

# **Mennonites in Unexpected Places: Sociologist and Settler in Latin America**

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In 1945 the eminent Mennonite historian, Harold S. Bender, penned an introduction to sociologist Joseph Winfield Fretz's pamphlet *Mennonite Colonization in Mexico*, a study of the conservative, elusive Old Colony Mennonites of Mexico. Bender offered a puzzling apology for Fretz's work:

The writer was well aware that the Mennonites of Mexico would not welcome publicity and had fully intended to respect their unspoken wishes. However, the information gathered was so impressive, and the interest of the members of the Mennonite Central Committee in the study was so great, that it was nevertheless decided to proceed with a brief publication. It is hoped that the Mennonites of Mexico will understand and appreciate the interest which their Mennonite neighbours in the United States and Canada have in their experience and will not object to the publication.<sup>1</sup>

Bender's justification of Fretz's work hinted at the tensions underlying his benign fact-finding mission. It suggested that, for Mexican Mennonite communities, a dialogue with their North American "neighbors" was neither natural nor especially desirable. Bender embraced the paradoxical nature of the situation. If Fretz had truly known and wished to respect the "unspoken wishes" of the community, why had he been sent to Mexico in the first place? Having violated these "wishes" Fretz now asked the Old Colonists not simply to tolerate North American attention, but understand and even appreciate it. Given these contradictions, what accounts for the North American desire for knowledge of and interest in the fate of their brethren in Mexico? What was it about colonization attempts in Mexico that was capable of generating such intense inter-denominational concern, a concern that violated a community's desire for anonymity? Bender's introduction imagined a future in which "mutual concern and mutual aid across the boundary lines of nations and church organizations will find expression". Though he was skeptical that such an integration could occur, Bender was certain that the curiosity of his North American readership for knowledge "of their brethren across the southern border" would only increase.<sup>2</sup>

Six years later Fretz was in Paraguay, preparing a similar but more extensive report on another colonization effort. At the time of his visit, the future of the Mennonites living in the Paraguayan Chaco was still far from certain. Many colonists, particularly the post-war Displaced Persons were emigrating northward to reunite with relatives in North America. As both a co-religionist and an outside observer, Fretz was sent to Paraguay by the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) at what was seen as a critical juncture for the long-term survival of the colonies. The publication of his findings in a full-length book, *Pilgrims in Paraguay*, together with the numerous articles that he and others wrote about Mennonite settlements in the late 1940s and early 1950s for the periodical *Mennonite Life*, offers evidence that Bender's prophetic vision for a transnational diasporic awareness was increasingly being realized.<sup>3</sup> While the thousands of Mennonites on the move in the wake of the Second World War provided a practical reason for this flowering of literature on Latin American colonies, the authors' perceptions of settler life also carried the unmistakable imprint of their own experiences of social and religious change within the context of the "maelstrom of secularization" they faced in North America.<sup>4</sup> The emerging discipline of sociology offered Fretz a vehicle for navigating this challenging terrain. As he and other Mennonites debated the nature of a newly defined Mennonite urban identity and the survival of isolated agrarian communities, they found the examples of those who had opted for an anti-modernity to be an increasingly relevant realm of research.<sup>5</sup>

As a space seemingly detached from the structural changes and everyday conflict of North American society, the Latin American colonies bore witness to a regenerative migration that other Mennonites could symbolically enact as they read through the pages of *Mennonite Life* and *Pilgrims in Paraguay*. The significant inter-denominational differences that had provided the impetus for much of this colonization were rarely stated directly. Yet, the implicit understandings in these accounts reflect competing interpretations of Mennonite life. Although divided along lines of social and religious practice, North Americans and Latin American colonists appear united in their wary relationship with outsiders, ideas about appropriate land use, and placement in a larger collective memory of migration. These diverse but interlocking themes co-existed in the narratives that North American Mennonites constructed about their southern brethren, narratives that claimed intimacy even as they revealed distance. Contradictions were most apparent when the discussion moved from symbolic affiliations to practical recommendations.

Language shifted accordingly, from laudatory to condemnatory within the scope of any one article. This cut across the varied thematic concerns that Mennonites had in colonization, linked assessments of modernization with responses to evangelical changes within the church. In discussions from the social through to the spiritual, each positive pronouncement had its negative corollary. Mennonite scholars did their best to mediate these tensions, employing both spatial and temporal devices, yet never entirely resolved them. This tension challenged Bender's confident calls for solidarity and the legitimacy of his desire to bring together colonists and North American Mennonites.

Ignoring these tensions, Mennonite historiography on colonization has operated most comfortably from a regional standpoint, a tendency that can be seen in the extensive works of Leonard Sawatsky and Peter P. Klassen on the Mennonite colonies in Mexico and Paraguay.<sup>6</sup> In these studies, North America serves as a staging ground, illustrating the conditions that led to migration, before it disappears from the narrative entirely or is reduced to a description of the financial contributions of the MCC.<sup>7</sup> North American Mennonite history, influenced by narratives of secularization, assimilation and urbanization, explores Mennonite identity amid ongoing change in which migrants' histories simply end at the point of departure.<sup>8</sup> These studies examine the roles of Fretz, Bender and others in re-defining Mennonite community in the changing context of North America, while under-emphasizing the importance of Latin American colonization in this process. This omission has occurred in spite of a post-war Mennonite experience that transcended the local and the national.

Two recent books point to an alternative conception of the intertwined subjectivities of colonists and North American Mennonites. In *Diaspora in the Countryside*, Royden Loewen discusses migration to Mexico by focusing on the “competing cosmologies” of those who left and those who remained behind. Loewen writes: “Each constructed a mental picture of an historical trajectory and social space that placed it in opposition to the other” seeing their “counterparts as being inherently different and antithetical.”<sup>9</sup> Loewen identifies the role of this oppositional self-definition in the intensification of group identity. However, the negative dialectic he creates between Canadian and Mexican Mennonites - the former derided as “lapsed” in their faith, while the latter were seen as obstinately “blinded” to a changing reality - obscures some of the more positive, unified imaginings that colonization produced. At times this could take the form of a shared historical trajectory. Difference might then be re-conceptualized to represent a distinct point on a broad continuum rather than a diametrically opposed worldview. This was an option most readily available to those, like Fretz, whose scholarly mobility removed them from the personal animosities affecting the divided community. In *The Amish in the American Imagination*, David Weaver-Zercher explores the power of nostalgic identification that could exist side-by-side with the type of mutual condescension described by Loewen. Looking at Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Weaver-Zercher identifies the politics of representation at play in the paternalistic claim of Herald Press - the same publishing house that produced *Pilgrims in Paraguay* - that they alone could provide an authentic portrayal of their Amish “cousins”.<sup>10</sup>

Loewen and Weaver-Zercher both offer starting points for thinking beyond the material relationships between North American Mennonites and colonists. They enable us to understand the profound implications for Fretz’s work that lay behind Bender’s innocuous expressions of interest, sympathy, and concern. They also reveal why a certain understanding of North American Mennonite identity relied on a corresponding image of “our brethren down south”.

