



Intersections

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Unraveling our colonial legacies

The conversation in these pages about how to confront colonialism's enduring legacies is not new. Nor is it old. As long as human beings perpetuate new ways of colonizing territories and peoples, this conversation must continue, however hard it might be. As long as domination and oppression continue, their legacies will and must be discerned, analyzed and laid bare for the colonizer and the colonized.

The colonial legacy is one marked by violence, violence that has physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions. Colonialism's tools of divide and rule and of establishing hierarchies of value have led to the destruction of Indigenous languages and cultures and the promotion of racism and sexism. Any discussion of colonialism's legacies demands us first to focus on how our own histories—our identities as products of the colonial movement—have been shaped by this violence, whether we have inherited aspects of the colonizers or the colonized. The articles in this issue of *Intersections* undertake such self-examination. The authors of these articles invite readers to consider how colonialism's legacies shape, construct and condition each one of us.

Accepting this invitation can prove challenging, for both individuals and institutions. Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) as an institution trying to offer relief, support development and promote peacebuilding operates within systemic inequalities that are part and parcel of colonial legacies. In my years with MCC I have observed that it does relatively well at certain aspects of addressing these colonial histories and their present-day impact:

- Recognizing that we are socialized in multiple ways and that our way of being is not the only way of being;
- Acknowledging that, while there are commonalities in various contexts in which MCC works, each MCC program operates in different “locations,” each with their specific and distinctive cultures, stories and traditions;
- Understanding that colonialism has had a tremendous impact on economic, environmental and social structures.

“ The profound trauma experienced by the people of Congo during the years of Belgian King Leopold’s violent, abusive control of their land, resulting in the death of half the population, provides, in itself, adequate explanation for current political and socio-economic challenges in the DRC. Continued international exploitation and deception, coupled with Christian mission imitations of colonial styles, have merely reinforced the trauma-related patterns that have developed in the DRC over the past two centuries. – Suzanne Lind

Yet for MCC to live up to its calling of serving in the name of Christ, it must continue to struggle with additional dimensions of confronting colonial legacies, including:

- Constantly and consistently naming the inequalities within which MCC operates. MCC must be attentive to the power it carries with it when operating within cultural contexts shaped by the oppressive dynamics of colonialism and to differentiations of power and forms of oppression within those contexts;
- Identifying aspects of colonial legacies that have too often been overlooked, including the rootedness of racism and sexism;
- Recognizing that in its way of being and operating there might be covert (or overt) manifestations of colonialism.

Compiling this issue is by no means a feather in my cap. Nor should it be a tick mark for MCC. Confronting colonial legacies is not a one-time affair: it must be an ongoing struggle. Whatever your location within colonialism’s legacies, my challenge to you is to name your location within this conversation, to claim your identity and your socializations and to step forward with the humble intention of unraveling these legacies.

Valentina Satvedi, a product of the missionary movement in India, currently in Melbourne, Australia, is humbled by the opportunity to listen to the Dreaming stories of Australian Indigenous people expressed through song, dance, painting and storytelling.

The ongoing impact of colonialism on the Democratic Republic of Congo

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), colonialism is not just a historical period, but is visible in the lives, behaviors and social structures of people to this day. Congolese people generally talk about colonialism in an ambivalent way, because the topic has not been emphasized in their education or oral traditions. The experiences Congolese people underwent during the colonial period abruptly and profoundly changed their lives and their society. Even though most people may not be fully aware of all that happened, they know that it was a time of violent, traumatic upheaval and death.

The shock created by the meeting of northern and southern civilizations during the colonial period was reinforced by technology, religion and schools. The massive power of the colonial invaders imposed on the Congolese population through technological developments, schools and Christian missions convinced people in Congo that they could only survive by mimicking white people. Speaking French and living like a white person during the colonial period gave people the right to receive a card of distinction, called the civic merit card. Traditional beliefs and religions were labeled erroneous and dangerous. For a Congolese person, surviving required the immediate suppression of ancient beliefs, social patterns, spiritual support and sense of African selfhood.

This colonial devaluation of traditional Congolese identity led to the emergence of a deeply rooted inferiority complex in Congolese people: everything and everyone from the north was now viewed as superior

to what was found in the south. Congo’s languages have shockingly internalized this colonial hierarchy of cultural values, with white people referred to as *mundele*, which means model.

