Paulo Freire's Influence on MCC: A Preliminary Investigation[1]

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In 1968, twenty-four-year-old Eric Rempel, a young Manitoban agronomist with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)'s Teachers Abroad Program, arrived in Mochudi, Botswana. Rempel acknowledges he "didn't have a clear vision at all of what it was that we would be able to bring to those farmers, except that we were wealthy, they were poor, and what we had learned was what was possible with chemical agriculture."[2] Years later, after reading Brazilian education and development theorist Paulo Freire and being deeply influenced by his work, Rempel came to see development as a dialogical process instead of a top-down one. After this "Freirean" shift, Rempel reflected on his work in Botswana. He recounted demonstrating chemical agricultural possibilities one day by spraying 2,4-D on sorghum in Mochudi. The smell reminded him of his home near Steinbach in southern Manitoba. Rempel recalled that in the late 1950s his father was "totally impressed by what was possible" with chemical fertilizer, which he believed "any progressive farmer would be using." In Botswana, unlike at home, the use of "progressive" 2,4-D did not become widespread because it was too expensive. However, Rempel did design a toolcarrier. In a 1988 book titled *Perfected Yet Rejected*, animal-traction expert Paul Starkey surveyed fifty different toolcarrier designs produced to assist farmers across Africa, Europe, India, and Latin America.[3] One of these designs was the Mochudi toolcarrier initiated in Mochudi,

Botswana, which Rempel designed and launched in 1973, "perfected" by 1975, and named "*Makgonatsotlhe* or *the machine that can do everything*."[4] In 1978, "125 toolcarriers were manufactured . . . of which 72 were bought for testing by various government agencies."[5] Rempel admits, "As much as I thought I understood the conditions that these Botswana farmers were farming, really, I didn't, they were the only ones who really understood that, and this whole idea [the *Makgonatsotlhe*] was just not tested adequately with them. We moved too fast and didn't learn enough."[6] The early optimism on the design side was not sustained on the implementation side, as local farmers found that using the tool actually led to more weeds. By 1982, the project was discontinued.[7] As Starkey describes it, "despite the obvious enthusiasm of the Mochudi Farmers Brigade, displays at agricultural shows, and promotion through on-farm demonstrations in which over seventy units were placed in farmer service and maintained by the Ministry of Agriculture, the Mochudi toolcarrier had not been adopted by farmers on any large scale."[8] Rempel concluded: "In the end we managed to impress everybody except farmers." Rempel's Freirean shift also challenged the naïve implementation of certain technologies such as chemicals. Rempel later regretted his decision to spray 2,4-D and "shudders" at the "damage" he could have done, as it "made no sense at all to come in with these labour-saving things." According to Rempel, the introduction of chemicals would purport to solve a problem that did not in fact exist.

This paper traces a shift in thinking within MCC in the 1970s by showing the impact of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*[9] on MCC development theory and on MCC workers. I interpret several Mennonite Canadian agricultural development narratives, like Rempel's, in light of this Freirean shift. Using historical analysis and recent interview data, I reveal the impact Freire's ideas had on MCC and the people who went through its programs—explicitly, as evidenced by MCC documents and workers citing Freire, and implicitly as reflected in Freirean themes and language. One such implicit impact was on a group of market-oriented MCC workers who appear to have been shaped to some degree by Freire's influence on MCC despite resisting a full adoption of his more radical politics.

Freire and Mennonite Central Committee

At the fiftieth anniversary of MCC in 1970, long-time MCC worker Peter J. Dyck wrote in the *Mennonite Quarterly Review* that Mennonites "simply are not doing a very commendable job as

Mennonites in training our young people for dialogue and encounter with non-Mennonites and non-Christians."[10] In the next decades, MCC began centring on themes of "dialogue" and "encounter." Dyck recognized that "in many instances the root of the problem is fear," and "the basic problem generally is not lack of knowledge. It is fear of putting that knowledge to work."[11] This assessment anticipated some of Freire's insights in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. In the decade when Rempel was spraying 2,4-D and designing a toolcarrier in Mochudi, MCC responded to critical questions—agricultural or otherwise—by turning to the work of Freire.

Born in 1921, Paulo Freire was from the state of Pernambuco in northeastern Brazil. Raised middle class, he suffered acute hunger in the economic depression of the 1930s. He studied law at the University of Recife beginning in 1943, but never practiced. After leaving school, Freire began to develop a rapid method for teaching literacy. This method, which would be used across Brazil, became well known in national education circles after Freire presented a paper in 1958 in Rio de Janeiro. According to Andrew J. Kirkendall, in the paper Freire argued "that students should participate in the making of their own work plans and that teachers could learn from the illiterate."[12] At this time, Freire was influenced by Brazilian "developmental nationalism," an explicitly non-Marxist ideology. Developmental nationalism proponents maintained "it was possible through statist and nationalist policies of economic development to produce harmony among the classes."[13] Along with this movement, Catholic humanism and phenomenology/existentialism influenced Freire's early thinking. These influences encouraged him to consider his literacy program as one that could promote humanization and critical consciousness.