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When Mennonite academics, like *Mennonite Life* editor Cornelius Krahn, situated themselves as authorities “amid the maelstrom of secularization” they spoke with a sense of novelty and immediacy, hope and fear. Challenges over land, state interference, religious practice and generational conflict were nothing new to Mennonite communities and the early and middle decades of the twentieth century proved particularly turbulent.<sup>11</sup> The Great Depression exacerbated a process by which impoverished families were forced to move from farms into small towns and urban centers while the Second World War increased

this trend with growing industrial employment in the cities.<sup>12</sup> Successful farming in the post-war period involved the commercialization of operations with the introduction of greater mechanization and scientific innovations in fertilizer, modified seeds and livestock.<sup>13</sup> Automation and consolidation only further decreased the rural population necessary to support agricultural production. Mennonites responded in a multiplicity of ways, some occupying vanguard positions in these new forms of agriculture while others relocated, creating thriving, close-knit communities in small towns and urban centers.<sup>14</sup> An irony of this increasing urbanization was the importance that city dwellers placed on maintaining or re-establishing connections to the rural hinterland.<sup>15</sup> However, faced with a strange and rapidly commercializing rural environment, the growing literature on Mexican and Paraguayan colonies offered readers of *Mennonite Life* an ephemeral return to an authentic agrarian lifestyle.<sup>16</sup>

Joseph Winfield Fretz experienced many of these changes firsthand. His childhood and formative years shed light on his future academic concerns and provide an individual perspective on the urbanizing trends of other Mennonite communities. The ninth of eleven children, Fretz was brought up in the progressive General Conference Church of his father which accepted the use of automobiles in contrast to the more traditional Old Mennonite Church in which his mother had been raised.<sup>17</sup> His childhood was spent on a farm in a rural area outside of Philadelphia. His parents' attempts to modernize the family farm both through the installation of domestic amenities and the purchase of desirable new breeds of livestock ended in bankruptcy in 1922.<sup>18</sup> The family moved to the nearby industrial town of Lansdale where its members could individually find work. In the 1930s, Fretz attended Bluffton College before he was eventually pulled into the orbit of the University of Chicago.<sup>19</sup>

Time spent at the University of Chicago offered Fretz an analytical tradition to aid in understanding the effects that these cultural changes might have on Mennonite identity. He spent from 1938 to 1941 in the city, earning an M.A. and a PhD in sociology.<sup>20</sup> The Sociology department, then under the direction of the renown scholar of urban life, Robert Park, played a foundational role in the development of North American sociological theory through its attempts to define and theorize processes of assimilation and urbanization.<sup>21</sup> Park frequently encouraged young academics like Fretz who could benefit from a privileged, insider relationship, along with a scholarly distance from the communities they studied.<sup>22</sup> The small town backgrounds and rural imaginations of these scholars revealed themselves in the way they approached social phenomena in the urban environment as outsiders.<sup>23</sup> City life carried with it an implicit lack or loss in their writings with

the average city dweller oft maligned as the “highly individuated stranger.” Binary distinctions between rural community and urban alienation are evident in Fretz’s early work. In his PhD dissertation he credits the absence of mutual aid – for him a defining characteristic of Mennonite community – with the collapse of Mennonite identity in urban Chicago.

It is unlikely that Fretz ever stated his hope for agrarian Mennonite life more clearly than in a January 1946 article entitled “The Renaissance of a Rural Community”. In it, he set a tone and a trope that would continue through his later work on Paraguayan colonies. He began with a bleak scene. Endemic rural depopulation meant that everywhere across North America, “urban communities have been growing and rural communities dying.”<sup>24</sup> Yet his experiences in Chicago had made him skeptical of those who uncritically embraced the “century of the city”. For Fretz it was obvious that “the future of society must have its hope in the rural community” because such communities were “seed-beds of our country’s population; they were the areas in which Christian ideals, moral values, and standards of conduct and behaviour of the highest type were produced and maintained. It was here that democracy at its best and in its purest form could thrive.”<sup>25</sup> In short, the rural frontier was the embryo from which arose much of the best of American culture but was distressingly being left alone to “stagnate and die”.<sup>26</sup>

Yet salvage ethnography was not Fretz’s goal.<sup>27</sup> His aim, he declared, was “not that the rural community of yesterday be restored after the fashion of a museum display, but rather that the rural community be enriched and modified in the light of new inventions and improved methods of living.”<sup>28</sup> “Revitalization” was not a task suited to the “pessimists, the fatalists and the fearful”. Instead it was a new, younger generation, “the courageous, the far-sighted and the hopeful” that should take centre-stage, promoting innovation, integration and education.<sup>29</sup> The creation of cooperatives, institutions that “have their roots in the long-time expression of Mennonite mutual aid [were] central to this.”<sup>30</sup> Again, Fretz distinguished between tradition and its present-day manifestation. Modern cooperatives were not a straightforward example of cultural continuity but “indeed the stream-lined expression of mutual aid in that it is more highly systematized than much of the mutual aid in the past which was often quite spontaneous and sporadic.”<sup>31</sup> The language in which Fretz framed these concerns shifted from metaphors of death, darkness and dying, described as stagnation, isolation, and “looking-backwards” towards those of light, life, birth and rebirth seen as revitalization, systematization, enrichment and modification. However, his language was equally that of evangelical conversion in a shift from stagnation to rebirth with Fretz

concluding that, “in short, Altona [Manitoba] is demonstrating that a rural community can be reborn.”<sup>32</sup>

For Mennonites attempting to rewrite their history as a “useable past” compatible with a modern, urban future, the type of understanding proffered by charismatic brokers like Fretz was indispensable.<sup>33</sup> Yet as an outsider, an academic, and a Mennonite from a particular, *liberal* denomination, Fretz’s position in relation to the communities he studied was an ambivalent one. His marginality from these communities allowed him to act as a bridge, transmitting a vital but parochial experience to the larger world. He could also occupy this external vantage point in order to criticize what he saw as lacking in North American Mennonite society. An insider relationship suggested bonds of solidarity but the sociological gaze also implied a crucial, critical distance, an ability to “survey the problem...from a vantage point outside of [himself].”<sup>34</sup> If Fretz had been sympathetic enough to understand the “unspoken wishes” of the Mennonites in Mexico in 1944, he was also obliged by the “impressive” nature of the information collected to follow through with its publication. The onus rested on the sociologist to decide where the parameters of this dual perspective would be drawn, on knowing when or where to mark the difference between oneself and the object of study.<sup>35</sup>

