

‘We Are Aware of Our Contradictions:’ Russlaender Mennonite Narratives of Loss and the Reconstruction of Peoplehood, 1914-1923¹

Reina C. Neufeldt, *American University, Washington DC*

Introduction

Work, productivity and its resulting material blessing, were critical themes grounding Mennonite peoplehood at the turn of the twentieth century in waning imperial south Russia. Many Mennonites had accrued significant wealth, which was in part based on land ownership and in part on industrial production. Circumstances, however, undermined these themes during World War I and the Russian Revolution. Material and spiritual loss overcame Mennonite communities. In the process, Mennonite's relationships to work and productivity were inverted, accompanied by a sense of apathy and an unmooring of identity. Re-forming Mennonite narratives of work, with its promise of future productivity, were critical to the recovery process; these narratives restored a sense of collective worth

internally – amongst the Mennonite community – as well as externally in relation to the state.

In this article I examine how narratives of work and productivity helped frame Mennonite collective identity in south Russia, and how this affected and was affected by their relationship to the larger political, social and economic context. I focus on shifts that occurred between 1914 and 1923, which was a decade of deviant, high intensity experiences rich with information that help understand Mennonite identity and its relationship to wealth. Between 1914 and 1923, Mennonite narratives of work and productivity were radically challenged. The decade presented a period of immense loss and difficulty; there were also simultaneously new possibilities within a context of vying political and economic movements. The narratives of work and productivity were adapted, revitalized and helped Mennonites re-ground and re-imagine the future. Work returned to form part of the core of Mennonite peoplehood and in the process, the civil war experiences became anomalous.

I begin by briefly reviewing the status of Mennonite colonies at the start of 1914 and their sense of themselves as a community, focusing particularly on the two major Mennonite colonies of Molotschna and Chortitza. This is followed by an examination of how stories and narratives construct and maintain collective senses of identity and peoplehood. After briefly reviewing events of the Russian Revolution that affected Molotschna and Chortitza, I show how external circumstances undercut Mennonite stories of peoplehood and their sense of worth as evidenced in the way Mennonite leaders spoke of the community. The final section of the paper examines the critical importance of the narrative of work as a foundation for economic and social recovery for Mennonite peoplehood and the reconstruction of collective worth.

Mennonites in Imperial South Russia 1914: Background

Mennonite historians have detailed the founding and growth of Mennonite colonies in New South Russia; below, I provide a brief overview of this history in order to ground the Mennonite narratives evident in 1914. Mennonites arrived in New South Russia in the late eighteenth century from the Vistula Delta and Danzig regions of West Prussia, attracted by promises of farmland and an appealing set of rights and privileges (Epp 1989; Rempel 1973; Smith 1957; Urry 1989). A scouting party had identified suitable land and negotiated settler privileges (a *Privilegium*) with the Russian government, based largely on Tsarina Catherine II's manifesto to attract foreign settlers.²

Mennonite immigrants were part of large-scale Russian colonization that settled approximately 43,000 people – mainly from Western Europe and the Balkans – in South Russia (Rempel 1932).

Mennonites considered themselves distinctive, model colonists for Russia when they arrived; a view that was reinforced as they developed and expanded settlements. Tsar Paul I (1796-1801) codified a Charter of Privileges for Mennonites in 1800 (Rempel 1973), which enshrined language that emphasized Mennonites were models of industry.³ The charter, based on the immigration agreement, began with the preamble:

In order to authenticate our most gracious grant in response to the petition received by us from the Mennonites settled in the New Russian provinces, who, according to the testimony of their supervisors and because of their outstanding industry and their commendable way of life, can serve as an example to the others settled there, and who, because of this, have become deserving of our special attention, we have, in this charter of privileges granted to them, not only affirmed all of the rights and privileges previously agreed to, but have also, in order to encourage their thrift and concern for agriculture still more, graciously granted them additional rights in the following articles. (Friesen 1978, 119)

The Charter ensured Mennonites retained a particular type of land ownership and secured various other economic freedoms, such as the right to own factories, brew and distil beer, vinegar and brandy (Friesen 1978, 119-120).

Over time, the Mennonite colonies further solidified their image as industrious and productive model colonists. Mennonite farming practices were studied and documented by the Ministry of the Interior in the 1830s and 1840s, particularly in Molotschna under the firm hand of Johann Cornies (Dyck 1984; Urry 1989, 118-121; Goerz 1993). Mennonites received special visits by the Tsar and other government officials. As model farmers they ran several government-endorsed agricultural programs, including ones for the Nogai, and a trial experiment to encourage Jewish agriculture development called the “*Judenplan*.” During the nineteenth century, there were significant developments in agricultural techniques, animal husbandry, as well as education, religious practices, art, culture and gradually a move to industrialisation and urbanization in the Mennonite colonies. The external attention and recognition helped cement a unique Mennonite self-image based upon work and agricultural production.

Despite rising nationalism and pressure to assimilate in the late nineteenth century, Mennonite colonies expanded and flourished

economically. Mennonite historians frequently refer to the Russian-Mennonite world of the early twentieth century as a “Mennonite Commonwealth” because of the relative autonomy of colonies, strong economic base, social institutions and the growing religious and political ties amongst colonies (Friesen 1986, 1999; Rempel 1973, 1974; Urry 1989, 1992, 1994). By 1914 there were approximately 104,000 Mennonites in Russia spread across four major settlements, 15 significant daughter colonies, and large numbers of hamlets and estates (approximately 400 communities in all). Land was a large source of wealth, and approximately 70 percent of Mennonites lived on and farmed land they owned; about 25 percent possessed little or no land, and less than two percent were very wealthy estate owners (Urry 1989, 118-119). In contrast, by 1914 – after a period of about ten years of land reforms – approximately 40 percent of peasants owned their land (Klebnikov 1990). Peasants and landless Mennonites were often labourers on Mennonite farms or worked in Mennonite-owned factories. Industrialization also proved lucrative for Mennonites. Commonly cited figures of Mennonite industrial ownership from 1911 include: 73 motor- and steam-driven mills and 105 smaller mills, which together comprised 51.8 percent of the Ukraine milling industry; 26 agricultural implement factories, which produced 10 percent of all agricultural implements in southern Ukraine, and about 6.5 percent of the total Russian production (Epp 1989). In 1911, the eight largest Mennonite producers of agricultural machines were estimated to account for 6.2 percent of the total Russian production (Ehrt 1932 cited in Urry 1989).

Mennonite historian David G. Rempel (1932) summarized the economic indicators of Mennonite colonists in comparison to other colonists in Imperial Russia prior to World War I and argued that Mennonites above all the other colonists had achieved significant economic prosperity and cultural development. He suggested, “... it was they [German colonists, but particularly Mennonites] who converted the south in the seventies of the last century from sheep-rearing into a grain-growing country. Before the Great War they produced in Kherson, Tavrida and Ekaterinoslav some 100,000,000 puds of wheat for export alone”⁴ (Rempel 1932, 50-51). The history of founding and developing agriculture and other industries in imperial South Russia constructed and reinforced a narrative wherein a large part of Mennonite identity centered upon work, productivity and wealth. The concept of narratives and the construction of peoplehood requires further explanation before examining the subsequent Mennonite narratives of loss.