Freire developed his method of teaching literacy during the late 1950s and 1960s in reaction and response to Cold War–era declarations from the United Nations and the United States on the need for increased education and literacy in the "Third World." Both provided funding for Freire to implement his methods on a massive scale.[14] By the early 1960s, there were plans for hundreds of thousands of Brazilians in the Pernambuco area to be taught using the Freirean method. However, fears arising within the US government that Freire's program was subversive, or worse, communist, stirred policy debate and concern.[15] At this time, Freire focused more on literacy than revolution and relayed to a friend that "he would have to quit if he had learned that his methods were being used for ideological ends."[16] The Freirean literacy program ended after Brazil's March 1964 right-wing coup d'état. Freire was arrested on June 16 and, while detained, denied that his programs were communist

indoctrination, and "emphasized the Catholic humanist roots of this thought and the way he sought to promote an 'open mentality.'"[17] He spent the next five years in exile in Chile where he worked on implementing his literacy programs under the US-supported Christian Democratic Party government.[18] During this time, Freire shifted more explicitly to the "left" and began viewing himself as a revolutionary thinker.[19] He also gained international recognition. In 1969, Freire briefly spent time at Harvard's Center for Studies in Education and Development, before moving to Geneva in 1970 and joining the World Council of Church's (WCC) Office of Education. At the time Freire joined the WCC, they were criticizing the "modernization" theory of development, conceiving of development instead "as a process of people's struggle for social justice, self-reliance, and economic growth," and calling "for more structural change, support for liberation movements, and an expanding role for government."[20] This shift came after twenty years of debate about missionary work within the WCC focused on "the de-westernization of Christianity."[21] In December 1970, at the start of his tenure at the WCC, Freire held a colloquium where participants read *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He became the organization's guiding theorist of education over the next decade before returning to Brazil in 1980.[22]

Pedagogy of the Oppressed, written in 1967–68 in Portuguese but initially published in Spanish in 1968, and in English in 1970, had immediate and lasting influence. The book argues that the goal of education is humanization and a pedagogy that enables the oppressed to overcome their "fear of freedom."[23] Freire advocates for "a pedagogy which must be forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity."[24] This understanding of education is one that focuses on dialogical methods for literacy leading to "conscientization"—that is, dialogue with others, which leads to critical reflection on one's reality of oppression.[25] Through "problem-posing" education, in which teachers and students together pose questions about their historical reality and by learning from each other, conscientization occurs. The result is a liberatory praxis.[26] Freire opposes this to a "banking model" of education in which the teacher has the knowledge and the student is an object to be filled with that knowledge. Freire writes that the latter model "turns them [students] into 'containers,' into 'receptacles' to be 'filled' by the teacher. . . . In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing."[27] The students are no longer subjects but solely objects to be filled and, in this way, are no longer subjective agents in the world.

Pedagogy of the Oppressed was published at a moment when there was, as Daniel Immerwahr describes it, "momentum favoring industrialization, bureaucratization, standardization, commodification, secularization, urbanization, mechanization, specialization, and quantification."[28] This momentum was challenged by "community development" models that were in existence before, during, and after the peak of modernization theory. Immerwahr argues that "in the twenty years following 1945, it was the global South that provided the impetus for the global community development movement, even as the global North supplied funding and expertise."[29] These twenty years were the years when Freire developed his literacy program and came to prominence in Brazil. But, as Immerwahr argues, "by the 1970s, that relationship was flipped on its head. In the United States, communitarian ideologies flowered on the grave of modernization. The global South, by contrast, became less fertile ground for community strategies."[30] Immerwahr argues that community development proponents overlooked power: "power within communities and power relationships between communities and the larger societies around them."[31]

Freire's trajectory follows this narrative. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* developed from Freire's experiences in the south—in Brazil and Chile in the 1950s and 1960s—and then found favour in the north, at the WCC, in the 1970s. In his early literacy programs, Freire was less concerned with political radicalism or revolution. By the 1970s, in exile in the global North, Freire was writing against power structures and systems that oppressed. In this later period, his work found strong resonance within the WCC and elsewhere across the global North including MCC.

One of the Mennonites early to recognize Freire's work as important and argue for its usage was Merrill Ewert, who worked with MCC in Zaire/Congo in the late 1960s and again in the early 1970s. After his first Congo experience, Ewert read Freire and found that he "offered a strategy for teaching, challenged me to rethink what I believed about poverty, transformed my 'theory of society,' and changed my approach to development."[32] His doctoral work in the 1970s applied Freire's work to his own involvement with MCC. Describing Freire's critique of development, he wrote,

> Extension . . . is seen as a vehicle for transmitting knowledge. . . . This conceptualization of the educational process as the transfer of knowledge and technology from the "developed" to the "traditional" sectors assumes that someone knows what is good for the peasants, and that the "problem" of development is to convince them to adopt whatever is being touted as the solution.[33]

He contrasts this with a Freirean concept based on "problem-posing instead of problem-solving, dialogue instead of monologue, transforming unjust structures rather than helping people adapt to them."[34] Fremont Regier, an MCC worker in Zaire/Congo between 1965 to 1976, finished his doctoral work on Freire in the same year at the same institution, the University of Wisconsin–Madison, and employed the same Freirean analysis. He wrote: "The 'developed' have interpreted for the 'underdeveloped' what their condition was and what ought to be done about it. The result has been, in some cases, a rather abstract 'top-downing.' In other cases, it has been an almost conscious domination."[35] Both Ewert and Regier invoked Freire as a response to the shortcomings of the Green Revolution of the 1960s. In this way, each used Freire's work to answer Robert S. Kreider's question in a 1970 MCC fiftieth anniversary essay: "Dare the peaceable Mennonites become the outspoken Mennonites?"[36] Some MCC workers answered in the affirmative, demanding a theory of development *with* instead of *for* the oppressed.

