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Originating Sins

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Editorial

Malinda Elizabeth Berry

On March 20, 1925, Frederick Lewis Donaldson, then Canon of Westminster Abbey, preached a sermon enumerating "seven deadly social evils": wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, knowledge without character, commerce without morality, science without humanity, worship without sacrifice, and politics without principle. Donaldson's list is a variation on the seven deadly sins of Christian tradition: envy, greed, gluttony, lust, pride, sloth, and wrath. But I also think Dante's circles of Hell—described in the *Inferno* portion of his *Divine Comedy*—are apt as well. In addition to lust, gluttony, greed, and wrath, the poet names heresy, violence, fraud, and treachery as circles of Hell. What Donaldson's list rightly suggests is that spiritual trespasses have social implications; this connection, which is foundational for doing Christian ethics, is at the heart of the pieces collected in this volume.

The phrase "originating sins" directs our collective attention to the truth of the biblical adage that "we reap what we sow."

The organizing theme of this issue of *Vision*, "originating sins," is a complicated phrase. To some it signals the doctrine of "original sin," but to others it is a way of thinking theologically and morally about the roots and foundations of the institutions that are woven into the fabric of North American life. In either case, this phrase directs our collective attention to the truth of the biblical adage that "we reap what we sow." Using this imagery, we might think of critical theological and ethical reflection on the social and institutional manifestations of Christianity as comparable to the work farmers, botanists, and ecologists do to promote health and combat disease within an ecosystem like an orchard.

In late August, guided by staff from Mennonite Central Committee: Central States (Michelle Armster, Erica Littlewolf, and Karen Kauffman Wall), I joined a group of other church folk for two days of learning, listening, and conversing. Our topic was the Doctrine of Discovery—that doctrine promulgated by the church and European monarchies in the fifteenth century and inscribed into US law in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that blessed colonial powers to seize the lands of indig-

enous peoples and thereby to terrorize and massacre indigenous peoples in the process. We turned our attention to images as well as words, and one of the images we kept coming back to was something we called "the tree of death," producing genocide and femicide. In this image, developed by the Indigenous Peoples Solidarity Movement–Ottawa (IPSMO) and titled "The Tree of Colonial Oppression," the tree's roots are colonialism, capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy. Its trunk and branches are *terra nullius*, the Indian Act, intergenerational trauma, and other expressions of deadly social evils. In their work, IPSMO also refers to another tree: "The Liberation Tree." This tree is almost dancing in the soil and is full of life, nourished by love, respect, humility, honesty, wisdom, courage, and truth. This tree is sprouting diversity, coexistence, and harmony from branches of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well being—what the biblical tradition considers to be God's *shalom*.

Each contribution to this issue is a piece of resistance to the Doctrine of Discovery's building blocks and strategies of enslavement, exploitation, extraction, extermination, and extinction.

The pieces in this issue of *Vision* engage the broader theme "originating sins" through the particulars of the Doctrine of Discovery. Each contribution is a piece of resistance to the doctrine's building blocks and strategies of enslavement, exploitation, extraction, extermination, and extinction. Each contribution is also a piece of affirmation that we humans, with God's guidance, can learn, grow, heal, and change. But the tree of life and liberation is still vulnerable, and we are too. Even when our hearts have changed, and we see things differently, we are still caught in the snare of social and systemic evils even as we oppose and resist them.

In her song "Greed," Bernice Johnson Reagon intones, "Greed is a poison rising in this land / the soul of the people twisted in its command." From our historical vantage point, I concur with Reagon that greed has incredible staying power and has played a powerful role in forming the nations of Canada and the United States of America, among others. To further paraphrase Reagon, greed and its siblings are virulent. They tirelessly infect everyone, never stopping and never giving up.

What is the antidote to such poison? The song doesn't answer that question, but a biblical response to such atrocity might include donning

a sackcloth and wearing ashes after we have torn our clothes made of (colonialist and imperialist) North American homespun.

We Anabaptists are not the first or only Christians who have been working to respond to the generations and generations of violence against indigenous peoples perpetrated by colonialist nations and their citizens. The Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery Coalition is one expression of the World Council of Churches' 2012 call to "reflect upon our own national and church history and to encourage all member parishes and congregations to seek a greater understanding of the issues facing Indigenous Peoples."

When we begin to cut down the trees of death and oppression and cultivate trees of life and liberation, our mourning and pain begins to turn into joy.

As we Anabaptists deepen our commitment to the movement of Christians who consider the Doctrine of Discovery to be one of the originating sin of Western Christianity's westward expansion, my hope is that we will also find ways to affirm that Christianity is not a monolith. There has never been, nor will there be, consensus among all Christians on questions of biblical interpretation, doctrinal confession, or ethics. For all the defenders of the Doctrine of Discovery, there have also been opponents to this paradigm. Telling the truth about how European Mennonites benefitted personally from the doctrine in the past—and how the contemporary motley crew of Anabaptist-Mennonites that we call the Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA participates in the doctrine's cruel legacy in this moment—is difficult heart-breaking work. But when we begin to cut down the trees of death and oppression and cultivate trees of life and liberation, our mourning and pain begins to turn into joy.

My own journey with the Doctrine of Discovery is still young, and I have many questions, but I have been impacted personally by some of the writers featured here, especially Rich Hostetler Meyer and Katerina Friesen. As part of the ongoing commitment Rich has made to shifting all kinds of paradigms described in his article, Rich helped connect Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) to Potawatomi photographer Sharon Hoogstraten whose stunning portraits provide the AMBS learning community with a tangible, visual, and visceral sense of who tended the prairie before we arrived and how they have endured. A few years ago, AMBS exhibited Sharon's portraits in conjunction with our Rooted & Grounded conference. This conference, which Katerina helped plan, fo-

cused on Indigenous issues related to land. More recently, Rich helped area congregations purchase prints of the eight portraits for permanent installation on our campus. In June, when we celebrated their arrival in conjunction with the departure of the pilgrims who followed the Trail of Death (led by Katerina), Sharon remarked that the portraits seemed to her to be at home. I take her comment as a heartening word of encouragement. Don't misunderstand: buying portraits of Native Americans to hang on the walls of a seminary is not a magical transaction that erases history. Rather, these portraits help us begin to tell a story of acknowledgement—they are saplings of liberation I hope future generations of AMBS students and employees will experience as mature trees.

Many white Mennonites are still learning what it means to be white and how to integrate sociological understandings about identity with confessional and religious identity.

I have chosen to lead with a sampling of these portraits because, in the pages that follow, the primary speakers and audience are descended from white, European settlers of the United States and Canada. As I serve in the editorial role for this issue of *Vision*, I am, among other things, a person of color moderating and brokering a conversation focusing on white colonialist patterns and history because I understand how important it is for white Anabaptists in North America to recognize their sociological, psychological, and spiritual identity as settlers. While I would have preferred to gather articles from various perspectives of red, black, white, and mixed Mennonites, it is too early for that conversation. Many white Mennonites are still learning what it means to be white and how to integrate sociological understandings about identity with confessional and religious identity. This is why I am grateful for the articles Sheri Hostetler and Marty Troyer have contributed chronicling congregational journeys through this complex geography of memory, identity, violence, ignorance, denial, and reparation.

I am also glad to include here pieces by current AMBS students and recent alumni who followed the Trail of Death this summer. The nine-day pilgrimage from June 3 to 13, 2019, traced the route the US military forced approximately eight hundred and fifty Potawatomi to take in 1838 when they were forced from their ancestral homeland in northern Indiana to present-day Osawatomie, Kansas. The course description states:

> *We will remember this expulsion by prayerfully walking several miles of the route each day and by reading journals and letters from the time of the removal. Potawatomi descendants of those who survived the Trail of Death will join our group to share their stories during meal times and ceremony. We will confront the theologies that contributed to white settler colonialism and will seek what new paths God opens for repair today as we journey in remembrance and lament.*

Peter Anderson, Andrew Hudson, Mara Weaver Boshart, and Katerina Friesen have contributed pieces of their course work that also represent their soul work. We can see there are many ways to engage the originating sins of colonialism, capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy.

These complex spaces are liminal and just big enough to step into, allowing us to sit down and get cozy with our discomfort. Where do I belong? Do I have a sense of being deeply linked to a group or being from a certain place? What is it that makes one indigenous? How do I renounce systemic violence and oppression? What is the meaning and power of acknowledgement in Native communities compared to those shaped by dominant culture? Can I (whatever my lineage) forgive myself and my forebears for our part in contributing to the colonial enterprise? I hope what is here helps you deeply ponder your humanity within the ecosystem of our ancient Earth. After all, if our work is to be theological, it is necessarily deep. Here the articles by Elaine Enns and Jonathan Brenneman give us some places to pause and consider what we each bring to the work of listening, learning, and healing—as do the poems by Kevin Ressler, a Mennonite writer of color, with which this volume closes.

Just as the seven deadly social evils do not rest, neither does the quest for justice, compassion, sharing, joy, innovation, harmony, and understanding that becomes wisdom.

About the author

Malinda Elizabeth Berry is both a theologian and a teacher. Her commitment to Anabaptism in the Mennonite tradition is evident in her approach to an array of topics, issues, and concerns of our day: Christian social responsibility, environmental stewardship—with an emphasis on human ecology, and renewing congregational life in its structural and spiritual dimensions. In addition to the research she does to support her teaching, Malinda continues to develop her contribution to peace theology: shalom political theology.

Dancing for my tribe

Potawatomi tradition in the new millennium

Sharon Hoogstraten

My photographic portrait project of Potawatomi Indians in regalia is the story of wholly modern people (originally inhabitants of the Great Lakes region) preserving the traditional dress of their ancestors while also making it relevant to contemporary living and their own personal stories. My intention is to create images so compelling that they become the record for our place on the timeline of Potawatomi and American history. I am portraying the evolution of our ancestral dress interpreted by descendants who live in a world of sewing machines, duct tape, acrylics, hairdos and manicures, favorite sports teams, and service to our country. Indian regalia is not a re-enactment or artifact of the past but uniquely expressed designs informing our future.

Photographing formally on a seamless sweep using studio lighting, I strip away all distractions, maximize detail, and also create a look reminiscent of the Indian Country studio portraits of a century ago. We peer into those old portraits looking for details of the culture, but even more compulsively, for clues about that *particular* human being. I also strive for that honest, revealing, enduring revelation of each individual I photograph—sometimes conveyed in stillness, or by a delayed recognition of motion, ranging to outright exuberant dance. I've titled this body of work *Dancing for my tribe: Potawatomi tradition in the new millennium* because photography is *my* dance. It is my mission to preserve the current Potawatomi interpretation of regalia and to remind all citizens that we are still here. For ourselves, and our children's children, we experience striking symbolism, artistry, and techniques of our time, just as we honor the dress and demeanor of the ancestors who have walked on. Furthermore, we have the handwritten reflections of each person who posed, a priceless addition to each portrait.[1] Presenting the faces, stories, and regalia of modern Potawatomis will contribute to a better understanding of their transformed place in the diverse life of America.

1 Editors' note: The text accompanying each portrait is transcribed from handwritten originals. We have opted to preserve the original syntax. For full-color photos, see https://hoogstratenphotography.com/dancing-for-my-tribe.

Amelia, Citizen Potawatomi, 2011 – Shawnee, Oklahoma

It was important to follow my Indian Heritage by wearing a traditional regalia dress. My dress was made by my great aunt and grandmother. I chose the color turquoise since I am the oldest. It connects thoughts of my grandmother. It is also my favorite stone.

My beaded hairpiece and feather was handmade and worn by my cousin in her wedding, but after was passed down to me.

The beaded chest piece was assembled by family members.

My earrings were also handmade by my great aunt.

I am a descendant from the Krapp family. Two of their pictures are displayed on the veterans' wall.

I am thankful for everything that my family members have done for me. I hope to make them proud when I dance proudly around the arena!

Calvin Ballew, Pokagon Band of Potawatomi, 2015 – Dowagiac, Michigan

I'm 17 years old. I have been dancing since I began to walk. The style of dance I perform is called the Grass Dance. The responsibilities of the Grass Dance is that when our people would move to new areas we would send them to pat down the grass and drive away the bugs and snakes and small animals. We pay homage to the grass by putting ribbons on our regalia to symbolize the grass we are destroying.

The hoop I carry symbolizes the circle of life. Most people put otter fur in the hoop, but I chose to put ermine to symbolize the changing of seasons because in the summer and spring time its fur is brown and in the winter it changes to white to blend into the snow.

I come from Ballew, Quigno, White Pigeon, and Graverette families and I am enrolled in the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi tribal nation.

Cypress Kewayoshi-Deleary, 2016 – Walpole Island First Nation

Cypress "Jojo"'s Anishinaabe name is Neegahn Binayshees which means "leading little bird" and she is of the Mawng Clan (Loon Clan). She is 8 years old and has been dancing since she could walk in ceremonies and powwows. She wears a contemporary jingle dress regalia. Her mom (Daintry Kewayosh) makes all of her regalia. Jojo has Potawatomi lineage on both her mother's and father's side.

Candace Painter, 2016 – Citizen Potawatomi Nation

Fabric is symbolic of family, each stitch is an act of love and each pattern is a chapter of a family's story. It was my passion that the story of my family live on. The patterns are from my great great grandmother's family, the Vieux family. Through old photos and help from the tribal research department I was able to locate my family patterns. I decided to choose traditional colors in nature. Colors that would be true to nature and colors that would have been used by our people. From my father and aunt I was able to find out that my family is bear clan from my great grandfather's side. To honor my great grandfather's side I have bear claws to represent the Potawatomi families I am a descendant of. The skirt is made of broadclothe, which represents the broadclothe given to our people on the Trail of Death. I dyed the fringe to represent fire that represents the origin of our people and a brooch is the shape of flames on the top of the ribbon on my back. I wanted something I can pass on to my children, so our culture and our way of life continues for future generations. In my heart, I wanted to design something that would honor my family and honor our people. So, with my hands I used fabrics along with the colors and patterns of my ancestors to keep the story of our family alive, and in doing so, honor those who gave gone before me.

Georgia Potts, 2015 – Prairie Band Potawatomi

My name is Nazwin, I am fish clan and my color is red. My misho was an original allottee on the Prairie Band Reservation in Mayetta, Kansas. His name is Charles Nozackum and my grandma Annie.

My regalia is called a traditional sachen and is my color. I proudly wear it to represent my ancestors and the love of being a traditional nature woman.

My medallion is of a prairie rose.

Tony Wahweotten, 2018 – Prairie Band Potawatomi

I am of the Wahweotten, Wahwasuck, Thomas, & Shopteese families. They gave me the name Hïte pē kwaki (chita pu quakee), Prairie Magic.

I used to dance as a youngster. I would dance for the Elders at doings, and was encouraged by my relatives and friend, George Allen.

There was a fire at my home, and it destroyed my regalia. I didn't dance for many years.

My uncle, Badger Wahwasuck, requested I dance in some beadwork he was ready to retire. I was brought back into the arena in Chicago and have been dancing ever since.

Margaret Zientek, Citizen Potawatomi Nation, 2010 – Shawnee, Oklahoma

My grandfather Autwin Blaze Pecore served as tribal chairman. To carry on the tradition of our tribe is an honor.

Studying pictures of late 1800s—artist renditions of the tribal dress, I have incorporated some of the styles and applique designs in my sewing. I started sewing tribal dress for my daughter about ten years ago. Today I sew for several members of the tribe.

Each year I help the Potawatomi Leadership Program Students start to build their regalia. To tell them the names of the different applique and what it represents always makes me feel honored. How one part of applique faces upward, one faces downward to represent the reflector—the water, to identify the patterns—oak leaf, butterfly, violet, water lily—woodland star—is to give living history, to identify who created some of the patterns I use—to me—is to give honor to their art. The crane applique my daughter designed. The heat pattern my friend Jason Hawk created for his wife. The "scrolling" pattern, Carrol Clay allows me to replicate that her mother, Nona Clay (Chickasaw), created.

Last night as we did grand entry I kept seeing people who were wearing regalia I created for them. I lost count at 20 in full regalia.

Tesia Zientek, Self-Governance Office, Citizen Potawatomi Nation, June 2012 – Shawnee, Oklahoma

My mother, Margaret Zientek, named me Jejakwi, which means "like a crane." She chose the name to reflect the way that I dance traditionally as well as my affinity for travel. My mother and I worked together to design the crane icon represented in my regalia.

The colors were chosen to represent the sheen and shimmer of the water in which a crane stands.

She spent hours constructing the dress and labored ever each detail. I am extremely proud of her work and will wear the regalia with immense pride. She is a wonderful Potawatomi role model.

Logan Spence, 2015 – Pokagon Band Potawatomi

My dad helped me to pick my beads.

The belt says "Nektosha" which means "young horse," the name given to me by my grandfather at my birth.

About the photographer

A photographer, animator, and graphic designer, Sharon Hoogstraten is best known for her portraits of Potawatomi Indians in regalia and for her Emmy award-winning animated openings for television news programs. She received a BS in Professional Photography from Rochester Institute of Technology and an MFA from University of Illinois at Chicago, where she taught Graphic Communication at UIC as an adjunct associate professor. Hoogstraten's large-format canvas portraits of Potawatomi Indians have been exhibited in numerous museums and institutions, including AMBS, and are included in the permanent collection of the Citizens Band Potawatomi Cultural Center in Shawnee, Oklahoma. Her work can also be seen at the Smithsonian Institute's National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC.

Healing trauma, decolonizing memory

Elaine Enns

> *The Remembearers . . . [are] those who have the traumatic event registered in their consciousness without actually having experienced it themselves: the second circle of witnesses to the violent experience.*
> *–Lotem Giladi and Terece Bell*[1]

All four of my grandparents fled Ukraine and Russia in the 1920s, coming to Saskatchewan with some 22,000 other Mennonite immigrants.[2] During the Russian Revolution and Civil War (1917–21), they and other German-speakers endured a continuous climate of violence, plundering, rape, and killing.

As a child, I knew something unspeakable had happened to them. But my grandparents spoke only about the good times and the vast abundance and beauty of the land. In my senior year at a Mennonite high school in Saskatchewan, our drama teacher had us perform a reader's theater rendition of Barbara Claassen Smucker's novel *Days of Terror*.[3] Survivors of the *Zerrissenheit* (a German term loosely translated as "a time of being torn apart") spoke with us about their experience. Seeds of a call to become a "remembearer" in my community were planted in me, which have grown for thirty years.

Russländer Mennonites settling on the Canadian Prairies were neighbors to Cree communities. Those Cree communities were experiencing the ravages of colonization: cultural genocide in Indian Residential schools; land displacement; broken treaties; socioeconomic discrimination; and the resulting epidemic of intergenerational substance abuse, family fragmentation, and cultural loss. While these communities en-

1 Lotem Giladi and Terece Bell, "Protective Factors for Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma among Second and Third Generation Holocaust Survivors," *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy* 5, No. 4 (2013): 150.

2 A previous version of this article appeared as Elaine L. Enns, "Trauma and Memory: Challenges to Settler Solidarity," *Consensus* 37, no. 1 (2016), article 5; available at https://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol37/iss1/5/.