Stories of Peoplehood and Narratives of Worth

Collective identities are social groups with which people identify, and can range from small-scale clubs and unions to larger-scale religious and ethnic groups or nations. Stories, as a number of political scientists and sociologists argue, provide a critical resource for constructing and maintaining collective identities (Mortimer and Fine 1999; Smith 1992; R. Smith 2003). The term “stories” refers to narratives that become representative of identity groups. For example, there are powerful stories of “chosen peoples” like the Israelites or divinely ordained “settler peoples” such as Dutch Afrikaners in South Africa, that form the foundation of a people’s sense that they are a group God has selected, and that God oversees their lives, development and movement (A. Smith 2003). Stories provide a foundation for understanding a group’s history, a sense of collective meaning and what is important to them. Stories help to identify who belongs to the group – often through genealogies or linguistic markers – and mobilize symbolic resources around which group identifications are formed, maintained or changed (such as “chosen-ness”, “pioneering” or particular homelands). In the process, stories reinforce a collective understanding of what is important for in-group belonging.

My use of stories builds on the work of political theorist Rogers Smith (2003), who argues that stories contribute to the aspirations and interests of “political peoplehood.” That is, stories can set out ideals to which groups aspire, as well as articulate and reinforce values and interests of importance. Smith uses the term political peoples rather than competing terms like ethnicity or nationalism to highlight the membership in groups is political when the demands of belonging to one group supersede the demands of membership made by another group. For example, Mennonite demands of pacifism have superseded state demands for military service. Stories of political peoplehood not only set out ideals, but also inspire a sense of trust and worth amongst members and its leadership.

Smith argues that three particular types of stories are critical for constituting, reinforcing and transforming political peoplehood. These are: political power stories, economic stories and ethically constitutive stories (Smith 2003, 56-71). Political power stories tend to build trust amongst community members by promising power will be exercised in a representational system, where the collective political organization enhances the power of its members. For example, Canadians expect their elected leaders will represent their interests and concerns and uphold the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Economic stories focus on the collective economic interests of a group and its leaders, suggesting that their combined economic well-being will be enhanced when they

work together. Ethically constitutive stories capture traits that the group itself views as “imbued with ethical significance” (R. Smith 2003: 64, 73). These stories suggest elements of a group’s culture, religion, language or history constitute the worth of a people and their obligations. For example, Thomas Paine suggested Americans were a chosen people that would build a blessed nation (Paine 1967 [orig. 1776]). While Smith focuses particularly on ethical stories, he notes that the three types of stories function together to contribute to a sense of trust and worth for a peoples.

Stories of political peoples create a framework by which to examine the complex relationship between Mennonites as an ethical religious people, and their interpretations of wealth and loss between 1914 and 1923. The examination here centers on the ethical and economic narratives put forward by Mennonite leaders during and after the revolution. These stories help to illuminate the relationship between Mennonites work, productivity, loss and how Mennonites constitute their collective worth as a people.

A distinction should be made here between internal and external stories. There were internal stories which articulated Mennonite self-understanding, and included economic and ethical narratives. There were also external versions of Mennonite stories. That is, stories about Mennonites that Russians and Ukrainians believed. These external stories intersected with larger narratives of the state within which Mennonites resided as a minority. The distinction between internal and external stories is important because in the period between 1914 and 1923 there was a disjuncture between Mennonite internal stories which framed their sense of belonging and worth to the larger state, and the reactions and responses they received from those outside of the Mennonite community in Russia and Ukraine – where national stories were simultaneously undergoing a radical shift.⁵

Wealth and Mennonite Stories of Peoplehood in 1914

Prior to World War I, Mennonite stories of peoplehood framed a strong collective sense of identity and worth within waning Imperial Russia. As noted, Mennonites believed they were good, faithful Russian citizens who were a small semi-autonomous ethno-religious group within the empire.⁶ Economic stories framed Mennonite worth to the state and rested primarily on their model agricultural, and to a lesser extent industrial, productivity. For example, the editor of the Mennonite periodical *Friedensstimme*, Abraham Kroeker, wrote, “We were called to Russia to cultivate the steppes and we have done that. This has accrued to our benefit, but also to our neighbours, the

Russians and other groups”(1914).⁷ Mennonite history and privileges in Russia were viewed as fulfilling a religious calling to be a productive people. Russia – perhaps acting as a proxy for God’s intent – called Mennonites to be model agriculturalists, Mennonites responded, and God blessed them.

Mennonite economic stories also had a strong independent and capitalist component. Mennonites were committed to farming techniques that emphasized individual family farms and private property. They supported capital enterprise and industrialization. This component of Mennonite identity was not as directly addressed in Mennonite narratives, but runs as a subtext and emerges as a point of contention during and after the revolution as Russians and Ukrainians moved to embrace Communism.

The relationship between Mennonites and wealth was somewhat uneasy. There were tensions between ethically constitutive and economic stories. For example, a simple remark by one Mennonite writing a letter to *Friedenstimme* suggests wealth acquisition and spending was common but not a focus of discussion: “Our home training makes us very unassuming, quiet, and withdrawn. We like to work and spend, but we do not make a big fuss about that” (Friesen 1914). Others decried Mennonite pride and acquisition. For example, Kroeker (1914) suggested that increasing nationalist pressures against Mennonites might be linked to growing luxury, self-indulgence and risky speculation. Wealthy Mennonite estate owners while sometimes admired for their horses, farms and financial donations to social welfare organizations, were criticised at other times for their affluence. The tension was articulated in 1917, when a group of young Mennonite men critiqued wealthy Mennonites in discussing the revolution at an All-Mennonite Congress (All-Mennonite Congress 1917).⁸

Mennonite stories of ethical worth drew upon the ideals of communal support, charity, and pacifism. These values were evidenced in the social and welfare institutions Mennonite created in the late nineteenth century, such as mutual fire insurance, care for orphans, hospitals, schools for the deaf and mute, as well as the higher education system (Braun 1929; Ens 1989; Friesen 1978; Loewen 1990). Mennonite religious institutions bridged significant internal schisms at the turn of the twentieth century. In 1910 the two major Mennonite religious conferences – the General Conference of Mennonite Churches in Russia (*Allegemeine (Bundes) Konferenz der Vertreter sämtlicher Mennonitengemeinden in Russland*) and the Mennonite Brethren Conference (*Bundeskonferenz*) – formally agreed to unite into one All-Mennonite conference, in addition to cooperating to support the alternative Forestry Service (Friesen 1978). These institutions emphasized and reinforced ethical stories that highlighted Mennonites

were charitable, communally-oriented and committed to alternative service and pacifism.

In sum, Mennonites were economically secure in 1914 and their stories of peoplehood wove together ethically constitutive and economic narratives. Mennonites were good, faithful citizens who were blessed with prosperity as they had followed their agricultural calling. They were a religiously committed community whose values came from their beliefs (e.g. charity and pacifism), and were evidenced in their institutions. Mennonite stories of economic production – whether through farming or industry – reaffirmed their worth to the state and an independent, capitalist mode of production.

External Changes and an Inversion of Stories

Between 1914 and 1923, Mennonites witnessed a dramatic decline in their social value and position within former imperial Russia, in economic and material wealth, and in their capacity to be productive. War, revolution and social and economic upheaval marked the decade. Under the extreme duress of the revolution, the moral fabric of the community also began to fray. The external circumstances undermined and at times inverted the stories of peoplehood that were told in 1914.

