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Anabaptism and Postcolonialism

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Thanks to Valentina Satvedi, Mennonite Central Committee US Anti-Racism Program Coordinator, for compiling this issue of the *Peace Office Newsletter.*

Introduction

by Valentina Satvedi

I am a product of the Anabaptist Missionary movement, a third generation Christian, an individual, a woman raised in post-colonial India and influenced by postcolonial literature from India, and a resident of the complex United States of America. I was named and am still called Valentina, named after the first Russian woman cosmonaut sent into space. These are multiple traits that form my personality, my hybrid identity.

One might wonder why the list. It is my unique identity that grants me the use of certain lenses—lenses I use while reading scripture, other literature, and as I engage in my work of undoing oppression. It also affects how certain statements or movements within my world are viewed. So in retrospect it was not a surprise that I engaged colleagues within my workplace in a conversation critically reflecting on what it meant for our organization known as Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) to be global. These conversations across the various parts of MCC resulted in two specific outcomes.

The first outcome was MCC Staff participation in the conference "Envisioning Postcolonial Theologies to Decolonize the Body of Christ" in Bengaluru, India in January of 2010 which Tim Seidel describes in the next article.

Following the Bengaluru conference, the Anti-Racism Program engaged with the Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies at Elizabethtown College to explore the possibility of hosting a consultation focused on the subject of Postcolonialism and Anabaptism, our second outcome. This issue of the *Peace Office Newsletter* will further explore this theme and share resources from the consultation.

A planning committee consisting of representatives from the Young Center, Christian Peacemaker Teams, and various parts of MCC engaged in a process that reflected a commitment to decolonize the body of Christ and intersected with the ongoing anti-oppression work of MCC. The process was one of struggling with and acknowledging the manifestations of some of the oppressive patterns of sexism and racism in our interactions with each other as a group. To that end, we sought balance between circle process, small work groups, and academic presentations.

Our conversation in Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania began with an acknowledgement of the first nations, the people of the land, including the Susquehannock and the Delaware. The gathering began with a reflection on the theme of identity and the postcolonial concept of hybridity in the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman and Jesus (Mark 7:25–30) as well as the hybrid image of the dome at the temple of Kali in Kolkata alongside a cross put up by Missionaries of Charity. The consultation in Elizabethtown was reflective of our intention to be non-traditional and Rick Derksen's article will further explore this.

The consultation and presentations at the Elizabethtown event were an opportunity for us all to be engaged in intentional conversation on the subject of decolonizing ourselves and our theologies. The conversation on postcolonialism has several dimensions and

While the articles in this newsletter are excerpts the full text can be found on our facebook page titled “Postcolonialism and Anabaptism: A conversation.” Join the conversation at: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Postcolonialism-and-Anabaptism-A-Conversation/141110435931027

our presenters explored some specifically in light of the Anabaptist history and the institutions that each presenter was part of.

On the following pages of this newsletter you will read some of these presentations. They begin with an article by Peter Dula who offers a short overview of Postcolonial theory referencing Franz Fanon. He calls on Anabaptists to see the church in the Global South as an opportunity to take up some of their practices just as we have embraced the Sermon on the Mount. In his response to Dula, Alain Epp Weaver invites Anabaptist-Mennonites to reflect on the historical relationship between colonialism and missions.

In her presentation “In search for Liberating Independence,” Sarah Thompson invites a postcolonial vision for development alongside an articulation of a postcolonial feminist theology in Ghana. Nekeisha Alexis-Baker responds to Sarah’s article by saying: “we do not need to import and enforce our radicality onto other global communities.” Finally, Tim Seidel’s article offers a critique of Eurocentric development and reminds us to constantly revisit and rethink the ways we inhabit a world shaped by colonial history.

There is much to read and ponder in this issue. My hope is that the conversation that began within MCC, the articles in this issue of the *Peace Office Newsletter,* will continue to ripple out into Anabaptist communities and beyond. May these ponderings and conversations shed light on who we are and who we are called to be—confessing our colonized attitudes, and in some cases acknowledging our hybrid identities in Christ. May we continue to acknowledge that in our hope to connect globally we do not perpetuate our colonial tendencies. May God have mercy.

Valentina Satvedi is the Director of the Anti-Racism Program of Mennonite Central Committee US.

A conversation on MCC and the ‘postcolonial’ as steps on its anti-oppression journey

by Timothy Seidel

What is required is not a passive tolerance of each other, but an active reaching out to the other.

Last January, the United Theological College in Bengaluru, India, hosted ‘Envisioning Postcolonial Theologies to Decolonize the Body of Christ’. This gathering brought together postcolonial theologians and theorists from around the world.

Staff representing different parts of Mennonite Central Committee had the privilege of attending this event, interacting with many people, and hearing important perspectives. For example, we heard that ‘postcolonialism’ is a critical stance, not a notion of ‘over’ or ‘after’ colonialism but one of looking to move beyond. We heard that postcolonial theological reflection is a space for the colonized to have their voices heard, to take the postcolonial concerns into the reading, interpreting, and praxis of texts and institutions. And that such reflection must move us to bear witness to the love of Christ.

We heard that ‘global’ is read by many as ‘imperial’.

We were challenged by Esther Mombo, a Kenyan scholar, who reminded us that ‘decolonizing’ the Body of Christ first requires seeing the physical bodies of human beings—especially African bodies disfigured and bleeding for decades.

We heard that postcolonial developments embrace the ‘both-and’, hearing multiple voices, avoiding hegemonic discourse.