Throughout the 1970s, inspired by Freire's writings, many more Mennonites within MCC also become outspoken advocates for a more liberative and humanizing form of development. This was evident in the Development Monograph Series that the agency began publishing in 1975.[37] The first publication in the series was *Thoughts on Development*, by Edgar Stoesz, at the time MCC's director of food production and rural development. Stoesz argued for the centring of people and social justice in development. Referencing Freire's idea of conscientization, Stoesz wrote,

> People are what development is all about. . . . People are at the same time the principal participants and the objects of the exercise. Development is the process by which people are awakened to opportunities within their reach (concientizacion [*sic*]). Development is people with an increasing control over their environment and destiny; people with dignity and a sense of self-worth. Development is freedom and wholeness and justice. It is people living in the full realization of their God-given potential. It is a liberated spirit. It is people with rising expectations. Development is the new word for peace.[38]

In a revised edition published two years later, Stoesz, then MCC's associate executive secretary for overseas services, similarly described development as "the conscientization process by which people are awakened to opportunities within their reach. Development is people with an increased control over their destiny. Development is freedom, wholeness and justice."[39] Stoesz's description of development in his revised monograph was a move closer to a Freirean understanding. He removed references to "self-reliance" and

"economic growth" and asserted a "people's struggle in which the poor and oppressed are the active participants and beneficiaries."[40]

In 1975, while working on his dissertation, Merrill Ewert also wrote a monograph for the series. In *Humanization and Development*, he argued that the failure of development work was ideological in nature and employed Freire explicitly to argue that "people are not *passive objects* that need to be pushed or manipulated toward modernization but instead are *active subjects* of their own development."[41] Like Stoesz, Ewert defined development as humanization extending beyond economic growth to full self-realization. For Ewert, development involved "equipping individuals to better deal with their world, ending exploitative social relationships, providing equal access to the productive resources of a society, returning the focus of decision making to the people themselves and creating a situation in which the benefits of socio-economic transformation are available to all."[42] These two monographs essentially distill Freire's work in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* for a wider MCC development constituency.[43] As Alain Epp Weaver writes, "the 1970s saw the start of a multi-decade creative ferment and rethinking within MCC about the nature of service."[44] According to Weaver, the Development Monograph Series demonstrated a "bottom-up mode of development while critiquing the optimism that drove modernization theory."[45]

In addition to the writings of Stoesz and Ewert, most of the other monographs in the series also reveal Freire's influence, often through direct reference. In 1976, Luann Martin published *Women and Development*, which drew upon Ewert's Freirean definition of development and asked, "How can a world faced with famine ignore women, the producers, processors and vendors of food for much of the world?"[46] The next year, Doris Janzen Longacre wrote *Nutrition and Development*, referencing Ewert's definition of development and drawing heavily on Freire to argue for better nutrition education. Longacre quotes nutritionist Therese Drummond, who had employed Freire's ideas in Brazil: "Nutrition education then is a part of 'conscientization' and the awakening of critical awareness among people who have many deprivations, including food and nutrient deprivations."[47] That year, Nancy Heisey also published *Integrating Education and Development*, drawing on Stoesz's definition of development and emphasizing social justice and peoples' struggle. Heisey noted the revolutionary nature of Freire's pedagogy: "Education must not be remedial, a tool to improve upon current societal situations, but rather revolutionary, designed to overthrow unjust societal structures."[48] However, she also recognized that "totally accepting his theory would place the author in the untenable position

of advocating overthrow of the educational structures that now exist."[49] In 1978, Tim Lind shifted focus from the previous monographs with his *Biblical Obedience and Development*, describing a biblical theology of development. Lind argued that definitions of development needed to be grounded in what *is*, not in an ideal of what is hoped for. In providing a biblical basis for understanding development, Lind argued "true change is not technology, wealth, progress or even 'more human' structures and systems. Rather it is a change from obedience to false gods to obedience to Yahweh, from the developmentalism view of change as growth and progress to the biblical view of change as a reorientation in interhuman relationships."[50] Furthermore, Lind argued, "liberation is not biblical liberation if it leads or steers people directly to conformity to the world, to materialism, . . . integration into the world of having, into the existing system."[51] Instead of accepting materialism and the status quo of developmentalism, "the church should move to a more critical prophetic involvement in development programs."[52] Lind also maintained that "programs of imposition"—that is, top-down development—must be replaced by identification with the "victims of development."[53] Juanita Leonard's 1978 monograph *Family Life Education* also used Ewert's Freirean definition of development and noted that the National Christian Council of Kenya in 1975–76 employed Freire's work in its education programs.[54] Gordon Hunsberger's 1982 monograph *Land and Development* maintained that regarding land distribution, "The poor usually realize they are oppressed and are being unjustly treated, but are sometimes unable to identify the factors that are causing their problems."[55] Recognizing the revolutionary potential of "conscientization", Hunsberger asked, "Are we sowing the seeds of violent revolution if we help in identifying these factors?" He concluded: "That may depend on how it is done."[56]

By the mid-1980s, Freire's method was receiving wide recognition and support in MCC and elsewhere. It was "one of those bright sparks in an otherwise bleak contemporary world," according to a 1984 article in *International Review of Education*.[57] In a 1981 essay on Freire, Ewert wrote that Freire "has clearly focused attention on several critical issues. He exploded the myth of neutral education by exposing the assumptions underlying instructional practice."[58] Recognizing the, often unstated, radical nature of Freire's work, Ewert concluded, "His educational strategy amounts to a call for revolution."[59] By the time the final monograph in MCC's series was published in 1987,[60] "service [had come] to be viewed as an exercise in 'connecting peoples,' building connections across lines of national, cultural, religious, racial, and class difference."[61] Freire's ideas were clearly a central influence in this shift.

