

## **Mennonites in Latin America: A Review of the Literature**

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Mennonites hold a special place in the literature on German diasporas.<sup>1</sup> Since the mid-19th century, experts on Germans abroad have identified German-speaking Mennonites as model communities, especially regarding their ability to maintain German dialects in foreign settings and to perform characteristically “German” pioneer work. Fascination among the German public and German academics for their diasporic “co-nationals” peaked between Otto von Bismarck’s acquisition of a colonial empire in 1884 and Adolf Hitler’s bid for East European expansion during the Second World War, leading to an extensive literature on Mennonites-as-Germans in Ukraine, Poland, Siberia, Canada, Brazil, Mexico, Paraguay, and the United States. Yet even after the fall of the Third Reich and the relative decline of irredentist German nationalism, interest in German-speaking Mennonites around the globe persists.

Like Weimar and Nazi-era historians, journalists, and anthropologists before them, prominent German media outlets such as *Der Spiegel* find wide audiences for articles and documentaries about conservative Mennonites abroad. According to migration historian Dirk Hoerder, ethnicity among the millions of people with German heritage living beyond the borders of the post-World War Germanies became largely “symbolic,” limited to fond stories and traditional foods but no longer expressed through transnational relationships or the German language. “Only among the distinct group of the Mennonites,” Hoerder qualifies, “did a diasporic connectedness between Russian, North American, and South American colonies last through the

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<sup>1</sup> The sources for this article were collected during the research process for my forthcoming book, *Chosen Nation: Mennonites and Germany in a Global Era* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2017), with funding from the Fulbright Commission, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), and Harvard University. I wish to thank Rachel Waltner Goossen and Alison Frank Johnson as well as three anonymous reviewers for their comments. All translations are my own.

1950s and beyond—but this was religiocultural, not ethnocultural.<sup>2</sup>

Hoerder's distinction between "religious" and "ethnic" cultural dynamics invokes the central tension at the heart of the scholarship on Mennonites as diasporic Germans. If commentators ranging from pre-World War I officials of the Association for Germandom Abroad (*Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland*) to Heinrich Himmler's Ethnic German Office (*Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle*), a subsidiary of the SS, consistently identified Mennonites as unusually good at being German, they typically amended such sentiments by noting that this was due not to some deep commitment to the German nation but rather to their "strong religious affiliation."<sup>3</sup> In other words, Mennonites' most profound characteristic—and also the most apparent wellspring of their Germanness—was their pious, conservative faith. That some Mennonites considered religion more important than ethnicity helps to explain why certain congregations began participating in overseas mission work as early as the 1820s. Desiring to export their faith to "heathens" abroad or to spread it among non-believers at home, Mennonites in Europe and North America had established mission stations in colonial Indonesia by the 1850s and among American Indians during the 1880s, as well as in China, India, Nigeria, and Armenia by the first decade of the 20th century. Today, the world's 2.1 million Anabaptists make their homes in 87 different countries. A majority are people of color and live in the Global South.<sup>4</sup>

Recent literature on Mennonite history has attempted to reflect the religion's ethnic and geographical diversity. In addition to a longstanding historiography on Mennonite missiology, new works have explored the globalization of Mennonite worldviews, institutions, aid organizations, and movements.<sup>5</sup> Others have considered the experiences of communities

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<sup>2</sup> Dirk Hoerder, "The German-Language Diasporas: A Survey, Critique, and Interpretation," *Diaspora* 11, no. 1 (2002): 33.

<sup>3</sup> EWZ-Kommission XXVII-Sonderzug Gesundheitsstelle, "Bericht über die Durchschleusung der Russlanddeutschen im Warthegau," June 29, 1944, R69/418, Bundesarchiv, Berlin.

<sup>4</sup> For population estimates, see Mennonite World Conference, "World Map," 2015, [www.mwc-cmm.org](http://www.mwc-cmm.org). This source does not include Church of the Brethren members in Latin America; some conservative groups are likely underreported.

<sup>5</sup> Examples include John A. Lapp, "The Global Mennonite/Brethren in Christ History Project: The Task, the Problem, the Imperative," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 15, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 283-

composed primarily of non-whites, such as African Americans in the United States, or have looked at the changing role of humanitarian organizations like Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) from feminist or postcolonial perspectives.<sup>6</sup> Most prominent has been the five-volume “Global Mennonite History Series,” a project begun in the late 1990s and completed in 2012, through which Mennonite scholars in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and North America have written the histories of the faith on their respective continents.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, a popular and scholarly understanding of Mennonitism as a distinctively Germanic tradition continues. Histories and sociologies of Mennonite communities around the globe disproportionately focus on white, English or German-speaking “ethnic Mennonites,” a term used to distinguish members of European extraction who often claim to trace their lineage to the 16th-century Reformation against more recently converted whites or (usually) people of color. While studies of “ethnic” Mennonites generally take whiteness as normative, they rarely treat the denomination monolithically; works on the variation among different forms of Germanic Mennonite “ethnicity” in fact constitute a substantial subgenre.<sup>8</sup>

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90; Leo Driedger, *Mennonites in the Global Village* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2000); John A. Lapp and Ed van Straten, “Mennonite World Conference, 1925-2000: From Euro-American Conference to Worldwide Communion,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 77, no. 1 (2003): 7-46; Steven Nolt, “Globalizing a Separate People: World Christianity and North American Mennonites, 1940-1990,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 84, no. 3 (2010): 487-506; John D. Roth, “‘Blest Be the Ties That Bind:’ In Search of the Global Anabaptist Church,” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 31, no. 1 (Winter 2013): 5-43.

<sup>6</sup> Lucille Marr, “The History of Mennonite Central Committee: Developing a Genre,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 23 (2005): 47-58; Tobin Miller Shearer, *Daily Demonstrators: The Civil Rights Movement in Mennonite Homes and Sanctuaries* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2010); Alain Epp Weaver, *A Table of Sharing: Mennonite Central Committee and the Expanding Networks of Mennonite Identity* (Telford, PA: Cascadia, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Hanspeter Jecker and Alle G. Hoekema, eds., *Testing Faith and Tradition: Europe* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2006); John A. Lapp and C. Arnold Snyder, eds., *Anabaptist Songs in African Hearts: Africa* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2006); Jaime Prieto Valladares, *Mission and Migration: Latin America* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2010); John A. Lapp and C. Arnold Snyder, eds., *Churches Engage Asian Traditions: Asia* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2011); Royden Loewen and Steven M. Nolt, *Seeking Places of Peace: North America* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Recent works include Rodney J. Sawatsky, “Mennonite Ethnicity: Medium, Message and Mission,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 9 (1991): 113-21; Daphne Naomi Winland, “The Quest for Mennonite Peoplehood: Ethno-Religious Identity and the Dilemma of Definitions,”

This essay analyzes the English and German-language historiography of Mennonites in Latin America—a region firmly at the crossroads of history-writing about Mennonitism.<sup>9</sup> With an estimated population of 200,000, Latin America is home to arguably the most diverse set of Anabaptist congregations in the world.<sup>10</sup> Its communities include substantial numbers of both “ethnic” and non-“ethnic” Mennonites, as well as conservative/isolationist and progressive/assimilated Mennonites. A small sample of the descriptive prefixes used to distinguish various groups include Latino, Sanapaná, Sommerfelder, Bolivian, white, Old Colony, Ñandéva, indigenous, Paraguayan, Indian, black, Puerto Rican, Beachy Amish, Chulupí, aboriginal, Holdeman, Toba, *Kleine Gemeinde*, Jamaican, Chilean, *Allianz*, Russian, Lengua, and Canadian. Historically perceived as underdeveloped or even

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*Canadian Review of Sociology & Anthropology* 30, no. 1 (1993): 110-38; Steven M. Nolt, “A ‘Two-Kingdom’ People in a World of Multiple Identities: Religion, Ethnicity, and American Mennonites,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 73 (1999): 485-502; Hans Werner, “Peoplehoods of the Past: Mennonites and the Ethnic Boundary,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 23 (2005): 23-35; James Urry, *Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood: Europe—Russia—Canada, 1525 to 1980* (Winnipeg: Univ. of Manitoba Press, 2006), especially 205-28; Royden Loewen, “The Politics of Peoplehood: Ethnicity and Religion Among Canada’s Mennonites,” in *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada*, ed. Paul Bramadat and David Seljak (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2008), 330-64; Benjamin W. Goossen, “From Aryanism to Anabaptism: Nazi Race Science and the Language of Mennonite Ethnicity,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 90, no. 2 (2016): 135-63.

<sup>9</sup> A similar analysis of literature in Spanish and Portuguese would be most welcome. Readers interested in Spanish-language overviews of Mennonites in Latin America should consult Jaime Prieto, *Misión y migración: Colección de Historia Menonita Mundial, América Latina* (Guatemala: Ediciones Clara-Semilla, 2010); Jaime Prieto, *Menonitas en América Latina: Bosquejos Históricos* (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 2008); and Rafael Falcón, *Historia del Menonitismo Hispanohablante: 1917-1990* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016), part of the series Colección Menohispana.