3 Barbara Claassen Smucker, *Days of Terror* (Toronto: Penguin Global, 2008).

dured a virtually unbroken history of dispossession under colonization, settler Mennonites have experienced a complicated mix of persecution and marginalization on one hand but assimilation and privilege on the other. What are connections and disconnections between these two communities' respective experiences of trauma?

Settler Mennonites have experienced a complicated mix of persecution and marginalization on one hand but assimilation and privilege on the other.

My forthcoming book (2020) explores the necessary inward and outward journeys of descendants of European settlers in order to better practice restorative solidarity with Indigenous and other marginalized peoples. Within my settler Mennonite community, I am trying to identify and transform barriers that prevent us from living into deeper relationships and building solidarity with our Indigenous neighbors. I also seek to curate resources that will help us fully embrace the work of decolonization, which demands moral imagination, spiritual resilience, and political courage. In this essay I focus on three issues of critical self-awareness for settler Mennonites: impacts of intergenerational trauma; critically revising our communal narratives; and taking historical "response-ability."

Post-traumatic stress disorder and its transmission

Trauma studies is a dynamic, emerging field. Rather than examining trauma as underwriter of victimhood, I look at it here as one heritable factor that prevents historically victimized, but now privileged, communities from seeing and responding to Indigenous pain.

Theologian David Carr offers the following definition: "Trauma is an overwhelming, haunting experience of disaster so explosive in its impact that it cannot be directly encountered, and influences an individual and group's behavior and memory in indirect ways."[4] Trauma often has a life beyond the initial experience. Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), first identified in the late 1980s, describes how trauma survivors are unable to get violent events out of their mind and spirit.

Rachel Yehuda, professor of Psychiatry and Neuroscience at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York, has been studying the biology of PTSD. She

4 David Carr, *Holy Resilience: The Bible's Traumatic Origins* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 7.

argues that trauma caused by intensely personal violations (such as sexual assault, torture, or military combat) is far more likely to cause PTSD than, for example, a natural disaster. Yehuda also found that offspring of Holocaust survivors were more likely to develop PTSD when exposed to their *own* traumas, and as adult children displayed an unusually high rate of psychiatric disorders.[5] Pamela Sugiman is a child of Japanese Canadians who were dispossessed and interned after the bombing of Pearl Harbor; though not incarcerated herself she claims, "The pain of that experience . . . is etched in my memory. It has become an integral part of my existence, as well as the defining moment in my own family's history."[6]

Studies have found that trauma is passed down through both nurture (i.e., family systems) and nature (biologically and epigenetically).

Recent research has focused on intergenerational transmission of trauma in a wide range of cultural groups and communities who have experienced war, slavery, genocide, and other political oppression. Studies have found that trauma is passed down through both nurture (i.e., family systems) and nature (biologically and epigenetically). Three current trajectories of research explore how trauma symptoms can transmit across generations.

1. *The role of cortisol.* Cortisol is an important hormone in our body; both elevated and deflated levels wreak havoc on health.[7] Exposure to stress triggers various biological responses, including the release of cortisol, which animates the famous "fight, flight, or freeze" responses.[8] If the body is not able to shut down these re-

5 Rachel Yehuda, "Biological Factors Associated with Susceptibility to Posttraumatic Stress Disorder," *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* 44, no. 1 (1999): 34–39; Rachel Yehuda, "Clinical Relevance of Biologic Findings in PTSD," *Psychiatric Quarterly* 73, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 123–33.

6 Pamela Sugiman, "Passing Time, Moving Memories: Interpreting Wartime Narratives of Japanese Canadian Women," *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 36, no. 73 (2004): 52.

7 Bessel Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin, 2016), 30.

8 Yehuda, "Clinical Relevance." According to Carolyn Yoder in *The Little Book of Trauma Healing: When Violence Strikes and Community Security is Threatened* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2005), the freeze response "traps the intense trauma energy in the nervous system. If it is not discharged or integrated within a few days or weeks, this constriction

actions after the threat has passed, however, the hypothalamic pituitary adrenal axis (our central stress response system) becomes over-sensitized, resulting in lower cortisol levels.[9] Such low levels were a common factor among Holocaust descendants, which can lead to development of PTSD when faced with their own stressor.[10] Yehuda also studied women in their third trimester of pregnancy exposed to the 2001 World Trade Tower attacks; she found that both mothers and their infants had lower cortisol levels (meaning that cortisol levels were likely altered *in utero)*.[11]

2. *Epigenetics*. Epigenetics is a relatively new field of study looking at heritable changes in gene function.[12] Alterations to the chemical coating of chromosomes (not gene structure) have been found in survivors of life-threatening experiences such as war, torture, or famine.[13] This coating becomes a kind of cell "memory," which is then passed on, like other genetic characteristics, intergenerationally. Progeny thus can carry a kind of physiological "footprint" of the trauma.

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of energy is believed to be what produces common trauma reactions later" (20). Up until about twenty years ago, these studies had been conducted only on men; it was simply assumed that women responded similarly. More recent studies, however, have shown that women react differently. Related to the release of oxytocin, women can "tend and befriend" in the face of trauma, looking after their young and supporting each other. See Shelley E. Taylor, Laura Cousino Klein, Brian P Lewis, Tara L. Gruenewald, Regan A. R Gurung, and John A. Updegraff, "Biobehavioral Responses to Stress in Females: Tend-and-Befriend, Not Fight-or-Flight," *Psychological Review* 107, no. 3 (July 2000): 411–29.

9 Yehuda, "Biology of posttraumatic stress disorder," *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* 62, no. 17 (2001): 41–46.

10 Rachel Yehuda, James Schmeidler, Earl L. Giller, Larry J. Siever, and Karen Binder-Brynes, "Relationship between Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Characteristics of Holocaust Survivors and Their Adult Offspring," *American Journal Psychiatry* 155, no. 6 (June 1998): 841–43; Yehuda, "Biological Factors."

11 Yehuda, S. M. Engel, S. R. Brand, J. Seckl, S. M. Marcus, and G. S. Berkowitz, "Transgenerational Effects of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Babies of Mothers Exposed to the World Trade Center Attacks during Pregnancy," *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism* 90, no. 7 (2005): 4115–18.

12 Rachel Yehuda and Linda Bierer. "The relevance of epigenetics to PTSD: Implications for the *DSM-V*," *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 22, no. 5 (2009): 427–34; part of a special issue, "Highlights of the ISTSS 2008 Annual Meeting."

13 Natan P. F. Kellermann, "Epigenetic Transmission of Holocaust Trauma: Can Nightmares Be Inherited?" *Israel Journal of Psychiatry and Related Science* 50, no. 1 (2013): 33–39.

3. *Family systems*. A study of survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia found that role-reversed parenting was a recurring symptom.[14] When a parent looks to a child to meet their needs of intimacy or comfort, the child trying to meet these needs can experience anxiety. Yehuda found that some offspring of Holocaust survivors experienced PTSD symptoms just from *hearing* about Holocaust-related events.[15] In my own interviews with Russländer descendants, some noted that their mothers were unable to bond with them because of trauma experienced.[16] Similarly, a study of Kosovar survivors of war and ethnic cleansing found that children's depressive symptoms were significantly related to their fathers.[17]

These kinds of studies show a variety of ways in which trauma can pass from generation to generation.

Many of these symptoms present in my community. Lynda Klassen Reynolds has investigated the psychological effects of trauma on Russländer immigrants to Canada and their descendants. After surviving the fear and uncertainty of World War I, they were subjected to brutal violence during the Russian Revolution, which continued through the famine of 1921–23 and into the Stalinist era. Most of her respondents described witnessing the arrest or murder of a family member or loved one; seeing their home destroyed; and/or living in fear under the Soviet security apparatus. Reynolds also found that second- and third-generation subjects exhibited significantly higher than normal levels of, for example, anxiety, depression, phobias, obsessions, compulsions, and excessive para-

14 N. P. Field, S. Muong, and V. Sochanvimean, "Parental Styles in the Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma Stemming from the Khmer Rouge Regime in Cambodia," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 83, no. 4 (2013): 483–94.

15 Rachel Yehuda, Jim Schmeidler, Abbie Elkin, Elizabeth Houshmand, Larry Siever, Karen Binder-Brynes, Milton Wainberg, Dan Aferiot, Alan Lehman, Ling Song Guo, and Ren Kwei Yang, "Phenomenology & Psychobiology of the Intergenerational Response to Trauma," in *Intergenerational Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma*, edited by Yael Danieli (New York: Plenum, 1997), 639–56.

16 Interviews conducted with a Russländer focus group in Saskatoon, June 25, 2014.

17 Matthies Schick, Naser Morina, Richard Klaghofer, Ulrich Schnyder, and Julia Müller, "Trauma, Mental Health, and Intergenerational Associations in Kosovar Families 11 Years after the War," *European Journal of Pyschotraumatology*, 4 (2013); DOI: 10.3402/ejpt.v4i0.21060.

noia.[18] Frank H. Epp notes that Russländers in Canada were required to pay "a 5-cent-a-month-per immigrant fee for the care of mental patients to prevent their deportation"; in 1931 there were 61 Russländers "sick with the nerves" in public mental institutions.[19]

Trauma and communal narratives among Russländer Mennonites

Another trajectory for understanding how trauma is passed down is to look for "footprints" in a group's communal narratives—both what is related *and* what is absent. For example, our received Russländer narratives often marginalize women's victimization, which inhibits the processing of pain and complicates its intergenerational impact. Our Mennonite community continues to struggle with a patriarchal culture that tends to discount women's experiences. This is particularly consequential regarding experiences of gendered violence. Our popular Russländer narratives still tend toward a heroic story of hardworking, faithful people, naming some kinds of violence endured (e.g., murder, disappearance, or robbery) but omitting (or alluding to obliquely) rape and sexual assault. Firsthand accounts of survivors of the Eichenfeld Massacre describe in great detail the dismemberment, torture, and murder of individual men but speak sparingly about sexual violence toward women, making only general comments like "virtually every girl fell victim to the ruthless hands of these devils in human form."[20]

Our Mennonite community continues to struggle with a patriarchal culture that tends to discount women's experiences. This is particularly consequential regarding experiences of gendered violence.

Marlene Epp's groundbreaking *Women without Men* brings to light disturbing stories of Mennonite women who survived the arduous journey out of the Soviet Union during World War II, surviving relentless

18 Lynda Klassen Reynolds, "The Aftermath of Trauma and Immigration Detections of Multigenerational Effects on Mennonites Who Emigrated from Russia to Canada in the 1920s" (PhD diss., California School of Professional Psychology, 1997), 67, 70, 76.

19 Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada 1920–1940: A People's Struggle for Survival* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1982): 384.

20 Harvey Dyck, John Staples, and John B. Toews, *Nestor Makhno and the Eichenfeld Massacre: A Civil War Tragedy in a Ukrainian Mennonite Village* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora, 2004), 46.

hardship and violation, including rape.[21] But these have received little attention in our community—largely overshadowed by stories of martyred men during the Stalinist years—partly because of shame and stigma associated with sexual violence.[22]

Narratives of Russländers similarly focus on male experiences and avoid speaking directly about women's violation. A descendant I interviewed reflected, "Rape never came up because it wasn't appropriate to talk about. It was a hidden thing, but there were certainly children who were the result of rape."[23] Revered historian Frank Epp only mentions this issue in passing: "Many incidents of rape during the revolution resulted in venereal infection of a significant number of women."[24] A participant in one of my research focus groups deduced that her mother must have been raped based on her behavior and attitude towards sex; another heard her father speculate about his mother's rape. Others acknowledged that rape was widespread, relating anecdotes of girls being hidden in an attic or hayloft or crawling out of a window to escape soldiers. One interviewee wondered why her father's skin was so dark; two others called their mothers' experiences "too awful to talk about." Another said, "My grandparents were reticent to speak of things,

When traumatized people are not allowed to speak and process their experiences, it deepens trauma, forcing it to fester. Silencing not only re-victimizes but also negatively effects the community as a whole across generations.

21 Marlene Epp, *Women without Men: Mennonite Refugees of the Second World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

22 Epp, *Women without Men,* 59. These women typically spoke only indirectly about rape, often using depersonalized or third person narrative or referring only to the consequences of rape.

23 Interview, June 16, 2014. Another interviewee speculated that incidents of sexual assault were "pretty high in the 1920s." Another told me, "My mom said she knows that women were raped, but that none of my great aunts or my grandmothers were . . . at least not that she knows of. . . . The oldest child in a friend's family is a half sibling, but their mom has never talked about why or how that came about. My friend believes her mother was raped" (interview, July 17, 2014). Reynolds's study of 67 Russländers found that while a significant percentage of her respondents spoke about experiences of arrest, murder, displacement, and fear during the *Zerrissenheit*, no one admitted to being raped—although half of the respondents indicated they knew someone who was.

24 Epp, *Mennonites in Canada 1920–1940*, 476.

but my dad's older brother managed to get some information. But . . . a lot of people don't want to hear him talk about what he learned. These stories are somehow shameful or secret."[25]

Such reluctance to depart from the received communal narratives surely indicates a psychological distancing from pain. But these patterns of silencing can be damaging and function to exacerbate trauma. Among the reasons why women's stories of victimization are silenced or contorted are lack of safe space to recount painful experiences; power dynamics within family or community that determine which stories are vocalized; and manipulation of memory.[26] Communal narratives are not static but continually revised and retold; often in the process they are "cleaned up." Social power dynamics within a community can strip a victim of her ability to retain her narrative. When traumatized people are not allowed to speak and process their experiences, it deepens trauma, forcing it to fester. Silencing not only re-victimizes but also negatively affects the community as a whole across generations.

Historical response-ability

Mennonites cannot only understand impacts and work toward healing of our own intergenerational trauma. We must also include that of our Indigenous neighbors whose collective experiences of much greater and more persistent trauma have had adverse consequences that are also communal and long-lasting.[27] Studies conducted within Canadian Indigenous communities demonstrate that traumatic events occurring across generations build synergistically and must be understood as part of a single trajectory.[28] They show that Aboriginal mental health can only properly be understood and addressed by acknowledging the impact of colonization,

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25 Interviews conducted with a Russländer focus group, June 25, 2014.

26 Erin E. Seaton, "Common Knowledge: Reflections on Narratives in Community," *Qualitative Research* 8, no. 3 (2008): 293–305.

27 On this see H. Karenian, M. Livaditis, S. Karenian, K. Zafiriadis, V. Bochtsou, and K. Xenitidis, "Collective Trauma Transmission and Traumatic Reactions among Descendants of Armenian Refugees," *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* 57, no. 4 (2011): 327–37; and Rachel Lev-Wiesel, "Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma across Three Generations," *Qualitative Social Work* 6, no. 1 (2007): 75–94.

28 A. Bombay, K. Matheson, and H. Anisman, "Intergenerational Trauma: Convergence of Multiple Processes among First Nations Peoples in Canada," *Journal of Aboriginal Health* 5, no. 3 (2009): 6–47. See also Peter Menzies, "Intergenerational Trauma from a Mental Health Perspective," *Native Social Work Journal* 7 (2010): 63–85; and D. Smith, C. Varcoe, and N. Edwards, "Turning around the Intergenerational Impact of Residen-

particularly the devastation resulting from the Indian Act, the Child Welfare Act, and Indian Residential Schools. Poverty, addiction, and abuse on reservations today are a direct result of the synergistic traumas of colonization.

Unfortunately, there is also acute silence in settler Mennonite versions of our history regarding Indigenous peoples. Unlike many European settlers, we take a keen interest in history. My extended clan, for example, has produced multiple family history books—books that highlight how Catherine the Great invited Mennonites to settle the steppes of Russia/Ukraine in the late eighteenth century. But no mention is made of the Nogai and Cossack peoples (traditional inhabitants of the Ukrainian steppes) being forcibly removed by the Tsarina just prior to my ancestors' arrival.[29] Then, a century later and half a world away, Mennonite settlers procured land in Saskatchewan that had just been taken from the Young Chippewayan tribe without consultation or compensation by the Canadian government.[30] Yet there is not a whisper of this in our family books. Indigenous peoples rarely appear in our settler Mennonite narratives. Such silence functions to perpetuate the dangerous fantasy that the land to which we came was uninhabited. This destructive myth dates back to the *terra nullius* aspect of the medieval Doctrine of Discovery, which *still* undergirds rationalizations of the European conquest and colonization of the Americas.[31]

Indigenous peoples rarely appear in our settler Mennonite narratives. Such silence functions to perpetuate the dangerous fantasy that the land to which we came was uninhabited.

We need a more critical literacy in our communal narratives in order to nurture a better understanding of, and accountability for, both exemplary and problematic aspects of our past and present. This is especially

tial Schools on Aboriginal People: Implications for Health Policy and Practice," *Canadian Journal of Nursing Research* 37, no. 4 (2005): 38–60.

29 James Urry, *None but the Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia 1789–1889* (Kitchener: Pandora, 1989), 96.

30 For further information see https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatoon/landless-bands-saskatchewan-2017-reserve-107-1.4245184.

31 Robert J. Miller et al., *Discovering Indigenous Lands: The Doctrine of Discovery in the English Colonies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

true regarding issues of our complicity in social patterns of injustice and unacknowledged privilege. One of my research participants noted that most Mennonites believe "we purchased our land through fair and square deals" and prospered only due to "hard work."[32] But this conveniently overlooks how our farming enterprises were made viable and successful by, for example, subsidies of granted or cheap land, governmental incentives, tax breaks, preferential markets, assumed water rights, and access to transportation and technology. One interviewee confessed:

> *Mennonites were given all kinds of special privileges in Russia, and some became very wealthy there. . . . We went through a period of trauma, but then we came here, where the Canadian government wanted us and gave us breaks based upon the color of our skin or work ethic. Before long we were back in positions of privilege; we don't tell that side of the story very often!*[33]

We should no longer ignore these parts of the story.

Historical "response-ability" involves both learning the stories of our Indigenous neighbors and acknowledging ways in which racial privileges advantaged Mennonite recovery from marginalization. We need to unearth not only our own silenced stories of gendered violence but also those of Indigenous communities. In Saskatoon, I led a field trip for my Russländer interviewees to Wanuskewin Heritage Park, which was hosting an exhibit called "Walking with our Sisters," commemorating missing and murdered Indigenous women.[34] There we encountered the alarming rates of contemporary violence against native women.[35] It was a painful gift to our group's efforts to un-silence our suppressed history, and it chal-

32 Annual General Meeting, MCC Canada workshop, September 18, 2014.

33 Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission focus group interview, June 26, 2014.

34 The exhibit featured 1,800 colorful, beaded moccasin tops created by more than 1,400 artists—both Indigenous and non-Indigenous—each with a unique pattern sewn on to it. The moccasins are unfinished, representing and honoring the lives of women and girls who were cut short; grandmothers and "process-keepers" curate the traveling exhibit.

35 According to Evan Radford, "Memorial Honours Murdered Women, Builds Dialogue," *The Star Phoenix*, October 30, 2014, in Saskatchewan, "55 % of all homicides [have been] Aboriginal women. Police have reported this is the highest percentage among all Canadian provinces."

lenged us to overcome our ignorance concerning the traumas of our Indigenous neighbors.

