the institutions of popular education. This is taking place in popular movements, and is expressed in terms of justice, equality, and democracy. The classical concept is still an elitist thing, an activity for the well-educated few.

Bildung as an excursion and return opens itself for generalizing the possibility for every human being to go, or be in such a process of richer interpretations and wider understanding. Human growth can take place everywhere, with different experiences and activities. So if we hold on to the main idea of bildung, every human being relates to what is human. Let's consider the human to be a narrative creature. We understand ourselves and the world we live in with narratives. We each have our own story to understand our own life. We widen the understanding in taking part of others. We are in this sense *oneself as another*. Self-esteem has connections to sociality and friendship, which in turn have a relation to considering every human being as such.

In what is called world literature as it was understood by Goethe and nowadays renewed by postcolonial writers, we see how the horizon widens to the global. Bildung is then taken out of a limitation to the West or the European. When particular forms of literature are reflected in each other there is a growing understanding of the whole. The connection between a hermeneutic and a postcolonial understanding of bildung can be found in the space between the acquainted and the unacquainted, in the “nothingness” rising when we open ourselves for a new interpretation. The term for this in classical hermeneutics is play; we set ourselves in play when leaving an interpretation, such we do in a true dialogue. It is related to the third space as it is formulated by Bhabha:

It is in the inter – the cutting edge of translation and negation, the in-between space – that carries the burden of meaning of culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national, antinationalist

histories of the “people”. And by exploring this Third space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves”³⁰

When this is transformed into mimesis, the prenarrative, the narrative and the renarrative, we have the connection to educating world citizens, but still in a Western framework. No one who has written about *bildung* or liberal education has connected the Western tradition to non European or postcolonial.

It is most curious that the founder of both *bildung* as a relation between the foreign and our own and the other, Friedrich Hegel, considered Europe to be the norm for historical development. Still, the generation of the hermeneutic creators, Gadamer and Ricoeur, are in the framework of Western narratives and philosophy. But in the same way as Goethe can be understood in a new way about world literature, Hegel’s concepts are used in order to widen the understanding of *bildung* and the conditions for making it global.

The contribution of the postcolonial to the discussion and conception of *bildung* is primarily to show how a particular tradition has power to make itself universal, and how a reflection between differences can widen our understanding of the world we live in.

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³⁰ Bhabha, 1994

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