
Unsettling the Radical Witness of Peace

A Decolonizing Investigation of Mennonite
Migration from Russia to Manitoba in the 1870s

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This paper argues for the necessity of decolonizing the Mennonite peace witness in a settler colonial context. Using the historical case of Russian Mennonite migration to Manitoba in the 1870s, I demonstrate how the Mennonite peace witness has been complicated through migration to a settler colonial context.

When a large number of Russian Mennonites migrated to Manitoba in the 1870s to avoid perpetuating violence through military service, the change in social context in which they had previously interpreted violence added unforeseen factors to their attempt to avoid participating in further violence. In the midst of their commitment to peace, the group's immigration for the sake of radical witness ironically led them to become complicit in another form of violence toward Indigenous and nonwhite populations in Canada. European Mennonites not only became direct beneficiaries of the lands gained through unjust treaties but also experienced a sociopolitical shift from a religious minority to a racially privileged group, as white, through the racializing colonial process of nation-building. Their lack of attention to colonial violence consequently led Mennonites to become complicit in the construction and perpetuation of structural violence in Canada. Thus, I argue that peace witness in a settler colonial context requires a reinvestigation of the discourse and practice of peace, taking into account colonialism, upon which structural violence against Indigenous and racialized peoples has been built.

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Background

In the fall of 2015, the *Canadian Mennonite* article “These Records Are Unique” reported that a “significant historical artifact for Mennonites” had been found in the basement of the office of the Christian Mennonite Conference.¹ The important artifact was the *Privilegium*, written on July 24, 1873—an original letter of invitation from the Dominion of Canada to the Mennonites in Russia (present-day Ukraine) and legal agreement between the Mennonites and the Canadian government.² The *Privilegium* details Canada’s guarantee to provide the Russian Mennonites with land, religious freedom, exemption from conscription, and freedom of education for their children.³ As the article states,

The Dominion of Canada was looking for *hardworking European farmers to settle* its newest province, Manitoba, which the government had *recently cleared of its indigenous inhabitants*. Between 1874 and 1880, 17,000 Mennonites left Russia. Seven thousand of them came to Manitoba. Most made the voyage in small family groupings, but one colony moved in its entirety.⁴
[Italics added]

The article speaks of Mennonites’ excitement over the discovery of this historical document detailing their ancestors’ early immigration to Canada. What seems ironic is that while highlighting the early Mennonite immigrants’ strong commitment to nonresistance against violence, the author is silent about the haunting settler colonial context behind words such as “hardworking European farmers to settle,” “newest,” and “recently cleared of its indigenous inhabitants.”⁵ This raises the question: What is required to witness to peace in a settler colonial context?

In this paper, when I investigate the historical case of Russian Mennonite migration to Manitoba in the 1870s, I am also investigating the historical back-

1 Manitoba Correspondent, “These Records Are Unique,” *Canadian Mennonite* 19, no. 3 (November 18, 2015), <https://canadianmennonite.org/stories/%E2%80%98these-records-are-unique%E2%80%99>. Thanks to Tim Reimer for introducing me to this article and sharing his critical insight. The conversation with him motivated me to write this paper. Also, thanks to Jordan Balint and anonymous reviewers for reviewing this paper and providing helpful comments.

2 Erin Koop Unger, “This Lost Document Explains Why I’m Here (Probably You, Too),” *Mennotoba*, November 29, 2017, accessed May 01, 2019, <https://www.mennotoba.com/lost-document-explains-im/>. Unger reports that the 1873 *Privilegium* is kept in Mennonite Heritage Archives.

3 Manitoba Correspondent, “These Records Are Unique.”

4 Manitoba Correspondent, “These Records Are Unique.”

5 Mennonite pastor Tim Reimer initially raised a critical question about a colonial implication of the phrase “recently cleared of its indigenous inhabitants.”

ground of the *Privilegium*. In doing so, I demonstrate how the European Mennonite peace witness through migration is complicated when settler colonialism is foregrounded.

Settler Colonialism as Structural Violence

Canada is a settler colonial society. According to Walter L. Hixson, “Settler colonialism refers to a history in which settlers drove indigenous populations from the land in order to construct their own ethnic and religious national communities.” And Canada, he says, is an example of this.⁶ Unlike “conventional” colonialism, in which the colonizers come to colonies to exploit Indigenous people and resources, in settler colonialism colonizers also come to reside permanently in Indigenous lands.⁷ Regarding such colonialism, James Belich argues, “It was settlement, not empire that had the spread and staying power in the history of European expansion.”⁸

Settlers construct their own national identities and societies through a long period of migration and domination, displacing the Indigenous people and culture.⁹ According to *Strength for Climbing*, a booklet aimed to help non-Indigenous people participate in steps toward truth and reconciliation with Indigenous people, “settler,” for some, is “a political term that describes the newcomer’s relationship to colonialism, and signifies that colonial settlement has never ceased.”¹⁰ To speak more specifically to the Canadian context, in her book *Exalted Subjects*, Sunera Thobani examines how Canadian national subjects have been constituted and Indigenous sovereignty has institutionally been subjugated and erased through legislation and policy-making based on racial violence for the sake of the colonial process.¹¹ She shows that “colonial sovereignty relies on very ‘particular’ kinds of violence: the founding violence of conquest;

6 Walter L. Hixson, *American Settler Colonialism: A History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 4.

7 James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo World, 1783–1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 23. Hixson, *American Settler Colonialism*, 5.

8 Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, 23.

9 Hixson, *American Settler Colonialism*, 4–5.

10 Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives and Mennonite Church Canada, *Strength for Climbing: Steps on the Journey of Reconciliation* (Toronto: KAIROS, 2015), 2 and 23. *Strength for Climbing* was published by KAIROS CANADA, an ecumenical organization advocating for ecological justice and human rights across Canada. The booklet acknowledges that the “resource is an adaptation of *Paths for Peacemaking with Host Peoples* (third edition), written by Steve Heinrichs, published by Mennonite Church Canada.”

11 Sunera Thobani, *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and National in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 61.

the legitimating violence of transforming conquest into moral authority; and the ordinary and banal violence necessary for the maintenance of colonial sovereignty.”¹² Once the colonial structure is legitimated, everyday forms of violence against the colonized people are tolerated. For example, Statistics Canada reports that the rate of homicide for Indigenous people in 2018 was “five times higher than the rate for non-Indigenous people.”¹³

Johann Galtung’s account of direct and indirect violence may help us clarify our understanding of structural violence. In his article “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research,” Galtung explains the characteristics of (1) direct violence, such as killing or physically harming someone and (2) indirect violence, such as structural violence. With direct violence, the consequences of the violence can be referred back to specific actors. With structural violence, the actors harming others are not visible because “the violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life changes.”¹⁴ By producing unequal power and opportunities through unequal distribution of resources and vice versa, structural violence results in persistent and systematic physical, economic, political, and psychological harm to victims, as the case of high rates of murdered Indigenous people attests.¹⁵ The more stable the society appears, the more structural violence is perceived “as natural as the air,” appearing to operate as “tranquil waters.” By contrast, direct violence shows “tremendous fluctuations over time.”