Settler faith communities can create brave spaces to hear testimony about intergenerational trauma and silenced stories (our own and others') and to face our culpability in an unjust colonial history and present.[36] It is my hope that by working with intergenerational trauma, communal narratives, and historical response-ability, we can better nurture our capacity to heal our own wounds and stand with Indigenous communities and their struggles for justice.

About the author

Elaine Enns, a Canadian Mennonite, has worked in the field of restorative justice since 1989. She is co-director of Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries (www.bcm-net.org) in Oak View, California, and co-author of *Ambassadors of Reconciliation* (Orbis, 2009).

36 Over the last five years I have facilitated groups inviting settlers to construct a parallel chronology of their migration stories and Indigenous communities where their ancestors settled and to ask questions like the following: What are the narratives your family and social group tell? Can you detect any masks or half-truths? How did your ancestors first acquire land? What are the histories and stories of the places they settled (especially of Indigenous communities), and what was the impact of colonial settlement? What is missing from your family or communal stories in terms of Indigenous history and acknowledgement of privileges that settlers enjoyed? Participants explore untold stories in their family or communal narrative, probing questions of why and how these stories were silenced and by whom, and the impact of that. And we investigate footprints of trauma, asking what stories of violence were passed on in family, church, or local neighborhood narratives and how trauma is encoded. My forthcoming book, *Landlines, Bloodlines, Songlines: Healing Haunted Histories* (2020), will explore these and other issues (including practices of healing and resilience) in depth.

"Starting with secondly"

Land dispossession and (non)violence discourse

Jonathan Brenneman

The covenanted nation and the "violent" dispossessed

> *"The easiest way to dispossess a people is to tell their story starting with secondly."*
>
> *–Mourid Barghouti, Palestinian Poet*

"How about you renounce violence?" the audience member demanded of Ali Abunimah, the only Palestinian panelist at the academic presentation held at Notre Dame University. It was a startling interruption to the peace studies event. Abunimah had just countered a misconception that justifies Israeli military strikes against Palestinians as purely retaliatory. He recognized the media's tendency of "starting with secondly" as a key aspect of Israeli colonization, which frames Palestinian retaliation to violence as aggression. The audience member's response? "This is the Kroc Institute of peace and you sit here justifying violence." With his finger pointed at Abunimah, the disrupter leveled his demand again, "Renounce violence as a starting point!"[1]

The audience member didn't ask the Catholic American professor to renounce violence, though Western Catholics have contributed to much more violence than Palestinians. Nor did he demand a renunciation of violence from the Israeli professor sitting next to Abunimah, although she had been in the Israeli Military. Never mind that the Israeli military has killed nearly ten times as many people as Palestinians have (and nearly twenty times as many children).[2] The audience member had no qualms about the overt and systemic violence used to disposes Palestinians of their land; the only violence he wanted renounced was that of the people being dispossessed.

1 Ali Abunimah, "Understanding Gaza." Lecture at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame, South Bend, August 28, 2014, https://youtu.be/OJlOs86wva8?t=3574.

2 Statistics, https://www.btselem.org/statistics.

The hypocrisy of the audience member is glaring. What is more insidious is the implicit association of Palestinians with violence. Putting the onus on those being dispossessed to make peace—that is, to "renounce violence"—is a common rhetorical tactic of colonial projects, especially those of "covenanted nations," a term Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz uses to name a settler colonialism founded on a promised land and chosen people narrative.[3] While focusing on European colonization of North America, she lists two other examples of this: the Boer colonization of South Africa and Israeli colonization of Palestine.

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The audience member's comment is an echo of demands that apologists for covenanted nations make in every context. He likely did not realize that he was playing the part of Apartheidist P. W. Botha and putting Abunimah in the role of Nelson Mandela, but he nearly parroted the South African Apartheid leader's oft-repeated refrain, "As soon as he [Nelson Mandela] renounces violence and undertakes not to start violence in South Africa, the government will release him."[4]

The unique aspect of covenanted nations is the role of religion in the claiming of the land. Other authors in this issue write about the religious aspects of the colonization of North America, but this was also a theme in South Africa and in Palestine. Religion is used not only to bless colonialism with a "Promised Land" narrative but also to demonize those whose are being dispossessed of their lands.

Botha claimed in 1987, "I have come to the realisation and conviction that the struggle in South Africa is not between White, Black and Brown, but between *Christian civilized* standards and the powers of chaos."[5] This motif is picked up presently with the portrait of Palestinians. In 2012 subway ads were put up in New York and San Francisco stating, "In the war between the civilized man and the savage, support the civilized man.

3 Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon, 2015), 50.

4 Pieter-Dirk Uys, ed., *P.W. Botha in His Own Words* (New York: Penguin, 1987), 23.

5 Uys, *P.W. Botha*, 23 (emphasis added).

Support Israel. Defeat jihad." The covenanted nation can claim an angelic innocence, but for the covenant narrative to work, any opposition to the chosen people in their promised land must be evil, chaotic, and savage. To keep up the narrative it is essential for the covenanted nation to consistently portray those they are dispossessing not only as violent but also as the originators of the violence.

This fixation on the violence of the oppressed and dispossessed is troubling because it is so often effective. It is a key aspect of Israel's *Hasbarah* (Hebrew for "explanation") project.[6] US media is happy to provide the space. An audit of five major US newspapers from 1967 to 2017 bears this out:

> *The U.S. mainstream media's coverage of the issue favours Israel by providing greater access to Israeli officials, focusing on Israeli narratives both in terms of the quantity of coverage as well as the overall sentiment, as conveyed by headlines.*
>
> *This is in marked contrast to the Palestinians, who are consistently underrepresented as well as covered more negatively. Furthermore, key elements of the conflict are understated, likely not to provide readers of these publications the full nature and complexities of Israel's over 50-year occupation of the Palestinians.*[7]

The effect of the erasure of Israeli violence, particularly by ignoring structural violence, allows a colonial narrative of irrationally hostile natives to spread.

The call for Palestinians to renounce violence perpetuates the colonial framing of the conflict: that the colonizers are righteous and that there would be peace if only the savage indigenous people would put down their weapons. Or, as the Israeli refrain goes, "If they put down their guns, there would be peace; if we put down our guns, we would be driven into the sea." This hypothetical, devoid of any historical backing (quite the opposite), is based on nothing other than a blind faith in the colonial narrative. The narrative that Palestinians are inherently violent

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6 The Israeli's Ministry of Foreign Affairs refers to itself as "Hasbara"; https://mfa.gov.il/mfa/aboutheministry/pages/what%20hasbara%20is%20really%20all%20about%20-%20may%202005.aspx.

7 Usaid Siddiqui and Owais A. Zaheer, *50 Years of Occupation a Sentiment and N-Gram Analysis of U.S Mainstream Media Coverage of the Israeli Occupation of Palestine*, 416 Labs, http://416labs.com/blog/2018/12/19/50-years-of-occupation, 15.

creates a dichotomy in the colonial framework: either Palestinians are violently aggressive, or they should surrender. The colonial imagination has no room for true nonviolent resistance.

An ecosystem of nonviolent resistance

> *"We teach life sir. We Palestinians wake up every morning and teach the rest of the world life, sir!"*
>
> *–Rafeef Ziadah, Palestinian-Canadian poet*

I was enamored! I stood outside of a makeshift pavilion in the middle of the South Hebron Hills desert, the sun beating down on my neck, the wind swirling the dust around my legs, thinking that I had just glimpsed heaven. For a moment the Israeli soldiers overlooking us from the hilltops just seemed powerless. It was a feeling I've had on a few occasions: when praying at Standing Rock and when attending an Urban Land Justice gathering led by displaced people in Cape Town, South Africa. This feeling—that I'm witnessing the inbreaking of the kin-dom of God—only seems to happen when I'm among people who are fighting the dispossession of their land and doing so without violence.

The moment took place in the town of At-Tuwani, on the southern border of the West Bank. The people of At-Tuwani find themselves on the front lines of Palestinian dispossession. At-Tuwani sits in a valley. The hilltop to one side of it hosts an established illegal Israeli settlement.[8] On the hilltop to the other side sits a newer illegal outpost (a proto-settlement). The goal of the settlement and the outpost are to take over all the land in the middle and merge. That land makes up the village of At-Tuwani and the surrounding fields where shepherds graze their flocks.

Similar to other settler-colonial projects, Israelis who live in settlements tend to be there either out of financial difficulty or out of a religious fervor claiming their supposed God-given right to the land. The settlers near At-Tuwani are the latter. They hold extremist beliefs that they are destined to take over the land, cleanse it of all non-Jews, and rule over it as God-ordained lords. Their actions are just as extreme. They intimidate and attack Palestinians, especially shepherds, who are often alone in fields near the settlement and school children who have to pass the

8 All Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territories are illegal under international law. These settlements are additionally illegal under Israeli law.

settlements en route to school.[9] They have also thrown animal carcasses in Palestinian wells, their only water source.[10] They do all of this under the watchful eye of Israeli soldiers, who are not allowed to stop them, and who sometimes assist. In short, the Israeli machine made up of soldiers and settlers is trying to dispossess the Palestinians of At-Tuwani by turning their lives into a living hell.

But the people of At-Tuwani do not despair. Through a series of strategic decisions, the leadership of the village determined that the best way to combat their dispossession was to "renounce violence" and instead to resist nonviolently. This was no easy task. To effectively use nonviolence, the people of At-Tuwani had to create an entire ecosystem of resistance. They didn't just have a nonviolent campaign or a single strategy of nonviolence, but the village as a whole, in relationship with one another, chose nonviolence as a way of life. Everyone had a role to play in a balanced approach that grew the community—an ecosystem of resistance.

To effectively use nonviolence, the people of At-Tuwani had to create an entire ecosystem of resistance. They didn't just have a nonviolent campaign or a single strategy of nonviolence but chose nonviolence as a way of life.

It was not just older, able-bodied men who led the charge. Women were at the core of the nonviolent resistance. An incident near the beginning of the resistance helped put this in motion. The Israeli military invaded the village to destroy the pylons that held up power lines. They were going to leave the village with no electricity. The people in At-Tuwani realized that with armed guards surrounding the equipment, the men would be arrested or killed if they even approached. The women did not hesitate to step up. One elder woman stood in front of a bulldozer that was there to tear down the pylon, driven by a young female Israeli soldier. The woman from At-Tuwani stared straight into the young soldier's eyes, and she could see

9 Christian Peacemaker Teams and Operation Dove, *The Dangerous Road to Education: Palestinian Students Suffer under Settler Violence and Military Negligence* (Creative Commons: 2010), http://www.cpt.org/files/palestine/shh-report_school_patrol_2009-10-the_dangerous_road_to_education.pdf.

10 David Hearst, "West Bank Villagers' Daily Battle with Israel over Water," *The Guardian*, September 14, 2011, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2011/sep/14/west-bank-villagers-battle-water.

the soldier break out of her military training and become a young woman again. The Israeli dropped her head and turned the bulldozer around, and they stopped their destruction. Ever since then, the women of At-Tuwani not only have participated in the nonviolent demonstrations but are in all the planning meetings—and often lead them. Their leadership brought deeper creativity and inclusion into the ecosystem of resistance.

Artists, musicians, and actors also played a role in the ecology of nonviolence that has been cultivated in At-Tuwani. In my many visits to the village, I never went to a demonstration that didn't also include a celebration, and I never went to a celebration that didn't also include a demonstration. Their love of the arts attracted the Jenin Freedom Theater. The theater did a "Freedom Bus" tour through the West Bank. They stopped in major cities like Nablus, Bethlehem, Jerusalem, and Ramallah and in tiny little At-Tuwani. The idea was that the troupe would do playback theater, as a way of storytelling and healing. In the evening the village gathered. They told stories, and the actors would play them out. The troupe acted out stories of children being jailed and people being beaten by settlers. They told these stories with beauty and care, often finding ways to add in some humor, so everyone could laugh together. At the end of the evening, the organizers of the event reminded everyone to come back tomorrow to break ground on a new building, despite the authorities threatening to not allow them. The celebration needed a demonstration.

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Their organizing had space for "outsiders" to participate as well. An Israeli organization called Ta'ayush, an Italian organization called Operation Dove, and Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) answered the call. They were especially helpful in getting children to and from school past the Israeli settlements. In 2004 Operation Dove and CPT started accompanying children every day to and from school and lived in a small house in town. The settlers didn't change their actions much, but when their actions targeted not only "savage" Palestinian children but also "civilized" internationals, it became unacceptable. The organizations were able to

document the attacks. Ta'ayush used their contacts with Israeli journalists to make the issue front-page news, and eventually the Israeli government took notice. They demanded that the Israeli military show up every day to walk the kids to school. This is an unprecedented occurrence and a huge win for the At-Tuwani campaign. Though there are still many problems with having a foreign hostile military walking children to school (the soldiers are often late, often don't get along well with the children, or do not live up to their obligations),[11] it showed that this small village could leverage power and advocate for change.

The children were part of the demonstration too. They gave interviews to journalists, talking about their first-hand experiences. And they playfully challenged and distracted the soldiers.

The children of At-Tuwani were not helpless. They were part of the ecosystem too. I witnessed this when I was invited to a demonstration to build the kids a shelter that they could wait inside, if soldiers were late to walk them home from school, as they often are. The strategy included all aspects of the ecosystem. Internationals were invited to come and be observers. The men of the village would work on putting the shelter together, quietly behind the demonstration. Women led the chants and choreographed the event. The children were part of the demonstration too. They gave interviews to journalists, talking about their first-hand experiences. And they playfully challenged and distracted the soldiers. They were waving Palestinian flags, hanging them up on fence posts. The soldiers would angrily tear them down and throw them on the ground. So the kids would pick them up and hang them up again. They knew what they could get away with, without getting into too much trouble, and they knew not to get into fights with the soldiers. While the soldiers were occupied minding the children, the shelter was constructed. This was no lucky accident with ornery children; they were all trained in nonviolence.

The organizers in At-Tuwani know that they need to teach their kids these ways as well. So they put on a peace camp not only for their own children but also for the children of their Israeli allies. I attended the grad-

11 CPTnet, "AT-TUWANI: Military Escort Misconduct Exposes Palestinian Children to Risk on Their Way to and from School," Christian Peacemaker Teams, April 9, 2014, https://www.cpt.org/cptnet/2014/04/09/tuwani-military-escort-misconduct-exposes-palestinian-children-risk-their-way-and-.

uation of the peace camp, and it was incredible! The huge pavilion tent was filled with parents, friends of the village, and Israeli and international human rights NGOs. Two women MCed the event, while the men of the village served coffee to the crowd, a role reversal of patriarchal norms. The main event was the kids. First, a group of boys came up and danced *debkah*, a Palestinian dance that tells a story of resistance. The young boys enthusiastically expressed themselves and told stories through movement. Then two girls came up and gave riveting speeches to the crowd about what they had learned. They sounded like practiced orators.

I sat down beside a Palestinian Muslim activist from a nearby village, sitting across from a Jewish Israeli—one a farmer who will probably never leave that region, the other a well-educated, well-traveled journalist.

After all the children, Palestinian and Israeli, were honored for completing the camp, we got up to get food and share a meal together. I sat down beside a Palestinian Muslim activist from a nearby village, sitting across from a Jewish Israeli—one a farmer who will probably never leave that region, the other a well-educated, well-traveled journalist. They sat across from each other, old friends, reminiscing about the different demonstrations they'd been a part of, asking about each other's families, laughing, and eating off the same plate.

It didn't hit me until I stepped outside the pavilion and remembered where I was. I looked around and couldn't help but think, *This must be what heaven is like*. When I hear about God's upside-down kingdom, the image of those two eating together that day is what comes to mind. Despite the hell around them, they created heaven.

Not every day in At-Tuwani is like that day. Palestinian children are still arbitrarily arrested and abused by Israeli soldiers, farmers are still harassed and beaten by settlers, but the unifying force of the nonviolent ecosystem has made a difference. Not only does it offer temporary relief and make Palestinians feel better and more powerful; it actually makes them more powerful. For example, they created a master plan, allowing them control of building projects. This is unheard of in the West Bank. It means they no longer have to ask the Israeli Civil Authority for building permits (the CA denies 99.8 percent of requests). The demolition orders on the homes and the school were removed!

Conclusion

> *"I knew that I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today: my own government."*
>
> *–Martin Luther King Jr.*

How do people who have seen the liberating power of nonviolence—who understand it strategically or believe in its moral authority, who have witnessed its success against land dispossession—not contribute to the clamors of those with power that the violence is the fault of the powerless and that their renunciation of violence is what is needed for peace? How can we lighten the burden on those who are already carrying so much on their trail of death? Looking at King's quote in conversation with Barghouti's offers an insight. Both quotes hint at a sequence: "staring with secondly" or "without first." Before suggesting nonviolence, it is necessary to recognize, name, and condemn the massive violence of displacement. If one does not, one risks perpetuating colonial frameworks whose demand of nonviolence is actually a demand for nonresistance to land dispossession. A key component of colonialism is erasure. This erasure includes the erasure of the violence of colonialism and land dispossession. To preach nonviolence one must *first* name and condemn the violence of colonialism.

About the author

Jonathan Brenneman comes from a long line of Mennonites on his father's side and a prominent Palestinian Christian family on his mother's side. He grew up attending Lima Mennonite Church. After graduating high school, he participated in the Mennonite Mission Network's Radical Journey program in Northern Ireland before attended Huntington University, where he studied history and philosophy. He then worked with Christian Peacemaker Teams Palestine Project in Hebron, where they built partnerships with Palestinian and Israeli peacemakers to transform violence and oppression. Jonathan was a Rotary Peace Fellow studying at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, Thailand, and holds a master's degree in International Peace Studies at Notre Dame University's Kroc Institute. That program included a six-month internship with Ndifuna Ukwazi in Cape Town, South Africa, an organization which advocates for more just land policies. Most recently, he participated in the Mennonite Voluntary Service program, volunteering with MC USA to facilitate the writing, passing, and implementation of the Seeking Peace in Israel and Palestine Resolution. He currently resides in Syracuse, New York, with his partner, Sarah.

Becoming a dismantling community

Sheri Hostetler

I first heard the words "Doctrine of Discovery" on a bus coming back from a border tour with other Mennonites during the Mennonite Church USA general conference Phoenix 2013. I was sitting beside my friend and pastoral colleague Weldon Nisly, with whom I had worked on LGBTQ justice in the church, helping to found what is now called Inclusive Mennonite Pastors. We had done good work together, but I felt it was time for me to step back and let others lead on those issues. I was open to where the Spirit would next lead me. Weldon, not surprisingly, had ideas.

"The Doctrine of Discovery is the basis for so much of the oppression we're fighting against in the United States and worldwide," he said passionately. "You really must meet Sarah Augustine and hear her talk about this." Sarah, he explained, was an Indigenous woman who worked with Indigenous people around the world suffering from neo-colonization.[1]

I trusted Weldon, but I was also skeptical. I struggled to understand why a five-hundred-year-old church doctrine mattered today. It seemed abstract, even esoteric. Little did I know that I would help found the Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery Coalition a year later with Sarah and Anita Amstutz, then pastor at Albuquerque Mennonite Church. I didn't realize this dismantling work would become a significant ministry within my congregation, within Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference, and within the wider church. Weldon was right about the Spirit's leading!

