
A Postcolonial Response to Felipe Hinojosa's *Latino Mennonites*

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Situating Mennonites in a Postcolonial Context

Felipe Hinojosa's book *Latino Mennonites: Civil Rights, Faith, and Evangelical Culture* is a courageous emerging voice in Mennonite academia—a setting where racial difference has not been reflected much. I will begin my response to Hinojosa's book by resituating in a postcolonial context Latino and Black Mennonite struggles within white normalized society.

The normalization of white subjects and racialization of the others cannot be separated from a Eurocentric racial ideology constructed through colonial violence over hundreds of years.¹ And in the modern era, colonialism has been a major force for the birth of European capitalism through colonial settlement processes, slavery, and acquisition of raw materials.² Today, neoliberal capitalism, which many postcolonial thinkers identify as a neocolonial force, still functions to maintain asymmetric racial hegemony.³ For example, free trade and international division of labor are often followed in actuality by violation of human rights and discriminatory laws, reflecting racist ideologies inscribed within harmful social norms and practices.⁴

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1 Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (New York: Routledge, Taylor, and Francis Group, 2015), 112–39.

2 Loomba, 22.

3 Loomba, 256–57; Joerg Rieger and Kwok Pui-lan, *Occupy Religion: Theology of the Multitude* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 33, 38, 42, 63, and 133; Kowk Pui-Lan, “Feminist Theology and the New Imperialism,” *Political Theology* 8, no. 2 (2007): 145.

4 Raul Delgado Wise, “Migration and Labour under Neoliberal Globalization: Key Issues and Challenges” in *Migration, Precarity, and Global Governance: Challenges and Opportunities for Labour*, eds. Carl-Ulrik Schierup et al. (Oxford University Press, 2015), 25–45. Wise argues that neoliberal capitalism revolves around the global monopolization of finance and labor exploitation and that it relaunches imperialism. In particular, he

Within Mennonite communities, race relations have also been situated in a larger social context under colonial influence. When European Mennonites migrated to North America, they went from a persecuted ethno-religious minority group to a group racially and religiously normalized as white Christians.⁵ In the twentieth century, for example, white evangelical and American pop culture influenced the Swiss-German and Russian Mennonites to incorporate white Christianity in their identity and theology.⁶ As Hinojosa highlights, their resulting affinity for white evangelicalism significantly influenced the missions of these Mennonites to Latino and Black communities. Contemporary Mennonite racial relations are not unstained by colonial influence either, given that European Mennonites have been complicit in constructions of the white norm at the cost of displacements of Indigenous populations.⁷

A distinctive postcolonial condition⁸ that calls us to rethink this Eurocentric Mennonite identity in North America is the continual migration of multi-ethnic Mennonites from Congo, Indonesia, Mexico, and many other countries. With contextual sensitivity, I will call for a shifting of the dominant Eurocentric view toward an ethno-culturally polycentric and hybrid view of Mennonite identity and epistemology.

Hybrid Mennonite Identities

Colonial discourse has constructed Europe as authoritative and the source of the universal subject, while making the Other strange and provincial, thus justifying inequalities.⁹ Postcolonial thinkers such as Homi Bhabha, however, have debunked the resulting Eurocentric racial ideologies. Bhabha's notion of hybridity is of an ongoing process that challenges a binary demarcation of "au-

points out the proletarianization of migrant workers under the international division of labor, often followed by racial, ethnic, and gender discrimination.

5 I demonstrate this claim in detail in my other article in this issue: "Unsettling the Radical Witness of Peace: A Decolonizing Investigation of Mennonite Migration from Russia to Manitoba in the 1870s."

6 Felipe Hinojosa, *Latino Mennonites: Civil Rights, Faith, and Evangelical Culture* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 12.

7 Rita Dhamoon, *Identity/Difference Politics: How Difference Is Produced, and Why It Matters* (Vancouver: UBC, 2010), 74. In her analysis of the processes of the racialized gendering in the colonial context of the nation building, political scientist Dhamoon points out that European Mennonites were one of the favored immigrant groups by the government to expand whiteness in Canada. See my other article in this issue, "Unsettling the Radical Witness of Peace."

8 HyeRan Kim-Cragg, "A Postcolonial Portrait of Migrants as Vulnerable and Resistant," *Practical Matters* 11 (Spring 2018): 3.

9 Kim-Cragg, 29–30.

thentic” versus “impure,” and “superior” versus “inferior.”¹⁰ Using this critique of binarism, Bhabha’s postcolonial resistance embraces the intermixing of identities and cultures.¹¹

Joining this postcolonialist conversation, Hinojosa contributes to the pluri-ethnic Mennonite voice in Mennonite academia by adding an explicit voice of *Meno-Latinos*. Rather than essentializing a Mennonite identity inherited from sixteenth-century Europe, he traces various factors—such as the struggle for racial justice, the farmworker movement, and evangelicals in twentieth-century North America—that helped shape a hybrid identity of “Meno-Latino/a.”¹² This historical description of various influences opens up the possibility of understanding contemporary identities of both European and racially minoritized Mennonites in a religiously and culturally hybridized way.

In a Mennonite context, non-European Mennonites often feel confusion about their identity—not because of their religious conviction but because of their cultural differences from the normalized and centralized European Mennonite culture and identity.¹³ In a recent *Vision* article, for example, Chinese Canadian Mennonite Brian Quan writes about the confusion surrounding Chinese Canadian Mennonite identity, asking the question, “What does it mean for a church made up of Chinese Canadians to identify itself as Mennonite?”¹⁴ In order to recognize both his Chinese heritage and his Mennonite heritage, he interprets “peace” by connecting it to a Confucian concept of “harmony” in Chinese philosophy.¹⁵

Inspired by Quan’s cultural hermeneutics of peace and Hinojosa’s hybrid identity of *Meno-Latinos*, I claim that in North America, Mennonite identities and understandings of peace have been formed not only by European Mennonites’ experiences of persecution and conscious objection to wars but also

10 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Brantford, NY: Routledge, 2004), 37–38, 54–55.