In other words, “a certain stability” is observed in structural violence, and thus it functions silently for those in the majority, as it has in Canada. Moreover, while direct violence is much more readily identifiable and can be measured through means such as death tolls in conflict and war, structural violence is constructed through sociopolitical interactions in a particular location over long processes of time.¹⁶

In the Canadian context, compounding issues of coloniality pertaining to “race,” structural violence has simultaneously been constructed through the othering of diverse subjects in various degrees on multiple and intersectional axes of power-related factors according to gender, class, ability, sexuality, re-

12 Thobani, *Exalted Subjects*, 38.

13 Joel Roy and Sharon Marcellus, “Homicide in Canada, 2018,” Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, November 27, 2019, accessed September 11, 2020, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2019001/article/00016-eng.htm>.

14 Johan Galtung, “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research,” *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969): 170–71.

15 Roy and Marcellus, “Homicide in Canada, 2018.”

16 Galtung, “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research,” 173.

ligion, and so on.¹⁷ While acknowledging these intersectional factors, I have chosen to focus particularly on racial violence and its relation to colonialism in this article.

Although early European Mennonites did not commit violence like murder or harm Indigenous people in a directly physical manner, they were complicit with structural violence under Canada's settler colonial project, from foundation to expansion and maintenance of "its" territory. And settler colonialism is not an unfortunate past event but a persistent structure that continues to shape the reality in which Indigenous peoples are harmed, exploited, and eliminated.¹⁸ As a settler group, Mennonites in North America continue to benefit from the structure constructed under colonial influence.

Personally, as a Korean migrant Mennonite residing in Canada who grew up experiencing the pain from the colonial aftermath in the Korean Peninsula, I am ambivalent about my relation to colonialism in North America. I resist the Eurocentric colonial norms that racialize and minoritize me, but I also have benefited from my residence in Turtle Island¹⁹ as well as from the early European Mennonite settlement and their continuous privilege in the society built upon the colonial legacy. In this sense, I acknowledge my own complicity in colonialism. Acknowledging such complicity calls Mennonites to take responsibility for our involvement in colonial violence.

In order to seek peace witness against such violence in a settler colonial context, it is necessary to analyze how structural violence has been and continues to be perpetuated through the deep-rooted colonial influence in Canada—an influence that stems from the country's original construction under colonial force. In the following sections, using the case of Russian Mennonite migration to Manitoba in the 1870s, I will demonstrate how peace witness can become complicit in other forms of violence when settler colonialism as structural violence is not considered.

The Radical Peace Witness through Migration from Russia to Manitoba

In this section, I delve into the historical background of the Russian Mennonite migration in the 1870s in order to understand how the dominant Mennonite

17 Rita Dhamoon, *Identity/Difference Politics: How Difference Is Produced, and Why It Matters* (Vancouver: UBC, 2010), 91.

18 Maile Arvin et al., "Decolonizing Feminism: Challenging Connections between Settler Colonialism and Heteropatriarchy," *Feminist Formations* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 8–34.

19 Turtle Island is the name that many Indigenous people call the continent of North America.

pacifist position influenced their decision to migrate to Canada. In addition, I examine the importance of nonresistant faith to early Mennonite immigrants in Canada before the Russian Mennonite migration.

In *Mennonites in Canada: 1786–1920*, historian Frank H. Epp describes how thousands of Mennonites migrated from Russia to Canada in the 1800s to seek “the special kind of liberty”—freedom from use of force in the military.²⁰ The Russian Mennonite migration in the 1870s was part of this major movement. Conflict with the Russian government about the use of the Russian language and military service were key influencers in their move.²¹ The Tsar had decided to no longer exempt Mennonites from conscription, instead requiring universal military service as Russia faced German imperial growth:

He [Tsar Alexander II] announced his plans on July 16, 1870, implying at the same time that nonconformists would, within a 10-year period, be allowed to emigrate if they could not in good conscience submit to conscription. Thus, the Mennonites were being confronted with fundamental decisions.²²

This change in conscription conditions was the decisive factor for migration and resulted in Mennonites strongly prioritizing full exemption from conscription in their deliberations regarding a new place to live. Whenever official representatives were sent to other countries to assess their suitability as a new homeland, the most significant part of the discernment was determining whether military service was required.²³ Canada and the United States—both looking for skilled European farmers for their newly settled lands—and Russia, which did not want to lose its “best agriculturalists” in the end, competed for the Mennonites.²⁴ According to James Urry, the Russian Mennonites regarded the United States as a risky choice because their religious rights would receive little protection there in comparison to Canada, who assured the Mennonites both lands and privileges previously accorded to them in Russia, including military exemption and permission to operate their own religious schools in German, their own language.²⁵

Concurring with Urry, Epp notes that Canada consequently became the first choice for these Mennonites because Canada guaranteed benefits for pro-

20 Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada: 1786–1920*, vol. 1 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1979), 94.

21 Epp, 183–85.

22 Epp, 177.

23 Epp, 186.

24 Epp, 184–85.

25 James Urry, *Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood: Europe-Russia-Canada, 1525–1980* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2006), 162.

ficient farmers, such as complete exemption from military obligation and “a free grant of 160 acres of the best land in the possession of the Dominion of the Province of Manitoba, or in other parts of the Northwest Territory . . . to persons over the age of 21 years.”²⁶ This shows that the Mennonites’ strong commitment to faith against violence in military engagement was the primary reason why seven thousand Mennonites migrated from Russia to Manitoba between 1874 and 1880.²⁷

Before this migration, military exemption had already been one of the major issues for early Mennonite immigrants to Canada. In a chapter titled “The Non-resistors and the Militia,” Epp describes in detail how important it was to Mennonite immigrants to Canada to keep a clear religious position on nonresistance as the fundamental faith commitment of Anabaptists.²⁸ Their conviction of pacifism was founded on the article in their 1527 Schleithem Confession that “identified weapons of force, such as sword, armor and the like, as un-Christian.”²⁹ They also quoted Menno Simons, who wrote, “The regenerated do not go to war, nor engage in strife. They are the children of peace who have beaten their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, and know of no war.”³⁰

As Epp explains, the Mennonite pacifist position rejecting violence, which began in the sixteenth century in the Netherlands and Switzerland, provided the fundamental conviction for the early Mennonite immigrants’ move to Canada. Their strong commitment to pacifist conscience is further supported by their 1811 printing of the Dordrecht Confession, the very first document they printed in Upper Canada. Since the Dordrecht Confession’s adoption by Dutch Mennonites in 1632, it had been one of “the chief instruments of the perpetuation of the pacifist conscience and the doctrine of nonresistance,”³¹ and it now served to make the Mennonite immigrants’ pacifist convictions clear.