Originating sins

Driven by Weldon's enthusiasm, I began reading up on the Doctrine of Discovery. A few months later, my friend Anita met Sarah at a Women Doing Theology Conference, and soon the three of us were animatedly talking on the phone together. I learned that the Doctrine of Discovery was a five-hundred-year-old heresy that justified the seizure of lands from Indigenous people, their enslavement and domination, and the Portuguese slave trade from West Africa (the latter is often not as well known). I learned that these doctrines weren't a relic of history because colonization isn't a relic of history. There are Indigenous peoples right now

1 See the Suriname Indigenous Health Fund (SIHF) at http://sihfund.org/.

in Suriname, for instance, who are losing their ancestral homelands to US and Canadian mining corporations because they don't legally own these homelands. They don't own these homelands because the Doctrine of Discovery, five hundred years ago, said that any European discoverer could lay legal claim to lands inhabited by non-Christians. In the United States, it was enshrined into law in a landmark 1823 Supreme Court case and was cited as late as 2005 in another Supreme Court hearing.

My Amish ancestors were the first Europeans to settle the part of Ohio where I grew up, on land that had been "cleared" of its Native inhabitants only several years before. My pacifist ancestors got their land as a result of military conquest.

I began to see how this church doctrine that had became encoded into law, policy, and worldview was *the* engine of domination, just as Weldon had said. I felt I was facing the "powers and principalities" head on. And this wasn't an abstract evil. This was an evil in which my family had actively participated. The Hochstetlers arrived in Pennsylvania in the 1700s and settled on land bought from the Leni Lenape (Delaware) people by William Penn. I'd known about this for decades. But it was only as I was learning about the Doctrine of Discovery that I realized my Amish ancestors were the first Europeans to settle the part of Ohio where I grew up, on land that had been "cleared" of its Native inhabitants only several years before. My pacifist ancestors got their land as a result of military conquest.

The day I realized this was a day I did not get out of bed from grief. I have always felt a deep connection to the land I was born on in Ohio. My family has farmed that land since the early 1800s, and the hills and trees and creeks of that place form the terrain of my soul. I realized in a visceral way that other people had loved that land and found sustenance from it and that those people had been killed and removed so that my family could live there—so that *I* could live there.

Righting the wrongs of history

I might have been floored by paralyzing guilt after that realization, which could have kept me from working to right this historical wrong. Instead, I have been blessed to have been mentored in this work by Sarah, who once wrote:

> *I think that guilt is toxic and erodes authentic relationship–it is a subtle form of violence that has an effect that is counter-intuitive. If something makes us feel guilty, we tend to avoid conversations and encounters associated with the guilty feelings. I ask people everywhere I go to quit focusing on "guilt," and to instead focus on dismantling the structures that manufacture inequity. Indigenous Peoples around the world are still under attack, specifically by policies that favor resource extraction over human rights and human health. We need allies in dismantling the laws and policies that lead to oppression and death. We must not let the fear of guilt stall and prevent us from accessing our mutual potential in genuine relationship.*[2]

Toward that end, we founded the Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery Coalition. Our church hosted the first gathering in 2014, and a grant from Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference partially funded it. (The Coalition is now a ministry partner of the Full Circle Project of PSMC, which serves as our fiscal sponsor and has provided additional financial support.) The Coalition focuses on educating the church about the Doctrine of Discovery and dismantling the laws and policies that remove Indigenous people from their lands, culture, and self-determination.

Educating the church has been the easiest of these two aims. Building on the good work that Mennonite Central Committee–Central States has done with its "Loss of Turtle Island" exercise and other resources, the Coalition produced a documentary about the Doctrine of Discovery,[3] an accompanying Bible study and resource guide, and a historical exhibit that has traveled across the country. We partnered with Ted & Co. to bring the play "Discovery: A Comic Lament" (now called "We Own This Now") to life. Many of our Coalition members have given presentations in churches, colleges, and conventions. Five years later, I hear the words "Doctrine of Discovery" used frequently in Mennonite spaces.

And yet, we still have so far to go in actively dismantling these oppressive structures, which will be the work of generations. This isn't to say

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2 Sarah Augustine, "Current and Historical Harms Fueled by the Doctrine of Discovery: Breaking the Chains of Indigenous Peoples," Anti-Slavery Campaign Interview Series, March 29, 2013, http://www.breathingforgiveness.net/2013/03/anti-slavery-campaign-interview-series_28.html.

3 *Doctrine of Discovery: In the Name of Christ*, https://dofdmenno.org/movie/.

that there hasn't been success. In 2016, the Coalition began organizing people of faith across the United States to support the Miskitu people of Nicaragua, at the request of Miskitu elders in exile. Delegations traveled to Washington, DC, educating lawmakers about the connection between economic development and the suppression of human rights for the Miskitu. The Nicaragua Human Rights and Anticorruption Act of 2018 is a result, tying dollars issued by the US government to Nicaragua for economic development grants to human rights standards.

Bringing it home

Righting the wrongs of history will mean educating and activating congregations and communities to be active agents of healing and hope. What might it mean to be a dismantling community? Here are some ideas of where to begin:

- Know the history and the current impacts of the Doctrine of Discovery. In my experience, people sometimes know the former and rarely know the latter. Our congregation has tried to come up to speed on these realities by hosting the "Loss of Turtle Island" exercise, watching the documentary together, and hearing this preached about in sermons. A land acknowledgement listed in our order of worship reminds us every Sunday of whose land we are on.
- Build relationships humbly with local Indigenous people. Thanks to Beth Piatote, a Nez Perce scholar in our church who works on language revitalization for her people, our church got connected to two local Ohlone men who work on language revitalization, food sovereignty,[4] and traditional cultural practices. Louis Trevino and Victor Medina have twice come to our church to speak. We learned how much they love this land that has cared for them and how they continue to have a deep and precious relationship with it. We learned of the inspiring and amazing resilience of the Ohlone people, who endured decades of the harshest colonization. We also learned that they need allies in seeking federal tribal status, which has been consistently denied them. Developing relationships with local Indigenous people must be done with awareness of the fraught history between Native people and set-

4 See https://www.makamham.com.

tlers. Native American people do not owe us relationship, but we can humbly reach out and see if there are ways that we can support what local Indigenous people are doing.

- Learn to be a more faithful follower of Jesus from Indigenous spirituality, stories, and cosmology. The worldview of Jesus is much closer to that of Indigenous peoples than that of Christendom. Just as I believe we cannot understand Jesus without understanding his Jewishness, I also believe we cannot understand Jesus without seeing him through Indigenous eyes. Beth has preached illuminating and life-giving sermons that have opened up ways of looking at Jesus and Scripture. We recently concluded a series on the book *The Four Vision Quests of Jesus* that did the same.[5] We are excited as a community to continue to learn.
- Show up, speak up. Six months ago, twenty members of my church held a vigil outside the Oakland Federal Building, asking people to support the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), a landmark law governing the adoption of Native American children that was designed to keep them within Native American families. This law was struck down in October 2018, and the National Indian Child Welfare Association reached out to our Coalition to ask faith communities to be allies with them in upholding ICWA. These vigils were a first step in doing that. I have also been on a delegation to the US Treasury to talk about the impact of economic development grants on Indigenous and vulnerable people who are often removed from their land in the name of economic development. This kind of political activism does not come easily to many Mennonites, nor did it to me when I first started. Many of us are uncomfortable wading into political arenas. I think it's important that we push ourselves past this discomfort. We must use our voice and our privilege to advocate for justice. The Christian church created the Doctrine of Discovery and the laws and policies that uphold it to this day; these structures have to be undone by us also.
- Engage in reparations. Repentance without reparations is like saying "I'm sorry" after you stole someone's house but not doing anything to give it back. As Coalition member John Stoesz, who

5 Steven Charleston, *The Four Vision Quests of Jesus* (New York: Morehouse, 2015).

works on land return, says, "It is impossible to give back all the land taken from Native Americans, but it is immoral to give none of it back." Shalom Mennonite Church in Tucson, for instance, has designated a line item in its budget for "reparations and repair." They give a percentage of what they would pay in property tax to this line item, in recognition of the fact that their church is on Tohono O'odham land. Monies in this fund will be distributed to Indigenous groups. Engaging in household reparations is a key part of my personal discipleship, how I atone for what my ancestors did almost two hundred years ago when they came to Ohio. When my father sold his house there a few years back and divvied the earnings among my family, I gave 30 percent of my proceeds to causes working for Indigenous justice and land return. Retired Mennonite pastor Florence Schloneger did something similar in Kansas.[6] In the end, the way of reparations is not about retracing our steps and somehow magically going back to the way things were. Reparations is a repaired relationship that looks forward to what can be. Being "repairers of the breach" (Isaiah 58:12) will take creativity and collective action.

I am finishing this article at the Kansas City 2019 convention. As I staff our Coalition booth, most of the people coming to us already know what the words "Doctrine of Discovery" mean, and many of them are eager to take next steps in dismantling this Doctrine. I stand in awe of what the Spirit has already accomplished among us in five years, and I await, with eager anticipation, what the Spirit will continue to do among us.[7]

About the author

Sheri Hostetler is pastor of First Mennonite Church of San Francisco and one of the co-founders of the Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery Coalition. She and her family (husband, son, cat, and dog) live on the homelands of the Chochenyo Ohlone people.

6 Tim Huber, "Land of the Kanza: Descendant of immigrants gives portion from sale of family land to indigenous heritage society," *Mennonite World Review*, March 4, 2019, https://www.makamham.com.

7 I would like to thank Sarah Augustine and Jonathan Neufeld, co-chairs of the Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery Coalition, for their contributions to this article.

Acknowledging the land

The story of Houston Mennonite Church's land acknowledgment

Marty Troyer

Houston Mennonite Church worships in a place that for the time being we've agreed to call Houston, Texas. Space City, Bayou City, and the Energy Capital of the World are nicknames that give our country's fourth largest city some character. Today six million people have gathered from around the world to create our most diverse city.

But this has not always been the case.

The Karankawa, Atakapa, and other Native Peoples thrived on the land where our church building sits for more than twelve thousand years. Houston Mennonite has been on the land for fifty-two years and claims to "own" it. Here is their story and the story of how we came to acknowledge their history.

There are several reasons why we acknowledge the land on which our church sits as well as its stewards. Doing so offers recognition and respect to Native Peoples. It counters the Doctrine of Discovery with the true story of the people who have lived and thrived here for generations. It creates a broader public awareness of the history that has led to this moment. It begins to repair relationships with Native communities and with the land. It supports larger truth-telling and reconciliation efforts. It reminds people that colonization is an ongoing process, with Native lands still occupied due to deceptive and broken treaties. It takes a cue from Indigenous protocol, opening up space with reverence and respect. It inspires ongoing action and relationship. But there's one more surprising benefit as well: doing so can become a great Christian witness.

Their story—our story

Indigenous history in the Houston area began ten thousand years before the recorded migration of the Hebrews to Egypt. It was then that Indigenous Peoples began to, in the words of Genesis 1:28, "fill the earth" known later as North America. It took them another two thousand years to spread from sea to shining sea. The breadth of diversity of cultures,

habitation, and worship in this migration is one of the most beautiful stories in history. Each people group adapted to their environment and carved out sustainable communities that last to this day.

The Pueblo Peoples of New Mexico carved homes in cliffs and built cities with hundreds of adjoining rooms. Indigenous cultures in Ohio built geometric mounds that still make us wonder and long homes large enough to hold extended families. Where the Saint Louis Arch now stands was once the greatest city-state in North America. Cahokia was home to perhaps forty thousand people and was built up over hundreds of years, including the central structure likely forty-five meters high.

The people, the water, the land, and the sky were a living biosphere where everything both gave and received.

The Karankawa and Atakapa followed the seasons as hunters and gatherers. They built boats to navigate the many bayous as if a superhighway system. They would have known every tributary, the best locations to ford and fish and hide, the quickest routes inland and to the coast.

They harvested abundant seafood that today makes Houston a foodie's paradise: shrimp, clams, red snapper, and craw fish. And they knew how to use the land's resources, using alligator fat to repel the swarms of mosquitos and as sun block. The people, the water, the land, and the sky were a living biosphere where everything both gave and received. I imagine them having a love and respect of the land that runs as deeply or deeper than my Mennonite ancestors who revere the land as farmers who receive far more than they could ever give to the land.

The Karankawa Native Peoples lived here for countless generations not primarily as stewards of the land but as recipients of the rich diversity of its gifts. Here they lived at one with their Creator and with all creation in what Indigenous theologian Randy Woodley calls the "Harmony Way."[1] This way of life connected them as a community of creation and empowered them to live in the truth that they are related to all. Sadly, early reports of European encounters with the Karankawa were riddled with stereotypes of "primitive," "savage," "uncivilized" people. Yet, evidence suggests the Karankawa lived mostly in peace with their Indigenous neighbors, the Lipan Apache and Tonkawa. It's possible to overstate their lives

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

as carefree and utopian. They were not. Their lives were harsh and filled with struggle and incessant hard work. Their landscape infused them with resilience, creativity, empathy, and a necessary realism.

This is the history, and these are the characteristics we wanted to honor and acknowledge in our church statement:

> *Houston Mennonite Church acknowledges that this building stands on the ancestral land of the Karankawa and Atakapa Peoples.*
>
> *We honor their elders both past and present, who have stewarded this land throughout the generations.*
>
> *We know that Indigenous Peoples lived in what we now call Houston for millennia. And we acknowledge that for hundreds of years, the Christian Doctrine of Discovery has provided "theological justification and a legal basis for Christian governments to invade and seize Indigenous lands and dominate Indigenous peoples" (Erica Littlewolf).*
>
> *Since 1967, this land has been a place for Houston Mennonite Church to worship, learn, create, and grow in community with one another.*
>
> *Our hope is to live the Harmony Way, Indigenous theologian Randy Woodley's phrase for the ethic of living as one with creation and all people, or what our scriptures call shalom justice.*
>
> *We ask all people who come to this place to consider the ongoing impacts of the Doctrine of Discovery and the legacies of violence, displacement, migration, and settlement that bring us here today.*
>
> *Will you join us on the Harmony Way?*
>
> *#HonorNativeLand*

These were some of the very first words spoken at the grand opening of our new church facility in May 2018. They began as a conversation several years prior with an Indigenous woman I met at Houston's Apache

Museum. We conversed on several occasions, and I shared about the movement Mennonites are part of to dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery. Through our conversations it became clear she was surprised and appreciative to hear Christians had even heard of the Doctrine of Discovery. I shared my own powerful experience with Mennonite Central Committee's simulation, "The Loss of Turtle Island." She suggested that a good next step might be a public statement such as the one we ended up writing.

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Early in our church facility construction process, one of the leaders of Houston Mennonite raised the question of writing a land acknowledgement such as is widespread in her home country of Australia. When she suggested it, another leader who grew up in Canada immediately resonated, knowing the importance Canadians have placed on the practice. And that solidified our commitment to work at writing our land acknowledgement statement.

Writing our statement

We decided that we wanted a visual reminder in the form of a sign or plaque, which became our goal: to write a meaningful land acknowledgment concise enough to be printed as a plaque or sign. Our first step was researching existing documents from a variety of sources both in and outside the church. The best document we found to utilize is *Honor Native Land: A Guide and Call to Acknowledgement* on the US Department of Arts and Culture's website.[2]

I also spoke with Erica Littlewolf and Karin Kaufman Wall from Mennonite Central Committee–Central States, knowing that they have acknowledged land for years. Some of the questions they helped us think about were our audience, the events at which we would publicly acknowledge the land, how our church obtained the land, how this practice connects with other work we're doing, and what we are doing other than this statement to help honor Indigenous history and culture.

2 See https://usdac.us/nativeland.

They encouraged us to speak in present tense to combat the erasure of Indigenous Peoples. This was important for us in Houston, and it changed our language. In Texas it's not unusual to hear that the Native Peoples who lived on our land are now extinct or pushed to reservations. This accepted wisdom is simply not true.

Step two was clarifying who we were acknowledging. We kept in mind that we likely did not know all the tribal names, that people migrate over time, and that some tribes may have been pushed into the area as a result of colonization.[3] As we deepened our research, we discovered a lesser known tribe, the Atakapa, shared the land with the Karankawa.

In Texas it's not unusual to hear that the Native Peoples who lived on our land are now extinct or pushed to reservations. This accepted wisdom is simply not true.

Step three was writing and editing our specific statement. We wrote as a team of three, with several other consultants. Someone wrote an initial draft, which we wordsmithed, narrowed, sharpened, and marinated in for several months before feeling comfortable with our statement. Writing as a church for a broad audience, we chose to write our content in a distinctly Christian way, including both Indigenous Christian voices and acknowledgment of the church's complicity over the centuries.

Finally, for our fourth step, we decided that we wanted not only to speak our statement but to have a printed plaque immediately displayed inside our front door. That meant finding an image and formatting a sign, which one of our church leaders did incredibly well.

A bold public witness

One important witness to our Houston community has been explicitly naming our originating sins. It's no secret that the church baptized the genocide and erasure of Indigenous Peoples, but we've often wished it were a secret. It is important for us to tell the truth, to break the silence, and to recognize the complexity involved.

Houston, like all regions, has a distinct story and ongoing reverberations of colonization. Our deepest national sins—the genocide of Indigenous Peoples, the enslavement of black bodies, the exploitation of peoples

3 A good resource for such information can be found at https://native-land.ca/.

for cheap labor, our wars for oil in the Middle East—all somehow flow into and out of this geographical point on the map we call Houston. It's in our cultural DNA.

At the same time that Texas's second president, Marabeau Lamar, worked to solve "the Indian problem" through an "exterminating war," the European population eagerly brought in black slaves to build their wealth. By 1860, 49 percent of the inhabitants of Texas were slaves of African descent. Indigenous Christian leader Richard Twiss writes, "For America to gain its freedom to become a 'Christian nation,' 'founded on the Word of God,' it cost our First Nations people the loss of our lands, the decimation of our populations, and colonization of our nations, all in the name of the glory of God."[4]

I have spoken our statement many times outside of our church setting in groups I participate in, speeches, or when leading public prayers. Someone has nearly always approached me to comment on how meaningful, surprising, or important it was to hear a Christian leader name our complicity and commitments. It's been our experience that the gospel of just peace remains as it always has been—a bold public witness to Christ.

About the author

Marty Troyer, aka the Peace Pastor, is pastor of Houston Mennonite Church and a peace promoter in Houston, Texas.

4 Richard Twiss, "Reading the Bible Unjustly: How Has the American Church Read the Bible Unjustly?" in *The Justice Project*, edited by Brian McLaren, Elisa Padilla, and Ashley Bunting Seeber (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 68.

Behind our shared forgetting

Learning the stories of displaced peoples

Rich H. Meyer

South Africa

It's 1981. Brenda and I are driving through South Africa, from Lesotho to Botswana. We stop at a roadside farm stand in the Orange Free State, fresh fruit and beef jerky for sale.

"How do you like our country?"

It's a loaded question. We've heard it before. It often follows right after, "Are you American?"