We heard the danger of over-equating the ‘body of Christ’ with the institutional church. ‘Decolonizing’ requires suspicion and interrogation of such claims and maintains a certain ecclesial ‘fugitivity’.

We heard of the postcolonial task of rejecting the logic of the ‘center’-‘periphery’, asking where the ‘center’ is? Who controls and who is marginalized? Who is in and who is out?

And as we listened to the discussions on moving from totalizing ‘whole-parts’ to ‘one-in-many’, seeking to muddy rigid, binary oppositions and their totalizing, essentializing effects, we began to dream together of a space where all voices are present and accounted for.

This essay was adapted from a report by Harley Eagle, Sri Mayasandra, Valentina Satvedi, Timothy Seidel, and Alain Epp Weaver that was presented at the joint MCC U.S. Executive Committee and MCC Binational Board meeting, Akron, PA, 10 April 2010.

We heard several voices remind us that 'decolonizing' the Body of Christ requires practicing hospitality with each other, 'listening each other into speech'. And that 'postcolonial' theology recognizes that we cannot do it alone, that we need each other. The critical need for deep hospitality, for making space for each other—for postcolonial friendships—requires a deep humility, a bold humility, over our own identity, our own space, so as to allow for the space of others.

So instead of developing yet another orthodoxy, we heard 'postcolonial' theology described as practicing hospitality, as an invitation to a conversation.

This theme of hospitality ran throughout the event. Or rather, as the French philosopher Jacque Derrida was invoked several times, the theme of 'hostipitality' ran throughout. It recognized that what is required is not a passive tolerance of each other, but an active reaching out to the other. This recognition of the obligation to the other can be found in the command to love one's neighbor. Yet 'hostipitality' challenges us by naming the tension always present between hostility and hospitality. It acknowledges that tension in all our acts of hospitality by demonstrating that our attempts at hospitality can become a means of exercising and maintaining relationships of unequal power.

Or put another way, it analyses our allegedly humanitarian treatment of a marginalized groups and shows how that treatment involves its own form of domination.

Why this 'conversation' for MCC? We developed the hope that this form of engagement will move us along on our anti-oppression journey and enable us to develop resources that speak to oppressions (including racism) which continue to exist, evolve and emerge in new ways in our globalizing world.

We acknowledged that we will continue to be colonialist in new ways. And in some respects we should expect this and hide neither behind the language of 'postcolonialism' nor behind the imperialism of others while carrying on with our own imperialism or by simply re-branding our colonialism within the frames of globalization, relief, development, or peacebuilding.

This observation speaks to the tendency in Western institutions to construct all-inclusive systems that move dangerously toward hegemonic control over understandings of these activities—a reminder of the danger of a single story. This may also be seen as a challenge to our Western, liberal development and peacebuilding impulses to operate with assumptions that claim knowledge of what is best for the 'other' in what could be seen as contemporary manifestations of colonialism's 'civilizing mission.'

We also acknowledged that this is not a new conversation, but instead is one that intersects, coincides, and continues alongside other issues that have been addressed for a long time, not least of which being anti-racism/anti-oppression. This discussion of postcolonialism cannot be perceived as a departure from these commitments or this hard work.

In this regard, we sought to simply acknowledge this shared experience on an issue such as the 'postcolonial' or 'anti-oppression' as a marker on MCC's journey. And while we continue to discuss accountability as a follow-up to these experiences, we see ours as a search primarily to respond faithfully given our individual privileges and our institutions' colonial legacies.

The kenotic movement is a guiding one here, moving beyond identification with power to repentance (Philippians 2:5–11). The kenotic emptying of power sees postcolonial theology as in the business of repenting and overcoming temptations to dominate others. Such a renunciation is not a negation or extinguishing of the self, but rather an entering into a space opened up in God with the nonviolent performance of identity in the context of domination and power inequity. A kenosis characterized in the life of the Trinity, creating space for life, for the other.

This is hard work. And at time leads us simply to a place of prayer, 'Thy will be done.' in confession and repentance, seeking forgiveness and giving up control. It requires rigorous self-reflection on our part as we struggle to give up our presumed privilege to determine the legitimacy of others. In the space we create for prayer, self-reflection, and conversation, we can begin to imagine ourselves differently in this world.

Timothy Seidel is the Director of Peace and Justice Ministries with Mennonite Central Committee U.S.

Post-colonial vs. Postcolonial

"In postcolonial discursive practice . . . when the term is used with a hyphen, "post-colonial," the term is seen as indicating the historical period aftermath of colonialism, and without the hyphen, "postcolonial," as signifying a reactive resistance discourse of the colonized who critically interrogate dominant knowledge systems in order to recover the past from the Western slander and misinformation of the colonial period. . . ." —R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader,* Blackwell Publishing UK

Yet 'hostipitality' challenges us by naming the tension always present between hostility and hospitality.

Postcolonialism and Anabaptism: A Conversation

by Rick Derksen

Quotes are taken from the report "A conversation on MCC and the 'postcolonial' and MCC's participation in postcolonial theological reflection and engagement as steps on its anti-oppression journey" by Harley Eagle, Sri Mayasandra, Valentina Satvedi, Timothy Seidel, and Alain Epp Weaver that was presented at the joint MCC U.S. Executive Committee and MCC Binational Board meeting, Akron, PA, 10 April 2010.

The Young Center at Elizabethtown College welcomed and hosted 36 participants, September 24–25, 2010, for the "Postcolonialism and Anabaptism: A Conversation" gathering. The conversation consisted of circle process discussions, smaller work group discussions and presentation/response sessions. Each element of the conversation informed and was at the same time informed by the other as multiple conversations were going on at the same time.