<sup>10</sup> Earlier surveys of the field include Willard H. Smith, “Mennonites in Latin America: An Annotated Bibliography,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 26, no. 4 (1952): 298-318; Herbert Minnich, “Mennonites in Latin America: Number and Distribution,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 48, no. 3 (1974): 385-88; Juan Francisco Martínez, “Latin American Anabaptist-Mennonites: A Profile,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 74, no. 3 (2000): 463-77. See also Walter Sawatsky, “Mennonite Historiography and the New Mennonites of Asia, Africa, and Latin America: Attempting a Critical Evaluation,” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 15, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 95-113, for an overview of efforts to integrate missionized communities into broader histories of Anabaptism.

“backward,” Latin American countries have attracted both traditionalist communitarians seeking to escape assimilation in democratic Canada and the United States, as well as many of the evangelically-minded among their more progressive neighbors, enticed by the region’s broad mission fields.

Several states have granted special privileges and semi-autonomous zones to conservative groups, allowing the maintenance of an insular lifestyle as intriguing to scholars of the German diaspora as it is incomprehensible to many of the continent’s Mennonites of color who see conversion, in part, as a ticket to wealth and modernization. Latin America has long held a special place in the global Mennonite imagination: once as the potential site of a separatist “Mennonite State,” a new homeland to refugees from Bolshevism, more recently as the location of the first Mennonite World Conference (MWC) to be held outside North America or Europe, and since 2012 home to MWC’s official headquarters. By examining the ways that scholars have written about the history of Mennonitism in Latin America, I hope to illuminate the dominant modes of narration that have shaped academic understandings of diverse Mennonite groups, including the interactions or non-interactions between these strands.

### **“Canadian” Mennonites**

Histories of Mennonitism in Latin America often open with the migration, beginning in the 1920s, of some 10,000 conservative German-speaking Mennonites from Western Canada to Mexico and Paraguay. During the First World War, these Mennonites’ separatism, German language, and refusal to participate in military service had set them at odds with more patriotic Canadians, and after Canadian lawmakers banned German-language schooling, a number of communities resolved to leave for Latin America. Embedded within a broader literature on Mennonite mobility and anti-modernism, scholars have typically placed this story within a longer trajectory of Mennonite movement prompted by persecution.

In 1927, Orie O. Miller, a lay leader from Indiana and the first historian of the Latin American migration, compared it to three major previous migrations: first, the resettlement beginning in the 17th century of Amish and Mennonites from Central Europe to colonial North America and the early United States; second, of their coreligionists in East and West

Prussia to South Russia during the 18th and 19th centuries; and third, of approximately one-third of those same South Russians to Canada and the United States at the end of the 19th century. Combined with yet another wave from the former Tsarist empire to Canada after the Bolshevik Revolution, Miller noted that the size of the 1920s migration “exceeds the sum of the other three.” In the decade since the First World War, “more Mennonites will have taken such a step,” he calculated, “than was the case during our whole previous four centuries’ history. . . . Historians a century hence will undoubtedly appraise this present movement as epochal in our history as a people and as a denomination.”<sup>11</sup>

Nearly a century on, Miller’s words have proven prophetic. While historians have paid much greater attention to the movement of Mennonites from the early Soviet Union to Canada, scholars have recently taken a new interest in those who during the same years transplanted from the British Dominion to Mexico and Paraguay, as well as their many descendants. Higher levels of education among Mennonites in Canada, including a greater propensity to establish their own institutions of higher education and to pursue graduate degrees, as well as federal Canadian support for ethnic studies programs, have facilitated this disparity in the literature, while also helping to explain why most academic works about conservative Mennonites in Latin America are produced in Canada and the United States.<sup>12</sup>

In 2013, Royden Loewen, chair in Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg, published the most extensive study to date on these communities. Entitled *Village among Nations: “Canadian” Mennonites in a Transnational World, 1916-2006*, Loewen’s volume drew on longstanding tropes of Mennonites, like Jews, as a “nation among the nations”—a people united by faith and heritage but dispersed among multiple states with different majority populations. Analyzing the 250,000 Low German-speaking Mennonites now scattered through secondary migrations

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<sup>11</sup> Orié O. Miller, “The Present Mennonite Migration,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 1, no. 2 (1927): 9.

<sup>12</sup> Much of this work is supported by the Manitoba-based Plett Foundation: [www.plettfoundation.org](http://www.plettfoundation.org). Since 1999, one major Latin America-based center of research has developed around the Verein für Geschichte und Kultur der Mennoniten in Paraguay, which publishes a *Jahrbuch für Geschichte und Kultur der Mennoniten in Paraguay*. See also *Lexikon der Mennoniten in Paraguay* (Asuncion: Verein für Geschichte und Kultur in Paraguay, 2009).

across East Paraguay, British Honduras, Bolivia, Belize, and Argentina or through return migrations to Canada, Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas, his book demonstrates how these individuals often held onto their Canadian citizenship across several generations, migrating through North and South American states “without pursuing either social or cultural citizenship in them.” In Loewen’s estimation, “They were thus not Mexican Mennonites or Paraguayan Mennonites as much as Mexico Mennonites and Paraguayan Mennonites, a subtle, but significant, difference.”<sup>13</sup>

Adopting a “transnational” lens to analyze his subject, Loewen followed a trend among scholars across a broad swath of the historical profession. Rather than bounding their topics with the borders of nation-states, these historians have rejected “methodological nationalism” for approaches that favor comparison, interaction, reception, and cross-border movements of people, goods, ideas, and institutions. As Loewen ably shows, this methodology is well suited to Mennonite history. It provides a framework to understand not only the physical movement of Mennonite people but also the cultural formations that have allowed populations to think and dream on a trans-continental scale.

Thus we can integrate the story of the first Mennonites to arrive in Latin America—three agricultural workers from the Netherlands who in the 1640s came to what is now Brazil and petitioned the Dutch governor to allow the migration of their persecuted coreligionists in the Holy Roman Empire—with the imaginative discussions of economically and politically repressed Mennonites in 19th- and 20th-century Russia and Germany, for whom the region constituted a potential destination alongside Australia, Africa, the Ottoman Empire, and elsewhere. In each case, Latin America appeared as a place of refuge for a people under attack. But if transnational methodology has helped scholars tell more geographically expansive and theoretically nuanced tales, it has at the same time tended to emphasize the relative isolation of Mennonite communities. Thus in *Village among*

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<sup>13</sup> Royden Loewen, *Village among Nations: “Canadian” Mennonites in a Transnational World, 1916-2006* (Buffalo, NY: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2013), 5. Loewen had previously explored some of these communities in his monograph *Diaspora in the Countryside: Two Mennonite Communities and Mid-Twentieth-Century Rural Disjuncture* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2006). See also Lorenzo Cañas Bottos, “Transformations of Old Colony Mennonites: The Making of a Trans-statal Community,” *Global Networks* 8 (2009): 214-31.



*Nations*, conservative Low German-speakers have little in common with those outside their own faith community, including more progressive US missionaries in Argentina, who in 1919 had already established the first permanent Mennonite community in Latin America.

Traditionalist Low German-speaking Mennonites in Latin America are generally seen to have more in common with other conservative Anabaptist groups in Canada and the United States, including Amish, Hutterites, and Old Order Mennonites. In a short “Introduction to the Conservative Low German Mennonites in the Americas,” Loewen opens with quotations from nine of the most prominent scholarly works on North American Amish, casting his own subjects in the paradigms of this deeper, better-established literature.<sup>14</sup> Like other so-called “plain peoples” in Canada and the US, conservative Low German-speakers typically hold church services in German, eschew musical instruments and higher education, run their own schools, and adhere to rural agrarian lifestyles. Around half do not use cars or electricity and remove rubber tires from their farm equipment. Anticipating an acculturated, North American audience, Loewen presents these features as unusual. That some Mennonites would choose such a lifestyle seems out of step with mainstream values in an age of modernity: “The idea that an immigrant would make an economic sacrifice for a specific cultural goal seems strange in a world where middle-class values seem to dictate most social action.”<sup>15</sup> Through such representations, conservative Low German Mennonites are depicted in opposition to “modern” forms of technology and living, intended both to complicate readers’ assumptions about the desirability of their own choices and to demonstrate the possibility of an alternative path.<sup>16</sup>

But if these Mennonites question change, they are far from frozen in time. Just as recent works on North American Amish have reassessed the characterization of anti-modernism—emphasizing many communities’ selective use of technologies ranging from cell phones to Facebook—scholars

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<sup>14</sup> Royden Loewen, “To the Ends of the Earth: An Introduction to the Conservative Low German Mennonites in the Americas,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 82, no. 3 (2008): 427-28.

<sup>15</sup> Loewen, *Village among Nations*, 13.