Nationalist fervor spread across Russia at the start of World War I and quieted internal dissent as the nation rallied for war. There was wide-spread anti-German sentiment, and many Mennonites patriotically joined the pro-Russian response (Berg 1999; Klippenstein 1984; Reimer 1993; Toews 1982; Urry 1994). For example, an Elder in Halbstadt, Molotschna called upon young male recruits to perform Samaritan service for the wounded and sick on the battlefield “with God, for czar and Fatherland”(Unruh 1914 translated in Toews 1982, 69-70). Young men volunteered for alternative medical or forestry service, and some enlisted in the military.⁹ Mennonites were nevertheless subjected to anti-German legislation and public harassment during and following the war years. In 1914 the use of German in publications was banned and public meetings prohibited. School teachers were required to be Russian nationals unless teaching religion or German language courses (Braun 1929). Forestry service was condemned and a group of Mennonite medical orderlies arrested as prisoners of war in 1915 – released after extensive advocacy.¹⁰ Land reforms meant enemy-affiliated colonist lands, including Mennonite lands, were to be nationalized and given to Russian peasants in the boundary zones (Rempel 1932, 49).

Political unrest returned to Russia as the economy and war effort faltered. The February Revolution was fuelled by rapid inflation, trans-

portation difficulties, tremendous war losses, a shortage of industrial goods, labour strikes, dissatisfied soldiers, reported failings of the monarchy, peasant calls for land, and class antagonisms. Tsar Nicholas abdicated in March 1917; a provisional government was installed and then overthrown by Bolsheviks in October. In October, the new leader Vladimir Ilyich Lenin terminated Russian participation in World War I and enacted radical agrarian reforms.

Mennonite historians suggest that the fall of the Tsar was met with a range of emotions, from open jubilation to fear and uncertainty over what was to come (Epp 1989; Rempel 1992; Urry 1994, 1995). Many were initially optimistic about new freedoms under the emergent provisional governments as conferences began to meet again and one Mennonite newspaper – *Friedensstimme* – resumed publication. Mennonite communities looked to contribute to building a better Ukraine and Russia. For example, the minister who opened the All-Mennonite Congress in August 1917 stated, "All citizens of Russia are at work to establish a new commonwealth on a new foundation, and there it is essential that the Mennonites too put their hands to it" (All-Mennonite Congress 1917). There were a range of opinions regarding the degree to which socialism was consistent with Mennonite faith. Younger men exposed to broader and more radical social elements during World War I, argued that socialism was consistent with Mennonite beliefs (All-Mennonite Congress 1917). Older men and the majority of leaders disagreed, although they saw the need to integrate the old ways with the new social order being created (All-Mennonite Congress 1917; General Conference of the Mennonite Church in Russia 1917). The debate at the Congress Mennonite raised questions about private ownership, an important theme within Mennonite economic stories, and suggested there might be alternatives.

Livelihoods and physical security soon degraded. In Ukraine, the emergent Provisional Government struggled for independence until 1920 (Armstrong 1990; Lieven 1999; Magosci 1996; Reid 1999; Wilson 2000). Civil war raged between the White anti-Bolshevik and Red Armies following the occupation of German troops that had been negotiated with the treaty of Brest-Litovsk. There were a variety of other militarized groups including Ukrainian nationalist forces, local peasant groups attacking former landlords, and larger semi-political movements such as Nestor Machno's Anarchist force – which was the largest in the southern steppe and periodically aligned with the Red Army (Armstrong 1990; Sysyn 1977). The Mennonite colonies Chortitza and Molotschna, as well as numerous daughter colonies, fell within the ravaged and chaotic moving civil war front on the southern Steppe.¹¹ Particularly problematic for Mennonites in the early stages of the revolution were local robberies and peasant land

squatters motivated by the Bolshevik decree on land reform. There was a temporary respite for Mennonite areas when German and Austrian troops occupied the area in 1918 – a period during which some revenge attacks against Bolsheviks occurred. The occupying German forces provided support to Mennonites and German colonists to develop self-defence units, which they armed and trained (General United Mennonite Conference 1918). Subsequently, Mennonites in various villages in Chortitza and Molotschna formed the controversial self-defence force (*Selbstschutz*), primarily to fight against the Anarchist bandits.

Ethically Constitutive Stories Inverted: “Mennonite uprightness has frequently been lost”

Mennonite ethically constitutive stories were challenged first with the desire to engage in armed resistance and then later through moral failings as Mennonites struggled to cope with violence, trauma and disorder. The resort to armed defence controversially contradicted the Mennonite doctrine of non-resistance, and undermined a pillar of Mennonite’s ethical stories – that Mennonites were a “non-resistant” people. In June 1918, Mennonite delegates spent almost a day and a half of a three-day Conference debating non-resistance and self-defence. The debate included issues of scriptural interpretation, Mennonite identity, commitment, sacrifice, justice, defence of fatherland, and protection from robbers and murderers. During the debate it was evident that speakers continued to see the doctrine of pacifism as a key component of Mennonite identity; for example, “... The speaker [Jakob Thiessen] is astonished at the reversal in the basic convictions of many Mennonites in the past year. If we give up nonresistance [*sic*] then others will become bearers of this principle in our place” (General United Mennonite Conference 1918). Or: “Each denomination has its task. It is our task to hold firmly to the principle of nonresistance [*sic*]. What we have inherited from our fathers, we want to secure in order to possess it” (General United Mennonite Conference 1918). The group finally voted to leave the matter of armed defence to an individual’s conscience and re-affirmed the historic principal of non-resistance (General United Mennonite Conference 1918). The *Selbstschutz* had a fairly short and controversial life; it was initially seen favorably as contributing to security and then negatively as a source of reprisals.¹² Eventually some *selbstschutz* units joined the White Army and retreated with it into Crimea. A number of Mennonites also took up arms and joined bandit groups or fought with the Red Army.¹³ The rejection of full support for non-resistance represented

a shift in Mennonites' ethical stories of peoplehood. Non-resistance, once a cornerstone of Mennonite religious identity and their ethically constitutive story, was questioned and rejected by many.

Revolution engulfed the major Mennonite colonies after the withdrawal of the German forces in 1918. Armies moved through the area, requisitioning goods, staying in homes and enlisting able-bodied men.¹⁴ Machno's Anarchist-bandit forces left a noteworthy scar on Mennonite colonies as it occupied the area for a period of time, making extensive requisitions, conducting a number of large-scale massacres and an undocumented number of rapes, and spreading venereal diseases and typhus in the villages.¹⁵ Leaders reported, "The insurgents and particularly the population of the surrounding Russian villages have tortured and murdered the Mennonites and sacked and pillaged their colonies" (Ens, Klassen, and others 1922). Military requisitions and raids removed virtually all movable assets from Mennonite colonies, including livestock, grain, hay, wagons, food, clothing, bed linens, dishes and wood. The wealthy estates were amongst the first properties to be plundered. In 1919, the early narratives that emerged from Chortitza were those of victims trying to articulate the unspeakable (for example Neufeld 1919 transl. by Toews 1995). Villages in Chortitza were devastated. Soldiers remained in the area for billeting, people were worn out physically and mentally from destruction and disease. The area was almost paralysed by typhus, there were also high number of orphans, internally displaced, and depleted food stores. A malaise set in.

Requisitions and robberies meant virtually no working farm equipment and no healthy horses or cows for ploughing. Planting and harvesting were problematic and minimal. The less severely affected Mennonites in Molotschna sent material aid to ease suffering in Chortitza and formed a three-member Study Commission (*Studienkommission*) to travel abroad and secure aid from Mennonites in Europe and North America to alleviate sickness, prevent starvation, and identify possible locations for immigration and settlement (December 1919).