Circle process discussions framed the beginning and end of the first full day as well as the end of the second day. Everyone had the opportunity to share their hopes, expectations, and learnings. At the core of the conversation were work group sessions in which participants were assigned to one of five groups which focused on the following questions:

1. What does it mean to be 'Anabaptist' in a postcolonial context?
2. How does the legacy of colonialism impact our churches, our readings of scripture, and our relationships with communities around the world? How do we read/re-read, interpret/re-interpret, scripture as Anabaptists through postcolonial lenses?
3. How can we begin to envision 'postcolonial' theologies that move us to 'decolonize' the body of Christ and dismantle the structures of violence and oppression that persist in our relationships and churches?
4. How do/should Anabaptists deal with the concept of 'hybridity'?
5. How do we understand the concepts/experiences of displacement/exile/return in Anabaptist and postcolonial terms?

In between the work group sessions, presenters and respondents shared rich reflections on "Postcolonialism and Religion" and "Anabaptism in a Postcolonial Context," followed by open discussion times. At the end of each day, a listening committee had the opportunity to share their observations and questions with the whole group. Following the final work group session on the second day, each group shared a representation of its conversation to all of the gathered participants using a variety of creative verbal and visual expressions, one of which appears as a sidebar on this page.

"Postcolonial theological reflection is a space for the colonized to be heard." Did this process allow that to happen in an Anabaptist context? It was at least a beginning. "Postcolonial theology is an invitation to a conversation." Did that happen? I believe it did. "Postcolonial theology has value in how it is translated into practical activism." Whether or not this process of planning, organizing and experiencing the conversation on postcolonialism and Anabaptism will be translated into practical activism remains to be seen.

Rick Derksen was the Anti-Racism Coordinator for Mennonite Central Committee until May 2011.

My dream is that we can . . .
teach our children how to decolonize when we ourselves are so colonized

My dream is that we can . . .
recognize our own poverty

My dream is that we can . . .
name colonialism in our relationships and churches and take action to respond

My dream is that we can . . .
continue to critically engage and reflect on how we can dismantle our colonial thinking and doing

My dream is that we can . . .
create space where the lived experiences and voices of the marginalized are valued.

My dream is that we can . . .
walk our talk

My dream is that we can . . .
listen to the voices from the margin even when they disturb us.

My dream is that we can . . .
interpret scripture in community.

My dream is that we can . . .
listen to the voices of women.

My dream is that we can . . .
learn how to unlearn

My dream is that we can.

The litany above comes from one of the creative small group presentations at the September 2010 Postcolonialism and Anabaptism conversation at Elizabethtown College.

Anabaptism in a Postcolonial Context

by Peter Dula

Postcolonial theory begins, at least in my head, with Frantz Fanon and especially with the command issued in the closing chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth*. "Leave this Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them, at the corner of every one of their own streets, in all the corners of the globe."[1] That is, it begins with a basic awareness that the modern Western philosophical and theological traditions were not to be trusted. And with the question, what does it mean to "leave Europe"? Or, to be precise, what does it mean to "leave *this* Europe" the one still unaware of the bankruptcy of its humanism?

One of the many bold theorists that emerged to take up that question was from the West Indies, Stuart Hall. In a well known essay, "New Ethnicities," Hall "attempt[ed] to identify and characterize a significant shift that has been going on (and is still going on) in black cultural politics."[2] He described that shift as "a change from a struggle over the relations of representation to a politics of representation itself." (442)

Hall's essay articulates so clearly the signature postmodernist and postcolonialist move of deconstructing various binaries. In particular, he is identifying a shift that we might also understand as the shift from anti-colonial theory to postcolonial theory.[3] Where the anti-colonial (most commonly in nationalist and Marxist forms) was about the struggle for the reversal of hierarchical binaries—white/black, male/female, colonizer/colonized—or about the assimilation of the "lower" term into the higher, postcolonial theory concentrated on breaking down the categories themselves.

Dipesh Chakrabarty writes, "it is impossible to think of anywhere in the world without invoking certain categories and concepts, the genealogies of which go deep into the intellectual and even theological traditions of Europe."[4] Chakrabarty means the way that histories of non-Western nations are written as variations on a master narrative called "the history of Europe." History consigns the non-Western world to what Chakrabarty calls "the waiting room of history," and in doing so it converts history itself into a version of this waiting room. He doesn't mean the waiting room of a doctor's office. He means the waiting room at a train station. The train is going one direction. Its path is determined by the steel rails on which it rides. "We were all headed for the same destination" (8). The master narrative assumes that the trajectory of European history can be mapped onto the history of say, Jordan or Kenya, Iraq or India. Non-Western countries may have their own stories, but they are always subplots within the larger story. Within this larger story, the overriding themes are development, modernization and capitalism. Such histories are ones of absence and failure, lack and inadequacy, the failure to form a Western-style state, the inadequacy of the people to be democratic.

Various historians place the blame in various places. For colonial historians the "native" (whether Indian or African or Arab, etc.) was the figure of lack, requiring a period of British or French education in order to be made ready for the end of history by being assimilated into citizenship and the nation-state. For the nationalist historians who succeeded them after independence, the blame was shifted and the figure of lack became the peasant. The peasants needed to be educated out of their ignorance and parochialism and superstition. One might say, if simplistically, that for the colonial historians, the lack was configured racially, while for the nationalists it was figured according to class. For many postcolonialists, and especially the subalternists, this is tangled up with religion. That is, if the native or the peasant is dead weight slowing the train's the progress to modernity, that is in part due to their excessive religiosity. While religion, properly disciplined, may occasionally be a means to a more just society, it can never be an end in itself.

