'*So Ha' Wie Daut Emma Jedohne*,' (That is How We Have Always Done It):
The Collective Memory and Cultural Identity Of The Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia

By

Karen Warkentin

A Thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate Studies
Of the University of Manitoba
In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of History
Joint Master's Program
University of Manitoba/University of Winnipeg
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

*****

COPYRIGHT PERMISSION

'*So Ha' Wie Daut Emma Jedohne*,' (That is How We Have Always Done It):
The Collective Memory and Cultural Identity
Of The Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia

By

Karen Warkentin

A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree

of

Master of Arts

ABSTRACT

The Canadian-descendent Old Colony Mennonites first arrived in Bolivia from Mexico in 1967. A Low-German speaking, ethno-religious group who live in isolated, rural and conservative colonies they are easily distinguished by their cultural markers. Distinctive clothing and abstinence from automobiles and electricity are easily identified outward characteristics of the Old Colony Mennonite identity. More importantly, their communities promote a collective identity. Their collective identity has been shaped by a series of migrations through several countries, including Russia, Canada and Mexico. Through these migrations they have formed an identity as a pilgrim people who call nowhere home. They pride themselves as a people who resist assimilation to modern ways and the suffering such resistance entails. These Mennonites attempt to preserve their communities in isolation from the wider society and in doing so have built an ethnic border that informs their identity and their conceptions of 'outsiders'.

As some of the first historical research done in the Low German language among the Old Colony Mennonite communities in Bolivia this thesis builds on previous work by anthropologists and sociologists on social boundaries and internal structure. In this thesis I look at which memories are retold and how they are used to define their identity as an anti-modern people, and vice versa, how this identity filters their memories. I also look to see what it is that the Old Colony Mennonites recall of their migration history: the years before arriving in Bolivia in the 1960s, the pioneer years and succeeding decades of life in Bolivia. In addition, I examine how they have used their history to define their worlds and how their views on technology, language, and clothing are articulated by historical accounts. In short the Old Colony Mennonites have an oral history, often

remembered in religious terms, and they have used it to define their identity; and vice versa, this identity filters their memories.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Before starting this research I knew very little about the Old Colony Mennonites and in the process of writing this thesis I have come to learn, and appreciate, a great deal about these isolated people. This has been a fascinating journey as I was given an opportunity to learn history 'first-hand', through interviews with the Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia.

This research would not have been possible without the guidance and support of my advisor, Professor Royden Loewen. He first introduced me to the idea of writing a thesis on the Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia, and then, including me on the research team he put together on 'Horse-and-Buggy Mennonites', he made it possible for me to spend two months in Bolivia to conduct field research. He also patiently provided suggestions for further research and edited revision after revision to produce this thesis.

I would also like to thank the generous financial support of the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation Inc., for its fellowship, which made it possible for me to concentrate on this research.

I also need to thank the Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia. Dozens of families opened their doors to me when I showed up on their doorstep, usually unannounced. To them I was an 'outsider' but they nevertheless made me feel welcome. They opened their homes and not only provided interviews, but food, accommodation and transportation as well. Despite their pursuit for isolation, they took me, a stranger, into their homes.

Thank you, as well, to my family and friends for your patience and support.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION:

A Tradition of Non-conformity

The Canadian-descendent, Low German-speaking Old Colony Mennonites of Mexico first settled in isolated, rural colonies in south central Bolivia in 1967. Since their arrival in Bolivia many have maintained their ties of citizenship to 'modern' Canada but have raised curious looks and condescending remarks from Bolivians and other groups of Mennonites for their 'backward' ways. They comprise a continually expanding conservative, anti-modern ethno-religious group that look and sound surprisingly out of place in the Latin American culture of Bolivia. Yet this is their very identity; they are a migratory people out of place in any nation state. Identity, to use the definition from the *Encyclopaedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, refers to the "qualities of sameness, in that persons may associate themselves, or be associated by others, with groups or categories on the basis of some salient common feature, e.g. 'ethnic identity'"[1] and this identity is shaped over time. The Old Colony Mennonites can trace their history through four, and in some cases five or six, countries in three different continents over the past 150 years. Their migrations have allowed them to pursue isolation from national societies and governments; this is a strategy they have come to believe allows them to maintain their simple, agrarian Anabaptist worlds. Their most visible features are simple, dark clothing for men and women, the use of the Low German language and overt

[1] Reginald Byron, "Identity", *Encyclopaedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, Internet, Accessed on 31 March 2010, http://www.bookrags.com/tandf/identity-13-tf/

cultural traits such as an abstinence from electricity, an insistence on steel wheels on their tractors, and horse and buggy as a primary mode of transportation.

A less visible feature of their worlds is the memories they have developed and stories of the past they tell. Collective memory, which is the basis of a cultural identity, is a group's selective remembrances of the past that appear stable, gives a group its peculiarity and sense of self. Jan Assmann goes further and defines cultural memory, a collective memory that is rooted in a fixed point in history, as the "collective concept for all knowledge that directs behaviour and experience in the interactive framework of a society."[2] Collective memory then gives a group its identity and also informs its culture. It can also give a group its ethnicity, that is, a 'sense of peoplehood'[3], to use Timothy Smith's term. Therefore for the Old Colony Mennonites, not only their migrations, but the way they have remembered their migrations, have impacted the formation of their ethnic identity. Part of this formation occurs during their migratory years, therefore I also look to see what it is that the Old Colony Mennonites recall of their migration history: the years before arriving in Bolivia in the 1960s; the pioneer years; and the succeeding decades of life in Bolivia. In addition, I examine how they have used their history to define their worlds and how their views on technology, language, and clothing are articulated by historical accounts. In short the Old Colony Mennonites have an oral history, often remembered in religious terms, and it has defined their identity; and vice versa, this identity filters their memories. Not only their migrations, but also the way they have remembered them, have shaped their identity.

---

[2] Jan Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity" *New German Critique* 65 (1995), 126.

[3] Timothy Smith, "Religion and Ethnicity in America" *The American Historical Review* 83, no. 5 (Dec 1978): 1155

By undertaking an oral history account of specific colonies among the Old Colony Mennonite communities in Bolivia, I see which memories have been passed down over time, how these relate to their religious identity as *'Christenvolk'* (People of Christ)[4] who live separate from 'the world' and how they intersect with their everyday worlds, specifically as they relate to their identities as men and as women. The thesis, thus, includes a critical examination of an historical source, the memories of an ethno-religious, agrarian people.

In this chapter I look at the writings of immigration historians and the role immigration has on the formation of a cultural and ethnic identity. Then I look at what Mennonite historians have written about the Old Colony Mennonites and how their identity was formed. Because my research is based on interviews conducted in Bolivia the last section of the chapter will review oral historiography.

IMMIGRATION

Historians in the English language academy have looked at numerous aspects of immigration, especially in countries such as Canada and the United States that have seen considerable growth through immigrants. Migration historians have looked at the role of global economics in shaping migration patterns, the manner in which immigrants have integrated into a new country, and the process by which an ethnic identity has been created after migration. Although this thesis focuses on a group of migrants who do not correspond to these more typical migration accounts – the Old Colony Mennonites

[4] Lorenzo Cañás Bottos, *Old Colony Mennonites in Argentina and Bolivia: Nation Making, Religious Conflict and Imagination of the Future* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2008), 42.

seemed to be motivated as much by religious concern as economic concern and they pointedly do not seek cultural integration in new countries – migration history can help shed light on the Old Colony Mennonites. The idea that an ethnic identity is dynamic adds primarily to the last category by looking at what role migration has had on the formation of the Old Colony Mennonite identity.

The Old Colony Mennonites seem to defy immigration theories, particularly those that apply to assimilation, acculturation and symbolic ethnicity. Yet, they also do not adhere completely to the idea of transplantation.[5] The Old Colony Mennonites have portrayed themselves as holding onto practices and beliefs that their parents and grandparents also practiced and believed. They have depicted themselves as a static group, a people that have not changed, especially those that have migrated primarily to resist change. However, an ethnic identity is not static and migration, even for the purpose of resisting change, will impact a group's identity. Kathleen Neils Conzen et. al. argue that an ethnic identity is not a primordial concept, as Clifford Geertz saw it, but rather one that is constantly in a "process of construction or invention which incorporates, adapts and amplifies pre-existing communal solidarities, cultural attributes, and historical

[5] The Assimilation and Acculturation Theory saw immigrants being cut off from their cultural roots, acculturating to the host nation and eventually losing their distinguishing cultural characteristics. This theory is notable seen in Oscar Handlin's *The Uprooted*. The Old Colony Mennonites do not fit into this theory because they made considerable effort to maintain their isolation from the Bolivian society and not to acculturate to mainstream society.

The Symbolic Ethnicity Theory, introduced by Herbert Gans in his "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America", mainly focuses on the third generation of immigrants. Gans argues that the third generation identifies itself with descriptive, or symbolic, traits of a culture, but does not hold itself to ascriptive traits or a culture's values and social roles. This theory is not applicable to the Old Colony Mennonites because their culture continues to inform their values and social roles past the third generation.

The Transplantation Theory argues that immigrants were able to keep their culture intact after their migration and a historian to use this theory is Dirk Hoerder in his *Creating Societies: Immigrants Lives in Canada*. Later historians argued immigrant cultures shift and change with the migration and adjust to the host nation, which also applies to the Old Colony Mennonites.

memories."[6] Conzen's findings reflect earlier work by Werner Sollors who looks at the fluidity and the multiplicity of factors that influenced the formation of an ethnic identity. Sollors suggests that ethnicity is based on "widely shared, though intensely debated, collective fictions that are continually reinvented."[7] He writes historians need to look at the historical conditions, and the dynamic interaction with other groups, that influenced the formation of these 'collective fictions'. The work of Conzen and Sollors is useful because it provides a theoretical approach for examining the historical process of the 'static' identity of the Old Colony Mennonites.

For these historians, who base their research primarily on Canadian and American history, ethnicity is most often seen as a worldview that unifies people under certain symbols while they become a part of the new host's national identity. The Old Colony Mennonites are unified under many symbols, but their ethno-religious identity is an all-encompassing identity that prohibits allegiance to any nationality. The Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia are a migrant people, who have lived in many countries, including Canada, but they cannot be labelled with a symbolic ethnicity because their ethnicity continues to inform their everyday lives, values and social roles. The entire lifestyle of the Old Colony Mennonites has pulled them out of mainstream culture and compels them to adhere to a culture that rejects modernity, specifically modern technology that could compromise their isolation. Cultural items such as clothing, steel wheels and horse and buggies are tangible features that continue to separate them from their surroundings.

---

[6] Kathleen Neils Conzen, David A. Gerber, Ewa Morawska, George E. Pozzetta and Rudolph J. Vecoli., "The Invention of Ethnicity: A Perspective from the USA" *Journal of American Ethnic History* 12, no. 1 (Fall 1992): 5.

[7] Werner Sollors, "Introduction: The Invention of Ethnicity" in *The Invention of Ethnicity*, Editor Werner Sollors (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), xi.

However, despite its focus on urban immigrants, Conzen's work can be useful for my study. The Old Colony Mennonites are a migratory people and each migration impacts their identity. The impact of migration has gone so far as to become part of the Mennonite identity. As will be discussed later in the chapter, the Old Colony Mennonites interpret their migrations through their religious understandings and have defined themselves as a pilgrim people. This identity allows them to settle in the land, without creating any national allegiances.

Migration is a multifaceted process and some studies have looked at global patterns and the intertwining causes that motivate individuals, families and entire communities to migrate. Dirk Hoerder's *Cultures in Contact* looks at the complex process of migration, which includes economics, labour, world systems, social, human capital and emotional aspects. He argues against research that focuses simply on cross-border migration, since these borders are arbitrary and do not reflect cultural differences.[8] He also argues that immigrants have multiple goals, seeking both material security as well as emotional, spiritual and intellectual security.[9] Significantly the Old Colony Mennonites named certain reasons for migration and I ask whether the various motives that promoted the exodus were filtered through the definition of their ethnic identity.

As part of their ethnic identity the Old Colony Mennonites have described themselves as a 'folk'; a separate group of people scattered through many nations; a diaspora that retains a collective ethnic identity. Robin Cohen's *Global Diasporas* examination of the history of 'diaspora' features the role of memory and a real or

[8] Dirk Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact: World Migrations in the Second Millennium* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 14.

[9] Ibid., 15.

imagined homeland.[10] Cohen endeavours to categorize different diasporas, including those consisting of victims, labourers and cultural maintainers. The latter category helps define the Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia, who have used their memories of migrations to define their identity as a group separate from its host society and as a pilgrim people, looking towards a homeland that is not in this world.

The Old Colony Mennonites do not belong to an 'Atlanto-centric' historiography and their purposes for migration go beyond the economic 'push-pull' factor. At the root of their migrations was a religiously-informed collective memory and a religiously-defined notion of a homeland, an afterlife in heaven achievable through separation from old homelands in Canada and Mexico. The Old Colony Mennonites are a diasporic people, isolating themselves from the Bolivian society through the construction of anti-modern markers because they see themselves as '*Christenvolk*' *(*People of Christ*)*. Like other groups their ethnic identity is formed through a 'process of construction or invention'.[11]

MENNONITE HISTORIOGRAPHY

The Old Colony Mennonites' identity is based on their history as northern European Mennonites and was formed during the religious reformation of the sixteenth century. After migrating to West Prussia they acquired the Low German (*Plautdietsch*) language, and with the migration to Russia in the late eighteenth century they defined themselves as an ethnic group for economic and religious reasons. After their migration to Canada in the 1870s the Old Colony Mennonite Church was established as a separate,

[10] Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 23-24.

[11] Conzen, 4

conservative Mennonite denomination. These 'Low German Mennonites', forming an Old Colony Mennonite identity through a series of transnational migrations, comprise the subject of this thesis.

Several historians have looked at the period when the Old Colony Mennonites lived in Russia and the impact their self-imposed isolation had on the formation of their theology and identity. In the book *In Search of Utopia*, E.K. Francis argues that the Old Colony Mennonites left Prussia in search of an opportunity to establish a utopian community. Francis writes that Russia's Colonial Law, first enacted in 1764, provided the right context for the Old Colony Mennonites since the Law offered isolation for immigrant groups and protected their homogeneity.[12] Leo Driedger, like Francis, saw the migration to Russia as a search for an ideal homeland. Driedger argues that the Mennonite identity was formed through conflict, since in northern Europe they were subjected to war and revolution due to their beliefs in non-resistance at a time of rising nationalism. Migration to Russia provided a way out of the conflict, but it also set them apart as a sacred group. Driedger writes that "This setting apart produces strangers who seek secure homes."[13] The Mennonite migration to Russia added physical attributes to a religiously-defined community who sought utopian homes. Their 'Two-Kingdom' world view[14], combined with the formation of Germanic diaspora identity and their search for a

[12] E.K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba* (Glenco, IL: The Free Press, 1955), 20.

[13] Leo Driedger, *Mennonite Identity in Conflict*, Studies in Religion and Society 19 (Lewiston, NW: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), 30.

[14] Steve Nolt writes about the 'Two-Kingdom' worldview held by Mennonites. He argues that this worldview, previously a religious view of the separation of church and state, changed in Russia to include cultural and tangible attributes such as language and food. These Mennonites "saw themselves as part of a German diaspora in an uncultured and religiously degenerate land." Steve Nolt, "A 'Two-Kingdom' People in a World of Multiple Identities: Religion, Ethnicity and American Mennonites" *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 73, No. 3 (July 1999): 494.

utopian community, was part of the historical process of the formation of the Mennonite identity.

In the later part of the nineteenth century pressure to conform came from the Russian government as it reconsidered the privilege of military exemption. In response to this threat the idea of emigration first began to circulate, specifically in the Chortitza Colony and its daughter colonies Bergthal and Fürstenland. In 1873 this group sent delegates to Canada[15] and between 1874 and 1880 seven thousand Mennonites, some of the most conservative in Russia, immigrated to southern Manitoba.[16] Here, as Royden Loewen, argues, conservative Mennonites 'transplanted' certain aspects of their way of life from Russia, despite entering the modern world of a marketplace economy. Several aspects that were transplanted and became defining characteristics of the Old Colony Mennonite identity included the household as the primary economic unit.[17] Other characteristics that became more central to the Old Colony Mennonite identity were higher fertility rates, which affected gender relations, and land.[18]

The Mennonite sojourn in Canada was brief but important. The 1874 immigrants represented three groups – the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites, Bergthal Colony Mennonites, and conservative Mennonites from Fürstenland and Chortitza; the latter group settled on the West Reserve in Manitoba under the leadership of Johann Wiebe,

---

[15] Walter Schmiedehaus, *Die Altkolonier-Mennoniten in Mexico* (Winnipeg, MB: CMBC Publications, 1982) xii.

[16] 3,000 came from the Bergthaler Colony, under the leadership of Elder Gerhard Wiebe. 3,000 came from Fuerstenlaender and Chortitza Colony, under the leadership of Elder Johann Wiebe and 1,000 came from the Kleine Gemeinde

[17] Royden Loewen, "'The Children, the Cows, My Dear Man and My Sister': The Transplanted Lives of Mennonite Farm Women, 1874-1900" *Canadian Historical Review* 73, no. 8 (1992): 348.

[18] Ibid., 351.

who saw himself as a reformer and wanted to recover the vision of the New Testament Church, [19] while the others settled in the East Reserve.[20] Because those on the West Reserve were mainly from Chortitza, the original colony in Russia, these Mennonites were called the 'Old Colony' Mennonites. Changes in Canadian laws on education had a very significant impact on the more conservative Mennonites in Canada. Historian Frank Epp writes that during the First World War the provincial governments saw the public school system as the means to "inculcate patriotic sentiments and to foster Canadian nationalism."[21] In 1916 Manitoba passed the Compulsory School Attendance legislation and all public schools saw languages other than English severely curtailed.[22] While most Mennonite districts eventually complied with the new laws, the Old Colony Mennonites in the West Reserve opted for emigration rather than Canadianization.[23]

The Old Colony Mennonites chose to migrate to Mexico, as it allowed them to live in isolation and the means to preserve their ethno-religious identity. The country had recently recovered from a revolution and needed farmers to boost the economy. Mexico agreed to provide the Old Colony Mennonites the same privileges[24] which had been given in Russia and Canada, and included freedom from military service, oaths and

---

[19] Peter D. Zacharias, "Biography of Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), Rosengart" in *Old Colony Mennonites in Canada: 1875-2000*, editor Delbert F. Plett (Steinbach, MB: Crossway Publications Inc., 2001), 46.

[20] John J. Friesen, "Reinländer Mennonite Gemeinde", in *Old Colony Mennonites in Canada: 1875-2000*, editor Delbert F. Plett (Steinbach, MB: Crossway Publications Inc., 2001.) 3

[21] Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada 1920-1940: A People's Struggle for Survival* (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1982), 97.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] See Appendix 2 for the List of Privileges the Mennonites received in Bolivia

public schools.[25] The first group of Mennonites arrived in the state of Chihuahua, Mexico in 1922.

Over time several sociologists have studied the Old Colony Mennonite society in Mexico. Their research examines several aspects of the community's identity and the historical process that formed their collective memory. In 1945 Winfield Fretz, a Canadian sociologist, wrote about the structure of the colonies and their interactions with Mexicans. Fretz found that social structures were based on forms already created in Russia and that the Old Colony Mennonites continued to pursue cultural isolation. They made little effort to teach Mexicans their methods of agriculture and they did not learn Spanish.[26] These formations and perceptions of other ethnic groups continued to inform the Old Colony Mennonite communities in Bolivia.

Two decades later Calvin Wall Redekop, another sociologist from the United States, looks at some aspects of the Old Colony Mennonite identity and argues that these Mennonites believed they were God's chosen people, living under God's blessing so long as they lived in isolation.[27] The *Gemeinde*, the church community and the group by which the Old Colony Mennonites would attain salvation, was the very centre of Mennonite society. Helping to explain Redekop's observations is Donald Kraybill, a sociologist of the Old Order Mennonite and the Amish societies in the United States, parallel groups to the Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia. He writes that the *Gemeinde* is a 'redemptive community'; a community rooted in a place, experienced through daily

[25] Schmiedehaus, 26.

[26] J. Winfield Fretz, *Mennonite Colonization in Mexico* (Akron, PN: The Mennonite Central Committee, 1945), 33.

[27] Calvin Wall Redekop, *The Old Colony Mennonites: Dilemmas of Ethnic Minority Life*, (Baltimore, MA: The John Hopkins Press, 1969). 35-36.

interactions and encompasses an entire way of life.[28] This belief of communal salvation through the *Gemeinde* is evident in the memories of the Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia.

Other scholars have emphasized the strict regulations that keep the Mexican Old Colony Mennonite colonies intact. In his book *They Sought a Country*, Harry Leanord Sawatsky looks at the pressure to change in the Mexican communities as the Old Colony Mennonites dealt with a new environment and a newly emerging Mexican nationalism. Specifically, Sawatsky describes decisions made rejecting technological innovations. He describes these decisions as a "…source of slavish traditionalism and doctrinal rigidity in church and society [which]…ensures against the seeking and implementation of innovation for its own sake."[29] He writes that in "the *Altkolonier* [German term for Old Colony] philosophy, conventions once decided upon by the *Bruderschaft* [brotherhood] and sealed with prayer constitutes a covenant with God which can never be altered."[30]

Sawatsky argues that these pressures to modernize and land shortage became the primary reasons for the first emigrations from Mexico. Social tension between different social groups caused frustration with some groups accusing Colony leadership of failure for acquiring new land.[31] Further tension between groups who insisted on orthodoxy in language and technology also contributed to the exodus.[32] The first group to emigrate

---

[28] Donald B. Kraybill and James P. Hurd, *Horse-and-Buggy Mennonites: Hoofbeats of humility in a Postmodern World* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 26,

[29] Harry Leonard Sawatzky, *They Sought a Country: Mennonite Colonization in Mexico* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971), 300.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Harry Leonard Sawatsky, *They Sought a Country*, 296.

[32] Ibid., 299.

left for British Honduras in 1958 and less than ten years later the first group immigrated to Bolivia in 1967. By August 1968, 950 people had immigrated to Bolivia where they purchased 100,000 acres of uncleared scrub land at $3 per acre.[33] While Sawatsky looks at sources of tension and threats to the Old Colony Mennonite identity he does not examine the underlying collective memory that informs their identity and how this identity contributed to their migrations.

Some historians have emphasized how migrations have served to preserve the conservative Mennonite traditions and their ethnic identity. Royden Loewen explains that a fundamental facet of the Old Colony Mennonite faith was the idea of being 'pilgrims and strangers' in the land.[34] Their history of migrations became a story in their 'cultural repertoire'[35] and shaped their self-perceptions as Mennonites. Their suffering, which defined the early settlement years, became part of their mythology of martyrdom and sacrifice. Also part of this mythology is the belief that migration would preserve the 'Old Colony ways' as people called by God, ways that were often called the 'old ways'. Yet, as Loewen writes, reinvention also became part of the migration process. In the process of seeking a country that would allow the Old Colony Mennonites to retain their 'old ways' the Old Colony Mennonites had to define what constituted the 'old ways'.[36]

To understand the extent to which these Mennonites have isolated themselves in Bolivia, a brief overview of the period between 1952 and 2009 needs to be examined.

---

[33] Redekop, *The Old Colony Mennonites,* 24.

[34] Royden Loewen, "To the Ends of the Earth: An Introduction to the Conservative Low German Mennonites in the Americas" *Mennonite Quarterly Review* (July 2008): 431.

[35] Ibid., 433.

[36] Ibid., 443.

The Old Colony Mennonites arrived in Bolivia fifteen years after the 1952 Revolution, which had replaced the governing elite with the socialist party, *Movimiento al Nacionalista Revolucionario* (MNR). The MNR party wanted to nationalize the entire country and incorporate the countryside into the political system.[37] Between 1952 and 1956 several reforms were passed in order to achieve this goal, including: agrarian reform which confiscated large tracts of land and redistributed them among the peasants.[38] The reforms also included universal suffrage and the nationalizing of tin mines.[39] In 1954 the first Mennonites, relatively progressive Mennonites from Fernheim and Menno Colonies in Paraguay, moved to Bolivia, primarily for economic reasons. They settled in Tres Palmas, twenty-five kilometres northeast of the city of Santa Cruz. In the ensuing years several other settlements were started by Paraguayan, Canadian and Mexican Mennonite immigrants from various Mennonite churches.[40] These Mennonites were the first to establish a relationship with the Bolivian government, a foundation on which the Old Colony Mennonites have built.

In 1964, three years before the Old Colony Mennonites from Mexico arrived in Bolivia, the MNR government was overthrown and was replaced by the Bolivian army. In the next eighteen years, before a return to civilian rule, the military enforced harsh policies, but continued the nationalizing project begun by the MNR party. It was in this context, of nationalizing and colonizing the country, in which the Old Colony

---

[37] Deborah Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America: The Rise of Indigenous Movements and the Postliberal Challenge* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 156.

[38] Waltraud Queiser Morales, *Bolivia: Land of Struggle* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, Inc., 1992), 79.

[39] Cañás Bottos, , 59.

[40] Harold S. Bender, Martin W. Friesen, Menno Ediger, Isbrand Hiebert and Gerald Mumaw, "Bolivia", *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1987, internet, accessed 23 February 2010, http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/B665.html

Mennonites arrived in Bolivia. For their part in colonizing the Bolivian Chaco region the Old Colony Mennonites were granted the same privileges previously received in Mexico, Canada and Russia.[41]

In the decades following the Old Colony Mennonite immigration Bolivia went through a turbulent period; by 1985, with the return of the MNR party, the country had an external debt of $4 billion USD and inflation, peaking at 25,000% in 1984. To deal with the financial crisis the government recruited several economists from the United States to kick start the *Nueva Politica Económica*,[42] a 'neoliberalism project'.[43] Besides currency devaluation, liberalizing imports and foreign investments, reducing government regulations on the market and reducing government expenditures, the project also pushed for increased democratic participation.[44] One of the results of the neoliberalism project was that in the following two decades, the large indigenous population began to organize, eventually culminating in the election of Evo Morales, and his party *Moviemento al Sociaolismo* (MAS), in 2005.