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The Mennonite settlers that Fretz scrutinized in *Pilgrims in Paraguay* arrived in the Chaco, the semi-arid low-lying region of western Paraguay, in three principal waves. In the 1920s, the first group left Canada, along with Mexico-bound Mennonites, in response to a “One Language Law” that placed restrictions on Mennonite schools. They were joined by a second wave of Russian Mennonites who fled Ukraine in the early 1930s during Stalin’s collectivization program. Many of those who remained in Russia arrived in a third wave in the immediate post-war period as refugees and “ethnic Germans” that had fled Ukraine with the retreating German army and were avoiding forced repatriation to the Soviet Union. In Mexico, Mennonites settled predominantly in the northern states of Chihuahua and Durango, though over time groups would spread into Zacatecas and the Yucatan. Other Mennonite communities formed in the post-war period in Brazil, Uruguay, British Honduras (later renamed Belize), Bolivia and Argentina. The repeated migrations of Mennonite communities since the sixteenth century placed these new pilgrims within an important historical trajectory in which migration played a crucial role in the “maintenance and perpetuation of Mennonite identity.”<sup>36</sup> Relying on this shared understanding, Fretz narrated the Paraguayan experience as an epic reaffirmation of larger Mennonite and biblical narratives of migration.<sup>37</sup>

While some referred to the wartime flight from Russia as a “Mennonite exodus”, he began his dedication to *Pilgrims in Paraguay* by linking the colonists to “Abraham of old who went out not knowing whither he went and looked for a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God.”<sup>38</sup> For settled North American Mennonites living in an age of increasing comfort and material prosperity, Paraguayan colonization allowed them to retain a symbolic attachment to a history of “persecution for righteousness sake” where authenticity was related to the forced migrations of a “suffering church”.<sup>39</sup> Though Mennonites as a whole had not always been persecuted, Fretz argued, particular branches in each generation had. Such persecutions, Fretz maintained, served to “keep the rest of the worldwide brotherhood conscious of its own former days of hardship and suffering and has driven them to a sense of dependence in Almighty God.”<sup>40</sup> In a surprisingly frank gesture, Fretz conceded that not knowing the deprivations and dangers directly, any sense of solidarity with colonists could only be vicarious.<sup>41</sup> But vicariously or otherwise, the humbling presence of these historic remnants served as a strong reminder that the Mennonite church had been, and continued to be for some, a church of martyrs for the faith.<sup>42</sup>

When writing about Paraguay, Fretz continually spoke with a sense of optimism which he justified through reference to the same historic migration narrative. Such hope-in-continuity was clearly expressed in another of his articles on the Chaco in which he attributes any future success to the “blueprints” of Mennonite colonization, “exact replicas” transplanted from Russia to Canada, Paraguay and Mexico.<sup>43</sup> In *Pilgrims in Paraguay*, he concluded a detailed and specific analysis of social, religious, and economic conditions with a verdict based not in this material reality but upon the unstoppable inertia of Mennonite history. It was a force by which, “the prairies of America’s middle west were converted, like the steppes of Russia, from treeless ranges of cattle, buffalo, and Indians to fertile farming lands, and established communities...that which seemed dismal and hopeless at the beginning came in the course of time to take on beauty, order, and hopefulness.”<sup>44</sup> For those North Americans who may have had difficulty imagining life in the Paraguayan Chaco, images of previous pioneering efforts on the Vistula delta or the Ukrainian Steppe were interchangeable, just as Fretz could treat the construction of the Trans-Chaco highway in Paraguay as analogous to the creation of the Canadian trans-continental railway.<sup>45</sup> Such transference allowed for sympathetic understandings whereby the continuity of community placed all new lands within the scope of collective memory.

As an embodiment of Mennonite history and representative of an Old Order that was under threat in the north, the Paraguayan



and Mexican colonies were sometimes treated as cultural museums separated by temporal as well as spatial divides from their more progressively minded brethren. In a report on Old Colony Mennonites in Mexico, Cornelius Krahn hinted at both the unresolved tensions behind such a viewpoint and its likely implications. He cautioned readers to “be patient, tolerant and mindful that they may serve us as a mirror in which we view our own past.”<sup>46</sup> Fretz also pointed in a more lighthearted way to the courtship customs of Paraguayan Mennonites as “those of our grandparents.” The contrast was between the “highly mechanized and comfortably furnished homes” of a presumed readership and those of colonists which were not described in terms of poverty or intentional austerity but to the curious viewer, “as if he were suddenly projected into an eighteenth century colonial home.”<sup>47</sup> This narrative passage into a different temporality was reproduced nearly verbatim by German Consul Walter Schmiedehaus in a *Mennonite Life* article on Mexican Mennonites. To him it seemed, “as if the world-clock has been set back a few hundred years.”<sup>48</sup> The transfer of cultural continuity into a traditional past led him to describe Mexican Mennonite life in a kind of stasis. A captioned photo displaying a colony street scene illustrated this attitude of interchangeability. The specificity of both history and locality disappeared, as time and space were compressed and the reader was challenged to distinguish between “a typical Mennonite village street [in] Russia, Canada, Mexico.”<sup>49</sup>

The question of how to best represent difference posed a challenge for these authors. Krahn and Fretz reconciled the differences they encountered by pushing alternative practices into an imagined past where they were safely removed from denominational politics. This past returned urban Mennonites to a village life in which “face-to-face contact doesn’t need to be imagined”<sup>50</sup>, where the atomized family of modern social life was replaced by one of “sanctity, unity and permanence,” and where the “highly individuated stranger” that so distressed Chicago sociologists, was willingly subject to “neighborly responsibility.”<sup>51</sup> Whether such valued conditions may have existed in colony life anymore than their negative counterparts actually existed in the city did not take away from their potency as rhetorical poles in this dialogue. Krahn felt that these communities offered a “lesson” for turbulent North American life.<sup>52</sup> Yet, a distinction was maintained. A reminder of the past was not to be confused with a model for the future. While Paraguayan and Mexican Mennonites offered a critical outside space for the reflections of the historian and the sociologist, it became increasingly apparent that what they were not permitted to offer was a viable alternative.

By successfully managing difference, *Mennonite Life* hoped to discover and speak to something beyond religious practice that could bind Mennonites together. In a climate of internal dispute over the future direction of the Mennonite church, the treatment that Fretz and other scholars gave to colonization attempted to structure a common Mennonite identity through external difference. The authors emphasized their commonality with colonists through the creative foils of a harsh environment and the foreignness of Latin Americans and indigenous groups. In descriptions of Paraguay, this appeared in the colonists' relationship to the harshness of the Chaco and the general "backwardness and isolation" of the country.<sup>53</sup> The role of the environment was dual; it served as a potentially threatening source of degradation and a foe that once subdued would stand as a testament to Mennonite hardiness and ingenuity. What amazed Fretz was that Mennonites had entered a region "where it was thought impossible for civilized men to live" and succeeded in introducing a "highly developed and flourishing culture into a completely barren wilderness."<sup>54</sup> In January of 1950, an anonymous article, "Pioneering in Paraguay" expressed similar ideas of the Chaco. It championed the colonists for "conquering" the "isolated wastes", their task explicitly likened to that of their brethren who "make the wasteland here in Canada productive."<sup>55</sup> These, and other more implicit references, situated the colonists' attempts in a larger Mennonite struggle against hostile environments and justified their presence as essential to processes of modernization.<sup>56</sup>