The material, physical and spiritual circumstances in the colonies suggested Mennonite ethical stories of 1914 no longer applied. The spiritual and moral strength of communities, which formed an important core of their ethical stories, was weakened by the shift in position regarding non-resistance, and then further weakened by their circumstances. For example, Abraham Lepp notes in 1920 that, "No worship services took place in the Chortitza villages during the time of the Machno occupation until Heinrich Braun came and visited the villages. He was the first, after months of distress and misery, to be able to preach the word of God. During this time all the ministers have

failed. Without their own inner stay, they could not then be a blessing and comfort to others” (Lepp 1920). As famine set in, Mennonites found members resorted to thievery, lying or paying bribes to corrupt officials in order to have loved ones returned or to secure food. A memorandum on emigration states:

It was inevitable that this time of barbarous violence and the disappearance of any form of morality should have a corrupting influence on the Mennonites. We note with alarm that Mennonite uprightness has frequently been lost, that the Mennonite word no longer carries its former weight, that conscience is becoming flexible, and that we are frequently put in the position where we must lie and deceive. We ask ourselves whether this corruption, in a land where lies and deception are order of the day, will not lead to a literal moral bankruptcy. (Ens, Klassen, and others 1922)

Similarly, P. Cornies (1922) observes that “Our views about decency, ethics, and morality are influenced by and frequently saturated with the national spirit of the times, which we could not oppose properly for we were not adequately armed.” Mennonites found their community did not embody the strong, spiritual and moral dimensions that informed their ethical stories. Instead, they found many spiritually broken and engaging in immoral acts of bribery and thievery.

Economic Stories Inverted: “We are aware of our contradictions”

Mennonite economic stories were similarly undermined. Work and productivity flagged and stopped. During the revolution, the outward material symbols of blessing were stripped away first by war and civil war, and then by the heavy levies imposed on farmers by soviet officials re-ordering society. The new Soviet government placed levies and taxes on farmers that proved excessive given their limited capacities.¹⁶ In 1921, B. B. Janz summarized the situation:

Extremity drove people to their lofts to sweep up the last of the wheat together with dust and dirt and to deliver it [for levies]. ... The few stored sacks of flour have been broken open. Lots of butter and eggs had to be delivered as national taxes. The last of the calves and pigs which met weight requirements (not really, since pigs weighing under 3 pud were already accepted as the norm) had already been liquidated in the winter. This was done by the soldiers. So finally, for our farmers, who have

had things taken from them for years, but who have continued to build in hope, everything is gone! (Janz 1921)

As others wrote, "All this has depressed our farmer to such a degree that he has serious doubts about an early economic recovery, particularly when he takes into account the exorbitant levies in kind that are collected with greatest harshness. He no longer has any joy in his purposeless work" (Ens, Klassen, and others 1922). In a 1922 report to the study commission Janz summarized the situation:

Today's messenger reports that in the Molotschna almost nothing is being seeded. There is no grain there and there are almost no draft animals. The winter wheat appears to be almost a total loss. Prof. Hiebert is seeing the formerly blossoming, rich, proud Molotschna in the deepest humiliation of the total time of her existence. Nothing but beggars. (Janz 1922)

The descriptions of horses, which were often included as side notes in reports and letters, captured the discouraged state of communities. For example: "Useful, fit horses of the kind Mennonite farmers would not have been ashamed of before the war comprise only about one quarter of the total" (Baerg 1922); or "Of the six horses per farm of earlier days, a few crippled, gaunt old nags are left" (Janz 1921); "In many a village for example, hardly a team of usable horses could be found" (Janz and Cornies 1954). The horses, a point of pride for many in the formerly proud and strong community, symbolized how far they had fallen.

The Mennonite community found itself on the receiving end of charity, which was both necessary and humiliating. This element of shame and former pride was captured in Janz's letters to American Mennonites. For example, he wrote:

It becomes even more difficult to come hat in hand as a representative of the community; a community with whose national sentiment I am familiar and which focuses on one thing; a community which, according to an estimate from 1909 had a worth of 246 million [rubles] ...; a community which for a hundred years could open doors and give and never receive ...; a community which could give until most recent times when things were already scarce. (Janz 1921)

Being recipients of charity was antithetical to their previous experiences and stories of peoplehood. Mennonites lost the will to work, had lost the products of their labour, and needed to rely upon charity.

A Mennonite in Molotschna poignantly captured the conflicted and contradictory state in a letter to an American Relief aid worker:

We scarcely recognize ourselves. Is it really us or is it an evil dream? One thing is certain: we are uneasy. Insoluble problems agitate us. Tell your brothers over there that we are ill from the soles of our feet to the tops of our heads. Too many events in rapid succession have assaulted us: too many tragic experiences. Our nerves could no longer endure it and we became apathetic. We are inwardly torn. We are aware of our contradictions. We feel insecure. We have become skeptical. There is no zest for work, no rousing of oneself to joyful, productive activity. (But from where should the landsman receive courage when in one village only seven miserable horses are left?) We have almost lost faith in a worthwhile future. We see it in our farms, our houses, our fences: no hand moves to make repairs. We have surrendered to an "it doesn't matter" attitude. Hunger and poverty have debilitated us physically and morally. There is no longer any backbone, not many struggle with this poverty and its social consequences. Life appears bleak... (Classen 1923)

An American aid worker, Alvin Miller, wrote a colleague in 1922, saying: "They are almost at the point where they do not care a bit who rules them or what happens to them. They are discouraged, pessimistic and hopeless" (Miller 1922). There were, however, nascent efforts to recover that coalesced around and refurbished Mennonite narratives of work, to which I now turn.

Work as the Path to Recovery

The assistance of Mennonites from North America and Europe in the 1920s provided critical support to the colonies. Mennonite economic and ethically constitutive narratives resurged alongside physical recovery. The narratives of work and productivity made it possible to re-imagine the future and the basis upon which it could be achieved. The institutional church, while weakened, provided a basic infrastructure for recovery, and provide institutions that facilitated communication and networks between those gravely and less affected within Russia, Ukraine and the larger Mennonite communities overseas. In reflecting on the importance of material and nonmaterial support from Mennonites overseas Philip Cornies wrote:

You brothers out there, to the right and the left of the great water, next to God, that is your achievement. You seized us by the hair when we were at the point of sinking and slowly brought us to land. Admittedly, not everyone. But, thanks to God, we can gratefully state that in general, they have all come to land. (Cornies 1922)

Mennonite leaders also felt a new sense of global Mennonite solidarity, which gave them hope as well necessary material support.

Mennonites in Ukraine formed a civic organization to assist recovery at a final, All-Mennonite Conference in Alexanderwohl, Molotschna in February 1921. The organization was headed by B.B. Janz, who insisted upon a re-affirmation of the position of non-resistance before taking the post, and in doing so reinforced part of the pre-revolution Mennonite ethical story. The organization was originally called the Union of Mennonite Communities and Groups in South Russia (*Verband der Gemeinden und Gruppen des Sueden Russland*), or more frequently the Union or *Verband*. Its name was changed to the Union of Citizens of Dutch Lineage (*Verband der Buerger Hollaendischer Herkunft*) in order to gain official Soviet approval in April 1922. The *Verband's* basic purpose was to restore the Mennonite colonies economically as well as socially, and a sister organization was formed in Russia.

The political, legal and economic context within which the *Verband* operated was unpredictable. New Soviet laws regarding land redistribution, private ownership, and religion were implemented unevenly and often arbitrarily by local officials who tended to be former combatants and peasants with little experience in governance. The *Verband* assisted the American Mennonite Relief effort in the colonies and represented Mennonites to Soviet officials in Charkov and Moscow over issues such as military exemptions, land redistribution and emigration. Janz doggedly pursued government approval for various Mennonite efforts and was surprisingly successful on a number of early initiatives, such as garnering support for an effort to preserve historic centers of Mennonite culture and prevent further land division (Janz 1921).