At the beginning of their lives in Canada, the early Mennonite immigrants were not free to openly practice their belief in rejecting military engagement.³² However, this tension was lessened with the enactment of the Militia Act of Upper Canada 1793 under the influence of changed laws in England and Amer-

26 Urry, 186.

27 Manitoba Correspondent, “These Records Are Unique.”

28 Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 94.

29 Epp, 94.

30 Epp, 94. Epp’s quotes are originally from John Horsch’s article, “A Historical Survey of the Position of the Mennonite Church on Nonresistance,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 1, no. 3 (July 1927): 10.

31 Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 94–95. The Dordrecht Confession was printed in English at Niagara-on-the-Lake by the Mennonite immigrants to Upper Canada.

32 Epp, 93.

ica as well as Quakers' claim to religious freedom, another group that adhered to nonconformist Christian faith.³³ After the passing of the Militia Act, Mennonites were exempt from military service, and the mass of Mennonites from Russia in the 1870s inherited this benefit. The nonresistant faith passed down from Anabaptists who had rejected the use of force in sixteenth-century Europe was evidently still important to these early Mennonite immigrants in Canada.

In modern Mennonite history and theology in North America, nonresistance has been recognized as the crucial aspect of the early Mennonite faith and the root of their peace tradition. In his representative work *Peace, War, and Nonresistance* (1944), Guy H. Hershberger systematized nonresistance as the classic position of the Mennonite view of peace regarding conscription and warfare.³⁴ Theron F. Schlabach evaluates the major contribution of Hershberger's work as "offer[ing] a platform of biblical pacifism," noting that his work has often been regarded as "the definitive statement of Mennonites' pacifist thought" by many authors in the field of pacifism.³⁵ In connecting Mennonite nonresistance with peace, Epp cites Menno Simons's phrase "the child of peace" as he identifies Mennonites' rejection to military involvement in Russia as the primary reason for their migration to Canada in the 1870s.³⁶

In a more recent historical work—*Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood: Europe, Russia, Canada, 1525–1980* (2006)—Urry describes Mennonite nonresistance as a "stance that rejected all forms of violence."³⁷ These modern historical and theological descriptions demonstrate that nonresistance has been acknowledged as the fundamental ground of the Mennonite peace tradition, although Mennonite understandings of violence and peace have changed and diversified in response to various social contexts such as the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, and the second wave of feminism.³⁸ Despite the importance of non-

33 Epp, 94–95 and 97.

34 Guy Franklin Hershberger, *War, Peace, and Nonresistance* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1946).

35 Theron F. Schlabach, "Guy F. Hershberger's War, Peace, and Nonresistance (1944): Background, Genesis, Message," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 80, Issue 3 (July 2006): 294, 296.

36 Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 94.

37 Urry, *Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood*, 256.

38 The following sources demonstrate that Mennonite understandings of peace have been transformed and diversified over time in North America: Ervin Stutzman, *From Nonresistance to Justice: The Transformation of Mennonite Church Peace Rhetoric, 1908–2008* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 2011); Gayle Gerber Koontz, "Peace Theology in Transition: North American Mennonite Peace Studies and Theology," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 81, no. 1 (January 2007); Leo Driedger and Donald B. Kraybill, *Mennonite Peacemaking: From Quietism to Activism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1994); John Richard Burkholder and

resistance in the Mennonite peace tradition, it is necessary to recognize the complexity of the radical nonresistant practice of “peace-loving” Mennonites when taking a settler colonial context into account.³⁹

Unsettling the Radical Peace Witness in a Settler Colonial Context

In this section, by conducting a historical and social analysis in the context of Canadian nation-building, I demonstrate how Mennonites became complicit in colonial violence toward Indigenous and nonwhite people through the racializing colonial process. Then I argue that through European Mennonites’ migration to a settler colonial context, their social position shifted from that of a religious and ethnic minority to a religiously and racially privileged group as white Christians. Russian Mennonite immigrants became direct beneficiaries of Canada’s colonial project insofar as they became the new landlords in lands gained through unjust treaties and other acts of violence, and gained social power over time along with other preferred European immigrants.

Colonial Complicity through the Settlement

When seven thousand Mennonites migrated to Manitoba between 1874 and 1880, the region had newly become the fifth province of the dominion of Canada and had been “recently cleared of its indigenous inhabitants,”⁴⁰ implying that Indigenous sovereignty in the territory had been weakened by Canada. This happened through treaties following the Manitoba Act of 1870. According to Louis A. Knafla, “relatively symbiotic relations” and “peaceful coexistence” between Indigenous peoples and settlers had begun to change to domination of the Indigenous peoples by European settlers through the Confederation treaties in Canada.⁴¹ The Manitoba Act of 1870 was one instance where the sovereignty of the Métis and other Indigenous nations was significantly reduced in terms of their land ownership.

In the late 1860s, John A. McDonald, Canada’s first prime minister, had a vision of making the country a bicoastal nation comparable to the United States.⁴² As a part of the plan, the dominion of Canada purchased Rupert’s

Barbara Nelson Gingerich, eds., *Mennonite Peace Theology: A Panorama of Types* (Akron, PA: Mennonite Central Committee Peace Office, 1991).

39 Urry, *Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood*, 10.

40 Manitoba Correspondent, “These Records Are Unique.”

41 Louis A. Knafla and Haijo Westra, eds., *Aboriginal Title and Indigenous Peoples: Canada, Australia, and New Zealand* (Vancouver: UBC, 2010), 5.