The relationship between the Mennonites and their new environment also structured the encounter with their Paraguayan neighbors, one that appeared in constant danger of abstracting itself from the particulars of contact towards a generalized description of incommensurable ways of life. Fretz contrasted Mennonite achievements with the "low cultural attainments" of Paraguayans, not merely in the primitive conditions of the Chaco but also in the capital of Asunción where there were only "evidences of past glory" among crumbling buildings, started but never finished.<sup>57</sup> He saw this incompleteness as indicative of the nation's unfinished modernization project. Over a longer time span and with equivalent means, Paraguayans could not hope to match Mennonite achievements. Fretz acknowledged the Catholic Church's detrimental influence on education and other matters but the reasons for him were more broadly cultural.<sup>58</sup>

The distinction is best illustrated in his comparison of Mennonite and Paraguayan homes. The houses of the former were characterized by "their large size, their better-kept condition and their generally neat appearance" which reflects both "pride in ownership and responsible stewardship."<sup>59</sup> In contrast, "the typical rural Paraguayan house

is seldom fenced in--it seems to rise naturally out of the environment." While the Mennonites manipulated the landscape to reflect their value system and carefully defined social and domestic space, the Paraguayans accommodated their behaviour to the environment, to which they are likened, allowing divisions of space to break down, as when "children and animals freely intermingle."<sup>60</sup> These specific descriptions of land use are elevated as the defining characteristics of each group as Fretz deftly moved to contrast "Mennonite love of order, the ideal of absolute honesty, and the inclination toward frankness and directness as over against the politeness and diplomacy of the Spanish."<sup>61</sup> If his account polarized the personalities of Paraguayans (defined as Latin) and Mennonites, this binary understanding of cultural difference is even more stridently manifested in regards to the Chaco's indigenous population.

Mennonites settled in a region of the central Chaco that was home to the Northern Lengua.<sup>62</sup> In the years following the disastrous Chaco War (1932-1935), the Chulupi, Guaraní and eventually the Ayoreo also settled in and around the colonies where many worked on Mennonite farms.<sup>63</sup> Despite their active presence in the colonies, these groups were marked by their notable absence from many of the written accounts.<sup>64</sup> When visiting Mennonites acknowledged their presence, their tone could vacillate between the threatening and the benign neither of which recognized the possibility of any competing territorial claim or even desire for landownership. Facing similar legacies of indigenous displacement, Mennonite communities in the North could hardly afford to be critical on this issue, expressing instead a silent solidarity with colonists.<sup>65</sup> In 1950, *Mennonite Life* described the Chaco as, "a country shunned even by Indians of some ambition and where they [Mennonites] are neighbors to the most primitive tribes imaginable."<sup>66</sup> Mennonite colonization in an area with few Paraguayans but several prominent indigenous groups offered ripe opportunities for contrast between the Mennonites' settled, agrarian ways and the nomadic lifestyle of their neighbours. Fretz's descriptions emphasized the haphazard dependency that he took for the indigenous social system:

These Indians are very loosely organized and have low cultural attainments. They hunt with bows and arrows, unless here and there, a few are fortunate enough to secure guns. Most of them live from wild plant products and such game as they are able to find in their wilderness wanderings or beg from ranchers and civilized settlers. In more recent years it has become the practice for Indians to work for wages on the edges of civilization."<sup>67</sup>

Like the environment and other Paraguayans, the indigenous presence was an ambivalent one for the Mennonites who visited the colonists, somewhere between the Chulupi, “quite tame and in no way a danger,” and the, “wild, savage, bush inhabiting Moros [Ayoreo].”<sup>68</sup> Writing in 1947 for *Mennonite Life*, P.C. Hiebert and William T. Snyder caution of the same potential threat for colonists in Chihuahua who live currently unmolested but “surrounded by a temperamental Latinized Indian who is fickle in his attitudes and not always to be trusted.”<sup>69</sup>

In shifting constantly between themes of Mennonite-driven progress and their fundamental dissimilarity from their surroundings, both human and natural, descriptions like Fretz’s performed two important functions. The first was a strong justification for the Mennonite presence and for the importance of colonization more generally. The second was an oppositional self-definition that made differences between Mennonite communities appear paltry by comparison. In addition to maintaining cultural survival, Mennonites had a duty to their host countries and neighbours. If Fretz was careful never to directly invoke the “Black Legend” of Spanish colonialism in the Americas to explain the perceived backwardness of Paraguay and its inhabitants, it was likely because this would have been redundant. He could tactfully accomplish as much simply by conjuring up its inverted counter-narrative. “What a blessing to Paraguay as a nation, if the Mennonites in years to come could do for her what the New England Puritans and Pilgrims did for America by way of enriching her national heritage of democratic government and propagating the Christian religion with its vigorous ethics and its national cleansing power.”<sup>70</sup> In a country whose own tumultuous political leadership was for Fretz, no more than, “a lot of adolescent pranks carried on by politically ambitious individuals who seek power,” Mennonites could emerge as models of sobriety, steadfastness and separation from worldly avarice.<sup>71</sup>

The second fraternal function was equally important for a climate in which “everywhere among Mennonites there are evidences of accommodation and assimilation with national cultures.”<sup>72</sup> While Fretz did not hold Paraguay as an exception to this trend, the interactions between Mennonites, Paraguayans and indigenous groups in the Chaco only served to highlight what Fretz himself admits. If “it is only by comparing our own culture with other cultures that differences become apparent,” then this cross-cultural encounter highlighted, through the production of meaningful difference, the exceptionalism and internal coherence of Mennonite identity.<sup>73</sup> The juxtaposition offered North Americans a comparatively easy identification with colonists. As the spatial distance between these spiritual neighbours collapsed, difference was re-inscribed to create an impregnable barrier that separated

colonists from their proximate indigenous and Paraguayan neighbours in the Chaco.

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These diverse tactics – biblical allusion, narrative tradition, temporal abstraction, and oppositional self-definition -- all served to forge links between Mennonites in the north and south. But other tensions, latent in the earlier descriptions, came to manifest themselves in Fretz's recommendations for education and his understanding of religion. A reassuring sense of cultural and religious continuity existed simultaneously with a fear of economic and spiritual stagnation that only drastic change and the introduction of modern techniques could append. If it was in a struggle against hostile climes that Mennonites as a people truly came into being, the isolation of the new colonies, the very attribute so desired by many colonists, nevertheless posed its own threats. Fretz clearly understood the environment to function dually as creative antagonist and withering force. Robert Park's influence also stood tall and Fretz feared that this cultural barrier could collapse with Latin American Mennonites shifting from their position as model minorities to become victims of cultural assimilation within host countries.

