

**“Separation from the World”: Postcolonial Aspects of Mennonite/s
Writing in Western Canada**

by

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WRITING IN WESTERN CANADA**

BY

AMY D. KROEKER

**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**

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Abstract

How do Mennonites as immigrants to Western Canada express their identities without a land or language to call their own? This thesis explores some possible answers to this question as it examines the position of Mennonite writers and Mennonite writing in Western Canada using postcolonial theories such as those of Diana Brydon, Stephen Slemon, Arun Mukherjee, Homi Bhabha, Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan, Rosemary Marangoly George, and Mary Louise Pratt. Many Mennonites who immigrated to Western Canada brought with them a history of religious, geographic, cultural, and linguistic separation from those outside the Mennonite community. This desire to remain “separate from the world” translated into a struggle over language as most of the Mennonites in Western Canada exchanged the German language of their heritage for the English language of the majority in their new home. An examination of Rudy Wiebe’s novel *The Blue Mountains of China*, Armin Wiebe’s novel *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens*, Di Brandt’s poetry collections *questions i asked my mother*, *Agnes in the sky*, and *mother, not mother*, and Patrick Friesen’s poetry collections *the lands i am*, *The Shunning*, *Unearthly Horses*, and *st. mary at main* reveals how cultural and linguistic pressures from outside the community coupled with a desire to express aspects of the Mennonites’ cultural heritage has led to and continues to lead to the creation of a new “hybrid” language that uses elements of Standard English, the language of the outside majority, to express the different experiences and identities of many Mennonites and to resist these often oppressive external forces. The Mennonite experiences depicted in these texts include geopolitical, linguistic, and cultural border-crossings, attempts to create a

“place” to call “home,” the subject position of Mennonite women, and the move from the traditional rural community to the urban landscape. This thesis explores the idea that texts by Mennonite writers express the identities of this ethnic minority through a hybrid language made up of past cultural and religious traditions and an imposed system of meaning that, while often not of the Mennonites’ own choosing, is an integral part of who they have become. These experiences are expressed through this “new” language in a way that opens up Mennonite experiences and identities both to other Mennonite readers and to non-Mennonite readers.

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Introduction – Connections Between Postcolonialism and Mennonite/s Writing in

Western Canada

[...]
the nomad gone to ground in winnipeg
via ukraine poland and the lowlands
the nomad without fields
without mountains to cross
the nomad without a way
gone to poetry
here
this city
poet with 600,000 words
a language he wasn't born into
poet with his senses about him
an empty mirror
and the desire to love (Friesen, *st. mary* 48)

“nomads,” a poem in Patrick Friesen’s *st. mary at main* (1998), depicts many facets of the identity and experiences of a Mennonite writer in Western Canada in terms of both his/her poetry and his/her life. Like a “nomad,” this Mennonite writer moves voluntarily from place to place. The categorizing of the journey “via ukraine poland and the lowlands” suggests the importance of the Mennonite’s history in shaping his experience. The writer has “gone to ground” yet is “without fields / without mountains to cross;” this emphasis on physical land brings to mind the historical and present-day Mennonite’s search for a “home” and, while the “home” he seeks is “grounded” in the physical landscape, there is also a sense that “home” as a place of belonging and community eludes this writer who is “without a way.” That the writer has “gone” not only “to ground” but “to poetry” suggests that this elusive “home” might also be found through words and through the textual expression of experience. However, to express

these experiences, the poet must use “a language he wasn’t born into” and must use both his five “senses” with which he experiences life as well as the common “sense[]” that keeps him on his guard to wield that language effectively. He is a “mirror” with the power to reflect back what he sees (perhaps those who were born into the language) yet the mirror remains “empty,” devoid of a true reflection of the world outside. But his “desire to love” suggests that despite his inability or unwillingness to reflect back the outside world, he wants to engage that world in a positive and possibly mutual relationship. This Mennonite writer and, as further study suggests, other Mennonite writers in Western Canada use words to create a sense of “place” and “home” and to engage the outside world through a language that is a combination of their own experiences and an externally imposed system of meaning.

The ideas suggested by this reading of Friesen’s poem are also ideas prevalent in many postcolonial theories. First, and perhaps most importantly, the location of this poem in “winnipeg” calls forth the many theories about a postcolonial Canada such as those of Diana Brydon, Alan Lawson, and Stephen Slemon. Edward Said’s theories of exile inform the idea of a “nomad” or a writer on a journey (not always of his/her own volition). This journey is rooted in history and the theories of ethnic writing by Enoch Padolsky and Sneja Gunew highlight the importance of an ethnic group’s history in shaping experience. Furthermore, the concept of “home” both as a physical place and as a place of belonging and community plays a large part in theories about immigrant writers such as Rosemary Marangoly George’s and theories about “naming” experience such as those of Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan. The poet puts into practice some of the theories of hybridity and mimicry suggested by Homi Bhabha as he uses a language “not one’s own”

and writes of the “empty mirror.” Finally, further light is shed on the position of the poet if one thinks of the “contact zone” as defined by Mary Louise Pratt when considering this “desire to love” that suggests a yearning to engage the outside world through language.