Furthermore, colonial systems present white persons as the most intelligent and the closest to God, without fault and powerful. Thus, one of the consequences of the colonial invasions of the global south by people from the global north is that the south has tried to imitate northern ways as the model for life and society even though the colonial practices and cultures they experienced were mostly violent and demeaning.

The inferiority complex of people from the global south, and some of the resulting coping behaviors—such as obsequious fawning; trickster behavior designed to ‘beat the system’; and victimization of those of less power—heightened the sense of superiority in white people and allowed them to develop increasingly disdainful and destructive attitudes towards Africans.

The colonial heritage is not one of joy but rather of great fear and anger. This heritage is evident in behaviors and decision-making patterns that have become the norm throughout Congolese society, as well as in economic and political spheres. Blatant striving for money and power; refusal to create functional political, economic and infrastructure systems; and a willingness to beg for and accept unlimited financial aid without thought of repayment are three of the behaviors that have become stereotypes of the Congolese people. Considered in the light of how colonialism violently changed fundamental ways of being, these behaviors can be understood as creative coping methods developed by people who have had to internalize trauma and disdain.

MCC, as a Christian agency based in Canada and the United States, cannot escape the influence of colonialism. MCC personnel have generally been people of good faith, responding willingly and with compassion to situations of poverty and suffering. But these attitudes have excluded, at a certain level, recognition that the people of the global south also have ideas and potential and know best how to help themselves, perhaps by working together with MCC.

MCC has clearly tried to relate to Congolese people in a less neo-colonialist way than have many other northern groups that have come to Congo either for financial gain or allegedly to “help” through “development.” As MCC continues to find its role in a growing and changing Congo and seeks to grapple with and move beyond colonial patterns, it should be guided by some practical principles:

- Relate with empathy rather than pity. Empathizing with people leads to working together; pity leads to dependence.
- Projects should be based on a shared study of assets and potentials, not on an evaluation of problems and needs. Discussions of assets and potentials can lead to shared efforts; listing needs leads to one-sided solutions.
- Refer to projects as the partner’s project with MCC, not MCC’s project. It is a good sign when a partner refers to “our project with MCC” rather than “MCC’s project in our area.”
- Always describe work with partners in terms of what we have done together, and of our failures/successes.
- Maintain a *listen-and-learn* posture in all relationships.



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Living by these principles will not by itself undo colonial histories—but they do help northern organizations like MCC grapple responsibly with colonial legacies.

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Addressing the colonial legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery

In a 2010 preliminary study for the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, United Nations Special Rapporteur Tonya Gonnella Frichner showed conclusively that the so-called Doctrine of Discovery, institutionalized in law and policy on national and international levels over a period of hundreds of years, lies at the root of the violations of Indigenous peoples' human rights, both individual and collective. This article provides a brief overview of the history of the Doctrine of Discovery and its effects and will note what kind of remedial measures to address the DoD's pernicious legacy are currently being proposed.

The history of western colonialism has entailed the mass expropriation of the lands, territories and resources of Indigenous peoples. Embedded within a theological and ideological framework that some have called the Framework of Dominance, the DoD offered the legal justification for centuries of virtually unlimited resource extraction from the traditional territories of Indigenous peoples. This, in turn, has resulted in the dispossession and impoverishment of Indigenous peoples and, as U.N. Special Rapporteur Gonnella Frichner has shown, is the underlying reality from which the host of problems that Indigenous peoples face today emerges.

The DoD's beginnings can be traced to the Crusader era and its conceptualizations of non-Christians as enemies of the Catholic faith and even as less than human. In his bull of 1452, Pope Nicholas directed King Alfonso V of Portugal to put these enemies of Christ into perpetual slavery and to take all their possessions and property, leading Portugal to traffic in African slaves, with Portugal expanding its domain by claiming lands along the western coast of Africa as Portuguese territory. In 1493, upon the return of Christopher Columbus and his infamous discovery (a not only inaccurate, but far-from innocent, term) of the Americas, another papal bull was issued allowing for the control of the discovered lands and any future discoveries of Spain. A subsequent bull forbade the taking of lands already claimed by self-proclaimed "Christian lords" such as Portugal's rulers, leading to a mapped line of demarcation showing which lands would fall under Portuguese rule and which under Spanish sovereignty. This pattern of presumptuous dominance grew and developed over time, outlasting European monarchies and eventually providing the legal foundation for state-owned land and property laws in colonial states such as the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Canada. The DoD has become enshrined within the norms of international law that governs the interactions of sovereign states with one another and is used by these states to assert their authority over and their right to exploit Indigenous lands to this day.