For the Mennonite colonists isolated from their brethren by the Chaco and, with Paraguayans and indigenous groups as guides, there was "always the danger of an entire group becoming so accustomed to lower standards they will in time accept them as normal."<sup>74</sup> Returning to the idea of tropical Paraguay as a potentially debilitating force, Fretz emphasized how the "burden of keeping the Mennonites in contact with the remainder of civilized society rests on the school system."<sup>75</sup> The withering effects of the environment can be seen in a "regression to illiteracy on the part of ex-students" for want of opportunity to utilize their knowledge.<sup>76</sup> Fretz most directly attacked the more conservative Menno Colony, less concerned with educational standards than others, but held the rise of ignorance as a danger for all colonists. He felt that the colonies were a "cultural island" which desperately needed to maintain contact with the outside world.<sup>77</sup> It was a task that Fretz, *Mennonite Life*, and the MCC were uniquely positioned for and eager to carry out

The vision of Latin American colonists, particularly those who arrived in Mexico and Paraguay in the 1920s, had been to stop the gradual erosion of community independence and cultural self-determination caused by the national vision of the Canadian state. Choosing autonomy over a dubious progress placed them at odds with an entrenched modernist understanding of maintenance and restoration as inherently reactionary, futile aims.<sup>78</sup> Though church elders had led many of the migrations to Latin America, Fretz felt

that it was increased education and the provision of future “doctors, ministers, teachers and businessmen” that should be a primary marker of the success or failure of colonization. A shift in church leadership from farmer-bishops to educated teacher-pastors can be seen as the specific product of urban changes and professionalization taking place in North American society.<sup>79</sup> This transition coincided with Fretz’s career as a sociologist. The larger question was over the type of knowledge to be validated. Was knowledge produced externally or embedded within the community? Fretz’s perspective privileged a form of individual detachment and scholarly distancing that he learned in Chicago. From tradition as the root of Mennonite success, Fretz articulated an opposing vision of conservative Mennonite elders “clinging tenaciously to the past” with the need for external guidance to improve the system.<sup>80</sup> The problem, extending beyond material deprivation, isolation and poverty, was the fundamental resistance to change among community members whose “limited vision and training...often prevent the development of such potential leadership and latent talent as do exist.”<sup>81</sup> In paternalistic language, Mennonite aid to Paraguay became the task of “pioneering among the pioneers”, those whom Fretz described as “courageous” but also “bewildered”.<sup>82</sup>

While older colonists were obstacles to progress in Paraguay, the newly-arrived Displaced Persons of Neuland, whose migrations were not carefully planned responses to gradual change but desperate acts of self-preservation, presented other dangers.<sup>83</sup> Due to the arrests and conscriptions of adult men in the 1930s and 40s,<sup>84</sup> a disproportionate number of arrivals were women and children. The idea that these refugees were both victims in need of protection and threats of moral contamination is explicit in Fretz’s writing. “Left to women, children and old infirmed men, they were victims of thieves and robbers... In their weakened state...many fell easy prey to illnesses, some of a permanent nature.”<sup>85</sup> The experiences of “war, famine and revolution” along with “years of wandering” were a threat to moral order and “naturally introduced some unconventional ideas and practices,” calling for guidance and direction on the part of other Mennonites.<sup>86</sup> While images of colonists apart from the world and as bearers of tradition positioned them as “heroes of the faith”, other conceptions of society as demanding a constant reformulation produced a condescending view of the colonists, as weak, confused, damaged and in need of leadership from North Americans. With this rhetorical shift, Mennonite scholars defined colony life rather than North American society in terms of lack. In doing so, they revealed their own investment, critical or otherwise, in the changes taking place in the latter.

Though Fretz made clear the centrality of religion to community, that “a Mennonite community that loses its religious character soon loses its identity as a Mennonite community,” faith emerged as a highly contested category.<sup>87</sup> Unsurprisingly, it was in discussions of religion that differences between North Americans and colonists were most apparent and attempts at a transnational understanding confronted seemingly insurmountable barriers. Broad changes in the North American churches, including the growth of evangelicalism and a critical engagement with religion – counterparts to the socio-economic and agricultural changes that characterized the middle decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – heightened these discrepancies. Harold Bender’s dilemma over the Mennonites in Mexico, weighing the merits of community integrity against a desire for greater inter-denominational dialogue, and his privileging of the latter, points towards this changing spiritual alignment.<sup>88</sup> Two primary institutions, the emergent MCC and Goshen College, with Bender at the forefront, served as loci of change. These institutions were increasingly advocates of an “outward-looking vision” both towards society-at-large and other denominations within the church, seeing the community as moral project rather than a means of preserving tradition.<sup>89</sup> These novel perspectives broadened a bounded notion of what might constitute an authentic Mennonite identity and hence questioned the authenticity of the colonies.

Visitors were often struck by the skewed dynamic between individual and community they observed in these communities. Fretz’s own ideals for the Mennonite faith were clearly illustrated, albeit in roundabout fashion, in his critical treatment of the affiliated, but non-Mennonite, Hutterite group in East Paraguay. Observing the “confines of Hutterian life,” Fretz was surprised by the rigid controls that the community imposed on its members, which “seems like the way of *personal* frustration and a crushing of *individual* initiative and *personal* creativeness[emphasis added].”<sup>90</sup> For Fretz and Bender, the Mennonite community was a “voluntary association” that implied a degree of informed choice and individual critical engagement. This created a predicament in which the community was the obvious means of religious survival while its hegemony in colony life, where there was “seldom any other choice”, precluded necessary alternatives.<sup>91</sup>

Fretz again criticized Menno Colony, this time for denying land ownership to non-church members. Referring to church control as theocratic, he argued that the colony’s organization effectively, “invalidates the concept and the fact of a believer’s church and the separation of church and state” where membership becomes a pragmatic consequence of “group custom and personal convenience” instead of genuine belief.<sup>92</sup> These comments display a particularly ironic twist in light of the enshrinement of non-interference of government in church

affairs as a core of Mennonite belief which for Menno Colony was one of the primary reasons for their initial decision to immigrate to Paraguay. Yet the condescending tone receives only cursory deferral, a sharp departure from the sympathetic treatment that characterized other accounts of colonization stressing historical continuity and an authentic tradition.