The postcolonial theories here invoked apply not only to Friesen’s poetry but also to many texts by many Mennonite writers in Western Canada. The examination of Mennonite history, culture, and specific literary texts by Rudy Wiebe, Armin Wiebe, Di Brandt, and Patrick Friesen that follows traces out the validity of using such theories in the discussion of these texts and also highlights the way these Mennonite writers in Western Canada express their identities and experiences through language. The discussion sheds light on what it means to be a Mennonite writer in Western Canada writing both for other Mennonites and non-Mennonites and perhaps suggests ways in which texts by other immigrant writers or other writers from ethnic minorities might be read.

The use of postcolonial theories to examine Mennonite/s writing in Western Canada depends first upon whether one allows for the inclusion of Canadian writing into the arena of postcolonial studies at all. Linda Hutcheon cautions against the wholesale inclusion of a settler-invader country like Canada into postcolonial studies. She says that while Canada has struggled (and still does struggle) with issues of cultural unity and identity as a former colony of Britain, discussing “the white Canadian *experience* of colonialism” alongside that of “the West Indies or Africa or India” makes her feel “that there is something in this that is both trivializing of the Third World experience and exaggerated regarding the (white) Canadian” (155, her italics). Arun Mukherjee agrees. Although she adds to Hutcheon’s suggestion that perhaps the Native position in Canada

is the only true position of postcoloniality by suggesting that “nonwhite Canadians from colonized countries are also producing a postcolonial Canadian Literature,” she excludes white Canadians from such a position by virtue of their position of privilege within Canada (217). The result is that she also excludes Mennonite immigrants to Canada because they are “white Canadians.” However, Mukherjee herself does seem to allow for the inclusion of at least some “white” writing in Canada when she argues against postcolonial theory’s homogenizing tendency to define subject positions in exclusionary binary terms (centre/periphery, colonizer/colonized) and notes that this tendency “obliterates the fact that postcolonial societies also have their own internal centres and peripheries, their own dominants and marginals” (222). Mennonites in Canada do occupy just such an internally peripheral and marginal position within the larger group of “white Canadians” and, as Mukherjee suggests, do not fit easily into a homogeneous definition of the “centre” or the “colonizers.”

Mennonite writing in Western Canada does have a place within the field of postcolonialism by virtue of these “internal centres and peripheries.” This sense of many power relationships within a larger postcolonial society seems to fit with Diana Brydon’s idea of “different orders of colonial experience” and Stephen Slemon’s concept of a Canada (as a “Second World”) that cannot place itself neatly on one side or the other of the “colonizer/colonized” binary (given “the ‘always already’ condition of Second-World settler”) because “anti-colonialist resistance has *never* been directed at an object or a discursive structure which can be seen purely external to the self” (Brydon 2; Slemon, “Unsettling” 80, his italics). Sneja Gunew also addresses the inability to define Canada using “either/or” binary terms; although “it is much easier to stage a national history [...]

in terms of cohesive indigenous peoples displaced by equally cohesive colonizing powers [...] those other groups with their different legacies who settled the country and displaced its inhabitants are left out of the drama” (30). Canada indeed exhibits (as do other postcolonial countries) many examples of “different orders of colonial experience” and these experiences support the critics (those mentioned above, as well as Alan Lawson) who believe that reducing the subject position of Canadians to either “colonizer” or “colonized” excludes many Canadians (if not all Canadians) who fall into an “in-between” position.

Mennonites in Canada do fall into this “in-between” group with a “different legac[y]” as they occupy a position of *both* “colonizer” (in terms of their historical displacement of indigenous peoples) *and* “colonized” (in terms of cultural and linguistic threat from the Anglo-Canadian cultural and linguistic majority). Part of this “in-between-ness” stems from Mennonite constructions of “national” identity. Edward Said’s “Reflections on Exile” describes nationalism as “an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage. It affirms the home created by a community of language, culture and customs; and, by so doing, it fends off exile, fights to prevent its ravages” (359). But where does a Mennonite fit within such a definition of nationalism? By virtue of a definition merely of geographical “place,” Mennonites living and writing in Canada are unproblematically “Canadian.” But as far as “a people, a heritage” or “a community of language, culture and customs,” Mennonites are a nation unto themselves. Indeed, if (as Arnold Dyck writes), “homeless as we are, [the Low German language] has itself been something like a homeland,” then the definition of “place” moves beyond geography and suggests that “Canadian” Mennonites perhaps see themselves as different

from other “Canadians” by virtue of their linguistic and cultural differences (qtd. in Al Reimer 33). The concept of a Mennonite “nation” within Canada is complicated by the fact that although they share the same basic pattern of displacement and engagement with the linguistic and cultural majority upon arrival in Canada, these “Canadian” Mennonites are not a homogeneous group. The different Mennonite groups now in Canada trace their roots back to different branches of a larger religious movement, different migration routes to Canada, and different patterns of settlement once they arrived in Canada. This study focuses on Mennonites in Western Canada and, while the project’s suggestions about understanding Mennonite identities in Canada and the manifestation of those identities may be usefully applied to the writing of, for example, Ontario Mennonites, one must be wary of painting all Mennonite writing in Canada with the same postcolonial brush. Nevertheless, one aspect of their subject position shared by all Mennonites in Canada is that of a history of immigration. Discussing the position of the immigrant writer using Homi Bhabha’s theories of nationalism, Rosemary Marangoly George writes that “[i]mmigration, one could argue, *unwrites* nation and national projects because it flagrantly displays a rejection of one national space for another more desirable location, albeit with some luggage carried over” (186, her italics). Mennonites, with their history of frequent geographical movement in the face of persecution and attempts to assimilate them within the “nation” of Canada, do indeed “unwrite” the Canadian national project of unity with their historical struggle to remain separate from the political, cultural, and linguistic identity of the surrounding majority.