42 According to Richard J. Gwyn, John A. Macdonald “was determined” to make Canada “a sea-to-sea nation” by “adding the North-West and then British Columbia to

Land—present-day Manitoba—from the Hudson Bay Company, without consent from Métis and other Indigenous groups residing in the territory.⁴³ Because this transaction could threaten Indigenous peoples' way of life—by negatively impacting hunting, for example—resistance arose from the Métis group, leading to the First Riel Resistance in 1869. Following the resistance, the Manitoba Act of 1870 and consecutive numbered treaties were negotiated between Indigenous peoples and the dominion of Canada until 1921.⁴⁴

Because the traditional Indigenous economy was already declining under the influence of European settlement, the Prairie Indigenous peoples were more vulnerable to governmental negotiations than those of the Encounter era had been.⁴⁵ The treaties were ostensibly aimed at the protection of Indigenous peoples' rights and thus were accepted by Indigenous people at that time. However, because the Indigenous understandings of law, finance, and land were different from European settlers, many Indigenous treaty signers were unaware that “title to their lands was being expropriated” in “narrow terms, with much that was said left unwritten” through the treaties.⁴⁶ Moreover, not all Indigenous people were included in the treaty negotiations.⁴⁷

In fact, during the treaty period, Canadian political leaders explicitly expressed that the presence of Indigenous peoples had been a hindrance to the Canadian government, calling it the “Indian problem.” In the 2014 Sir John A. MacDonald Prize-winning study *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation and the Loss of Aboriginal Life*, James W. Daschuk reveals that MacDonald and the Canadian government, in order to save the government funds, deliberately abandoned Indigenous people who faced widespread disease and starvation caused by the rapid decline of the buffalo population in the late 1870s.⁴⁸

it as quickly as possible.” Gwyn states that the pressure from the Métis Group caused “the trouble” with McDonald’s plans for the North-West. See Richard J. Gwyn, *Nation Maker: Sir John A. MacDonald: His Life, Our Times* (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2011), 98.

43 Donald Swainson, *Sir John A. Macdonald: The Man and the Politician* (Kingston, ON: Quarry, 1989), 85–86.

44 Knafla and Westra, *Aboriginal Title and Indigenous Peoples*, 5.

45 Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC, 2010), 158.

46 Regan, 90; Knafla and Westra, *Aboriginal Title and Indigenous Peoples*, 5–6.

47 Regan (*Unsettling the Settler Within*, 146) notes that Cree Chief Mistahimaskwa (Big Bear), who wanted to keep his people’s traditional ways, was excluded from the Treaty 6 negotiations.

48 James W. Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Indigenous Life*, electronic resource (Regina, SK: University of Regina Press, 2019), 99–101.

Daschuk argues that this was “the moral and legal failure of the crown’s treaty commitment” to the clause that Canada should provide Indigenous people with relief in case of “national famine.”⁴⁹ Furthermore, Indian Affairs Deputy Minister Duncan Campbell Scott expressed in a report to a parliamentary committee in 1920 his desire to eradicate the Indian problem, saying, “Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian department.”⁵⁰

Given this history of Indigenous oppression, Paulette Regan, director of research with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada, challenges “the peacemaker myth”—the pervasive belief that Canada, unlike the United States with its more violent domination, has maintained relatively peaceful relationships with Indigenous people through treaties and “well-intentioned (if ultimately misguided) policies designed to solve the Indian problem by civilizing and saving people seen as savages.”⁵¹ Tracing history from treaty-making to the recent discourse of reconciliation, Regan criticizes the discourse of “settlers as peacemakers” produced from the settlers’ perspectives,⁵² calling us to divert our attention from “Indian problem” to “settler problem.”⁵³

Under Canada’s treaties and controlling policies, Indigenous communities have been displaced from their long-dwelling lands and their social status has noticeably been subjugated. Two years ago, in the midst of this reality, Canada celebrated the 150th anniversary of its birth.⁵⁴ As Lorenzo Veracini points out, given that a characteristic of settler colonialism is to make Indigenous people

49 Daschuk, 101.

50 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *What We Have Learned: Principles of Truth and Reconciliation* (Ottawa: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), 25. The quote is originally from Library and Archives Canada, RG10, volume 6810, file 470-2-3, volume 7, Evidence of D. C. Scott to the Special Committee of the House of Commons Investigating the Indian Act amendments of 1920, (L-2)(N-3).

51 Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 14.

52 Regan, 83–110.

53 Regan, 11.

54 In 2018, Canada held a nation-wide “Canada 150” celebration. In response, there was also a counter narrative, such as #Resistance150, to remember colonial history and recognize Indigenous peoples’ longer history in the continent. See Ashifa Kassam, “Canada Celebrates 150 but Indigenous Groups Say History Is Being ‘Skated Over,’” *The Guardian*, June 27, 2017, accessed September 18, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/27/canada-150th-anniversary-celebration-indigenous-groups>.

refugees,⁵⁵ Canada's settler colonialism cannot easily be justified by its "relatively moderate" colonial practices from a Eurocentric perspective.

The *Canadian Mennonite* interpreted the *Privilegium of 1873* to say, "The dominion of Canada was looking for hardworking European farmers to settle its newest province, Manitoba,"⁵⁶ to replace the Indigenous population evacuated from the territory after the Manitoba Act of 1870. Mennonites, along with other European agriculturalists, were prime immigration candidates, desired by both Canadian and American governments.⁵⁷ In the end, the Mennonites' faith commitment against violence was ensured through Canada's military service exemption along with the country's guarantee of land.

The great irony of this fulfilled radical commitment is that it came at the expense and pain of Indigenous people through the violence of land deprivation. Mennonite poet Di Brandt expresses her anguish in encountering the harsh truth of the history of the land where she had grown up.⁵⁸

It is impossible for me to write the land. This land that I love, this wide, wide prairie, this horizon, this sky, this great blue overhead, big enough to contain every dream, every longing. . . . How I loved you, how I love you, how you keep me alive. This stolen land, Metis land, Cree land, buffalo land. When did I first understand this, the dark underside of property, colonization, ownership, the shady dealings that brought us [Mennonites] here, to this earthly paradise?⁵⁹

As Brandt states, the Mennonites who sought to witness against engaging in violence consequently settled on the "newest province" of Canada, which had been unjustly taken from Indigenous people. Recognition of this complicity in colonial violence complicates the Mennonite radical peace witness.

55 Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Basingstoke, England: Springer, 2010), 35.

56 Manitoba Correspondent, "These Records Are Unique."

57 Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 185.

58 Steve Heinrichs, ed., *Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry: Conversations on Creation, Land Justice, and Life Together* (Winnipeg, MB: Mennonite Church Canada, 2013), 76.

59 Heinrichs, 76. Neil Funk-Unrau, a Mennonite scholar working for restorative justice between Indigenous people and settlers, quotes Mennonite poet Di Brandt. See Di Brandt, *So This Is the World & Here I Am in It* (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 2007), 1–2.

Colonial Complicity in the Normalization of Whiteness

“Whiteness” does not hold its intrinsic meaning without the context to which it applies, and its meaning is constructed through particular historical, social, political, and cultural processes such as European colonization and slavery.⁶⁰ The Eurocentric racializing process of Canada’s formation and growth expanded and privileged whiteness to build Canada as a white nation. Such structural violence continues to subjugate Indigenous and nonwhite people’s lives in contemporary Canada. Within the broader context of settlement, European Mennonites as white settlers have been involved in this normalizing of whiteness through the racializing colonial nation-building process.