It was in this context that the Old Colony Mennonites arrived in Bolivia to establish their isolated colonies. Despite the turbulence during this period it is noteworthy that the Mennonites rarely recalled anything that related to national events or crises. Only the more recent years, and Morales' presidency, were mentioned during the

---

[41] See Appendix 2 for the list of privileges.

[42] Harry Sanabria, "Consolidating States, Restructuring Economies, and Confronting Workers and Peasants: The Antinomies of Bolivian Neoliberalism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, Number 3 (July 1999): 537.

[43] James Petras and Henry Veltmey, *Social movements and state power: Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador* (Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2005), 183.

[44] Ibid.

interviews. The Old Colony Mennonites had managed to carve out tracts of land that remained relatively insulated from the national context.

Several scholars have focused their research on the colonies in Bolivia and analysed the factors that have contributed to the continued existence of the isolated communities. Graduate student, James Walter Lanning, conducted field research in 1971 in the newly established Mennonite colonies in Bolivia; at the time Mennonites were still in process of migrating from Mexico. Lanning's sociological research concluded that mutual assistance was essential for colonization and that religion provided the Old Colony Mennonites a means for common solidarity.[45] Lanning also argued that land influenced the decision to migrate and writes that "farming is relevant to the basic religious tenets of the Old Colony which they see as a necessary fulfillment of their faith."[46] In her book, *Outside the World*, anthropologist Anna Sophia Hedberg examines what motivates the Mennonites to stay within the isolated colonies and argues that these Mennonites stay through both negative and positive social control. Ministers in the Colony Church pass rules on to the members and thereby social control is determined. As a negative pressure sanctions are meted out by ministers against those who do not conform to the *Ordnung*, the set of rules lived out by ministers who interpret the Bible. Since non-conformity threatens the stability of the community excommunication is the most extreme form of negative pressure and isolates the transgressor from the close-knit community. Positive pressure is evidenced by teachings meant to raise an individual's

[45] James Walter Lanning, "The Old Colony Mennonites of Bolivia", Master's Thesis at Texas A&M University (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1982), iv.

[46] Ibid., 44.

desire to be part of the collective salvation, to see their lives as good and the safest route to reach salvation.[47]

Another anthropologist, Lorenzo Cañás Bottos, has examined how these Bolivian Mennonites remain a cohesive group. He emphasizes how symbols in the closed Old Colony communities have changed according to their contexts, especially in times of migration. Teachings such as 'separation of the world', 'baptism of adults', and 'church of believers' may have retained outward similarities through time, but their social relevance have changed through application in changing contexts.[48] Over time group membership has changed from voluntary to compulsory, while belief in their separation from the world has changed from religious to political. Cañás Bottos writes that the Bolivian Mennonites' relationship with the state is relatively close as they have benefitted from legislation that pushed for nationalizing and colonizing certain areas in the country. The Chaco region, where the first Mennonites settled, was populated by indigenous people that the state considered unsympathetic to the national state. Mennonite settlements in the Chaco legitimized state authority in the area and influenced the indigenous population to develop an agricultural economy.[49]

Lanning, Hedberg and Cañás Bottos, and the other scholars of Old Colony Mennonite society, have provided a rich resource to Old Colony Mennonite studies. Many of them look at social formations and the social controls that help maintain the Old Colony Mennonite identity as an isolated community. My thesis will build on these ideas,

---

[47] Anna Sofia Hedberg, *Outside the World: Cohesion and Deviation among Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia (*Stockholm, Sweden: Elanders Gotab, 2007), 140.

[48] Lorenzo Cañás Bottos, *Old Colony Mennonites in Argentina and Bolivia: Nation Making, Religious Conflict and Imagination of the Future* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2008), 17.

[49] Ibid., 61-62.

but argue more specifically that their ethno-religious identity is reflected in their memories of migration and settlement.

RESISTING MODERNITY

A key feature of the Old Colony Mennonite identity is their rejection of modern society and its accompanying technology. The Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia filter their remembrances through their rejection of modern technology because of the fear that it would become a gateway to the 'outside' society and become a threat to their religious community. Therefore, they try to hold back the clock and maintain the life of their ancestors to maintain their religious community.

Philosophers and sociologists, among others, have tried to define modernity. Several key characteristics that apply to this study of Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia include 1) the emphasis on reason and rationality over religion; 2) the shift to the individual as the subject and away from God and community; 3) the increased use of science and technology to control the environment, and the subsequent view of history as progress. Anthony Cascardi writes about the modern emphasis on rationality and argues that although individuals do not live unattached from other influences "the modern subject [i.e. individual] not only legitimizes itself but 'rationalizes' the status of its own beginning by transforming the difference between history and theory into the self-justifying, homogenous, and ostensibly coherent narratives of human progress, self-improvement, and growth."[50] The second characteristic of modernity replaces God and King with the individual as the main subject. Craig Calhoun argues that in modern times

[50] Ibid., 70.

the individual has replaced the community as the main form of social organization.[51] Timothy Luke provides a critical approach to modern theories about historical development, the third characteristic of modernity, and argues that modernity's sense of time is not a literal concept, but one that relates to the development of its core, that is, the constellation of western countries, which are defined as metropolitan and having "an absolute faith in technology."[52]

These characteristics of modernity provide a framework for examining the Old Colony Mennonite communities in Bolivia. Their memories reflect their rejection of a faith in technology. This rejection is primarily connected to the other two characteristics of modernity, the role of religion in the communities and the continued authority of the Church over the individual. The Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia are community-oriented and under religious authority, which is shared by several other Anabaptist groups, specifically groups such as the Old Order Mennonites and the Amish.

Studies on such groups provide useful tools for the study in Old Colony Mennonite culture. Donald Kraybill and Carl Bowman provide extensive research on four ultra-conservative Anabaptist groups – Hutterites, Old Order Mennonites, Amish and Brethren – in their book *On the Backroad to Heaven*. All four groups are selective about technology because they fear it might "contaminate their values or disrupt the

---

[51] Craig Calhoun, "The Infrastructure of Modernity: Indirect Social Relationships, Information Technology and Social Integration" in *Social Change and Modernity*, Editors Hans Haferkamp and Neil J. Smelser (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 215.

[52] Timothy W. Luke, *Social Theory and Modernity: Critique, Dissent, and Revolution* (Newberry Park, CA: SAGE Publications, 1990), 233.

solidarity of their communities."[53] In each of these communities the Church holds the principal authority and enforces the *Ordnung*, the religious set of rules for behaviour. The *Ordnung* "embodies the tradition of the community and regulates, among other things, gender roles, dress codes, the use of technology, worship practices, recreational activities, and relations with the outside world."[54] The *Ordnung* can command such authority because of Old Order's culture of *Gelassenheit*, a "yielding and surrendering to a higher authority."[55] All four groups also adhere to the principle of nonconformity, a principle grounded in the belief that baptized persons need to stand apart from the larger community.[56] These findings are echoed by other works on the Amish, including works by Steven Reschly[57] and John Hostetler.[58] The Old Colony Mennonites share many characteristics with such groups as the Old Order Mennonites and Amish. Their nonconformity to larger society, the *Ordnung* and *Gelassenheit,* continue to define their communities and impact their recollections of past experiences and these recollections of past experiences can be examined through oral history.

ORAL HISTORY

Oral history was used for this thesis because it is a means to examine the Old Colony Mennonites' memories and identity. The interview, the site of oral history, is also the site of an individual's negotiation with his or her own memories and the

[53] Donald B. Kraybill and Carl F. Bowman, *On the Backroad to Heaven: Old Order Hutterites, Mennonites, Amish, and Brethren* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 10.

[54] Ibid., 180.

[55] Ibid., 181.

[56] Ibid, 185.

[57] Steven D. Reschly, *The Amish on the Iowa Prairie, 1840-1910* (Baltimore, MA: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 159.

[58] John Hostetler, "Old Order Amish Survival" *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 51 (1977): 357-359.

collective memory. The profession of oral history only saw considerable growth in the 1960's; however over the past several decades the term has remained while its goals and methods have changed. In the 1960's oral historians were mainly concerned that the growing use of telephones by 'men of affairs' would lead to the discontinuance of personal diaries or memoirs.[59] For these historians recorded interviews would add to the records and would become another document in the archives. Oral history was also hailed as the history directly from the people, without the historian as an intermediary.[60] Later in the 1970's, however, oral history was impacted by the larger transformation in the field of history and oral historians began to recognize the subjectivity of the interviews and the dialectic nature of the interview itself. Ronald Grele, for example, argues that in the process of the interview the role of the oral historian should not be ignored and the interviewee should be considered "a key creator and interpreter of history."[61]

In keeping with Grele's admonishments the context of the interviews used for this thesis needs to be explained. The interviews were conducted in the spring and summer of 2009 in seven colonies in south-east Bolivia and were done in the Low German dialect (*Plautdietsch*) of the Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia. The colonies selected were Manitoba, California, Belice, Oriente, Valle Nuevo, Valle Esperanza and Neuland.[62] These seven colonies are located in the department of Santa Cruz and most of them are

---

[59] Ronald J. Grele, "Oral History as Evidence" in *Handbook of Oral History*, editors Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers and Rebecca Sharpless (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2006), 44.

[60] Ronald J. Grele, "Reflections on the Practice of Oral History: Retrieving what we can from an earlier critique" *Suomen Ansropologi: Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society* 32, No. 4 (Winter 2007): 12.

[61] Ibid., 13

[62] See Appendix 3 for a map of the colonies.

considered to be part of the arid Chaco region. Most of the colonies are also located along the Trans Continental highway, a major artery connecting the city of Santa Cruz to Brazil. All seven colonies originated at one point from the colonies in the Chihuahua region in Mexico, of which all trace their history back to Canada. The four original colonies in Bolivia were established in 1967 and are located close to the city of Santa Cruz, and most of the colonies used for this research are considered the daughter colonies of these original colonies. Three colonies, however, are not from the original four colonies and these are Belice, Valle Esperanza and Neuland. Most of the members of Belice emigrated from the colony Shipyard in Belize, Valle Esperanza was established directly from the colonies in the Chihuahua region in Mexico and Neuland is a new colony formed by Mennonites from the Rio Verde colony in east Paraguay; however Belice and Neuland also trace their migration through the Chihuahua colonies in Mexico.

The interviews were conducted in the seven colonies during a two month visit and I used a set of pre-determined questions.[63] A special effort was made to locate the viewpoints of leaders and lay people, men and women, and also members of different ages -- young people, middle age adults and the elderly. Due to the conservative nature of the colonies that forbids recording equipment, the oral history documentation was only extensive field notes taken by me, the interviewer, immediately following each interview. While all interviews were in the Low German dialect, the notes were written in English. The dynamics of the individual interviews varied, but it should be remembered that I was seen as an 'outsider'; someone who was not part of the Old Colony Mennonite community. Often I had to explain why I understood Low German, but was not fluent in

[63] See Appendix 1

speaking the language. My answer - that my parents had left the colonies in Paraguay to live in Winnipeg, Manitoba where I grew up in the city - seemed to imply that my parents had left the protective fold of the colony to live with the worldly vices found in the city. The impact of these impressions on the interviews cannot be known, but needs to be considered as to the extent the Old Colony Mennonites would share their memories with me.

As a Master's student I was attracted to the Old Colony Mennonites precisely because of their outward peculiarities – the horse and buggy, their distinctive dress and their isolated colonies. Although many have left the numerous colonies in Bolivia over the years, I focused primarily on those who remained in the Old Colony Mennonite communities. As an outsider I wanted to understand what their collective memory was and how it informed their identity and their motivation to remain resistant to modernization. Although I tried to remain objective during my research no interview or oral history is entirely impartial for as Grele writes, "What is admissible as evidence depends on the gatekeepers and the gatekeepers, with their values, attitudes and power change over time."[64]

Beyond considering the subjectivity of the interviews another consideration that needs to be noted is the role of memory, the foundation of oral history. In recent years oral historians have adopted theories from psychology as they relate to memory. Alice M. Hoffman, an oral historian and her husband, Howard S. Hoffman, a psychologist, found that in the course of a person's life only some experiences were retained as memories.

---

[64] Ronald J. Grele, "Oral History as Evidence", *Handbook of Oral History,* editors Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers and Rebecca Sharpless, (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2006), 43.

The Hoffmans found there were three key factors that turned an experience into a memory: the degree to which it was emotional, whether it was a turning point in the person's life, and the extent to which it was unique.[65] Alice Hoffman's interviews with her husband on his experiences in World War II found that memory was not reliable for remembering exact dates, but that her husband's memories could not be dislodged or changed. From this the Hoffmans concluded that "we have a subset of memory, here called autobiographical memory, which is so permanent and so largely immutable that it is best described as *archival*."[66] These are the memories that are rehearsed and can be recalled at any time. They become memories that define the individual and become their identity over time. However, this 'archival' memory, which defines an individual, could also be adjusted to accommodate other factors.

The remembrances of the Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia reflect not only individual 'archival memories' but also a collective ethnic identity. Alessandro Portelli's seminal piece "The Death of Luigi Trastulli" argues that discrepancies in the oral historical accounts reveal a great deal about the individuals, their values and the collective memory of the group. In the interviews the death of Trastulli, a demonstrating steel worker, became symbolic for the workers who remembered that he was killed in 1953 when thousands were laid off from the local steel factory, instead of remembering that he was killed during the anti-NATO demonstrations in 1949. Moving Trastulli's date of death provided psychological healing, by providing agency to the workers who

---

[65] Alice M. Hoffman and Howard S. Hoffman, "Memory Theory: Personal and Social" in *Handbook of Oral History*, Editors Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers and Rebecca Sharpless (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2006), 278.

[66] Alice M. Hoffman and Howard S. Hoffman, "Reliability and Validity in Oral History: The Case of Memory" in *Memory and History: Essays on Recalling and Interpreting Experience*, Editors, Jaclyn Jeffrey and Glenace Edwall (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1994), 125.

had felt humiliated and disempowered with the loss of their jobs.[67] Many of these workers were recalling memories according to a collective memory, a unifying force which allows individuals to become public beings.[68] Collective memory is linked to the past, but it also attempts to assure future remembering of the same event[69] and it is thus also a resource for the present, influencing individuals as they retell their stories in interviews. Ronald Grele argues that "Collective memories focus on the ethno and national construction of identity as the universally salient history and thus…become open to myths of a special people with a special mission."[70] Myths are created by memories and myths are part of the vision of the past, the making of a people's collective memory and influencing them in the present.

Jan Assmann's "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity" can provide further useful tools to understand the underlying collective memory of the Old Colony Mennonites. Assmann differentiates between different forms of collective memory. He view communicative memory, one form of collective memory, as everyday communication as individuals relate to others within the group and one of its key features is its limited temporal horizon.[71] Cultural memory, on the other hand, distances itself from the everyday and has six characteristics[72] of which the concretion of identity and

---

[67] Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli, and other stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), 26.

[68] Kendall R. Phillips, *Framing Public Memory* (Tuscaloosa, AB: The University of Alabama Press, 2004), 4.

[69] Edward S. Casey, "Public Memory in Place and Time" in *Framing Public Memory,* Kendall R. Phillips, editor (Tuscaloosa, AB: The University of Alabama Press, 2004), 17.

[70] Grele, "Oral History as Evidence": 86.

[71] Jan Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity" *New German Critique* 65 (1995): 127.

[72] Six characteristics: concretion of identity, capacity to reconstruct, formation, organization, obligation and reflexivity. Ibid

obligation seem especially useful in this study of the memories of the Old Colony Mennonites and will be discussed further in chapter three and four. It is a definition of collective memory from the earlier thinking of Maurice Halbwachs. Halbwachs argues that individual memory, "in order to corroborate and make precise and even to cover the gaps in its remembrances, relies upon, relocates itself within, momentarily merges with, the collective memory."[73] Halbwachs' understanding of collective memories is focused on groups, such school groups or work groups and families, who define themselves according to many different identities with different collective memories over their lifetime. Assmann broadens the understanding of collective memory and incorporates it as part of the cultural identity, which defines larger groups of people and is passed down to the next generation, which is the focus of this thesis.

Another feature of collective memory, which is useful in interpreting Old Colony Mennonites, is a group's heritage. Despite the private nature of an oral history interview, which were usually conducted in the interviewee's homes, the stories told by the interviewees reflect a collective memory, of which heritage is a part. David Lowenthal writes that heritage may be a wilful misreading of the past as it "reshapes a past made easy to embrace."[74] Memories that form a heritage will remember what they feel they need to remember, while forgetting the rest. An aspect of collective memory that needs to be examined then is the role of myths in individual accounts of their own history. Raphael Samuel and Paul Thomson see oral history as a useful tool to understand underlying myths and show the extent to which public myths have been internalized by

[73] Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, translated by Francis J. Ditter, Jr. and Vida Yazdi Ditter (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1980), 51.

[74] David Lowenthal, "Fabricating Heritage" *History and Memory* 10, Issue 1 (Spring/Summer 1998): 11.

individuals. Samuel and Thomson write, "for minorities, for the less powerful, and most of all for the excluded, collective memory and myth are often still more salient: constantly resorted to both in reinforcing a sense of self and also a source of strategies for survival."[75] For these groups myths provide agency in the making of their own history.

These oral historians have provided a rich theoretical resource for this analysis on the Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia. The role of memory, the subjective nature of the interview, the overarching narrative of the collective memory and the influence of cultural myths have to be taken into account in the interviews conducted in Bolivia. Yet, using these tools provided by oral historians, the collective identity of the Bolivian Old Colony Mennonites can be examined through their memories and how they filter their memories through their collective identity. Oral history can be beneficial to understanding a group's 'self' perceptions and its underlying framework for inner dynamics and outward relations. The Old Colony Mennonites do not have a common practice of writing their own history. Therefore oral history can provide a rich, additional resource in these complex and isolated communities. More importantly oral history can provide understanding to the communities' identity, for as Elizabeth Tonkin writes, "memory [is]…the site of the social practices that make us".[76] Through interviews the underlying narrative of the Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia can be examined. For the Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia, who see their past as their present, oral history is a means to see the historical process that shaped their identity and, vice versa, the means to examine the identity that filtered their memories.

---

[75] Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson, editors, *The Myths We Live By* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 19.

[76] Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating our Pasts: The Social Construction of our History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 12.

CONCLUSION

The Old Colony Mennonites have defined their identity as a group that has resisted modernization and is rooted in their past. By listening to their memories I was able to see the historical process that shaped their cultural identity, and therefore how their memories shaped the way they viewed themselves and how their ethnic identity was formed, for as Conzen et. al. write, ethnicity is a process of construction, constantly changing as it adapts to new environments.[77] Also, in reverse, their memories are a means of understanding the present Old Colony Mennonites and their self identity. Memory is selective and as Alice Hoffman writes, those memories that are continually recalled form the archival memory and are the basis of the identity. Also, collective memory forms the basis of a cultural identity, as Jan Assmann argues. Therefore, for the Old Colony Mennonite the repeated memories of land, religion, family, struggle and their views of 'outsiders' showed how the Old Colony Mennonite's saw themselves in the present and they wanted to portray themselves to me, an 'outsider'.

The following three chapters examine the memories of the interviewees and what they reveal about the Old Colony Mennonite identity in Bolivia. The Bolivian Mennonites are a migratory people and many of the interviewees have lived in several colonies. Chapter two looks at the memories of prior colonies and examines the common themes discussed by the interviewees. These common tenets form the archival memory of the Old Colony Mennonites and inform the concept of their collective identity. The third chapter examines a central tenet to the Old Colony identity, which is that of 'struggle'. The Bolivian Mennonites belong to a larger Anabaptist group that sees

[77] Conzen, 5

'struggle' and 'sacrifice' as part of their calling as '*Christenvolk*' *(*People of Christ*)*. The third chapter looks at the memories the Old Colony Mennonites shared when recalling past events and the emphasis on their struggles. The fourth and final chapter discusses the role of the ethnic border in the formation of the Old Colony Mennonite identity. A collective identity is not solely based on the inner formation of a group, but also on interactions with 'outsiders'. This chapter examines memories of these interactions and how they reflect the Old Colony Mennonites' collective identity.

The Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia are a distinct minority in Bolivia. They see their history through memories of migration from Russia, through Canada and Mexico. They have settled in Bolivia, but do not call it home; in fact many possess Canadian or Mexican passports. They reject modern society and pursue a world view that adheres to practices established over centuries. In the following chapters I explore further the memories that these members of a Mennonite diaspora in the Americas recall of settling in Bolivia and establishing farm communities. I also explore how these stories have contributed to the formation of the Old Colony Mennonite ethnic identity. Using the arguments of such scholars as Grele, Portelli and Assmann, I want to see which memories are retold and how this reflects a collective memory and a cultural identity.

CHAPTER TWO

"Emma jedohne":

Memories that formed the Old Colony Mennonite Identity

When asked why things were done a certain way the most common response given by the Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia was '*So ha' wie daut emma jedohne*' (that is how we have always done it). However, while listening to their stories it becomes evident that certain events were highlighted, indicating that these events were influential in shaping the Old Colony identity. Yet, the question can also be turned around and asked whether these memories are retold precisely because they fit into the collective Old Colony identity. The Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia emphasize the needs and identity of the collective over the individual and as members of the group individuals recall memories that emphasize their allegiance to the colony. I suggest that individuals recall events that were part of their archival memory and thus were part of the formation of the Old Colony Mennonite identity.[1]

The Old Colony Mennonites have shaped their identity around community, making individualism a secondary concern. During the interviews conducted in the colonies of Bolivia the emphasis on community over individuality became evident. Few interviewees could remember stories passed on from their parents or grandparents, but most saw themselves living the same lives that their predecessors lived. In order to preserve the Old Colony identity, handed down to them from their parents, the Old

---

[1] Alice M. Hoffman and Howard S. Hoffman, "Reliability and Validity in Oral History: The Case for Memory" in *Memory and History: Essays on Recalling and Interpreting Experience*, Editors, Jaclyn Jeffrey and Glenace Edwall, (Lanham, MA: University Press of America, Inc., 1994), 124.

Colony Mennonites have been willing to migrate throughout the world. In the process of these migrations their collective identity has shifted and changed. This chapter will look at memories that were formed during the Old Colonists' time in previous colonies, some in Mexico, and others in Belize or East Paraguay, others still in parent colonies established in Bolivia during the 1960's.

If there was a variation in these memories it had less to do with individuality or place of origin than with gender. Gender, a 'social construct'[2] "based on perceived differences between sexes",[3] shapes the meanings of experiences,[4] thereby influencing which memories are deemed important to the individual's identity. The Old Colony Mennonite men and women live in patriarchal agrarian communities. Royden Loewen, examining conservative Mennonite communities in the later 1800's, argues that the status of both men and women had clear gender divisions and was based on the centrality of the household.[5] Although the conservative Mennonites lived in patriarchal societies both genders held authority in different realms. The men worked outside the home, mainly in the fields, and the women retained close ties to the household economy, and "considered their lives complementary to those of their husbands".[6] These gender divisions and characteristics can be used to examine the Old Colony Mennonite men and women, and their memories.

---

[2] Elisabeth Prügl, *The Global Construction of Gender: Home-Based Work in the Political Economy of the 20th Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 14.

[3] Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis" *American Historical Review* 91, Number 5 (Dec 1986): 1067.

[4] Joy Parr, "Gender History and Historical Practice" *The Canadian Historical Review* 96, Number 3 (Sept 1995): 364.

[5] Royden Loewen, "'The Children, the Cows, My Dear Man and My Sister': The Transplanted Lives of Mennonite Farm Women, 1874-1900" *Canadian Historical Review* 73, no. 8 (1992): 348.

[6] Ibid., 369.

MEN

Most men mentioned aspects of their connection to the land when asked about memories from previous colonies. Many interviewees described themselves as 'People of the Land' and their constant migration is partly evidence of this characterization. Many men have migrated multiple times, often in search for land. This constant migration is also evidence of the Old Colony's struggle to maintain its ideal identity as 'People of the Land'. Land shortage occurs frequently because of rapid population growth in the Mennonite colonies. Pressure is constantly applied on colony leaders to buy more land and establish new colonies in order that young Mennonites in particular, are given the opportunity to start their own farms.

In the early part of the twentieth century the term *Gemeinschaft* was defined by the German philosopher and sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies as "close emotional ties through face-to-face interactions, common values and attachment to place"[7] and social networks based on friends and relatives. Several decades later another scholar gives a definition of *Gemeinschaft*. In his book, *The Quest for the Folk,* Ian McKay uses *Gemeinschaft* to describe the term 'folk'. McKay defines *Gemeinschaft* as "the ideal type of a society bound together by tradition, custom, and faith, and permanently rooted over generations in small, uncommercialized communities."[8] Although McKay describes the rooted communities of Nova Scotia, his and Tönnies' description of *Gemeinschaft* can be used to describe the Old Colony Mennonite communities in Bolivia. The Bolivian Old

[7] "Gemeinschaft" in *Globalization: Key Concepts* [database on-line] (Taylor and Francis, 2009, accessed 2 April 2010); available from http://www.bookrags.com/tandf/gemeinschaft-tf/#bro_copy; Internet.

[8] Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 12.