This historical struggle and its literary outcomes have a place within the particular field of postcolonial studies herein examined. With reference to Mennonite/s writing in

Western Canada, "postcolonialism" moves beyond a (merely) temporal definition (one that emphasizes the hyphen in "post-colonialism") or a (merely) geographic (or even racial) definition (that can lead to a conflation between the terms "postcolonial literatures" and "Third-World literatures"). "Postcolonialism" as it relates to Mennonite/s writing in Western Canada is what Diana Brydon posits as "a locally situated, provisional, and strategic attempt to think through the consequences of colonialism and to imagine nonrepressive alternatives to its discursive regime [...]. [I]t is an activist and interventionary politics and a thinking process more than a static object of inquiry" (10). She later suggests that postcolonialism "is neither a thing nor an essentialized state; rather, it is a complex of processes designed to circumvent imperial *and* colonial habits of mind" (11, her italics). Without equating (and therefore "trivializing," as Hutcheon suggests) the "colonial experience" of the Mennonite in Western Canada with that of the Indian, the West Indian, the Nigerian, or the Algerian, there is nevertheless a need to examine the way "imperial *and* colonial habits of mind" are a part of the history of the Mennonites' cultural and linguistic struggle and how Mennonite writing in Western Canada expresses identity despite (and because of) such habits of mind.

A focus on the literary text and the way that text manifests *and* subverts/resists colonial discourse using the very language of the oppressive forces (in this case, Standard English) reveals the link between postcolonial theories and Mennonite/s writing in Western Canada. Diana Brydon and Helen Tiffin call for "a focus on language, on the problems of translating from one language system into another and on the search for a discourse that can move beyond the violent suppressions of the western need for unity" (76). Historically, the move from German to English in Mennonite writing in Western

Canada exhibits just such a “translation” as Mennonites sought to express their identities in a language not their own. Enoch Padolsky notes that all Canadian writers are ethnic (the difference lies in whether they are part of the “ethnic majority” or “ethnic minority”) and that ethnicity manifests itself “not only thematically (ethnic identity, family relationships, language, religion, inter-group relations, discrimination, and so on), but structurally, formally, or in the writer’s or reader’s perspective” (27). Rosemary Marangoly George adds a further characteristic of immigrant writing in that it is “marked by a disregard for national schemes, the use of a multigenerational cast of characters and a narrative tendency toward repetitions and echoes [...]. Most importantly, the immigrant genre is marked by a curiously detached reading of the experience of ‘homelessness’ which is compensated for by an excessive use of the metaphor of luggage, both spiritual and material” (171).

This reading of Mennonite writing in Western Canada as postcolonial writing rests in large part on notions of “hybridity.” Homi K. Bhabha writes that “[resistance] is the effect of an ambivalence produced within the rules of recognition of dominating discourses as they articulate the signs of cultural difference and reimplicate them within the deferential relations of colonial power – hierarchy, normalization, marginalization and so forth” (“Signs” 110). In one sense, Mennonite writing in Western Canada submits to the power of colonial discourse as it moves to the use of English over German, yet in another sense it resists the very “rules of recognition” within this “dominating discourse.” The resultant hybrid brings together the cultural and linguistic historic identity of the Mennonites and the “colonizing” system of language (Standard English) and becomes something entirely new that articulates the unique identities of the Mennonite living in

Western Canada. The negotiated encounter between two systems of languages produces a literature that mimics (but is not quite) the “standard.” Reading Mennonite writing in Western Canada (and as such expressions of Western Canadian Mennonite identities) as postcolonial therefore requires a textual examination that considers some of the strategies suggested by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back*: the “abrogation or denial of the privilege of ‘English’” and the “appropriation and reconstitution of the language of the centre” (38) through such techniques as refusing to gloss Low German words and phrases, syntactic fusion (the “direct translation” syntactically from Low German into English), code-switching, and the foregrounding of “Mennonite” experience as something “worth” writing about. This hybrid product both articulates specific “Mennonite” identities and creates a place for the expression of those identities within the larger scope of “Canadian Literature” as it brings together a discourse that plays a part in assimilationist projects and a discourse that desperately seeks separation.

The first chapter of this thesis seeks to outline the historical background of the Mennonites before they came to Canada and the way that an identity based upon first religious and then cultural and linguistic separation informs the position of a Mennonite writing in Western Canada. This emphasis on the Mennonite identity as “separate” reveals how Mennonites have historically placed and seen themselves as the “other” in an antagonistic binary relationship with the rest of the world. The Mennonite quest for religious, geographic, cultural, and linguistic separation accompanied the Mennonite immigrants who came to Canada and accordingly affects both the self-conceptions of the Mennonites and the way they express their perceived identities through language.