Political scientist Rita K. Dhamoon names this reality in her book *Identity/Difference Politics*, including Mennonites as one of the favored European immigrant groups who expanded whiteness in Canada:

An account of the conditions under which whiteness is produced and transformed reveals that the authority of the two settler groups has been expanded to include immigrants who most easily fit into a racialized Euro-liberal representation of Canada. This expansion historically includes the Scots, Irish, Americans, Germans, Scandinavians, Belgians, *Mennonites* [italics added], and Icelandic people. The hierarchy that privileged (and continues to privilege) Euro-liberal values and whiteness therefore explicitly favoured (and continues to favour) specific groups, groups that have adapted and been reconstituted through processes of white Euro-Canadianization. The English (and the French) therefore created an imagined community, one that hinged on the notion of a white man’s country and the erasure of indigeneity.⁶¹

The process of nation-building through immigration overtly and exclusively favored people who were racially represented as white, which, in turn, resulted in the production of various degrees of “otherness” for nonwhite people.⁶² In other words, the privilege of one group is inevitably operationalized through the penalty of the other in the same system.⁶³

This othering process has been constructed through many colonial disciplines of legitimized control imposed upon Indigenous bodies, such as the formation of the reserve system, the administration of the residential school

60 Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 6. Read Tobin Miller Shearer’s article to see a discussion of white racial formation in a contemporary Mennonite context: Tobin Miller Shearer, “Conflicting Identities: White Racial Formation among Mennonites, 1960–1985,” *Identities* 19, no. 3 (May 1, 2012): 268–84.

61 Dhamoon, *Identity/Difference Politics*, 74.

62 Himani Bannerji, *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Gender* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars, 2010), 76.

63 Dhamoon, *Identity/Difference Politics*, 74.

system, and the exclusion of citizenship and voting rights.⁶⁴ Mennonites were involved in this process by running the residential schools, which were mostly operated by white Christian groups.⁶⁵ The Canadian state still practices colonialism through continuous refusal of Indigenous sovereignty, genocide of Indigenous cultures, denial of this colonial history, and refusal to honor treaties and land claims.⁶⁶ These colonial practices have generated a racialized Indigenous “victimized collective identity” rather than autonomous Indigenous identities founded on nationhood. This totalizing category has constructed “representations of indigeneity” as Other in the dominant discourses in Canada.⁶⁷

The heterogeneity of Indigenous and white peoples has added further layers of complexity that extend beyond the binary dynamic of Indigenous peoples and white immigrants. Himani Bannerji notes, for instance, the particularity of ethnicities within European immigrants, such as the power differentials between British immigrants and Ukrainian immigrants. Nevertheless, she argues that the different ethnicities of European immigrants have been incorporated into whiteness through an “Anglo-Euro ethos” as the ethnicities have been replaced with “general Englishness.”⁶⁸ According to Emma Batell Lowman and Adam J. Baker, despite the various degrees of heterogeneity among settler groups, their common identity as settler is based on particular and common processes and “practices of settler colonialism” in Canada.⁶⁹

Lowman and Baker note a high level of heterogeneity culturally, geographically, and historically among Indigenous nations and peoples as well. Nevertheless, because of settler colonialism, Indigenous identity often centers on “the experience of struggling to live an ‘oppositional, place-based existence’” and can generate “a critical mass” collectively to challenge “contemporary nation states.”⁷⁰ As for Indigenous and nonwhite immigrant relations, racialized immigrants are often viewed as allies for solidarity against racism and white suprema-

64 Dhamoon, 125.

65 Melanie Kampen researched Indian Residential Schools in Canada that were run by Mennonite missionaries from the United States and supported by Mennonite churches in Canada. She mentions that the Residential Schools were also operated and taught by Mennonite conscientious objectors as alternative service. See Melanie Kampen, “The Spectre of Reconciliation: Investigating Mennonite Theology, Martyrdom, and Trauma” (PhD diss., Emmanuel College and the University of Toronto, 2019), 1.

66 Dhamoon, 125.

67 Dhamoon, 126.

68 Bannerji, *The Dark Side of the Nation*, 113.

69 Emma Battell Lowman and Adam J. Barker, *Settler: Identity and Colonialism in 21st Century Canada* (Halifax: Fernwood, 2015), 14–15.

70 Lowman and Barker, 14.

cy,⁷¹ while some nonwhite immigrants can also be understood as brown settlers when claiming their legal and cultural entitlement in stolen Indigenous lands.⁷²

Despite these complicated relations, what I want to point out here—by paying attention to the relation of Indigenous peoples and white settlers, including the early Mennonite immigrants—is this: the racializing mechanisms of social control that privilege whiteness while othering and thereby diminishing Indigenous and nonwhite people is structural violence constructed through colonialism. This structure of Canadian law, institutions, and governance continues to produce indirect and direct violence against Indigenous and racialized women and men. Indigenous women's bodies have been disciplined in particular ways through colonial laws like the Indian Act, implemented in 1876 and 1884.⁷³ Indigenous women's legal status, and thus their sociopolitical and economic rights, were controlled according to their marriage status with Indigenous or non-Indigenous men. Even after the Indian Act was changed in 1985, this colonial law continues to discipline Indigenous bodies while gaining legitimacy from the law in the name of protecting them.⁷⁴

Also, discriminating discourses constructed by the colonial and legal disciplines still exert power over the reality of Indigenous people. For instance, Colten Boushie, a twenty-two-year-old Cree man of the Red Pheasant First Nation, was shot by Gerald Stanley, a white Saskatchewan farmer, in August 2016. Yet

71 In "Salmon and Carp, Bannock and Rice," Greer Anne Wenh-In Ng points out the complex relationship between Asian Canadian women and Aboriginal women. As visible minority groups in Canada, Aboriginal and Asian and Asian Canadian women share potential for solidarity. However, Asian and Asian Canadian women are also regarded as "oppressors" who "have benefited on a par to those of white Europeans." See Greer Anne Wenh-In Ng, ed., "Salmon and Carp, Bannock and Rice: Solidarity between Asian Canadian Women and Aboriginal Women," in *Off the Menu: Asian and Asian North American Women's Religion and Theology*, ed. Rita Nakashima Brock (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 204.