Within the evangelical impulse outlined by these authors, Mennonites were redeemed through their active discipleship to the surrounding society and a critical participation in inter-Mennonite discussions. Rather than possessing an inherent ethnic value as chosen people, Mennonites in Latin America needed to demonstrate their commitment to this novel interpretation of faith. The results were disappointing to some North Americans. In "From Russia to Mexico" Peter J.B. Reimer portrayed religious progressivism in a similar light. He championed the transition of the Mennonite *Kleine Gemeinde* church from "absolute conservatism" to "a spiritually-minded, mission-minded, progressive church."<sup>93</sup> However, he similarly feared the effects of the permissive legislation of the Mexican government on spiritual growth. The same could easily be applied to the generous *Privilegium* granted to Paraguayan colonists.<sup>94</sup> The implication here was that true Mennonite life was threatened not by encroaching modernity and state interference but by its absence. "Will they continue to progress educationally and religiously in Mexico, where nobody is doing any pushing, where the government is leaving all those things to them...or will they, too, slip into a materialistic rut like the other Mennonites in Mexico?"<sup>95</sup>

The indigenous presence in the Chaco spoke to the same philanthropic impulse among Mennonites to act as "witnesses" for their non-conformist Christian lifestyle. Along with their duty to render productive these "isolated wastes," Fretz and others saw a corresponding obligation to spiritual and moral uplift. H.A. Fast captured this sentiment. Though "in 1939 the Lengua or Chulupi Indians were wandering around in their free manner as children of the forest...[they now possessed] school[s], intelligence, aptitude and eagerness to learn."<sup>96</sup> For Fretz, the processes of practical education, missionary work and overall development of society were inextricably linked through "the power of Christ to change the life of man from darkness to light, from uselessness to usefulness, [which] is impressively illustrated in the lives of these Chaco Indian converts."<sup>97</sup> Even in the isolation of the Chaco, sectarian Mennonite groups would not be entirely free from their evangelical obligations.<sup>98</sup>

The prescriptions of Reimer and Fretz foreshadowed a transition in the coverage of *Mennonite Life*, apparent in the following decades, with accounts of missionary work in Africa and Asia far surpassing



the number of articles published on the colonies.<sup>99</sup> The treatment that Paraguay received tended to focus not on the colonists but on the mission work being conducted with indigenous groups in the Chaco, and was of an increasingly critical nature.<sup>100</sup> An anxious moment had passed. Cultural survival, once the priority, came to represent a dangerous, or at best self-indulgent, form of escapism.

\* \* \*

Tradition served a dual purpose in the work of Fretz and the other Mennonite scholars published in *Mennonite Life*. When defined as an authentic connection to a Mennonite past, it allowed these authors to champion the position of the colonists in Paraguay and Mexico, placing them within a narrative tradition as “witnesses” to the historic migration of a “suffering church.” While relating the experiences of everyday life in Paraguay or Mexico, these representations offered a means for readership to participate, albeit voyeuristically, in this more authentic form of Mennonite community. For North American Mennonites experiencing the ongoing rural/urban shift in Canada and the U.S. and articulating new ideas about religion and interdenominational cooperation, questions of tradition, collective identity, and a “useable past” took on an added importance.

The sociologist and the historian, products of this transition, emerged as its principal mediators, able to comprehend the significance of colonization efforts while placing them in dialogue with the ongoing changes in North American life. These academics mediated the profound contradictions in practice and lifestyle between Mennonites in the North and the South by means of a temporal gap which filtered difference through a historical rather than a doctrinal lens. Yet these tensions were never entirely suppressed. When they re-defined tradition as a form of cultural and spiritual stagnation it became, not a marker of authenticity and stability, but a crippling burden for the colonists, inhibiting the necessary progression of both individual and community.

Though these conflicting representations would appear to be mutually exclusive, they existed simultaneously in the writings on colonization. The interdenominational aims of *Mennonite Life* and the MCC had provided the impetus to insist upon a dialogue with these Mennonite “pilgrims.” Yet the products of this interaction, an estrangement over the meaning of religion and the role of community, revealed that very desire to be profoundly ideological. Through this process, the productive yet contradictory position of the colonists in the eyes of their North American brethren was revealed. It was one that encompassed both expressions of intimacy and statements of difference, an authentic tradition and a burdensome past.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Harold S. Bender, foreword, *Mennonite Colonization in Mexico* by J.W. Fretz, (Akron: MCC, 1945)
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>3</sup> J.W. Fretz *Pilgrims in Paraguay: The Story of Mennonite Settlement in South America*. (Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1953) The periodical *Mennonite Life* was itself a product of this post-war boom, first published in 1946. Along with articles in *Mennonite Life* Annemarie Krause, also from the University of Chicago produced her dissertation on Mennonite settlements in Paraguay in 1952, Annemarie Elizabeth Krause "Mennonite Settlement in the Paraguayan Chaco," Ph.D diss. in *Geography Research Papers*: 25-27. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1952) as well as George Fadenrecht "Mennonite Migrations to Paraguay" (M.A. thesis, University of Kansas, 1949)
- <sup>4</sup> Cornelius Krahn "The Mennonite Way of Life," *Mennonite Life*, 2 no.2 (April 1947): 3
- <sup>5</sup> The concept of "modernity," and its implications for the church, was central to debates within Mennonite communities in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. An early polemical example would be John Horsch, *The Mennonite Church and Modernism* (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1924).
- <sup>6</sup> Peter P. Klassen, *The Mennonites in Paraguay. Vol.1: Kingdom of God and Kingdom of this World*, trans., Gunther Schmitt (Steinbach MB: Mennonitische Post, 2004), Leonard Sawatsky, *They Sought A Country: Mennonite Colonization in Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California, 1971) David M. Quiring, *The Mennonite Old Colony Vision: Under Siege in Mexico and the Canadian Connection* (Crossway Publications: Steinbach, MB, 2003) foregrounds the tense relations and conflicting interests of Mennonites in Canada and Mexico.
- <sup>7</sup> Adam Mckeown, "Conceptualizing Chinese Diasporas, 1842-1949," *Journal of Asian Studies* 52 (1999): 312, argues that this is a problem common to nation-based histories in which the act of migration implies a "dropping out" of one national narrative with the onus on the receiving country to take up the story on the other end.
- <sup>8</sup> Leo Dreydiger, *Mennonite Identity in Conflict* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), Calvin W. Redekop, ed., *Mennonite Identity: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (New York: University Press of America, 1988). Tensions were also apparent within the broader field of North American Mennonite history. Canadian Mennonite historian Frank H. Epp, "vigorously argued that the time was right for Mennonite history in a national framework. The Americans should do the same, Epp advised, and not pretend to write an international history while in fact playing out one more chapter in the long history of American domination of Canadians." "Good History," Epp said, "has well-defined borders." James Juhnke "Mennonite History and Self-Understanding: North American Mennonitism as a Bipolar Mosaic," in *Mennonite Identity: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, 96.
- <sup>9</sup> Royden Loewen, *Diaspora in the Countryside: Two Mennonite Communities and Mid-Twentieth Century Rural Disjuncture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 15.
- <sup>10</sup> David Weaver-Zercher, *The Amish in the American Imagination* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001).
- <sup>11</sup> In particular, John D. Staples, *Cross-Cultural Encounters on the Ukrainian Steppe: Settling the Molochna Basin, 1783-1861* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2003), Fred Kniss, *Disquiet in the Land: Cultural Conflict in American Mennonite Communities*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997) and James Urry, *Mennonites, Politics and Peoplehood: Europe, Russia, Canada, 1525-1980* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2006) Kniss, Loewen and Staples all argue for a dynamic relationship between sectarian communities and

the external world as well as within such presumably homogenous groups. As such, cultural change is ongoing and negotiated rather than imposed or outright resisted.