<sup>16</sup> See especially Royden Loewen, *Horse-and-Buggy Genius: Listening to Mennonites Contest the Modern World* (Winnipeg: Univ. of Manitoba Press, 2016).



of conservative Low German-speakers have argued, seemingly paradoxically, that they have in many cases exercised a modernizing influence on Latin American states. Historian Jason Dormady, for example, has argued that the influx of Old Colony Mennonite settlers to Chihuahua in the early 1920s helped to re-stabilize the region's economy after the Mexican Revolution. And today, subsequent generations have found creative methods of adapting their social and agricultural practices to a 21st-century Mexico troubled by drug violence and rapid climate change. Old Colony Mennonites, Dormady writes, "are as likely to follow global currency and stock exchange rates as read the Bible."<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, in her history of nation-building in early 20th-century Paraguay, Bridget María Chesterton has shown how public debates about whether to invite conservative Mennonites from Canada (and about what kind of privileges to grant them) hinged on notions of progress, modernity, and civilization. Just as Mexican President Alvaro Obregón had in 1921 promised Mennonite settlers from Canada freedom from military service, exemption from oaths, permission to establish parochial schools, and significant legal autonomy in order to stimulate agricultural development, the Paraguayan government extended in the same year similar measures to those willing to tame the "wilderness" of the country's Gran Chaco region.<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps the most thorough critique of the Mennonites-as-static narrative has come from social anthropologist Lorenzo Bottos. In *Old Colony*

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<sup>17</sup> Jason Dormady, "Mennonite Colonization in Mexico and the Pendulum of Modernization, 1920-2013," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 88, no. 2 (2014): 189. On Old Colony Mennonites in Mexico, see also J. Winfield Fretz, *Mennonite Colonization in Mexico* (Akron, PA: MCC, 1945); Calvin Wall Redekop, *The Old Colony Mennonites* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1969); Harry Leonard Sawatsky, *They Sought a Country: Mennonite Colonization in Mexico* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1971); David M. Quiring, *The Mennonite Old Colony Vision: Under Siege in Mexico and the Canadian Connection* (Steinbach, MB: Crossway Publications, 2003).

<sup>18</sup> Bridget María Chesterton, *The Grandchildren of Solano López: Frontier and Nation in Paraguay, 1904-1936* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 2013), 97-101. On this settlement, John B. Faust, "The Mennonite Colony in Paraguay," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 3, no. 3 (1929): 183-89; Martin W. Friesen, *Neue Heimat in der Chacowildnis* (Loma Plata, Paraguay: Sociedad Cooperativa Colonizadora, 1997); Jacob A. Braun, *Im Gedenken an jene Zeit: Mitteilungen zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Kolonie Menno* (Loma Plata, Paraguay: Geschichtskomitee, 2001).

*Mennonites in Argentina and Bolivia: Nation Making, Religious Conflict and Imagination of the Future*, Bottos challenges the notion that Old Colony Mennonites are stuck in time, building his analysis around their conceptions of the future. “Not all societies or groups need imagine the future in the same way,” he explains, “and the evolutionary narrative of modern western society should be taken as but one among many other possibilities.”<sup>19</sup>

Overtuning both popular representations of conservative Anabaptists as backward holdovers from a distant past and nostalgic accounts by acculturated Mennonite historians, who have often portrayed more traditionalist communities as idyllic and harmonious, Bottos focuses on internal conflict, showing how dissent and its resolution contribute to order, boundary making, and identity formation in Old Colony communities. Drawing on the philosophy of Giorgio Agamben, he argues that the special privileges enjoyed by Low German-speaking Mennonites in Argentina and Bolivia have enabled them to construct “embedded sovereignties” within larger territorial countries. While these “states of exception” have helped to bolster their host nations’ legal authority, Mennonite settlers’ sense of independence depends on a silencing of this relationship. Within the colonies, tools of community regulation such as excommunication are used to maintain social and religious control as well as to avoid external intervention; but they are also applied judiciously to avoid mass defection and the formation of yet another exceptional state.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Lorenzo Cañas Bottos, *Old Colony Mennonites in Argentina and Bolivia: Nation Making, Religious Conflict and Imagination of the Future* (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2008), 2.

<sup>20</sup> Lorenzo Cañas Bottos, “Order and Dissent among Old Colony Mennonites: A Regime of Embedded Sovereignty,” in *Permutations of Order: Religion and Law as Contested Sovereignties*, ed. Thomas Kirsch and Bertram Turner (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009), 107-24. See also Anna Sofia Hedberg, *Outside the World: Cohesion and Deviation among Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia* (Uppsala: ACTA Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2007), much of which focuses on transgression, departure from community, and return; the ethnographic essays in Carel Roessingh and Tanja Plasil, eds., *Between Horse & Buggy and Four-Wheel Drive: Change and Diversity among Mennonite Settlements in Belize, Central America* (Amsterdam: VU Univ. Press, 2009); and papers from a 2011 conference on “Anti-modern Pathways: Horse and Buggy Mennonites in Canada, Belize and Latin America” in *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 31 (2013): 51-201.

### “Russian” Mennonites

If current debates about Latin America’s conservative “Canadian” Mennonites center on questions of modernity and nationality, these discussions owe much to the historiography of a smaller but more heavily studied group: German and Low German-speaking “ethnic” Mennonite refugees from the Soviet Union. Between 1929 and 1934, an international community of Mennonite leaders from Canada, the United States, Germany, Switzerland, France, the Netherlands, and the Soviet Union worked with the League of Nations and multiple national governments to resettle some 4,000 Russian-born Mennonites in Paraguay and Brazil. While these colonists arrived from various locations, including Ukraine and Siberia via Moscow, interwar Poland, and a refugee camp in northern China, most had fled collectivization and “dekulakization” as instituted by Joseph Stalin’s “Revolution from Above.”<sup>21</sup>

In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, a second wave of 5,000 refugees from the Soviet Union arrived in Paraguay, while another 1,000 from the formerly German provinces of northern Poland relocated to Uruguay.<sup>22</sup> While these various groups generally settled among themselves, forming their own colonies with organizational structures similar to those they had known in Russia and the Soviet Union, several did maintain contact with the already extant conservative Mennonite community in

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<sup>21</sup> See James Casteel, “The Russian Germans in the Interwar German National Imaginary,” *Central European History* 40, no. 3 (2007): 429-66; Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2001), 319-21; John B. Toews, “Die Flucht rußlanddeutscher Mennoniten nach China (1929-1934),” *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter* 36 (1979): 27-48.

<sup>22</sup> On these movements, see Frank H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus* (Altona, MB: Canadian Mennonite Relief and Immigration Council, 1962); Peter and Elfrieda Dyck, *Up from the Rubble: The Epic Rescue of Thousands of War-Ravaged Mennonite Refugees* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991). Most internal histories written by these groups have been regional or national in scope, such as Johannes Bergmann, *Neue Heimat in Uruguay: Der Weg der Mennoniten von Danzig, Westpreußen und Polen nach Uruguay* (Montevideo: Grund Technischer Mängel, 1988); Reynolds Herbert Minnich, *The Mennonite Immigrant Communities in Parana, Brazil* (Cuernavaca, Mexico: Centro Intercultural de Documentación, 1970). However, some have adopted a transnational focus: see Willy Janz and Gerhard Ratzlaff, *Gemeinde unter dem Kreuz des Südens: Die mennonitischen Brüdergemeinden in Brasilien, Paraguay und Uruguay 1930-1980* (Curitiba, Brazil: Imprimas, 1980).

Paraguay. Indeed, it was largely because these “Canadians” had negotiated immigration rights from the Paraguayan government that so many of their “Russian” coreligionists were able enter in the first place.

Early scholarship on the “Russian” Mennonite settlements in Brazil and Paraguay developed along two interrelated tracks. First, chroniclers associated with North American Mennonite aid organizations, especially MCC, cast the settlers as participants in an audacious experiment in communal religious living. Writers like the historian and MCC leader Harold S. Bender praised their pioneering abilities, drawing on tropes of both Christian utopianism and European civilization to contrast the Mennonite colonies with the supposedly empty and wild land around them. During a 1930 “World Aid Conference” held in Danzig to decide the fate of the refugees from the Soviet Union, Bender had suggested that their relocation to Paraguay could facilitate the formation of an autonomous “Mennonite State.” Given the chance to build a new homeland in “one of the largest fertile, undeveloped lowlands in the world,” he explained, the “little Mennonite nation, with its culture and its faith, can live in peace under the best conceivable conditions.”<sup>23</sup>

Bender returned to the topic nine years later in a wide-ranging essay on “Church and State in Mennonite History.” Along with an earlier phase of Mennonite self-government in Tsarist Russia—a phenomenon that subsequent historians have referred to as the “Mennonite Commonwealth”—he identified Paraguay as playing host to a smaller Mennonite country. Anticipating Bottos’s notion of embedded sovereignty, Bender noted that Paraguayan laws had never been applied within the Mennonite settlements, no police officer or government official had ever exercised jurisdiction there, and none of the national courts had brought inhabitants to trial. In sum, “the

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<sup>23</sup> Harold Bender, “Die Einwanderung nach Paraguay,” *Mennonitische Welt-Hilfs-Konferenz vom 31. August bis 3. September 1930 in Danzig* (Karlsruhe: Heinrich Schneider, 1930), 117-25. On Bender, see Albert N. Keim, *Harold S. Bender, 1897-1962* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998). On MCC’s involvement in Latin America, see Gerhard Ratzlaff, *Das Mennonitische Zentralkomitee in Paraguay, 1930-1980* (Asunción: Oberschulzenrat der mennonitischen Kolonien Menno, Fernheim, Friesland, Neuland und Volendam, 2014); Robert S. Kreider and Rachel Waltner Goossen, *Hungry, Thirsty, a Stranger: The MCC Experience* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1988), 249-96.