Colony Mennonites emphasize the local community and veer away from building relationships outside of the Old Colony Mennonite network. One Mennonite remembered his experiences of land shortage precisely in these terms. Peter Knelsen, in his fifties, explained why the Old Colony Mennonites defined themselves by their land. Knelsen lived in Manitoba Colony, established in 1993 by the Riva Palacios Colony, a colony established in 1967. Knelsen traced his roots through Riva Palacios Colony back to Mexico where he remembered there had been a shortage of land. He explained that Old Colony Mennonites were left with few options when there was not enough land, because moving into a nearby city was not an option for them. For Knelsen the 'city' was a place where the Old Colony Mennonites, especially the young people, would not to be able to 'stay true' to the Mennonite way. Peter Knelsen described the Old Colony Mennonite agrarian way of life as the means to preserve *Gemeinschaft*.[9]

Other men shared similar memories of the natural environment. Franz Wiebe, age 67, in Neuland Colony, a new colony begun in 2004 by migrants from Rio Verde Colony in Paraguay, recalled the sun shining differently in Paraguay. Wiebe remembered digging a well forty meters deep and the sun shining directly to the bottom, while in Bolivia the sun seemed to slant more, especially during the winter months.[10] Peter Bergen, age 47, had a childhood memory also directly linked to the land. When Bergen was six years old he migrated with his family from Cuauthémoc, Mexico to Santa Rita Colony, a colony that borders Swift Current Colony. He remembered being part of one of the earlier groups that left Mexico for Bolivia, a group that traveled by ship, rather

[9] Peter Kneslen, interview by author, written notes, Manitoba Colony, Campo 319, 18 May 2009.

[10] Franz Wiebe, interview by author, Written notes, Neuland Colony, Campo 3, 29 June 2009.

than airplane. He remembered that neither he nor his brother became sick during the ship ride, unlike many of the other children who did and had to stay in the onboard hospital. Bergen also remembered one day looking out and seeing only the blue of the sea and the sky; he concluded that the ship must have been far from land.[11]

Beginning anew in a colony was a defining moment for many of the men. Clearing virgin land to make it suitable for agricultural purposes was often remembered as being a difficult time. The interviewees seemed to take pride in their capabilities in starting a new farm. Johan Rempel from Cuauthémoc, Mexico, age 57, in Belice Colony, the daughter colony of Shipyard Colony in Belize, moved to Shipyard Colony from Mexico with his family when he was still quite young. The decision to leave Cuauthémoc, for the country Belize (or British Honduras as it was then called) was made by his grandparents in 1958, but he remembered that the first years were very difficult for his family, a time of a lot of mud, of impenetrable forest and hordes of insects, all of which made it difficult to clear the land.[12]

Another man also recalled the difficulties in establishing a new farm, but at a much older age. Daniel Niedorf, age 40, lived in California Colony, an offshoot of Manitoba Colony. In 2009 California was still a young colony, founded two years earlier. Many inhabitants could trace their migration back through the Manitoba and Riva Palacios Colonies, and earlier from Cuauthémoc Mexico. Niedorf's parents had moved from Cuauthémoc to Riva Palacios Colony in 1970 as part of a later group; he remembered that they flew with a '*jet'*, rather than travelling with a ship as earlier groups

[11] Peter Bergen, interview by author, Written notes, Valle Nuevo Colony, Campo 105, 15 June 2009.

[12] Johan Rempel, interview by author, Written notes, Belice Colony, Campo 60, 30 May 2009.

had done, and recalled the decision to fly had been made by the leaders of the group. When land was bought by Riva Palacios Colony to establish Manitoba Colony Niedorf was one of the first men to buy land; however, his land was in one of the disputed areas in the colony. Niedorf had gone to start clearing the land when he, along with several other Mennonite men, were arrested and told that the sale of their land had been illegal. For the disputed land the Old Colony Mennonites had paid seven U.S. dollars per hectare, but were now told that this sale was not legitimate and over the next year lawyers haggled over the land ownership. The end of the dispute resulted in nullifying the previous sale, giving the other party legitimate ownership. The Old Colony Mennonites were asked to buy the land again, this time for fifteen dollars per hectare.[13] Niedorf still seemed angry over being charged twice for the same land.

Land ownership has come to represent the basis of ideal Old Colony male identity. Several men recalled the struggle to achieve this ideal. Because of constant demand and shortage of land families often had to migrate through two or three colonies in their lifetime and some men had to resort to other means of acquiring income in order to support their families. For many of these men these jobs were seen as temporary, a stepping stone to buying their own land.

'*Ootschoffe'* (directly translated: 'to work outside') is used to describe any work done outside of the family farm. The term itself evokes degradation to a Mennonite man's identity, because it implies the inability to support the family through farming. A man in his sixties, Johan Wall from Manitoba Colony, had lived in three different colonies during his lifetime. When he lived in Mexico, Wall had to supplement his

[13] Daniel Niedorf, interview by author, Written notes, California Colony, Campo 334, 22 May 2009.

income by working in a colony store. When the opportunity came to emigrate in 1969 he and his family joined a group from his colony, led by *Omtje* (leader) Bernard Peters to start the new colony, Riva Palacios Colony in Bolivia. By joining this migration Wall was able to acquire fifty hectares of land, freeing himself from the necessity of '*ootschoffe*'.[14] Cornelius Loewen, 31, of California Colony, also saw his previous jobs as temporary. When he and his wife lived in the parent Manitoba Colony he held several jobs. In the mornings he worked as a teacher in one of the schools, in the afternoons, weekends and holidays in a colony store. In addition to these jobs he also did some electrical work, converting appliances to 12V which enabled the Old Colony Mennonites to use appliances with batteries. Loewen did acknowledge that he enjoyed working as a teacher, but he felt the need to buy his own land which prompted the move to California Colony.[15] In Valle Nuevo Colony, a daughter colony of Swift Current Colony, Peter Bergen, age 47, also worked temporarily as a teacher. Bergen lived in Santa Rita Colony before marrying and moving to Swift Current Colony and in both colonies Bergen found work as a teacher.[16] These men saw land ownership as the ideal Old Colony identity and they strived to be a part of it at a great cost.

Some men managed to establish themselves in the colonies despite abstaining from extensive farming. Peter Friesen, age 59, of Belice Colony, was one of the few Mennonite men interviewed who did not rely primarily on his crop land. He had moved with his family to Shipyard Colony in British Honduras from Cuauthémoc, Mexico, in 1959 when he was a child. He recalled his family had left Mexico because they had been

[14] Johan Wall, interview by author, Written notes, Manitoba Colony, Campo 315, 20 May 2009

[15] Cornelius Loewen, interview by author, Written notes, California Colony, Campo 342, 23 May 2009.

[16] Peter Bergen, interview by author, Written notes, Valle Nuevo Colony, Campo 105, 15 June 2009.

poor and needed land. After he married he started a *Descharie* (carpentry shop) with his wife, the only person in the shop during the school term when Peter served as teacher. After a few years he and his family returned to Mexico where they settled in La Honda Colony in Zacatecas State. Friesen explained the motivation to return to Mexico as a desire ('*jankred'*) to see the country in which he grew up. However, he had less than twenty hectares of land in La Honda Colony, insufficient to support his family, and therefore he continued as a teacher with his wife in the *Descharie;* as a teacher Friesen was entitled to housing for his family.[17] For Peter Friesen the shortage of land made it apparent how integral the identity of land and farming was to the Mennonite male.

For the Old Colony Mennonites farming was the ideal occupation, and there were few options left for men when there was a shortage of land. Their relationship with the land was complex and linked with their religion. These beliefs underlay many traditions and interpretations of their history and for the men, their recollections revealed the shaping of their religious beliefs and their own interpretations of their history according to their Old Colony faith. These memories became part of the men's 'archival memories' and formed their individual identity, but they also merged with the collective Old Colony Mennonite identity, which emphasized land ownership.

Religion

Old Colony Mennonite identity is rooted in religion. It is through their religion that the Old Colony Mennonites have defined their social borders and it is when these borders were threatened that the Old Colony Mennonites often have migrated to new

[17] Peter Friesen, interview by author, Written notes, Belice Colony, Campo 60, 29 May 2009.

areas. Most of the men interviewed saw their religion as part of their migration history and a cause for dispute that pushed many to leave for new countries. When remembering their immediate history most men saw the need for land as the primary reason for migration, but when looking further back to their parents and grandparents the men often remembered the religious or cultural reasons that prompted their parents and grandparents to migrate.

Ethnic identity is constantly evolving and changing. As examined in the introduction Kathleen Neils Conzen, et al. argue that an ethnic identity is "a process of construction or invention which incorporates, adapts, and amplifies pre-existing communal solidarities, cultural attributes, and historical memories"[18] The Old Colony Mennonites' cultural memory has changed over time. They may trace their roots to the sixteenth century Anabaptism and to Menno Simons, however when asked why they continue their distinctive lifestyle, the Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia rarely mentioned Menno Simons. Instead, they usually replied, "*So ha' wie daut emma jedohne*" (that is how we have always done it).

One man acknowledged this discrepancy in the Old Colony Mennonites' memory. George Knelsen, in Belice Colony explained the origins of the term 'Mennonite' and acknowledged that the practices of colony parents had taken priority over the teachings of Menno Simons. He explained that the Old Colony Mennonites took their name from a man called Menno Simons, who was a '*Predja*' (preacher) in the Roman Catholic Church. Through studying the Bible, Menno learned a new way. Knelson continued that the

[18] Kathleen Neils Conzen, et al. "The Invention of Ethnicity: A Perspective from the U.S.A." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 12, Issue 1 (1992): 4.

followers of Menno Simons eventually moved to Germany where they learned German, and from Germany they moved to Russia in order to retain their new teachings. With his considerable knowledge of Mennonite history, Knelsen acknowledged that the Old Colony Mennonites' lifestyle did not date back to the time of Menno or to the time when Mennonites lived in Russia. The church leaders, for example, allowed certain things, such as Round Up and basic farming equipment, into the colony that had not existed at the time when Mennonites lived in Russia. Knelsen remembered the time he lived in Shipyard when a group broke from the colony, seeking a lifestyle that would date further back in time. This group built a colony in a heavily forested area in Belize and built roads into the colony that only allowed horse drawn vehicles and prohibited any motorized vehicles.[19]

For the Old Colony Mennonites many ethnic traits have become synonymous with their religious identity. Some memories shared by the men indicated the process by which some attributes came to be linked with the Old Colony religious identity. The memories were of stories told to them by their parents or grandparents about the migration from Canada to Mexico. George Knelsen, in Belice Colony, recalled hearing from his parents that the emigrant groups left Canada for Mexico in the 1920s due to changes the government was implementing, including mandatory English education. His mother's family had joined the migration in 1923, but only stayed in Mexico a few months. They returned to Saskatchewan, where they joined other Mennonites who moved to La Crete, in the far north of Alberta, hoping to preserve their distinct clothing and the German language. They were able to preserve the 'old ways' for only a period of

[19] George Knelsen, interview by author, Written notes, Belice Colony, Campo 60, 1 June 2009.

time in Alberta, before things 'went too far', at which point his family decided to move to British Honduras (later renamed Belize).[20] Franz Wiebe, from Neuland Colony, also remembered his parents speaking about their religious convictions in terms of cultural traits in their religion. For Wiebe's parents too, it was change in the school curriculum that prompted them to move from Manitoba, Canada to Mexico in 1922. He recalled that his parents joined seven thousand other Mennonites under the leadership of *Ältesta* (bishop) Johan Friesen in order to keep the German language.

Another aspect apparent in their memories was the importance of community in the Old Colony religion and identity. They reflected Hedberg's argument that Old Colony Mennonites of Nuevo Durango Colony remained within the isolated communities because they believed it was the only way to guarantee their salvation.[21] To live a faithful life was to abide by the collective identity no matter how costly. Peter Knelsen in Manitoba Colony recalled hearing that a group decision was made in the 1930's in Mexico to prohibit any further changes in the Old Colony Mennonite way of life, effectively stopping the clock. Knelsen remembered hearing that it was at this time that the fractious ruling disallowing rubber tires on tractors occurred. Any Mennonite who disobeyed this rule was considered '*onnjehuarsom*' (disobedient). Knelsen remembered hearing about Mennonites introducing rubber tires by using tractors as they came from the factory, thereby disobeying the *Ordnung*. Knelsen concluded that this disobedience

[20] George Knelsen, interview, Belice.

[21] Anna Sophia Hedberg, *Outside the World: Cohesion and Deviation among Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia*, (Stockholm, Sweden: Elanders Gotab, 2007), 145.

caused many Mennonites, who wanted to remain true to the Old Colony Mennonite Church eventually to leave Mexico in the 1960's and migrate to Bolivia.[22]

To maintain the collective Old Colony identity and attain salvation the *Ordnung*, the "religious blueprint for expected behaviour",[23] must be lived by. Community stability and eventual eternal salvation are attained by following this 'blueprint'. Several of the Old Colony men remembered times when they felt some of the rules were unnecessary, but that they followed the rules because they believed that the community took precedence over individual desires.

In Valle Nuevo Colony, Peter Bergen did not understand the rule against rubber tires on tractors, but believed it was a rule that had been made at one point and that Colonists needed to continue the practice. Personally, he favoured rubber tires but obeyed the rule and continued to use steel wheels. Bergen thought the same way regarding the rule which prohibited the driving of cars. Again, Bergen did not know why the rule was initially made, but he continued the practice. Another ethno-religious characteristic is found in the order of the Sunday church service. During the Sunday service singing is done in '*langewies*', a liturgical style led by the *Vorsänga*, men appointed by the church to lead the singing. Bergen was aware of other forms of musical styles, such as the '*kortewies*', the more 'modern' form of hymn singing, one with a

[22] Peter Knelsen, interview, Manitoba.

[23] Donald Kraybill, *Old Order Amish: Their Enduring Way of Life* (Baltimore, MA: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 8.

musical score, but he agreed that his church continue to sing '*langewies*', that being they had always done it.[24]

Another man in Valle Nuevo Colony, Franz Rempel, age 56, also highlighted the Old Colony identity based group priority in his interview by placing the community before individual desires. Rempel originated from Bolivia's Swift Current Colony, but in 1997 helped established Fresnillo Colony with a group directly from Mexico. The small group from Mexico had migrated because of the rubber tire-steel wheel dispute while the Old Colony Mennonites from Swift Current Colony moved to Fresnillo Colony due to land shortage. Rempel shared that he did not understand why the Old Colony Mennonites were not allowed to use rubber tires on their tractors, but he believed that one man could not make a difference in colony practices. As the colony's pharmacy owner the issue was not particularly contentious as it did not directly affect Rempel's income. Since he was not an '*Ackermaun*' (farmer), it was easier for him to keep the Old Colony way.[25]

The Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia believed the *Ordnung* was what maintained the *Kontroll* (control) over individual members of the colony and kept the community intact. When individuals challenged the *Ordnung* control was lost and the community, and communal salvation, were threatened. Most of the interviewees remembered times when individuals challenged the collective Old Colony Mennonite identity by introducing modern technology, acts that the interviewees considered as sin. A number of the Mennonites who had left for other colonies cited the old colony for

[24] Peter Bergen, interview, Valle Nuevo.

[25] Franz Rempel, interview by author, Written notes, Valle Nuevo Colony, Campo 102, 16 June 2009.

going '*too wiet*' (too far) and becoming 'worldly', implying they were no longer living as '*Christenvolk*' (People of Christ).

Wilhelm Peters, in Oriente Colony, was four years old when his family left Mexico in 1967 and moved to the Riva Palacios Colony near Santa Cruz. He wished that he had been older when they left Mexico, so that he would have remembered more and would be able to identify with older Mennonites when they talked about their experiences. He thought that his parents left Mexico because things had been going '*too wiet*' (too far), with people driving cars and using rubber tires on their tractors. Mostly he remembered the move to Bolivia had been very difficult for his mother; he recalled her crying and wanting to move back to Mexico for a long time. He recalled that his father, too, disliked the first few years when they were settling into the Bolivian bush land. Peters, however, thought his father was eventually '*toofräd*' (content) and his mother was also eventually happy to live in Bolivia.[26]

Immigration was the means to preserve the Old Colony Mennonite identity, but as many migrants discovered the pressure to modernize followed them into their new colonies. In Rio Verde Colony, East Paraguay, founded by conservative Old Colonists from Mexico, the colony leaders had begun to allow members to connect to the national hydro electric grid; even though they continued to prohibit the use of cars. Franz Wiebe, originally from Rio Verde Colony, believed that to drive a car was a sin, a sign of a lack

[26] Wilhelm Peters, interview by author, Written notes, Oriente Colony, Campo 1, 10 June 2009.

"*Kontroll*" (control). It was when Rio Verde Colony became more lax with its control that Franz Wiebe and his wife decided to move to Neuland Colony in Bolivia.[27]

These men's stories indicate that the Old Colony Mennonite identity was never static and was constantly challenged. Colony leadership was continually pushed as surrounding societies pressured the Old Colony Mennonites to change their identity as a people who resist modernity. The resulting disputes often led to migration as dissenting groups left the modernizing colonies. The disputes also led to colonies breaking apart as members could not agree on what formed the Old Colony Mennonite identity. George Knelsen in Belice Colony grew up in the country of Belize. His family was part of a small group that moved to Belize from Canada; in total there were about thirty families with *Omtje* Wolf as their leader. This group rented land beside the Shipyard Colony in northern Belize and called it *Pachtdarp;* translated it meant 'rented village'. After a while there was trouble with their leader, *Omtje* Wolf, because he wanted to allow rubber tires into the community, which the other residents did not want. The dispute resulted in the community breaking apart and the residents heading in different directions. Some, such as Knelsen's parents, joined Shipyard Colony; others bought land elsewhere in Belize, while others returned to Canada.[28]

The disputes and migrations contributed to Old Colony identity, founded on land ownership and religious beliefs. Despite the men's statement '*So haa wie daut emmer jedoane*' (that is how we have always done it) their memories reveal the historical process that formed their identity. The Old Colony Mennonites' collective memory

[27] Franz Wiebe, interview, Neuland.

[28] George Knelsen, interview, Belice.

reflects an identity that has remained unchanged through the years. However, through these oral accounts it becomes apparent that other contributions such as government bylaws, land shortage and religious disputes have assisted in the formation of the Old Colony Mennonite identity and I suggest that in the process of this formation the men have adapted the collective identity as a basis for their own individual archival memories.

WOMEN

The women often highlighted the same themes as the men when recollecting their experiences in different colonies; however they also talked about other topics that seemed to define their identity as Old Colony Mennonite women. Land shortage and church regulations played a part in shaping their identity, but family relations, food and poverty were also discussed by many of the women in the interviews.

Family

Old Colony Mennonites have strong family bonds, including with parents, siblings and children. Their memories are influenced by their familial connections and the primacy of these relations. As previously written, the Old Colony Mennonites focus on the group identity and subjugate the individual beneath the communal unity; a subset of this group identity is family relations. Joy Parr writes about the numerous positions held by individuals and how meanings are extrapolated from experiences according to these various positions.[29] The women interviewed would often remember their previous experiences according to the positions they held within their families; whether as

[29] Joy Parr, "Gender History and Historical Practice" *The Canadian Historical Review* 96, No. 3 (Sept 1995):364.

daughters, sisters or wives. These relationships played a part in their oral narratives, for as Marie-Françoise Chanfrault-Duchet writes, "women's life stories, unlike men's, deal not only with the relation between the self and the social sphere, but also, and above all, with woman's condition and with the collective representations of woman as they have been shaped by the society with which the woman being interviewed must deal."[30]

As in many societies parents have considerable influence in the shaping of their children's identity. Old Colony Mennonite communities have resorted to migration in order to continue their isolation from outside influences. But women especially emphasized how such migrations assured a setting to structure their children's identity according to the Old Colony identity. Sarah Klassen, age 50, in Valle Nuevo Colony grew up in Shipyard Colony, Belize. Shipyard Colony bought land in Bolivia as a community to form Belice Colony, but Klassen's parents decided to leave Shipyard Colony before the colony bought this land, hoping to keep the family intact before their children would try to find land elsewhere. Klassen's entire family, excluding one married sister, left Shipyard Colony and moved to Swift Current Colony; later her married sister joined the family in Bolivia. [31] Marie Knelsen, 51, in Belice Colony also grew up in Shipyard Colony where her family migrated to from Mexico. She remembered only two of her father's siblings joining them in their migration, while all of her mother's siblings stayed in Mexico.[32] In the family of Frau Abrahm Loewen, age 53 in Belice Colony, a woman who only identified herself by her husband's name, all of her

[30] Marie-Fançoise Chanfrault-Duchet, "Narrative Structures, Social Models, and Symbolic Representation in the Life Story" in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, editors Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (New York: Routledge, 1991), 78.

[31] Sarah Klassen, interview by author, Written notes, Valle Nuevo Colony, Campo 104, 16 June 2009.

[32] Marie Knelsen, interview by author, Written notes, Belice Colony, Campo 60, 1 June 2009.

father's siblings remained in Mexico, while only one of her mother's sisters, a blind woman who had remained single, joined her family when they migrated to Riva Palacios Colony.[33] For these women the parents made decisions to migrate according to their views of what constituted the Old Colony Mennonite identity. Their parents were willing to leave other family members behind as they sought places that would provide opportunities that would allow them to continue their Old Colony identity. The memories of these women reveal the role their parents had in shaping their identity. What is notable is that these women did not question their parents' motives, but rather took their parents' motivations to preserve the Old Colony identity as their own.

Older children often followed the parents, causing a chain migration. In Helena Rempel's family the chain reaction occurred twice. Rempel, age 57, had lived in Mexico until she was six years old, when her grandparents decided to return to Canada after a sojourn in Mexico of 30 years and her parents followed the grandparents. Her family however did not return to the Prairies, but settled close to Aylmer, Ontario where her parents worked on tobacco and strawberry farms while she attended an elementary school. After nearly three years her grandparents decided once again to migrate, this time to British Honduras to live in Shipyard Colony. Again, Rempel's parents decided to follow her grandparents and at the age of nine, in 1961, Helena Rempel moved to Shipyard Colony.[34] Rempel did not question her parents for following her grandparents and it could be assumed that loyalty to family was considered the norm. In Rempel's recollections her parents followed the older generation, but chain migration could also

[33] Frau Abrahm Loewen, interview by author, Written notes, Belice Colony, Campo 53, 2 June 2009.

[34] Helena Rempel, interview by author, Written notes, Belice Colony, Campo 60, 30 May 2009.

occur in the other direction. Grandparents, who had established lives, also uprooted themselves and followed their children and grandchildren. Susana Peters, 44, told of her grandmother, the only surviving grandparent, who joined Peters' family in their migration to Bolivia because she wanted to be with her children.[35]

Parents were a leading influence in the women's stories as they remembered their migrations; however siblings were also part of their social network. Among conservative Mennonites the role of sister was important and would often continue to be despite separation by national borders. In her research on her own Mennonite family members, historian Patricia Harms found that her mother and her mother's sisters maintained contact through decades of separation after a sister left Canada for Paraguay. She notes that within the Mennonite female culture, "family and kinship was the primary arena of her social relations while the church and community were secondary."[36] These primary social relations were also evident in the recollections of the Old Colony Mennonite women in Bolivia.

Another woman, who identified herself to me as Frau Jakob Schmidt, was originally from the Sommerfeld Colony near Santa Cruz. Mennonites in this colony were not considered part of the Old Colony Mennonite Church, but Sommerfelder Mennonites were still conservative. Sommerfeld Colony borders Swift Current Colony where Schmidt met and married her Old Colony Mennonite husband. For Schmidt the transition to a new colony was eased because two of her sisters had already married into Swift Current Colony. Schmidt recalled her mother bringing her to the *Ältesta* (bishop) of

[35] Susana Peters, interview by author, Written notes, Valle Nuevo 109, 17 June 2009.

[36] Patricia Harms, "'Gott es hiea uck': Gender and Identity in an Immigrant Family from Paraguay" *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 22 (2004):48.

Sommerfeld Colony and both asking her whether she was certain that she wanted to leave the Sommerfeld Colony. Both of them were worried that she was making a mistake, but Schmidt was certain of her decision to leave Sommerfeld Colony and that moving to Swift Current Colony was what she wanted.[37] The Mennonite women's identity was linked to their family relations and was often listed as one of the motivations for migration. The primacy of family over colonial allegiance showed the importance of these relationships to the women's identity.

The Old Colony Mennonite women found their identity through their relationships within family, while their affiliation to a specific colony took less importance. Ann Sawatsky, in her mid-thirties, was originally from Rio Verde Colony in Paraguay but she married a man from Riva Palacios Colony. She found it very difficult to move to Riva Palacios Colony because she felt the people in the Bolivian colony were different from what she was used to in Paraguay and she found the '*Omm'gang*' (socialization) was different.[38] Another woman from the Neuland Colony also found it difficult to move to a different colony without her parents. Aganetha Friesen, 41, moved with her husband from the Durango Colony in Paraguay to Rio Verde Colony to join his parents. After living in Rio Verde Colony she *'bangt'* (longed) for Durango Colony. She eventually got used to living in the new colony.[39]

Family – first the one the woman was born into, then the family the woman married into – was the basis of the Mennonite women's social network and recollections

[37] Frau Jakob Schmidt, interview by author, Written notes, Valle Nuevo Colony, Campo 102, 16 June 2009.

[38] Ann Sawatsky, interview by author, Written notes, Neuland Colony, Campo 3, 29 June 2009.