72 In "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang argue that although minority literature of people of color "offers a strong critique of the myth of the democratic nation-state," its option is "to become a brown settler" in a "settler nation" at best, ultimately seeking "an investment in settler colonialism." However, considering all nonwhite people as settlers excludes the history of slavery that black people experienced. In "Slavery Is a Metaphor," Tapji Garba and Sara-Maria Sorentino critique Tuck and Yang's reduction of slavery to "forced labour" to claim "a settler-native dyad." See Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 18; and Tapji Garba and Sara-Maria Sorentino, "Slavery Is a Metaphor: A Critical Commentary on Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's 'Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,'" *Antipode* vol. 52, no. 3 (March 17, 2020).

73 Dhamoon, *Identity/Difference Politics*, 127.

74 Dhamoon, 127.

Stanley, who was accused of the second-degree murder, was finally acquitted by a Saskatchewan jury.⁷⁵ Although the death of the young Indigenous man sparked outraged marches and vigils across Canada, such a racially discriminatory verdict continues to consolidate the colonial structures that foster everyday violence against Indigenous people.⁷⁶ This indicates that the colonial legal discipline is a form of structural violence that harmfully imposes a signification as the “should-be-or-can-be-erased others.” Indigenous peoples are regarded as bodies out of place in a society asymmetrically structured by the white norm, a key axis of power in Canada.⁷⁷

Through migration to the settler colonial context of Canada, Mennonites practiced the radical witness to avoid the direct violence of harming people physically in military service, but their very migration and settlement led to their participation in structural violence built through the racializing colonial process against Indigenous and nonwhite peoples. Furthermore, through colonial complicity, European Mennonites become a racially and religiously privileged group as white Christians.

Toward Peace Witness in a Settler Colonial Context

The historical and social analysis of the case of the Russian Mennonite migration suggests the necessity of recognizing contextual factors in understanding and practicing violence and peace. The violence that the early European Mennonite immigrants to Canada were concerned with, for instance, can be traced back to their conviction of nonresistance as a pacifist faith, primarily constructed in a European context.⁷⁸ Without an understanding of the context in which violence occurs, even radical peace witness can lead to complicity in other forms of violence. This contradiction is explained not only by a limited understanding of peace as nonresistance but also by a lack of attention to violence deeply embedded in a settler colonial context. Even in relatively recent historical descriptions of the Russian Mennonite migration such as Urry’s *Mennonites, Politics*,

75 Sarah Rieger, “‘We’re Not Disposable’: Hundreds March to Reconciliation Bridge Demanding Justice for Colten Boushie,” CBC, February 12, 2018, accessed September 16, 2020, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/colton-boushie-rally-calgary-1.4531101>.

76 “‘Shame on Canada’: Vigils Being Held in N.S. over Verdict in Colten Boushie Case,” CBC, February 11, 2018, accessed September 18, 2020, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/colten-boushie-vigil-1.4530234>.

77 Dhamoon, *Identity/Difference Politics*, 126–27.

78 The violence that the early Mennonite immigrants in Canada attempted to avoid is traced back to sixteenth-century Europe. From the beginning, Mennonite views of peace were contextually developed as responses to violence in the given context. For more details, see C. Arnold Snyder’s *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora, 1995).

and *Peoplehood* (2006) and the article ‘These Records Are Unique’ in *Canadian Mennonite* (2015), there is little attention to its relation to settler colonialism in Canada.⁷⁹

As I demonstrate the necessity of paying attention to colonial influence, I argue that peace witness in a settler colonial context requires a critical investigation of Mennonite peace theology and practice, explicitly considering structural and power-sensitive colonial violence. Given that the understanding and practice of violence and peace in Mennonite peace theology has predominantly been developed from white male perspectives, its relevance for a settler colonial context needs to be reconsidered.

In modern Mennonite theology, influential white male Mennonite scholars have taken on a minority position to claim their pacifist stance challenging Christendom theology without situating their privileged social location in North America. Emily Servant critiques Mennonite scholars such as John Howard Yoder and J. Denny Weaver, for instance, as having gentrified the margins by placing themselves as a religious minority in line with other marginalized groups—such as black, feminist, and womanist theologians—yet without actual experiences of suffering.⁸⁰ The result has been to displace the underprivileged and maintain the status quo.

To unmask who ultimately benefits from or is harmed by a theological discourse and practice of peace, the crucial question “By whom and for whom are violence and peace defined?” needs to be considered.⁸¹ For critical theological discourses, the question “Through whose eyes and whose experiences are texts interpreted?” has long been key in liberation and contextual theologies.⁸² In addressing multiple kinds of violence, this question challenges hegemonic discourses that have subjugated persons who are different from prevailing norms. It discloses power differentials deeply embedded in theological discourses situated in asymmetrical social structures, which often mask the voices

79 Urry, *Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood*; Manitoba Correspondent, “These Records Are Unique.”

80 Emily Ralph Servant, “The Gentrification of the Margins,” *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 92, no. 3 (2018): 404–5.

81 Feminist liberative ethicist Marilyn J. Legge emphasizes a critical question, “What is at stake and for whom?” as a theo-ethical method to uncover imbalanced power dynamics. See Marilyn J. Legge, “Necessary Considerations of Theo-Ethical Method” in *EMT 5912 Method in Theology and Ethics* (2016), Emmanuel College, University of Toronto, Toronto, ON, <https://www.tst.edu/resources/coursefiles/EMT5912HS%20Methods%20in%20Theology%20and%20Ethics%20Final%20Version%20Legge%2020181.pdf>.

82 Angela Pears, *Doing Contextual Theology* (London: Routledge, 2010). In this book, Pears introduces Latin, Black, Feminist, Queer, and Postcolonial theologies as contextual theology.

of the oppressed by universalizing the voice of the dominant and privileged. For an example of the power of these questions for theological discourse, take Samuel J. Steiner's *In Search of Promised Lands* about histories of Mennonite and Amish migration to Ontario. Steiner's use of the metaphor "promised lands" can be challenged by Native American scholar Robert Allen Warrior, author of "Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians," who posits two questions—From whose perspective is the Exodus story interpreted? and Who is the liberation and salvation story in Exodus for—as he reads the story from the perspective of the Canaanites—Indigenous peoples—in the conquerors' *promised* land.⁸³

Reading the Mennonite pacifist migratory history to Canada through the parallel Indigenous and Canaanite perspectives may lead us to ask how the pacifist God in Russia⁸⁴ can become the conqueror God in Canada. In this situation, from whose perspective and for whom are violence and peace interpreted? Who benefits or is harmed by the interpretation?