Brydon's "different orders of colonial experience" help define the historical relationship between the Mennonites and the Canadian government as one demonstrating "imperial *and* colonial habits of mind" as the concise historical account sketches the assimilationist program of the Canadian government towards the Mennonites in Western Canada and the resulting struggle over culture and language. The discussion of the cultural and linguistic pressures on the part of the Anglo-Canadian majority towards this "separate" ethnic minority then turns to the way those pressures on the Mennonite identity came to be expressed through the language of that majority. A brief examination of Rudy Wiebe's *Peace Shall Destroy Many* (1962), the first major Mennonite fictional text written in English and read outside of the Mennonite community, demonstrates the beginning of the resistance against these "imperial *and* colonial habits of mind" on the part of some Mennonite writers in Western Canada and helps to provide a background for the following readings of more current texts by some of those writers.

The second chapter returns to Rudy Wiebe and reads his novel *The Blue Mountains of China* (1970) both together with and against Armin Wiebe's novel *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens* (1984). The second text builds on the ideas presented in the first and reveals a progression in the way the two authors represent their Mennonite experiences and engage the world outside Mennonite communities. Despite different emphases on various Mennonite experiences, the two novels both demonstrate some form of "resistance" against the Anglo-Canadian political or linguistic majority as they manifest some of the postcolonial theories mentioned above, particularly those of Radhakrishnan and Pratt. *The Blue Mountains of China* focuses on the Mennonites' historical search for "place" (both in the sense of physical land and a sense of belonging)

and, as George suggests, “*unwrites* nation and national projects.” This reading of the text emphasizes the different crossings of borders undertaken by the Mennonites and the way those border crossings lead to new “places” in which the Mennonites attempt to “name” themselves apart from oppressive political and cultural forces. *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens* also challenges assimilationist attempts but does so not through the idea of physical border crossings but through cultural and linguistic border crossings. Bhabha’s theories of hybridity come to the fore in this reading as Armin Wiebe uses the very “dominating discourses” against which he struggles to reverse “the process of domination through disavowal” (“Signs” 112). Pratt’s theories of the “contact zone” inform the way Wiebe emphasizes language and demonstrates the way a Mennonite writer in Western Canada can express his/her language (“language” here meaning “a system of meaning”) in a way that both uses, subverts, and engages the discourse of the majority represented by the world outside the fictional village.

The third chapter moves to focus on texts written by Mennonites more recently and in a different medium. Where Rudy Wiebe and Armin Wiebe express their Mennonite identities and experiences through the novel form, Di Brandt and Patrick Friesen build upon the foundation laid by earlier Mennonite texts and often express their Mennonite identities and experiences through poetry. Brandt’s poetry in *questions i asked my mother* (1987), *Agnes in the sky* (1990), and *mother, not mother* (1992) and Friesen’s poetry in *the lands i am* (1976), *The Shunning* (1980), *Unearthly Horses* (1984), and *st. mary at main* (1998) add to this discussion as the authors write about and write from the position of Mennonites in Western Canada. The move to poetry adds a new dimension to the struggle against the colonizing pressures felt by these Mennonites as these texts

subvert the very foundation of the English linguistic system. Brandt's poetry provides a new element to the discussion of Mennonite texts as postcolonial as she writes from the metaphorically "doubly colonized" position of both a Mennonite writer and a Mennonite woman. Her texts enhance the discussion of Mennonite literature as postcolonial resistance while exploring the way the experience and identity of a Mennonite woman can be expressed through language using the same forms of resistance. Patrick Friesen's poetry also manifests the resistance against programs of assimilation seen in the other texts but a review of his work in a chronological fashion reveals the way his version of Mennonite writing moves beyond mere resistance to embrace other minority experiences in Canada. His work provides a glimpse of a possible result of other Mennonite writing in Canada – an expression of identity and experience that retains its distinctiveness while suggesting commonalities with the various textual expressions of other minority identities. The poetry of both Brandt and Friesen highlights the way postcolonial theories help to clarify the position and expression of a Mennonite writer in Western Canada and the way that expression relates to the outside world.

In her introductory remarks to a collection of conference proceedings entitled *Acts of Concealment: Mennonite/s Writing in Canada* (1992), Hildi Froese Tiessen says that "[p]ost-colonial literary theory may well prove to be instructive in any future study of the development and place of the literature of the Mennonites in Canada in so far as it has focussed on how language and writing in post-colonial cultures have been appropriated for use away from a 'privileged norm' or dominant cultural centre" (12). The study that follows attempts to trace out the implications of Tiessen's suggestion as it reads both the historical search for Mennonite identity and the different expressions of that identity

through language alongside postcolonial theories about settler/invader colonies, ethnicity, identity, immigrant writing, and hybridity. The conclusions reached help to understand and suggest answers to the question “how do Mennonites as immigrants to Western Canada make sense of their identities without a land or language to call their own?” And it is these suggestions that may shed light on the position of other minority writers in Canada and perhaps lead to further understanding of the relationship between Canadian minority writers like the Mennonites and their various audiences.