[39] Aganetha Friesen, interview by author, Written notes, Neuland Colony, Campo 3, 30 June 2009.

of the past were based on what position other individuals held in the women's family, either immediate or more extended. One of the most frequent questions I received when I arrived at a Mennonite's home was whether I was '*Frind'schauft* (a relative). For them I was not *Dietsch* (the insider term for Mennonite) because of my modern clothes and limited Low German. However, for the Old Colony Mennonite women it did not matter whether someone was '*Dietsch'*, but rather more importantly, whether she was related to them. In Valle Esperanza Colony, a colony established over twenty years ago mainly by Mennonites that migrated directly from Mexico, the widow Sarah Fehr, age 58, remembered an experience that occurred while she still lived in Mexico with her husband. One day, while Fehr and her husband were in a city, they saw another "*Dietscha"* couple, distinguishable by their dress. Fehr recalled that her husband was eager to approach the couple and to converse with them; an action that she said was unusual among the Old Colony Mennonites. Fehr remembered that she was hesitant to talk with them since they were "*gaunz framd*" (total strangers), but her husband persisted. Once they struck up a conversation with the couple they discovered that the wife was Fehr's cousin.[40] This realization, that the couple that was "*gaunz framd"* was family, seemed to make the unusual practice of talking with strangers acceptable.

Listening to their recollections of experiences in previous colonies made it evident just how important these familial connections were to the women. These relations have influenced decisions to migrate and have shaped their social networks. The men listed land and religion as the main themes in their collective and individual

[40] Sarah Fehr, interview by author, Written notes, Valle Esperanza Colony, Campo 224, 25 June 2009.

identities, but for the women family relations seemed to take precedence over land and religion.

Poverty

Another common theme in the women's recollections was their economic standing and memories of poverty. The book *Märtyrer Spiegel (Martyrs Mirror)* was one of several books promoted within the Old Colony Mennonite communities. Published in Dutch in 1660 by Thieleman J. van Braght, *Martyrs Mirror* is a compilation of stories of Christians, mainly Anabaptists, who were martyred for their faith. The Old Colony Mennonites have been taught to value persecution and potentially embrace a difficult life. In his research among the Old Colony Mennonites in Argentina and Bolivia anthropologist Lorenzo Cañas Bottos finds that there are two paths considered by the Old Colony Mennonites. The first is the broad path, the one taken by many in 'the world', and is described as easy and joyful but leads to hell, and the other path, the one taken by the few chosen people and the one Cañas Bottos argues is sought by the Old Colony Mennonites, is narrow and considered painful and difficult and is the path to salvation.[41]

The women I interviewed insisted that the Old Colony Mennonites who migrated to Bolivia were often the poor and landless and were the ones that had struggled to establish themselves in Mexico, Belize or Paraguay when populations expanded and caused land shortage. Most of the Old Colony Mennonites interviewed for this thesis saw their economic plight as significant. To use Joy Parr's view of experiences, meaning

[41] Lorenzo Cañas Bottos, *Old Colony Mennonites in Argentina and Bolivia: Nation Making, Religious Conflict and Imaginations of the Future* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill BV, 2008), 42.

often precedes the event.[42] Perhaps for these Mennonite women the Old Colony identity associated poverty with spiritual maturity, which would elevate their memories of poverty as a status symbol. Poverty was a common thread in many of the interviews. Increasing population and life on arid land impacted many of the Old Colony Mennonites living in Mexico. Sarah Fehr left Mexico for Bolivia with her husband's family to live in Valle Esperanza Colony primarily because of her family's poverty. She remembered always being poor in Mexico. She and her husband had opened a store in their Mexican colony, but four or five years later they were forced to close the store because other members in the colony were unable to pay off their debts.[43]

Poverty was not left behind in Mexico with the migrations and several interviewees recalled difficult years after moving to Bolivia. Several women that came from Belize recalled their time there as years of extreme poverty. Marie Knelsen, 51, in Belice remembered helping her parents with planting in Shipyard Colony. She remembered her family did not have a lot of land and that the land itself was of poor quality.[44] Greit Bergen, 42, in Oriente Colony, also grew up in Shipyard Colony, Belize. Before her parents moved to Santa Rita Colony, Bolivia when she was nine, she remembered that they had been poor in Shipyard Colony and it was her parents' poverty that prompted their decision to leave Belize for Bolivia. She remembered that people

[42] Joy Parr, "Gender History and Historical Practice" *The Canadian Historical Review* 96, No. 3 (Sept 1995): 364.

[43] Sarah Fehr, interview, Valle Esperanza.

[44] Marie Knelsen, interview, Belice.

were not able to have a proper dairy in Belize and believed that it was better for the Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia because they were able to have cows and have a dairy. [45]

Memories of supplementing a family's income were remembered as abnormal, as times when a woman was forced to break her prescribed gender role. Helena Rempel, age 60, grew up in Shipyard Colony, in the British Honduras, and remembered that many people had to go '*ootschoffe'* (work outside the farms) because most members of the colony owned small parcels of land, which were insufficient to support their families.[46] Sarah Klassen, age 50, also grew up in Shipyard Colony, Belize and she remembered growing up in poverty. To supplement her family's income members of her family made mattresses to sell to the '*Ein'heimijche*' (local people), by drying straw outside and sewing the mattresses with material they bought. Looking back at her life Klassen commented, "*Ick haa aul ne schwoaret Läwe hinja mie*" (I already have a difficult life behind me).[47] Christina Niedorf, 38, in California Colony, sewed a lot of clothing for other families after marrying her husband Daniel. They lived with his mother in Riva Palacios Colony because they did not have any land. She continued her sewing after they moved to Manitoba Colony because her family was only able to afford a small parcel of land.[48] Marie Reimer, age 27, also used her domestic skills to supplement her family's income by sewing for others, while she and her husband lived in Manitoba Colony. Reimer and her husband also only had a small portion of land, and she sewed while her

[45] Griet Bergen, interview by author, Written notes, Oriente Colony, Campo 2, 11 June 2009.

[46] Helena Rempel, interview by author, Written notes, Belice Colony, Campo 60, 30 May 2009.

[47] Sarah Klassen, interview by author, Written notes, Belice Colony, Campo 104, 16 June 2009.

[48] Christina Niedorf, interview by author, Written notes, California Colony, Campo 334, 23 May 2009.

husband worked for others clearing land.[49] Marie Loewen, age 29, also had to generate a monetary income for the family; as a young unmarried woman she had done so by working outside her home when she lived in Riva Palacios Colony. When she was in her late teens she worked for other people within the church, doing odd jobs such as cleaning.[50]

The poverty of the migrants was described by their inability to finance their migration. To raise enough money to enable them to migrate several women had to work outside the home with their families, often on fruit or vegetable farms, Anna Banman, a seventy-five year old widow, was eager to share her family's history and the difficulties they had faced through their migrations. She recalled hearing that her grandparents had joined the larger migration from Canada to Mexico in the 1920s, but her parents, newlyweds at the time, were unable to afford the move. Her parents stayed behind to work and save money. Later, in 1930, her parents joined her grandparents in Mexico.[51] Sarah Fehr, in Valle Esperanza Colony, spoke about her own experiences when she and her husband believed they would have better opportunities in Bolivia. However, they did not have enough equity to finance their emigration and in order to leave Mexico, Fehr and her family worked on a cucumber farm in Mexico for eight weeks before emigrating.[52]

Poverty was also remembered by these women as a crucial element in the first settlement years. On many yards there were several buildings; one was considered the

[49] Marie Reimer, interview by author, Written notes, California Colony, Campo 341, 23 May 2009.

[50] Marie Loewen, interview by author, Written notes, California Colony, Campo 342, 23 May 2009.

[51] Anna Banman, interview by author, Written notes, Valle Esperanza Colony, Campo 210, 23, June 2009.

[52] Sarah Fehr, interview, Valle Esperanza.

main residence but there was often a much smaller, older building. This older building was often the first residence occupied by the family after moving into a new colony. When asked about important events in their lives many of the Mennonite women remembered migrating to a new colony and experiencing many difficulties in the first years. There seems to be a sense of pride in recalling those difficult years, and the women speak laudingly of their men cutting into virgin forest. These recollections may be influenced by *Martyrs Mirror* and its idealism of suffering; in this sense the memories of the Old Colony Mennonite women, which revealed a sense of pride in their and their husbands' agency contradicted Donald Kraybill's definition of *Gelassenheit* - "yieldedness, surrender, submission, humility, calmness."[53] Their pride also stemmed from the sense of accomplishment when they compared the older buildings with their current, and larger, residences.

The women described the first years after they migrated to a new colony as '*eenfach'* (simple). Ann Banman in Valle Esperanza Colony remembered stories from her grandparents of when their parents migrated to Canada from Russia, stories that had significantly strayed overtime from historical fact. As Banman recalled the story, her great-grandparents had left Europe during a war in 1850, an impression she had, even though her ancestors would have migrated in the 1870s at a time when Russia was not at war. She recalled that the migration from Russia had represented a difficult time for them and it seemed like they were not able to leave, but eventually an opportunity opened up and through the help of the Canadian government, which offered each Mennonite family a house and a horse upon arrival in Canada (also a factual error, as the government

[53] Donald B. Kraybill and James P. Hurd, *Horse- and-Buggy Mennonites: Hoofbeats of Humility in a Postmodern World* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2007), 27.

granted land, but not a house and horse) the Old Colony Mennonites were able to migrate to Canada. Banman recollected hearing that the beginning was very simple for her grandparents in Canada, but eventually they were able to build bigger houses.[54] That Banman remembered her grandparents' exodus from Russia in a time of war, rather than at a time of peace, implied that, for Banman, migration was a result of persecution, rather than an economic choice.

Other women remembered their own experiences when they were young and their families left Mexico to settle in the first colonies established in Bolivia. Susana Peters, 44, in Valle Nuevo Colony, moved to Swift Current Colony from Mexico with her family when she was young and she remembered it was very difficult for her parents in the new colony. Her father, especially, did not want to stay in Bolivia and had planned on moving back to Mexico, but her mother was more '*motig*' (courageous) and insisted on staying in Bolivia. Peters remembered her mother saying that they had made this major transition to Bolivia and therefore they should stay. Peters seemed to find this ironic since her mother had since passed away while her father continued to live in Bolivia.[55] Frau Isaak Rempel, 39, remembered moving with her parents to Santa Rita Colony in 1975. She was too young to have many memories of this period but remembered her parents saying that it was a difficult time; she did, however, remember living in small, wooden house. For a family of twelve children this small house was not big enough and they only lived there for two months before they moved to a different house.[56]

---

[54] Ann Banman, interview, Valle Esperanza.

[55] Susanna Peters, interview by author, Written notes, Valle Nuevo Colony, Campo 109, 17 June 2009.

[56] Frau Isaak Rempel, interview by author, Written notes, Orient 5, 11 June 2009.

Some women recalled that their families only remained in the new colony because of the authority of the church. 'Suse' Knelsen, 53, of Manitoba Colony, remembered moving to Riva Palacios Colony from Mexico with her family. They had to sell everything when her family left Mexico, which added to the strain of starting new in Bolivia. Knelsen remembered that her mother wanted to go back to Mexico because things in Riva Palacios Colony were '*too schwoa*' (too difficult). Her parents had decided to move back to Mexico but the colony *Ältesta* (bishop) found out and forbade them from going back. Knelsen recalled that her mother did not enjoy living in Bolivia and that it was difficult to start a new colony, mostly because of the unbroken, virgin bush land.[57]

Other women credit the diligence of the Old Colony Mennonites for changing their economic status. 'Suse' Rempel, 53, recalled that upon settling in Bolivia the bush was so thick that they could not use a *Kruper* (bulldozer). Instead they had to use axes and cleared the land by hand. Rempel credited the hard work put in by the Old Colony Mennonites for transforming the Bolivian landscape. She remembered when the Old Colony Mennonites first arrived in Bolivia no one planted soy beans or corn and that the '*Dietsche'* (Mennonites) were the only ones that farmed the land. Now she looked around the area and saw that the colonies were surrounded by soy bean and corn farms. Rempel saw the change and thought the Old Colony Mennonites were very *fruchtboa* (fruitful) since there were now many Mennonites in the area.[58]

---

[57] 'Suse' Knelsen, interview, Manitoba.

[58] 'Suse' Rempel, interview by author, Written notes, Valle Nuevo 102, 16 June 2009.

The women's memories of frontier life highlighted their poverty. I would suggest that the Old Colony identity that links hardship with spiritual maturity may have influenced and enhanced these memories. However, the women's memories also emphasized the Old Colony Mennonites' fortitude and ability to overcome poverty. The emphasis on their own agency seemed to contradict the image proposed by the *Martyrs Mirror*. Their experiences of establishing homes in new colonies seemed to change their Old Colony identity and included the ability to succeed and rise in economic status.

Food

Another part of the Old Colony Mennonite women's identity is their role as the provider of physical sustenance. Marlene Epp's study on the role of food with the Mennonite refugees from Russia in the early twentieth century suggests that food has historically embodied religious connotations for Mennonite women. *Zwieback*, a type of bun, was a mainstay on the Mennonite table in Russia and continues to this day in Bolivia; Epp suggests that the *Zwieback*, as a form of bread, acquired several symbolic connotations among Mennonites; those connotations included concepts such as the 'Bread of Life', the body of Christ, and the communion table. Not surprisingly the women interviewed referenced food in their recollections of experiences in previous colonies.

Food is a physical characteristic in an ethnic culture and the Mennonite women were no exception in creating food that represented the Old Colony Mennonite identity in Bolivia. It was in the kitchen that there was evidence of past migrations, but few women remembered the origins of the many dishes they cooked. Migration also had an effect on

their dishes and several women remembered having to adjust their recipes accordingly. Leona Sawatsky, age twenty-eight, was a single woman who lived most of her life in Valle Esperanza Colony, but she remembered her mother saying she used to use different fruit powders, such as Jello or gelatine, when her mother baked cakes and pies in Mexico. When her mother moved with her family to Bolivia these ingredients were not available and the Mennonite women had to learn to make them from scratch, but Sawatsky did not go into detail how her mother changed her recipes.[59] 'Suse' Knelsen, in Manitoba Colony, saw differences in the general food consumption between Mexico and Bolivia. In Mexico both the Old Colony Mennonites and the Mexicans ate more corn and tortillas, while in Bolivia the general population, including the Old Colony Mennonites, ate more rice and potatoes.[60] These women had noticed the impact of migration on their Mennonite identity as it was represented in their dishes. They had to adjust according to available resources and their ethnic traits reflected their surroundings.

Food scarcity threatened the Old Colony Mennonite women's identity as they struggled to feed their families and some women remembered food shortages as one of the main reasons for migrating. Sarah Klassen, in Valle Nuevo Colony, remembered that the food was '*too knaup'* (too scarce) for her entire family in Belize. Klassen thought that her life in Bolivia was better because there was enough food.[61] Leona Reimer, in Neuland Colony, remembered her time in Rio Verde Colony, Paraguay with fondness in respect to food supply. In Paraguay the Old Colony Mennonites had been able to grow good fruit, such as mangoes and pineapples, because the soil was good for growing fruit.

---

[59] Leona Sawatsky, interview by author, Written notes, Valle Esperanza Colony, Campo 210, 24 June 2009.

[60] 'Suse' Knelsen, interview, Manitoba.

[61] Sarah Klassen, interview, Valle Nuevo.

Reimer seemed disappointed with the quality of land in Neuland Colony because she thought that she would not be able to replicate the garden she had in Rio Verde Colony.[62] Katharina Wolf, age sixty-two, also in Neuland Colony, remembered that the settlement years in Rio Verde Colony were good, precisely because her family was able to have a source of nourishment. Her family had a cow, which enabled them to sell milk to the colony's cheese factory and thereby established a source of income. Her family was also able to grow a garden, which guaranteed them fresh vegetables.[63] For these Mennonite women food was part of their ethnic identity and their past recollections revealed how migration through different colonies and countries impacted their dishes.

In all of the women's recollections – of family, poverty and food – it became evident that the Old Colony Mennonite identity was not static but shaped and influenced by certain events. For most of the women, their family was an integral part of their identity and social network, and influenced the decision to migrate, to follow parents or children into new colonies. Recollections of poverty revealed another aspect of their Bolivian Mennonite Old Colony identity; they seemed to be proud of their agency to succeed in new colonies, in seeming contradiction to the *Martyr's Mirror*'s emphasis on embracing poverty. The women's memories of food showed the impact of migration through different countries on this physical characteristic of the Old Colony ethnicity.

[62] Leona Reimer, Interview by author, written notes. Neuland Colony, Campo 3, 29 June 2009.

[63] Katharina Wolf, Interview by author, written notes, Neuland Colony, Campo 3, 30 June 2009.

CONCLUSION

The common refrain '*So ha' wie daut emma jedohne*' (that is how we have always done it) was often given as an explanation for the distinctive lifestyle of the Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia. The Old Colony Mennonites saw their history in almost static terms; their surroundings might change but their identity remained the same. In listening to individual recollections of the migrations that eventually brought the Old Colony Mennonites to their current colonies however, it became apparent that there were certain events that shaped and influenced their current identity. The men emphasized land and religion, and the struggles that pertained to maintaining the ideal male Mennonite identity. For the women family often took priority over religious or colonial affiliation and poverty was seen as something to be overcome. Memories from previous colonies, and from the migration to the present colony of residence, revealed a dynamic Bolivian Old Colony Mennonite identity. As the next chapter indicates, it was an identity that required a struggle to maintain.

CHAPTER THREE

'*Too wiet*': Struggle and the Old Colony Mennonite Identity

Most Mennonites remembered times when things went '*too wiet*' (too far), emphasizing their resistance to overt change. '*Too wiet*' implied that things were changing to resemble 'the world', and these changes meant the Old Colony Mennonites were veering away from the life God had ordained for them and their salvation. The Old Colony Mennonite identity insists on a perceived continuance with the past, indicated by the repeated phrase '*So ha' wie daut emma jedohne*,' (that is how we have always done it). However, the Old Colony Mennonite narrative is also one of struggle, a struggle to maintain their identity as *'Christenvolk'* (People of Christ).

Chapter two discussed common events and themes based on life in previous colonies; both events and themes reflected core tenets of the Old Colony identity in Bolivia. This chapter looks at memories in the colonies the interviewees resided in at the time of the interviews. It is clear from these memories that the Old Colony Mennonites in these new colonies continued to struggle to maintain their Old Colony Mennonite identity and that they found the life, which was passed down to them from their parents, difficult to maintain. When asked about significant events in their life and how they passed their beliefs on to their children several topics and memories were recalled. Many of these memories emphasized that struggle was required to preserve the 'old ways' inherited from their parents. Technology, health concerns, commitment to prescribed gender roles and commitment to dress regulations were all memories from life in the new

colonies. These recollections suggest that the struggle to remain faithful as *'Christenvolk´* (People of Christ) is at the heart of the Old Colony Mennonite identity.

The Old Colony Mennonites have linked struggle to their identity as '*Christenvolk*', in contrast to the 'easy path' taken by 'the world'. Lorenzo Cañas Bottos writes that these Mennonites "recognize two paths for living life on earth: a narrow, difficult and painful one, and a broad, easy and joyful one. The first leads to salvation while the second to damnation."[1] Other scholars have examined the role of sacrifice and its part in the Mennonite identity. Donald Kraybill and Carl Bowman's study of Anabaptist Old Order groups in the United States argues that they have incorporated a history of suffering and sacrifice into their self-understandings and that stories of persecution of early Anabaptist Christians has become a component of their identity. Kraybill and Bowman write in *On the Backroad to Heaven* that the "Old Orders still hear the clang of chains falling on prison floors and smell the smoke of martyrs burning alive."[2] This tenet of suffering is part of the belief that sacrifice is needed to remain faithful as '*Christenvolk'* (People of Christ). In his article "To the Ends of the Earth", Royden Loewen argues that conservative Low German Mennonite migrants held to a theology which depicted them as 'suffering pilgrims'.[3] The Old Colony Mennonites "firmly believe that as a migrant people they are walking in a life of self-denial, following the ways of Jesus and, indeed, 'living in Christ.'"[4] Loewen quotes Rev. Isaak

---

[1] Lorenzo Cañás Bottos, *Old Colony Mennonites in Argentina and Bolivia: Nation Making, Religious Conflict and Imagination of the Future* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2008), 42.

[2] Donald B. Kraybill and Carl F. Bowman, *On the Backroad to Heaven: Old Order Hutterites, Mennonites, Amish, and Brethren* (Baltimore, MA: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 237.

[3] Royden Loewen, "To the Ends of the Earth: An Introduction to the Conservative Low German Mennonites in the Americas" *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 82 (July 2008): 427.

[4] Ibid., 431.

Dyck's recounting of the 1922 migration to Mexico in which he reminded the Old Colony Mennonites that they were called to suffer like the Anabaptist martyrs; in migration, and its accompanying sacrifice, they would find spiritual health.[5]

The stories told by the Old Colony Mennonite interviewees, as in the stories from earlier times, reflected their memories by their cultural identity. Jan Assmann's definition of 'obligation' in collective memory is relevant here. Obligation occurs when the "relation to a normative self-image of the group engenders a clear *system of values* and *differentiations in importance* which structure the cultural supply of knowledge and the symbols" [original emphasis].[6] The Old Colony Mennonites' 'normative self-image' brings with it a clear sense of obligation as emphasized by the colony leadership and the *Ordnung*. Because of the focus on the community, any individuals that have threatened the 'system of values' have been viewed by the more orthodox Mennonites as going '*too wiet*', that is, too far from the 'normative self-image', and as having negated their obligation to the group. Scholars of oral history have written that individual memories speak to their collective identities.[7] I agree with this statement, but also suggest that individuals recall specific memories of those times when their cultural identity was challenged and their 'system of values' was threatened. These memories show that the Old Colony Mennonites were aware of some challenges to their 'normative self-image' and have included them as part of their cultural identity. These memories also revealed the Old Colony Mennonites' methods of resistance to certain changes.

---

[5] Ibid., 433-434.

[6] Jan Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity" *New German Critique* 65 (1995): 131.

[7] Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, translated by Francis J. Ditter Jr and Vida Yazdi Ditter (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1980), 51.

Technology

As noted earlier, the Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia have defined themselves as a group which resists modernity, in particular, modern technology. Chapter two noted that many men recalled stories of when the 'clock stopped' on their technology. Any disobedience to the *Ordnung* could lead to excommunication. The men often highlighted their struggles to maintain the ideal Old Colony Mennonite identity and many allowed '*pleitsch*' (secret)[8] items into their households. Most scholars examining Old Colony Mennonites disputes over new technology have centered on men and farm equipment, although my research indicates that both men and women recalled times of tension when various technologies were introduced into the colonies.

Community takes precedence over individuality; social cohesion leads to salvation,[9] and disobedience to the *Ordnung* rules threatens the community's stability.[10] David M. Quiring's research on the Mexican Old Colony Mennonites found that they believed that their distinctive 'simple' lifestyle dated back to their Anabaptist beginnings,[11] and that sometime in the past "some bishops made a vow to their predecessors that they would not allow changes."[12] By holding onto these promises, and

[8] Plietsch: this term was used to describe any item or behaviour that was considered disobedient to the Church's *Ordnung*.

[9] Calvin Wall Redekop, *The Old Colony Mennonites: Dilemmas of Ethnic Minority Life* (Baltimore, MA: The John Hopkins Press, 1969), 37

[10] Anna Sophia Hedberg, *Outside the World: Cohesion and Deviation among Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia.* (Stockholm, Sweden: Elanders Gotab, 2007), 208.

[11] David M. Quiring, *Mennonite Old Colony Vision: Under Siege in Mexico and the Canadian Connection* (Steinbach, MB: Crossway Publications Inc., 2003), 33.

[12] Ibid., 31.

the ‘normative self-image’ defined by the predecessors, divisions have occurred as communities differed on modern technology and its accompanying threat to their identity.

When asked about important events in their lives many of the interviewees spoke about rubber tires on tractors, a conflict which had begun in Mexico in the 1960s but continued to be a source of dissension in current colonies in Bolivia. In 1979 George Knelsen left Shipyard Colony in Belize for Swift Current Colony in Bolivia due to land shortages; after just two years Knelsen joined other migrants from Belize and bought land on the eastern edge of the Mennonite settlement area and established the new colony Belice. Because the colony was jointly established by the Belizean group with another group from Riva Palacios Colony opinions differed on which technology was permitted. The Old Colony Mennonites from Shipyard used motorized combine harvesters on steel wheels, while those from Riva Palacios used steel wheeled tractors to pull the combines on rubber tires. Knelsen remembered many disputes in Belice over the combines a disagreement which continued for years and was only recently resolved. Knelsen favoured the pull-type combine, but the colony’s church established that both types were permitted and each man could choose which type of combine he preferred. [13] The Old Colony Mennonites saw the importance of the steel wheel as it related to their ‘normative self-image’. The leaders of Belice Colony seemed to find that by permitting both types the Old Colony identity could still be preserved.

The inclusions of other modern technology saw similar mixed responses. Several interviewees saw no cause for concern regarding the use of solar panels. Jakob Reimer in

[13] George Knelsen, interview by author, Written notes, Belice Colony, Campo 60, 1 June 2009,

Manitoba Colony had installed several solar panels in his home,[14] as did Johan Wall in the same colony.[15] However, several young women in other colonies spoke of fear of reprisals from church leaders over the use of their solar panels. The family of Ann Peters, an eighteen year old in Oriente Colony, had installed a solar panel on the roof of their house to power the lone light bulb in the main room of their house hidden from view by heavy shrubbery surrounding the house. Peters remembered an occasion when a relative, a church elder in a different colony, came to visit her family. Before the man entered the house Peters' sister quickly unscrewed the light bulb. Peters noticed the visitor looking at the empty socket and felt relieved when he made no comment.[16] Another woman, Leona Sawatsky, age twenty-eight, of Valle Esperanza Colony also recalled her family sidestepping the *Ordnung* to permit electricity in her home. Although the use of electric lights is prohibited by the *Ordnung*, Sawatsky thought that this was only because electric lights had never been used before in the colony. Because her father thought that gas lamps were too dangerous he had installed several electric lights in his home and without consequences. In this instance the Old Colony *Ordnung*, although defined, permitted some leeway for individual interpretation.