Mennonites of the Chaco do constitute an absolutely independent state.”<sup>24</sup>

The work of Bender and others associated with MCC echoed for decades in scholarship on the “Russian” colonies. During the mid-20th century the Kansas-based sociologist J. Winfield Fretz, in particular, studied Mennonite colonization in Paraguay as an exercise in “immigrant group settlement.” Fretz’s work aimed both to contribute to the burgeoning field of Mennonite sociology and to provide a usable set of guidelines for directing the future transfer of Mennonite populations to new locations. A prolific writer and speaker, Fretz helped to popularize the story of Paraguayan Mennonitism among North American audiences while also casting the “Russian” Mennonites of Latin America as a normative subject for sociological research.<sup>25</sup>

The close links between knowledge production in North American Mennonite colleges and the Latin American development work sponsored by organizations like MCC and Mennonite Economic Development Associates—including frequent correspondence, circulation of articles, and visits between Paraguay, Brazil, Canada, and the United States—helped to cement pioneering as a dominant mode of historical narration at both the popular and academic levels.<sup>26</sup> Unsurprisingly, this has provided a significant idiom for internal colony histories, often written by Mennonites in Latin America to mark the twenty-fifth or fiftieth anniversary of a settlement’s

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<sup>24</sup> Harold S. Bender, “Church and State in Mennonite History,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 13, no. 1 (1939): 100. See also Harold S. Bender, “With the Mennonite Refugee Colonies in Brazil and Paraguay: A Personal Narrative,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 13, no. 1 (1939): 59-70.

<sup>25</sup> J. Winfield Fretz, *Mennonite Colonization: Lessons from the Past for the Future* (Akron, PA: MCC, 1944), *Pilgrims in Paraguay* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1953), and *Immigrant Group Settlements in Paraguay: A Study in the Sociology of Colonization* (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 1962). See also Hertha Kraus, *International Relief in Action, 1914-1943* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1944), 211-15; Hendrick Hack, *Die Kolonisation der Mennoniten im paraguayischen Chaco* (Den Haag: Drukkerij Albani, 1961); Hermann Schempp, *Gemeinschaftssiedlungen auf religiöser und weltanschaulicher Grundlage* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1969), 199-225, 315-18.

<sup>26</sup> On transnational humanitarian and development projects, see for example Gerhard Ratzlaff, *The Trans-Chaco Highway: How it Came to Be* (Asunción, 2009); Gerhard Ratzlaff, *Hospital Mennonita Km 81: Liebe, die tätig wird* (Asunción: Gemeindegemeinschaft, 2001).

founding.<sup>27</sup> In 1948, Paraguayan leaders' report to the fourth Mennonite World Conference was entitled "Carving a Home Out of the Primeval Forest," while one co-founder of the Association for the History and Culture of Mennonites in Paraguay (*Verein für Geschichte und Kultur der Mennoniten in Paraguay*) examined the role of education in Mennonite cultural and economic development.<sup>28</sup> Even the respected Paraguayan Mennonite historian Peter P. Klassen—whose two-volume histories of Paraguay and Brazil, in addition to other works, remain the most comprehensive accounts of "Russian" Mennonites in Latin America—constructed his books primarily as group-historical narratives of settlement, pioneer work, expansion through migration or evangelization, religious reconstruction, financial growth, and agricultural improvement.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Examples include Walter Regehr, ed., *25 Jahre Kolonie Neuland Chaco Paraguay, 1947-1972* (Karlsruhe: Heinrich Schneider, 1972); Martin W. Friesen, *Kanadische Mennoniten Bezwingen eine Wildnis: 50 Jahre Kolonie Menno* (Asunción: Artes Graficas Zamphiropolos, 1977); Peter Pauls, Jr., *Mennoniten in Brasilien: Gedenkschrift zum 50 Jahr-Jubiläum ihrer Einwanderung 1930-1950* (Witmarsum, Brazil: Festkomitee für die Jubiläumsfeier, 1980); Peter Wiens, *Geschichte der Mennonitengemeinde Fernheim 1930-1990* (Filadelfia, Paraguay: Mennonitengemeinde Fernheim, 1990).

<sup>28</sup> J.W. Warkentin, "Carving a Home Out of the Primeval Forest," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 24, no. 2 (1950): 142-48; Jakob Warkentin, *Die deutschsprachigen Siedlerschulen in Paraguay: im Spannungsfeld staatlicher Kultur- und Entwicklungspolitik* (Münster: Waxmann, 1998). On education, see also Andreas F. Sawatzky, *50 Jahre Fortbildung der Kolonie Menno: Entstehung und Entwicklung der Zentralschule, 1951-2000* (Loma Plata, Paraguay: Geschichtskomitee der Kolonie Menno, 2009), and *Glaube und Schule unserer Väter: Ein Beitrag zum 80. Jubiläum der Kolonie Menno im paraguayischen Chaco* (Loma Plata, Paraguay: Geschichtskomitee der Kolonie Menno, 2007).

<sup>29</sup> See Gerhard Reimer's helpful review: "The 'Green Hell' Becomes Home: Mennonites in Paraguay as Described in the Writings of Peter P. Klassen," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 76, no. 3 (2002): 460-80. Klassen's publications on Paraguay include Peter P. Klassen, *The Mennonites in Paraguay: Kingdom of God and Kingdom of this World*, vol. 1 (Hillsboro, KS: Print Source Direct, 2004), *The Mennonites in Paraguay: Encounters with Indians and Paraguayans*, vol. 2 (Winnipeg: Mennonite Books, 2002), and *Immer kreisen die Geier: Ein Buch vom Chaco Boreal in Paraguay* (Filadelfia, Paraguay: Imprenta ASCIM, 1986). On Brazil, see Peter P. Klassen, *Die russlanddeutschen Mennoniten in Brasilien: Witmarsum am Alto Rio und Auhagen auf dem Stolz-Plateau in Santa Catarina*, vol. 1 (Bolanden-Weierhof: Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein, 1995), and *Die russlanddeutschen Mennoniten in Brasilien: Siedlungen, Gruppen und Gemeinden in der Zerstreuung*, vol. 2 (Bolanden-Weierhof: Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein, 1998).

Only recently have historians begun to deconstruct this Mennonite-as-pioneer paradigm. In an important essay in the *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, Ben Nobbs-Thiessen has analyzed the writings of Fretz, showing how his monographs and other publications in periodicals like *Mennonite Life* helped Mennonite readers in North America develop a sense of transnational peoplehood that allowed them to embrace assimilation in their own democratic contexts while simultaneously championing the “traditional” circumstances of colonists in Paraguay. Following recent work on the place of Amish in the US imagination, Nobbs-Thiessen demonstrates how Fretz, Bender, and others referred to conservative Mennonites in Latin America as “brethren” and “cousins,” constructing the notion of a common Anabaptist identity spanning religious and geographic boundaries. Descriptions of colonists’ homes as neat and orderly contrasted with the supposedly wild and even animal-like abodes of neighboring Indians. Invoking such distinctions allowed North American writers to justify the settlers’ presence in rural Paraguay as a civilizing force; yet doing so also functioned as a means of foreclosing the notion that they could integrate into the surrounding culture, allowing them to appear culturally static and unchanging.<sup>30</sup> Writing about Mennonite immigrants to Paraguay during the 1920s and 1930s, historian John Eicher has examined the ways that communities reinvented themselves in an unfamiliar context. Focusing on politics of memory and narration, he elegantly destabilizes longstanding assumptions about diasporic Mennonite peoplehood, showing how the absorption and redeployment of literary tropes allowed colonists to imagine themselves in relation to their old and new homelands.<sup>31</sup>

The second and equally important trajectory of scholarship on “Russian” Mennonites in Latin America owes its origin to nationalist writers in Weimar and Nazi Germany. During the early 1930s, the first refugee transports to Brazil and Paraguay were supported by the German state and drew widespread popular interest in interwar Germany. Prior to the Second

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<sup>30</sup> Ben Nobbs-Thiessen, “Mennonites in Unexpected Places: Sociologist and Settler in Latin America,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 28 (2010): 203-24.

<sup>31</sup> John Eicher, “Diaspora Hermeneutics: Mennonite Refugee Narratives between the World Wars,” in *New Perspectives in Diasporic Experience*, ed. Connie Rapoo, Maria Luisa Coelho and Zahira Sarwar (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2014); John Eicher, “Now Too Much For Us: Mennonite Migrations between the World Wars” (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 2015).