We acknowledge that he pegged our accent, and I give a vague response: "It's a beautiful land—and there are problems." The South African government has been trying to establish "homelands" for blacks, with forced removals of black communities from wide swaths of the country. Nelson Mandela is in prison, the anti-apartheid movement is gaining traction in the United States, and the Boer farmer would probably like to be able to look into the future. Then he says, "You Americans did it right—just a few small reservations left." (Did he say, "killed them off"? I can't remember.)

We "did it right"? He's referring to our[1] successful effort to get rid of the indigenous people and take their land. I'm from Indiana, a state that, in spite of the name, has no Indian reservations.[2] Indians are less than .5 percent of the population of Indiana and hold no tribal trust land,[3] so I guess if that was the goal, then he's correct. His government is trying to

1 As a descendant of Swiss and Alsatian immigrants to North America, I identify as part of the dominant culture built through the displacement of Native Americans by European settlers.

2 I use varied vocabulary—Indians, Native Americans, members of First Nations—because I have heard the people I am identifying ask for all of these in different contexts. It is my assumption that preferred terminology will vary from place to place and over time, as it has in the past. I attempt to allow individuals and groups to name themselves, and if the labels I have used offend, I apologize.

3 This changed in 2016 when the Bureau of Indian Affairs accepted 166 acres owned by the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians near South Bend in trust.

do the same, but internal and international opposition is frustrating their efforts.

I thought about similarities and differences between Indiana and South Africa. What are the essential components of conquest, and which are "optional"? Colonization including immigration? Check. Ethnic cleansing? Check. Genocide? I think that term fits the European conquest of North America more than of southern Africa. From an estimated indigenous population of ten million in 1492 to about a quarter of a million in 1890, we did a pretty effective job of extermination. I don't know how much Lord Amherst's smallpox-infected blankets contributed, but clearly the dispossession and replacement of the indigenous population had been far more successful in the United States than in South Africa.

Indiana

How did we do it? I knew in generalities but not in any detail. And why didn't I know this history? The answer to that has two related parts: because I wasn't taught, and because it wasn't important. It wasn't important to my teachers; it wasn't important to my community. Of course, there were Indians here before European settlement—homes, farms, villages—but then what happened? I knew that much of the land was ceded in treaties, but that doesn't really explain disappearance. I've heard of the Trail of Tears, the forced removal of the Cherokee, from Georgia. What about Indiana? When I returned to Indiana in 1987, I decided to do some research.

Having a general idea might be the subject matter of sociology, history or political science. I was fuzzy even on that. Not that I was completely ignorant. As a child I had a small book that had been given to my mother when she was a child: *Indians of America*, copyright 1935.[4] I believe it was that book that first caused me to wonder what happened to the Indians who were described there. Later I had a junior high history teacher who offered me some independent study, including sobering material on poverty and life expectancy of Native Americans. I was in high school and an avid reader of *Newsweek* during the siege of Wounded Knee, when President Nixon sent tanks and snipers to put down the protest occupation by the American Indian Movement of the church. I was aware of the general outlines of some parts of the history, but I don't know that I could have told you what tribe had lived around Goshen before colonization.

4 Lillian Davids Fazzini, *Indians of America* (Racine, WI: Whitman Publishing, 1935).

Now I wanted to know in detail, about people in a place; I wanted to know stories. What stories are told, by whom, about my place? In a speech at the opening of an ice park, Elkhart Mayor Dave Miller said, "Just 200 years ago on this very site, there lived small tribes of Indians." He said they made fires and lived in teepees. "Then the missionaries came, and the builders came, and the Indians moved on. It's amazing what God allows us to do with the land he gives us."[5] Apart from getting the housing wrong, this is pretty vague on what happened. In the Dr. Seuss book, if you want to know how the Lorax "got lifted and taken away," you have to pay for the secret.[6]

The phenomenal wave of migration that overwhelmed the Potawatomi and Miami brought the settler population of what is now Indiana from an estimated 6,550 in 1800 to 344,508 in 1830.

I began with a few maps showing traditional lands of Indian tribes and land cessions by date. Northern Indiana/Illinois was ceded through a series of treaties between the United States and bands of Potawatomi Indians, from about 1816 through 1836. Before that, the Potawatomi were among the signatories of the 1795 Treaty of Greenville (Ohio), where the United States committed to preventing further westward expansion of European settlement, and the tribes ceded what is now Ohio. By that treaty, settlers moving into what is now Indiana were to be treated as outlaws. The United States was to remove them, and the Indians were free to attack them.

The underlying contradiction was that the Treaty of Greenville ended a period of skirmishes along the border, resulting in a sense on the part of settlers that it had become safer to move west. I don't know whether any of the representatives of the United States at Greenville thought it possible or ever intended to stop westward expansion at the Ohio line, but they didn't. The phenomenal wave of migration that overwhelmed the Potawatomi and Miami brought the settler population of what is now Indiana from an estimated 6,550 in 1800 to 344,508 in 1830.[7]

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5 Adam Nussbaum, "Elkhart Water & Ice Park opens," *Goshen News*, December 9, 2007, A1 (cont. on A2).

6 Dr. Seuss, *The Lorax* (New York: Random House, 1971).

7 Esarey, Logan, *A History of Indiana from Its Exploration to 1850* (2 vols. 1915), I, 175, 315. Cited (footnote, p. 17) in *Potawatomi Trail of Death,* Shirley Willard and Susan Campbell, 2003 Fulton County Historical Society, Rochester, Indiana.

That fifty-fold increase in one generation defines the dispossession of the Potawatomi and Miami.

In the face of this tidal wave of immigrants, many Indians concluded that continuing in their traditional way of life was impossible. Some moved west. Wonongaseah ("Five Medals") led a village on the Elkhart River, just south of Goshen. He traveled to Philadelphia, then the capital of the United States, and when he returned, he advised no further resistance but rather a shift to agriculture, with the goal of remaining among the settler farming communities. Other leaders continued to resist. A coalition that included representatives of at least fourteen tribes was gathered by Tecumseh and The Prophet near Lafayette, Indiana. They were defeated by US troops in 1811. The Chicago area (Fort Dearborn) was then ceded in 1816. Indiana became a state in 1816, at a time when most of the land had not yet been ceded. (I'm still not sure how it works to add territory to your nation while it still belongs to another nation.) The cession of land by treaty was perhaps a detail to neaten things up after the fact. In 1821, in a treaty signed in Chicago, the land on which Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) now stands was ceded.

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In 1829 Andrew Jackson was elected President on a platform of "Indian Removal." Following his election, the Indian Removal Act was passed, requiring all Indians to move west of the Mississippi River. There were many removals of Potawatomi over the next few years, some "voluntary" and some conducted by federal agents. In the series of treaties that followed, the remaining Potawatomi were concentrated into smaller and smaller reserves. In the 1832 Treaty of Tippecanoe, four chiefs were reduced to twenty-two square miles in what is now Marshall County. On this reserve the Potawatomi who were still hoping to stay made their homes.

In 1836 in the Treaty of Yellow River, the other three chiefs agreed to cede their land and to move west within two years. The fourth chief, Menominee, refused. One factor may have been that the negotiators for the United States brought whiskey to the treaty, but Menominee, who

had been ordained as a Baptist minister, was a teetotaler.[8] US courts decided that three out of four was good enough. In an 1837 affirmation by a number of Potawatomi chiefs of the decision to move west, Menominee again refused to sign.

The Trail of Death

On August 30, 1838, Menominee and others were asked to come to a meeting at the chapel in their village. It was a trap: they were held at gunpoint by a militia raised from South Bend, Logansport, and LaPorte. Over the next few days, the US troops rounded up all the Potawatomi they could find from as far away as Shipshewana. Some Potawatomi fled north to Michigan, where deportation was not threatened. (The governor of Indiana was eager to enforce removals. Most of the Potawatomi land in Michigan had been converted from tribal holdings to private property held by title and was therefore available for purchase by settlers. Michigan has fifteen Indian reservations today.)

The end of the Trail of Death was in early November, when the US troops left the survivors of this Great Lakes woodland tribe on the treeless plains of eastern Kansas and hurried home.

On September 4 the troops began driving about eight hundred Potawatomi on a forced march. Menominee and a few other leaders who still refused to cooperate were placed in cages on wagons. Details of this emigration are recorded in a journal kept by one of the soldiers, in letters written by Fr. Benjamin Petit, and in stories handed down through the descendants of the Potawatomi who were on the removal. Perhaps sixty Potawatomi died on the Trail of Death, most of them children or the elderly.

The end of the Trail of Death was in early November, when the US troops left the survivors of this Great Lakes woodland tribe on the treeless plains of eastern Kansas and hurried home. The Potawatomi were left without the promised homes or land; the area where they were left had earlier been promised to the Osage. The Potawatomi moved south twenty-five miles to join members of the tribe who had emigrated earlier and found refuge at a Catholic mission on Sugar Creek.

8 By this time, following the closure of the Baptist mission near Niles, Menominee and his band had converted to Catholicism.

Because the US government frequently changed its policies for relating to Indian tribes, and because often the policies broke tribes up into smaller bands, Potawatomi today are organized in at least nine separate bands or nations. Descendants of the Potawatomi who lived in Elkhart County might be found among the Pokagon, as some fled north in the era of removals. The descendants of the survivors of the Trail of Death might be in the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation, located in Kansas, or in the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, based in Oklahoma.

So that is how we did it. A hundred and fifty years later, Brenda and I bought thirty-five acres of farmland in Elkhart County. The title abstract for our farm begins with a "Certificate of Entry" from a US Government land auction in Fort Wayne in 1833. This land was ceded in a treaty signed at Carey Mission (near present-day Niles, Michigan) in 1828, so it took a few years to survey the land for sale.

Finding the stories

Then I saw a photo in the newspaper of a man holding a pinch of tobacco up toward a brown and white sign along a highway. The sign read, "Potawatomi Trail of Death—Regional Historic Trail—1838 Indiana to Kansas." The caption identified the man as George Godfrey of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation and made reference to a Trail of Courage Festival that was going to take place near Plymouth, Indiana. With a few phone calls, I was in touch with George and with Shirley Willard, president of the Fulton County Historical Society. Now the stories started coming.

Stories begin wherever the storyteller decides to begin. I started to notice how accounts of Amish-Mennonite communities in the *Mennonite Historical Bulletin* often began with the first Amish-Mennonite settler. This was often about a decade after the treaty ceding the land, but that close proximity in time was hidden because there was silence about everything before the Amish-Mennonite settlement. In 1998 I suggested to the editor that articles about the beginning of Amish-Mennonite settlements should include a short introductory paragraph that would give the reader just this much: Whose land was this before colonization, how did they lose it, and where are their descendants today?

The editor of the *Mennonite Historical Bulletin*, John Sharp, replied that he supported this but that this would be an area of research new to many of their writers, requiring the use of unfamiliar sources. (Apparently I was not the only person for whom this story had not been part of my education, had not been important to my community or my teachers.)

He asked whether I would write an instructional article on how someone could learn the answers to these three questions for their home or the area they were studying My article was published in the July 1999 *Mennonite Historical Bulletin*.[9]

Palestine

By this time I had begun working with Christian Peacemaker Teams, and my first assignments were in the southern West Bank. There I was immediately partnered with Israeli and Palestinian peacemakers who were trying to protect the homes of Palestinians from demolition by the Israeli government. Many of the Palestinian families had land records from the Ottoman era. These home demolitions were part of an Israeli government policy attempting to bring the facts on the ground into line with a colonial narrative which begins like this: "A land of no people for a people with no land."[10]

Colonization including immigration? Check. Ethnic cleansing? Check. I visited some newly built concentration towns[11] where Bedouin were being settled as their fields and grazing lands in the Negev were being taken from them. Rabbi Jeremy Milgrom, one of the founders of Rabbis for Human Rights, once told me in personal conversation, "We think of the Bedouin as you might think of crows in a field. If you wave your hand, they will fly away, and you don't have to think about where they will land—they are just gone from your field and your sight." The dispossession of the Bedouin is continuing today.

Covenant nations

My son who lived on Pine Ridge said, "The Indian Wars aren't over; we are still taking their land today." Ask any Lakota about the theft of the Black Hills or the Bureau of Indian Affairs management of grazing leases to ranchers, or the transfer of land taken from the Lakota by the United States to the state of South Dakota. I think South Africa is different; after elections, a huge disparity in wealth is one legacy of colonization, and

9 Rich H. Meyer, "Why Don't We Tell the Beginning of the Story?," *Mennonite Historical Bulletin* 55, no. 3 (July 1999): 1–8.

10 The population of Palestine was about half a million (94 percent Arab) when Theodore Hertzl and Israel Zangwell introduced this phrase at the First Zionist Congress in 1847.

11 "Concentration towns" is the description of veteran Israeli peace activist Amos Gvirtz.

building a multi-ethnic democracy is a challenge, but the colonial enterprise is now explained in museums for people too young to remember it.

This is not just a story of Indiana, not just a story of South Africa, not just a story of Israel/Palestine. It is a consistent pattern when Europeans move into the lands of non-Europeans. Legal structures around land tenure that disregard indigenous people. Unwilling to share, willing to kill, armed with gunpowder—how deeply engrained in our culture is this sense of entitlement? Where does this hubris come from? Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz makes a category for these "covenant nations," meaning that the conqueror believes that they have a covenant with God that includes a right to this land that they are taking.[12]

Forgetting, remembering

French historian Ernest Renan wrote that a nation is a community formed of shared remembering and shared forgetting.[13] The stories of the indigenous people of this place and of our handling of relationships with them were part of the shared forgetting of my community. My teachers left this out in order to form a more perfect Union—that is, to create in our defective memories a nation more perfect than the reality of this nation of the United States of America. Mayor Dave Miller skipped over it when dedicating the ice skating park. South Dakota Governor William Janklow affirmed this shared forgetting when he dismissed the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 on the grounds that all of the people who signed it are now deceased.[14] Golda Meir chose it when she said, "There were no such thing as Palestinians."[15]

Learning these stories is important to my understanding of my world and my place in it. Today I take any opportunity to pass these stories on.

Learning these stories is important to my understanding of my world and my place in it. Today I take any opportunity to pass these stories on. I

12 Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon, 2014).

13 Ernest Renan, "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?," lecture given at the Sorbonne, March 11, 1882.

14 Reported via email by sources quoting Lakota youth who met with Gov. Janklow on March 22, 1999.

15 As quoted in *Sunday Times*, June 15, 1969, and *The Washington Post*, June 16, 1969.

am grateful for the biennial AMBS class that follows the Trail of Death. I am encouraged by others who are also telling these stories: George Schricker, who has been singing the song of Menominee for thirty years; Shirley Willard and other county historians along the Trail of Death; Adam Friesen, whose fourth-grade class at Bethany Christian Schools performed his play about Menominee and the Trail of Death; and especially George Godfrey, Sister Virginia Pearl, and other Potawatomi who have continued to remember and teach these stories that can change our forgetful nation. Dr. Seuss says that knowing the story matters because the next chapter is up to the hearers: "UNLESS someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not."[16]

My interest is growing in the nonverbal story-telling of Citizen Potawatomi Nation photographer Sharon Hoogstraten whose large canvases of Potawatomi in regalia now greet you in the halls of AMBS. I'm interested in learning from the Pokagon cooks who are recovering their food sovereignty and are willing to share those stories with us. When Skylar Alsup brought Three Sisters Soup (corn, beans, and squash) to a reception at AMBS on June 3, 2019, he said, "Thank you for listening. It feels like for a long time we've been trying to say something, and no one was hearing us."

About the author

Rich H. Meyer lives on Potawatomi land along the Elkhart River, five miles upstream from the site of Wonongaseah's village. He has been the navigator for a number of groups retracing the Trail of Death from Indiana to Kansas. His work history includes plumbing and auto mechanics, years with Mennonite Central Committee, Christian Peacemaker Teams, and now Elkhart County Clubhouse, an intentional work community for adults with mental illnesses.

16 Dr. Seuss, *The Lorax*.

Dangerous memories of the Trail of Death

Facing our past and moving toward peace

Peter Digitale Anderson

It was hot and humid. Only mid-morning, and the sun was already beating down on us, raising temperatures to the mid-80s, with hardly a cloud for respite. Yet as we walked near the border between Indiana and Illinois, where once the vast forests of the East met the prairie, we knew our discomfort was minor compared to those who had walked this path one hundred and eighty-one years ago. Unlike the Potawatomi, who were being evicted from their land, our group had easy access to water and food. We spent most of the trip in a van rather than on foot. We did not experience our way of life disappearing as we left native forests behind. We were not being forced from our homes at gunpoint traveling for two months as our children and elderly died along the way.

Our group was traveling together on a pilgrimage remembering the Trail of Death, an opportunity through Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS). Over the course of nine days, we drove and walked from Plymouth, Indiana (near the original home of Chief Menominee's band of Potawatomi), to Shawnee, Oklahoma (the area where many Potawatomi eventually settled after first being forcibly removed to Kansas). Guided by George Godfrey, a member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation and a researcher of the Trail of Death, alongside our instructor Katerina Friesen and historian Rich Meyer, we traced the path of the removal, learned from other Potawatomi, and stopped to lament and commemorate significant locations along the way.

The Trail of Death was one example of Indigenous nations being forcibly removed from their homelands in the early and mid-1800s, a contemporary to the well-known Trail of Tears removing the Cherokee from the Southeastern states of Florida, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. In the early decades of the United States, the population was growing, and people sought new land to farm and settle. Millions of Americans crossed the Appalachians to squat on Indigenous land, despite federal treaty agree-

ments promising to prevent this. New treaties (the United States signed several dozen treaties with the Potawatomi[1]) urged Indigenous Nations to cede their land and move to "Indian Territory" west of the Mississippi. In 1830, President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act, empowering the federal government to "negotiate"—often through manipulative, coercive, and violent tactics—with Indigenous Nations to clear them from lands desired for white settlement. Throughout the following decade, the Potawatomi were persuaded to relocate; finally, in 1838, Chief Menominee's band, one of the last refusing to leave Indiana, was rounded up and marched to Kansas. More than eight hundred and fifty people were removed on this Trail of Death, with at least forty-one Potawatomi—including many children—dying along the way. Many more perished after they arrived in Kansas, as they arrived just before winter and were given little shelter and provision.[2]

Dangerous memories and embodied learning

That's some heavy history. But I'm not Potawatomi; I'm as white as a northern and western European guy can get. Why would I spend a week driving in a smelly van, walking in the heat, and camping in summer humidity for a history that is not my own?

But it is my history. I grew up on land taken from the Potawatomi; my community's existence was built on their removal. And it is not only history: the Potawatomi and other Indigenous Nations are still actively fighting for the national sovereignty they have been promised, and the ideology that empowered the Indian Removal Act is still influential today.

In *Faith in History and Society*, theologian Johann Metz describes two types of memory.[3] There is a type of memory that has only a loose relationship to the past, offering an idealized history to those who have benefitted, an idea of the "good old days" in which there were few problems, none of which risk the future we imagine we are progressing toward. Then

1 The Kansas Heritage Society lists forty-four treaties between the United States and the Potawatomi. See "Potawatomi Treaties: Treaties between the Potawatomi and the United States of America, 1789–1867," *Kansas Heritage Group*, http://www.kansasheritage.org/PBP/books/treaties/title.html.

2 See Thomas J. Campion, "Indiana Removal and the Transformation of Northern Indiana," *Indiana Magazine of History*, March 1, 2011, https://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/imh/article/view/12592.