The following year, Mark Nord, then Mennonite Central Committee director in Bangladesh, sent a memo titled "The Limits of Development" advocating a Freirean interpretation. Connecting Freire to the prophetic Judeo-Christian tradition, Nord wrote, "If the social system is the problem, then only transformation of that social system will answer the need. Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is a seminal work on this topic. (As are Leviticus 25, Deuteronomy 15, Nehemiah 5, Isaiah 58, and Amos 5)." He noted that "the key ingredients to Freire's strategy are organizing the poor, conscientizing the poor, and empowering the poor. Much of the work of NGOs [non-governmental organizations] in Bangladesh (including some of MCC's) is in this tradition. In fact, seminars on Freire's work figure prominently in the early development of many of the major NGOs in Bangladesh."[62]

In the late 1970s and 1980s, MCC was bridging the "major gap" identified by seminarian Daniel Schipani "between Freire's liberation theology and our Anabaptist approach."[63] Schipani found a resonance in Freire's critique of the "present order of things," including churches (or NGOs) that are on the side of power, and the Anabaptist view of the church and the kingdom of God that are at odds with it.[64] By the 1980s, Freire's influence within MCC was growing and spanned South America, Africa, North America, and Asia, causing a shift in development thinking. Given this expansive influence, it is hardly surprising that an undergraduate student at Columbia Bible College in 1999 would write a paper titled "A Survey of Similarities Between Paulo Freire and the Mennonite Central Committee" and find that "the similarities are startling and undeniable."[65]

During the 1970s and 1980s many North American Mennonites travelling abroad for development work—work being increasingly influenced by Freirean ideas—returned and participated in "development education" at home.[66] Kreider, in his essay describing MCC as an educational institution in 1970, wrote that "for many young people the MCC service experience is the most intense educational experience of a lifetime."[67] In a 1995 *Conrad Grebel Review* essay, Ronald J. R. Mathies traced the evolution of MCC as an educational institution for its workers ("MCCers") as one that "moves from (a) 'teaching over there,' to (b) 'learning while serving,' through (c) a 'sense of mission' upon returning home, to (d) a stance of ongoing, interdependent learning and teaching in a global society."[68] These "four not mutually exclusive conceptual 'generations'"[69] began in the post–Second World War period, with the first stage represented by the Teachers Abroad Program that peaked in numbers in the late 1960s and early 1970s.[70] Mathies describes "a good deal of critical self-evaluation concerning the efficacy of formal education" in the

first generation. "The cynical 1970s . . . brought substantial disillusionment concerning the system. The inherited colonial patterns were often inappropriate; more African content, practical skills, critical and creative thinking, in-service and non-formal education were called for."[71] In the 1980s a stance of "listening and learning" was mandated for MCCers "as a requirement for service," and Mathies asserts that for the second conceptual generation a Freirean pedagogical understanding provided the foundation for "a transformative learning experience that comes from the process of conscientization or critical awareness."[72] The third generation of MCCers engaged in "reverse mission," focused on "education for transformation at home."[73] The fourth generation, beginning in the 1990s, focused on "mutually transformative education" between local constituencies and global actors.[74]

As MCC workers increasingly took a learning stance and were transformed by their experience overseas, this affected the way they viewed their home life in North America. Historian David A. Hollinger calls this the "Protestant boomerang."[75] The return of missionaries (and/or their children) to North America "was laden with an indictment of 'cultural imperialism and arrogant paternalism' and a plea for a more genuinely universal human community."[76] Hollinger notes that "ecumenical" and "mainline" missionaries, whether "Methodists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Disciples of Christ, Dutch Reformed, Episcopalians, Northern Baptists, Quakers, several Lutheran denominations, and a smattering of smaller Anabaptist and Reformed confessions," often returned home in the 1960s with a different outlook.[77] Their missionary work generated "in some individuals a more critical assessment of the home culture than in others."[78] Much like their missionary counterparts, Mennonites serving with MCC, influenced by Freirean ideas of solidarity and treating the oppressed as subjects instead of objects, returned home to find themselves with new ideas that challenged the status quo. These Freirean themes were precursors to what was named by three scholars on MCC's seventy-fifth anniversary in 1995 as the fourth generation of development, based on "seeking justice with others."[79] Many of those who returned to North America from abroad brought with them a broadened horizon of solidarity and a desire to seek justice with others.

Freire and the Recollected Perspectives of MCC Participants

The influence of Freire on MCC workers became apparent in a number of interviews I conducted in recent years as part of an