Over the last few decades a growing number of voices, primarily those of Indigenous peoples, have called attention to the legal construct of the DoD and its horrific effects. Several Christian denominations and organizations have been moved to adopt statements addressing the DoD and its legacy. Statements are certainly important, but must be complemented by processes that practically address the DoD's legacy for Indigenous peoples. Three to five hundred million Indigenous persons in over 72 countries continue to live with the corrosive and destructive legacies of their encounter with colonial forces.

In most Indigenous communities the effects of genocide, dispossession, forced removal from homelands and families, inter-generational trauma and racism have manifested in poverty, alcohol and drug problems, violence and other forms of social breakdown. One of the most devastating effects of colonization was changing the worldview of Indigenous peoples, who had traditionally valued women's leadership, by promoting gender-encoded hierarchies and patterns of leadership more easily controlled by colonial powers, with women's leadership in Indigenous communities suffering as a result. Indigenous communities' ways of life, identities, wellbeing, leadership structures and very existence are threatened by the continuing effects of colonial national policies, regulations and laws that attempt to force them to assimilate into majoritarian societies.

A main principle of MCC's work with Indigenous people is to work at root causes. MCC at its best seeks to address the pervasive colonizing root that continues to adversely shape Indigenous communities to this day. As a Christian organization founded by Mennonite settlers of European heritage on Indigenous land colonized by Canada and the United States, MCC is called to take on the difficult task of exploring its own place in the colonial narrative. MCC has joined the growing number of people and organizations hoping to find ways of addressing the legacy of the DoD in practical ways, recognizing that lasting justice for Indigenous peoples requires addressing the ideological mechanisms that facilitated the dispossession and genocide of Indigenous peoples. This task includes both the calling for Mennonites of European heritage to re-examine how their stories are intertwined with the colonial legacy of the DoD and the calling to join and take the lead from Indigenous peoples seeking to counter the DoD's colonial legacy and its continuing negative impact on Indigenous peoples.

Undoing the effects of the DoD construct involves at least three elements.

- First, healing from the legacy and trauma trail left by colonial policies and Indigenous encounters with colonizers both historical and contemporary. The Canadian Indian Residential School Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is but one example of this type of process. MCC's organizational engagement in the TRC process as an organization has been part of the healing process.
- Second, action to stop ongoing injustices from contemporary colonial seizure of Indigenous land and resources that are justified in part by the DoD.
- Lastly, decolonizing our thinking to change patterns of how MCC operates as an organization. MCC must take direction from Indigenous communities and get resources into their hands so that they can do the work in the way that they see appropriate. This type of decolonizing action includes taking direction from Indigenous women.

“ The Doctrine of Discovery lies at the root of the violations of Indigenous peoples' human rights, both individual and collective.

Learn more

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Website: www.dismantlingdoctrineofdiscovery.org

The story of colonialism is centuries old. The DoD and its patterns of pervasively oppressive dominance are a part of this history. Sadly it is still with us today. However, its vastness and longevity should not deter us from taking immediate steps to undo it, even if those steps are seemingly small and difficult. Many small steps will lead to transformation as long as we keep moving forward.

Harley Eagle is Co-Coordinator for Indigenous Work for MCC Canada.

“MCC is at times inevitably enmeshed in local political ecologies that pose challenges to the performance of Mennonite theologies and practices of anti-colonialism.”

Racial justice is more than relief, development and peacebuilding

Postcolonial theology is the work of confronting the relationship between empire and the church: how these historical realities have erased and undermined histories, languages, cultures, identities and the agency of colonized people all over the globe. Postcolonial theology acknowledges that what has typically been presented as uninflected “theology” has in fact been embedded within colonial realities and can thus be understood as “colonial theology.” Postcolonial theology is informed by anti-colonial movements, especially those from the late 1950s into the 1980s. It is born from the praxis of enslaved and Indigenous colonized peoples in active resistance to the hegemonic forces of European colonialism and neocolonialism. Critiquing and confronting colonial systems and legacies seriously are essential tasks for relief, development and peacebuilding organizations like MCC that seek to carry out their work responsibly and faithfully.