"Leave this Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them, at the corner of every one of their own streets, in all the corners of the globe."

Anabaptism and Postcolonial Theory

My summary of postcolonial theory says a lot about my understanding of Anabaptism which is deeply informed by John Howard Yoder. Postcolonial contempt for the privileging of the nation-state as political arena and governments as political actors par excellence, dovetails nicely with Yoder's critique of Constantinianism. The emphasis of Hall and many others on political struggle as cultural struggle provided an outlet for protest that did not need to be validated by the state and hence did not conflict with conventional Anabaptist wariness of participation

Suggested Reading

Homi Bhabha. *The Locations of Culture.* London: Routledge, 1994.

Mark G. Brett. *Decolonizing God: The Bible in the Tides of Empire.* Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2008.

Jacque Derrida. *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness.* London: Routledge, 2001.

Musa W. Dube. *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible.* St. Louis: Chalice, 2000.

Peter Dula and Chris K. Huebner, eds. *The New Yoder.* Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010.

Michel Foucault. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Writings, 1972–77,* edited by C. Gordon. New York: Pantheon, 1980.

Toni Morrison. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination.* New York: Vintage, 1992.

Ronaldo Munck and Denis O'Hearn, eds. *Critical Development Theory: Contributions to a New Paradigm.* New York: Zed, 1999.

Laura Nader. "Harmony Models and the Construction of Law," in *Conflict Resolution: Cross-Cultural*

Perspectives, edited by Peter Avruch, Peter Black and Joseph Scimecca, 41–59. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1991.

(continued on page 7)

in the state apparatus. Yoder's uneasiness with liberation theology seemed, theoretically, right to me, yet it also seemed to turn his theology and that dependent upon it pale and wealthy and Northern and tame. But if my reading is fair, then liberation theology is more properly understood as the anti-colonial, not that postcolonial just insofar as it was heavily indebted to the nationalist and Marxist discourses that retained the master-narratives of Europe at their center. This fortuitous conjunction with postcolonial theory provided a political reason to keep Yoder's theological uneasiness with the liberationists while also giving that theology an unruly edge.

Now I think all this is true, and I think we ought to attend to it and I think such conjunctions ought to be more widely known in both theological and postcolonial circles. I think it is testimony to just how much Yoder was ahead of his time, perhaps because he understood the Anabaptists to be one of the first irrational others against which liberalism (or "this Europe") chose to define itself.[5]

In the spirit of Foucault, let's think of postcolonial theory not as a body of information or even a theory to be lined up with Anabaptism in order to see how they correspond. Instead let us understand it as a *style* or a *posture,* or, perhaps an invitation or call to a certain posture.

Although there are many forms of organization that have emerged to compete with the sovereignty of the weakened African nation-state, one of the most influential younger postcolonialists, Achille Mbembe chooses to highlight as most important "the state of war" and Pentecostalism. Pentecostalism, according to Mbembe, is not some opiate of the people arising out of the desperation of war, but "the process of reinventing the self and the polis, in its twofold sense—the earthly polis and heavenly polis." This should interest us. In fact, if we are who we say we are, I can think of few things that should interest us as much.[6]

For the moment what it mostly does is expose a tension. It makes it all the more curious that the gap between Western Anabaptist theology and, say, African theology, remains so wide. Traditionally Mennonite theology has been relentless in its criticism of other theologies for their ethical failures, in particular their individualism and political accomodationism. We have insisted on being able to infer a relatively direct line from constantinian practices to bad theology. We have vigorously criticized other communions for neglecting the Sermon on the Mount. But why don't we also see the church in the Global South as an opportunity to take up some (self and polis re-inventing) practices we routinely ignore such as faith healing, exorcism and glossolalia? In Fanon's words, why is it so hard to "leave Europe"?

There is a range of possible answers to such questions. The most obvious one is that we remain colonialist. First and most plainly, we retain the money/power/institutions (mission agencies, Mennonite Central Committee, universities, seminaries) I am just enough of a simplistic Marxist to know that if you change that, you change everything. Also, we remain colonialist in that we still believe in Chakrabarty's waiting room. There are many differences between North American Anabaptism and, say, African Pentecostalism, which make us uncomfortable. African Pentecostalism is "by and large far more interested in personal salvation than in radical politics."[7] They are biblical literalists who practice faith healing and exorcism. When they say "liberation" they often mean from demon possession. The root of the reason they make us uncomfortable is because we still believe in the waiting room. We think those things are "traditional" or "superstitious." Bishop Spong said that the African bishops have "moved out of animism into a very superstitious kind of Christianity" and that he "never expected to see the Anglican communion, which prides itself on the place of reason in faith, descend to this level of irrational Pentecostal hysteria."[8] We would never say anything that transparently bigoted, but are we sure that we aren't at least a bit sympathetic with the old bishop?

Very little of that is unique to Africa or the global South. Thinking so is just perpetuating one more binary that postcolonial theorists have taught us to be suspicious of. The story of Anabaptism interacts with varieties of ecstatic worship from its very beginnings until the present. The Anabaptism that Yoder inherited had relegated its spiritualists to the fringes. And in the 1970s the charismatic movement swept through Lancaster County, emptying the pews of churches like the one in which I grew up. And so as is often the case with postcolonial inquiry, we are led to a new set of questions, question about how our relationship to our colonial others reflects and refracts our relationship to ourselves.

Peter Dula is Assistant Professor of Religion and Culture at Eastern Mennonite University.

Notes

1. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York, Grove Press, 1963), 311.

2. In David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, eds., Stuart Hall: *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 441.