The *Verband* pursued two major strategies for recovery. One was emigration – to leave and start anew – and the other was reconstruction. Both strategies relied on a mix of internal fortitude and external aid and were accompanied by a re-forged identity with reformulated economic and ethical stories, with economic stories being particularly prominent. Mennonite leaders emphasized that Mennonites would once again become productive agriculturalists within Ukraine or elsewhere. For example:

Dear brother, tell your - our brothers (you cannot put the paint on too thickly in order to picture what has come over us), tell them that in spite of everything we still hope, in spite of it all we still believe that it is not all over with us yet, that God will lift us up again after we have been down so long. We will again work successfully, create and produce joyfully. (Classen 1923)

The constitution of the *Verband* stated: "The Union sets for itself the task of restoring the seriously stagnated agriculture industry in the colonies of the citizens of Dutch lineage to its former strength and well known glory within the framework of the state, as well as to promote the general welfare of the members of the Union" (Janz 1921). Restoring work and material conditions to their "well known glory" required productivity.

Productive work – work that generated outputs that Mennonites could keep – reinforced the will to work. For example, one group wrote "Despite much that is still discouraging and depressing the farmers in general are working courageously to improve their farms and their remaining energy, which has been strengthened by the assistance they received and by the good crops" (Janz, Wiens, and Dueck 1923). Or: "Where ordinarily an ocean of green stalks tossed in waves, weeds now sprout in variety and luxuriance that are truly amazing. The farmer's worried look wanders between such fields and his poor emaciated horses and he says with a shake of his head, "How can that be cultivated?" Courage, dear friend. With a tractor we shall get the better of your weeds and you will rejoice..." (Cornies 1922). Productivity reinforced work and the Mennonite economic story.

Those who desired to emigrate drew upon older narratives of work and productivity in a way that supported their prospects for future productivity outside of Ukraine or Russia. In highlighting the pre-civil war narrative of productivity, a group wrote that the Mennonite communities wished "... to leave a land that gave our fathers hospitable reception in difficult times, a land that has become loved and dear in its unique beauty and its prosperity producing richness, a land that we have learned to cultivate, whose population we know, where we have experienced an economic evolution that is almost unique in the world... (Ens, Klassen, and others 1922). Leaders also spoke of the importance of working elsewhere, within an orderly and secure environment. For example:

You [American brothers] have given us many gifts. Now give us work as well. For years already we have been seeking work protected by law and order, and for the blessing of labour. We

are convinced that you have seen in those of our brothers who are already among you how seriously the emigrants take the obligations they have taken upon themselves. We too, who are still here, assure you that while we come with empty hands, we come with the firm will to welcome any work, any effort, any position that allows us to eat our own bread in peace. (Enns et al. 1923)

And similarly:

Our people are still capable of work. Extraordinarily capable in fact. They just need new ground under their feet, and a better, nobler frame of mind will once again make itself apparent. In this present atmosphere, pregnant as it is with lust for murder, thievery, base denunciation, jealousy, hatred, no prosperity is possible. I was forced to agree with people who responded to my presentations with, "Create human conditions for us and we will once again be human." (Baerg 1922)

Those looking to emigrate tied productivity to a new environment, arguing Russia and Ukraine would not permit a full recovery. These arguments were tied to the model of farming Mennonites used and sought to continue. The very methods of farming (and its resultant productivity) were understood to be antithetical to the new economic order and therefore untenable. For example, in a letter to B.B. Janz, K. Sawatsky observed:

The Mennonite manner of farm operation is organized around a landholding of from 40 - 65 dessiatines. Already the fact that all Mennonites, with few exceptions, do not think it possible to reduce the size of the farm is evidence that any kind of reduction would mean its decline. The Mennonite farmer with his equipment and buildings neither can, nor wishes to adapt to a smaller operation. ... [I]n a socialist state social differences among the different population groups are in principle not permissible. In this way it may well be possible that, due to our diligence, we will always be among the exploited. In Russia individual agricultural activity will long be out of favour. Any other form of agricultural activity is, however, foreign to the Mennonite character. (Sawatsky 1922)

The new agrarian and social policies were deemed a significant threat, "fatal to our prevailing and well proven agricultural system and for our continuing existence as a distinct religious community" (Ens, Klassen,

and others 1922). The economic arguments were also reinforced by fears of moral decay and decline.

Intriguingly, the argument to the Ukrainian authorities to allow for a mass emigration also built upon the foundations of Mennonite's economic stories and worth to the nation. Janz, on behalf of the *Verband*, argued that Mennonite work as model farmers was completed and their continued presence would be detrimental to the local population. He wrote: "And truly, by determination of history, the task of our colonies to serve in Russia as models of good farmers has been fulfilled in 130 years. The method of working the land on the part of the Russian population bears witness to this. If our farmers move out voluntarily they will avoid continuous friction and bloodshed" (Janz 1921). The *Verband* further argued that the excess population, particularly those displaced by the revolution, should be removed and "repatriated" (Janz 1921). In exchange, the *Verband* and AMR arranged to supply 50 tractors and seed grain to assist agricultural recovery in Ukraine.

Mennonite leaders looking at recovery within Ukraine persistently believed their contributions to farming would be recognized by Soviet authorities and they would receive larger land allocations for model farms given their historical role in agricultural production. For example, in 1922 *Verband* meeting minutes noted:

It is clear from this that the [Land] Commissariat certainly wants to make allowance for the farming culture in our colonies, and that it is further prepared to become familiar with one of the projects to be introduced by the Mennonite Union and to accept practical suggestions regarding special crop agriculture. (Union of Citizens of Dutch Lineage in Ukraine 1922)

Or, in a resolution passed at a 1924 *Verband* meeting:

Based on local reports the Congress finds that, regardless of all the governmental decrees relative to the settling of land norms, the land share for Mennonites who operate specialized farms has not yet been determined. While on the one hand the central government authorities support the establishment of specialized farms, on the other hand, many local institutions do not appear to share this view. ... Therefore the delegate assembly instructs the central executive: 1) to apply all available means to expedite the final implementation of the land reform in the colonies pointing to the repeated ignoring by the local agricultural authorities of the orders of the NKS of Mar. 9, 1923, which established the land norm for Mennonite

specialized farms at 32 dessiatines. (Union of Citizens of Dutch Lineage in Ukraine 1924)

These farms, while adapted, suggested Mennonites could recover as individuals and a community. It was also suggested that redistributing land within the Mennonite community according to socialist principles would reduce friction with Ukrainian and Russian neighbors:

There is the awareness that this would mean a substantial reduction in the size of the land norm for the old farmsteads already assigned larger land quantities by decisions made at higher levels of authority. Yet, this sacrifice is made for the benefit of the land poor and the landless of our population, for whom the land norm will thus increase.

In this way cause for disturbances and unrest about land could be avoided from without (on the part of the surrounding population) and from within (on the part of our own landless people). ...(Union of Citizens of Dutch Lineage in Ukraine 1922)

There were further suggestions that Mennonites could become citizens in good standing by building upon their well-known agricultural practices. For example, efforts were made to focus on Mennonite contributions through further breeding of the German Red Cow, a widely recognized breed of cattle that was developed in the Mennonite colonies (Union of Citizens of Dutch Lineage in Ukraine 1924). Members of the *Verband* hoped to reassert a role for Mennonites as worthy contributors, although their narratives of productivity were necessarily adapted to the new environment.