The work of racial justice is a critical component of faithful relief, development and peacebuilding work, because concrete action for racial justice speaks to the hopes and ambitions of the racially oppressed. The work of racial justice as a global phenomenon is centered in the self-determination of colonized peoples of the Two-Thirds World. A very recent example of this push for racial justice is the call on the part of 14 Caribbean nations for reparations for the ravages that slavery inflicted and that its legacy continues to inflict on those nations. These nations are compiling an inventory of the lasting damage inflicted by their former colonizers during the slave trade. Postcolonial theology calls on us to acknowledge the role colonialism, slavery and globalization have played in creating the current state of economic affairs on a global scale—and to take that seriously when we think about Christian humanitarian response.

Postcolonial theology further encourages us to ask what the God who declared “I, the Lord, love justice” (Isaiah 61:8) requires of us. Colonial theology works to justify colonization and the exploitation of the land and wealth accrued by the colonizers, from Columbus to the European Union. Organizations shaped by postcolonial theology, in contrast, join in efforts to redress the sins of colonialism. Caribbean nations, for example, are calling for recognition of the impact of colonialism and a response that meets the suffering of their peoples to this day—a response that would include reparations for slavery. Apologies for such colonial legacies will not suffice. Therefore, Christian organizations from the global north that work in Caribbean countries like Haiti must do so mindful of these calls for reparations and racial justice.

Churches and church-related organizations of the global north (the so-called “developed” nations,” or the One-Thirds World) have responded

to problems of poverty, disasters and conflict in the global south with relief aid, support for development and promotion of peacebuilding interventions. Yet too often these efforts have done little to address the root causes of poverty and lack of infrastructure both economic and social. In fact, they have worked in many cases to exacerbate the problems they seek to address. And even at their best, even when they stress the importance of mutual partnerships and seek to embed participatory listening and support for empowered local communities into their work, international aid organizations, including Christian international aid organizations, too often fail to address how legacies of racialized colonial systems continue to shape the contexts in which they work and to recognize the need to work for ways to redress the injustices left by those systems.

Without adequately confronting colonial legacies and consciously seeking to redress colonial wrongs (for example, by pressing for racial justice), the relief, development and peacebuilding activities carried out by international aid organizations will only reinforce dependency as they strengthen the paternalism of the old colonial model, reproducing the image of formerly colonized peoples as helpless, ignorant and idle. The rhetoric of partnership adopted by most international aid agencies points to a desire to move beyond such colonial patterns, but rhetoric is not sufficient: concrete action to redress the injustices of colonial legacies is needed in order to get at the root of why the formerly colonized nations of the global south continue to suffer as they do generation after generation.

For aid organizations that are Christian or church-based, it becomes even more crucial to consider the critique that postcolonial theology provides. The lingering reluctance of such groups stems from their unwillingness adequately to confront how the church has also been a primary exploiter of oppressed and colonized peoples throughout history. Indeed, a key function of the church during the colonial period was to justify the colonial projects of various European nations. The consequence of this relationship of the church with empire has been dire—not only for the colonized, but for the colonizer as well. In the latter case, churches from the colonizing nations of the global north have been taught an interpretation of the biblical message that fails to interrogate their positions of privilege on a global scale. Captive to such theologies, these churches are in danger in their outreach work of failing to recognize how Christian relief, development and peacebuilding work carried out with the best of intentions can in fact replicate and exacerbate colonial patterns. Escaping from colonial legacies may not be possible: but for the church in the global north to address such legacies responsibly, it must carry out its relief, development and peacebuilding work by following the lead of formerly colonized peoples. That includes engaging in vigorous advocacy to redress colonialism’s injustices. In short, it must recognize the fundamental desire of formerly colonized peoples for fundamental *relief* from their oppression.

Learn more

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Christian organizations in the global north that are mindful of the eurocentric legacies of colonialism often respond by seeking to diversify their staff leadership. While such action is crucial to undermine white supremacist attitudes within these churches and church organizations, diversifying staff alone will fail to address colonial legacies if it is not grounded in movements for racial justice. In truth diversity without racial justice is mere tokenism. It is neocolonialism in form and spirit. The faces in leadership may become more multicultural, but unless the organizational agenda is centered in the pursuit of racial justice, of justice for the survivors of colonialism, then the organization and its impact will remain in conflict with the self-determined hopes and aspirations of colonized peoples themselves.