World War, the most prolific scholar of Mennonites in Paraguay was Walter Quiring, a Germany-based Russian-born Mennonite and Nazi sympathizer who completed much of his research—including field work in Paraguay and Brazil—with funding from the German Foreign Institute (*Deutscher Auslands-Institut*), an organization dedicated to the study and support of Germans living outside German borders.<sup>32</sup> Drawing on depictions dating to the 19th century of Mennonites in Russia as ideal German settler colonists, Quiring cast the migration to Paraguay as an important step not only for “Russian-German” Mennonites but also for the German nation. This is how he began his 1936 book, *Germans Exploit the Chaco* (*Deutsche erschliessen den Chaco*): “Exceptional are the centuries-long paths of these world-wide wanderers through countries and continents, from west to east, from east to west, from north to south—an unbroken and persistent struggle for Germandom, faith, and soil.”<sup>33</sup> Such assertions were taken up elsewhere in both official and unofficial propaganda about Germans abroad. In 1935, for example, the popular *Book of German Race* (*Das Buch vom deutschen Volkstum*) informed readers that Mennonite migrations to Latin America and elsewhere could “serve as an allegory for the entire fate of Germandom . . . across the entire earth.”<sup>34</sup> Nor was Quiring the only pro-Nazi scholar to visit the colonies, as testified by their prominent treatment in a work on German agricultural settlements in South America by the Kiel-based geographers

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<sup>32</sup> On Quiring, see Ted Regehr, “Walter Quiring (1893-1983),” in Harry Loewen, ed., *Shepherds, Servants and Prophets: Leadership among the Russian Mennonites (ca. 1880-1960)* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2003), 313-36. See also works by Walter Quiring: “The Canadian Mennonite Immigration into the Paraguayan Chaco, 1926-27,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 8, no. 1 (1934): 32-42; “The Colonization of the German Mennonites from Russia in the Paraguayan Chaco,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 8, no. 2 (1934): 62-72; *Deutsche erschliessen den Chaco* (Karlsruhe: Heinrich Schneider, 1936); and *Russlanddeutsche suchen eine Heimat* (Karlsruhe: Heinrich Schneider, 1938).

<sup>33</sup> Quiring, *Deutsche erschliessen den Chaco*, 9.

<sup>34</sup> Hermann Rüdiger, “Zahl und Verbreitung des deutschen Volkes,” in Paul Gauß, *Das Buch vom deutschen Volkstum* (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1935), 4. I have translated “Volk” and “Volkstum” as “race” in contexts where the original texts inflect these words with racial connotations. On the emergence of Mennonitism as a racial category in the Third Reich, see Benjamin W. Goossen, “Measuring Mennonitism: Racial Categorization in Nazi Germany and Beyond,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 34 (2016): 225-46.

Oskar Schmieder and Herbert Wilhelmy.<sup>35</sup>

If scholars in Hitler's Germany took interest in Latin America's Mennonite settlements, many colonists were themselves keen observers of the Third Reich. Most prominent was Fritz Kliewer, a teacher and organizer who in the mid-1930s traveled from Paraguay to Germany to write his dissertation, *The German Racial Group in Paraguay (Die deutsche Volksgruppe in Paraguay)*.<sup>36</sup> Along with other Nazi supporters, Kliewer generated enthusiasm for National Socialism among Paraguay's "Russian" Mennonites, many of whom hoped to resettle in Germany. As German national sentiment gained prominence in several Paraguayan colonies, as well as in Brazil and Mexico, it generated tensions with a variety of actors: internally (with separatist-minded Mennonites), with Latin American governments (which eventually declared war on Germany), with the North American MCC (which opposed Nazi militarism and aimed to bolster nonresistance among Latin America's Mennonites), and even the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (keen to monitor Nazi influence in "America's backyard").

In Paraguay, the pro-Nazi movement's eventual eradication—culminating in a case of moderate inter-Mennonite violence and the intervention of the state military—left such a bitter aftertaste that the topic has remained contentious, if not taboo, for more than half a century. In 1990 Peter P. Klassen produced the first full-length book on the "period of German-racial enthusiasm in the Fernheim colony."<sup>37</sup> While Klassen

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<sup>35</sup> Oskar Schmieder and Herbert Wilhelmy, *Deutsche Ackerbausiedlungen im südamerikanischen Grasland, Pampa und Gran Chaco* (Leipzig: Deutschen Museums für Länderkunde, 1938). On this work and its context, see Ulrike Bock, "Deutsche Lateinamerikaforschung im Nationalsozialismus: Ansätze zu einer wissenschaftshistorischen Perspektive," in *Der Nationalsozialismus und Lateinamerika* ed. Sandra Carreras (Berlin: Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut Preußischer Kulturbesitz, 2005), 7-22.

<sup>36</sup> Fritz Kliewer, *Die deutsche Volksgruppe in Paraguay: eine siedlungsgeschichtliche, volkskundliche und volkspolitische Untersuchung* (Hamburg: Hans Christians Verlag, 1941). See also Fritz Kliewer, "The Mennonites of Paraguay," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 11, no. 1 (1937): 92-97. On Kliewer, see Jakob Warkentin, "Kliewer, Friedrich (Fritz)," *MennLex V*, [www.mennlex.de/doku.php?id=art:kliewer\\_friedrich\\_fritz](http://www.mennlex.de/doku.php?id=art:kliewer_friedrich_fritz).

<sup>37</sup> Peter P. Klassen, *Die Deutsch-völkische Zeit in Der Kolonie Fernheim, Chaco, Paraguay, 1933-1945* (Weierhof: Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein, 1990). See also Warkentin, *Die deutschsprachigen Siedlerschulen*, 182-280; Alfred Neufeld and Wilma Neufeld, eds., *Nikolai*

focused on National Socialism in a single community, the US historian John D. Thiesen later took up the topic with an expanded scope, examining Nazi influence among German-speaking Mennonites across Latin America. Although the bulk of his findings concerned enthusiasm for Nazism in Paraguay, Brazil, and less prominently in Mexico, Thiesen also brought to light the divisiveness of this issue, including the presence of a substantial anti-Nazi movement based on religious opposition, separationist ideals, and nonresistance.<sup>38</sup>

The formal end of Nazism among Latin America's German-speaking Mennonites did not, however, curtail representations of their communities as diasporic German settlements. A number of familiar authors reinvented themselves and continued publishing. In 1953, the former propagandist Walter Quiring, who was now based in Canada, compiled a coffee-table book on Mennonites in Paraguay, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and Mexico, while Walter Schmiedehaus, a former Nazi consul, published two monographs on Mexico's Old Colony Mennonites.<sup>39</sup> Postwar efforts on behalf of MCC and others to brand Mennonite refugees from the USSR as nationally Dutch rather than German helped to revitalize an older debate about the communities' national origins, but with the exception of a dissertation by Johan Sjouke Postma—a Dutch-born Nazi collaborator who had fled to Paraguay with a false passport—the balance of literature on Latin America favored a “German” designation.<sup>40</sup> Focusing on the years 1949-1973, Nikolaus

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*Siemens, der Chacooptimist: Das Mennoblatt und die Anfänge der Kolonie Fernheim, 1930-1955* (Weisenheim am Berg: Agape Verlag, 2005). On Paraguayan Mennonites' engagement with this history, see the essay series by Alfred Neufeld and others in the April to July 2015 issues of the *Mennoblatt*, published in Filadelfia, Paraguay.

<sup>38</sup> John D. Thiesen, *Mennonite and Nazi? Attitudes Among Mennonite Colonists in Latin America, 1933-1945* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 1999).

<sup>39</sup> Walter Quiring, *Im Schweisse deines Angesichts...: Ein mennonitisches Bilderbuch: Paraguay, Brasilien, Argentinien, Uruguay und Mexico* (Steinbach, MB: Derksen Printers, 1953); Walther Schmiedehaus, *Ein feste burg ist unser Gott: der Wanderweg eines chirstlichen Siedler Volkes* (Blumenort, Mexico: G.J. Rempel, 1948), and *Die Altkolonier-Mennoniten in Mexiko* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1982). On Schmiedehaus, see Thiesen, *Mennonite and Nazi?* 43.

<sup>40</sup> Johan Sjouke Postma, *Das niederländische Erbe der preußisch-rußländischen Mennoniten in Europa, Asien und Amerika* (Leeuwarden: A. Jongbloed, 1959). On Postma, see Gabe G. Hoekema, “Idealisten en baasjes met oogkleppen voor: Voorgangers van doopsgezinde

Barbian's recent study has demonstrated how various Mennonite colonies retained formal connections to cultural and development organizations in West Germany, such as the Association for Germandom Abroad, well after the end of World War II.<sup>41</sup> By the mid-1950s, generous repatriation policies even enabled a number of Latin American Mennonites to relocate to the Federal Republic, consummating an unfulfilled promise of the Nazi era. Finally, West German and Israeli efforts to locate Nazi war criminals who had fled to Latin America also helped to perpetuate the association between Mennonitism and Germanness.<sup>42</sup>

### **“Missionized” Mennonites**

English and German-language literature on non-“ethnic” Mennonites in Latin America is, relatively speaking, less extensive. One reason may be that many Latino or indigenous congregations have emerged in recent decades; in many cases there has simply been less time to study them. Another explanation may be the continued association, acknowledged or otherwise, of Anabaptism with white members of European heritage. While scholars of the religion have long since abandoned the crude racism characteristic of many 19th and early 20th-century studies, the skewed source base perhaps echoes older senses that converts could become Christian, but not quite Mennonite. Thus Fritz Kliewer, writing in the late 1930s to the German Foreign Office (*Auswärtiges Amt*): “That an Indian could become a Mennonite is a thing of impossibility.”<sup>43</sup> Even mission enthusiasts not

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gemeenten die van 1933 tot 1945 aangesproken werden door het gedachtegoed van de NSB of tijdens de oorlog meewerkten met de Duitse bezetter,” *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen* 41 (2015): 224-36.

<sup>41</sup> Nikolaus Barbian, *Auswärtige Kulturpolitik und “Auslandsdeutsche” in Lateinamerika 1949-1973* (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 2014), especially 463-65.