3. See Achille Mbembe, "African Modes of Self-Writing," *Public Culture* 14/1 (2002): 263.

4. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 4. Italics in original. All further references will be noted parenthetically in the text.

5. In 1980 Mennonite Board of Missions (MBM) adopted the statement "Ministry Among African Independent Churches" which explicitly understood its work in this manner saying "Having been a minority ought to enable us to identify with those who have little power, prestige and privilege." Quoted in James R. Krabill, *When Teachers Become Learners: MBM Marks Four Decades of Ministry with African-Initiated Churches* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Board of Missions, 2001), 9

6. The 'if' is not rhetorical. It may be that we are not who we say we are.

7. Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 8.

8. Jenkins, 142.

Suggested Reading (continued)

Michael Prior, ed. The *Bible and Colonialism: A Moral Critique* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

Kwok Pui-lan. *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology.* Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005.

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Fernando Segovia. *Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View from the Margins.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000.

R.S. Sugirtharajah. *Voices from the Margins: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World, 3rd edition.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006.

R.S. Sugirtharajah. *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation.* Oxford: Oxford University, 2002.

Alan C. Tidwell. *Conflict Resolved?: A Critical Assessment of Conflict Resolution.* New York: Pinter, 1998.

George E. Tinker. *Spirit and Resistance: Political Theology and American Indian Liberation.* Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004.

Robert J.C. Young. *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction.* Oxford: Oxford University, 2003.

Anabaptism in a Postcolonial Context: A Response

by Alain Epp Weaver

How should we understand the relationship between liberation theology and postcolonial theory and theology? What are the implications of postcolonial approaches for missiology? What would it mean for the Anabaptist-Mennonite churches of Canada and the United States, and Anabaptist-Mennonite institutions like Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), to think of their work and mission as unfolding within a postcolonial context?

In his presentation Peter noted that anti-colonialism's mistake was in misidentifying the location of political struggle, confining it to struggle over the means of production or over the state apparatus and an accompanying neglecting of the struggle over cultural resources. He then presents liberation theology as the theological analogue to anti-colonialism. Is Peter—and are postcolonial theorists like Dipesh Chakrabarty or Homi Bhabha—simply wanting to insist that the cultural forms of resistance of, say, Indian peasants, are forms of political action, or is Peter also saying that struggles for, say, land restitution or economic redistribution, are illegitimate? If Palestinian Christian theologians, or theologians from First Nations, for example, insist on economic and state-level dimensions of liberation—of stolen land returned, of treaties honored, of compensation and restitution made—is that insistence really an example of what Peter names as the indebtedness of much liberation theology, as a form of anti-colonial discourse, "to the nationalist and Marxist discourses that retained the master narratives of Europe at their center?"

Undoubtedly this description matches the work of some liberation theologians, perhaps especially some Latin American liberation theologians, who engage in different ways in questioning colonialism's binary categories and in the struggle over cultural resources. My main concern here is that we not set up liberation theologians as straw men and women and thus escape the force of their critiques; rather, we should recognize the continuity between much liberationist and postcolonial theological thought.

Peter's helpful observation regarding the convergence of postcolonial themes with some dimensions of John Howard Yoder's thought also provokes reflections about the colonial character of ecclesiology and missiology. My first encounter with the word "colony" was as a child and it was a positive one, arising in the context of my father and his parents telling me about how my ancestors had migrated to the United States from colonies in Russia, with some of their relatives later leaving Russia for colonies in Paraguay, Bolivia, and Mexico. It was only until I was much older that the term "colony" struck a discordant note for me, as I began to wonder to what extent these Mennonite and Hutterite "colonies" were or were not comparable to, say, the Zionist colonies established in early 20th century Palestine.

MCC and the Mennonite press at large continue to refer to colonies without embarrassment and seemingly without any sense that the word colony is semantically related to the practice of colonialism. Mennonite colonies are not, of course, the same as British colonies in, say, India, where the purpose of the colony was to extract natural resources for the benefit of the sending metropolitan power. Mennonite colonies arguably were and are more like Zionist colonies, established on land granted to them by the ruling power (and sometimes at the expense of indigenous peoples) with the aim of long-term settlement. The term "colony" is not the key concern here, rather the phenomenon.

Colonial language and attitudes also infiltrate contemporary theology. Think of the subtitle of *Resident Aliens* by Stanley Hauerwas and Will Willimon: *Life in the Christian Colony*. Is the language of "colony" adequate or appropriate for the missionary, diasporic ecclesiology that Hauerwas, claiming to follow Yoder, wants to champion? Yoder's answer in his pamphlet, As You Go, was clearly no. In his argument for what he called "migration evangelism," Yoder stressed that "There should be no idea of a 'colony,' taking with it a Western, Germanic, or Anglo-Saxon culture which the local people would then be invited to join. . . . They [the migrant missionaries] would rather expect to lose their identity and perhaps even their names in the birth of first-generation Christian fellowships." A postcolonial ecclesiology is thus inherently destabilized, with the church reaching out beyond itself and expecting to lose itself as it seeks the peace of the city; this stands in contrast to a Hauerwasian ecclesiology which too often reads as a call to fortify the walls and towers guarding the Christian colony.

We need more reflection within Anabaptist-Mennonite circles about the historical relationship of colonialism and mission.

We need more reflection within Anabaptist-Mennonite circles about the historical relationship of colonialism and mission. Mennonite missionaries in the Congo, Indonesia, and India operated under the auspices and with the blessing of colonial administrations, yet strikingly little historical or missiological writing exists examining the impact of the colonial context on this mission work and the birth of these churches. How can a relatively powerful institution like, say, MCC enter into renewed, postcolonial relationships of mutual hospitality with Anabaptist churches worldwide when its supporting churches have barely begun to grapple with the colonial context and impact of their mission work?