In recent years the world has witnessed the rise of the formerly colonized in nations of the Two-Thirds World as they have confronted neocolonialism and have elected Indigenous leaders, including women, committed to creating more just economic and political systems. These democratic grassroots movements are a critical and promising guide for Christian organizations that claim the mantle of peace and justice. In the face of their agency we find the hopes of the poor realized.

Ewuare Osayande is MCC U.S. Anti-Oppression Coordinator.

Decolonizing consciousness: Zochrot's transformative strategy

The colonization of consciousness—the production and reproduction of colonial modes of thinking, wanting and feeling among both colonizers and colonized—constitutes a central pillar of the colonial project. Like other structures of domination, colonialism establishes certain forms of subjectivity conducive to the perpetuation of its existence. By anchoring itself in various layers of our inner world, the colonial project seeps into the most mundane, everyday aspects of life. It naturalizes the colonial order, making it seem inevitable, self-explanatory and morally justified (see Fanon, 2008; Said, 1994; Spivak, 1998; and Thiong'o, 1986). Rolling back colonial forms of consciousness is thus indispensable for decolonization (see Dascal, 2009; Oliver, 2004; and Memmi, 1991).

Indeed, the tendency to underestimate the internalization of colonial consciousness in political projects of decolonization might be reason why, after decolonization has occurred at the formal political and juridical level, colonial realities often persist in other ways. Dismantling colonial modes of consciousness ensures a more thorough and long-lasting decolonization and provides better foundations for the postcolonial future.

What strategies, then, may be implemented for bringing about transformations of consciousness among the colonizers and the colonized? The Israeli organization Zochrot (Hebrew for “remembering” or “the ones who remember”) offers in its practice examples of concrete strategies for such transformative projects. Zochrot dedicates itself to “remembering the *nakba* in Hebrew,” with the *nakba* (Arabic for “catastrophe”) being how Palestinians refer to their mass uprooting and dispossession, both historically (before, during and after the 1948 war) and today. In the context of Israel-Palestine, Zochrot's decolonizing endeavors involve working through deep-seated and emotionally charged elements of Jewish-Israeli subjectivity. Zochrot engages these elements

by re-thinking, re-designing and re-visioning basic building-blocks of Jewish-Israeli language, culture and physical space. Fundamental elements of the hegemonic consciousness are unpacked and reworked, offering a critical understanding of the way they function as building-blocks of colonial consciousness. It then endows them with new meanings, thereby turning them into stepping-stones towards new, decolonizing forms of consciousness.

Zochrot's recently published bilingual tour guide titled *Hikayat Balad / Omrim Yeshna Eretz* (“Once upon a Land”) illustrates this mode of operation (Gardi, al-Ghubari and Kadman, 2012). Using the book as a guide, a Hebrew-speaking Israeli or visitor can tour the sites of 18 former Palestinian neighborhoods and Palestinian villages, places whose inhabitants were expelled by Israeli forces during the *nakba* and have now been transformed into Israeli spaces, even as traces of the former Palestinian presence persist.

The pre-1948 existence of these sites has been persistently elided or marginalized within Israeli consciousness, as have their physical remains that still riddle the country's landscape. Against this backdrop, the publication of a guidebook that leads its readers to discover and confront the disavowed history of Israel-Palestine—to overcome the colonial veil of ignorance cast by the Zionist project over the *nakba* and its physical traces—is itself a decolonizing and liberating act. In a country characterized by a “national monopoly over marking trails, a different marking of trails is an act of resistance to the national monopoly over the land and the truth.” Gardi concludes that the guidebook “offers the possibility of partaking in such an act of resistance” (Gardi, 18).

The decolonizing work performed by the guidebook begins as soon as one glances at its front cover, which features a photograph of the remains of a stone wall with a blue stripe sandwiched in-between two white stripes painted on it—the symbol used by Israeli authorities to mark the Israel Trail (a hiking trail traversing the entire country from north to south). The average Israeli gaze born out of Zionist socialization will probably see in this photograph nothing but an innocuous, even banal, countryside landscape. Yet, as the book's cover intimates, the Israel Trail is marked in this photograph on the remains of Bayt Thul, a Palestinian village destroyed in 1948. The photograph thus invites the Israeli reader to undertake a leap of perception, to move from the Zionist surface of the landscape to its more ominous, colonial underside. Such a shift, let us note, does not simply discard the surface, but rather incorporates it into a broader, deeper, politically subversive and liberating frame of reference and significance. The perceptual shift consists in denaturalizing the Zionist landscape, exposing the colonial conditions of its production, and—in this very act of resignification—moving one's consciousness towards a decolonizing horizon. Such perceptual shifts that denaturalize the landscapes and politics created by colonialism are essential to decolonizing struggles and to the imagination of new political futures beyond colonialism, be it in Palestine-Israel, Canada, the United States or elsewhere.