<sup>42</sup> In one bizarre episode, a Ukrainian-born Mennonite novelist—currently a well-known Holocaust denier—investigated rumors that the Nazi doctor Joseph Mengele had spent time among Mennonites in Paraguay. See James C. Juhnke, “Ingrid Rimland, the Mennonites, and the Demon Doctor,” *Mennonite Life* 60, no. 1 (2005), <http://ml.bethelks.edu/issue/vol-60-no-1/article/ingrid-rimland-the-mennonites-and-the-demon-doctor/>. On Rimland, see also James Urry, “Fate, Hate and Denial: Ingrid Rimland’s Lebensraum!” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 73, no. 1 (1999): 107-27.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Manfred Kossok, “Die Mennoniten-Siedlungen Paraguays in den Jahren 1935-1939,” *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 8 (1960): 370-71.

uncommonly referred to converts primarily with ethnic or tribal appellations rather than as Mennonites.

Recognition of this past by subsequent interpreters—including a commitment to wrestling with the inequalities that such language has engendered—may have served to keep scholarly focus on white communities. While “ethnic” Mennonite historians now generally recognize the broader church’s heterogeneity, many remain committed to the “preservation of our [German] cultural and spiritual heritage.”<sup>44</sup> If such introspection reflects increasing attunement to the dynamics of interethnic relations, it simultaneously grants renewed license to academic contributions centered on white kinship, German language use, and the transmission of European worship or culinary practices.

Prominent discussions about the equality of ethnic and non-ethnic Mennonites first emerged in the 1960s, when white leaders in North America—prompted by the Civil Rights movement, decolonization, and the vocal criticism of members of color in their own church—contemplated a recalibration of power along lines of racial privilege. A watershed, if deeply controversial, event was the ninth Mennonite World Conference held in Curitiba, Brazil, in 1972. While all eight previous World Conferences had occurred in Europe or North America, the planners of the Curitiba assembly opted to hold their event in the so-called Third World, not least because of the confession’s rapidly changing demographics. “One third of the Mennonites in the world today are non-white,” Executive Secretary Cornelius J. Dyck reported in his address to the presidium and delegates. “If MWC is to continue as a useful instrument in the world brotherhood, it must be more than an ethnic gathering to celebrate a great past. It must be a part of the mission Mennonites are being called to in the world, not just white, Western Mennonites, but all Mennonites. Whether they are in Asia, Africa, Latin America, or from minority groups in North America, all must feel that this is their conference too.”<sup>45</sup> This and future Mennonite World Conferences,

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<sup>44</sup> Gerhard Ratzlaff, “Die Pflege unseres kulturellen und geistlichen Erbes,” in Gerhard Ratzlaff, ed., *Auf den Spuren der Vaeter: Eine Jubilaeumsschrift der Kolonie Freiland in Ostparaguay, 1937-1987* (Asunción: Verwaltung der Kolonie Friesland, 1987), 238.

<sup>45</sup> Cornelius J. Dyck, “Report of the Executive Secretary to the Presidium and Delegates,” in *Jesus Christ Reconciles: Proceedings of the Ninth Mennonite World Conference, July 18-23, 1972* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite World Conference, 1972), xxii-xxiii.

including events held in India, Zimbabwe, and Paraguay, provided forums for leaders from around the world to envision a global religious community supportive of multiple kinds of diversity.

One outcome was a new interest in the history of mission and more specifically the histories of Mennonites of color. As Cornelius J. Dyck had argued at the 1972 conference, these communities “do not care much for Luther’s sixteenth-century Europe, which ethnic Mennonites consider important.” At least in a direct ancestral sense, the Reformation was “not part of their history.”<sup>46</sup> Yet for Dyck these congregations were not entirely without histories, an assumption that would have been self-evident to many earlier commentators. Now, the challenge was to write them. While a number of pamphlets, articles, and manuscripts on Mennonite missions and development work among native Latin Americans had appeared in North America, Europe, and Paraguay, academic treatments increasingly took people of color seriously as members of the Anabaptist church community. A kind of evolution-in-miniature can be traced in works about Paraguay: in 1980 the US-based sociologist Calvin W. Redekop produced the first full-length monograph on “Mennonite and indigenous relations” in the country. In *Strangers Become Neighbors* he told a story of inter-ethnic engagement between Mennonites and Indians in the Gran Chaco, arcing from uncertainty to fraternal associations.<sup>47</sup>

Redekop’s book was followed in 1991 by Peter P. Klassen’s second volume on Mennonites in Paraguay, bearing the subtitle “Encounters with Indians and Paraguayans.”<sup>48</sup> If Klassen’s book continued to treat this subject from an “ethnic” Mennonite perspective, the US writers Edgar Stoesz and

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Calvin W. Redekop, *Strangers Become Neighbors: Mennonite and Indigenous Relations in the Paraguayan Chaco* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980). On indigenous peoples in the Chaco, including their relationships with “ethnic” Mennonites, see Walter Regehr, *Die lebensräumliche Situation der Indianer im paraguayischen Chaco* (Basel: Wepf & Co., 1979); Verena Regehr and Walter Regehr, *Chacoindianer gestern und heute* (n.p., c. 1975); Elmer S. Miller, ed., *Peoples of the Gran Chaco* (Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1999).

<sup>48</sup> Peter P. Klassen, *Die Mennoniten in Paraguay: Begegnung mit Indianern und Paraguayern*, vol. 2 (Bolanden-Weierhof: Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein, 1991). See also Hans J. Wiens’s account of Mennonite missions in the Chaco: “... *Dass die Heiden Miterben seien*”: *Die Geschichte der indianermission in paraguayischen Chaco* (Filadelfia, Paraguay: Konferenz der Mennoniten Brüdergemeinden in Paraguay, 1989).

Muriel T. Stackley sought to narrate an integrated account of “ethnic” and non-“ethnic” Mennonites in their 1999 *Garden in the Wilderness*, a richly-illustrated popular history of Mennonites in Paraguay.<sup>49</sup> Subsequent studies have continued to differentiate between “ethnic” and indigenous Mennonites, yet authors now stress that “most of the ‘Indians’ are as Mennonite as the immigrant colony settlers.”<sup>50</sup>

Scholarship on “missionized” Mennonites in Latin America is extremely uneven. The richness of work on evangelism in Paraguay contrasts with the comparative paucity of English and German-language literature on the tens of thousands of Mennonites of color living in Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Uruguay, Argentina, Bahamas, Cuba, Jamaica, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Grenada, and Trinidad-Tobago. One explanation for this disproportionality lies with the nature of inter-Mennonite relations in Paraguay. The landlocked country is home to Latin America’s largest population of progressive, mission-oriented “ethnic” Mennonites, meaning that the country’s indigenous and Latino churches were organized primarily by local evangelists as opposed to foreign missionaries from Europe or North America. The presence of a substantial number of Mennonite settler colonists created unusual conditions for proselytism. Most obvious was the joint evangelization-colonization initiative—developed during the 1950s and expanded with the help of MCC between 1967 and 1980—in which eight “indigenous agricultural colonies” comprising 69,000 hectares of central Chaco land were founded for Enlhet, Nivaclé, Lengua, Toba, and Sanapaná families.<sup>51</sup> This history has proven intriguing to Mennonite scholars in North America, as well as to “ethnic”

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<sup>49</sup> Edgar Stoesz and Muriel T. Stackley, *Garden in the Wilderness: Mennonite Communities in the Paraguayan Chaco* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1999).

<sup>50</sup> Alfred Neufeld, “Foreword,” in Edgar Stoesz, *Like a Mustard Seed: Mennonites in Paraguay* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2008), 11; Gerhard Ratzlaff, *Ein Leib – viele Glieder: Die mennonitischen Gemeinden in Paraguay* (Asunción: Asociación Evangélica Menonite del Paraguay, 2001).

<sup>51</sup> Prieto Valladares, *Mission and Migration*, 110-12. On the environmental dimensions of settlement and mission activities among indigenous Paraguayans, see Rosa del Carmen Garay-Flühmann, “The Social Ecology of the Central Chaco in Paraguay: The Mennonite Colonies and Adjacent Indigenous Settlements” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2000).



Mennonite scholars in Paraguay itself, who have been far more engaged in chronicling their own history than have those in other Latin American countries.

Treatments of Paraguayan settlement projects have generally exhibited a triumphalist or apologetic tenor. Former missionaries continue to write positively about the “settlement of the Indians in the Central Chaco and their evangelization,” sometimes framing their narratives against the criticisms of “anthropologists from Europe, who have no idea of the original situation of the Indians” but who insist that “the whites robbed the Indians of their ideal life and perfect culture.”<sup>52</sup> While such defenses accurately note the humanitarian impulses often undergirding mission enterprises, they tend to obscure the degree to which early evangelists framed their projects with the language of primitivism and savagery, or the extent to which “civilizing” ideologies continue to serve white Mennonites’ economic interests through the production of cheap labor. Commenting on the separate land-holding, financial, and insurance opportunities available to white versus indigenous residents of the Chaco, as well as on their enormous wage disparity, human rights observers have issued searing critiques. As recently as 2009, United Nations investigators charged German-speaking Mennonite employers with supporting a “system of forced labour” that involved “grave violations of international instruments supported or ratified by Paraguay.”<sup>53</sup>

If the historically imperial or quasi-imperial relationship between white missionaries and converts of color is by now well studied in the wider academy, it has only rarely influenced scholarship on Anabaptist missions in Latin America. One prominent exception is Elmer S. Miller’s 1995 intellectual autobiography *Nurturing Doubt*, which traces the author’s transition from Old

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<sup>52</sup> Bernhard M. Funk, *Wer konnte das bewirken? Die Sesshaftmachung der Indianer im zentralen paraguayischen Chaco und ihre Missionierung* (Loma Plata, Paraguay: Druckerei Friesen, 2008), 4.