Recovering Worth: Spiritual and Material Recovery

Mennonite narratives of recovery depended upon a return to work and productivity, yet they did not function alone. Mennonite leaders also spoke of the need for spiritual recovery. There was a humble reframing of Mennonite religious identity that focused on the need to, and possibility of, rebuilding their spiritual community. Leaders who looked to stay, focused on reconstructing the moral and spiritual aspects of Mennonite community life in Russia, and believed it could be recovered (General United Mennonite Conference 1925). While they too saw threats in the communist system, they believed they could survive if they stayed unified in a tight Mennonite community, building upon Mennonite institutions, practices and separate way of

life: "A mental and spiritual recovery is imperative; a rediscovery of old tried ways and goals, and a return to altars. We need to create, if at all possible, a new unified front in the home, the school and the church. This could pave the way to the so essential regeneration of our society" (Cornies 1922). Recovering elements of the past, with some accommodations to the new order – such as accepting schools as neutral territory – was perhaps the only way the leaders could attempt to reconstitute the community under antagonistic conditions.

Those leaders who looked to emigrate drew upon a much older narrative from their European past. They focused on recovering the spiritual core of a people who necessarily moved in order to retain their faith. For example: "In just a few years, that which we have inherited from our fathers ... can be seriously undermined and can finally disappear completely. Is it not then our sacred obligation to think of rescue? And where does this rescue lie if not in emigration?" (Ens, Klassen, and others 1922). Leaders, such as Janz, compared Mennonites to Israelites, with its inference of being a chosen, wandering people; Mennonites were like the Israelites struggling in the desert, or leaving the "Egyptian darkness" (Janz 1921, 1921, 1922). Others referred to similar Old Testament incidents, such as "May God help us and a guide us as He helped and guided Israel under Ezra and Nehemiah" (Klassen 1922). This restructured narrative was supported by the belief that Mennonites were doomed under Communism:

Should we be offered the shortest time for our departure from this country, we would say "Tomorrow", if only in that event we could take our children by the hand and go, leaving all our belongings, our houses and lands in Russia! If we would then come away a whole in heart, mind and spirit, and would then be able to carry away with us our ideal values, then I would say that we have lost little. We are sinking. (Janz 1921)

Janz's comments here place spiritual recovery above economic recovery, although by mentioning houses, land and belongings, he highlights the importance of material goods to Mennonites in order to show how significant was the sacrifice. American Mennonite aid worker Alvin Miller phrased it more bluntly when he wrote to an American colleague: "As one member of the Committee puts it – when a Mennonite is ready to leave all his land and all his goods, hoping and praying only for escape, there are reasons for it that lie much deeper than economic organization and theory of Government. 'Wir verderben' [we are decaying] goes to the heart of the matter. Despair is paralyzing the Mennonites of south Russia" (1922). Mennonite ethically constitutive stories played a critical role in framing the need for emigration.

The reconstitution of Mennonite stories of peoplehood was not complete in 1924. However, the narratives had overcome and incorporated the antithetical experiences of the revolutionary period and laid a path for future recovery as a people. The narratives of work, and more specifically the narratives that Mennonites were hard working and productive, were critical in helping frame the absence of work and productivity as "unusual" and helped Mennonites reconstitute their sense of collective worth. The anticipated productivity suggested a future return to Mennonites being desirable and worthy citizens – either in Ukraine or elsewhere.

As a vulnerable minority group it was imperative that these stories of worth connected with and reinforced the larger economic and political stories of the states in which Mennonites resided; that their stories of peoplehood were externally accepted. Mennonite economic and ethical stories of peoplehood reinforced and contradicted particular stories in the larger economic and political contexts in which they sought to survive. Mennonite stories of ethical worth, which were re-forming around religious beliefs of pacifism and moral fortitude, did not resonate with the new Soviet ethical story of peoplehood that centered on secular themes of economic redistribution and equity. The reconstituted Mennonite economic narratives retained a substantial focus on individual property ownership as well as work and productivity. Again, this narrative did not fit within larger Soviet economic narratives. While Mennonite ethical stories were not wholeheartedly embraced by foreign governments, like the Canadian government, they were tolerated (Neufeldt Forthcoming). Mennonite economic narratives resonated strongly with the economic narratives in countries that supported capitalism. Successful immigration occurred to those countries where the re-knit Mennonite economic narratives suited the dominant ethical and economic narratives of the state.

In 1923 the Soviet government approved the first group of emigrants and roughly 3,500 left for Canada under *Verband* supervision. Another 5,000 successfully emigrated in 1924. Crop yields were higher in 1923 and 1924, and a number of former industrial owners were supervising production in now-nationalized factories. The Mennonite colonies were recovering and no longer required food assistance although they sought additional financial backing from North American and Europe. The *Verband* continued to actively pursue agricultural reform, economic recovery and Mennonite communal well-being into 1926 with some success. Many were optimistic that Mennonites would recover, although the wealth of the Colonies was a thing of the past. With land reform, Mennonite villages were by and large no longer Mennonite-only, and a new era was beginning in Soviet Ukraine.

As I noted earlier, stories of peoplehood set out ideals to which groups aspire, as well as frame and reinforce important interests and values. For Mennonites, economic and ethical stories of peoplehood were important for helping Mennonite communities to recover and re-imagine themselves after devastating losses between 1914 and 1923. They were also critical for framing Mennonite contributions and worth to the state. The reconstitution of Mennonite stories of worth after the revolution, while problematic in terms of their resonance within the Soviet Union, nevertheless critically reframed and reinforced Russlaender Mennonite's collective worth as a minority people who could contribute in elsewhere.

References

- All-Mennonite Congress. 1917. Minutes of the All-Mennonite Congress August 14 - 18. In *The Mennonites in Russia From 1917 to 1930: Selected Documents*, edited by J. B. Toews. Winnipeg, MB: Trans. W. Regehr, Unpublished. Original edition, Christian Press.
- Armstrong, John A. 1990. *Ukrainian Nationalism*. Englewood, CO: Ukrainian Academic Press.
- Baerg, P. 1922. to B.B. Janz, July 1. In *The Mennonites in Russia From 1917 to 1930: Selected Documents*, edited by J. B. Toews. Winnipeg, MB: Trans. W. Regehr, Unpublished. Original edition, Baerg, P.
- Berg, Wesley. 1999. Bearing arms for the Tsar: the songs of the Germans in Russia. *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 17:178-193.
- Braun, Peter. 1929. The educational system of the Mennonites in South Russia. *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 3 (3):169-182.
- Classen, D. 1923. Letter to C.E.Krehbichl, Halbstadt, 1 January. In *The Mennonites in Russia From 1917 to 1930: Selected Documents*, edited by J. B. Toews. Winnipeg, MB: Translated by W. Regehr, Unpublished. Original edition, Christian Press.
- Cornies, P. 1922. Concerning the Situation, 17 June. In *The Mennonites in Russia From 1917 to 1930: Selected Documents*, edited by J. B. Toews. Winnipeg, MB: Translated by W. Regehr, Unpublished. Original edition, Christian Press.
- Dyck, Cornelius, ed. 1967. *An Introduction to Mennonite History*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press.
- Dyck, Harvey L. 1982. Russian Mennonitism and the challenge of Russian Nationalism, 1889. *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 56 (4):307-341.
- . 1984. Agronomists Gravel's biography of Johann Cornies (1789-1848). *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 2:29-41.
- Dyck, Harvey L., John R. Staples, and John B. Toews. 2004. *Nestor Makhno and the Eichenfeld Massacre*. Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press.
- Ehrt, A. 1932. *Das Menonitentum in Russland von seiner Einwanderung bis zur Gegenwart*. Thesis. Langensalza.
- Enns, H.H., Jac. Rempel, J.H. Rempel, Joh. Schroeder, Peter Epp, Jac. Lorenz, J. Friesen, Johann Driedger, and Gerhard Doerksen. 1923. Distress Call of the Mennonite Emigrants in the Ukraine, Kharkov, Dec. 21. In *The Mennonites in Russia From 1917 to 1930: Selected Documents*, edited by J. B. Toews. Winnipeg, MB: Translated by W. Regehr, Unpublished. Original edition, Christian Press.
- Ens, Adolf. 1989. Mennonite education in Russia. In *Mennonites in Russia, 1788-1988: Essays in Honour of Gerhard Lobrenz*, edited by J. Friesen. Winnipeg, MB: CMBC Publications.
- Ens, F., J. Klassen, and others. 1922. Memorandum on the question of the Emigration of the Russian Mennonites, Chortitza, July. In *The Mennonites in Russia From 1917 to 1930*:

- Selected Documents*, edited by J. B. Toews. Winnipeg, MB: Translated by W. Regehr, Unpublished. Original edition, Christian Press.
- Epp, G.K. 1989. Mennonite-Ukrainian relations (1789-1945). *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 7:131-144.
- Epp, George K. 1989. Urban Mennonites in Russia. In *Mennonites in Russia, 1788-1988: Essays in Honour of Gerhard Lobrenz*, edited by J. Friesen. Winnipeg, MB: CMBC Publications.
- Friesen, A. 1914. Unsere Mennoniten als Sanitäre. *Friedensstimme*, 8.
- Friesen, Peter M. 1978. *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)*. Translated by J. B. Toews, A. Friesen, P. J. Klassen and H. Loewen. Fresno, CA: Board of Christian Literature General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches. Original edition, Halbstadt: Raduga, 1911.
- Friesen, Rudy P. 1986. *Into the Past: Buildings of the Mennonite Commonwealth*. Winnipeg, MB: Raduga Publications.
- . 1999. Places of worship in the Russian Mennonite commonwealth: expressions of conformity, contradiction and change. *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 73 (2):257-285.
- General Conference of the Mennonite Church in Russia. 1917. Minutes of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church in Russia, June 6, 7, and 8. In *The Mennonites in Russia From 1917 to 1930: Selected Documents*, edited by J. B. Toews. Winnipeg, MB: Translated by W. Regehr, Unpublished. Original edition, Christian Press.
- General United Mennonite Conference. 1918. Lichtenau Conference, June 30, July 1 and 2. In *The Mennonites in Russia From 1917 to 1930: Selected Documents*, edited by J. B. Toews. Winnipeg, MB: Translated by W. Regehr, Unpublished. Original edition, Christian Press.
- . 1925. Minutes of the United Conference of the Mennonite Churches of Russia, January 13-18. In *The Mennonites in Russia From 1917 to 1930: Selected Documents*, edited by J. B. Toews. Winnipeg, MB: Translated by W. Regehr, Unpublished. Original edition, Christian Press.
- Goerz, Heinrich. 1993. *The Molotschna Settlement*. Translated by A. Reimer and J. B. Toews. Edited by V. G. Doerksen, *Echo Historical Series*. Winnipeg, MB: CMBC Publications and the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society. Original edition, 1951.
- Halbstädter Volost. 1918. *Volksfreund*.
- Janz, B. B., and Ph. Cornies. 1954. A Russian Mennonite Document of 1922. *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 28:143-147.
- Janz, Benjamin B. 1921. Constitution of the Union of Citizens of Dutch Lineage in Ukraine. In *The Mennonites in Russia From 1917 to 1930: Selected Documents*, edited by J. B. Toews. Winnipeg, MB: Translated by W. Regehr, Unpublished. Original edition, Christian Press.
- . 1921. Petition to the All-Ukrainian Central Executive Committee. In *The Mennonites in Russia From 1917 to 1930: Selected Documents*, edited by J. B. Toews. Winnipeg, MB: Translated by W. Regehr, Unpublished. Original edition, Christian Press.
- . 1921. to Mennonite Relief Agencies, Orloff, July 25. In *The Mennonites in Russia From 1917 to 1930: Selected Documents*, edited by J. B. Toews. Winnipeg, MB: Translated by W. Regehr, Unpublished. Original edition, Christian Press.
- . 1921. to the Dutch Mennonite Relief Agency, October 8. In *The Mennonites in Russia From 1917 to 1930: Selected Documents*, edited by J. B. Toews. Winnipeg, MB: Translated by W. Regehr, Unpublished. Original edition, Christian Press.
- . 1922. B.B. Janz to to the Study Commission, Kharkov, April 27. In *The Mennonites in Russia From 1917 to 1930: Selected Documents*, edited by J. B. Toews. Winnipeg, MB: Translated by W. Regehr, Unpublished. Original edition, Christian Press.
- Janz, H.B., K.A. Wiens, and D. Dueck. 1923. to American Mennonite Relief, Halbstadt, July 17. In *The Mennonites in Russia From 1917 to 1930: Selected Documents*, edited by J. B. Toews. Winnipeg, MB: Translated by W. Regehr, Unpublished. Original edition, Christian Press.
- Klassen, H. 1922. Report from Waldheim, South Russia, April 20. In *The Mennonites in Russia From 1917 to 1930: Selected Documents*, edited by J. B. Toews. Winnipeg, MB: Translated by W. Regehr, Unpublished. Original edition, Christian Press.