We also need more reflection on the relationship between missiology and a Christian theology of history. Peter rightly follows Chakrabarty in analyzing how the colonialist imagination consigns the non-Western world to "the waiting room of history." In the Hegelian, teleological account of History with a capital H, the world is all headed in one direction: the Prussian nation-state for Hegel, globalized capitalism and liberal democracy for Francis Fukuyama. Peter has capably analyzed racist and Orientalist dimensions of this secularized theology of history. The theological and missiological challenge, however, is to articulate a Christian theology of history which does not mirror or replicate this Hegelian structure, which does not relegate Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, adherents of so-called African Traditional Religions, and more to the "waiting room of history"—a theology of history which allows for genuine difference, which doesn't turn Jews, Muslims, Hindus, etc. into anonymous Christians, and which permits the church to be surprised and taught by those which it encounters. What Christian accounts of history can there be apart from ones of progressive, evolutionary development, accounts in which non-Christians are by definition situated on a lower rung of the developmental ladder? The answer, I'd suspect, would come in the form of an apocalyptic account of history, in which God's Word breaks in and disrupts the church's complacency, using persons and communities from beyond its self-erected protective walls to upend, correct, and clarify the church's understanding of the Word which it seeks to tame and control.

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The Search for Liberating Interdependence

by Sarah Thompson

My four month stay in Ghana in the Fall of 2009 gave me an opportunity to meet a diverse groups of Christians. There was hardly a conversation that I participated in or listened to about the future of the country that did not bemoan all the "things that are wrong" with Ghana. Most Ghanaians expressed their desire for their society to function in a way that benefits all people. These wishes were described under the umbrella words of "we want development."[1]

A well-known description of the interaction between colonialism and Christianity in Ghana is narrated in this way: "When the white man came to our country, he had the Bible and we had the land. The white man said to us, 'let us pray.' After the prayer, the white man had the land and we had the Bible."[2]

Many African people, whether landless or property owners, do indeed cherish the Bible. Some received the Bible through ancient contact, but most through the channel of development professionals (in this era, colonizers). All African countries have gained at least their nominal independence from their colonizing countries. The process of getting the land back from the people who brought the Bible ("land" in the story is a synecdoche for the wealth, natural resources, sovereignty, and the possibility of *development*) has often, and still often is, articulated by Ghanaians with explicit or implicit Christian connotations.[3]

The way that ordinary Ghanaians explained their hopes for societal improvement was different than the way that development organizations analyzed and addressed the Ghanaian situation. The development director of the United States Agency for International Development spoke of "systems of accountability," and "rule of law," and "democratic process."[4] Christian Ghanaians spoke of development by the power of "God's blessings," "better moral standards," and their ideal president as "a born-again man after God's heart."[5] These are two completely different lexicons and frames of reference for thinking about development. In the course of the research, I found the analysis of Musa Dube and her postcolonial feminist Biblical interpretation to be very useful critique of both these approaches to development.

Western colonists, most of whom were Christians, were the development professionals of the 1600s. Successive delegations from numerous European countries arrived in Africa where they encountered the local people and their beliefs, culture, and social systems.

The European colonization of Africa united the concepts of "God, glory, and gold." These three concepts colluded in ways that perpetuated a theology that served the purposes of individualistic Europeans and legitimized the appropriation of African natural resources and people.[6] Colonization and imperialism were the *development frameworks at that time*. Dube notes that the concept of "gender" should be added to the triad because of the way in which patriarchy systematically valued the lives, experiences and methodologies of men over those of women and children

Postcolonial Development Theory, Postcolonial Theology, Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation and Postcolonial Feminism

Using a postcolonial critique enables decolonization activities when it addresses exploitative patterns present in a society that are the result of previous colonial experience, and the ongoing experience of globalization. In the area of economics and development discourse in Ghana, traditional Western-capitalist development paradigms continue the exploitive pattern of colonization. In contrast, a postcolonial vision for development is needed. As Dube and others note, a postcolonial vision for development is strengthened by postcolonial discourse and liberatory practices in other areas of life. From my experience with various Christian groups in Ghana, the areas of theology, Biblical interpretation, and gender relations were some of the most pertinent areas that a postcolonial analysis could deeply enhance a postcolonial process of development.

Christianity is a strong force in Ghanaian society. As part of the colonial machinery, the mainline protestant and Catholic churches have not officially propagated alternative narratives to that of "God, glory, gold, and gender."

Many groups appeal to Scripture as a source for understanding God and faithful living, but did not recognize that the literature in the Bible itself reflects encounter with imperialistic forces. The text is no stranger to being used as a force for imperialism or for resistance, for building up or for destruction. In order to ask appropriate development questions in Ghana, a postcolonial interpretation of the Bible is necessary.

In *Postcolonial Feminist interpretations of the Bible,* Dube "builds a bridge from postcolonial analysis to feminist biblical exegesis."[7] She first paints the picture of the social structures in which most Africans live, examines the initial and ongoing implications of contact with Christianity, and then systematically analyzes how numerous colonial Christian and indigenous African Christian authors have responded to the questions of colonialism and patriarchy. Finally, she outlines her perspective on readings that promote "liberating interdependence" and tests her readings with a group of African Independent Church (AIC) women. This text was helpful to me as I navigated my teaching assignment at the Good News Theological College and Seminary, near Accra, Ghana.