ongoing research project on MCC's role in transmitting agricultural knowledge.[80] The interviewees presented here represent a spectrum of MCC workers, from those who explicitly mentioned Freire to those who do not agree with many of his ideas. Eric Rempel, whose story opens this paper, arrived in Mochudi in 1968 after four years of agricultural education at the University of Manitoba, where "chemical farming" was "progressive," so naturally Rempel brought agrochemicals with him to Botswana. Similarly, MCC worker Alf Epp (born in 1952) brought a backpack sprayer to La Paz, Bolivia, from Saskatchewan in the mid-1970s. Further illustrating the pervasive shift to agrochemicals in North America, David M. Neufeld (born in 1955) remembered his father burning down his livestock barn around 1970 because, after adopting commercial fertilizer, he no longer needed manure. Neufeld characterized his father's attitude towards this profound agricultural shift as "we got a better way now."[81] Yet he would reject this purportedly "better way" after serving with MCC in South Africa from 1982 to 1991. While in South Africa he learned of older and more traditional ways to farm and realized "growing food . . . it's a political act," an act of resistance against dominant agricultural, economic, and development forces. In apartheid South Africa he learned to ask, "How do you, in a gentle but very persistent way, resist what's happening on the global or macro scale of political manipulation?" In South Africa they were "trying to subdue those people [Africans], so that they can keep benefiting from the labours of the poor and powerless." Neufeld responded by refusing "to participate in macro agriculture: I'm going to do my darndest to see if I can grow really healthy food and then provide that to people who know me." On Neufeld's return to Manitoba he began an organic farm, a way for him to "resist gently" the changes occurring in agriculture in North America. Neufeld recalled how in South Africa the introduction of hybrid corn seeds in 1983 yielded corn three times the size of the traditional corn grown, but also how the inability of farmers to save this seed for themselves led to a loss of their autonomy. Tim Lind of MCC stressed to Neufeld the need to listen and learn and that "we were not sent there by God to teach—we were sent there by God to listen and perhaps influence North America by what we learned." The Freirean themes of liberating not only the oppressed but oppressor and the need for North Americans to change their perspective from that of top-down helpers to being in solidarity are echoed in Neufeld's description and experience. For Neufeld, farming was not a neutral act; it was political, in how it was done and who it was done for. In South Africa, agricultural development involved solidarity with the oppressed in resisting the apartheid regime.

At the time that Neufeld was shifting to organic farming methods in the 1990s, conservation agriculture was gaining traction in some areas of development work. Alden Braul (born in 1964) worked in Bolivia from 1993 to 2002 and became a strong advocate of conservation agriculture. In my interview with Braul, he emphasized the importance of his mentor, Roland Bunch, on his ideas of development and, in particular, Bunch's influential 1982 book about smallholder farmers, *Two Ears of Corn*.[82] Bunch wrote that "superior to just 'learning by doing' is learning by doing and then reflecting on the doing."[83] In a note to this assertion, Bunch states, "Paulo Freire, of course, has written a good deal about this process."[84] In a more recent book advocating for green manure/cover crop applications, Bunch argues that "many people working in agricultural development strongly believe that farmers should participate in their own agricultural development. I would go one step further than that. I believe that farmers should become the protagonists, the architects or, as Paulo Freire wrote, the authors of their own development."[85] In our interview, Braul emphasized relationships, dialogue, and the need to organize field days through which local farmers could share information horizontally as "the answers really lie within the people there." These are all Freirean-influenced ideas. Braul notes that his work, promoting green manure/cover crops, was not "super successful. There were some growers that were using it but they were pretty reliant on their use of agro-chemicals, fertilizers, and different inputs. Unfortunately, they [the Bolivian farmers he worked with] don't have an organic market which growers in Canada now do, so they could never really capitalize on it." Although Braul's encouragement of conservation agriculture was not largely successful, like Neufeld, he returned home with an interest in "sustainable farming practices."[86]

Braul's comment on the lack of a consumer market in Bolivia for organics emphasizes a point made to me by Harold Dueck (born in 1948), an implicit critic of the Freirean shift. For Dueck and others, the Freirean understanding is naïvely lacking a form of developmental realism. For Dueck, the "pure commercial marketplace" is the solution. A self-described "cynic," he stressed to me that his work in the occupied territories in Palestine in the 1980s was political in all senses, dealing largely with officials and handshakes. The most important thing his farming upbringing contributed to his MCC assignment his understanding and appreciation for the marketplace and marketing—in disjunction with Freire's criticism of the current globalized market system. Despite Dueck's stress on markets there are still some Freirean notions in his narration. He explained how Palestinians under occupation are alienated from the

land and live in fear, and how this limits their capacity for action. His role was one of solidarity and "supporting people to stay on the land." He noted that "working with them involved the politics of saying, 'Go and do it.' Because the Israelis forever tried to control them and get them not to do it." For Freire, the discovery of subjective agency by the oppressed and their overcoming of internalized fear are key shifts in conscientization. But unlike Freire, who is critical of globalized markets, Dueck stressed the need for access to these markets: "There was nothing [to teach] on the growing side. They [Palestinian farmers] were enormously productive. They knew how to do this. They knew they could have taught us how to do agriculture. There was nothing at the agricultural technical level." Dueck worked to bring Palestinian-grown fruit and vegetables to European consumer markets noting, "There's something remarkably nonviolent about wanting to move a tomato across a hostile border."[87]

Art DeFehr (born in 1942), emphasized how his business experience and training at Harvard Business School informed his approach to development in Bangladesh, where he served as MCC director from 1972 to 1974. DeFehr described how he began his term by conducting an analysis of the Bangladeshi diet, finding it nutritionally quite unbalanced. This research guided DeFehr and his team to develop an agricultural program focused on "nutritional self-sufficiency" as well as maximizing crop yields.[88] When it came time to conduct trials of new crops, higher in protein, vitamins, and minerals, DeFehr, in conversation with his staff and their Bangladeshi counterparts, decided in a Freirean sense that "we will do no experimental farms, we will do all of our testing with farmers. And the idea being that it's not only an agricultural-scientific issue we have to solve." Acknowledging that cultural and social issues would be implicated in changing crops, DeFehr proposed a solution that would have lead farmers in communities pilot alternatives. Availability of water for irrigation during the dry season was also an issue hindering agricultural production during the dry season. DeFehr spoke about the years after he left Bangladesh and the development of the rower pump in the late 1970s by an MCC agricultural engineer, George Klassen,[89] and the competing treadle pump designed by a Norwegian engineer working in northern Bangladesh for a Lutheran NGO.[90] Both pumps were sold to farmers, and their production proved commercially viable; in 1984, International Development Enterprises (iDE) began a project to market the pumps, soon seeing sales of tens of thousands of pumps annually. Founded in 1982, DeFehr was president of iDE Canada in its early years. As he describes it, iDE takes an approach to development "where the

person participates more actively and uses it as their income investment, not just as charity."[91]