- <sup>12</sup> These trends are identified in J.W. Fretz, "The Renaissance of a Rural Community" *Mennonite Life* 1, no. 1 (Jan 1946).
- <sup>13</sup> Loewen, *Diaspora in the Countryside*, 19-32.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid., 3, Laura Beattie and David Ley, "The German Immigrant Church in Vancouver: Service Provision and Identity Formation," *From Research on Immigration and Integration in the Metropolis* (Vancouver: Vancouver Centre for Excellence, 2001), discuss how for many Mennonite refugees in post-war Vancouver the urban environment proved only more conducive to forms of mutual aid, and community solidarity.
- <sup>15</sup> Leo Dreidger, *Mennonite Identity in Conflict*, 47.
- <sup>16</sup> Beginning in 1946, the periodical *Mennonite Life*, published by Bethel College in Kansas, offered "the best in the religious, social and economic phases of Mennonite culture." *Mennonite Life* was more than a simple vehicle for Mennonite scholarship. It claimed to provide a unique space in which a number of voices generational, denominational, geographical, academic and popular could converge. Unlike the highfalutin tone of the *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, its Goshen College counterpart, issues of *Mennonite Life* juxtaposed scholarly articles on Mennonite history with human-interest stories on the plight of refugees and works of poetry and short fiction. Readership also indicated their appreciation of the high-quality photography that made up a significant portion of each issue. Within this accessible format, Mennonite academics like Cornelius Krahn (editor), Fretz (assistant editor), Bender (contributor) and others could broach their concerns with a larger audience, strengthening the bonds between the urban collegial world of Bethel College and the rural hinterland in which these academics had been raised
- <sup>17</sup> Leland Harder, "The Personal and Scholarly Pilgrimage of J. Winfield Fretz," *Mennonite Life* 54, no.2, (June1999): 4-16. For a young Fretz the distinction that auto-mobility provided was impressively apparent on Sunday mornings, "when they came to church in their buggies, and we came in our cars, we literally left them in our dust." 5
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid, 5-7
- <sup>19</sup> Royden Loewen and Paul Toews see the urban experiences of Fretz in Chicago as essential to his ideas about community stability. According to Toews, Fretz felt that Mennonites in the city had lost substantial connection to their roots both individually and institutionally. Loewen presents a similar opinion of Fretz's thought at the time, that where Mennonites have entered cities "solidarity has been shattered and identity has been lost." Paul Toews, "J. Winfield Fretz and the Early History of Mennonite Sociology," *Mennonite Life* 54, no.2 (June1999) 19, Loewen, *Diaspora in the Countryside*, 203
- <sup>20</sup> These were "Christian Mutual Aid Societies Among Mennonites" (M.A. 1938); "A Study of Mennonite Religious Instructions in Chicago" (B.D., 1940); and "Mennonite Mutual Aid: A Contribution Toward the Establishment of a Christian Community" (Ph.D. 1941); Toews, 17.
- <sup>21</sup> Barbara Schmitter-Heisler, "The Sociology of Immigration" in *Migration Theory: Talking Across Disciplines*, eds., Caroline Brettel and James Hollifield (New York: Routledge, 2000).
- <sup>22</sup> Henry Yu, *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America* (Oxford University Press: New York, 2001), 137. Yu's work on Chinese American sociologists and the University of Chicago describes the intellectual climate created by Robert Park, identifying many of the same concerns about assimilation and the role of the intellectual insider that influenced Mennonite scholars.
- <sup>23</sup> Yu, *Thinking Orientals*, 32, 33.

- <sup>24</sup> J.W. Fretz, "The Renaissance of a Rural Community," 14.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup> A critical reference to anthropologists of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, particularly Franz Boas and his students, who sought to capture and preserve the social and cultural practices of "disappearing" races. See Jacob A. Gruber, "Ethnographic Salvage and the Shaping of Anthropology," *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 72, no.6 (Dec1970): 1289-1299.
- <sup>28</sup> Fretz, "The Renaissance of a Rural Community," 14.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid, 17.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid, 17
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid, 39.
- <sup>33</sup> Dreidger, *Mennonite Identity in Conflict*, 193; Toews, 18. In a foreword to J.W. Fretz's *The Waterloo Mennonites: A Community in Paradox* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1989), Kenneth Westheus, a colleague at Conrad Grabel College, describes precisely such a capacity and its relevance in an undergraduate trip to an Old Order community guided by Fretz. In Westheus's description, the visit succeeded in conveying to his class the "gentleness, simplicity, and intimidating strength" of the community. Yet what Westheus remembers most clearly is telling, it was not the individuals encountered but Fretz himself. "Information and detail flowed from him, and in their midst not just fascination but reverence for a people whose life is a *witness* that the best of the twentieth century is not good enough [emphasis added]." In this encounter, Westheus understood "Fretz's gift" to be the ability to render this essentially foreign way of life, and its importance to outsiders, both intelligible and accessible, a talent that leaves the visitors "spellbound."
- <sup>34</sup> Yu, *Thinking Orientals*, 94.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid., 101.
- <sup>36</sup> Dawn S. Bowen, "Die Auswanderung: Religion, Culture and Migration among Old Colony Mennonites," *The Canadian Geographer* 45, no.4 (2001), 462.
- <sup>37</sup> Fretz, *Pilgrims*, 23. He noted it as "One of the great colonization epics of all time."
- <sup>38</sup> Fretz, dedication to, *Pilgrims in Paraguay*, similar biblical allusions are made by Edgar Stoesz, and Muriel Thiessen Stackley, *Garden in the Wilderness: Mennonite Communities in the Paraguayan Chaco, 1927-1997* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1999).
- <sup>39</sup> Bender stresses the importance of a "suffering church" in Harold S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 8 (1944): 67-88.
- <sup>40</sup> Fretz, *Pilgrims*, 205. He further cites the importance of surviving hardship for faith's sake. See *ibid.*, 91, 98-99.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid, 212.
- <sup>42</sup> This vicarious identification could draw from an established tradition centered on the reading of Martyr's *Mirror* a catalogue of Anabaptist "martyr's for the faith" first published in 1660, Loewen, *Diaspora in the Countryside*, 65.
- <sup>43</sup> Fretz, "Factors Contributing to Success and Failure in Mennonite Colonization," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 24 (April1950): 130.
- <sup>44</sup> Fretz, *Pilgrims*, 225.
- <sup>45</sup> Fretz. "Trans-Chaco Highway," *Mennonite Life* 15, no.1 (Jan1960): 22.
- <sup>46</sup> Krahn, "The Mennonite Way of Life", 3.
- <sup>47</sup> Fretz, *Pilgrims*, 65. Such temporal disconnects abound, "almost a medieval pattern of handcraft", "reminiscent of the days of the circuit riding preacher on the North American frontier" 160
- <sup>48</sup> Schmiedehaus, "Mennonite Life in Mexico," 31.
- <sup>49</sup> The temporal lag of Mennonites runs parallel to the condition of Paraguay more generally. For Fretz, Paraguay existed in a state of arrested economic develop-