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"How can Ghanaians begin to read biblical texts for liberating interdependence, and transform the relationships of their lives based on it?"

"Things will change for Africa only when the ordinary citizens of Africa say 'Enough is enough: I'm tired, I need something better than this!'"

Most postcolonial activists who pay particular attention to gender see the church as a negative force in their approaches to bringing positive change here in Ghana (whether that be in the arena of development or reproductive rights or health concerns). Dube calls on feminists and anti-oppression activists of faith to continue their struggle within/through/for the church even though it has been a difficult and tense relationship for years.

Like Dube, I asked the question, "How can Ghanaians begin to read biblical texts for liberating interdependence, and transform the relationships of their lives based on it?" The reading practices of AIC movement women, using Matthew 15:21–28, offer viable strategies for Dube. I did a qualitative study with the female students at GNTCS that attempted to mirror Dube's qualitative study and interviews in Botswana.[8]

Overall, I didn't really gain as many clues about a "reading for liberatory interdependence" as Dube seems to have gained from her interviews. One similar aspect of the interviews with AIC women, for both Dube and myself, was that, no matter if they were from Catholic, Protestant, or AIC background, they felt they were allowed to interpret the text. They did not feel they needed to wait for anyone from the West or a man to do it for them.

General Conclusions

An AIC woman will more likely give an interpretive reading that is liberatory if she is involved in a larger movement for social justice (like a nonprofit or women's organization) than if she is only involved in the church. If the woman or her family has a history of resisting imperialism and patriarchy and if the society still has a profound critique of either of those oppressions then she is more likely to consciously read for liberatory interdependence.

Perhaps it is because in 1957 Ghana was the first country in Africa to gain its independence from the British colonizers that nearly everyone living now has no recollection of direct British influence here. Most Christians (from AIC to Charismatic/Pentecostal to mainline Protestants) do not know how significantly their readings of the Bible are influenced by patriarchal imperialism.[9] Dube stresses that there is a "need to depatriarchalize as well as to decolonize texts before any attempt is made to reclaim them."[10]

Given my experiences in Fall 2009, I suggest that all Ghanaian Christian seminaries should have institutionally supported safe-spaces where female students can gather to bring multiple analyses together and discuss them.[11] But supporting individual seminary students in their decolonization process or educational endeavors is no substitute for grassroots mass movement for social change. As Mensah Otabil said, "Things will change for Africa only when the ordinary citizens of Africa say 'Enough is enough: I'm tired, I need something better than this!' Until we have people who demand better than what they are receiving, this continent has no future."

It is a crucial time for the Ghanaian feminists and Ghanaian theologians to articulate what they need. There are a few voices speaking for significant anti-patriarchal and anti-imperialist analyses, that is, postcolonial and feminist, expressions of Christianity. Even given the power of newer Charismatic/Pentecostal mega-churches that do not articulate a strong alternative to a narrative of God, glory, gold, and gender, if postcolonial feminist theologians mobilize to articulate what it means to be a Christian in a Ghana that is in the process of development, then I believe that the institutions are still flexible enough to respond, and leadership of various Christian churches are eager enough for new voices that they'll listen.

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Notes

1. Emmanuel Amankwah, *Personal Interview.* 4 December 2009.

2. Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible.* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000), 7.

3. At least, in Ghana, by the majority of the Christian majority.

4. Cheryl Anderson, *Personal Interview in Accra.* 31 October 2009.

5. Bruce Agbadi, *Personal Interview, at Good News Theological College and Seminary.* 29 November 2009.

6. Dube, 6.

7. Sylvia Shirk, *PhD Dissertation Draft,* 3 December 2009.

8 Dube, 186.

9. Patriarchy and imperialism are not identical phenomena or oppressions. Patriarchy serves imperialism.

10. Dube, 184.

11. I suggest this not only for Ghanaian Christian seminaries, but seminaries all over the world.

The Search for Liberating Interdependence: A Response

by Nekeisha Alexis-Baker

Sarah Thompson's presentation led me to reflect on how an anti-civilization discourse might interact with and strengthen the critiques of post-colonialism as I am beginning to understand it. What is the core of the colonialist enterprise and project? What is it trying to uphold? As I see it, colonizers are civilizers. That is they are engaged in the process of building and sustaining what we call civilization: cities, nation-states, empires, etc. To resist colonialism then should involve the resisting, critiquing and challenging the desire to extend and import Western civilizing impulses to other parts of the world.

As post-colonialists, we do not need to import and enforce our "radicality" onto other global communities. Instead, we can learn about and point to indigenous movements that embrace anti-oppression. When churches in global contexts begin repeating patterns of domination picked up from their Western oppressors and/or continue to employ repressive practices from their pre-existing cultural practices, perhaps one role anti-colonialists in the United States might play is to connect liberating movements with one another so they can work together in authentic ways. That way, we could at least temper the urge to force liberation on others in the same way that US foreign policy tries to force democracy on other nations "for their own good."

I heard Sarah speak about the benefits and dangers of traditional Western-capitalist development in Ghana, which raised two questions in my mind. First, how do we express cautions about development practice in a non-colonialist way, especially since our objections might seem like we are trying to prevent others from experiencing the good-life we have enjoyed? Second, do people of color who have experienced oppression and the lie of our Western contexts have a role in foreshadowing the events to come for people of color in the Two-Thirds World where development is being touted as the direction to go?