3 Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, translated by David Smith (New York: Seabury, 1980).

there are "dangerous memories" that challenge our assumptions about ourselves and our history, forcing us to be honest about the harm that has been caused, reminding us of those whose lives and dreams have been trampled underfoot for the sake of our own community's advancement.

The former "memory" lies to us and comforts us, letting us believe that everything is essentially fine. The latter is more difficult and more painful but invites us to learn, to grow, to acknowledge suffering, and to work toward healing. One memory listens to and responds to the leading of the Spirit, the suffering of the incarnate Christ among those we have forgotten or ignored. The other memory embraces spiritual blindness, tuning out the voices of those our nation and ancestors have harmed in the name of progress. Wrestling with the past and its challenge for the present is a deeply spiritual activity.

I signed up for the pilgrimage because this wrestling matters to me. When I was a kid, "Indians" were presented as part of an idealized, harmless memory. I grew up in Indiana (which ironically means "land of the Indians") where Indigenous people were either fictional or historical. Many places were named after them, such as the Potawatomi Zoo and Miami Road. It was fun to look for arrowheads alongside freshly plowed fields. They were the antagonists when playing Cowboys and Indians or mysterious figures in historical fiction. Nobody I knew complained about them being turned into sports mascots (my favorite baseball team as a kid was the Atlanta Braves).

There is more to this history than the idealized past; there is a dangerous memory ready to challenge. Many of my ancestors first came to Indiana in the years after the Potawatomi and Miami were removed.

But there is more to this history than the idealized past; there is a dangerous memory ready to challenge. Many of my ancestors first came to Indiana in the years after the Potawatomi and Miami were removed, just as the land was being surveyed, parceled, and sold to settlers. Many of Indiana's residents with German heritage came in the mid-1800s because of the promise of open, unoccupied land where they could farm and thrive. While it is true that, as far as I know, none of my family directly participated in forcibly removing Indigenous people, it seems they were quite content to reap the benefits, building their lives on newly claimed land, ignoring or ignorant of those who had once called it

home. They came to work hard, farm the land, raise their children, and secure a future for their families—all good and noble intentions. I assume most of them were good-hearted people and kind neighbors. Nonetheless, individual morality does not negate cultural evil. My childhood home, the wellbeing and wealth of my family, the very existence of my hometown and my family's roots in Indiana, did not come from nothing; they were made possible by America's theft of Indigenous lands. (Mennonites—which included some of my forebears—are also facing this historical complicity in colonialism, a key theme of the pilgrimage.[4])

This dangerous memory extends beyond my direct ancestors. The United States also has a national myth, an idealized, sanitized history, that we use to tell our story. The United States was forged out of the hard work and pioneering spirit of explorers, cowboys, settlers, and patriots. God gave us, a special and privileged people, this land as our Manifest Destiny. The land was empty and uncivilized; it was our calling, our duty, to tame it, from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The citizens of the United States were always the heroes of the story, and our moral and cultural superiority were a gift for us to share with the world.

This dangerous memory extends beyond my direct ancestors. The United States also has a national myth, an idealized, sanitized history, that we use to tell our story.

But as with Indiana, so with everywhere else. The land was not empty; our ancestors did not respect the dignity and humanity of the people living there and did not respect their ways of life or claim to their home. This mindset was not new; it was simply another expression of the Doctrine of Discovery, a legal framework born out of the Roman Catholic Church in the 1500s giving European Christians a theological foundation for invading and claiming non-Christian, non-white lands. Both explicitly and implicitly, this doctrine has undergirded European and US colonization and the destruction of Indigenous Nations ever since, especially in Africa and the Americas.

It is imperative for me, as a Christian, to confront and repent of the ways this oppressive, colonizing attitude of moral and cultural superiority is embedded within my own worldview. It is imperative for me, as a spiritual leader, to recognize how it appears in my teaching and mentoring.

4 Paul Schrag, "Gospel of Conquest," *Mennonite World Review*, March 4, 2019, http://mennoworld.org/2019/03/04/editorial/gospel-of-conquest/.

It is imperative for me, as a peacemaker, to see and resist the ways the Doctrine of Discovery continues to shape society and harm marginalized communities today. Ultimately, facing our dangerous memories is not about placing blame or feeling guilty; it is a process of healing spiritually, leading to humility, repentance, and learning to love the Other whom we have harmed.

Transforming historical harms

The Potawatomi Trail of Death is tied to my own history, both my personal ancestry and my cultural heritage. The beliefs that led to Indigenous removal have left wounds on my own soul in the form of arrogance, privilege, cultural isolation, and spiritual blindness. They irrevocably harmed the Potawatomi who lost their land, saw their language and culture nearly destroyed, and continue to struggle for the survival of their nation. Reading about the history would not be enough; spiritual transformation requires activity, relationship, an embodied form of learning. Dangerous memories demand actual change.

One resource that I have found useful in this process is *Transforming Historical Harms*, a manual from Eastern Mennonite University's Center for Justice and Peacebuilding.[5] This was born out of EMU's STAR program for trauma healing and Coming to the Table's work of healing racial wounds between descendants of enslaved and enslaver Americans (slavery itself being deeply tied to the Doctrine of Discovery). I believe the Transforming Historical Harms (THH) framework holds significant potential for helping groups and individuals face and process the evil of the past and turn toward a more hopeful, just, and healthy future.

The THH framework consists of four dimensions:

Facing history—looking at the history of a relationship, conflict, or event from the perspectives of all involved, seeking truth at the risk of upsetting one's preferred beliefs. One of the most uncomfortable parts of our pilgrimage was facing our history, the reality of the harm that had been done. Through readings, conversations, historical locations, and personal reflection, we both learned and faced the facts about the Potawatomi removal.[6]

5 David Anderson Hooker and Amy Potter Czajkowski, *Transforming Historical Harms* (Harrisonburg, VA: Eastern Mennonite University, 2012).

6 See, for example, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon, 2014).

Making connections—building authentic relationships of understanding and respect with the "other side." A key part of the pilgrimage was not simply learning about the Potawatomi but also meeting some of them and being welcomed into their reality. No longer were Indigenous people confined to history and fiction; they were real people wrestling with identity, culture, and politics.

Healing wounds—creating intentional spaces and rituals for the physiological, spiritual, emotional, and cognitive healing of trauma. Although I can't say whether the pilgrimage was healing for our Potawatomi hosts, it was deeply so for many in our group. Full of ritual and reflection, we walked parts of the Trail, journaled and reflected, sang and prayed, and more.

Taking action—in partnership with the "other side," working to change cultural and institutional systems that perpetuate harm and injustice. By the end of the trip, our group was left with a question: What does it look like for us to take action, to show solidarity with the Potawatomi and other Indigenous peoples? In many ways, it still felt so big, so long ago, that it was hard to know where to start.

These are not one-time activities; healing and transformation are long-term, ongoing processes. Nor are they necessarily sequential steps, although one dimension often leads to another. In reflecting upon our pilgrimage, I saw how elements of all four dimensions were incorporated into the trip, both in our activities during the week and in our discussions about what might come next.[7]

About the author

Peter Digitale Anderson is an Anabaptist-Quaker who graduated from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in 2019 with an MA in Theology and Peace Studies. He and his family serve with Peace Catalyst International, training peacemakers and facilitating interfaith peacebuilding in Minneapolis. Peter writes at www.fiercelyalive.com.

7 This essay is adapted from Peter Anderson, "Dangerous Memories of the Trail of Death: Facing Our Past and Moving toward Peace," *Fiercely Alive*, July 16, 2019, which includes a photo essay documenting the 2019 Trail of Death pilgrimage and a concluding list of specific actions steps; http://fiercelyalive.com/dangerous-memories-of-the-trail-of-death-facing-our-past-and-moving-toward-peace/.

European clothes

A song from the Trail of Death pilgrimage

Andrew Hudson

Packing light to go on the trail:
Shirts and socks and pants.
Unthought choices, outfits to go–
We're dressed in nothing flat.

European clothes,
Hiding us right under our nose.
'Tis better to give than to receive.
We'll still own our stuff when it's time to leave.
We'll wear our lifestyles home
Like European clothes.

Forebears came to convert the land
With shirts and pants and guns.
Imposing crops, imposing cloth,
Outfitted to win.

European clothes–
They couldn't see beyond their nose.
'Tis better to give than to receive,
But pawns submitted to the kings.
They simply played the role
In European clothes.

Settlers tore a landscape apart
Thread from thread from thread.
Pi'neer species on rags of land–
Formerly whole cloth.

European clothes:
Wealth, but just above our toes.

'Tis better to give than to receive.
A single garment of destiny
Would be denied by those
In European clothes.

Decades later, pilgrimage walked,
Sunscreen, shoes, and socks.
A thousand miles to walk and ride–
End at the museum.

European clothes–
The reservation's full of those.
'Tis better to give than to receive.
Casino money, shared, relieves
A few of history's woes;
In European clothes.

The well-dressed guide
trips down the past.
Dresses, shirts, and ties
Hid their ways from white man's view.
Thriving out of sight.

European clothes, hiding them right under our nose.
'Tis better to give than to receive.
Their coverage serves the whole tribe's needs.
They've found a gracious flow
In European clothes.

Jesus walked a trail of death,
Sandals, tunic, coat.
We dress him for success in our time
Like they'd walk to church.

European clothes, hiding him right under our nose.
'Tis better to give than to receive.
The stones cry out for us to leave
A lifestyle that arose
In European clothes.

Soldiers rent the fabric of life:
Moccasins and robes (were)
Taken by the empire. We wait
For the veil to tear.

In European clothes,
Adapting, they continued to know:
'Tis better to give than to receive.
Obedient Sons, modeling peace
And sharing hope with those
In European clothes.[1]

About the author

Andrew Hudson is a pastoral ministry student at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary. He most recently lived in Sarasota, Florida, although he has deep roots in the Pacific Northwest, where his son and extended family live. Andrew's vocational background is in organic agriculture.

1 The song was written on the June 2019 Trail of Death pilgrimage as part of a course for Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary.

"Can these bones live?"

A sermon on Ezekiel 37 in response to the Trail of Death

Mara Weaver Boshart

In 1838, not quite a decade after the US government passed the Indian Removal Act allowing the removal of Indigenous groups from east of the Mississippi, a group of Potawatomi in the young state of Indiana were rounded up, under the guise of a church meeting, after their leader refused to sign an agreement with the US government to cede the land where his people lived.

A few days later, the group began the grueling march that would come to be known as the Trail of Death. They began the trek in September; heat was abundant, water and food scarce. Dozens, sometimes hundreds, were plagued by illness on any given day. These woodland people were slowly dragged from the forests, gently rolling hills, rivers and lakes that they had known for generations, until they were far enough away to abandon their hope of returning home. This was not just "home" in a sentimental sense; this was the land that sustained them, the land where they knew how to build shelters, treat illness, forage, plant, harvest, and store food. They were going to a place where, because they had no relationship with that land and had not inherited wisdom about it, they did not know how to feed, shelter, clothe, or heal their families.

The caravan arrived two months later near present-day Osawatomie, Kansas, with winter upon them, only to find that the homes and farmland that had been promised to them were nonexistent. By that point, an estimated forty-one members of their group had already died along the way, most of them children. In an effort to stave off even more death, they soon continued south, on to Sugar Creek Mission, a Catholic-run mission where some of the other previously removed Potawatomi groups had ended up. Over the next decade at Sugar Creek, approximately six hundred more Potawatomi died.

In June 2019, I was part of a group of eighteen people who spent a week retracing this path of forced removal traveled by a group of around

eight hundred Potawatomi persons from northern Indiana to eastern Kansas nearly two hundred years ago.

The purpose of the trip was not just to learn and remember but to lament as well. Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann has written that through lament Israel names its "hurt and anger," submits this hurt and anger to God, and finally relinquishes it. Only after this relinquishment is Israel once again capable of praise. Brueggemann makes it clear that covenant relationship requires lament. This is because God's omnipotence is not "conventional"; it does not ask us to be "docile reactors." God does not seek empty praise or doxologies spoken out of distant fear. In all God's power, *God is still fundamentally relational*: God is, as Brueggemann says, "capable of and willing to be respondent and not only initiator."[1]

Brueggemann cautions,

> *A community of faith which negates lament soon concludes that the hard issues of justice are improper questions to pose at the throne, because the throne seems to be only a place of praise. I believe it thus follows that if justice questions are improper questions at the throne . . . they soon appear to be improper questions in public places, in schools, in hospitals, with the government, and eventually even in the courts. Justice questions disappear into civility and docility. The order of the day comes to seem absolute, beyond question, and we are left with only grim obedience and eventually despair. The point of access for serious change has been forfeited when the propriety of [lament] is denied.*[2]

Lament is not just cathartic but necessary. It is part of what Brueggemann calls "responsible faith."[3] Lament keeps the door open for questions of systemic justice *and*, more importantly, God's intervention to bring such justice about.

Lament was a task that struck our group, the vast majority of us being descendants of white settlers, as a fitting way to begin to respond to this tragic—though unfortunately not unique—event in the history of the land now called the United States. In the face of a problem so expansive

1 Walter Brueggemann, "The Costly Loss of Lament," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 11, no. 36 (October 1986): 57–71, quote at 61.

2 Brueggemann, "Costly Loss of Lament," 64.

3 Brueggemann, "Costly Loss of Lament," 61.

and permeating, it is easy—at least from a white settler perspective, safeguarded by privilege—to throw your hands up and say, "This is too far gone; the removal and genocide of Indigenous peoples on this land began so long ago and has done so much damage, I don't even know where to begin trying to make things right." Our group found that lament is one way to take a step out of ignorance or paralysis toward a world where God's shalom is expected, demanded, and realized.

Most evenings, the group would gather for a short time to debrief the day. One of the questions that Katerina, one of our group leaders, often posed to us was, "Where have you seen Christ today?" Each time I heard this question, I desperately wanted to be able to answer it, but I found myself at a loss. I could not recognize Christ's presence in the midst of this Trail of Death, much less proclaim it with any confidence. I could do the first part of lament—the sad part, the naming of pain and injustice, the articulation of hurt and anger. But the second part of lament—the part that actually moves us toward hope based in the expectant call for God to exercise justice, the reassurance of God with us—that was elusive.

Our group found that lament is one way to take a step out of ignorance or paralysis toward a world where God's shalom is expected, demanded, and realized.

One of the Scripture texts we heard several times during the trip was Luke 24:13–35, the road to Emmaus, a story in which some of Jesus's disciples also fail to identify Christ's presence.

In the text, it's been two days since Jesus died. These two followers of Jesus are making their way to a village outside of Jerusalem, and they're reviewing the shock and chaos of the last few days. Jesus waltzes right up—but, of course, they don't recognize him—and he joins them on their walk, coyly asking, "So whatchya talking about?"

They look at him like he must live under a rock. "Are you the only one around here who doesn't know what has happened in Jerusalem these last few days?"

He pushes further, "Whatever do you mean?"

So they indulge this clueless stranger, explaining to him that there was this prophet named Jesus who seemed to be the real deal, but in the end, Jewish leaders had handed him over to the Roman authorities who then killed him.

These disciples and their friends were rather disappointed about all of this because they thought he was going to be the new King David and redeem Israel. Now it's been a few days, so the clock is really ticking, and it would seem at this point that Jesus is *really* quite dead—except for the fact that Mary and Mary Magdalene and Joana went to the tomb just this morning, and Jesus's body wasn't there, *and*, what is more, some angels told them that Jesus was alive. Of course, the other disciples couldn't take their word for it, so they went to check it out too, and they couldn't find him either, dead *or* alive.

At this point, unrecognized Jesus, cheeky as ever, responds to his walking buddies, "Oh all that stuff? Yeah, I know about that, but *you all* clearly don't get it. Let me straighten some things out for you, help you understand (one more time) why all of these things had to happen."

So he tells them the whole story, from the beginning, going back through all the prophets to help them understand the trajectory of the Messiah.

They finish their conversation and arrive at their destination, and Jesus keeps on cruising ahead, but the other two offer their new friend some hospitality. They ask him to stay with them because it's nearly evening. They sit down to eat, Jesus takes the bread and blesses it, their eyes are opened, and in their moment of recognition, he vanishes.

They turn to one another—I imagine in quite the state—and say, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the Scriptures to us? Seriously, how did we not recognize our own Messiah?"

So they get right back up and head back to Jerusalem—where they just came from. They find the eleven and report to them that they have seen the risen Christ in the flesh.

As we followed the Trail of Death, I felt like the disciples, enveloped by the apparent reality of death, both past and present, around me. I could not see past it to recognize the Risen Christ.

In his commentary on Luke, John Carroll writes that this story "chronicles the transformation of Jesus' followers as, in fits and starts, they are led from *uncomprehending discouragement* to *perceptive faith*."[4] As with these disciples, so too I have felt "uncomprehending discouragement" rather than "perceptive faith." And yet this story reminds me that

4 John T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary*, New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing, 2012), 475.

the Living Christ walks with us even when our eyes are not yet opened to his presence. Through this text from Ezekiel, and through my own experience on the Trail of Death, I offer testimony these "fits and starts," the move from the *defeat* of uncomprehending discouragement to the *hope* of perceptive faith, as I ask whether the oppressed and conquerors can be revived, together.

So back to our good friend and trusty prophet Ezekiel. To set the scene, Israel has been defeated by Babylon, deported from their homeland, and Ezekiel, while in exile, has predicted the fall of Jerusalem, God's dwelling place among God's chosen people.

We picked up the story in chapter 37, the end of a section that, as one commentator puts it, "depict[s] the extent to which God is willing to go to transform the will of the people, care for the weak, raise up the spirits of the desolate and despondent, and create peace in the land. In all this, God's deepest desire is to dwell among the people forever."[5] So the question that confronts Israel at this point is, If God wants to dwell with Israel (despite their less than perfect record), but Babylon destroys Jerusalem, where will God dwell? God's place and God's people are, seemingly, utterly destroyed, uninhabitable for God's presence, unable to carry out God's shalom mission.

With this question at the forefront, God takes Ezekiel into this vision of a vast valley, full of dry, lifeless bones. As long as I can remember, the image that I have had for the valley of Ezekiel's vision is the elephant graveyard from *The Lion King*—the scary place where Simba and Nala wind up after they refuse to follow the rules and where they are chased by hyenas. But despite my juvenile depiction, this valley is not an elephant graveyard but a battlefield, covered in the Israelite death that Babylon has left in its wake.

Our tendency may be to think about the life of each individual whose bones reside in this valley, but for God and Ezekiel, "it is not about the resurrection of the individual but about whether a dead *people* can become alive again."[6]

God asks Ezekiel, "Can these bones live?"

Ezekiel responds, "O Lord God, you know."

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5 Gordon Matties, "Ezekiel," in *The New Interpreter's Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*, edited by Walter J. Harrelson (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 1154.

6 Matties, "Ezekiel," 1211.

It is unclear whether Ezekiel defers to God as a nod to God's sovereignty and the divine intention that permeate this story or out of his own, dare I say, uncomprehending discouragement. Perhaps it is both.

God says, "Go on and let them have it. Prophesy to these bones, and they *shall* live. Speak my intention into this seemingly insurmountable tragedy and see what happens."