Chapter 1 – The Quest for a Separate Identity

We are agreed [as follows] on separation: A separation shall be made from the evil and from the wickedness which the devil planted in the world; in this manner, simply that we shall not have fellowship with them [the wicked] and not run with them in the multitude of their abominations (Sattler, qtd. in Wenger 249).

These words, written by Michael Sattler in 1527, encapsulate a major theme in the discussion of postcolonial aspects of Mennonite writing in Western Canada. Although this statement was recorded far from North America and, indeed, only decades after people in Europe even found out about the land that would eventually become Canada, the experiences of Mennonites in Canada are nevertheless directly linked to this idea of “separation” from “the world.” And it is this insistence on “separation” that supports an examination of certain texts written by Mennonites in Western Canada in terms of certain postcolonial theories such as Diana Brydon’s theories about a postcolonial Canada, Rosemary Marangoly George’s theories about immigrant writing, Homi Bhabha’s theories about hybridity, Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan’s theories about ethnic identity, and Mary Louise Pratt’s theories about the “contact zone.”

As the epigraph to this chapter suggests, a discussion of Mennonite writing in Western Canada begins in sixteenth century Europe. The experiences of Mennonite writers as immigrants or as descendants of immigrants to Canada have their roots in the history of this religious and cultural minority group. Moreover, the Mennonite insistence on “separation” has led to a group that has retained much of its original religious and cultural structure and, as such, no discussion of Mennonite writing in Western Canada is complete without an examination of its history.

The following chapter begins to explore the identities of Mennonites in Canada by looking at some of the initial and central tenets of their faith, at the way their religious foundation became part of their cultural self-definition, and at the way language came to be a major part of Mennonite senses of identity. Rudy Wiebe's 1962 novel, *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, links this historical background and cultural position of Mennonites in Canada to an expression of that background and position through language. Further, an examination of *Peace Shall Destroy Many* helps to demonstrate the validity of applying this definition of "postcolonial" and corresponding theories to some more recent texts written by some Mennonites in Western Canada.

Mennonites take their name from Menno Simons, an Anabaptist leader who became a figurehead for and a leader of a persecuted and floundering religious movement which developed in the Netherlands and Germany in the early sixteenth century as a response to the Protestant Reformation. At the core of the movement were religious tenets that point to the Anabaptists' desire to be a people apart and suggest that the concepts of "inclusion/exclusion" and "belonging/not belonging" were major themes in the articulation of their new religious identities. The major point of difference between the Mennonites and other Protestant groups was the idea of the "believer's church." The Anabaptists opposed what they saw in both the established Catholic Church and the new Protestant movements as a lack of choice on the part of the member. They believed salvation came only to those people who consciously accepted that Jesus Christ was a sacrifice of atonement for their sins. Only the "believer" who had made a personal decision for God was allowed to be a church member and express his or her commitment to God through the act of baptism. This community of believers made up the "true"

Christian church, described by J. Denny Weaver as “a suffering community of adult believers which existed as an alternative, minority society within the dominant society of the world. One entered this new society voluntarily, which made it an adult act” (111). And so, the very beginnings of the religious movement out of which the Mennonites in Canada come were infused with the notion of a separate minority community that consciously holds itself apart from the dominant majority. Identity and a sense of belonging were the result of defining oneself as “this and not that.”

The relationship between Mennonites and state authority has often been fraught with tension. The group’s founding ideals acknowledged and respected the power of the state over non-church affairs but maintained that the “abomination” from which they were to keep separate included “civic affairs, the commitments [made in] unbelief and other things of that kind, which are highly regarded by the world and yet are carried on in flat contradiction to the command of God” (qtd. in Wenger 249). State authority, they felt, was put in place by God to preside over non-religious affairs. Adolf Ens notes that “Christians therefore owed obedience to the secular authority as long as its claims did not violate the prior obedience owed to God” (3). Basing their lives as much as possible on the modelled life of Jesus Christ, the Anabaptists repudiated “the sword” and took up a strong position against violence. They took literally the verses in the Bible that say, “Do not swear at all [...]. Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’ and your ‘No’ be ‘No,’” (Matt. 5:34-37) and refused to swear allegiance to any power other than God. Their rejection of infant baptism, their refusal to bear arms, and their refusal to pledge allegiance to any earthly political power were seen, in the words of Frank Epp, as “a non-recognition of civil and ecclesiastical authority in matters of conscience and faith” and as “an anarchical threat to

the maintenance of a united, homogeneous, obedient and serene society” (Epp, *History* 30). Again, in their relationship with the state, the Anabaptist religious movement had at its foundation the idea of an exclusively defined identity – just as membership was based on choice, that same choice was exercised against established ecclesiastic and civil authority. As the early Anabaptists banded together in small, covert groups, they worked out the tenets of their faith and solidified their sense of identity as a separate religious minority.