If some technologies were pushed from within the communities, other changes were pushed by people from outside the Mennonite colonies. Jakob Klassen of Valle Nuevo Colony had traveled twice to Paraguay and returned with new ideas. While the first trip was a private one to visit a sister, a second trip in 2002 was with a group of eighteen men from various colonies. Organized by Centro Menno, a branch of

---

[14] Jakob Reimer, interviewed by author, Written notes, Manitoba Colony, Campo 310, 20 May 2009.

[15] Johan Wall, interviewed by author, Written notes, Manitoba Colony, Campo 315, 20 May 2009.

[16] Ann Peters, interviewed by author, Written notes, Oriente Colony, Campo 1, 10 June 2009.

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) that provided various services and ideas for agricultural reform for the Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia,[17] the group toured several progressive colonies in Paraguay for a week, observing several business and colony co-operatives.[18] The men were encouraged by Centro Menno to see whether they could incorporate any practices into their own colonies. When Klassen returned to Valle Nuevo Colony he adapted two things he had seen in Paraguay on his own farm. One was a certain type of 'knife' that he thought was better for ploughing the earth, while the second adaptation enabled him to build a self-locking contraption to secure dairy cows for milking, thereby freeing him from manually securing the cows in place. He noticed that others in his colony saw his new technology and were quick to copy him. Klassen admitted that when it came to their agricultural practices there were other changes accepted by the colony. Several years earlier men in Valle Nuevo Colony had begun to spray their fields with the common herbicide, *Round Up*, which they bought in the city of Santa Cruz, and to good effect.

While minor adaptations were accepted by the colony, major changes in the colony were greeted with little warmth. Klassen indicated that one year the Old Colony Mennonites in his colony attempted to build a co-operative, but they had since discontinued the practice[19] as it did not seem to suit the Bolivian context. Daniel Niedorf,

---

[17] Mennonite Central Committee, available at www.mcc.org, accessed on January 20, 2009.

[18] The Old Colony men visited the progressive Paraguayan Mennonite colonies of Fernheim, Menno and Neuland. Fernheim, Menno Colony and Neuland are three Mennonite colonies located in the Chaco region of Paraguay. Menno Colony was founded by Mennonites from Canada in 1928, Fernheim was founded by Mennonites that left Russia in 1930 and Neuland was established in 1947 by Mennonite refugees from Russia. All three are considered to be more progressive than the Old Colony communities in Bolivia. Peter Duerksen and Heinz Braun. (1987). "Neuland Colony (Boquerón Department, Paraguay)." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online.* Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online. Retrieved 21 January 2010 <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/N4855.html.

[19] Jakob Klassen, interviewed by author, Written notes, Valle Nuevo Colony, Campo 104, 16 June 2009.

age forty of California Colony, was familiar with the Paraguay Mennonite co-operatives but disapproved of them as they led to increased interaction with 'the world', more so than individual farmers working through colony-based businesses.[20]

The Old Colony Mennonites, like other conservative Anabaptist groups, were selective about which technology was included in their communities. The principle of selective inclusion, according to Donald Kraybill and James Hurd, secures the purity of the community[21] and the recollections of the Old Colony Mennonite interviewees confirm this argument. 'Suse' Knelsen in Manitoba Colony thought church leaders prohibited the modernizing of farm machinery because the Old Colony Mennonites should work with their hands and not get rich from their work and this 'normative self-image', according to Church leaders, was ordained by the Bible.[22] Instances of when modern technology was introduced saw mixed receptions. Memories of these occasions revealed that the Old Colony Mennonites' culture was occasionally in flux, and that individuals challenged the 'normative self-image' while remaining firmly fixed to the general Old Colony identity. In some instances, such as rubber tires, colony leaders attempted to preserve their culture by completely rejecting any new additions. However, other instances of leniencies seemed to suggest that not all new technologies threatened their cultural identity. This would correspond with Assmann's definition of 'obligation' where there are 'differentiations in importation'. [23] Minor alterations, such as different types of ploughs, were less important to their collective identity, while the dispute over

[20] Daniel Niedorf, interview with author, Written notes, California Colony, Campo 331, 22 May 2009.

[21] Donald B. Kraybill and James P. Hurd, *Horse-and-Buggy Mennonites: Hoofbeats of Humility in a Postmodern World* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 28.

[22] 'Suse' Knelsen, interviewed by author, Written notes, Manitoba Colony, Campo 319, 19 May 2009.

[23] Assmann, 'Cultural Memory and Cultural Identity', 131.

rubber tires was seen as an integral part of the Old Colony culture. These memories emphasized the Old Colony Mennonite continuous struggle to define the Old Colony identity as new technologies continued to be introduced.

Health

Another area of struggle many interviewees spoke about regarded their health. This common theme seemed somewhat surprising since it is rarely examined by scholars of the Old Colony Mennonite identity. Yet there might be two explanations for this trend: the first relates to the Mennonite's persecution mentality, already referred to in the previous chapter;[24] a second explanation is that my study asked more general questions allowing the Mennonites to see the interviews as a place where they had agency to represent past events. As suggested by several oral historians, in retelling their stories the interviewees control their interpretations of events that make them feel helpless. Elizabeth Tonkin writes that in the interview "it becomes possible to argue that we constitute ourselves and one another in society as active subjects even if we are powerless ones."[25] Alessandro Portelli's study on oral accounts of the death of Luigi Trastulli in Italy found that one way the retellings healed past wounds was by amplifying the workers' responses, thus enhancing their agency in the past event.[26] The Old Colony Mennonite

---

[24] Cañás Bottos writes that initially rules were placed on the Anabaptist groups, but later the Mennonites adopted these imposed rules as their own as part of a persecution mentality. Cañás Bottos, 47.

[25] Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating our Pasts: The Social Construction of our History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 100.

[26] Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli, and other stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), 19. Portelli looks at the recounting of the death of a young man, Luigi Trastulli and how interviewees changed details of the death to fit into their own stories. Portelli argues that changes were made in oral accounts to provide "adequate circumstances, causes, and consequences" (15). Portelli then offers three major functions for manipulating memory: 1) symbolic 2) psychological and 3) formal. See Chapter One, page 29 for further details.

memories of health issues seem to arise from both their 'suffering pilgrim' identity, and the opportunity for agency.

When Franz Rempel looked back on his fifty-six years for major events he recalled one that had occurred recently. In 2007 a tumour had begun to grow on his chin, and later a bump developed on his neck. To treat the tumours he and his wife traveled to distant La Paz, where the best specialists were located. The first time Rempel and his wife traveled to La Paz they stayed for a month and half, only to return a month later for another two months which he spent in the hospital. The doctors had to remove a large portion of his chin in the hopes of removing the entire tumour. At first the doctors tried to use skin taken from his shoulder to graft onto his chin, but that operation was unsuccessful. The second time the doctors took skin from his chest, which was more successful. In 2009 he still had difficulties drinking and was forced to use a straw, producing a strong aversion to the idea of a return to La Paz. Although he recalled La Paz as a pretty city, he spent most of his time in that city in a hospital. The last time Rempel was in La Paz he recalled that his only desire was to buy bus tickets for himself and his wife and to leave the city because it had become such an '*elend'* (misery) for him to stay in the hospital. To pay for the numerous surgeries, people in Valle Nuevo Colony donated money to Rempel and some money Rempel was forced to borrow.[27]

Both genders were eager to recall heath concerns and the sufferings they lived through. Marie Reimer, in California Colony, and her youngest daughter, had been sick with sores inside their mouths, sores that burned on contact with anything and causing significant loss of energy. After these sores had appeared several times she went to the

[27] Franz Rempel, interview by author, Written notes, Valle Nuevo Colony, Campo 102, 16 June 2009.

doctor who prescribed a salve costing Reimer eleven dollars for a small bottle. Despite the high cost Reimer was happy that the salve worked; recently she had gone back for more salve but was prescribed a different salve that did not have the same results.[28]

As an ethnic group which identified itself with land ownership and farming, the Mennonites worked the land and had extensive household duties, and any threat to their health could be perceived as a threat to their identity. In Neuland Colony, Aganetha Friesen, age forty-one, recalled being out in the field helping her husband when she noticed a problem with her eyes. She thought she might be going blind and then her arm went numb. It seemed as though her eye had detached itself and she went to a doctor. As a result of the high medical costs she and her husband had not been able to afford to clear their land and plant as many crops as they would have liked. She was thankful for all the help that she had received from her neighbours, particularly Frau Wolf who took care of her and took one of her sons in for two months, but there were still moments when she felt scared.[29] For Friesen her health scare was both a struggle in itself and a threat to her, and her husband's, identity as 'people of the land'.

The interviewees not only told stories about their own health concerns but also remembered when the health of their loved ones was threatened. Peter Friesen in Belice Colony recalled his wife's terminal suffering with liver cancer. Friesen's wife had been sick with diabetes for several years, although she only discovered this when she went to

[28] Marie Reimer, interview by author, Written notes, California Colony, Campo 341, 23 May 2009.

[29] Aganetha Friesen, interview by author, Written notes, Neuland Colony, Campo 3, 30 June 2009.

the doctor's office for a regular visit and was told she had a blood glucose level of 900.[30] In the years after this discovery Friesen's wife lost a lot of weight, dropping from close to 300lbs to 187 lbs. When Friesen was told that his wife had liver cancer he went to considerable lengths to restore her health. He recalled that he had spent a lot of money and even traveled with his wife to Kilometer 81,[31] a hospital run by Mennonites in Paraguay. The doctor at Kilometer 81 declined to treat his wife and sent Friesen and his wife to Asunción, the capital of Paraguay. In Asunción the doctors wanted to try expensive treatments, but Friesen's son in the United States talked to American doctors who told him that his mother should only try natural remedies. Friesen explained that the treatments the Paraguayan doctors wanted to prescribe would have only worked if his wife were younger. In the end all of Friesen's efforts were for nought and his wife passed away.[32]

Sarah Fehr of Valle Esperanza Colony told a similar story of her husband who died in 2008, ten days short of reaching the age of fifty-eight. Fehr remembered that he had been full of cancer; his stomach was so bloated that it was impossible for him to eat. She took her husband to see a doctor in Santa Cruz but was sent away. Fehr thought the doctor did not know how to help her husband or simply did not know what was wrong with him. She remembered that her husband had been sick for five weeks before he died,

---

[30] Normal fasting blood glucose levels are between 70 and 100 and post-meal levels are less than 140. *American Diabetes Association*; available from http://www.forecast.diabetes.org/diabetes-101/blood-glucose; Internet; accessed 21 January 2010.

[31] The Km 81 hospital began in 1948 as a project settlement for lepers, but then evolved into an out-patient program for individuals suffering from leprosy (a.k.a. Hansen's disease). In the ensuing years the hospital has increased its programs to include treatments for other health issues. *Km 81 – Asociacíon Evangélica Mennonita del Paraguay*; available from http://www.km81.org/en/?Getting_to_know_Km_81:Origin_and_Development; Internet; accessed 21 January 2010.

[32] Peter Friesen, interview with author, Written notes, Belice Colony, Campo 60, 29 May 2009.

and prior to that he had been slightly sick. For Fehr, it had been very difficult to lose her husband because he had always told her how their life of poverty was bearable 'as long as we are together', but now he was gone and she felt like his death was much too soon.[33]

For Frau Jakob Schmidt the suffering her mother-in-law went through was remembered in vivid detail and her retelling also highlighted her efforts to alleviate the women's pain. Her mother-in-law had diabetes and family members suspected that she had also developed cancer before she died. Schmidt frequently went to visit her mother-in-law who was sick for ten months before she passed away. Schmidt remembered that her mother-in-law had sores all over her body; and when her sores were checked her cries of pain could be heard from far away. Her family had taken her to a hospital in Santa Cruz but the doctors just sent them away. Despite undergoing a surgery twenty years before to reduce her stomach size Schmidt's mother-in-law had still been overweight at 331lbs. Schmidt thought the surgery may have helped the woman but Schmidt also thought the surgery probably made her mother-in-law weaker. At the end Schmidt clearly remembered her mother-in-law often saying she wanted to die.[34]

These are only a few stories about health the Old Colony Mennonites shared during the interviews. Perhaps the dominance of the recent stories, rather than older memories indicated the less linear approach of history taken by the Old Colony Mennonites, because they place less focus on progress and more on their communal salvation. For them their lives were not dissimilar from those led by their parents or grandparents, therefore when asked about major events in their lives recent memories

[33] Sarah Fehr, interview with author, Written notes, Valle Esperanza Colony, Campo 224, 25 June 2009.

[34] Frau Jakob Schmidt, interview with author, Written notes, Valle Nuevo Colony, Campo 106, 16 June 2009.

were seen as reflective of their entire lives. Also, the willingness to share these personal memories with an outsider seemed to imply that they saw these health struggles as important to their lives and to their identity. Sacrifice and struggle underlay many characteristics of the Old Colony Mennonite identity, ranging from their refusal to accept burden-easing technology to times of sicknesses. Each showed their struggles to maintain their identity as farmers, and struggles they went through living in isolated communities far from medical services.

WOMEN

Often research on collective identity of ethnic groups has focused on men and their concerns – religion, land and technology. Many of the women spoke of the same topics, which indicated that these are critical points also in their collective memory. But when asked about important historical events in their lives, these women highlighted another aspect of the Old Colony cultural identity. Many women discussed topics related to family life, such as marriage, children and clothes. Often recognized as a patriarchal society many Mennonite scholars have only given a brief look at women's voices and their understandings of their past. Still it seems apparent that women have contributed to the Old Colony's collective identity. Recalling memories of times when the women struggled to maintain the accepted Old Colony female identity reveals further elements of the reiterated standard identity of the Old Colony Mennonite woman.

Dating

Talking with several young women it became clear that women in the Bolivian colonies were expected to marry before they reached their early twenties. One woman, Katharina Fehr, age forty, in Valle Nuevo Colony, was married with eight children and was very curious about my single status as a woman. She thought that, due to limited socialization on their family farms, most Mennonite women married to avoid loneliness.[35] Through various discussions with Old Colony Mennonites it became clear that the female 'normative self-image' included marriage, usually before the woman reached her mid-twenties. Anthropologist Doreen Helen Klassen's research on single women nurses in the conservative colonies in Mexico, confirms Fehr's comments. Klassen also found in her research that singleness had been seen as a temporary state or, if prolonged, as a deficit identity.[36]

Two interviews with single women illustrate this point. Aganetha Niedorf, age 31, was a live-in personal assistance, for the seventy-five year old widow Anna Banman in Valle Esperanza Colony. Niedorf shared that while most women have had the '*Jeläajenheit*' (opportunity) to marry when they were twenty; she never had this '*Jeläajenheit*'.[37] The second single woman, Niedorf's neighbour, Leona Sawatsky, age twenty-eight years, viewed singleness differently than did Neidorf; she preferred singlehood. Sawatsky explained this unusual viewpoint by saying she thought that historically it ran in her family. She had several male cousins who had lived with their

[35] Katharina Fehr, interview by author, Written notes, Valle Nuevo Colony, Campo 109, 17 June 2009.

[36] Doreen Helen Klassen, "'I wanted a life of my own': Creating a Singlewoman Mennonite Identity in Mexico" *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 26 (2008): 52. Klassen found that the single women created a 'fictive kin' in their new living situation, private houses close to the nursing home and far from their home colonies. Through this creation the women would belong to the *Altenheim* (nursing home) community and offer a means to mitigate marginalization or loneliness. Klassen, 56.

[37] Aganetha Niedorf, interview by author, Written notes, Valle Esperanza Colony, Campo 210, 23 June 2009.

parents or married very late in life, several in their late thirties and one at age forty; when they married people said that 'it was about time'.[38] Clearly singleness was not considered part of the ideal Old Colony male or female identity. Still neither Niedorf nor Sawatsky indicated they wanted to leave the colony. Both of them were willing to 'struggle' as single women in the colony, rather than leave and find work that would give them more independence.

Husbands

All Bolivian Old Colony Mennonite women live in a patriarchal society and many women saw their material well-being dependent on their husbands. However, several women spoke of their memories of when they lost their husbands. Despite their loss these women continued to live in their colonies, even when they had the opportunity to leave. Significantly, most women gave their husband's name as their own and I specifically had to ask them for their first names. Anthropologist Janet Bennion's *Desert Patriarchy* argues that a harsh desert environment and the unique social traditions produce a particular set of gender dynamics among the Mormon and Mennonite communities of Chihuahua, Mexico.[39] Combined, these factors enable the continued existence of these isolated communities.[40] The environment the Bolivian Mennonites occupy is not arid as in Chihuahua, but they do try to live in isolation from other ethnic groups, even from more progressive Mennonites, and practice a strict patriarchal culture.

---

[38] Leona Sawatsky, interview by author, Written notes, Valle Esperanza Colony, Campo 210, 24 June 2009.

[39] Janet Bennion, *Desert Patriarchy: Mormon and Mennonite Communities in the Chihuahua Valley* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2004), 3.

[40] Bennion lists six components to desert patriarchy: 1) male supremacy 2) female networking 3) nonsecular education 4) imbalanced sex ratios 5) alternative sex and marriage forms 6) geographic and social circumscription where emigration is hindered by the physical or social environment. Bennion, 4.

I suggest that this patriarchy has also contributed to the Old Colony Mennonites' emphasis of community over the individual. Patriarchy enforces submission to authority, as does the Anabaptist view of communities. This places individual needs, and the status of women, on a lower priority, for fear of upsetting the 'normative self-image' of patriarchy. To push these gender rules would be considered '*too wiet*' (too far) and would be seen as becoming like the world. The following section deals mainly with extraordinarily detailed recollections from women who lost their husbands. They indicate the emotional impact of the events on the women and the dependency these women had on their husbands.

Several women spoke of their memories when their husbands passed away. These memories relayed a sense of suffering in that they lost their gendered role of leading the household economy. Widow Anna Banman, age seventy-five, vividly recalled the day she lost her husband on September 12, 2001. Banman was in Santa Cruz with her husband to see a doctor regarding some of her husband's health concerns. She and her husband were crossing a street when he was hit by a truck and his head was severely wounded. When Banman saw the wound she did not think that her husband, whose 'heart and body were old', was capable of surviving the trauma; he died shortly after he was hit. A nurse in the city had seen her husband shortly after the accident and had told Banman that there was nothing that could have been done for him. Banman ended her recollection by saying she brought her husband back to the colony dead. After her husband died Banman's sister in Mexico asked her to move back to Mexico to live together, but Banman declined the offer stating that she did not think she could share a kitchen with another woman. The death of her husband, and her desire to continue to run

her own house, left Banman dependent on the assistance of her live-in help, Aganetha Niedorf.[41] In the patriarchal culture of her colony, this woman had to exhibit *Gelassenheit,* submission to the suffering allotted her. The loss of a husband left her bereft of a certain degree of independence. She expressed her frustration regarding her dependence on a "stranger", but she continued to live in the colony rather than seek to live with her children, some of whom had left the Old Colony Mennonite community.

The husband of another widow, Frau Franz Berg, age sixty-three, died several months after he and Berg returned from a second trip to Canada in 2007. She remembered that he had kidney problems, was unable to walk, and had been sick for five weeks prior to his death. When her husband passed away Berg recalled that it had been a very difficult time for her. Currently she lived with a '*Framda*' (stranger) couple. Berg hoped that her granddaughter would move in with her after her granddaughter was married, thereby forcing the other couple to move out.[42] For Berg it was difficult to transition from wife to widow, because like Banman she had 'strangers', a couple who was not related to her, living in her home. She was forced to live in a situation considered less than ideal for a Mennonite woman, because she was husbandless and was dependent on *'Framde'* (strangers). Although Berg's situation was less than ideal she continued to submit to the *Ordnung* by remaining in the colony, rather than seeking alternative housing for seniors.

The women in the colonies were dependent on their husbands for economic reasons as well. Griet Bergen, age forty-two, in Oriente Colony spoke about a young

[41] Anna Banman, interview by author, Written notes, Valle Esperanza Colony, Campo 210, 23 June 2009.

[42] Frau Franz Berg, interview by author, Written notes, Manitoba Colony, Campo 318, 19 May 2009.

man who had suffered from a shooting accident a few years before. At age twenty-six he was working for others in the colony as his young family needed the money. He would shoot doves or other birds that came in flocks in winter to eat off the fields, reducing their potential yield. One day the young man was standing with his wrists resting on the upturned barrel when a little boy came over to him to play, accidentally pulling the trigger, leaving a hole through the young man's wrists and almost severing his right hand. Bergen and her husband rushed the young man to a hospital in Santa Cruz to see an expensive doctor about reattaching his right hand. With funds from the colony, and a brother in Canada, the young man was able to pay the doctor fees and was also able to buy a few cows and kitchen appliances. Bergen thought that it was good that the young man regained both his hands because he had five children and he had to provide for them.[43]

Some women said that they preferred to have their husbands nearby and shared memories of times when their husbands were not at home. According to Old Colony Mennonite gender roles men usually worked outside on the fields, the women within the homes and both in the barn. Despite the patriarchal nature of the colony, the household is based on a degree of mutuality. Katharina Fehr, age forty, was the wife of Valle Nuevo Colony's *Vorsteher*,[44] who had recently become the principal *Vorsteher*, implying more responsibilities. Because the Fehrs lived in the central part of the colony most colony members would come to Fehr's husband with their requests. At the time of the interview Fehr's husband was busy ensuring that all colony members had their Bolivian identity

[43] Griet Bergen, interview with author, Written notes, Oriente Colony, Campo 2, 11 June 2009.

[44] The *Vorsteher* is considered the 'secular' half of the church as it deals secular and official matters. The *Vorstehers* are appointed by the church. Calvin Wall Redekop, *The Old Colony Mennonites: Dilemmas of Ethnic Minority Life*(Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins Press, 1969), 103.

cards, in addition to registering weddings and births with the Bolivian government.[45] All these responsibilities forced Fehr's husband to travel regularly to Santa Cruz, often for several days at a time. In addition to traveling to the city, Fehr's husband also had to travel within the colony to ensure members were growing trees around the perimeters of the colony (according to Katharina Fehr this barrier was believed to block phone and radio signals from accessing the colony). Fehr did not like it that her husband was so busy because their new house was still unfinished and she preferred it when her husband could work on their house and farm. However, for Fehr the community continued to take precedence and this meant she would not ask her husband to abstain from his duties in the colony.

Based on the memories of these women the 'normative self-image' of Old Colony Mennonite women included marriage in their early twenties and adherence to clearly defined gender roles. The women were reliant on their husbands to help build a strong household income that made them both self-sufficient and independent from others in the colony. With the loss of a husband, the women were sometimes left dependent on strangers, either for financial support or live-in personal assistance. This situation, in which they were no longer capable of running their own households, threatened their sense of ideal Old Colony womanhood.. In retelling these stories the women spoke about their suffering, as widows or 'work-widows', but their suffering belonged to the overall Old Colony narrative. The narrative spoke about *Gelassenheit* to the *Ordnung*, and the *Ordnung* prescribed patriarchy. These women did not question their suffering or express

[45] Newly married couples brought their identity cards, along with their parents' cards, to Fehr's husband and he would take these cards to Santa Cruz and register the marriage with the Bolivian government. To register babies' births Fehr's husband would wait until several babies were born before registering them in Santa Cruz.

desire to change the *Ordnung*. Despite their expressions of frustration or dislike regarding their situations, the women did not express any desire to leave the colony. For them their suffering belonged to their identity as Old Colony Mennonite women.

Children

Beyond the role of a husband another common theme among the recollections of the Mennonite women was their children and their struggle to retain their adult children in the colonies. The average woman in the Bolivian colonies had eight to ten children, which effectively tied her to her household. Katharina Fehr thought this average was lower than in her mother's generation, which she estimated had about twelve children per family.[46] Anna Banman, age seventy-five, shared Fehr's opinion, and noted that women no longer had as many children as women did in her generation. This dip in reproduction was despite the prohibition that Old Colony women did not have the '*Frieheit*' (permission) to limit the number of children they conceived.[47] Both Fehr and Banman thought the reason families were becoming smaller was due to decreasing health of the women over generations. Leona Reimer in Neuland Colony thought the women in the colonies were '*februckt*' (used up), and therefore could no longer have fifteen children, like previous generations such as her mother-in-law.[48] Despite the perceived decline in women's health, the continued high birth rates[49] caused land shortage and forced

[46] Katharina Fehr, interview, Valle Nuevo.

[47] Anna Banman, interview, Valle Esperanza.

[48] Leona Reimer, interview with author, Written notes, Neuland Colony, Campo 3, 29 June 2009.