- Klebnikov, Paul. 1990. The Man Who Saved Russia...With Capitalism. *Wall Street Journal*, July 24.
- Klippenstein, Lawrence. 1984. Mennonite pacifism and state service in Russia: a case study in church-state relations: 1789-1936. PhD dissertation, University of Minnesota, MN.
- Kroeker, Abraham. 1914. Ein Demoklesschert über unserm Haupte. *Friedensstimme*, 4-5.
- Lepp, Abraham. 1920. to G.G. Hiebert, Halbstadt, March 6. In *The Mennonites in Russia From 1917 to 1930: Selected Documents*, edited by J. B. Toews. Winnipeg, MB: Translated by W. Regehr, Unpublished. Original edition, Christian Press.
- Letter. 1918. *Volksfreund*, 22 (7), 7.
- Lieven, Anatol. 1999. *Ukraine and Russia: A Fraternal Rivalry*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press.
- Loewen, Harry. 1990. Intellectual developments among the Mennonites of Russia: 1880-1917. *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 8:89-107.
- Loewen, Helmut-Harry, and James Urry. 1991. Protecting mammon. Some dilemmas of Mennonite non-resistance in late Imperial Russia and the origins of the selbstschutz. *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 9:34-53.
- Magosci, Paul R. 1996. *A History of Ukraine*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.
- Miller, Alvin J. 1922. Letter from Moscow to Professor J.G. Evert, Newton, 31 January. Russian Relief Collection, Levi Mumaw General Correspondence, Mennonite Church Archives, Goshen.
- . 1922. Letter to Professor J.G. Evert, Jan. 31. Moscow.
- Mortimer, Edward, and Robert Fine, eds. 1999. *People, Nation and State: the meaning of ethnicity and nationalism*. New York, NY: I.B. Tauris Publishers.
- Neufeld, David. 1919. The Days of Terror in Blumenort, Halbstadt Volost. *Friedensstimme*, November 16, 3-4.
- Neufeldt, Reina C. 2005. Barn Razing: Change and Continuity in Identity during Conflict. Doctoral dissertation, School of International Service, American University, Washington, DC.
- . Forthcoming. Tolerant Exclusion: expanding constricted narratives of wartime ethnic and civic nationalism. *Nations and Nationalism*.
- Paine, Thomas. 1967 [orig. 1776]. Common Sense. In *Tracts of the American Revolution, 1763-1776*, edited by M. Jensen. New York: Bobbs-Merrill.
- Reid, Anna. 1999. *Borderland: A journey through the history of Ukraine*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Reimer, Al. 1993. *Sanitätsdienst und Selbstschutz*: Russian-Mennonite nonresistance in World War I and its aftermath. *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 11:135-148.
- Rempel, David, and Abe J. (Ed.) Dueck. 1993. Mennonite medics in Russia during World War I. *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 11:149-161.
- Rempel, David G. 1932. The Expropriation of the German Colonists in South Russia during the Great War. *Journal of Modern History* 4:49-67.
- . 1973. The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia: a sketch of its founding and endurance, 1789-1919. *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 47 (4):259-308.
- . 1974. The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia: a sketch of its founding and endurance, 1789-1919 (concluded). *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 48 (1):5-54.
- Rempel, Johann G. 1992. Mennonite Revolutionaries in the Old Colony Before 1917. *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 10:72-86.
- Sawatsky, K. 1922. Our Future in Russia, Alexandrovsk, January 15. In *The Mennonites in Russia From 1917 to 1930: Selected Documents*, edited by J. B. Toews. Winnipeg, MB: Translated by W. Regehr, Unpublished. Original edition, Christian Press.
- Smith, Anthony D. 1992. Chosen peoples: why ethnic groups survive. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 15 (3):440-449.
- . 2003. *Chosen Peoples*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press Inc.
- Smith, C. Henry. 1957. *The Story of the Mennonites*. 4th ed. ed. Newton, KS: Mennonite Publication Office.

- Smith, Rogers M. 2003. *Stories of Peoplehood: The Politics and Morals of Political Membership*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Sysyn, Frank. 1977. Nestor Makhno and the Ukrainian Revolution. In *The Ukraine, 1917-1921: A Study in Revolution*, edited by T. Hunczak. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Toews, John B. 1967. *Lost Fatherland. The story of Mennonite emigration from Soviet Russia 1921 - 1927*. Edited by J. C. Wenger. Vol. 12, *Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press.
- . 1982. *Czars, Soviets and Mennonites*. Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press.
- . 1995. "No songs were sung at the gravesite" The Blumenort (Russia) massacre (November 10-12, 1919). *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 13:51-70.
- Union of Citizens of Dutch Lineage in Ukraine. 1922. Minutes of the Verband Congress Margenau, Jan 3-4. In *The Mennonites in Russia From 1917 to 1930: Selected Documents*, edited by J. B. Toews. Winnipeg, MB: Translated by W. Regehr, Unpublished. Original edition, Der Bote II, 2.
- . 1924. Minutes of the Delegate Assembly of Citizens of Dutch Lineage in the Ukraine, held on March 1, 3,4. In *The Mennonites in Russia From 1917 to 1930: Selected Documents*, edited by J. B. Toews. Winnipeg, MB: Translated by W. Regehr, Unpublished. Original edition, Christian Press.
- . 1924. Notes from Minutes from Kalinovo Congress, March 1-4. In *The Mennonites in Russia From 1917 to 1930: Selected Documents*, edited by J. B. Toews. Winnipeg, MB: Translated by W. Regehr, Unpublished. Original edition, Der Bote II, 2.
- Unruh, Benjamin H. 1914. Rede, gehalten ... im Halbstädter Bethause. *Friedensstimme*, 1-2.
- Unruh, H. 1914. Mennonitische Reservisten. *Der Botschafter*, 3.
- Unruh, Heinrich. 1918. *March 10 and on, 1918, biographical update*. Translated by H. P. Enns: Conrad Grebel College Archives.
- Urry, James. 1989. Mennonite economic development in the Russian mirror. In *Mennonites in Russia, 1788-1988: Essays in Honour of Gerhard Lohrenz*, edited by J. Friesen. Winnipeg, MB: CMBC Publications.
- . 1989. *None but Saints: The transformation of Mennonite life in Russia 1789-1889*. Winnipeg, MB: Hyperion Press Limited.
- . 1992. The cost of community: the funding and economic management of the Russian Mennonite commonwealth before 1914. *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 10:22-55.
- . 1994. The Russian Mennonites, nationalism and the state 1789-1917. In *Canadian Mennonites and the Challenges of Nationalism*, edited by A. J. Dueck. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society.
- . 1995. After the rooster crowed: some issues concerning the interpretation of Mennonite/Boshevik relations during the early Soviet period. *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 13:26-50.
- . 2006. *Mennonites, Politics and Peoplehood: Europe - Russia - Canada 1525 - 1980*. Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press.
- Wilson, Andrew. 2000. *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Notes

- ¹ This article draws on elements introduced in "Barn Razing: Changes and Continuity in Identity during Conflict" (Neufeldt 2005).
- ² The agreement included provisions for living in enclaves, exemptions from taxes and military service, loans, freedom to practice religion and so forth (Rempel 1973).

- ³ Russian authorities maintained a separate category for Mennonites in records (Rempel 1973).
- ⁴ One pud equals thirty-six English pounds.
- ⁵ James Urry, in his recent excellent and wide-ranging book that examines snapshots of Mennonite relationships to the state, rather unfortunately refers to Mennonite internal stories as “folk tradition” (2006, 3) which elides their significance in the process of constructing and maintaining Mennonite peoplehood over time.
- ⁶ Russia was considered home and there were many testaments to Mennonite support for Russia (for example, Unruh 1914 translated in Toews 1982, 73-74), but Mennonites also identified with German and Dutch heritage. Mennonites widely used the term *Mennonitisches Völklein* (“little people”) for in-group publications prior to WORLD WAR I, which historian Harvey Dyck (1982, 317) suggests presents a sense of Mennonite identity that was significant, although not equivalent to a national *Volk*.
- ⁷ This section was translated by John B. Toews (1982, 74).
- ⁸ There were reports that some Mennonites were killed because they were Bolshevik supporters (Letter 1918; Halbstädter Volost 1918).
- ⁹ For reviews of war service see Reimer (1993) and Toews (1982).
- ¹⁰ For more details see Rempel and Dueck (1993)
- ¹¹ Cornelius Dyck (1967) suggests in some regions the front passed through Mennonite villages more than twenty times.
- ¹² For details on the *Selbstschutz* see Loewen and Urry (1991), Reimer (1993) and Toews (1967, 1995).
- ¹³ For example, see Baerg (1922) and Unruh (1918).
- ¹⁴ Some poorer Mennonites, sympathetic to Bolshevik-ideals, were spared death or robbery.
- ¹⁵ Debates surround Machno centre on the degree to which he was politically motivated by Anarchism or Ukrainian nationalism (Sysyn 1977). Some argue he and his troops were little more than opportunistic bandits (see Rempel 2002), others that he pursued political autonomy (Dyck, Staples, and Toews 2004)
- ¹⁶ Initially payment-in-kind levies were set at 10 percent of “normal” production but with shortages of farm equipment, animals, seed grain and drought, production was well below normal and the levy prohibitive.