Just as the relationships between the Mennonite community and the outside world or the state were marked by politics of inclusion and exclusion, so were the relationships within the community. These separate Mennonite communities (based first on religion and later on culture) demonstrated the importance of belonging in their internal correction of disobedience. The Mennonites’ refusal to bear arms (either in self-defense or on behalf of civil authority) and a commitment to pacificism led to an alternative form of church discipline – “the ban” was a form of excommunication that kept the erring member from taking part in “the communion of the celestial flesh of Christ” if a sin was not confessed after several confrontations. As George Williams further notes, “Paul’s injunction [in 1 Cor. 5:11] not to eat with the faithless could be interpreted as limited to the Supper of the Lord or it could be extended so as to exclude all social intercourse with the banned” (732). In other words, taken to its extreme definition, this biblical form of correction led to an erring member of the community being entirely cut off from his or her family and surrounding community, including the marital bed. Even in matters of discipline the Anabaptists were conscious of the power of excluding someone from the community.

The concept of a “believer’s church,” the Mennonite concept of the state, and the concept of “the ban” all reveal the extent to which Mennonites were historically concerned with keeping themselves a people apart. This emphasis on separation became an integral part of the identity of Mennonites wherever they made their home. While the oft-cited binary of “colonizer/colonized” in theories of postcolonialism is, as both Arun Mukherjee and Sneja Gunew note (Mukherjee 222; Gunew 30), far too simplistic to base a theory upon, this idea of opposition is nevertheless useful in defining Mennonite self-conception. The Mennonites consistently defined themselves as “other.” Facing enormous religious and (later) cultural pressure to conform, the Mennonites also defined themselves, in a sense, as “colonized.” Although the Mennonites have never faced direct colonial power as have people in places like India or the Caribbean, they have nevertheless faced throughout their history religious, cultural, and linguistic pressures that have attempted to assimilate and to control them.

Separated by their faith, their cultural practices, and, eventually, their language, the Mennonites began a life of self-induced exile. They moved continually to escape persecution from civil authority (from both Catholic and Protestant leaders) and to find land in the domain of some sympathetic and tolerant ruler who cared more for the Mennonites’ renowned agricultural abilities than their different religious practices. The Mennonites diverged into two main groups – the Swiss and the Russian Mennonites. Many of the Swiss Anabaptists took refuge in the religious freedom of William Penn’s new colony in America. Some members of this group moved to Canada during and after the War of Independence in 1776 and today many of the Mennonites in Ontario count these early settlers as their ancestors (Ens 2). However, most of the Mennonites in

Canada (especially those living in the highly concentrated Mennonite areas in Manitoba and Saskatchewan) are of Dutch-Russian descent. Their ancestors moved from the Netherlands to Prussia to Russia and then finally to Canada in two major waves. The first wave of immigrants came in 1874 and saw Canada as both a refuge from growing accommodation to the Russian way of life as well as a source of new economic opportunities given the increasingly crowded Mennonite settlements (Ens 7). After World War I, a second major wave of Russian immigrants came to Canada in response to the chaos and violence surrounding the Bolshevik revolution and the civil war devastating the country (Epp, *Struggle* 139). Given the relatively early arrival to what is now Canada of many of the Mennonites from the Swiss Anabaptist heritage, and their lengthier exposure to British society, this thesis concentrates on the experiences and self-expression through writing of Mennonites tracing their roots to the Dutch-Russian group, most of whom settled in the Western Canadian provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta.

Almost every major movement of Mennonites has been the result of a search for a place where they could live in communities separate from “the world.” At first, Pennsylvania, Prussia, and then Russia seemed ideal locations for settlement because the rulers turned blind eyes to the non-conformist practices of the new settlers and instead focused on the settlers’ ability to “domesticate” recently “acquired” frontier land. However, as the colonies became established, governmental pressure increased as the Mennonites were “encouraged” to become more like the surrounding majority and demonstrate their loyalty to the country by becoming more amenable to cultural and civic change (especially in the area of military service).

Canada seemed the ideal solution for Russian Mennonites in the later nineteenth century in the face of impending Russification. The Canadian government engaged in an intensive campaign to attract new settlers for land recently left “vacant” by Native treaties and under threat of American expansion (Epp 12). The Russian Mennonites were wooed by the promise of free (and large) blocks of land, “an entire exemption from military service,” acceptance of the use of the German language, “the right to affirm instead of to swear in taking the oath,” and (deemed by many Mennonites to be most important), “full exercise of religious principles and education of children without restriction” (Epp, *History* 191-2). These promises from the government seemed to guarantee the desire for culturally and linguistically separate communities.

The relevance of the Mennonites’ historical search for a geographically separate “home” to the discussion of postcolonial aspects of Mennonite writing in Western Canada comes from the intricate links within the Mennonite community between religion, culture, and language. As Frank Epp notes, it was in Russia that the Mennonite identity began to mean more than simply religious affiliation. Their search for a physical “home” altered into a search more for a cultural “home.” The concentrated area of Mennonite settlement in Russia was essentially a “self-contained cultural island” and “it was in Russia that the ethnic quality of being a Mennonite became mixed and sometimes confused with the religious quality” (Epp, *History* 161, 164). Royden Loewen notes further that if culture is defined as “the symbols and systems of meaning constructed by ordinary people in the everyday to make sense of life” then “[i]n this process [of making meaning] a sense of peoplehood is developed, not inherited, when a common world view, a common religiousness, a common historical mythology, a set of inter-ethnic relations, a

set of economic activities, a common interpretation of experience comes to create connectedness in a community” (“Bright” 32). Given that Anabaptist theology applied holistically to all aspects of life and that the Mennonite desire to remain “separate” meant geographic separation as well as religious separation, it is not surprising that religious separation supported by geographic separation became only a part of a more general cultural separation as generation after generation grew up in the close(d) community.