[49] According to the United Nations populations division estimated in 2009 that the global average for birthrates would be to 2.1 children per household. *The Economist*, "Go forth and multiply a lot less: Lower fertility is changing the world for the better" 29 October 2009; accessed by http://www.economist.com/displaystory.cfm?story_id=14743589; Internet; accessed 21 January 2010.

migration. Many women shared that they preferred to have their children in the same colony in which they resided rather than strewn throughout various colonies, and sometimes throughout several countries. Marie Knelsen, in Belice Colony, had seventeen children, one of whom died when it was two years old. Most of her children lived in her colony, but one of her sons lived in Canada. She would have preferred having her son in Bolivia, but she and her husband once went to visit her son in Alberta. Knelsen remembered with disapproval how her son told her that the neighbours did not know each other. [50]

For many women it was the threat of things going '*too wiet*' in a colony and the implications on their children that caused the mothers to consider migration. They were concerned about the impact of 'the world' on their children and any perceived threat to their children's salvation. Katharina Fehr from Valle Nuevo Colony commented that it might be better for a woman not to have any children because then she would not have to worry about their future and their status in the Old Colony Church. Fehr and her husband were so concerned about the salvation of their children that they bought their children German Children Bibles, which, Fehr admitted, was unusual for Old Colony Mennonites for Old Colony Mennonites.[51]

Frau Abrahm Loewen similarly recalled several instances when she felt things in Belice Colony went '*too wiet'*. Loewen had nine children, eight of whom still lived at home. Her eldest son had left Belice Colony at the age of twenty-one because, as he told

---

The average Canadian fertility rate in 2007 was 1.66. *Statistics Canada*; available from http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/090922/dq090922b-eng.htm; Internet; accessed 21 January 2010.

[50] Marie Knelsem, interview with author, Written notes, Belice Colony, Campo 60, 6 June 2009.

[51] Katharina Fehr, interview, Valle Nuevo.

his mother, he found life in the colony too strict. He went to live with Loewen's sister in a more progressive colony, but returned every few months to visit his family. Loewen thought it was more difficult for boys than girls to remain in the Old Colony communities for when the boys were fifteen they were permitted to socialize on the dirt streets that ran through the villages and Loewen believed that it was on these roads that the boys learned 'the ways of the world'. Loewen was less concerned about her second eldest son, who preferred to stay at home, but her third son would often go to the Trans Continental Highway that bisected the colony. This highway was a main commercial artery between Santa Cruz and Brazil and saw a considerable amount of traffic, despite its unfinished state as a dirt road. Loewen thought that this highway provided teenage boys in the colony easy access to rides to nearby towns and opened up possibilities that were otherwise prohibited by the Old Colony Church. A few years ago a church *Ältesta* (bishop) tried to prohibit boys in the colony from congregating on the roads, but Loewen said that it did not take long before the boys were back on the roads. Besides being influenced by 'the world' Loewen also feared that the youth was introducing too many changes in the colony. She thought that if things went '*too wiet*' she would move her family to a newly established colony in the west, far removed from any highway.[52] Echoing Rev. Isaac Dyck's memoirs of the 1922 emigration from Canada, Loewen saw sacrificing a more established life in Belice Colony for life in a more isolated colony necessary if it meant her children would stay loyal to the Old Colony Church.

The women, more so than the men, emphasized their struggles to keep their children in the colonies and faithful to the Old Colony Mennonite identity. However,

[52] Frau Abrahm Loewen, interview with author, Written notes, Belice Colony, Campo 52, 2 June 2009.

some mothers disclosed their struggles between obligation to the 'normative self-image' and preserving their relationships with their children when things went '*too wiet'* in the colony. Frau Wilhelm Peters, in Oriente Colony, was willing to face punishment and possible excommunication for the actions of her daughter. The action was described by Peters' other daughter, Ann, who told of the time when her oldest sister left the colony to attend a more progressive Mennonite church in the nearby town of Pailon.[53] According to Ann Peters this church did not make head-coverings mandatory, unlike the Old Colony Church. The Peters' family attended the oldest daughter's baptism in Pailon and as a result Ann's father was excommunicated from the Old Colony Church for a short period. The punishment would have been mitigated if Ann's parents had promised the church leaders that they would forbid their daughter from coming to their home. However, Ann remembered her mother responding 'but what mother can forbid her child from coming onto her yard?'[54]

Things were changing in the colonies, despite the women's assertion to the contrary. Some were subtle changes, such as the decreasing birthrates, while others were more apparent, such as the impact of the Trans Continental Highway. Children were an integral part of the Old Colony identity and memories of when this aspect of their identity was threatened were highlighted. The women were aware of perceived and subtle threats to their identity and the varied responses disclosed the individual agency as they interpreted the 'differentiations in importance' of the various obligations in the Old Colony Church. The women also highlighted their struggles to remain true to the 'old

[53] Many excommunicated Mennonites have moved to Pailon, a town in eastern Bolivia. Many evangelical Mennonites have also moved to this area to start outreach and radio programs for the surrounding Old Colony Mennonite communities.

[54] Ann Peters, interview with author, Written notes, Oriente Colony, Campo 1, 10June 2009.

ways'. They noted that their bodies were no longer able to maintain the standard of reproduction set by their mothers. The women also spoke about their struggles in keeping their children true to the 'old ways'. For them struggle had become part of an Old Colony Mennonite mother's identity.

Clothes

Husband and children were usually the main focus of stories told by the Old Colony women, but they also spoke of their distinctive dress. Several female Mennonite scholars have already looked at various aspects of conservative dress within Mennonite communities. Marlene Epp argues that the head-coverings and plain dress in Old Order Mennonites in Ontario served two purposes: first, to preserve the Old Colony Mennonites' separatist identity, the second to put the women in a subordinate position.[55] Lynette Sarah Plett, in studying women in the conservative Kleine Gemeinde Mennonite Community[56] in which she grew up, agrees that head-coverings defined women's subordinate position since men, ministers or brethren in individual congregations, determined the use of head-coverings.[57] Anthropologist Linda Boynton Arthur's study of conservative Holdeman Mennonite[58] women's uniform pattern of dress was linked to the

---

[55] Epp examines the beginning of this practice in the late nineteenth century and linked the cap and plain dress with the 1920's fundamentalist-style theology that had become prevalent at the time. Marlene Epp, "Carrying the Banner of Nonconformity: Ontario Mennonite Women and the Dress Question" *The Conrad Grebel Review* 3 (Fall 1990): 238, 243.

[56] The Kleine Gemeinde Church began in Molotschna, Russia in 1814 by dissatisfied members of the Mennonite Church. Several key components of the Kleine Gemeinde Church includes: nonconformity, humility and church discipline. Harold S. Bender "Kleine Gemeinde" *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online.* Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online. , (1956). Retrieved 21 January 2010 <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/K5446.html.

[57] Lynette Sarah Plett, "Refashioning *Kleine Gemeinde* Women's Dress in Kansas and Manitoba: A Textual Crazy Quilt" *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 26 (2008): 112.

[58] Holdeman Mennonites, formerly known as The Church of God in Christ, was founded 1859 though a spiritual awakening led by John Holdeman in the United States. Holdeman insisted on a return to the

Old Colony Mennonites' "two kingdom" worldview and their belief in the separation from the world. However, Arthur also argues that through minor alterations, such as the type of fabric used,[59] the women asserted a semblance of power and agency.[60] These themes are evident too in the Old Colony communities where both men and women wore distinctive clothing; however, as the main seamstresses it was the women who spoke more often clothing. Anna Banman, age seventy-five, remembered wearing dresses made out of cotton in Mexico, but personally thought that cotton dresses were not as '*fein*' (nice) as the polyester dresses the women wore in Bolivia. Unlike Arthur's conclusions with regard to assertions of agency, Banman thought the switch in fabrics simply reflected Bolivia's hotter climate, although Banman did note that even in winter months the women wore polyester dresses made warmer with cotton slips or sweaters overtop.[61] 'Suse' Knelsen in Manitoba Colony also remembered the switch to polyester, but she thought it was because the Mennonite women could not find any cotton fabric in the Bolivian markets when the Old Colony Mennonites first arrived in the late 1960's.[62]

In the interviews more changes to the Old Colony clothing were remembered. Despite her young age eighteen year old Ann Peters in Oriente Colony noticed several changes in the clothing styles between generations. She noted with irony that customs

---

primitive Gospel way of life and doctrine. Hiebert, P. G., Clarence Hiebert and Otis E. Hochstetler. "Church of God in Christ, Mennonite (CGC)." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online.* 1989. Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online. Retrieved 21 January 2010. Accessed http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/C487ME.html

[59] In the 1970's Holdeman women switched to from cotton to polyester but they continued to buy fabric with similar prints in order to not draw the attention of the minsters. (Arthur, 95)

[60] Linda B. Arthur, "Deviance, Agency, and the Social Control of Women's Bodies in a Mennonite Community" *NWSA Journal* 10, No. (Summer 1998): 96.

[61] Anna Banman, interview, Valle Esperanza.

[62] 'Suse' Knelsen, interview, Manitoba.

that used to be '*plietsch*'[63], that is in times when her grandmother was young, were now part of the *Ordnung*. She recalled her grandmother saying that Old Colony women had to wear aprons with their dresses when she was young, but now it was no longer mandatory. Also, her grandmother was not allowed to have a fringe on her headscarf. Peters remembered her grandmother saying that the girls would try to hide their fringes, and her sister, Peters' great-aunt, made holes in the kerchief with her teeth in order to sew fringes in. Now, a fringe on the headscarf had become mandatory. Peters noted that people in the colony thought they were doing everything as their parents and grandparents had done them, but things were changing.[64] Peters had noticed the changing nature of the Old Colony Mennonite collective memory and how cultural identity was not static, and did so, despite the Old Colony Mennonites' claim of '*So ha' wie daut emma jedohne*' (that is how we have always done it).

Two older women also noted changes in the Old Colony dress. Sixty-two year old Katharina Wolf in Neuland Colony remembered that her grandmother's dresses were longer, to the ankles, and had buttons down the front. Wolf thought the shift to shorter dresses[65] was the result of the migration to warmer climates. Widow Tien Wall, age sixty-five, of Neuland Colon, remembered some differences in the clothing between generations when looking at an old photograph. Wall remembered that the Old Colony women used to tie their head kerchiefs in front, under their chins, but now they usually tied the kerchiefs in the back, at the nape of their necks. She recalled that because her mother-in-law disapproved of the new way Wall continued to tie her kerchief under her

[63] Plietsch: forbidden by the *Ordnung.*

[64] Ann Peters, interview, Oriente.

[65] Dresses worn by the Old Colony women in Bolivia are approximately mid-calf length.

chin. Wall also remembered a time when women would wear elaborate headpieces for church services and receiving guests on Sundays. This practice had also declined to a point in which such headpieces merely showed who was a grandmother.[66]

These women noted changes in their dress as reflecting different climates. Only one of the women interviewed seemed to think about the implications clothing had on the Old Colony women's identity. Forty-four year old Katharina Teichrob thought Old Colony Mennonites wore different clothing because they were supposed to be a light to 'the world' and to be different from 'the world', for the same reason they did not watch television or listen to the radio. She was concerned that their lifestyle was changing and that it would be difficult to preserve things the way their parents had done them.[67] Katharina Teichrob was the only woman who explicitly spoke about clothing as a symbol to the outside world. According to Teichrob, the Old Colony Mennonites were willing to suffer in the sense that they were different from the surrounding society, because they were called to do so as '*Christenvolk*' (People of Christ). The Old Colony Mennonite women were willing to wear clothing that would visibly separate them from the surrounding society and suffer rejection from their neighbours. The women were also willing to continue sewing their own clothes even when ready-made clothes were available in the Bolivian markets.

Most of the Old Colony women did not see the change of standard clothing as an assertion of agency or as affecting the relations of power between genders. Instead, the women explained these changes in ways that would be acceptable to their 'normative

---

[66] Tien Wall, interview with author, Written notes, Neuland Colony, Campo 3, 30 June 2009.

[67] Katharina Teichrob, interview with author, Written notes, Valle Nuevo Colony, Campo 18 June 2009.

self-image'. By explaining the switch to polyester as the result of migration to warmer climates the women explained the change within the framework of an acceptable Old Colony identity. Other changes, such as fringes or different ways to tie a headscarf, revealed more visible threats to the Old Colony Mennonite women's identity. These changes were part of outside influences and the older women feared the younger generation was introducing changes that would push the colonies '*too wiet'* into 'the world'. For as other scholars have noted, clothing and dress are a distinctive part of the conservative Mennonites' identity.

CONCLUSION

The memories of the Old Colony men and women were filtered through their 'normative self-image'[68]. Their accounts suggest key aspects of the Old Colony identity, aspects important in the lives of both the men and the women, and specific memories recounted times when the Old Colony identity was threatened. These memories reveal the Old Colony Mennonites' historic responses to these threats, such as modern technology, disease or death. These recollections showed which things were considered '*too wiet'* and were seen to push the Colony further into 'the world', while other things were considered safe and were adapted into the Old Colony identity. These memories showed that the Old Colony Mennonites were aware of the threats to their 'normative self-image' and did not omit them from their recollections. Rather than omitting recollections of struggles, the Old Colony Mennonites spoke eagerly of those memories. The number of memories that recounted struggles or sacrifices implies that an underlying tenet to the Old Colony Mennonite identity includes struggle and sacrifice, because they

[68] Assmann, 131.

were called to be different from '*Dee Welt*'. As examined in the first part of the chapter, scholars have linked these tenets to the conservative Anabaptists' theology and the memories of the interviewees confirm this tenet as part of the Old Colony Mennonite identity.

CHAPTER FOUR

'*Dee Welt*': Creating and Maintaining an Ethnic Border

Cultural identity is not limited to the dynamics within the ethnic group, but also includes interactions with other ethnicities and the wider national community, '*Dee Welt´* in Old Colony vocabulary. This chapter examines interviewees' memories of the social border between the Old Colony Mennonite communities and other groups, primarily the wider Bolivian society. The previous chapters have outlined key characteristics of the Old Colony Mennonite identity in recent history. These characteristics have also impacted the views held by the Old Colony Mennonites regarding their national context and their Bolivian neighbours and partially, in turn, affected their own identity.

This chapter primarily looks at Old Colony Mennonite memories during the years they resided in Bolivia. Although the questions asked were about the history of relations with their surrounding society, many of these memories reflected life in recent years. Even though these are recent individual memories they relied on the collective memory that shaped their cultural identity by filtering their memories according to what defined the Old Colony Mennonites. Since the collective memory, constructed over time, emphasizes certain cultural characteristics individuals recollect memories accordingly. Individual recollections will reflect the priorities of the group, as evidenced by the memories of the Old Colony Mennonites. The interviewee's recollections discussed in this chapter reflect the identity examined in previous chapters.

Ethnic Border and Othering

In his 1969 *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, Fredrik Barth argues that an ethnic identity is not necessarily based on internal dynamics, but at the borders through interactions with other ethnic groups. Barth writes that "a dichotomization of others as strangers, as members of another ethnic group, implies a recognition of limitations on shared understandings, differences in criteria for judgement of value and performance, and a restriction of interaction to sectors of assumed common understanding and mutual interest."[1] Further he writes, "The ethnic boundary canalizes social life – it entails a frequently quite complex organization of behaviour and social relations."[2] It is at the boundary, where groups follow certain forms of behaviours in their interactions, that certain characteristics of an ethnic identity become evident.[3]

Such a social process can arise from daily tensions within an immigrant group. The Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia fit the definition of a diaspora since the communities continue to migrate through countries, never claiming allegiance to any national state. The Old Colony Mennonites are also scattered throughout the Americas and continue to be a minority with tentative relationships with the surrounding societies.

---

[1] Fredrik Barth, editor, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference*, The Little, Brown Series in Anthropology (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), 15.

[2] Ibid.

[3] The ethnic border encompasses an internal formation of an idealized society, with a communal memory and a cultural identity, and external views to inform the interactions with other ethnic groups. Jan Assmann's 'the concretion of identity' argues that this is the point where cultural memory gives a group of people a store of knowledge which becomes the foundation of its peculiarity and unity and determines who becomes a member. Jan Assmann, "Collective memory and Cultural Identity' *New German Critique* 65 (1995): 130.

Ramaswami Mahalingam's article "Cultural Psychology Of Immigrants" argues that minority immigrants tend to use idealized societies to create and sustain communities. Ramaswami Mahalingam, editor, *Cultural Psychology of Immigrants* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers. 2006), 3.

As part of the diaspora community the Old Colony Mennonites live with a tension between the physical 'here' in Bolivia, while simultaneously remembering 'there', the metaphorical home in the afterlife, in heaven, and attempting to realize their idealized Old Colony Mennonite identity, as discussed in previous chapters. [4] To deal with the 'here' the Old Colony Mennonites rely on a sense of the 'other', which is formed in opposition, or comparison to the 'self's' identity. For the Old Colony Mennonites this implies that the Old Colony Mennonites view Bolivian society according to their own identity and their own idealized communities.

National Politics

Interviews conducted on the question of boundaries and 'othering' suggest that the Old Colony Mennonites' search for cultural and social isolation and the process of 'othering' are closely linked. As mentioned in previous chapters, religious salvation in the Old Colony communities is pursued as a group, with a clear sense of their self identity and a willingness to defend it from '*Dee Welt*' (the world) [5]. Here the Old Colony Mennonites have defined 'self' – themselves – in contrast to the 'other', the Bolivians. Yet the 'self', that is, their idealized communities, lives in the changing context of the Bolivian country and, in spite of their isolation, several Old Colony Mennonites readily spoke about the national government albeit in terms that reflected a particular sense of 'self' and social border.

---

[4] The concept of 'here' versus 'there' is adapted from Vijay Agnew's examination of immigrants in America. Vijay Agnew, *Diaspora, Memory, and Identity: A Search for Home* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 4.

[5] Anna Sophia Hedberg, *Outside the World: Cohesion and Deviation among Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia.* (Stockholm, Sweden: Elanders Gotab, 2007), 132.

Several interviewees referred to the indigenous president, Evo Morales, elected in 2005. Jakob Friesen, a twenty-eight year old of Manitoba Colony who had resided in Canada for one year, confessed that he knew more about Bolivian politics during that time in Canada, than after he returned to Bolivia. However, he had recently read of a hunger strike led by Morales in the *Mennonitische Post* and disapproved of the president's action.[6] Peter Knelsen, also in Manitoba Colony, did not trust Morales and thought the Old Colony Mennonites would lose money with him as president. He recalled once reading about black Africans who confiscated land owned by white Africans and consequently bankrupted the farms.[7] It seemed that Knelsen feared the same thing would happen in Bolivia and that the Bolivian indigenous population would reclaim Mennonite farms.

Several women also indicated they feared the indigenous president and his control over the colonies. Katharina Friesen in Belice Colony was concerned that Morales would hinder Mennonite exports, specifically Mennonites' sales of certain beef products. She was also concerned that oil might be in short supply, despite its abundance in the country. She accused the president of selling oil to other countries and controlling the price within Bolivia.[8] Seventy-five year old Anna Banman described Morales as the '*de Easchta Drogenhaendler*' (the primary drug handler) in the country. She remembered hearing that when the president traveled to the United States he had refused to sign a document declaring drugs to be illegal. As she recalled it, in the end Morales had been forced to

[6] Jakob Friesen, interview with author, Written notes, Manitoba Colony, Campo 315, 15 May 2009.

[7] Peter Knelsen, interview by author, Written notes, Manitoba Colony, Campo 319, 18 May 2009.

[8] Katharina Friesen, interview by author, Written notes, Belice Colony, Campo 60, 29 May 2009.

sign the document, proving that the United States was still stronger than Bolivia.[9] Twenty-eight year old Leona Sawatsky, in Valle Esperanza Colony, accused Morales of sanctioning blockades on the nearby highway, although she admitted the blockades had become less frequent with Morales as president. Sawatsky recalled that the blockades occurred several times, but she did not know for what purpose, she just said "*maunchmol fe dit, mauchmol fe daut*" (sometimes for this, sometimes for that). Her main concern was that the blockades were irritating, especially when she tried to travel to Santa Cruz with her family. Once, during a blockade, her family was forced to detour through the neighbouring region of New Holland on the way to the city. After a week in the city the blockades were still up, forcing her family to take a barge over the Rio Grande River to access another road to the colony.[10]

These interviewees had heard some details about Bolivian politics and viewed them with respect to their impact on the Mennonite communities. In spite of their claim that their communities were separated from the state, the Old Colony Mennonites knew they were affected by state politics. The Old Colony Mennonites held to an idealized community and looked towards an eventual 'home'.[11] However, they were still a minority in Bolivia and lived with the daily tensions of the 'physical' in the tangible and every day interactions.[12] Part of this tension included national policies that the Old Colony Mennonites feared would threaten their idealized communities. The memories the interviewees recalled about national politics usually included policies that impacted

[9] Anna Banman, interview with author, Written notes, Valle Esperanza Colony, Campo 210, 23 June 2009.

[10] Leona Sawatsky, interview with author, Written notes, Valle Esperanza Colony, Campo 210, 24 June 2009.

[11] Agnew, 4.

[12] Ibid.

their agricultural livelihood. Although the Old Colony Mennonites, an agricultural-based community, tried to preserve their cultural identity in isolation they were nevertheless connected to the more complex society surrounding them. E.K. Francis examined the conservative Mennonites in Canada during the 1950's and writes, "While economic self-sufficiency is typical of folk societies, the subsistence of a peasant village depends upon the exchange of goods and services with the rest of the larger society."[13] The Old Colony Mennonites participated in the Bolivian market to finance and maintain their isolated communities, but they did not see themselves as Bolivian citizens, involved in national movements, and did not care to know what drove other Bolivian groups to initiate blockades. For them, the blockades were simply an annoyance that prevented easy access to resources in the city. The interviewees' recollections of the indigenous president, Evo Morales, also revealed their tiered views of different ethnic groups in Bolivia, specifically the *colla* and the *camba.*

'Mexa', Colla *and* Camba – *Terms used to define Bolivians*

Race is a socially learned concept and perceptions of 'outsiders' are learned within a community. Paula Rothenberg writes about race relations and says, "Our compass for navigating race relations depends on preconceived notions of what each specific racial group looks like."[14] These preconceived notions are based on socialization within a community. Martin Marger examines the role of socialization in race relations and writes, "Fear of, dislike for, and antipathy toward one group or another are learned in

---

[13] E.K. Francis, "The Adjustment of a Peasant Group to a Capitalistic Economy: The Manitoba Mennonites" *Rural Sociology* 17, No. 3 (Sept 1952): 219.

[14] Paula S. Rothenberg, *Race, Class, and Gender in the United States*, 7th edition (New York: Worth Publishers, 2007), 16.

much the same way that people learn to eat with a knife and fork."[15] These concepts help us to examine the Old Colony Mennonite perceptions of their Bolivian neighbours.

In the process of 'othering' racial terms are used to define 'outsiders'. These terms are based on the belief that there are differences between ethnic, and racial, groups and that these differences are important to the identity of the community. Martin Marger examines the relations between ethnic groups and finds that several tools are used, including stereotypes and prejudices. Stereotypes are based on assumptions describing certain groups and these assumptions are then applied to individuals. Marger writes, "In a sense, generalizing on the basis of group membership is a kind of predictive mechanism we use in various situations."[16] Marger also gives three characteristics of prejudices: categorical, inflexible and negative. The 'categorical' aspect includes stereotyping, which judges individuals according to their group membership. Second, Marger argues that prejudices are not subject to correction and are therefore 'inflexible', because according to Marger, "Individuals develop emotional attachments to certain beliefs and will not discard them in the light of contrary evidence."[17] The last definition of prejudices is that they are 'negative', which means they portray the other groups as inferior and socially undesirable.[18] Prejudices and stereotypes are often based on social norms within the ethnic group. Marger defines 'social norms' as the "group standards that define how people are expected to act in particular social situations."[19] When the

---

[15] Martin N. Marger, *Race and Ethnic Relations: American and Global Perspectives*, 6th edition (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2003), 88.

[16] Ibid, 69.

[17] Ibid., 67.

[18] Ibid., 68.

[19] Ibid., 87.

Old Colony Mennonites spoke about the Bolivians they rarely termed them as 'Bolivians'. Instead they used other terms, often based on stereotypes and prejudices, according to their 'social norms', their 'self' and the differences believed to exist between the ethnic groups.

According to the Old Colony Mennonites there were two main groups in Bolivia. Adherents to one group called themselves '*camba*' and the other considered themselves '*colla*'. The first term was usually used to describe Bolivians who had adopted the Spanish culture, while the latter term referred to Bolivians who were considered part of the indigenous population. Several interviewees gave their opinions about the two groups. According to Peter Knelsen in Manitoba Colony *cambas* were capable of learning German given some time, but *collas* were incapable of learning the language.[20] Other Mennonites described other attributes of the two groups. The interviewees, like Knelsen, judged the Bolivians according to the Old Colony Mennonites' 'self' identity. Ironically, for Knelsen it was the inability to learn German that lowered his opinion of the Bolivians. Knelsen based his descriptions of Bolivians on how he understood the Old Colony 'self', and its 'social norms', which included knowledge of the German language.

Despite the acknowledged differentiations in the Bolivian society most Mennonites simply referred to the Bolivians as '*Mexa*' (Mexican). Old Colony Mennonites have lived in Bolivia since 1967, but many still used the term '*Mexa'* when referring to Bolivians, a term they used in Mexico. Thirty-one year old Cornelius Loewen in California commented on the continued use of the term and noted that this was brought over with the migration from Mexico. He also noticed, with humour, that

[20] Peter Knelsen, interview with author, Written notes, Manitoba Colony, Campo 319, 18 May 2009.

the term was completely inaccurate since it was "Mexican" Mennonites who had moved to Bolivia, meaning that the only 'Mexicans' in Bolivia were the Old Colony Mennonites themselves.[21] In certain colonies the Old Colony Mennonites have switched from referring to the Bolivians as '*Mexa'* to '*Ein'heimijch'* (native). Katharina Fehr in Valle Nuevo Colony explained that Mennonites in her colony once used the term *'Mexa'* but Bolivian workers complained about the term since they said they were not Mexicans. Fehr recalled that the Old Colony Mennonites learned not to use the terms *colla* or *camba*, since the Bolivians also seemed offended if mistakenly called by the wrong term. Eventually the Old Colony Mennonites decided to use *Ein'heimijch*', a term Bolivians were unable to understand.[22] The continued use of *'Mexa*' and '*Ein'heimijche*' emphasized the existence of a racially-informed ethnic border and enforced 'othering'. The terms were part of "a dichotomization of others as strangers"[23] and implied the recognition that others were members of another ethnic group, thereby emphasizing the ethnic border. These terms formed stereotypes of the Bolivians and were used to define their interactions with the Bolivian society.