Asaf Kedar holds a Ph.D. in political science from the University of California, Berkeley and serves on the Board of Directors of Zochrot.

Learn
more

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Notes on post-development in the African post-(post)-colony

Postcolonial theory and its cousin, post-development, have not been as popular in the African continent as in South Asia and Latin America. Colonies—places where imperialism meant settlers, wholesale alienation of land and institutionalized racism—have been the most fertile soil for these critical theories. Africa had only a handful of European colonies: places like Algeria, South Africa and Mozambique. The African peoples that the U.N. recognizes as Indigenous are the survivors of far older processes of settlement, initiated by speakers of Arabic and the Bantu language family. Unlike India and the Americas, European rule in most African countries is measured in decades rather than centuries. Beyond the coast, European imperialism was generally late and limited. As Fred Cooper observed, it was an imperialism of trespass, not transformation. Crude exploitation and vivid, frequently brutal demonstrations of violence broke much and rebuilt little in African societies.

Cold War neo-imperialism was also muted in much of the continent. President Harry Truman's 1949 inaugural address, proclaimed by post-development thinkers to be the birth of development, had far less influence in Africa than the British and French developmental imperialism of the 1920s-40s. France's lingering decolonization explains more of African development than does the relative trickle of American aid. Postcolonial theory in Africa is challenged by the future as well as the past. For Achille Mbembe the "postcolony" is a society "recently emerging from the experience of colonization." Its practices and institutions are marked by the violence of colonial relations. When this historical phase will end in countries like Cameroon—Mbembe's focus—is not clear. But seventeen years from now Cameroon, like many African countries, will have been independent for as long as it was under effective European control. At that point forty percent of Cameroon's (and Africa's) people will be too young to remember the fiftieth anniversary of independence. It is hard to know what the post-post-colonial era might look like. But we are probably starting to see it when we observe that China has aid programs in more African countries than do the Americans, that Portuguese are migrating to Angola for better jobs, that Canada is the continent's mining "superpower," or that Brazilian soap operas define the good life on many African TVs.

Postcolonial and post-development theories focus on words and culture, using them as tools to deconstruct the bedrock of twentieth century life: the nation and tribe, progress and modernity, gender and race, even the idea of Africa. This is why they are classed as critical theories. These differentiate themselves from conventional theory by pointing to what lies behind social life and, in so doing, create resources for changing society. As Mick Taussig observes, after showing us that the social realities we take for granted were constructed, not natural or permanent, the deconstructionists fumbled. Most showed no interest in building back better the elements of society they demolished. In countries where deprivation is deep and widespread, this vacuum of ideas is unappealing. Thandika Mkandawire's development credo is the riposte: "I do not believe that the quest for economic development is dead. Nor do I believe

that the most dramatic efforts of catch-up by developing countries have been at the behest of the 'mission civilatrice' of Western powers."

Ruth Rempel is Associate Professor of International Development Studies at Menno Simons College.

Mennonite colonies and colonialism in Latin America

In this article I will juxtapose two colonial projects in Latin America: one that affirmed the historic just war tradition (the colonial conquest by Spain and Portugal) and the other committed to the peace church tradition that emerged during the sixteenth-century Reformation (the establishment of Mennonite colonies in several Latin American countries during the twentieth century). They represent two different approaches to life in society. Yet, ironically, the two projects are inevitably intertwined with one another, with Mennonite settlement in Latin America occurring in the context of a nation-state system shaped by the colonial system in which Indigenous claims to traditional land and resources persist as significant concerns.

The popes of the fifteenth century presumed ownership of the world and consigned the newly "discovered" continents, along with their original inhabitants, to the Catholic royals of Spain and Portugal to conquer and exploit but on condition that they "christianize" the Indigenous populations. The conquest of the New World was so devastating that it reduced the 80-100 million inhabitants to 10-12 million by the end of the 1500s. Historians call this the greatest genocide in history (Boff, 1991).