This new emphasis on cultural separation was transported to Canada along with the desire for land on which to maintain separate communities. The closed Mennonite communities that intentionally kept themselves apart from extensive outside influences recall Edward Said’s definition of nationalism as “an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage. It affirms the home created by a community of language, culture and customs; and, by so doing, it fends off exile, fights to prevent its ravages” (359). While traditional definitions of nation almost always ground themselves in physical “place” with corresponding geographic borders, the Mennonite community both without and within Canada can also be seen as a “nation.” Culturally and linguistically Mennonites have created for themselves a “home” through custom and the maintenance of a different language than that spoken by the surrounding majority. In Canada, this “nation” within a nation occupies a position of ambivalence as the Mennonites struggle(d) to maintain their identities in the face of pressure to assimilate culturally and linguistically yet base those identities in part on a geographic separation made possible only through colonial practices which removed resident Native populations from the land that became the Mennonites’.

Initially, given the low population of the Canadian West, geographic separation in the form of concentrated and segregated communities of Mennonite farmers was enough to keep the minority group distant from “the world.” The cultural and linguistic “home” that the Mennonites created for themselves in Russia and, to some extent, Prussia, survived transplantation to Canada because this geographic separation kept assimilationist pressures at bay for a time. Royden Loewen notes also the importance of “social boundaries, family networks and village hierarchies” in the successful transplantation of Mennonite communities (“New Themes” 5). However, as the surrounding areas became more populated in the last decades of the nineteenth century, many Mennonites turned increasingly to social separation in the form of nonconformity, emphasizing lifestyle differences that arose from their interpretation of their faith (Driedger 42). One of the main aspects of this social separation was that of language. This struggle over language both within the community and against the agenda of the Canadian government solidified the identities of Mennonites in Canada and gave rise to the experiences eventually expressed through literature.

Language has always been a major factor in Mennonite identities. Ontario Mennonites retained the “Pennsylvania *Deutsch*” they initially brought with them from the German Palatinate. After moving to West Prussia, Dutch-German Mennonites retained the Dutch they had used in the Netherlands to remain distinct while acquiring yet using sparingly the Low German prevalent in their new home. In Russia both Low German and High German were used to remain culturally distinct and separate, with Russian eventually becoming a language learned but used primarily in necessary business dealings with the outside world. The languages were also used to separate different facets

of life. Epp explains this compartmentalization of life using language: "High German became the language of school and church and Low German took over as the language of the family, of the extended family, and in social and business communications, generally" (Epp, *Struggle* 518). In the same way that language delineated various components of life, so too did the German language and culture delineate the Mennonite way of life as separate from that of other Canadians.

And so, it was over language that the battle between this minority ethnic group and the ethnic majority represented by the Canadian government was fought and it was in the arena of the public school that the battle was won. The Mennonites thought they had ensured the right to educate their own children in their chosen manner when they came from Russia in 1873. However, the document they signed in good faith with a federal representative was not valid when challenged in 1919 because education was a matter of provincial jurisdiction and not federal (Ens 141-43). The invalidity of the document was not discovered until challenged, and a series of Public Schools Acts in Western Canada, beginning in 1890 and ending in 1916, changed the educational climate from mostly private schools taught solely in German to a predominance of public schools where German was reduced to one period per day and then only as a study of the language itself. The eventually successful enforcement of English-only public schools on the part of the Canadian government was an intentional plan to force the Mennonites out of their linguistic separation and to make the Mennonites more "Canadian." Several startling examples of assimilationist sentiment demand quotation in full as they shed light on this assimilationist program. While discussing the "language question" in his 1918 book *The Education of the New-Canadian*, J.T.M. Anderson admonishes the government for being

overly lax in allowing “New-Canadians” (among them the Mennonites) to continue teaching children in their mother tongue:

It is surely manifest that the greatest agency in racial assimilation is the common or public school. This is the great melting-pot into which must be placed these divers racial groups, and from which will eventually emerge the pure gold of Canadian citizenship [...]. [T]he common school exerts its supreme influence over youthful minds at their most impressionable stage of development (114).