Mennonite feminist liberative ethicist Melanie Kampen argues, "Given that the Mennonite tradition is a Christian tradition that emerged in Europe during the rise of modernity, it should come as no surprise that white Mennonites in the Americas retain and reproduce epistemologies of oppression. . . . While Mennonite theology has been critical of some forms of state violence, it has not been anti-colonial."⁸⁵ Thus, when Mennonites, as historic peace churches, are to witness to peace in a settler colonial context, the colonial influence needs to be a key theological and ethical consideration in their discourses and practices of peace, with contextual sensitivity and recognition of privilege built upon colonial legacy.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this paper, I raised a question derived from the silent scenes hidden behind the words "hardworking European farmers to settle," "newest," and "recently cleared of its indigenous inhabitants" in the *Canadian Mennonite* article about *Privilegium*: What is required to witness to peace in a settler colonial context?

83 Robert Allen Warrior, "Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians: Deliverance, Conquest, and Liberation Theology Today," *Christianity and Crisis* 49 (1989): 261–66.

84 "Pacifist God" is a rhetorical expression about the nonresistant faith rather than a precise reference to a Russian Mennonite view of God. Mennonite historians, such as Frank H. Epp and James Urry, often link nonresistance to peace or describe it as a pacifist practice. As I discussed earlier, nonresistance has been regarded as the classic position of the Mennonite view of peace.

85 Melanie Kampen, Review of *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latina/o Theology and Philosophy*, by Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Eduardo Mendieta, eds., *Anabaptist Witness* 3, no. 1 (2016).

By tracing the historical background of the *Privilegium* and conducting a social analysis, I demonstrated that a large number of Mennonites in the 1870s decided to migrate to Manitoba in order to avoid perpetuating violence through military service in Russia. Despite their commitment to peace against violence, migrating for their pacifist witness ironically led them to become complicit in structural violence in a settler colonial context; Mennonites became direct beneficiaries of Canada's colonial expansion and nation-building project—as new landlords and recipients of the dominance and the privilege of whiteness gained at the cost of the attempted elimination of Indigeneity in Canada.

The changing social context of migration complicated European Mennonites' decision against violence. Their peace witness, inherited from the sixteenth-century European context, was applicable to avoiding direct violence like military engagement. But their lack of attention to the contextual and power-sensitive violence ingrained in the Canadian settler colonial society resulted in their complicity in the construction and perpetuation of structural violence against Indigenous and nonwhite peoples in Canada.

From the social analysis and the theological reflection on this lived contradiction, I conclude that peace witness in a settler colonial context requires a critical investigation of structural violence and asymmetric power dynamics built upon colonial legacy. It also needs a reconsideration of theological discourses and practices of peace, taking colonial violence into account beyond dominant white Mennonite perspectives. There have been decolonizing theological works in North American Mennonite contexts. Nevertheless, given the vast and devastating influence of colonialism in North America, the amount of decolonizing research in Mennonite theology is still quite insufficient.⁸⁶

86 The following sources are decolonizing theological works in North American Mennonite contexts: Steve Heinrichs, ed., *Unsettling the Word: Biblical Experiments in Decolonization* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2019); Mealie Kampen, "The Spectre of Reconciliation: Investigating Mennonite Theology, Martyrdom, and Trauma," (PhD diss., Emmanuel College and University of Toronto, 2019); Anthony G. Siegrist, "Part of the Authority Structure": An Organizational History of Mennonite Indian Residential Schools in Ontario," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 93, no. 1 (2019): 5-39; Elaine Enns, "Facing History with Courage: Toward Restorative Solidarity," (DMin., St. Andrew's College, Saskatoon, 2015); Steve Heinrichs, ed., *Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry: Conversations on Creation, Land Justice, and Life Together* (Winnipeg, MB: Mennonite Church Canada, 2013).

Hopeful signs that this kind of engagement is happening can be found in the April 15, 2019, *Canadian Mennonite*, which includes articles on how Mennonites in Canada are engaging in Settler-Indigenous relations:

- “The Awakening: Indigenous Voices in Restorative Justice” workshop was held at the office of Mennonite Central Committee Saskatchewan in Saskatoon.⁸⁷
- Toronto Mennonite United Church held a six-week video conference for a book study on *Unsettling the Word: Biblical Experiments in Decolonization*, published in 2019 with efforts of “over 60 Indigenous and Settler authors” “to wrestle with the Scriptures, re-reading and re-imagining the ancient text for the sake of reparative futures.”⁸⁸
- Across Canada, many Mennonites have advocated for Bill C-262, which “calls for the government to enshrine the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples into Canadian law.”⁸⁹

In 2020, such efforts continue:

- In September, an anthology *Be it Resolved: Anabaptists & Partner Coalitions Advocate for Indigenous Justice* was published by Mennonite Central Committee Canada (MCC) and Mennonite Church Canada. This is “a collection of over 90 documents detailing commitments Anabaptists have made to Indigenous justice and decolonization since the 1960s.”⁹⁰
- In October, more than forty people across Canada are participating in an eight-week online book club for *Canada at a Crossroads: Boundaries, Bridges, and Laissez-Faire Racism in Indigenous-Settler Relations*, host-

87 Donna Schulz, “Workshop Challenges Participants to Move from Multiculturalism to Antiracism,” *Canadian Mennonite* 23, no. 8 (April 10, 2019), <https://canadianmennonite.org/deconstruct-racism>.

88 Joelle Kidd, “Readers ‘Zoom’ to Discuss Unsettling the Word: Online Book Study a Hit at Toronto United Mennonite Church,” *Canadian Mennonite* 23, no. 8 (April 10, 2019), <https://canadianmennonite.org/stories/readers-‘zoom’-discuss-unsettling-word>. See Steve Heinrichs, *Unsettling the Word: Biblical Experiments in Decolonization* (Winnipeg: Mennonite Church Canada, 2018).

89 Rachel Bergen, “Mennonites Advocate for Bill C-262,” *Canadian Mennonite* 23, no. 8 (April 10, 2019), <https://canadianmennonite.org/c262-rally>.

90 Katie Doke Sawatzky, “New Anthology Documents Six Decades of Anabaptist Response to Indigenous Calls for Justice,” Mennonite Church Canada, September 21, 2020, accessed October 09, 2020, <https://www.mennonitechurch.ca/article/10700-new-anthology-documents-six-decades-of-anabaptist-response-to-indigenous-calls-for-justice>; Katie Doke Sawatzky, *Be it Resolved: Anabaptists & Partner Coalitions Advocate for Indigenous Justice* (Winnipeg: Mennonite Church Canada, 2020).

ed by Mennonite Church Canada's Indigenous-Settler Relations.⁹¹

Alongside these decolonizing and restorative educational and activist efforts, decolonizing theological works is also a substantive way to bear witness to peace in a settler colonial context. These efforts will lead us to continue the long-standing Mennonite tradition for peace in our context today.