This brutal conquest found justification from theologians like Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda who argued from a twisted form of just war theory and natural law thinking. However, the conquest was never without prophetic figures such as Antonio de Montesinos, Pedro de Córdoba and Bartolomé de Las Casas.

The legacy of Hispanic colonialism with its institutionalized injustice and structural violence is palpable throughout Latin America to this day. Typically, a handful of big landowner families (*latifundistas*) own most of a nation's wealth while the impoverished masses of *mestizos* and Indigenous peoples struggle for survival. For centuries, Hispanic colonialism's bifurcated Christology—with a broken, defeated Christ for the poor and a heavenly monarch Christ for the rich—served the interests of the economic elites who had benefitted from colonialism's legacy (Casalis, 1984). However, with the advent in the 1970s of Liberation Theology with its motto, "God's preferential option for the poor," ecclesial base-church communities and the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, much has changed in Latin American society, but the colonial legacy is far from extinct.

A long history of migrations has taught the peace churches that we are not owners but sojourners and strangers in this world. Numerous waves of Low German Mennonites (LGMs)—some coming directly from Europe, but most by way of Canada—have migrated to Latin America's former Iberian colonies from the 1920s on, seeking refuge from what they perceive as the modern world. Successive migrations have established LGM colonies in Mexico, Paraguay, Belize, Bolivia and Argentina over the

Learn more

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last 90 years. All of them are heirs of the Anabaptist movement committed to a free-church ethos that stresses discipleship, truth-telling and the rejection of military service.

While religious freedom was paramount for the Mennonites, their host countries were so eager to have these renowned farmers that they bent their national constitutions to accommodate the Mennonites' requests (Friesen, 2012; Klassen, 2001). These Mennonite settlers, without exception, significantly benefitted their host countries' economies, even when assigned marginal tracts of land. However, most LGM colonists kept their relationship with their surrounding societies to a minimum: they produced and sold crops and dairy products and bought goods on national markets and they also employed Indigenous and national workers on their farms and industries, though often for low wages.

Culturally, the majority of LGM colonists have opted for isolation from the national mainstream cultures. But exceptions can be noted: some Old Colony Mennonites in Mexico have adopted the national curriculum and the Spanish language. To this can be added examples of service outreach such as meals for street children and a workshop for persons with disabilities. Although some LGM colonies in Paraguay continue to resist more advanced schooling, most Mennonite colonies in this country have long promoted advanced education. Paraguay's 15,000 LGM colonists have been remarkably productive with agro-industries and active in service and mission projects among neighbouring tribal societies and Latin Paraguayans (Stoesz and Stackley, 1999). These contributions have impressed mainstream Paraguayan observers, who have suggested that the whole country use the Mennonite model to relate to its Indigenous peoples. Even though Mennonites form only about one percent of the nation's total, they (together with sister denominations) were successful in having a clause inserted into Paraguay's constitution in the early 1990s that allows all conscientious objectors to render alternative social service under civilian leadership.

LGM colonies in Latin America, though differing markedly from country to country and sometimes colony to colony, have generally excelled in their economic contributions in their host countries. Latin American states, in turn, have also consistently honoured their agreements with the immigrant communities and have shown considerable appreciation for their achievements. Not infrequently, governments have lifted up LGM colonies as models to be emulated by the surrounding societies. In spite of the pervasive tendency to isolate themselves from their host societies, and in spite of problems in some contexts like a deteriorating level of schooling and inter-colony rivalries, LGM colonies still exhibit many notable virtues (Loewen, *Canadian Mennonite*, August 19, 2013).

Yet despite these positive contributions and attributes of LGM communities in several Latin American countries, LGM colonies also inevitably participate in the problematic legacies of Latin American colonialism. For example, although LGMs came to a country like Paraguay as peace churches, their sheer numbers (some 4,000 Canadian-European Mennonite immigrants in the 1920s) represented a veritable invasion of the hunting grounds of a couple of hundred Indigenous persons—a kind of conquest, albeit outwardly peaceful. The LGM settlement in the Central Chaco of Paraguay did not decimate the small Lengua tribe of the area like Hispanic colonialism had decimated Latin