So Ezekiel speaks, and the bones come together, and bodies form. But they are not yet alive. They lack breath. God then tells Ezekiel to prophesy to the breath to come from the four winds and fill the lifeless bodies. God makes it clear to Ezekiel: "My breath can resuscitate and propel an entire people forward into the new life that my breath inaugurates." For Israel, this meant that they would once again have life in their holy land and God would dwell with them, a witness to God's righteousness and justice among the nations.

The message of the story of Ezekiel and the Israelites in the context of Indigenous removal and white settlement in the United States is complex. On the one hand, the echoes of Indigenous confusion and anger and pain, their cries of being cut off from the land, seem to resonate with the cries of exiled Israel. On the other hand, it's possible that Indigenous people in the United States would more closely identify with the inhabitants that God's chosen people ran out of the Promised Land when they arrived. These complexities are important to explore, and there is some good, important scholarship on it, but I am going to focus on just three of the questions that I think Ezekiel's vision offers us for consideration in light of the Trail of Death.

The message of the story of Ezekiel and the Israelites in the context of Indigenous removal and white settlement in the United States is complex.

First, *whose bones can this story reveal to us?* In the Bible, these are the bones of Israel, God's chosen people. But whose dry bones fill the valleys of *this* land today? Do we see the bones of the children who perished along the Trail of Death (so ambivalently documented in a military escort's daily record with the words "a child died tonight")? Do we see the bones of those who survived the journey only to die in the unfamiliar land where they had been taken? Do we see the bones of the settler colonists who died throughout centuries of battles and wars waged to uphold the Doctrine of Discovery and secure Manifest Destiny for white Christians of European descent? The bones of my farming ancestors who moved onto the land

once stewarded by Indigenous peoples? Do we see the bones of the thousands of Indigenous children forced to attend boarding schools designed to exterminate their cultures and instill shame deep within them in the name of Christianity? Do we see our bones?

I am hesitant to claim these bones as my own and those of other white settlers because I am a part of the conquering empire, not the exiled minority nation. I wonder if I and people like me can claim this story as our own. While white settlers weren't conquered by the empire, there is certainly *spiritual* deadness among us that we must acknowledge and confront. The injustice that we perpetuate deadens us; our lack of faith in God to respond to our cries for justice deadens us. While we did not end up in the valley by the same means as the Israelites, can we claim the desperation and destitute circumstances of these dry bones? Can we claim a complete and total need for the breath of God to revive us as a people?

I say these are all our bones—both oppressed and conquerors. In Christ, God chooses not just Israel but all nations. God chooses not just the marginalized but also those who recognize their privilege and submit it to the cause of God's shalom.

The second question is this: *Can these bones live?* Here we return to the theme of uncomprehending discouragement that we saw from the disciples. I confess that during the pilgrimage, it was this—not my faith in God's sovereignty—that would have prompted me to respond as Ezekiel did, hesitant to assert that I, of all people, know whether or not these bones can live. So I ask myself now, When the Lord asks if the dry bones of both the conquerors and the oppressed can live, am I ready to say yes? To claim with conviction that God transforms from death to life, that God's very breath is the "impulse for life"?

I say yes. With God's breath, these bones can live.

Which leads me to my third question: *If these are all our bones and all our bones can live, can these bones live, together?* Even if God chooses to graciously bestow such breath upon oppressors and their descendants in the same way that God brings the oppressed to life, are we capable of coming together in our restored life? Can new communities be formed in the image of the living God?

The possibility of such reconciliation is the gospel; all things can be reconciled in Christ in a way that spans time and space. So I say yes; I must trust that these bones can live together. God's vision of full shalom life for all creation is big enough for that. I have to believe that.

The Trail of Death helped me begin to trust anew that God *does* resuscitate dry bones. Whether we have ended up in that valley by our own doing or have been forced there by oppressors, God shows up and wants to breathe deep into our withered bodies and dwell with us.

We are not called to breathe new life into the valley that white US imperialism has left in its wake. Only God's breath can do that. But we *are* called to cry out to our relational God—our God who loves justice. We are called to use the life that God has given us to plant seeds of God's shalom, to use this breath for everything that it is. I am called to believe that God is bigger than the sins of my ancestors and of this generation. I am called to acknowledge the Living God who has not abandoned us and who is not defeated by the powers of Death, though they yet seek domination.

God makes a way of life where there is none, where it seems improbable if not impossible. I need look no further than the hospitality and relationship that the Potawatomi people we met along our way offered us. For those of us who continue to benefit from the unholy conquest of this land and the subjection of its original stewards, new life is not a cover up but an opportunity. We have only to trust God's invitation to lament, respond to God's call to prophesy, and become aware of the breath of God's Spirit animating our bodies.

When we have worked ourselves into a pile of dry bones, when we have given in to the hopelessness of the tomb, the Triune God beckons us to remember and to believe. God beckons us to hope and trust that God's Spirit can and does move among us, breathing, reconciling, recreating. God beckons us to lend our whole selves to this faith and the action to which it leads us.[7]

About the author

Mara Weaver Boshart is a third-year MDiv student at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana. She graduated from Goshen College in 2013 with a BA in history and secondary education, with a minor in Spanish. She lives in Archbold, Ohio, with her husband, Corben, where she is a member of Zion Mennonite Church.

7 This sermon was first preached at Benton Mennonite Church in Benton, Indiana, on August 18, 2019.

The Doctrine of Discovery beast and the slaughtered lamb

A sermon on Revelation 7:9–17

Katerina Friesen

Did you ever play "finder's keepers" as a child? Basically, whoever finds a lost item gets to claim ownership over it. Finder's keepers may be innocent enough for children, but it's a dangerous principle applied politically and economically. Yet that's what happened with the Doctrine of Discovery. The Doctrine of Discovery is a complex legal and philosophical framework that started as a series of papal bulls—official decrees by the pope in the fifteenth century—that provided religious justification for Christian European conquest of those who were not Christians. It is otherwise known as the "Law of Christendom." Under its legal framework, land in the New World could be claimed under the Christian ruler of the explorer or conquistador who first "discovered" that land. If the land was not ruled by a Christian sovereign, it was considered uninhabited, even if Indigenous peoples lived there. Basically, "finder's keepers." If I had to pick an image to represent the Doctrine of Discovery, it would Theodor de Bry's 1594 copper engraving, captioned, "Columbus as he first arrives in India, is received by the inhabitants and honored with the bestowing of many gifts."

The cross shown in this image would later be replaced by a nation's flag marking its territory—or forts and settlements that marked expanding boundaries over and against other nations' land claims. For the United States, the Doctrine of Discovery (DoD) developed into Manifest Destiny, the idea that it is America's right and providential destiny to expand. What was first an explicitly Christian European claim to land became generalized to include all European settlers.[1]

Just because the so-called discovery of new lands for Europe happened five hundred years ago doesn't mean the legal framework for conquest is now dead. It has morphed and adapted, but the DoD is still very much alive in dispossessing indigenous peoples of their lands. Its impacts have been what I've called the "3 E's"—enslavement, extraction, and extinction.[2]

The Doctrine of Discovery is still very much alive in dispossessing indigenous peoples of their lands. Its impacts have been what I've called the "3 E's"—enslavement, extraction, and extinction.

I am part of the Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery Coalition that was formed in 2014 with like-minded Anabaptists committed to joining Indigenous peoples and ecumenical groups around the world in dismantling the DoD. Sarah Augustine, the coalition's co-chair, has pointed out that, like the institution of slavery, the DoD was a structure that was put in place historically and thus is something that we can dismantle in history. At one time, it was *perfectly legal* to own other human beings as slaves. And it is currently *perfectly legal* in many places around the world for Indigenous People's lands to be taken and their lives to become disposable. Christian powers set up this structure, but today corporations and international financial institutions continue this structure.

As with slavery, the Bible and Christian teachings have been used to justify and support the DoD. As with slavery, this system is lucrative and thus hard to give up. It is difficult—probably impossible—to disentangle ourselves and our investments from this current system of exploitation.

1 See Steven Newcomb, *Pagans in the Promised Land: Decoding the Doctrine of Christian Discovery* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum, 2008).

2 See the fact sheet at https://dofdmenno.org/learn-more/.

And, as with slavery, our coalition believes it will take a movement like the abolition movement to bring it down.

Revelation and the beast

Christian scriptures have been used to support the DoD, but they can also be used to resist the DoD in its current forms. Our text comes from Revelation 7:9–17. The book of Revelation describes a dream of John of Patmos that is filled with vivid symbolism, confusing meanings, and gory images. It speaks of a cosmic struggle between God and the powers and principalities of Empire. Christ is at the center of the dream as a lion in sheep's clothing—a slaughtered lamb who is seated on the throne, triumphant over the principalities and powers of evil.

I see the Doctrine of Discovery as part of the horde of principalities and powers that wage war against Christ. It is not just a legal framework over indigenous land tenure, but it has spiritual dimensions as well. Inspired by the Revelation passages that are full of images of animals, dragons, and beasts, I drew a picture of the DoD as a monster. That way, we can better understand its dimensions, discern its presence in our world, and struggle against it.

Terra Nullius

The Monster is blind in its dollar-sign eyes because of the principle of *terra nullius*. This is a legal principle dating back to Roman law that says the land is empty unless it is ruled by a Christian prince. Under *terra nullius*,

Indigenous peoples were not considered to be fully human. They didn't really count because they were not baptized and were instead defined as "infidels and heathens." Today, government policies still consider Indigenous peoples to be backward or "undeveloped." Some countries, like Suriname, don't even legislatively recognize Indigenous people and their lands or rights.

The concept of *terra nullius* developed over time and can be seen in the view that European settlers' uses of agriculture were better than hunter-gathering and Indigenous ways of subsistence. Under *terra nullius*, Europeans had more of a right to the land because they could make it "productive" through farming or other methods of land use. European governments believed they also brought culture and civilization to "uncivilized" peoples and places. Of course, harmful versions of Christian mission played into these tropes.

Mennonites are not exempt from these views. Mennonites were often invited in by the state—in places like Russia, Canada, and Paraguay—and were often used to settle Native lands and claim them for the state through agriculture. Take, for example, this quote by Mennonite historian H. S. Bender:

> *We have a future Mennonite state in mind, where, if possible, all Russian Mennonites in unrestricted freedom may establish and develop their life and their culture again. A further specific advantage of the Paraguayan Chaco in cultural respect is the fact that today there exists no culture. Therefore there will be no danger that the Mennonites with their German culture may perish in a foreign culture.*[3]

Entitlement

The second dimension of the DoD monster that I see is that of entitlement. In my picture, I've drawn a tree that the beast has ripped out of the ground, displaced people still clinging to its roots. The mouth of the beast is an open gold mine, with a serpentine tongue of gold coming out of it. Around its bald head are stumps of felled trees. The DoD is based on theologies of entitlement to land and riches. Because early European explorers and governments identified with God's covenant people, the

3 From Calvin Wall Redekop, Victor A. Krahn, Samuel J. Steiner, eds., *Anabaptist/Mennonite Faith and Economics* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), 127, italics mine. Note: there were and are many different Indigenous tribes in the Chaco!

chosen people, they believed they had a divine mandate to own and exploit Indigenous land and resources. They could do whatever they wanted with the land because they represented God's rule and had the blessing of the pope to exercise dominion over foreign people and lands.

This past summer, I traveled with a group of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) students and community members on a pilgrimage on the Trail of Death, the route of the 1838 forced removal of about eight hundred and fifty Potawatomi people from northern Indiana. This was one of many such removals that cleared land for European settlement, including Mennonite and Amish settlers. As we journeyed and met with descendants of those who were removed, we both lamented the displacement of the First Nations from where we now live and encountered some of our own underlying entitlement issues. The feeling of entitlement to private property runs deep in our American veins and can be seen in our anger at people trespassing on "our" land, the idea that we can do whatever we want so long as it's on our property, and the ways we go to great lengths to protect what we own. Whatever happened to the theology of Psalm 24:1, "The Earth is *the Lord's* and everything in it"?

We both lamented the displacement of the First Nations from where we now live and encountered some of our own underlying entitlement issues.

Indigenous peoples around the world today lack full legal title over their land. They are not *entitled* to their own land because of the original entitlement of colonial powers, which stripped them of their sovereignty and their right to say what happens on their land.[4]

Christian and European rule

In the picture I drew, you see the beast wearing a crucifix and holding a bloodied sword. This is because the violence of the DoD took place in the name of Christ. Historically, we can see this violence made manifest in the different forms of cultural genocide that decimated food sources like the buffalo and banned the speaking of Indigenous languages and in the establishment of Indian boarding schools by the US government in 1819

4 The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) is an incredibly important standard that established a universal framework for the human rights of Indigenous Peoples and their self-determination. See https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html.

under the Civilization Fund Act. Christian societies were charged with civilizing children with a program of forced assimilation. The expressed philosophy of this program was to "kill the Indian, save the man."[5] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada has offered a space for story sharing, grief, and the start of repentance of this legacy of residential schools, yet the United States has not yet made steps in this direction, to my knowledge.[6]

Today, genocidal violence continues under international financial structures. We can trace the flow of wealth and capital to former Christian, European powers, no longer under colonialism but under a new form of colonialism through neoliberal economics, expressed in free trade agreements, International Monetary Fund loan policies, and international development banks.

The DoD shows us that colonialism and the global capitalist economy it paved the way for were not and are not *secular* economic systems but have deeply *religious* roots. The question for followers of Jesus is, What religion do we follow? Do we follow the false religion of Empire or the religion of Jesus, the persecuted Palestinian Jew who sides with the poor and dispossessed? The ongoing violence we are encountering today under the DoD is a result of a false religion, a heretical and horrible perversion of Christianity that can only be countered with *true* religion, which, as James 1:27 says, means looking after the most vulnerable (orphans and widows then) in their distress. It means defecting from the entitlement that separates us from God to stand with Jesus and the oppressed in direct opposition to the beasts of destruction.

What religion do we follow? Do we follow the false religion of Empire or the religion of Jesus, the persecuted Palestinian Jew who sides with the poor and dispossessed?

And what a terrible beast we face! It's been on the loose for five hundred years, perhaps more if you think of the ways the Spirit of Conquest has morphed over time. Its impacts have been destruction and desecra-

5 Quote by Capt. Richard H. Pratt, founder of a residential school for Indian youth in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, 1879. See Ward Churchill, *Kill the Indian, Save the Man: The Genocidal Impact of American Indian Residential Schools* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2004).

6 Mark Charles (Navajo) has been calling for a Truth and Conciliation Commission for truth-telling about the impacts of the DoD in the United States. See http://wirelesshogan.blogspot.com/2014/12/doctrine-of-discovery.html.

tion of land and Indigenous communities around the world. Many Indigenous peoples in the United States tie high rates of alcoholism, health issues, sexual abuse, homelessness, and suicide in their communities and on reservations to the original sin of colonial violence and their loss of rights and sovereignty through the DoD.

Surely it will take a much more powerful beast to slay this monster! Surely we need something much bigger and stronger, a ferocious divine Rottweiler or something! Yet looking to our text from Revelation, what do we see on the throne as an answer to the Powers? A slaughtered *lamb*!

Hope in the slaughtered lamb

Revelation 7:9 speaks of tribes from every language and tongue gathered around the throne of the slaughtered Lamb: "After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands."

As with Pentecost, I see this as another reversal of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11), when people attempted cultural and linguistic hegemony and thought they could reach God through their own power. Here in Revelation 7, God is not depicted on the heights of power, accessible through growth and dominion, but as a lamb, slaughtered and at the center of this powerful throng of martyrs. God is embodied in the crucified and resurrected Christ, in solidarity with these victims of violence as one whose life has been taken, yet who is triumphant over death. Significantly, the languages of those gathered are still alive! The forces of assimilation and conquest have *not* won out, and the nations have survived "the great ordeal" (v. 14).

Anthropologists have recognized that the survival of languages is intrinsically connected to a people's self-determination and sovereignty. When people have the rights to their land, they are able to continue cultural practices like native languages that are tied to their land and their cohesive identity in relation to the land. I see this vision of the tribes gathered, each praising the Lamb in their own tongues, as an indication and celebration of Indigenous sovereignty. The sovereignties of the tribes are restored under the sovereignty of the Lamb. The Lamb's sovereignty does not overtake and diminish the sovereignty of the tribes but uplifts and restores their identities and affirms linguistic and cultural diversities.

Revelation offers us a vision of hope, one that declares that the Lamb is sovereign, and the Powers are not! In Christ's death and resurrection,

the beasts have already been defeated. According to New Testament scholar Loren Johns, this is why no battles are depicted in Revelation between the dragons and beasts and the Lamb.[7] The Lamb has already conquered and has done so in a way altogether different than the expected bloody conquest of rulers, like those acting under the DoD. Christ's rule has been established through nonviolent resistance to evil and through love and solidarity with the victims of religious and state-sanctioned violence, to the point of death. This understanding of Christ, Johns writes, is central to the Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse. We as Christ's followers are called to wage battle against the forces of evil and conquest in the same manner: "consistent, nonviolent resistance born of clear allegiance to God that may well result in death."[8]

For the sake of the future of life on our planet, which hangs in the balance, for the sake of our own salvation, and for the sake of the victims and survivors of the repeated assaults by the DoD, let us stand together and wage battle in nonviolent resistance against the beast! We bear the flag of the slaughtered Lamb, the one who died an unjust death and yet rose in life victorious. The Great Ordeal is nearly over, but the future is not closed, so let us press on together with these words of hope:

> *The one who is seated on the throne will shelter them.*
> *They will hunger no more, and thirst no more;*
> *the sun will not strike them,*
> *nor any scorching heat;*
> *for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd,*
> *and he will guide them to springs of the water of life,*
> *and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*
> *(Rev. 7:15–17)*[9]

About the author

Katerina Friesen lives in Fresno, California, on traditional Yokut land. She works with incarcerated people to grow healing gardens in prison through the Insight Garden Program and leads Wild Church, an Anabaptist gathering seeking to encounter God in their watershed.

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7 Loren Johns, *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John: An Investigation into Its Origins and Rhetorical Force*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock: 2003), 185.

8 Johns, *Lamb Christology*, 183.

9 This sermon was originally preached at Fellowship of Hope in Elkhart, Indiana, in April 2016.

Three days in the desert

Poetic wrestling with borderland injustice

Kevin M. Ressler

Introduction

I just returned from a week in the Sonoran Desert on a Mennonite Central Committee Borderlands Learning tour, and my mind and spirit cannot stop wrestling with discomfort. As much as the national psyche claims to be a nation of superior morality and methods from the rest of the world, it does not compute when you visit our practices around incarceration and detention. Having previously visited prisons in the United States, I was not terribly shocked to find what we consider acceptable behavior around immigration detention. Having previously traveled to other nations and visiting their Free Trade Zones, I was not terribly shocked to find the end result of economic refuge being sought. What does shock the conscience is how silent our politics and our news coverage are surrounding the root causes of the immigration crises.

I just returned from a week in the Sonoran Desert on a Mennonite Central Committee Borderlands Learning tour, and my mind and spirit cannot stop wrestling with discomfort.