In a devotional meditation titled "And Some Fell on Rocky Soil," presented to a meeting of MEDA (Mennonite Economic Development Associates) in late 1974, DeFehr offered a Freirean perspective on the social and cultural subjectivity and agency of farmers. DeFehr wrote, "The Western world relates to the developing nations in terms of knowledge and technology. Presumably our approach must go beyond this. . . . Fundamental problems can only be resolved with the very active participation of the people themselves."[92] At the same time, for DeFehr such an approach must be combined with strong rational leadership. As he put it,

> When I look at under-development . . . I said, if we really studied it, I wonder how much of this so-called "poverty" and "the people have no choice" are the fact that people can't organize themselves and things that are not that difficult, but it requires certain rationality, sometimes communal cooperation, sometimes some wisdom at the top.

In my interviews, both DeFehr and Dueck criticized other NGOs for their seemingly naïve work in their regions and viewed commerce and globalization as helpful and important for development, but also nuanced their positions with certain implicit Freirean influences. For Freire, capitalism and globalization are both hindrances to true development as they inherently uphold systems of oppression. For DeFehr and Dueck, globalized markets present an opportunity to solve societal issues on a large scale.

Conclusion

A report in 1974 from the Botswana Christian Council described Rempel's toolcarrier as "little short of revolutionary, and when the Mennonite volunteer who has developed the machinery returns home next year after six years in Botswana it will be with a tangible achievement to his credit."[93] The toolcarrier, abandoned only a few years later, was clearly not revolutionary in any Freirean sense, but Rempel was aware of the need to work *with* people, not only *for* them, early on. This is apparent in his report on a 1972 conference he attended in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) on the role of the church in rural development: "There was much talk about the perennial problem: discovering the real need underneath the apparent need. An African (well educated) said: 'If you want to know what the real needs are, don't ask us. To find them, you yourself must be in discussion with the people at the bottom.'"[94] For Freire, those at the

bottom know their own liberation, or as MCC education coordinator Lynn Longenecker put it in a 2014 essay, directly referencing *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, "education should be participatory, centered on dialogue around questions that are relevant to participants' lives, through which they discover a new understanding of their reality."[95]

As Weaver notes, for folks like Rempel and other MCC workers, there were ironic colonial legacies in their development and educational work since "countries which sought to chart new paths of independence from former colonial powers [were] also turning to the educational systems inherited [from] the colonial powers as vital tools for freedom and development."[96] Freire's ideas have been important for attempts to shift away from top-down colonial forms of development. He sparked a revolution in how development and education are understood and helped shift the way that MCC workers engaged in their overseas work. Even those who do not share Freire's critique and are critical of the turn that his work helped inaugurate still appear to have been influenced by his ideas. In this way, Freire's ideas have had a considerable influence on those working with MCC since the 1970s, both in the way they conceptualize the work they are doing overseas, as well as how they view society when they have returned.

Notes

1 This paper was initially presented on Oct. 1, 2021, at the online conference "MCC at 100: Mennonites, Service, and the Humanitarian Impulse," hosted by the Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg. Thank you to the Dr. Royden Loewen and the rest of the Transnational Flows of Agricultural Knowledge research team for comments on the paper, and to the peer reviewers who offered thoughtful criticism and suggestions.

2 Eric Rempel, interview with the author, June 29, 2020.

3 Paul Starkey, *Perfected Yet Rejected: Animal-Drawn Wheeled Toolcarriers; A Cautionary Tale of Development* (Braunschweig: Vieweg, 1988). "Wheeled toolcarriers are multipurpose implements that can be used for plowing, seeding, weeding and transport. Many have been designed as ride-on implements using a 'bullock-tractor' analogy." Ibid., 9.

4 Starkey, *Perfected Yet Rejected*, 40. Italics in the original.

5 Starkey, *Perfected Yet Rejected*, 40.

6 Although Rempel only read Freire after leaving Botswana in 1974, at a conference in Salisbury in 1972 where he represented the Botswana Christian Conference, a nun from the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur in Bulawayo presented a report drawing directly and heavily on Freire's work. See Sister Mary McLeish, "Needs in the Rural Areas, a Challenge to the Church," in *The Role of the Church in Rural Development: Report on the Proceedings and*

Recommendations of the Working Conference (Salisbury, Rhodesia, August 27–30, 1972), ed. G. A. Smith and A. Jolson (New York: Agricultural Missions, Inc., 1972), 67–70, https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED078262.pdf.

7 Starkey, *Perfected Yet Rejected*, 45.

8 Starkey, *Perfected Yet Rejected*, 45.

9 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 50th anniversary ed. (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).

10 Peter J. Dyck, "A Theology of Service," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 44, no. 3 (July 1970): 269.

11 Dyck, "Theology of Service," 276.

12 Andrew J. Kirkendall, *Paulo Freire and the Cold War Politics of Literacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 17.

13 Kirkendall, *Paulo Freire*, 17.

14 Kirkendall, *Paulo Freire*, 26–27.

15 Kirkendall, *Paulo Freire*, 33–48.

16 Kirkendall, *Paulo Freire*, 53.

17 Kirkendall, *Paulo Freire*, 57.

18 Kirkendall, *Paulo Freire*, 62–64.

19 Kirkendall, *Paulo Freire*, 89.

20 Kirkendall, *Paulo Freire*, 92–93.

21 David A. Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad: How Missionaries Tried to Change the World but Changed America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 81, 81–83.