America's Indigenous peoples: in fact, the Lengua tribe has grown dramatically and several other tribal groups have flocked to the area in search of work and settlement possibilities, swelling Indigenous numbers in the area to some 26,000 persons. Yet, as the only employers in the Central Chaco, Mennonites have prospered often at the expense of Indigenous peoples. Farms in adjacent Indigenous settlements are small indeed compared to LGM farms and cattle ranches, with LGM families enjoying an annual per capita income much higher than the national average. In Bolivia, meanwhile, the current socialist government, which has made land rights and cultural autonomy for Bolivia's Indigenous peoples a priority, has been frustrated by the lack of unity and cooperation between colonies and by their lack of respect for the environment as seen in their insatiable acquisition of new land and their reckless deforestation practices. The Bolivian government is accordingly trying to impose stricter regulations on the acquisition and use of new lands, leading to some tension with LGM communities.

LGM communities have embodied a notably different way of colonization from that undertaken by the Spanish conquerors. The latter came to plunder the riches of the New World and to subject and brutally dominate its inhabitants. Low German Mennonites, in contrast, came to practice family farming and maintain their faith, language and culture of peace and honesty in business. At the same time, however, LGM colonization in Latin America was made possible thanks to the power of Latin American states over territory, and these states were successors to and inheritors of colonial systems and patterns of land administration and of discriminatory practices towards Indigenous communities. While LGM communities sought to keep a distance between themselves and the surrounding society, their very settlement and presence (just like Low German and Swiss-German Mennonite settlement in Canada and the United States) has been inextricably intertwined with legacies of colonialism.

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Mennonites colonizing Canada and the United States

The Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization (CMBC) was established in 1922 to facilitate the migration of Mennonites from the Soviet Union to Canada in the wake of revolution, terror and famine. Headed by Bishop David Toews of the Rosenorter Mennonite Church at Rosthern, Saskatchewan, the CMBC, in an arrangement with the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), coordinated the movement to and resettlement in Canada of more than 20,000 Mennonites between 1923 and 1930.

U.S. Mennonites similarly established a Mennonite Colonization Board (MCB) in 1920 to facilitate a hoped-for movement of Mennonite immigrants from the former Soviet Union to the United States. When the U.S. government would not open the country's doors to admit Mennonite immigrants, the MCB raised funds to support migration to Canada. It also assisted in re-settling in Mexico those immigrants from the USSR who could not meet Canada's stringent health regulations. The U.S. board was dissolved in 1947. The Canadian board brought an additional 8,000 Mennonite refugees to Canada between 1947 and 1951. It was

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restructured in 1960 as the Canadian Mennonite Relief and Immigration Council, which in turn was subsumed into Mennonite Central Committee Canada when that organization was established in 1963.

The term “colonization” was neither new nor unique to Mennonites. The Canadian government actively pursued an agenda of colonization by extinguishing Indigenous claims to land through treaties and opening up that land to European settlers. Throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s, many religious and ethnic groups developed colonization societies to help establish new communities of their people on Canadian soil. Lutherans, Baptists, Catholics, Norwegians, Ukrainians, Icelanders and others all developed organizations to bring co-religionists from the “old country” to “colonize” the new.

Common to all groups, including the Mennonites, was the sense that they were settling on mostly empty land, land waiting for settlement, cultivation and “development.” Sometimes they regarded the availability of land as a blessed gift from God. The author of a history of the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, for example, wrote in 1957 that “Before us lay a mighty expansive chunk of natural resources and opportunity. We chose where we wanted to live, bought land for a dollar an acre or thereabouts, and made our living. West, north, or any direction spelled opportunity. An undeserved opportunity to be sure, but there it was, ours as a gift of God’s hand.” (*Canadian Mennonite*, May 31, 1957, 2)

The immigrants of the 1920s were generally oblivious to the fact that Indigenous people had until recently lived and roamed on the land for millennia. They were perhaps even less aware than an earlier wave of Mennonite immigrants to the United States and Canada in the 1870s that the Canada and U.S. government had re-located Indigenous people onto reserves to make way for European settlers like themselves.

The Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, working together with that mighty engine of colonization, the Canadian Pacific Railway, participated in the colonial project of the Canadian federal government. Mennonite immigrants and refugees benefited enormously from this partnership. Today their descendants are beginning to come to terms with that colonial legacy.

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“ Low German Mennonite colonization in Latin America was made possible thanks to the power of Latin American states over territory, and these states were successors to and inheritors of colonial systems and patterns of land administration and of discriminatory practices towards Indigenous communities.

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