11 Bhabha, 54–55.

12 Hinojosa, *Latino Mennonites*, 145, 175.

13 Kelly Bates Oglesby, “Ain’t I a Mennonite?,” *The Mennonite*, September 27, 2016, accessed July 15, 2020, <https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:16v5yS-gXr18J:https://themennonite.org/opinion/aint-i-a-mennonite/+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=-clnk&gl=us>. In the article, Oglesby, an African American Mennonite, shares ongoing questions about her Mennonite identity that were raised by her cultural difference from the dominant Mennonite culture, as well as her fear of creating new traditions unlike those of ethnic Mennonites.

14 Brian Quan, “The Global Church Lived Out in a Local Congregation: The Chinese Mennonite Church in Toronto” *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* 19, no. 2 (October 1, 2018): 11.

15 Quan, 12.

by Latino and Black Mennonites' objection to racial persecution and injustice against migrant farmers; Chinese Mennonites' longing for harmony; and Korean Mennonites' resistance to colonialism, and their longing for reconciliation in the divided peninsula.¹⁶

Epistemological Shift

Despite the increasing numbers of multiethnic Mennonites, the experiences of these Mennonites have only recently begun to get attention in Mennonite discourse and practice. Recent institutional changes of Mennonite leadership, for example, such as the hiring of an African American executive director¹⁷ and a Korean American denominational minister¹⁸ in Mennonite Church USA, show the beginnings of a structural change of interracial relations that stands in contrast to the struggles of the Minorities Ministry Council detailed in Hinojosa's book.

However, ethnic and cultural differences have still not been much reflected in the authorship of Mennonite scholarship. *Latino Mennonites* is one of only a few books about racial relations written by a nonwhite Mennonite scholar in North America. In this sense, Hinojosa's painstaking research—collecting scattered notes and interviews of Latinx and interracial experiences as Mennonite academic sources—challenges the epistemological domination of European voices in Mennonite academia.

Producing such knowledge is an important role of scholarship, and that knowledge cannot be separated from power.¹⁹ Power shapes whose knowledge is treated as authentic, credible, and universal and whose is considered syncretic, heretical, and subjugated. Throughout our history, Mennonites have understood this—how hegemonic religious discourse has legitimated the persecution of some, marginalizing their knowledge as heretical rather than different.

16 Mennonite Church USA, "Join the North and South Korea Day of Prayer on May 20," April 30, 2018, accessed July 15, 2020, <http://mennoniteusa.org/news/join-the-north-and-south-korea-day-of-prayer-on-may-20/>.

17 Mennonite Church USA, "Glen Guyton Called to Serve as Next Executive Director of Mennonite Church USA," February 9, 2018, accessed July 15, 2020, <http://mennoniteusa.org/news/glen-guyton-called-serve-next-executive-director-mennonite-church-usa/>.

18 Mennonite Church USA. "Executive Board Staff Transitions: Sue Park-Hur Begins as Denominational Minister," March 20, 2018, accessed July 15, 2020, <http://mennoniteusa.org/news/executive-board-staff-transitions-sue-park-hur-begins-as-denominational-minister/>.

19 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1977), 184.

We might ask whose knowledge and identity today have been understood to be authentic and credible Mennonite knowledge and identity and whose has not. According to Bhabha, however, “Authenticity . . . do[es] not guarantee anything, it seems.”²⁰ Instead, a postcolonial imagination calls for an interstitial creativity between the binary poles of center and periphery. In the in-between space, antagonistic and different meanings conjoin, producing new knowledge through ongoing interactions.²¹

I hope Mennonite scholarship in the twenty-first century will pay attention to the creative potential of ongoing intercultural hybridization among multiethnic Mennonite identities and cultures in epistemological mutuality. Considering a globalizing context, the epistemological shift from a Eurocentric view toward racially and culturally polycentric and hybrid views may not seem optional. In any case, it is necessary. Given the asymmetric epistemological power balance status quo, postcolonialists endorsing epistemological mutuality need to start questioning the dominant discourse mostly occupied by European male perspectives. Power/knowledge operates intersectionally on multiple axes of factors such as gender, class, race, disability, sexuality, and so on, so the discourse—constructed through our repeated citations—together with affirming and critical comments on certain knowledges, shapes our social reality in churches and society.²²

For this reason, I appreciate Hinojosa’s painstaking work. Having grown up in South Korea, I chose to become a Mennonite ten years ago while living in Los Angeles, and I continue to be a Mennonite now that I live in Toronto. Personally, this scholarly work on Mennonite history and theology allows me to breathe in Mennonite academia and encourages me to be myself—as a Korean, a migrant, a woman, and a Mennonite.

To wrap up my response at this “Migration, Borders, and Belonging” gathering, I hope that the more we are open to crossing borders in our knowledge, the more people will find a place of belonging in our scholarship in this migration era.

20 David Huddart, *Homi Bhabha* (London: Routledge, 2006), 43. Huddart writes this exact phrase in order to explain a transformative implication of Bhabha’s concept of mimicry.

21 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 54–55.

22 Dhamoon, *Identity/Difference Politics*, 91. Intersectionality provides a theoretical tool to name and analyze how asymmetric power functions to deepen violence when various historical and social factors intersect. In this view, there is no pure racism, sexism, and ableism because the multiple factors in power relations simultaneously constitute one another. See also Nancy J. Ramsay, “Intersectionality in Theological Education,” *Spotlight on Theological Education* (April 2015): 7–10.