22 Kirkendall, *Paulo Freire*, 94–96.

23 "The oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom." This fear of freedom is referenced often throughout the text. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 47.

24 Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 48.

25 See chapters 2 and 3 of Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. In a footnote in the preface the translator defines conscientization as "learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality," 35n1.

26 Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 79–86.

27 Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 72.

28 Daniel Immerwahr, *Thinking Small: The United States and the Lure of Community Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 4.

29 Immerwahr, *Thinking Smal*l, 171.

30 Immerwahr, *Thinking Small*, 171.

31 Immerwahr, *Thinking Small*, 178.

32 D. Merrill Ewert, "Africa: A Transformative Place," in *Mennonites and Post-Colonial African Studies*, ed. John M. Janzen, Harold F. Miller, and John C. Yoder (London: Routledge, 2021), 210.

33 David Merrill Ewert, "Freire's Concept of Critical Consciousness and Social Structure in Rural Zaire" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin–Madison), 7–8.

34 Ewert, "Freire's Concept," 12.

35 Fremont Alvin Regier, "Ownership: Participation in Planning, Administration, and Operation of a Rural Development Project, Nyanga, Zaire" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1977).

36 Robert Kreider, "The Impact of MCC Service on American Mennonites," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 44, no. 3 (July 1970): 255.

[37] For the following argument I am greatly indebted to Alain Epp Weaver, *Service and the Ministry of Reconciliation: A Missiological History of Mennonite Central Committee* (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 2020), 58–60, 101–8.

[38] Edgar Stoesz, *Thoughts on Development*, Development Monograph Series (Akron, PA: Mennonite Central Committee, 1975), 3.

[39] Edgar Stoesz, *Thoughts on Development*, rev. ed., Development Monograph Series (Akron, PA: Mennonite Central Committee, 1977), 4.

[40] Stoesz, *Thoughts on Development*, rev. ed., 3.

[41] Merrill Ewert, *Humanization and Development*, Development Monograph Series (Akron, PA: Mennonite Central Committee, 1975), 1.

[42] Ewert, *Humanization and Development*, 24.

[43] While the Freirean influence is clear, the revolutionary nature of Freire's view is not expressed in these monographs. Throughout *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire mentions Mao, Lenin, and Castro, among others. Perhaps Freire anticipated such a denatured appropriation of his ideas. "This admittedly tentative work is for radicals," he wrote in his preface. However, he continued, "I am certain that Christians and Marxists, though they may disagree with me in part or in whole, will continue reading to the end." Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 37.

[44] Weaver, *Service and Ministry*, 58.

[45] Weaver, *Service and Ministry*, 103.

[46] Luann Habegger Martin, *Women and Development*, Development Monograph Series (Akron, PA: Mennonite Central Committee, 1976), 5.

[47] Doris Janzen Longacre, *Nutrition and Development*, Development Monograph Series (Akron, PA: Mennonite Central Committee, 1977), 13, quoting from Therese Drummond, *Using the Method of Paulo Freire in Nutrition Education an Experimental Plan for Community Action in Northeast Brazil*, Cornell University International Nutrition Monograph Series 3 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975).

[48] Nancy Heisey, *Integrating Education and Development*, Development Monograph Series (Akron: Mennonite Central Committee, 1977), 20.

[49] Heisey, *Integrating Education*, 22.

[50] Tim Lind, *Biblical Obedience and Development*, Development Monograph Series (Akron, PA: Mennonite Central Committee, 1978), 2.

[51] Lind, *Biblical Obedience and Development*, 5–6.

[52] Lind, *Biblical Obedience and Development*, 24.

[53] Lind, *Biblical Obedience and Development*, 25.

[54] Juanita Leonard, *Family Life Education*, Development Monograph Series (Akron, PA: Mennonite Central Committee, 1978), ii. In Kenya, throughout the 1980s, Freirean views and explicit references were expressed in debates about the pastoralists that MCC was working with. At a meeting on what to do for the pastoral people of north Kenya, Peter Grill, who was influenced by Freire's work noted: "Some sociologists and anthropologists had their ethnographic studies to show what the problems were. The agriculturalists brought along improved technology as their contribution. Economists brought along improved market incentives as the cure-all. Despite all of the development jargon concerning grass-roots involvement the people most conspicuous by their absence were the pastoralists themselves." Peter Grill, untitled reflection, Kenya, Oct. 1983, 1–2, MCC U.S. Archives.

[55] Gordon Hunsberger, *Land and Development*, Development Monograph Series (Akron, PA: Mennonite Central Committee, 1982), 23.