Other Mennonite scholars have found evidence of these borders in previous generations. [24] Calvin Wall Redekop writes that in Mexico during the 1960s Mennonites considered themselves superior to the Mexicans and described local Mexicans as

---

[21] Cornelius Loewen, interview with author, Written notes, California Colony, Campo 342, 23 May 2009.

[22] Katharina Fehr, interview with author, Written notes, Valle Nuevo Colony, Campo 109, 17 June 2009.

[23] Barth, 15.

[24] Royden Loewen examines diaries of late 19th century Mennonite immigrants to Canada and found some Mennonites judged other ethnicities according to their respect for land. Loewen writes how some men disdained industrialized Western Europe and criticized the Europeans' low quality of workmanship. Royden Loewen, "Wonders and Drudgery: The Diaries of Mennonite Migrants, 1857-1879" *Hidden Worlds: Revisiting the Mennonite Migrants of the 1870's* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2001)

'*Schvoata Tjarscht*' (black toast)[25], implying discrimination based on skin colour. David Quiring finds that in the 1990s Hispanic Mexicans indicated they were willing to intermarry with the Old Colony Mennonites but that the Old Colony Mennonites refused to consider this option,[26] a clear reluctance to cross ethnic borders. Racial terms were not the only means to define '*dee Welt'*, but in these situations the Old Colony Mennonites used these terms to accentuate the ethnic boundary and separation from the surrounding Bolivian society. Ironically, these condescending descriptions of Bolivians seemed to emphasize the dichotomy of the Old Colony Mennonites as '*Christenvolk*' (People of Christ) versus the locals as the sinful '*Welt*'.

Bolivian Workers

Few Mennonites spoke of Bolivian politics or the president, but many interviewees spoke about their interactions with local Bolivians and it was in these memories of daily contact in the 'physical home'[27] that the tension at the border between cultural groups became evident. Mostly the Old Colonists referred to the Bolivians they hired to work for them. They usually described the Bolivians as good workers, but not people they trusted. Johan Rempel, age fifty-seven, in Belice Colony, described his Bolivian workers as good workers, but he thought they lied, which made them untrustworthy.[28] Jakob Friesen, in Manitoba Colony, had hired some Bolivians to work on his yard and to help him build several buildings. In his experience Friesen thought

---

[25] Calvin Wall Redekop, *The Old Colony Mennonites: Dilemmas of Ethnic Minority Life* (Baltimore, MA: The John Hopkins Press, 1969), 93.

[26] David M. Quiring, *Mennonite Old Colony Vision: Under Siege in Mexico and the Canadian Connection* (Steinbach, MB: Crossway Publications Inc., 2003), 61.

[27] Agnew, 4.

[28] Johan Wall, interview with author, Written notes, Manitoba Colony, Campo 315, 20 May 2009.

few Bolivians would know how to drive tractors, but he also thought that perhaps a few could be taught; and as a comparison he thought Brazilian migrant workers '*kaune et bäta*' (could do it better).[29]

Peter Knelsen, like many others, hired Bolivians to work for him when he first settled in Manitoba Colony. Knelsen came to Manitoba Colony on December 8, 1993, without his wife, to clear land and build a house. He had hired two '*Dietsche'* (Mennonites) and six Bolivians to help him. In the beginning they did not have any clean water to drink and one day he noticed that there was only half a canister left with drinking water. Knelsen decided to hide it from the Bolivians to prevent them from drinking it all and he recalled that that day the Bolivians did not do any work. Remembering that day Knelsen summarized Bolivians as '*Tjleenlofttja Mensch'* (weak people). Because they were running low on water Knelsen and the other two '*Dietsche*' decided to build a contraption that would catch rain water. He recalled that the Bolivians were incredulous and did not believe it would rain, but the Bolivians were proven wrong. When the rain came Knelsen remembered the Bolivians running around trying to find all the canisters they had to catch the rain water. Based on his experiences Knelsen did not like Bolivians and described them as '*onmaklijch Mensch*' (people who caused discomfort). Therefore he did not like having Bolivians around his house, but he was willing to hire Bolivians to transport his crops to Santa Cruz.[30]

Some Mennonite men gave credit to the Bolivians and their contributions to the Old Colony communities. Jakob Reimer, age fifty-eight of Manitoba Colony, did not like

[29] Jakob Friesen, interview, Manitoba.

[30] Peter Knelsen, interview, Manitoba.

all Bolivians, but he did admit that Bolivians had built most of the houses in the colony and were also used as a taxi service both within the colony and to service other colonies.[31] Johan Wall, of Manitoba Colony, thought the Bolivians were actually capable of harder work than the Old Colony Mennonites because the Bolivians were used to the heat while the Old Colony Mennonites were not.[32] In some colonies Bolivians were hired to protect the Old Colony Mennonites. Daniel Niedorf spoke about the two entrances into the new colony of California. One gate was always locked, and only Mennonites had the key, while the other gate, he said, was guarded by a *camba*. Niedorf, like Wall, thought Bolivians would do work that others in the colony would not want to do. Niedorf thought this practice occurred because Mennonites paid more than other farmers in the region.[33]

Another man compared his experiences with Bolivians with those of locals in Paraguay. Sixty-seven year old Franz Wiebe moved to Neuland Colony in 2008. In his experience, he said, he could not complain about Bolivian workers and lauded them for easily agreeing to a particular wage. Wiebe thought the Bolivian workers were '*too'fräd mett sijchselwst'* (satisfied with themselves) and that they were not easily '*beleidjicht'* (offended), especially when compared to Paraguayan workers he had hired in Rio Verde Colony in East Paraguay. He recalled that in Paraguay he and his workers might have decided on a wage, but halfway through the day the workers would come to him and demand an increase. Wiebe's perceptions of his workers were based on 'social norms' and standards of the Old Colony Mennonites. Wiebe's memories, like those of Reimer

[31] Jakob Reimer, interview, Manitoba.

[32] Johan Wall, interview with author, Written notes, Manitoba Colony, Campo 315, 20 May 2009.

[33] Daniel Niedorf, interview with author, Written notes, California Colony, Campo 334, 22 May 2009.

and Wall, seemed to reflect his idea of work and identity as a Mennonite farmer. His view of honesty and a good work ethic seemed to reflect a wider, Old Colony identity and a particular Mennonite standard. It suggested a chasm between the Old Colony Mennonites and their neighbours, one infused deeply in ideas of race, but also based on their religious understandings of their cultural identity.

Mennonite women also spoke about their experiences with Bolivians, and many of these memories revealed the limited interactions due to gendered language barriers. In fact they emphasized their separation from other ethnic groups. Ann Sawatsky remembered when she and her husband moved to Neuland Colony from El Tinto Colony, another colony in Bolivia. They had hired several Bolivian workers to build their house before she and her husband arrived, but the workers had not finished the doors and the windows as agreed. Sawatsky remembered that they all slept together in the same house, she and her husband on one side of the house and the Bolivians on the other side. The next day all of them worked on the house and were able to finish building that day. She also remembered that she had brought tortillas, meat and mayonnaise along from El Tinto Colony, serving it to everyone, including the workers.[34] This event seemed memorable to Sawatsky because it broke the Old Colony's isolation and separation from other ethnic groups. By sharing a roof and a meal the Bolivians were not 'strangers'[35] and by recollecting this unusual memory Sawatsky emphasized the Old Colony's rejection of close interactions with other ethnic groups. The Old Colony Mennonites were willing to hire Bolivians as workers, but anything further was considered atypical.

---

[34] Ann Sawatsky, interview with author, Written notes, Neuland Colony, Campo 3, 29 June 2009.

[35] Barth, 15.

These remembered acts of 'concretion of identity'[36] provide the basis of a group's peculiarity. Clothing, discussed in chapter three, visibly marked Old Colony Mennonite peculiarity, and therefore the crossing of social borders in clothing were memorable. Leona Reimer in Neuland Colony remembered when her neighbour, Frau Wolf, was asked by an *Ein'heimijch* to sew a shirt and a pair of pants for him, albeit not the typical Mennonite male *Schlaubbetjse* (overalls). Still the pants she sewed reflected Mennonite patterns and Reimer thought other Mennonites in the colony must have stared at this Bolivian worker the next time he rode on the bus with them to Santa Cruz.[37] The ethnic border in her mind was preserved by distinctive clothing; as she saw it she had preserved the boundary by refusing to share traditional patterns with '*dee Welt*'.

The internal formation of an idealized community is based on communal memories. The Old Colony Mennonites have a collective memory that prioritizes land, farming and clothing. These memories informed the 'social norms' that shaped the Old Colony Mennonite 'self' and based on these 'social norms' the Old Colony Mennonites created prejudices and stereotypes of their Bolivian workers. Mennonite memories of interactions with hired Bolivians emphasized the ethnic boundary, with an idealized communitarian 'self' on one side and Bolivian 'other' on the outside.

Land Titles

Another main interaction with local Bolivians the Old Colony Mennonites recalled regarded their acquisition of land. The Old Colony Mennonites were dependent on their land for their identity and were therefore not immune to their national context

[36] Assmann, 130

[37] Leona Reimer, interview with author, Written notes, Neuland Colony, Campo 3, 29 June 2009.

when it concerned land ownership. Anthropologist Lorenzo Cañás Bottos goes so far to argue that Old Colony Mennonites let the Bolivian state be a main interlocutor in order to claim sovereignty over land, a direct counterclaim to the Old Colony Mennonites' claim of separation from any national state.[38] None of the interviewees shared memories that corresponded to Cañás Bottos' allegation. They did, however, remember when their land titles were called into question. Land, as discussed in chapter two, has been an integral part of the Mennonite identity and conflict over land ownership was vital to Mennonite identity. Two of the seven colonies chosen for this study – Manitoba Colony and its daughter colony California Colony – reported disputes over land titles.

Manitoba Colony's land dispute occurred when the Old Colony Mennonites first moved to the colony in 1991. Peter Knelsen recalled that a year after settlement several Bolivians came and wanted to reclaim the land. Knelsen thought the Bolivians saw an opportunity because the ownership papers had not yet been finalized.[39] A more recent land dispute occurred in California Colony. Daniel Niedorf, age forty, recalled how he moved to this daughter colony and started to work on the land. Sometime between January and March of 2008, some *collas* moved onto his property and several properties that belonged to several other Mennonites. Niedorf remembered that the *collas* were part of the MAS party (*Movimiento al Socialismo*), the political party of Evo Morales, and he

---

[38] Lorenzo Cañás Bottos, *Old Colony Mennonites in Argentina and Bolivia: Nation Making, Religious Conflict and Imagination of the Future* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2008) 50. Bottos writes that in Bolivia, the state used the immigrant Mexican Mennonites as a means to nationalize and colonize the Chaco region in the 1960's. At that time the region was mainly inhabited by indigenous people, who did not regard the Bolivian government as a legitimate authority.[38] By providing the Mennonites with land the Bolivian government gained sovereignty over the region. The Mennonites' separation from the national state did not preclude a dependence on it to supply their land. Also discussed in Chapter 1.

[39] Peter Knelsen, interview, Manitoba.

thought these *collas* did not like foreign farmers. Crossing another boundary, the Old Colony Mennonites retained legal representation, violating traditional principles against coercion, they relied on police to remove the *collas* from the land, but at the time of the interview the dispute was still in the Bolivians courts.[40] These legal disputes represented a departure of the Anabaptists' belief in *Gelassenheit* (submission), since the Old Colony Mennonites did not yield to their circumstances. However, these land title disputes evince 'othering', and a hardening of the ethnic border, as the Old Colony Mennonites tried to reclaim something that was central to their collective identity: land.

Another man in California Colony, Cornelius Loewen, had not had any problems with the indigenous people because his land did not have conflicting land title claims. However, Loewen was aware of others in the Colony who continued to have legal issues. He thought the *collas* were smarter than they let on, because they would only come to reclaim the land after the Old Colony Mennonites had started clearing. Loewen also had noticed that the *collas* did not try to reclaim land owned by Brazilians; a pattern Loewen thought reflected their fear of the Brazilians. He recalled hearing the *collas* say that they were poor and that was why they needed land, but he had also heard that the *collas* sold land they reclaimed in other areas. According to Loewen the *collas* had recently let the Old Colony Mennonites in California Colony keep their land, except for one woman who continued to fight over a land title.[41]

An Old Colony Mennonite woman in California Colony was also concerned about the land disputes and the impact it might have had on her family. Marie Reimer, age

---

[40] Daniel Neidorf, interview with author, Written notes, California Colony, Campo 334, 22 May 2009.

[41] Cornelius Loewen, interview with author, Written notes, California Colony, Campo 342, 23 May 2009.

twenty-seven, her husband and young children lived close to the colony border. Reimer and her husband had had few worries because the colony legally owned their land, but she still recalled feeling uncertain about the dispute. She recognized that both the Old Colony Mennonites and the *collas* had been given land titles, but she had also heard that a government office employee, a seventy-year old man, had written land titles for the *collas* for some bribe money. She recalled worrying that if the Old Colony Mennonites had been forced to move not enough people would have been left to maintain the colony and her family would have had to move as well, always an expensive venture.[42]

In these recollections Mennonites canonized their identity as a 'People of the Land', a characteristic of their identity discussed in chapter two. The land title disputes were seen as a direct threat to their identity as farmers. Their view of Bolivians corresponded to an idealized Mennonite community and they viewed the *collas* according to their 'self'. The *collas* threatened the identity of the Old Colony Mennonites and therefore the Old Colony Mennonites saw the *collas* in more derogatory terms.

Santa Cruz

Some of the most dramatic Mennonite memories concerned the city of Santa Cruz where Mennonites interacted with '*dee Welt´* and crossed over ethnic borders. Most of the colonies chosen for this thesis were situated several hours east of Santa Cruz and, while the Old Colony Mennonites sought isolation, all colonies travelled to the city by bus, a special service provided by Bolivians to Mennonites on a weekly or daily basis.

[42] Marie Reimer, interview with author, Written notes, California Colony, Campo 341, 23 May 2009.

Santa Cruz, one of the biggest cities in Bolivia, was a resource both for commodities and health benefits, but nevertheless a part of '*dee Welt*'.

Some Mennonites traveled to Santa Cruz regularly for businesses they ran in the colony. Franz Rempel, age fifty-six, of Valle Nuevo Colony, ran a pharmacy, a business he operated in several colonies before moving to Valle Nuevo. Rempel traveled to Santa Cruz monthly to resupply the stock of medications for his pharmacy.[43] Johan Sawatsky and his wife Ann, of Neuland Colony, also ran a pharmacy. He chose his profession from his experience as a boy in Santa Cruz. When he was eight years old he had a tonsil infection that spread to his heart and later he had to see a doctor once a week, which eventually became once a month and then later once every two months. When Sawatsky was older he went with his mother, who had heart problems, to the hospital to help translate. Because of the numerous hospital visits, and reading Spanish medical books, he taught himself about medicine and became the colony's pharmacist.[44]

Several women also saw Santa Cruz as a place that provided medical benefits. Twenty-three year old Lena Friesen of Belice Colony often went to Santa Cruz to get medicine for her mother; sometimes she would go with her mother and father-in-law but other times she went alone.[45] Katharina Fehr, age forty of Valle Nuevo Colony, saw a German-speaking dentist in Santa Cruz alone for basic dental work. Special work on her

[43] Franz Rempel, interview with autor, Written notes, Valle Nuevo Colony, Campo 102, 16 June 2009.

[44] Johan Sawatsky, interview with author, Written notes, Neuland Colony, Campo 3, 1 July 2009.

[45] Lena Friesen, interview with author, Written notes, Belice Colony, Campo 60, 29 May 2009.

teeth however required the Spanish-speaking dentist and at such times she went with her husband who could translate for her.[46]

Santa Cruz represented '*dee Welt*' in spite of the services it provided the Old Colony Mennonites. It was a place to which Mennonites moved when they fell away from the Old Colony Church. Seventy-five year old Anna Banman told of a *Dietsche* woman, originally of Santa Rita Colony, who had recently died in Santa Cruz. She had lived in the city for some time, cohabiting with an excommunicated Mennonite man, a man Banman no longer considered a *Dietscha*. Banman recalled hearing that the couple had been so poor they had been forced to sleep on the streets, something Banman said she could only imagine.[47] She remembered hearing that the woman had a little stand in the city where she sold second-hand items, but that the man had been unemployed. Banman seemed to excuse the woman as she had noticed that when speaking to the woman that she seemed to have a learning disability. But she blamed the woman's family or others from Santa Rita Colony, for not doing more to bring the woman back to the colony. She wondered if the woman's family actually was relieved to be rid of the woman. She also suspected the woman's *Dietscha* partner in the death, wondering if the police might get involved and speculating that if the man did not receive justice in this world, he would in the next.[48] Mennonites might have viewed Santa Cruz as a legitimate place to do business, but they still saw it reprehensively as *'dee Welt'*.

---

[46] Katharina Fehr, interview, Valle Nuevo.

[47] Anna Banman remembered once when she was in the city she had gotten up early and had left the hotel where she and her husband were staying. She had walked past a street when she saw many people sleeping next to each other on the ground; some were only covered with newspapers. Banman thought the *Dietscha* woman must have lived in a similar circumstance.

[48] Anna Banman, interview, Valle Esperanza.

The Old Colony views of other ethnic groups were not as simple as the Old Colony Mennonites would portend. The Old Colony Mennonites have sought isolation from other ethnic groups and separation from national states, but in their daily 'physical' lives the Old Colony Mennonites continued their interactions with Bolivians. They built a tiered system of views of their Bolivian neighbours and extended it to their perceptions of national leaders and Bolivian neighbours. Despite their idealized identity of separation from a nation state, their 'physical' presence within a country forced the Old Colony Mennonites to interact with other ethnicities. T.H. Marshall wrote in 1963 about the multiple aspects included in citizenship – civil, political and social.[49] The latter aspect encompassed many facets, from the "the right to a modicum of economic welfare" to living "the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society."[50] In their daily interactions with Bolivians the Old Colony Mennonites abstained from full social citizenship and assimilation to the standards of the Bolivian society, but they continued to interact with '*dee Welt*' as it benefited them, such as providing medical services.

Education and Language

[49] Civil: "is composed of the rights necessary for individual freedom - liberty of the person, freedom of speech, thought and faith, the right to own property and to conclude valid contracts, and the right to justice."

Political: "the right to participate in the exercise of political power, as a member of a body invested with political authority or as an elector of the members of such a body."

Social: "the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society." T.H. Marshall, *Sociology at the Crossroads: and other essays* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1963), 74.

[50] Ibid.

Language is another fundamental element of the Old Colony Mennonite identity and for those in Bolivia it was an important aspect of their interactions with locals. As discussed in the first chapter the German language has been a defining characteristic of the Mennonite ethnic group since Russia[51] and a main contributor to the maintenance of language is education. Donald Kraybill describes education as "a formal agent of socialization for the ethnic group"[52] and part of this socialization includes language. Immigration historians have found that language retention usually diminishes in most ethnic groups by the second generation and by the third generation it is often entirely forgotten.[53] For Mennonites in Bolivia education has been at the heart of both language retention and ethnic identity and language makes the ethnic border evident. In the process they have prioritized German education in their schools. They have memories of the German language as a fundamental part of the Old Colony Mennonite identity. In the second chapter several Mennonites recalled parents or grandparents talking about the enforced English education in Canada in the 1920s and school closures in Mexico in 1935.[54] Their German language and their private education is an important element to the Old Colony Mennonite identity. The language is a key characteristic of the Old Colony Mennonite identity and one of the major components that separated the Old Colony Mennonites from other ethnic groups. This is especially evident in the labels

---

[51] Steve Nolt, "'A Two-Kingdom' People in a World of Multiple Identities: Religion, Ethnicity and American Mennonites" *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 73, no. 3 (July 1999): 494.

[52] Donald B. Kraybill, *Ethnic Education: The Impact of Mennonite Schooling* (San Francisco: R&E Research Associates, Inc., 1977), 1.

[53] William C. Fischer, editor, David A. Gerber, Jorge M. Guitart, Maxine S. Seller, *Identity, Community, and Pluralism in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 236.

[54] Walter Schmiedehaus, *Die Altkolonier-Mennonite in Mexico* (Winnipeg, MB: CMBC Publications, 1982), 136, 147. Walter Schmiedehaus' study found that Mexico had closed the Colony schools in 1935, because the Mennonites did not teach their children according to Mexican standards. After a year the schools were reopened but during that year the Mennonites began to consider migrating once again.

used by the Old Colony Mennonites to refer to other ethnicities and of themselves. As discussed above Bolivians were often referred to as the *'Mexa*', English speakers who lived in the area were referred to as *'Enjlenda'* (English), regardless of their nationalities, and when referring to themselves the Old Colony Mennonites usually used *Dietsche* (the Germans). Their language was so intrinsic to their identity that it became the term they used to describe themselves.

Knowledge of Spanish was considered a necessary evil required of men who did business with Bolivians. Most women knew only a few words, making gender division apparent. Leona Sawatsky described this pattern. She had wanted to learn Spanish, recalling her father's fluency in it and believing that such knowledge would have ensured that her exchanges in the wider world would have had a better '*ootkomme'* (outcome). She recalled one time when her parents had gone to the city, and her brothers had left to work elsewhere in the colony, that some '*Mexa'* came to the house. Neither she nor her sisters knew Spanish and one of her sisters had to get one of her neighbours to translate. Sawatsky eventually bought a small German-English phrasebook from Centro Menno in Santa Cruz, but even then she was handicapped by her inadequacy in High German. She did not know why the Old Colony Mennonites opposed women learning Spanish; her only response was '*so haa wie et emma jehaut'* (that is how we have always had it).[55]

Only a few women, like Anna Banman, had been able to learn to speak fluent Spanish from a young age. Her story was unique as at the age of seventy-five Banman recalled her father hiring Mexican workers in Mexico. In winter it became so cold the workers were allowed to stay in the Banman home, where one of the older Mexican

[55] Leona Sawatsky, interview, Valle Esperanza Colony, Campo.

workers eagerly taught her entire family Spanish. As a result Banman was more comfortable speaking Spanish than High German. This anomaly was even noticed by the Bolivians. Banman recalled how surprised a taxi driver in Santa Cruz had been when he found out she spoke Spanish. He thought the Old Colony men forbade women to learn Spanish. Banman corrected the man, explaining that Mennonite women did not speak Spanish because their life in the "kitchen" did not afford them the opportunity to learn Spanish.[56]

Despite many women's wish for knowledge of Spanish most opposed implementing Spanish education in their schools. In fact, fears circulated through the colonies that Spanish would become a mandatory subject in the Colony schools. 'Suse' Knelsen in Manitoba Colony had heard that President Morales had made it mandatory that everyone should learn Spanish, but that the Old Colony Mennonites had successfully resisted. She did not know what would happen if the law was enforced but she thought that the Old Colony Mennonites would probably migrate elsewhere.[57] Peter Bergen, age forty-seven, of Valle Nuevo Colony, had also heard that the Bolivian government had made one hour of Spanish per day mandatory for school education, but until that point the Old Colony Mennonites had not implemented this change. Personally, Bergen thought it would be good for the children to learn Spanish in school.[58]

A few Mennonite women made it clear that their German education was crucial in maintaining their ethnic identity and that any Spanish curriculum would undermine the

---

[56] Anna Banman, interview, Valle Esperanza Colony, Campo 210.

[57] Suse Knelsen, interview with author, Written notes, Manitoba Colony, Campo 319, 18 May 2009.

[58] Peter Bergen, interview with author, Written notes, Valle Nuevo Colony, Campo 105, 15 June 2009.

culture of their community. Forty-four year old Katharina Teichrob explained that the Old Colony Mennonites could not learn Spanish in the schools because German was one of the distinguishing markers of the Old Colony Mennonites, although she had taught herself some Spanish in order to travel to the city by herself.[59] Frau Abrahm Loewen, age fifty-three of Belice Colony, also thought it would be helpful to know Spanish, but thought she was too old to learn the language herself and that the Mennonite youth were too fickle for it; a knowledge of Spanish would only make it easier for the youth to go into '*dee Welt*'.[60] Katharina Fehr repeated the idea – Spanish in school would make it easier for her children to go into '*dee Welt*'.[61] It would seem that the women, even more so than the men, were careful to ensure that their children would develop a strong Old Colony Mennonite identity.

The Colony school and German education were one of the primary means of preserving the Mennonite ethnic boundary from the surrounding Bolivian society. By preserving a separate education and language the Old Colony Mennonites enabled themselves to remain separate from the '*dee Welt'*, and specifically the Bolivian society. Memories recalled fears that their German identity would be challenged by the Bolivian state or by restless youth. Language was equated with salvation.

CONCLUSION

As a cultural minority the Old Colony Mennonites formed an idealized community based on their collective memory. The memories of interactions with other

[59] Katharina Teichrob, interview with author, Written notes, Valle Nuevo, 18 June 2009.