We can get in a tit for tat around which party is worse on immigration, but it is dishonest to pretend that either one is good at all. Our present story begins with bipartisan legislation when Bill Clinton was president, but Republicans controlled the house and the senate. Democrats and Republicans have had plenty of opportunities where they controlled all three branches of the federal government and done nothing with immigration.

Correction: both political parties have spoken nearly continuously for the need for comprehensive immigration reform dating to the Reagan administration, and in our present governance speaking loudly counts as legislation. Meanwhile, every successive president chooses the policies that set Border Patrol policy, not the least of which is the principle of us-

ing the desert as a lethal deterrent when we know full well someone will try the desert's likely death when they are fleeing the guaranteed death of gang violence or globalized economic exploitation.

Donald Trump, without question (and I don't think he'd take umbrage here because he is proud of this), has accelerated and expanded enforcement while slowing down processing. The slowdown is not just for border crossings but everything including processes such as green card applications for long-time residents marrying American citizens. These are simply new theaters in the war against the most destitute in our global society, the migrant. Migrants require leaving their permanent homes—often alone or with only part of their family—to find work or safety from violence. To survive. To exist. Usually, flight is from unjust policies which go unacknowledged by our politicians and news media—often these policies harm not only other nations' citizens but our own national interests. (NAFTA/CAFTA haven't been good for workers in North Carolina any more than they have been for workers in Mexico; the winners are big corporations and the donation coffers of their political stooges in Washington.)

If this is starting to sound complicated or complex, that is because it is. If this is sounding generational, that is because it is. If it's beginning to sound unsolvable, it isn't.

If this is starting to sound complicated or complex, that is because it is. If this is sounding generational, that is because it is. If it's beginning to sound unsolvable, it isn't. But we do need to focus on what is driving the sense of impossibility: the love of money by some, which is greater than their sense of humanity.

For the majority of history, we did not have border walls or fences. The most powerful part of my trip was when a First Nations indigenous speaker told us how her family has, for millennia, walked back and forth between the lands now called Mexico and the United States for ceremony and family visits. This "border" was created by the descendants of foreign invaders who came without permission to these lands from Europe—namely, Spain and France and England and Germany. We are, in fact, the illegal immigrants, and now we have the audacity to put up fences between native descendants.

Why fences? There are those who love money more than humanity. They make money bulldozing the earth to set up the ground for the per-

son making money building the fence material for the people making money installing the fence. That unwieldy barrier makes opportunity for someone to make money installing the cameras. That makes money for a corporation to house detainees and make profit on their bodies and their work. (Historically we called that slavery and now we call it a for-profit prison company.) That company makes millions on ankle monitors and re-entry contracts. And we, voters, elect politicians for the sole purpose of lowering our taxes, even if our morality is lowered with it.

And so, this is who we are. The question is whether this is who history will know us as. Will we be remembered as the nation who said, "give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free"? Or will we be remembered for the tens of thousands of dead migrants having been turned away at the ports of entry driven into the killing fields of the desert for political gain and a stock market boom?

The question is whether this is who history will know us as. Will we be remembered as the nation who said, "give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free"?

I believe we each have a personal responsibility to wrestle with the consequences of our social conditions. We don't choose to be born into the privileges and opportunity that we do nothing to deserve any more than the victims of oppressive systems choose to be born into the destitute places of colonial devastation. And maybe our wrestling is inconsequential, but maybe that's the point. For me, the following poetic reflections represent just a sampling of my own wrestling.

When I think about the spirituality of these things, I am often reminded of the story of Jacob on the road to reconciling with his brother Esau. He wrestles God through the night, unable to overpower or be overpowered, and he refuses to accept the unresolved stalemate without a blessing. It is here that God says to Jacob, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome" (Gen. 32:28 NIV). The great blessing comes when we encounter the intractable realities of the world and refuse to be overcome by a poor theology of acquiescence but instead demand more of God and each other. Poetry is my wrestling match; I hope it helps you wrestle.

Three days in the desert

I have never known true hunger.
Yet at least once daily
I have been bound by habit
Stating with certainty, "I'm starving!"

I flippantly eat a whole bag of chips
because I can. Because they are there.
Because bags of consumerism are always there
littering the cabinetry with ugly unnecessity.

. . .

I have not known thirst, truly.
Not spot seeing, dizzy before falling, thirsty.
My day's epilogue at worst finishes,
"I probably should have drank more water today."

. . .

I see three flames, prayer lamps,
They dance as if braiding among
each other, both fencing and standing alone.
I stand among the fires, yet I run cold.

How dare I sit stilled in silence
while the whole world burns?
Who am I to suffer the contemplation
available only in privilege. Thinking, inactive

too many times I have heard
the mock, sincere sounds garbled
out of the mouths of religious brethren,
"Why? . . . this thing. Why?! . . . that thing. . ."

Too few times have I heard
The cry out from believers
"Where is God in this?"
Or from the faithless, "I, am God."

. . .

Whether fancied self as follower
or a drum beating troubadour leading
yourself, it's a reflection of the future:
we make the world the way we walk.

Who will follow? What will survive
of America? Who will survive as America?
We are in a time to define time to come.
Like Leopold to Congo, this is the darkness.

Our heart's darkness is found bright sunned
three days in the desert, running for freedom,
hope sold around the world to market shoes.
Long lines. Sold out. The reckoning is the dead.

If there is not death, you will be welcomed
With a cold cell and hate. Promises, broken.
Land of the free . . . unless pushed away from port
through three days in the desert, a killing field.

An American poem

I've seen Edgar in my nightmares,
and I've seen Whitman in my dreams.
I found Amiri Baraka (because they
don't teach him or Matriarch Nikki).

By their words, dreams, songs,
I've woken up walking in fields, gold,
and full of grain, and I've drowned
in two oceans while swimming home.

But nobody here knows what home is,
well, not anymore. Because somewhere
we came from somewhere else.
And sometime, we came from some
other person's century.

Persecuted, and persecuting and cycling
the violence we were born of.
Someday, I dream, we'll stop screwing
the blacks, we'll stop screwing the whites,
and we'll stop screwing the Asians,
stop screwing the Jews, the gentiles,
the Muslims, the other–whoever the other
is in order to stop screwing ourselves
because everyone is everyone else.

But this is America. Land of Tinseltown.
It's not as pretty as in the movies.
It's not as ugly as they claim across the seas.
This is America, accurately called experiment,
and it's far from perfect,
and I'm not yet sure the results are in.

We are captives to the lottery of gestation

Laying on my back on a loveseat
in my bedroom I stare.
I can see all the cracks and fissures
the plaster ceiling is a century old;
I am considerably older now.

~

Younger, then, at sixteen, I slept on boards, raised,
a platform my Nicaraguan hosts called bed.
Normally, this, and the other laid on by
my fifteen-year-old travel companion
were reserved for the Papa and Mamita
of this campesino house.

She, my friend, was granddaughter
of an indigenous American, political prisoner.
I, grandson to the first African Mennonite Bishop.
Our blood knew racism, oppression, then triumph
Our bodies knew the privilege of being descendants:
the children of revolutionaries who refused cages.
Here, now, growing into adults on learning tours.

Looking to the galvanized roof, then, I saw poverty
because I was young, I listened more.
Some breathed heavy, labored sounds of labor.
I've never slept much, or well, and I feared:
nobody snored half as
loudly as I would have
sleeping on the floor, might I stir them?
And I the privilege of the bed, would I wake them?

Would I show my comparative comfort, insufficient?
Sixteen people, normally on the floor. Three generations.
The first (or fourth) on yellow foam pads on boards.
Now, four generations lay below me, all on dirt floor.
I feared sleep. Disrespect to the honor of the gift.
There are no cracks on a zinc, corrugated roof.

~

Most haves have never seen such a ceiling.
Mud floors don't have the even and measured lines
of my century old wood floorboards.
The castaway attic loveseat is more comfortable
than the elder's prominent, padded wood bed.
Older now, the cracks remind me so much is broken
These floorboards are still original, the built wood.
I wonder, though I know the answers
"Is this room for one bigger?
Theirs slept over a dozen.
They split the room, hanging black plastic
for the privacy of an American boy and girl.
Trash bags, a luxury, split so I had a quarter
and she had a quarter
and they all shared half.
Two sections for eighteen.
Two sections for one.

~

Then, I visited a factory. Textiles, jackets, shirts.
Today, I wonder if the shirt I wore
that day had been made there. Then,

I was too young to think to check the tag.
The irony would not have been lost on me
you don't need age for that kind of wisdom
but you need age to think to verify.
I don't shop at that outlet anymore.
I still don't remember to check the tag
Vietnam? Bangladesh? Indonesia? Nicaragua?
We wear our sin on our skin,
the export of slavery and its sibling hegemony.
So close to us, that which warms us
should chill our heart. Suffering, for what,
so I can have different colors for every season?
How do I thank them for my warmth?
America first, under the guise of the religious vote?
I know the name of the man who fixes my furnace
but the name of the laborer who stitched
my socks and my underwear? Mystery to me.

~

These hundred-year-old plaster cracks staring at me
make me wonder, are they or the world more broken?
Does anyone even really care?

A decade later from then and I was now a delegate leader.
Irony not lost on me during the return visit.
Fate? Fortune? Divine schadenfreude?
Surely, just coincidence finds me hosted again
by the same family, again offered the same bed.
I am much, much older now. I still am unaware
when do I learn when I am being gracious, when offending?
Papa and Mamita are gone now,
Mama and Papa then are they now.
I have made it normal, three generations
on the floor. And I. And my companion.
Have I tainted his experience? Robbed future guilt?

None of them remembered me. I did them
but not their names. . .

~

Now, a decade again beyond the last trip,
two past that first endeavor.
This is a recounting of memories in three parts.
I've paper pictures from my first visit.
I've digital images of my second.
I pour over these now without memory as guide.
What bewildering greatness is my fortune
to lay here on a comfortable castaway loveseat
to write poetry, the luxury of thought not needing
to weed and plant and till and harvest a garden
to survive and feed my foreign guests
a meal cooked slowly because it cooked over open fire.

With strong memory, deeply in waded reflection
their lives are more significant it seems than mine.
Their consequences both more severe and unavoidable.
My third floor second guestroom and makeshift office
are larger than their whole living space and kitchen.
Surplus room. This modern manifest destiny.

They hope a rain won't wash out their floor again this year,
I hope the rain doesn't drench my vanity tomatoes.

I have a dog and cat for pets, luxury companions
who sit quietly when I feel like avoiding my family
but not suffering the indignity of being alone.
They have a dog, starving as it were from visual inspection
who protects their crops from animals and neighbors
but can do nothing against the tide of climate change
my life in excess does little to help but all to create.
Some keeper of the dominion I am.

~

Twenty years past my first trip. I wonder:
that young girl, my age the first time I met her
already a twice over mother the second time.
Is she already the Mamita on the wooden bed?
I will not return again this decade to come to know.
They would again, this decade, still toil in fields

a life with little in the way of choice.
They would again, this decade, not remember me
because we do not exist in the same world
where one looks at random pictures and reflect.

I do not equally exist in the casual snow globe
playpen of mind and memory that they do in mine.

We are captives to the lottery of gestation.

On staring at a wall between nations

I am not as struck as my expectation.
When the wall comes into touch
it feels one-part modern art installation,
one part hate. I feel all parts angry,
the largest portion that I am not angrier.
It is an "aesthetic wall" I think,
having memory of pictures of the prior.
18 year old Kevin would be ashamed,
I didn't even explore in my mind
how I could possibly tear this down. . .
. . . even Reagan could dream of that.

18-year-old Kevin should be ashamed
of many things: comfort, silence,
false propheteering for easy targets,
comfort, and the ease of compromise
or at least of self forgiveness.
Comfort.

People are dying in the desert,
young Kevin will say. "People
are dying in the fucking desert:
parched lips, cactus prickers,
frozen to death or dehydrated
and you're still worried
people will get hung up on fucking
and give no two shits:
people are dying in the fucking desert

deal with the words,
God is offended by the giant scars
cut deeply across her
beautiful creation.

I am not as struck as my expectation.
When the wall comes into touch
it feels one part modern art installation,
one part hate. I feel all parts angry.

Out the windshield and through the wall
I see shadows of the thirsty migrant flicker.
Scattered, to die silent
one by one over hours or days or years
No one knowing; forensics fall short.

There is a Mexican saying:
"There is more time than life."
Life, like Time, can move
forward and back
I have seen migration, in my life, in yours,
in the history of life itself and the life of history,
forward and back. Life is migration.

Three times they built a wall to bridge the arroyo
Three times the flood tore the gates down.
Build a taller wall, they say, make it aesthetic,
they say, but nature will always push through.
Did you know? The first time? The second?
There is a constant pressure of the absent.

The things we don't know, the things
Which should break our hearts.
The things which break the heart of a mother
whose son left long ago, in hope. Silence.
They are met with silence. Pressure.
Pressure in the heart, an aching, a longing.
Love inventing but also knowing.

He would have called by now. He would have called.

Her love is an art form, distorted by what she saw
Him, walking forward, away, warmed by her embrace.
Her love is an art form, absent nothing
But the voice of her boy. Her dead boy.

"I will send for you mother."
"It's just for a job mother."

Unknown Male. May 29, 2003.
The tombstone read.
Nobody will ever know
if he dried out in the desert with
the ants crawling in his mouth
like the dark stream of absence.

Or if somewhere an agent drinks
To forget the night he first said,
"It's a job. It pays the bills.
It feeds my daughters,
It clothes my wife.
It pays for their college.
It bought the dog.
I don't live lushly.
I do need to live.
It's a good job.
I'm just enforcing the laws"

****

And what of you?
Are you different now, wisened by years?
Is your thinking more forward, blunt?
And your politics? Have they changed?
Softened for the love of your children?
Hardened by the fear of their safety?

When have been the interruptions?
The transitions? Has there been hope

that you will grow or are you bound,
destined to fall back?
Are the gates closed?
Can we breach the wall
to embrace once more?
Two forgotten loves
like a mother
Hugging a lost son
Across vast distances
Past deserts
Past arroyos
Beyond life
There is still time.

My Mulatto Blues

I am afraid to touch this tip
Down to the page
For if I slip
And write my rage
I may lose, my positions
Goodbye job, and
Goodbye wife, and
Goodbye child, and
Raising her life
Through all that may bruise.

But how will I tell my little love,
the world is not all I said before
when first experience unmoors her?

Once unfurled
The truth is a distant shore
Where comfortably the masses
Reside, numb
I do desire not to feel
The pains.
Dumb to speak the ire.
Praying the hope of a world
Doesn't rest on me,

Yet I realize just how grave
It is I don't wallow in how I'm depraved
But grab to my goodness
And break all the rules
Fumble around as I press in the dark
I am at least aware the inequality is stark
We can no longer afford
The comfort of fools

They shot a boy in Ferguson
Yet it took some time to catch the news
And when it did
It caught the virus of racial animus
And historical enmity
The battle lines were drawn long before
Any of us were born
The just are all accusers
To their differentiators
Defenders to the death of those of ancient texts
And passed on stories told them are their side
So the poor kill the poor and the slightly lesser poor
Shoot them with cans of mace and cans of tear gas,
Rubber bullets,
They start with live rounds and live rounds
Will eventually return once the ticker tellers
Have told the tale till it's taken as truth
The wealthy will track their stocks.
They will pat on the backs those who have protected
Their way.
This is an America where might is right and poor
Eats poor in hopes of wealth.
They choked a man in NYC
He wasn't charging tax quite appropriately
On the cigarettes he was selling
One by one on the streets
This is not a happy poem.
The roses are dead, the violence comes from the blues
I long for the day when I am seen same as you.
This poem will be seen as divisive

But it is not intended to be.
It is little more than an attempt to share the world
I have no choice not to see.
I remember hearing about four girls in Birmingham
I remember hearing about amadou diallo
I remember hearing about sean bell
I remember hearing about mike brown
I remember hearing about tamir rice
I remember hearing about sandra bland
I remember hearing about aiyana stanley-jones
I remember hearing about how they shot them down
I remember hearing they weren't seen as same.
I remember hearing about Timothy McVeigh
I remember hearing about Ted Kaczynski
I remember hearing about Dylan Roof
I remember hearing about James Alex Fields Jr
I remember hearing about how the law
Treated them like humans, humanely,
got them off the streets and put them on trial
while keeping them in protective custody.

The tip of this pen today is unlikely to make
Any new friend. The ink of this pen today
Is hoping to make your heart rend
The rage I have for these and other unjust things
Are not the result of black rage
But the serious undertaking of my white Mennonite ways
Applied seriously to my black bodies pains.
But, I am not two halves of two different people.
I am wholly me asking would you be wholly you?
Can you see that your brother and your sister too,
Your mother and your father are equally true?
The God that is in one is basking, beaming in each:
A song from a steeple.
We are awaited to join hands in laughs.
I begin my effort by singing to you,
This song in verse hoping for days anew.
Friend, stranger, enemy too.
This is my mulatto blues.

A misunderstanding as to how I see this sensible world
integrated and lived in bliss, constantly confronting
Irreconcilability in the news.
Banned by law and religion in fools.
We are not captive to the rules.
My life was illegal merely 50 years ago
Because my black mother didn't share with my white father
The same kinky hair.
Eventually, to injustice, people said no.
I look at you, my species siblings
Knowing beyond the narratives you have the niblings
Of the sweeter taste beyond the fed fluff
Open ourselves and we will find we are less different
Than we are in kind.
It's as difficult as it's simple to tell the narratives enough.
I swear to you, I am not drunk
And my beliefs are not a metaphorical skunk.
I have heard worser slurs as a pacifist
That I am a snake oil bursar
Who places in peril the weak who are oppressed
And vulnerable. And somehow truly I am the masochist.
Every day I live under this American flag, I feel a great burden
A need to nag, to combat with optimism against every hater
By sharing truly this magnificence of overcoming both sides
Intransigence.
My legal being shows we can be greater.
As time progresses we do well to have some chaos
Which eventually we join to quell. Since history shows,
We'll need some pizazz to gain the attentive bullhorn
Of news and show the transformation of my mulatto blues
Into the future sound of my daughters' mulatto jazz.

We have seen starvation

Leader: *From Eden into the world we have come, Lord.*
People: *We are forgiving, for having experienced exile.*

Leader: *As we wander this world of such brokenness and pain,*
People: *We are grateful, having seen suffering not ours.*
Leader: *full deep with bigotry and hatred,*
People: *We are humbled for having seen troubles of others.*

Leader: *of crises and disasters natural and manmade.*
People: *We are patient for having seen starvation.*

Leader: *People on one half of the world chuck food.*
People: *People on one half of the world lack food.*

Leader: *Too often their meals are memories,*
People: *too often many dream just of scraps,*
Unison: *Allow us a strength deeper*
than we could sustain ourselves
knowing we have more to share
than we need to protect to keep.

About the author

Kevin M. Ressler is married to Melissa Ressler, and they are working to raise Acacia Atieno and Iriana Awino with a passion to better the world beyond themselves. Kevin studied Justice, Peace, and Conflict Studies as well as Theater at Eastern Mennonite University and holds a Master of Divinity from Lancaster Theological Seminary. He is Executive Director of Meals on Wheels of Lancaster and serves on a variety of community boards.