<sup>53</sup> United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, “Mission to Paraguay: Report and Recommendations,” 2009, [www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/-NPFII\\_Mission\\_Report\\_Paraguay\\_EN.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/-NPFII_Mission_Report_Paraguay_EN.pdf). See also Miguel Chase Sardi, “The Present Situation of the Indians in Paraguay,” in Walter Dostal, ed., *The Situation of the Indian in South America* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1972), 173-217; Stephen W. Kidd, “The Working Conditions of the Enxet Indigenous People of the Chaco,” in *Enslaved Peoples in the 1990s: Indigenous Peoples, Debt Bondage and Human Rights* (Copenhagen: Anti-Slavery International, 1997), 151-80.

Mennonite missionary in the Argentinian Chaco to trained anthropologist studying the Toba people of the same region. Through close readings of letters and diary entries, Miller explores how his experiences in Argentina forced him to confront personal doubts about both his proselytism and, later, his academic commitments. *Nurturing Doubt* provides a thoughtful analysis of intercultural exchange, including its transformative potential in the context of Anabaptist witness, as well as a compelling injunction to question modes of writing that “unwittingly support self-definitions by providing descriptive accounts of an exotic Other.”<sup>54</sup>

Works examining Mennonite evangelism in Latin America—including monographs on Costa Rica, Guatemala, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Jamaica—more typically resemble the group-historical treatments of German-speaking settlers.<sup>55</sup> They tend to move chronologically, emphasizing church planting, membership growth, and the expansion of humanitarian and social services. If such narrative strategies often mirror accounts of other, non-Mennonite Christian missions, this may in part reflect a sense that proselytism is, historically speaking, un-Anabaptist. Indeed, scholars often characterize the emergence of Mennonite missions during the 19th century as a decisive break with church tradition. “Except for their beginnings in the sixteenth-century European Anabaptist movement,” one author notes, “history has known Mennonites more as the

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<sup>54</sup> Elmer S. Miller, *Nurturing Doubt: From Mennonite Missionary to Anthropologist in the Argentine Chaco* (Urbana, IL: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1995), 202-203.

<sup>55</sup> Jaime Adrián Prieto Valladares, *Die mennonitische Mission in Costa Rica 1960-1978* (Hamburg: Verlag an der Lottbek, 1992); Jaime Adrián Prieto Valladares, *Indianermission im Tal von Talamanca, Costa Rica 1891-1987* (Hamburg: Verlag an der Lottbek, 1995); Dallas Witmer, *The Guatemalan Cry: A History of the Mission Work of the Conservative Mennonite Fellowship Missions in Guatemala, Central America* (Seymour, MO: Edgewood Press, 1974); Rafael Falcón, *Mennonite Memories of Puerto Rico* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014); Marieta Zimmerman, *25th Anniversary of The Evangelical Mennonite Church in the Land Columbus Loved Best* (Fort Wayne, IN: Commission on Overseas Missions, Evangelical Mennonite Church, 1971); Twila Y. Brunk, *Together in the Lord: The Jamaica Mennonite Church 1955-1980* (Harrisonburg, VA: Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, n.d.). On Mennonite Brethren missions, see J.J. Toews, *The Mennonite Brethren Mission in Latin America* (Winnipeg: The Christian Press, Ltd., 1975). On the church in Central America, see the special August 1984 issue of *Mennonite Quarterly Review*.

quiet in the land than as heralds of the gospel.”<sup>56</sup>

Thus, while internal explanations have described Mennonite evangelism as a spontaneous renewal, attributable to “the grace of God,” more historicist interpreters have invoked the trans-denominational context of modern Christian evangelism. In his account of the establishment of Mennonite missions in Colombia during the late 1940s, for instance, James C. Juhnke has noted that General Conference evangelists were “only a tiny fraction of the large North American mission force which had been shut out of China [after the communist takeover in that country] and now looked for new openings in Latin America.”<sup>57</sup> Mennonite missionaries in Colombia shared many of the same concerns and experiences as representatives of other Protestant churches, contending with civil conflict and political corruption, as well as the challenge of winning souls in a predominantly Catholic country.

Efforts to read Anabaptist theology back into the evangelical commitments of many 20th-century Mennonites (or to track the distinctively Mennonite qualities of their Latin American church plants) have likewise tended to privilege the perspectives of missionaries rather than the missionized.<sup>58</sup> Identifications of Mennonite evangelism with peace witness, decentralization, rural proclivities, and practical emphases may help to illuminate how some Anabaptist converts experienced Christianity differently from those entering other denominations. Yet the sources used to substantiate these claims disproportionately constitute written materials produced by white missionaries themselves or by their sending agencies.<sup>59</sup>

A range of alternative possible interpretations is revealed in *How Beautiful Is Your Voice* (*Wie schön ist deine Stimme*), a 2014 collection of oral

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<sup>56</sup> Victor Harold Wiens, “From Refugees to Ambassadors: Mennonite Missions in Brazil, 1930-2000” (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2002), 315.

<sup>57</sup> James C. Juhnke, *A People of Mission: A History of General Conference Mennonite Overseas Missions* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1979), 151.

<sup>58</sup> Articles interrogating the theological underpinnings and practice of Anabaptist missions in Latin America can be found, for example, in the journal *Mission Focus*, published between 1972 and 2012, and appearing since then under the title *Anabaptist Witness*.

<sup>59</sup> Jaime Prieto has advocated oral history as one methodological strategy for moving beyond such missionary-centered approaches. See Jaime Prieto, *Mennonites in Latin America: Historical Sketches* (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 2008), 39-52.

histories gathered among natives of the Gran Chaco. Reflecting collaboration by Paraguayan Mennonites of various backgrounds, the book moves beyond traditional, record-based archives to “give the Enlhet [Indians] a voice,” providing a space for Enlhet men and women to share memories of their lives, including relations with “ethnic” Mennonite evangelists.<sup>60</sup> “We children ran away when the Mennonite came,” one respondent recalled of early encounters—“Why is the Mennonite coming here? He will bring disease among us!”<sup>61</sup> Others recounted their families’ transition to settled life, the adoption of European-style clothing, intercultural communication in German or Spanish, and religious conversion. That many Enlhet are now preachers or active church members serves as a reminder that Christianity is spread not only by white missionaries, and that accounts of Anabaptist evangelism must consider the agency of people of color.<sup>62</sup>

One model for future works on missionized congregations might be Filipe Hinojosa’s 2014 publication, *Latino Mennonites*. Although this study is limited to the 20th-century United States (including Puerto Rico), it provides an excellent window onto the lives of often mobile Mennonites whose language and physiognomies set them apart from their more numerous “ethnically” Mennonite coreligionists and who remain deeply connected with Spanish-speaking family and friends in countries to the south. Perhaps more important, *Latino Mennonites* reminds us that “Latin America” does not stop at the US-Mexico border. Just as Mexico’s Old Colony Mennonites have been as likely to move to Canada as to Argentina, non-“ethnic” Mennonites are also transnational. From the first Mennonite missions among Latino populations in Chicago, New York, and elsewhere to contemporary questions of political and religious belonging, Hinojosa examines the complex processes of negotiation between white Mennonites and members of color, paying close attention to issues of race, gender, and the

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<sup>60</sup> Hannes Kalisch and Ernesto Unruh, eds., *Wie schön ist deine Stimme: Berichte der Enlhet in Paraguay zu ihrer Geschichte* (Münster: Monsenstein und Vannerdat, 2014), 7.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 297, 299.

<sup>62</sup> That missionaries from Anabaptist congregations in North America and Germany have undertaken “renewal” work among conservative, German-speaking congregations in Latin America further blurs the conceptual distinction between white evangelists and converts of color, raising questions about white Mennonite indigenization and the politics of intra-group proselytism among “ethnic” members.

intersection of minority freedom struggles from the Caribbean to the Civil Rights movement to California fruit farms. At the heart of *Latino Mennonites* is the insight that religions take on new meanings in changing circumstances: “being Latino and Mennonite also meant being part of a larger family of *evangélicos* (Latino evangelicals), that included their Pentecostal and mainline Protestant neighbors.”<sup>63</sup> Extended to Latino and other Mennonites across Latin America, this approach could yield fascinating studies about the ever-changing forms of a vibrant, dynamic church.