⁹¹ "Canada at Crossroads Online Book Club," Mennonite Church Canada, accessed October 10, 2020, <https://www.mennonitechurch.ca/event/10674-2020-10-08-canada-at-crossroads-online-book-club>).



What Does Shalom Mean?

Comparing Anabaptist and Indigenous Perspectives

Randolph Haluza-DeLay

Peacemaking, that important characteristic of Anabaptist praxis, has been increasingly referred to as *shalom* in recent years. This essay probes what might be meant by the term through comparing the book-length works on shalom of Mennonite theologian Perry Yoder and Indigenous scholar Randy Woodley. Yoder calls shalom “the Bible’s word for salvation, justice, and peace.”¹ Woodley argues for a conception of shalom that extends beyond the realm of humanity to include the entire “community of creation.”² As a social scientist, I am interested in how shalom can be applied to living well together in this land. Toward this end, engaging the Indigenous perspective will be particularly helpful for non-Indigenous Mennonites to develop broader notions of discipleship, faith, and peacemaking, especially in light of both Indigenous-settler reconciliation and the global ecological crisis.³ Yoder’s approach—while a helpful treatise on shalom—remains limited to the levels of human society and existent political structure.

In the phrase “living well together in this land,” ecological sustainability and social justice are intrinsically and inextricably linked, with an open-endedness in terms of working toward a just sustainability.⁴ The words encourage us to figure out such questions as “Who is the implied ‘we?’” or “What does ‘living

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1 Perry B. Yoder, *Shalom: The Bible’s Word for Salvation, Justice, and Peace* (Napanee, IN: Evangel, 1987).

2 Randy Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012).

3 For the purpose of deliberate focus on these two specific thinkers and their eminently accessible works, this essay will not examine Jewish understandings of shalom.

4 As a term, “just sustainability” was coined by Julian Agyeman to describe a proactive and normative goal for human societies in terms of both justice and sustainability. See

well’ and ‘living well *together*’ mean?” The components of this guiding principle—living well, together, in the land—all require attention primarily to actual lived relations. As does the concept of *shalom*. Lived relations occur in places.⁵ We do not live in abstractions—or, at least, ideas and principles have to be practically enacted. As anthropologist Clifford Geertz asserts, “No one lives in the world in general.”⁶ And so a concept like *shalom* or just sustainability becomes what philosopher Charles Taylor calls a “strong evaluation”—an inescapable moral framework of values and practices that orients our relations in real time in a present that leads toward a future.

In Christian terms, we are required to evaluate: Do these actions bring about the wholeness of relations that characterizes *shalom* in the biblical narrative?⁷ *Shalom* is the foundation of the Christian message, the intended purpose of the language about the kingdom of God. As Brueggemann writes:

That persistent vision of joy, well-being, harmony, and prosperity is not captured in any single word or idea in the Bible; a cluster of words is required to express its many dimensions and subtle nuances: love, loyalty, truth, grace, salvation, justice, blessings, righteousness. But the term that in recent discussions has been used to summarize that controlling vision is *shalom*.⁸

Woodley will help Anabaptists be more faithful to a mission of reconciliation, primarily because he emphasizes that *shalom* requires decolonization and that *shalom* needs to be extended beyond the human portions of the entire community of creation. Yoder may value creation-care and likely would not disagree about decolonization, but he does not make these notions evident. In-

Julian Agyeman et al., *Just Sustainabilities: Development in an Unequal World* (London: Earthscan/MIT Press, 2002).

5 Even “cyberspace” is geographically constituted. Web-based relations are only a portion of our relations. Even in the extreme case of lockdowns during the Covid-19 pandemic, relatively few people interacted to a greater extent with new people online than they did with people they already knew through workplaces, schools, homes, and so on. People also felt considerable dis-location during the pandemic. Even a practice such as ordering groceries online still requires locally available delivery, material food to arrive, and a place to consume it. Any item ordered from a “virtual” store is constructed in some other physical place. Materiality still matters.

6 Geertz, Clifford, “Afterword: No One Lives in the World in General,” *Senses of Place*, eds. Stephen Feld and Keith H. Basso (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1996), 262.

7 Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, Philosophical Papers 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985). For an extended discussion, see Randolph Haluza-Delay et al., “That We May Live Well Together in the Land . . . : Place Pluralism and Just Sustainability in Canadian Studies,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 47, no. 3 (2014), 226–56.

8 Walter Brueggemann, *Peace* (St Louis: Chalice, 2001), 14.

stead, he focuses very specifically on the normative bases of socioeconomic and political structures and how, in God’s design, such structures are intended to create shalom. Woodley significantly extends this conceptualization of shalom and perhaps challenges a reformist notion that shalom can be easily manifested within a liberal, capitalist, and Euro-Western cultural context.

Shalom as Described by Yoder and Woodley

Yoder’s *Shalom: The Bible’s Word for Salvation, Justice, and Peace* and Woodley’s *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision* are both short (146 and 166 pages, respectively) and eminently accessible works. Both books can and have been used for adult reading groups and university classes. Both authors are or have been college and seminary professors in the United States, and both have other identities as well that help provide a transnational perspective: Yoder is a Mennonite theologian (now retired), and Woodley is a Cherokee biblical scholar. Yoder’s book, as he explains in the preface, is derived from teaching a Bethel College course in the early 1980s.⁹ A few years after the course, his family spent time in the Philippines because he was concerned that “*peace is a middle class luxury, maybe even a Western middle-class luxury.*”¹⁰ Woodley’s book began as a doctoral dissertation on “the Harmony Way,” which he describes as a “shared life-concept that is widespread among Native Americans” and compares favorably to the concept of shalom.¹¹ And while there is no universal “Native American” (sic) culture, Woodley, like many Indigenous scholars, asserts that there are common Indigenous values or orientations. He believes his book represents one of the expressions of a globalizing, non-European Christianity.

Consistent with his Indigenous cultural lens, in his explication of biblical principles and narratives Woodley prioritizes place over history and orthopraxy (*good relations instead of right relations*) over orthodoxy (practice over doctrine). He draws on biblical exegesis and on teaching narratives from various North Indigenous communities. My experience of using the book with Canadian students in senior social science seminar courses at a Canadian Christian university was that Woodley often challenged their conception of Christianity as they had learned it, and because of this some students resisted the book. While Yoder’s book is a challenge to reform existing society, Woodley’s is a deeper, cultural challenge. He asks readers to alter their thinking, to—in Cree education scholar

⁹ Although Yoder’s *Shalom* has been reissued (most recently in 2017), I will be using the original 1987 edition here since it was the one used for an AMBS short-course I took some ten years ago.

¹⁰ Yoder, *Shalom*, 3 (italics in the original).

¹¹ Woodley, *Shalom*, xiii.