[56] Hunsberger, *Land and Development*, 23.
[57] Yusuf Kassam and Patrick Healey, "Adult Education in a Rapidly Changing World," *International Review of Education* 30, no. 3 (1984): 240.
[58] D. Merrill Ewert, "Proverbs, Parables and Metaphors: Applying Freire's Concept of Codification to Africa," *Convergence* 14, no. 1 (1981): 32.
[59] Ewert, "Proverbs, Parables and Metaphors," 32. There is clearly a tension between Freire's radical critique and its appropriation as a reform tool. For a critique from the "left" within the Mennonite community, see Mark Neufeld, "Critical Theory and Christian Service: Knowledge and Action in Situations of Social Conflict," *Conrad Grebel Review* 6, no. 3 (1988): 249–61.
[60] Catherine R. Mumaw, *Technology, Women and Change*, Development Monograph Series (Akron, PA: Mennonite Central Committee, 1987). This monograph drew on Ewert's Freirean definition of development and described appropriate forms of technology transfer focused on women.
[61] Weaver, *Service and Ministry*, 108. One may add, as the monographs attest, service had come to involve bridging gender differences as well.
[62] Mark Nord to MCC Bangladesh Expats, "The Limits of Development," Apr. 6, 1988, 3, Departmental Office (Correspondence) Files 1988, "MI Bangladesh," microfilm roll #126, MCC U.S. Archives.
[63] Daniel S. Schipani, "Conscientization and Creativity: A Reinterpretation of Paulo Freire, Focused on His Epistemological and Theological Foundations with Implications for Christian Education Theory" (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1981), 96.
[64] Schipani, "Conscientization and Creativity," 167.
[65] Lisa-Anne Dyck, "A Survey of Similarities Between Paulo Freire and the Mennonite Central Committee" (undergraduate paper, Columbia Bible College, 1999), 1.
[66] I am again indebted to Weaver for pointing out the essays referenced here. *Service and Ministry*, 58n34.
[67] Kreider, "Impact of MCC Service," 248. Similarly echoed in a more recent reflection by Edgar Stoesz, "MCC: In Giving, We Have Received," *Mennonite World Review*, Apr. 9, 2020, https://anabaptistworld.org/mcc%e2%80%88in-giving-we-have-received/.
[68] Ronald J. R. Mathies, "Service as (Trans)formation: The Mennonite Central Committee as Educational Institution," *Conrad Grebel Review* 13, no. 2 (1995): 117.
[69] Mathies, "Service as (Trans)formation," 118.
[70] Mathies, "Service as (Trans)formation," 120.
[71] Mathies, "Service as (Trans)formation," 121.
[72] Mathies, "Service as (Trans)formation," 123–24.
[73] Mathies, "Service as (Trans)formation," 126.
[74] Mathies, "Service as (Trans)formation," 130.
[75] See Hollinger, "Introduction: The Protestant Boomerang," in *Protestants Abroad*.
[76] Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad*, 2.
[77] Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad*, 10.
[78] Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad*, 288–89.
[79] The authors, following the work of David Korten, describe the previous three generations as the emergency relief model, the integrated community model, and the greater local networking model. See Kristen A. Grace, D. Merrill

Ewert, and Paul R. Eberts, "MCCers and Evangelicals: Perspectives of Development," *Conrad Grebel Review* 13, no. 3 (1995): 368.

[80] Interviews were conducted for the project "Transnational Flows of Agricultural Knowledge," led by Dr. Royden Loewen, professor emeritus at the University of Winnipeg.

[81] David M. Neufeld, interview with the author, Nov. 5, 2018.

[82] Roland Bunch, *Two Ears of Corn: A Guide to People-Centered Agricultural Improvement* (Oklahoma City: World Neighbors, 1982). Bunch mentions conscientization twice (pp. 13, 23). More recently, Bunch has described Freire as "the great Brazilian prophet of *concientización*." Roland Bunch, "Case Studies of Regenerative Agriculture," Oct. 2017, rev. Apr. 2020, 14, https://www.csuchico.edu/regenerativeagriculture/_assets/documents/case-studies-roland-bunch.pdf.

[83] Bunch, *Two Ears of Corn*, 197.

[84] Bunch, *Two Ears of Corn*, 246n1.

[85] Roland Bunch, *Restoring the Soil: A Guide for Using Green Manure/Cover Crops to Improve the Food Security for Smallholder Farmers* (Winnipeg: Canadian Foodgrains Bank, 2012), 19.

[86] Alden Braul, interview with the author, June 12, 2020.

[87] Harold Dueck, interview with the author, Nov. 7, 2020.

[88] Art DeFehr, interview with the author, Aug. 14, 2020.

[89] John Longhurst and George Klassen, "The Advent of the Rower Pump: Creating New Irrigation Technology in Bangladesh," Mennonite Central Committee, 2020, https://mcc.org/centennial/100-stories/advent-rower-pump.

[90] Paul Polak, "How IDE Installed 1.3 Million Treadle Pumps in Bangladesh by Activating the Private Sector: The Practical Steps," annex to *Poverty Alleviation as a Business: The Market Creation Approach to Development*, by Urs Heierli (Berne: SDC, Swiss Agency for Development and Co-Operation, 2000), 101–8.

[91] DeFehr, interview.

[92] Art DeFehr, "And Some Fell on Rocky Soil," devotional presented to a MEDA (Mennonite Economic Development Associates) convention on Oct. 6, 1974, https://artdefehr.com/documents/bl004-and-some-fell-on-rocky-soil-19761006-ev.pdf.

[93] Jim Flood, "Mochudi Farmers Brigade" (unpublished report, 1974), Review of Development Projects Sponsored by the Botswana Christian Council—1968 to 1972 (website), 1, https://bccprojects19711973.files.wordpress.com/2019/04/13.-mochudi-farmers-brigade-paginated.pdf.

[94] Flood, "Mochudi Farmers Brigade," 7.

[95] Lynn Longenecker, "Education for Transformation," *Intersections: MCC Theory & Practice Quarterly* 2, no. 3 (Summer 2014): 1. There is further discussion of Freire in Monica Shank's "Literature Circles as Transformative Classroom Pedagogy," in the same issue, p. 4.

[96] Weaver, *Service and Ministry*, 36.