- ment, functioning as a 17<sup>th</sup> century mercantilist state and not a twentieth century capitalist one. Fretz, *Pilgrims*, 151.
- 50 Loewen, *Diaspora*, 170.
- 51 Fretz, *Pilgrims*, 60, 106.
- 52 Krahn, "The Mennonite Way of Life," 3.
- 53 Fretz, *Pilgrims in Paraguay*, 2.
- 54 *Ibid*, 218.
- 55 "Pioneering in Paraguay" *Mennonite Life* 5, no.1 (January 1950): 6, 8, 31.
- 56 Fretz, *Pilgrims*, 167. He describes this role as complimentary to the 4 Points program of U.S. aid.
- 57 "Pioneering in Paraguay," 33.
- 58 Fretz *Pilgrims*, 215.
- 59 *Ibid*, 68.
- 60 *Ibid*, 66. Fretz clarifies that Mennonites were eventually forced to modify certain housing styles and behaviours in relation to the environment.
- 61 *Ibid.*, 113.
- 62 Peter P. Klassen, *The Mennonites in Paraguay Vol.2: Encounter with Indians and Paraguayans*, trans., Gunther H. Schmitt (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2002), 65-86.
- 63 Indigenous-Mennonite labour relations have been the subject of several works. An early critical perspective was taken by Jacob A. Loewen and Leon Cadogan, *The Anatomy of an Unfinished Crisis in Chulupi Culture Change* (Asunción: Centro de Estudios Antropologicos de la Revista del Ateneo Paraguayo, 1966).
- 64 Klassen, *The Mennonites in Paraguay Vol.2*, 68, notes that this was evident in colony records of meetings and assemblies held at the time.
- 65 For a discussion of the link between indigenous displacement and Mennonite migrations see, Calvin Redekop, "Mennonite Displacement of Indigenous Peoples: An Historical and Sociological Analysis," *Canadian Ethnic Studies/Etudes Ethniques au Canada* 14, (1982): 71-90.
- 66 "Pioneering in Paraguay," 30.
- 67 Fretz, *Pilgrims*, 4.
- 68 *Ibid*, 96.
- 69 P. C. Hiebert and William T. Snyder. "Are the Doors of Mexico Open to Mennonite Immigrants," *Mennonite Life*. 2, no.2 (April 1947): 45.
- 70 Fretz, *Pilgrims*, 112.
- 71 J.W. Fretz, "Paraguay – An Informal History," *Mennonite Life* 5, no.1 (Jan 1950): 38.
- 72 Fretz, *Pilgrims*, 119.
- 73 *Ibid*, 113.
- 74 Fretz *Pilgrims*, 116.
- 75 *Ibid.*, 81.
- 76 *Ibid*.
- 77 *Ibid*.
- 78 Described by Leo Dreidger, *Mennonite Identity in Conflict*, 190 as an overemphasis on "structures and boundaried traditions."
- 79 Loewen, 146.
- 80 Fretz, *Pilgrims*, 126.
- 81 *Ibid*, 81.
- 82 *Ibid*, 147, 149.
- 83 Neuland was a colony created to house the Displaced Persons arriving in 1947, others founded Volendam in Eastern Paraguay.
- 84 Marlene Epp, *Women Without Men: Mennonite Refugees of the Second World War*. (University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 2000). Epp captures the fears and anxieties raised among male North American Mennonite leaders due to the predominantly female composition of refugee groups.

- <sup>85</sup> Fretz., *Pilgrims*, 39.
- <sup>86</sup> Fretz, 62.
- <sup>87</sup> Fretz, 83.
- <sup>88</sup> Kniss, *Disquiet in the Land*, identifies the period from 1935 to 1958 as one of movement towards a new cultural consensus in American Mennonite communities
- <sup>89</sup> Kniss, 63. As with other revisionist historians, Bender returned to the “roots” in order to make an argument about where the radical gesture of Anabaptism had faltered. Isolation as achieved through closed agrarian communities was a pragmatic response to religious persecution. It hastened the unfortunate transition of Mennonites “from religious group to ethnic group” by enshrining separation from society as a tenet of the Mennonite faith. The latter expression from E.K. Francis, “The Russian Mennonites: From Religious Group to Ethnic Group,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 54 (1948): 101-107; Redekop, “The Sociology of Mennonite History: A Second Opinion,” in *Mennonite Identity*, 180-183, embraces this narrative of “enclavement” as “the gradual change from being at the center of the general protest and utopian reform to the periphery through rejection, migration, and isolation” at which point the ideology of Mennonites as the “quiet in the land” came into being.
- <sup>90</sup> Fretz *Pilgrims*, 59.
- <sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, 83.
- <sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 84. Bender’s description of Mennonitism stated, “Voluntary church membership based upon true conversion and involving a commitment to holy living and discipleship was the absolutely essential heart of this concept. This vision stands in sharp contrast to the church concept of the reformers who retained the medieval idea of a mass church with membership of the entire population from birth to the grave.” Harold Bender, “The Anabaptist Vision”, 43.
- <sup>93</sup> Peter J.B. Reimer, “From Russia to Mexico: The Story of the Kleine Gemeinde,” *Mennonite Life* 4, no.4 (Oct1949): 30.
- <sup>94</sup> See Appendix in Fretz, *Pilgrims*, 229-232 for a copy of the Privilegium.
- <sup>95</sup> Reimer, “From Russia to Mexico,” 32.
- <sup>96</sup> H.A. Fast. “Mennonites in Paraguay,” *Mennonite Life* 1, no.1 (Jan1946): 38.
- <sup>97</sup> Fretz, *Pilgrims*, 96.
- <sup>98</sup> Loewen, *Diaspora in the Countryside*, 115, makes a similar point about Quellen Kolonie in Mexico, despite being a product of an evangelical/sectarian split, it was seen by Canadian Mennonites as an excellent base for mission-work.
- <sup>99</sup> The online version of *Mennonite Life* contains an index organizing articles published by subject heading and year in which this trend is apparent. See “Mennonite Life Cumulative Index 1946-1999,” retrieved 2 April 2009 <[www.bethelks.edu/mennonitelife/indexes/](http://www.bethelks.edu/mennonitelife/indexes/)>
- <sup>100</sup> Donald N. Larson, “Training Missionaries for Today’s World,” *Mennonite Life* 21, no.1 (Jan1966), 4-7; Jacob A. Loewen, “Reciprocity in Identification,” *Mennonite Life* 21, no.1 (Jan1966), 10-18; Fretz, “Paraguayan Indians,” *Mennonite Life* 17, no.2 (April 1962).