[60] Frau Abrahm Loewen, interview with author, Written notes, Belice Colony, Campo 53, 2 June 2009

[61] Katharina Fehr, interview, Valle Nuevo

ethnic groups in Bolivia revealed further aspects of the Old Colony Mennonite communal identity. The Old Colony Mennonites have used their concept of 'self', as *Christenvolk* (People of Christ) working towards a communal salvation, and dichotomized it with the 'other', the Bolivians who represented '*dee Welt*'. Their German identity was compared to other groups, such as the *Mexa,* as opposite to their *Dietscha* identity. Their collective memory highlighted farming and land ownership and was used as the standard of measurement for other ethnic groups. Santa Cruz represented '*dee Welt',* but memories of this city revealed the tension between the 'idealized' and the 'physical', or temporal, aspects of life. While the Old Colony Mennonites characterized the city as '*dee Welt*', the city also provided the Old Colony Mennonites with necessary services and business links.

The Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia formed an idealized identity but had to live with tensions in their daily encounters with Bolivians. Their memories were based on a canonized collective memory and a polarized identity in contrast to the Bolivian society. However, the memories also indicated struggle at the ethnic border as the Old Colony Mennonites interacted with and depended on their Bolivian neighbours. In the process the tension between the idyllic 'self' versus the physical 'other' was revealed.

CONCLUSION

The Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia have defined their collective memory as static. The common refrain '*So ha' wie daut emma jedohne*' (that is how we have always done it) was often used as an explanation for their distinctive ways. The interviewees saw themselves continuing the 'old ways' passed down from generation to generation and hoped to pass the 'old ways' to their children. However, through the use of oral history, the 'old ways' can be examined; the Old Colony Mennonites' collective memory testifies to a change in the 'old ways'.

The Old Colony Mennonites have traversed many continents and countries, often in search for nations that provided the Old Colony Mennonites with privileges to retain their peculiarities and unity. They considered themselves pilgrims for God and prided themselves in their struggle to remain faithful as '*Christenvolk*' (People of Christ). Land, technology, clothing and language were several tenets that defined the Old Colony Mennonites and shaped their collective identity. To remain faithful as '*Christenvolk*' also required them to distance themselves from the surrounding society and maintain an ethnic border that provided the framework for interactions with 'outsiders'.

The collective identity of the Old Colony Mennonites prioritized the community and *Gemeinschaft* and their collective identity impacted the way they saw their history. They participated in a diaspora that saw daily tension between their metaphysical home

and their physical presence in Bolivia[62] and they created ethnic borders based on conceptions of 'self' and 'other'.[63]

Their collective memory explains their resistance to modernity. They struggled to resist modernizing their farms and homes based on what they remembered their parents and grandparents telling them about the 'old ways'. Their memories revealed a community-oriented people that prioritized the Church over individual desires and that the Church's *Ordnung* enforced the continuation of the 'old ways'. Their resistance to modernization, however, was not absolute and depended on its reflection of their Old Colony identity. Their existence in a 'physical' context meant that they had to base their interactions with Bolivians on the way they remembered the 'old ways'.

The Old Colony Mennonites do not have a common practice of writing their own history. Therefore oral history can provide a rich resource in these complex and isolated communities, but it can do more than fill in gaps in a literary record. Oral history can provide understanding of the communities' identity, for as Elizabeth Tonkin writes, "memory [is]…the site of the social practices that make us".[64] Through interviews the underlying narrative of the Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia can be examined. Oral history can be beneficial to understanding a group's 'self' perceptions and its underlying framework for inner dynamics and outward relations.

---

[62] Vijay Agnew, *Diaspora, Memory, and Identity: A Search for Home* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 4.

[63] Anthony Wilden, "Lacan and the Discourse of the Other" in *The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis*, by Jacques Lacan, trans. by Anthony Wilden (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), 169-171.

[64] Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating our Pasts: The Social Construction of our History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 12.

This thesis was limited in scope and did not exhaust the oral history research in these Mennonite communities. More research could be done based on Jan Assmann's definition of collective memory. Assmann's characteristic of a cultural memory's 'capacity to reconstruct'[65] could be used to compare memories of different countries. Also, research could look at the differences in collective memories within different colonies, especially those that migrated through different countries. By comparing colonies that migrated through Paraguay to colonies which recently arrived in Bolivia from Mexico, differences could be identified to reveal the extent to which the context impacted the Mennonite colonies. Another of Assmann's characteristics looks at 'organization'.[66] In this respect research could compare what role formal organization played in forming individual memories, particularly the Old Colony Church. As Michael Jackson writes, storytelling is a dialogue between private and public memories[67] and by comparing the two sets of memories research could examine where memories differed and what these differences implied. Another area of further research could compare written accounts, mainly from the *Mennonitische Post*, a newspaper published in Canada which prints letters from Old Colony Mennonites throughout the Americas, with the oral accounts. To use Portelli's research, discrepancies between the oral and written accounts could reveal further aspects of the Old Colony identity.

Oral history can be a fascinating field as it opens doors to people's understandings of themselves. It can be a useful tool, particularly in cultures with limited written resources. Because interviewees will filter the past according to the values they hold in

---

[65] Jan Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity" *New German Critique* 65 (1995): 130.

[66] Ibid., 131.

[67] Michael Jackson, *Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression and Intersubjectivity*, (Copenhagen S, Denmark: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2002), 22.

the present, oral history is both a history of the past and examination of the people in the present. For the Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia, who see their past as their present, oral history is a means to see the historical process that shaped their identity and, vice versa, the means to examine the identity that filtered their memories.

APPENDIX 1 – LIST OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is the history of your family? How long has your family lived in this community? For generations? Years? From where did your family move? What was life like there? How has it changed?

2. Why did your family move? What was the move like? Do you have a lot of family living nearby? Where do they live? How often do you see them? Who are your in-laws? Where do they live? How do you stay in touch with family members who don't live nearby?

3. What is your family history? What kind of stories did your grandparents/parents tell you? Has your life changed from theirs?

4. What have been some important moments in your life and in your family's?

5. How did you meet your husband/wife? Describe what happened when you got married. Do you remember the day of your baptism? Do you remember the funeral of your grandparents or other significant people in your life? Are there special events and/or tragedies that have shaped your life?

6. Has there been a person in your life who has inspired you? (Uncle/aunt/grandparent, friend, healer, midwife, church or community leader, etc.)

7. How do you make your living? How has this changed in your life time? How is your family involved? Are there challenges you face? How do you deal with them? How were you able to set up your farm/livelihood?

8. What motivates you to live a life set off from the world? Is your lifestyle important to you? What does it mean to you? How would changes to your lifestyle alter your life? Your family's? Your community's? What are the biggest threats to your way of life?

9. How do you pass on your lifestyle to your children? Do you think they will continue living as you taught them? What lessons/values/skills did you learn from your mother/father?

10. How do you relate to people around you (Mexicans, Canadians)? Do you have much to do with them? How would you describe the difference between yourself and the people around you?

APPENDIX 2 – BOLIVIAN PRIVILEGIUM

For the list of privileges granted to the Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia see:

James Walter Lanning, *The Old Colony Mennonites of Bolivia*, Master's Thesis at Texas A&M University (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1972), Appendix B

APPENDIX 3 – MAP OF OLD COLONY MENNONITE COLONIES IN BOLIVIA

Map of Bolivia: Family Education Network, "Map: Bolivia" *InfoPlease*; accessed 17 February 2010; available from http://www.infoplease.com/atlas/country/bolivia.html; Internet

Map of Colonies: Mennonite Central Committee, *Map of Bolivian Colonies 2005*

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

(All interviewees resided in the Department of Santa Cruz, Bolivia)

Banman, Anna. Interview by author. Written notes. Valle Esperanza Colony, Campo 210. 23 June 2009.

Berg, Frau Franz. Interview by author. Written notes. Manitoba Colony, Campo 318. 19 May 2009.

Bergen, Griet. Interview by author. Written notes. Oriente Colony, Campo 2. 11 June 2009.

Bergen, Peter. Interview with author. Written notes. Valle Nuevo Colony, Campo 105. 15 June 2009.

Fehr, Katharina. Interview with author. Written notes. Valle Nuevo Colony, Campo 109. 17 June 2009.

Fehr, Sarah. Interview by author. Written notes. Valle Esperanza Colony, Campo 224, 25 June 2009.

Friesen, Aganetha. Interview by author. Written notes. Neuland Colony, Campo 3. 30 June 2009.

Friesen, Jakob. Interview with author. Written notes. Manitoba Colony, Campo 315 15 May 2009.

Friesen, Katharina. Interview with author. Written notes. Belice Colony, Campo 60. 29 May 2009.

Friesen, Lena. Interview with author. Written notes. Belice Colony, Campo 60. 29 May 2009

Friesen, Peter. Interview by author. Written notes. Belice Colony, Campo 60. 29 May 2009

Klassen, Jakob. Interview by author. Written notes. Valle Nuevo Colony, Campo 104, 16 June 2009.

Klassen, Sarah. Interview by author. Written notes. Valle Nuevo Colony, Campo 104. 16 June 2009.

Knelsen, 'Suse'. Interview by author. Written notes. Manitoba Colony, Campo 319. 19 May 2009.

Knelsen, George. Interview by author. Written notes. Belice Colony, Campo 60. 1 June 2009.

Knelsen, Marie. Interview by author. Written notes. Belice Colony, Campo 60. 6 June 2009.

Kneslen, Peter. Interview by author. Written notes. Manitoba Colony, Campo 319. 18 May 2009.

Loewen, Cornelius. Interview by author. Written notes. California Colony, Campo 342. 23 May 2009.

Loewen, Frau Abrahm. Interview by author. Written notes. Belice Colony, Campo 52. 2 June 2009.

Loewen, Marie. Interview by author. Written notes. California Colony, Campo 342. 23 May 2009.

Niedorf, Aganetha. Interview by author. Written notes. Valle Esperanza Colony, Campo 210. 23 June 2009.

Niedorf, Christina. Interview by author. Written notes. California Colony, Campo 334. 23 May 2009.

Niedorf, Daniel. . Interview by author. Written notes. California Colony, Campo 331. 22 May 2009.

Peters, Ann. Interview by author. Written notes. Oriente Colony, Campo 1. 10 June 2009

Peters, Susanna. Interview by author. Written notes. Valle Nuevo Colony, Campo 109. 17 June 2009.

Peters, Wilhelm. Interview by author. Written notes. Oriente Colony, Campo 1. 10 June 2009.

Reimer, Jakob. . Interview by author. Written notes. Manitoba Colony, Campo 310. 20 May 2009.

Reimer, Leona. Interview with author. Written notes. Neuland Colony, Campo 3. 29 June 2009.

Reimer, Marie. Interview by author. Written notes. California Colony, Campo 341. 23 May 2009.

Rempel, ‘Suse’. Interview by author. Written notes. Valle Nuevo Colony, Campo 102. 16 June 2009.

Rempel, Franz. . Interview by author. Written notes. Valle Nuevo Colony, Campo 102. 16 June 2009.

Rempel, Frau Isaak. Interview by author. Written notes. Orient Campo 5. 11 June 2009.

Rempel, Helena. Interview by author. Written notes. Belice Colony, Campo 60. 30 May 2009.

Rempel, Johan. Interview by author. Written notes. Belice Colony, Campo 60. 30 May 2009.

Sawatsky, Ann. Interview by author. Written notes. Neuland Colony, Campo 3. 29 June 2009.

Sawatsky, Johan. Interview with author. Written notes. Neuland Colony, Campo 3. 1 July 2009.

Sawatsky, Leona. Interview by author. Written notes. Valle Esperanza Colony, Campo 210. 24 June 2009.

Teichrob, Katharina. Interview by author. Written notes. Valle Nuevo. 18 June 2009.

Wall, Johan. Interview by author. Written notes. Manitoba Colony, Campo 315. 20 May 2009.

Wall, Tien. Interview by author. Written notes. Neuland Colony, Campo 3. 30 June 2009.

Wiebe, Franz. Interview by author. Written notes. Neuland Colony, Campo 3. 29 June 2009.

Wolf, Katharina. Interview by author. Written notes. Neuland Colony, Campo 3. 30 June 2009

Secondary Sources

Agnew, Vijay. *Diaspora, Memory, and Identity: A Search for Home*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006.

American Diabetes Association; available from http://www.forecast.diabetes.org/diabetes-101/blood-glucose; Internet; accessed 21 January 2010.

Anthias, Floya. "Evaluating 'Diaspora': Beyond Ethnicity" *Sociology* 32. Number 3 (1998).

Armitage, Susan, Sherna Berger Gluck. "Reflections on Women's Oral History: An Exchange" *Frontiers: A Journal Studies* 3, Volume 19 (1998): 1-11.

Arthur, Linda B. “Deviance, Agency, and the Social Control of Women’s Bodies in a Mennonite Community” *NWSA Journal* 10, No. (Summer 1998): 75-99.

Assmann, Jan. “Collective memory and Cultural Identity’ *New German Critique* 65 (1995): 125-133.

Barth, Fredrik. Editor. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference*. The Little, Brown Series in Anthropology. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969.

Bender, Harold S. "Kleine Gemeinde." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online.* Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online. (1956). Retrieved 21 January 2010 <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/K5446.html.

Bender, Harold S., Martin W. Friesen, Menno Ediger, Isbrand Hiebert and Gerald Mumaw. "Bolivia." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online.* 1987. Internet. Accessed 23 February 2010. Available at http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/B665.html

Bennion, Janet. *Desert Patriarchy: Mormon and Mennonite Communities in the Chihuahua Valley*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2004.

Blanc, Cristina Szanton, Linda Basch and Nina Glick Shiller, “Transnationalism, Nation-State, and Culture” *Current Anthropology* 36. Number 4 (Aug-Oct 1995): 684.

Bornat, Joanna. „Two Oral Histories: Valuing our differences“ *Oral History* 1. Volume 21 (Spring 1993): 73-96.

Bottos, Lorenzo Cañás. *Old Colony Mennonites in Argentina and Bolivia: Nation Making, Religious Conflict and Imagination of the Future*. Leidem, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2008.

Casey, Edward S. “Public Memory in Place and Time” in *Framing Public Memory.* Editor Kendall R. Phillips. Tuscaloosa, AB: The University of Alabama Press, 2004.

Chanfrault-Duchet, Marie-Fançoise. “Narrative Structures, Social Models, and Symbolic Representation in the Life Story” in *Women’s Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, editors Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai. New York: Routledge, 1991.

Cohen, Robin. *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997.

Conzen, Kathleen Neils, David A. Gerber, Ewa Morawska, George E. Pozzetta and Rudolph J. Vecoli. “The Invention of Ethnicity: A Perspective from the U.S.A” *Journal of American History* 12. Number 1 (1992): 3-41.

Driedger, Leo. *Mennonite Identity in Conflict*, Studies in Religion and Society 19 (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1988).

Duerksen, Peter and Heinz Braun. (1987). "Neuland Colony (Boquerón Department, Paraguay)." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online.* Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online. Retrieved 21 January 2010 http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/N4855.html.

Epp, Marlene. "Carrying the Banner of Nonconformity: Ontario Mennonite Women and the Dress Question" *The Conrad Grebel Review* 3 (Fall 1990): 237-257.

Field, Sean. "Turning up the Volume: Dialogues about Memory Create Oral History" *South African Historical Journal* 2. Volume 60 (2008): 175-194.

Fischer, William C. Editor, David A. Gerber, Jorge M. Guitart, Maxine S. Seller. *Identity, Community, and Pluralism in American Life*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Francis, E.K. *In Search of Utopia: The Old Colony Mennonites in Manitoba.* Glenco, IL: The Free Press, 1955.

_____ "The Adjustment of a Peasant Group to a Capitalistic Economy: The Manitoba Mennonites" *Rural Sociology* 17, No. 3 (Sept 1952): 218-228.

Fretz, Joseph Winfield. *Pilgrims in Paraguay: The Story of Mennonites Colonization in South America*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1953.

_____*Mennonite Colonization: Lessons from the Past for the Future.* Akron, PA: The Mennonite Central Committee, 1944.

_____ *Mennonite Colonization in Mexico.* Akron, PA: The Mennonite Central Committee, 1945.

Gans, Herbert. "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America" *On the Making of Americans: Essays in Honour of David Riesman*. Editors Herbert Gans. Philadelphia: 1979.

Grele, Ronald J., "History and the Languages of History in the Oral History Interview: Who Answers Whose questions and why?" in *Interactive Oral History Interviewing*. ditors Eva M. McMahon and Kim Lacy Rogers. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1994.

_____ "Movement without aim: Methodological and Theoretical Problems in Oral History" *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History*, editor Ronald Grele, et. al. Chicago: Precedent Publishing, 1985.

_____ "Oral History as Evidence" in *Handbook of Oral History*. Editors Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers and Rebecca Sharpless. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2006.

_____ "Reflections on the Practice of Oral History: Retrieving what we can from an earlier Critique" *Suomen Ansropologi: Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society* 32. Issue 4 (Winter 2007):11-29

Halbwachs, Maurice. *The Collective Memory*. Translated by Francis J. Ditter Jr. and Vida Yazdi Ditter. New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1980.

Handlin, Oscar. *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations that made the American People.* New York, NY: Grosset and Dunlap, 1951.

Harms, Patricia. "'Gott es hiea uck': Gender and Identity in an Immigrant Family from Paraguay" *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 22 (2004): 39-57

Hedberg, Anna Sofia. *Outside the World: Cohesion and Deviation among Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia.* Stockholm, Sweden: Elanders Gotab, 2007.

Hiebert, P. G., Clarence Hiebert and Otis E. Hochstetler. "Church of God in Christ, Mennonite (CGC)." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online.* 1989. Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online. Retrieved 21 January 2010. Accessed at http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/C487ME.html.

Hoerder, Dirk. *Creating Societies: Immigrant Lives in Canada.* Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999.

_____ *Cultures in Contact: World Migrations in the Second Millennium*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002.

Hoffman, Alice M and Howard S. Hoffman. "Memory Theory: Personal and Social" in *Handbook of Oral History*. Editors Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers and Rebecca Sharpless. Lanham, MD: Alta Mira Press, 2006.

Hoffman, Alice M. and Howard S. Hoffman, "Reliability and Validity in Oral History: The Case of Memory" in *Memory and History: Essays on Recalling and Interpreting Experience.* Editors, Jaclyn Jeffrey and Glenace Edwall. Lanham, MA: University Press of America, Inc., 1994.

Jackson, Michael. *Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression and Intersubjectivity*. Copenhagen, DNK: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2002.

Kauffman, J. Howard and Leo Driedger. *The Mennonite Mosaic: Identity and Modernization*. Scottdale, PN: Herald Press, 1991.

Klassen, Doreen Helen. "'I wanted a life of my own': Creating a Singlewoman Mennonite Identity in Mexico" *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 26 (2008): 49-

68.Klassen, Jakob. . Interview by author. Interview notes. Valle Nuevo Campo 104. 16 June 2009.

Kilometer 81 – Asociacíon Evangélica Mennonita del Paraguay; available from http://www.km81.org/en/?Getting_to_know_Km_81:Origin_and_Development; Internet; accessed 21 January 2010.

Kraybill, Donald B. *Ethnic Education: The Impact of Mennonite Schooling*. San Francisco, CA: R & E Research Associates, Inc, 1977.

_____*Old Order Amish: Their Enduring Way of Life*. Baltimore, MA: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.

_____ and Carl F. Bowman. *On the Backroad to Heaven: Old Order Hutterites, Mennonites, Amish, and Brethren*. Baltimore, MA: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.

_____ and James P. Hurd, *Horse- and-Buggy Mennonites: Hoofbeats of Humility in a Postmodern World*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2007.

Lacan, Jacques. *The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis.* Translated by Anthony Wilden. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1968.

Loewen, Royden. "'The Children, the Cows, My Dear Man and My Sister': The Transplanted Lives of Mennonite Farm Women, 1874-1900" *Canadian Historical Review* 73. Number 8 (1992)

_____ "The Quiet on the Land: The Environment in Mennonite Historiography" *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 23 (2005): 151-164.

_____*The Making of Ethnic Farm Culture in Western Canada*. Canada's Ethnic Group Series. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Historical Association, 2002.

_____ "To the Ends of the Earth: An Introduction to the Conservative Low German Mennonites in the Americas" *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 82 (July 2008): 427-448.

_____ "Wonders and Drudgery: The Diaries of Mennonite Migrants, 1857-1879" in *Hidden Worlds: Revisiting the Mennonite Migrants of the 1870's*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2001.

Lowenthal, David. "Fabricating Heritage" *History and Memory* 10, Issue 1 (Spring/Summer 1998): 5-24.

Mahalingam, Ramaswami. Editor. *Cultural Psychology of Immigrants*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers. 2006.

Marger, Martin N. *Race and Ethnic Relations: American and Global Perspectives*. Sixth edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2003.

Marshall, T.H. *Sociology at the Crossroads: and other essays.* London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1963.

Martens, Hildegaard M. *Mennonites from Mexico: Their Immigration and Settlement in Canada.* Research Grants Program, Canada Manpower and Immigration and Mennonite Central Committee, June 30, 1975.

Martin, Donald. *Old Order Mennonites of Ontario: Gelassenheit, Discipleship, Brotherhood*. Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2003.

McKay, Ian. *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in the Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009.

Mennonite Central Committee. Available from www.mcc.org. Accessed January 20, 2009.

Morales, Waltraud Queiser. *Bolivia: Land of Struggle.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press, Inc., 1992.

Nolt, Steve. "A 'Two-Kingdom' People in a World of Multiple Identities: Religion, Ethnicity and American Mennonites" *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 73. Number 3 (July 1999): 485-502.

Parr, Joy. "Gender History and Historical Practice" *The Canadian Historical Review* 96. Number 3 (Sept 1995): 354-376.

Petras James F, and Henry Veltmeyer. *Social movements and state power: Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador.* Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2005

Phillips, Kendall R. *Framing Public Memory.* Tuscaloosa, AB: The University of Alabama Press, 2004.

Plett, Delbert, and Adina Reger, *Diese Steine: Ein Bildband zur Geschichte der Russland Mennoniten.* Steinbach, MB: Crossway Publications, 2001.

Plett, Lynette Sarah. "Refashioning *Kleine Gemeinde* Women's Dress in Kansas and Manitoba: A Textual Crazy Quilt" *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 26 (2008): 111-131.

Portelli, Alessandro. "The death of Luigi Trastulli and other stories: Form and meaning in oral history" *SUNY series in Oral and Public History*. New York, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991.

Prügl, Elisabeth. *The Global Construction of Gender: Home-Based Work in the Political Economy of the 20th Century*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

Quiring, David M. *Mennonite Old Colony Vision: Under Siege in Mexico and the Canadian Connection*. Steinbach, MB: Crossway Publications Inc., 2003.

Redekop, Calvin Wall. *The Old Colony Mennonites: Dilemmas of Ethnic Minority Life*. Baltimore, MA: The John Hopkins Press, 1969.

Reschly, Steven D. *The Amish on the Iowa Prairie, 1840-1910*. Baltimore, MA: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000.

Rothenberg, Paula S. *Race, Class, and Gender in the United States*. Seventh edition. New York: Worth Publishers, 2007.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Random House, Inc., 1994.

Samuel, Raphael and Paul Thomson. Editors. *The Myths We Live By*. New York: Routledge, 1990.

Sanabria, Harry. "Consolidating States, Restructuring Economies, and Confronting Workers and Peasants: The Antinomies of Bolivian Neoliberalism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41. Number 3 (July 1999): 535-562

Sandwell, R. W. "The Limits of Liberalism: The Liberal Renaissance and the History of the Family in Canada" *Canadian Historical Review* (2003): 423-450.

Sawatsky, Rodney J., "Domesticated sectarianism: Mennonites in the U.S. and Canada in Comparative Perspective" *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 3 (1978): 233-244.

Sawatzky, Harry Leonard. *The Sought a Country: Mennonite Colonization in Mexico*. Berkely, CA: University of California Press, 1971.

Schartner, Sieghard and Sylvia. *Bolivien: Zufluchtsort der konservativen Mennoniten*. Asunción: by the author, 2009.

Schiller, Nina Glick. "From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration" *Anthropological Quarterly* 68(1995): 48-63

Schmidt, Frau Jakob. Interview by author. Written notes. Valle Nuevo Campo 102. 16 June 2009.

Schmiedehaus, Walter. *Die Altkolonier-Mennoniten in Mexico*. Winnipeg, MB: CMBC Publications, 1982.

Scott, Joan W. "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis" *American Historical Review* 91. Number 5. Dec 1986): 1153-1075.

Smith, Timothy L. "Religion and Ethnicity in America" *The American Historical Review* 83. Number 5 (Dec 1978): 1155-1185.

Sollors, Werner. *The Invention of Ethnicity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Starr, Louis. "Oral History" in *Oral History: An Interdisciplenary Anthology*. Editors David K. Dunaway and William K. Baum. Second Edition. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 1996.

Statistics Canada. Available from http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/090922/dq090922b-eng.htm. Internet. Accessed 21 January 2010.

The Economist, "Go forth and multiply a lot less: Lower fertility is changing the world for the better" 29 October 2009; accessed by http://www.economist.com/displaystory.cfm?story_id=14743589; Internet; accessed 21 January 2010.

Thistlethwaite, Frank. "Migration from Europe Overseas in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" *A Century of European Migrations 1830-1030* Editors Rudolph Vecoli and Suzanne Sinke. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991.

Tonkin, Elizabeth. *Narrating our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992

Wiebe, Gerhard. *Causes and History of the Emigration of The Old Colony Mennonites from Russia to America*. Translated by Helen Janzen. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 1981.

Yashar, Deborah J. *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America: The Rise of Indigenous Movements and the Postliberal Chalenge.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Yoder, Paton. *Tradition and Transition: Amish Mennonites and Old Order Amish 1800-1900.* Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History 31. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991.

Zacharias, Peter D. "Biography of Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), Rosengart" in *Old Colony Mennonites in Canada: 1875-2000.* Editor Delbert F. Plett. Steinbach, MB: Crossway Publications Inc., 2001.