### **Conclusion**

The history of Mennonitism in Latin America is a multifaceted story encompassing both the immigration of white “ethnic” Mennonites from Europe and North America, as well as the conversion of large numbers of local people, a duality captured fittingly in the title of the Latin America volume of the Global Mennonite History Series, *Mission and Migration*.<sup>64</sup> This book—the only comprehensive account yet published—is essential reading. Masterfully researched by Costa Rican scholar Jaime Prieto, *Mission and Migration* provides a bird’s-eye view of the origins, interactions, and transformations of a bewildering variety of communities across nearly one hundred years. Reminiscent of the group-historical approaches of Harold S. Bender and J. Winfield Fretz, yet tempered by the integrative global vision of Cornelius J. Dyck (a perspective taken up by series editors John A. Lapp and C. Arnold Snyder), it posits Latin American Mennonitism as a unitary, albeit internally variegated, subject. If such an approach runs the risk of homogenizing groups that have (or want) little to do with each other, it nevertheless provides a necessary corrective to a longstanding bias in the literature for “ethnic” Mennonite protagonists. Prieto’s study reflects a growing tendency among scholars in and beyond Latin America to treat Mennonitism as plural. That this development has its analogues in broader wings of religious and ethnic studies, including the historiography of German nationalism, is an encouraging sign.

Future scholars will undoubtedly find new means of exploring

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<sup>63</sup> Felipe Hinojosa, *Latino Mennonites* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2014), 3.

<sup>64</sup> Prieto, *Mission and Migration*. See also the extensive notes to Prieto’s book: [www.pandorapress.com/LatinAmericaNotes.pdf](http://www.pandorapress.com/LatinAmericaNotes.pdf).

difference among Latin America's Mennonites. While significant attention has been paid to the distinctions between various religious groupings, much could be done to deconstruct these ideal types, which too often base their representations on male authority figures. Growing efforts among Mennonite institutions and scholars to be inclusive of communities of color have done comparatively little to challenge patriarchal structures—a disparity encapsulated in Mennonite World Conference's simultaneous embrace of ethnic diversity and continued refusal to engage questions of sexual orientation.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, the study of gender (and to a lesser degree sexuality) is already providing a set of alternative perspectives with the potential to reframe the field. To date, the most groundbreaking work remains Marlene Epp's *Women Without Men*, a history of the disproportionately female Mennonite refugees who migrated from Europe to Paraguay and Canada after the Second World War. Through extensive oral interviews, Epp recovered the stories of thousands of women living in a world of upended gender relations; in 1948, not a single adult man lived in one Paraguayan settlement, colloquially known as *Frauendorf*, or "Women's Village."<sup>66</sup>

More recently, scholars of social work and economics have begun to study how gender shapes every aspect of Mennonite life in and beyond Latin America, ranging from employment opportunities to mobility, faith, and dress. "The double-bind of transnationalism," Luann Good Gingrich and Kerry Preibisch argue in their essay on the migration of Low German-speaking Mennonite women from Mexico to Canada, "is inherently gendered in nature, as the meanings of and responses to migration are different for men and women."<sup>67</sup> Following the widely-reported news of horrific "ghost rapes" in Bolivia's Manitoba Colony during the 2000s, the history of Mennonite

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<sup>65</sup> Lisa Schirch and Jacob Mack-Boll, "No Pink in MWC's Rainbow," *Mennonite World Review*, September 14, 2015, [www.mennoworld.org/2015/09/14/opinion/opinion-no-pink-in-mwcs-rainbow/](http://www.mennoworld.org/2015/09/14/opinion/opinion-no-pink-in-mwcs-rainbow/).

<sup>66</sup> Marlene Epp, *Women Without Men: Mennonite Refugees of the Second World War* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2000), 100.

<sup>67</sup> Luann Good Gingrich and Kerry Preibisch, "Migration as Preservation and Loss: The Paradox of Transnational Living for Low German Mennonite Women," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36, no. 9 (2010): 1512. See also Carel Roessingh and Linda Mol, "Working Ladies: Mennonite Women in the Enterprises of Spanish Lookout, Belize," *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business* 5, nos. 3/4 (2008): 241-56; Loewen, *Village among Nations*, 205-26.

sexual abuse will surely receive new attention as well.<sup>68</sup>

Among the greatest challenges for future studies of Latin American Mennonitism will be integrating the interrelated yet contradictory literatures of German national and Mennonite religious history. As Jaime Prieto and others have demonstrated, viewing Mennonite history through the lens of a single German diaspora no longer constitutes a viable methodology. Historian H. Glenn Penny's call to uncover the "polycentric" nature of German identity may offer one means of reinterpreting Mennonite history within the context of German studies.<sup>69</sup> Understanding how some Mennonites in Latin America generated different conceptions of Germanness, many of which were not oriented toward a distant German nation-state, might yield innovative ways of parsing the paradox noted at the beginning of this essay, namely the fundamentally religious motivations behind many conservative Mennonites' German language use and adherence to other "German" cultural traditions.

Pieter M. Judson and Tara Zahra's notion of "national indifference" could likewise prove a useful tool, especially if paired with increasingly robust literatures on missiology and spiritual formation.<sup>70</sup> Innovative scholarly works have already appeared on specifically Latin American permutations of Mennonite religious thought, including "The Anabaptist Vision of the Church of Central America," Anabaptist liberation theology, and the influence of Pentecostalism.<sup>71</sup> The status of nonresistance and Mennonite peacemaking

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<sup>68</sup> Scholarly work has not yet appeared on this topic. Journalistic accounts include Jean Friedman-Rudovsky, "A Verdict in Bolivia's Shocking Case of the Mennonite Rapes," *Time*, August 17, 2011, <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2087711,00.html>; Nicole Akoukou Thompson, "The Demons in the Church: At Least 100 Women Raped by Nine Mennonite Men in Bolivia," *Latin Post*, November 8, 2013, [www.latinpost.com/articles/3641/20131108/tranquilized-raped-religious-community.htm](http://www.latinpost.com/articles/3641/20131108/tranquilized-raped-religious-community.htm); Jean Friedman-Rudovsky, "The Ghost Rapes of Bolivia," *Vice*, December 23, 2013, [www.vice.com/read/the-ghost-rapes-of-bolivia-000300-v20n8?Contentpage=1](http://www.vice.com/read/the-ghost-rapes-of-bolivia-000300-v20n8?Contentpage=1). The topic of John Howard Yoder's sexual abuse has also been taken up by some Mennonites in Latin America: see the September 1 and September 16, 2015 issues of the *Mennoblatt*.

<sup>69</sup> H. Glenn Penny, "German Polycentrism and the Writing of History," *German History* 30, no. 2 (2012): 265-82.

<sup>70</sup> Pieter M. Judson and Tara Zahra, "Introduction," *Austrian History Yearbook* 43 (2012): 21-27; Tara Zahra, "Imagined Non-Communities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis," *Slavic Review* 69, no. 1 (2010): 93-119.

<sup>71</sup> Mario Higueros, "The Anabaptist Vision of the Church of Central America," *Mennonite*



across the Global South is also a subject of longstanding interest for those seeking sources of commonality in an ethnically diverse global church.<sup>72</sup>

The negotiation between faith and place will continue to be a defining feature of Latin American Mennonitism. This much was already clear in the 1920s to a young Orrie O. Miller. Traveling to Mexico to observe the movement of Old Colony Mennonites from Canada, he met one member near the San Antonio railway station. Miller recalled the self-description of his conversation partner, narrated as a kind of transnational, multi-generational saga: “Great-grandfather migrated with his family from Prussia to South Russia via the wheel barrow method. Great grandfather lies buried in Russia. Grandfather with married sons and daughters came to Canada in 1873. Grandfather lies buried in Manitoba. Now father, an old man, has brought his family to Mexico where they are again starting over.’ One could not help asking, ‘Where next?’ and the answer was a shrug of the shoulders, the attitude meaning, ‘Mexico only as long as we can here live out the principles we deem vital and essential.’”<sup>73</sup> Whether Miller’s friend ever left Mexico is impossible to know. Today his descendants could be in Bolivia, Kansas, or any number of other places. But if the specific outcome of this story is unclear, the sentiment at its heart—as well as its innumerable possible resolutions—reflects a mode of thinking that would resonate with Mennonites across Latin America of every conceivable background.

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*Quarterly Review* 69, no. 3 (1995): 389-404; Daniel Schipani, *Freedom and Discipleship: Liberation Theology in Anabaptist Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989); LaVerne A. Rutschman, “Latin American Liberation Theology from an Anabaptist Perspective,” *Mission Focus* 9, no. 2 (1981): 21-26; Jaime Adrián Prieto Valladares, “The Pentecostal Experience in the Anabaptist Churches of Latin America (1971-1999),” *Mission Focus Annual Review* 10 (2002): 71-85.

<sup>72</sup> See Peter P. Klassen’s study: *Kaputi Mennonita: Eine friedliche Begegnung im Chacokrieg* (Asunción: Imprenta Modelo, 1980). For a helpful framework on Mennonite peacemaking and peace theology in a global context, see John D. Roth, “The Emergence of Mennonite Peacebuilding in an International Perspective: Global Anabaptism and Neo-Anabaptism,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 89, no. 2 (2015): 229-52.

<sup>73</sup> Miller, “The Present Mennonite Migration,” 16.

Mennonite Brethren immigrants to North America from Russia brought with them a vision for Christian mission outreach, something that characterized the Mennonite renewal movement from its birth in 1860. The story of North American MB missionary work in Latin America is only a small part of the broad sweep of the 20th-century mission movement. The methods used and the policies made reflect the mission thinking current in that day. Foldoutcount. 0. There are no reviews yet. Be the first one to write a review. 376 Views.

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