In conclusion, what defines a colonizer? Would we be colonizers for resisting oppression carried out by the hands of the formerly colonized? Sometimes being post-colonialist might mean resisting indigenous voices that speak and act in colonial patterns. We need to be careful how we do it. We need to be thoughtful and analytical about it. But I think one of my fears is that post-colonialism not turn into another way of seeming radical while turning a blind-eye to injustice. How do we make sure that the "p" in post-colonial neither stands for "paralysis" or "perpetrators of previous patterns?"

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How do we make sure that the "p" in post-colonial neither stands for "paralysis" or "perpetrators of previous patterns?"

Postcolonialism and a Critical Approach to Development and Peacebuilding Theory and Practice

by Timothy Seidel

Anthropologist Talal Asad has argued that the liberal nation state is paradoxically required to define the genuinely religious in order to lay claim to the secular.[1] Similarly, one might argue that self-described secular peacebuilding and development organizations are compelled to define themselves in opposition to religious groups and religious parties in areas of their operation. They must define the religious in order to carry out their work as secular organizations. It is precisely their secular status that compels them to delineate and circumscribe the religious. This engagement is a tenuous process that leads to homogenized and static definitions of people and groups. Perhaps most importantly, it grants secular institutions the power to name and delegitimize religious organizations. And this is integral to the dominant frameworks that development and peacebuilding have historically operated within.

I open with this to illustrate the point that utilizing tools from postcolonial theory that lead us to interrogate categories such as "religion" and "secular" as products of colonialist modernity begs the question of the colonialist legacy latent in contemporary development and peacebuilding theory and practice.

A healthy skepticism, then, of any rigid, binary oppositions that may be operative in development and peacebuilding (such as civilized-barbaric, developed-underdeveloped, or secular-religious distinctions) is warranted. To unsettle these distinctions not only opens productive lines of inquiry into possible forms of engagement in conflict situations that embrace the inherently contingent and fluid identities of the social fabric, but it also begins to recognize the locations from which the theory and practice of development and peacebuilding is produced. Indeed, acknowledging the existence of development and peacebuilding discourses, that they have a location, helps us avoid the tendency to universalize those discourses.[2]

As we interrogate these distinctions we come closer to understanding voices such as Ziauddin Sardar's who point out: "The problem of Eurocentrism, and hence the problem of development, is thus the problem of knowledge. It is a problem of discovering other ways of knowing, being and doing. It is a problem of how to be human in ways other than those of Europe. It is also a problem of how the West could liberate its true self from its colonial history and moorings."[3]

"The problem of Eurocentrism, and hence the problem of development, is thus the problem of knowledge."

Unmasking the Eurocentric location of this discussion, Bruno Charbonneau argues, makes it easier "to see the hegemonic politics of peacebuilding" in its move "to establish the legitimate parameters of an epistemology for/of peace. It sets the limits to political debates and policy options 'in a way that nearly always disguises the fact that [peace] is essentially contested.'"[4]

Looking at conflict resolution approaches that utilize "harmony models" that seek to eliminate conflict, Laura Nader has pointed out that these models can in fact be used ideologically as a powerful form of direct and indirect control. "Harmony may be used to suppress peoples by socializing them toward conformity in colonial contexts."[5] Nader makes the connection between the spread of harmony models as control or pacification techniques in colonial as well as missionary contexts.

There is a reminder here to constantly revisit and rethink the ways we inhabit a world shaped by colonial history. This resonates with Asad's discussion of a "decentered pluralism" characterized by a "continuous readiness to deconstruct historical narratives constituting identities and their boundaries" in order to open up space for the full multiplicity of overlapping, rather than opposed, social identities.[6]

What then is the goal of our development and peacebuilding efforts? From where does it emerge, begin, and end? And who benefits? Such questions are critical if we are to avoid unreflective assimilation to humanitarian industries where development efforts are too often reduced to simply plugging more people into the global market, or our peacebuilding efforts unwittingly becoming a cover for more effective nation-state-building.

Attention to the potential for "relief," "development" and "peace" to operate as totalizing ideologies that are themselves built on binary oppositions that represent the legacy of colonialist modernity is our challenge.

Perhaps this is one of the greatest contributions of postcolonial theory and theology: It does not allow us to gloss over the particularity of our witness as a Northern-based, church-related development and peacebuilding agency. Instead, it not only warns us that any such denial begins to move us down the path of a universalizing colonialism, it also reminds us of the potential of such a witness to interrupt seemingly common-sense distinctions and reveal—in those in-between spaces where rigid categories, distinctions, and identities are fluid and hybrid—radically open and unexpected possibilities for justice and peace.

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Notes

1. Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 17.

2. By "discourse" I am thinking in particular of Stuart Hall's description as "a particular way of *representing* 'the West,' 'the Rest,' and the relation between them. A discourse is a group of statements which provide a language for talking about—i.e. a way of representing—a particular kind of knowledge about a topic in a certain way" with power seen in creating and reinforcing Western dominance, not least by excluding the "Other" from the production of the discourse; see "The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power" in R*ace and Racialization: Essential Readings,* ed. Tania Das Gupta et al (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 2007), 56.

3. Ziauddin Sardar, "Development and the Locations of Eurocentrism," in *Critical Development Theory: Contributions to a New Paradigm,* eds. Ronaldo Munck and Denis O'Hearn (London: Zed Books, 1999), 60.

4. Bruno Charbonneau, "The Colonial Legacy of Peace(building): France, Europe, Africa" (Paper presented at the ISA annual convention, New York City, NY, 15–18 February 2009).

5. Laura Nader, "Harmony Models and the Construction of Law" in *Conflict Resolution: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (41–59), K. Avruch, P.W. Black & J.A. Scimecca (eds.) (Greenwood, 1991), 45.

6. Asad, *Formations of the Secular,* 177.