In the same year, a report on the Saskatchewan education system by Harold W. Fought notes that the “assimilation process is made even more difficult by reason of the fact that the foreign born have settled mostly in great settlements, embracing frequently thousands of square miles, where they live largely unto themselves, using their own mother tongue, their own manners and customs, often to the utter disregard of Canadian standards and ideals” (13). He speaks highly of the more “Progressive Mennonites” whose longer stay in the United States on their journey to Canada allowed them to “accept the ways of the American people including their system of public education” (145). He feels that in the Saskatchewan education system “the outstanding problem so far as the process of making one Canadian-speaking and thinking people goes, centers around the colony Mennonites” and that “[a]s for the ideals, the aspirations and the future of the Canadian people, they are largely meaningless to [the Mennonite student]; for while he lives in Canada he is not of Canada” (15, 147). However, he reassuringly adds that “[p]atiently, sympathetically, but firmly, [this “alien”] must be led – and by teachers of highest Canadian ideals [...]. With the right type of schools established in the heart of the non-English communities – faithfully served – the assimilation process cannot long be delayed” (19). To support his hope he refers to the “success” of the South Dakota school board whose recent move to

curtail the use of German in the schools “may seem radical to some people; but [these steps] will assuredly hasten the Americanisation process, and for it, some day, the state may receive the gratitude of the very people who assumed rights that the state is now curtailing” (148). These words reveal an attitude determined to “Canadianize” immigrants to Canada such as the Mennonites and a knowledge that language as taught through the educational system is the best means with which to assimilate the outsider. As part of a 1907 election campaign, then-Premier of Manitoba Rodmund Roblin decreed that the Union Jack be raised in public schools daily in order to “blend ‘together the various nationalities in the province into a common citizenship, irrespective of race and creed’” as well as to make the students “‘filled with the traditions of the British flag’” (qtd. in Epp, *History* 345). The new legislation caused eleven public schools in Mennonite districts to become private and parents boycotted the schools where the flags flew. However, the language debate eventually ended in favour of the Canadian government and most of the Mennonites, except for those who emigrated to Latin America in search of educational freedom, acquiesced to English-only public education.

A number of factors increased pressure for linguistic assimilation after the separate schools debate ended and many Mennonite children were learning “what was proper [... that is,] the English language, English styles, English values, and English institutions, even English music” (Epp, *Struggle* 100). Popular opinion responded negatively during the periods around World Wars I and II to a people that refused to swear allegiance to Canada or Britain, refused combat service on behalf of their country, and clung tenaciously to a system of language and values that championed German language and culture (Driedger 43). Increased mechanization after World War II decreased farming

opportunities for many young Mennonites who found new kinds of work in urban centres and who left the geographically separate communities and often the linguistic separation behind (Regehr 102). Many conservative Mennonites despaired that the move from German to English over so few generations meant the end of the entire system of beliefs and the demise of the unique identity of the ethnic minority.

The tracing of the historical background underlying the identities of Mennonites in Canada and the consequential struggle with the Canadian government over language leads to a discussion of the ramifications of this move from German to English. One of those results was the effect this linguistic shift had on textual expressions of those identities. While the movement from German to English resulted in the assimilation of many Mennonites into mainstream Canadian culture, it nevertheless created the possibility of a “hybrid” language through which some Mennonite writers could affect the majority as they wrote about their different identities not in the German of their roots but using the very language from which they had historically struggled to remain apart. Many trace the “birth” of this Mennonite writing in English in Western Canada to Rudy Wiebe’s *Peace Shall Destroy Many* published in 1962. Heretofore most Mennonite texts written in English were translations of German religious texts and designed with missionary pursuits in mind. In contrast, Wiebe’s novel, written to fulfill his MA thesis requirement at the University of Alberta, caused a furor as it seemed explicitly designed to reach the larger audience outside the Mennonite community through the telling of a specifically “Mennonite” story. (Indeed, Wiebe later interpreted the anger over his having written the book as a response to his “talking from the inside and exposing things that shouldn’t be exposed” [qtd. in Reimer and Steiner 127]). Both the events within the story

and the process of writing the story itself manifest this linguistic shift from German to English and highlight the way this shift laid the foundation for some later Mennonite writing in English.

The novel's plot highlights the tension between the older, more conservative members of an isolated Mennonite community and a young teacher concerning the use of English. This textual conflict arises out of the real linguistic struggles already mentioned above. Joseph, the teacher, is under fire for using English at a young peoples' meeting. Deacon Block, the religious and conservative leader of the community says, "all of us agree that our children know the Bible and the traditions of our fathers because we have been separated from the worldly influences which bother many other Mennonite churches. We also know that much of this separation has been brought about because we have held to the German language in both church and home" (59). Joseph defends his choice by saying, "I addressed the *young* people in English for only one reason: at least four in the group could understand no word of German. Since I was speaking on non-resistance and believe it to be based on the love the Christian has received from God, Franz was persuaded that my using English would benefit them also" (57-58, his italics). Here the reader finds the main issues facing many Mennonites in Western Canada in the mid-twentieth century – whether to remain separate and religiously and culturally "pure" or to reach out to the very "world" they found so threatening.

However, it is the actual writing of the text that gives rise to the discussion of the postcolonial aspects of the expression of the identities of Mennonites in Western Canada. Significantly, as W. J. Keith notes, this argument comes to the reader not in German (which it would be were Wiebe writing for a solely Mennonite audience) but in English,

accessible to those beyond the Mennonite community (Keith 89). No longer is the “language question” a matter for the closed community; Wiebe opens the experience of a separate, minority group to the scrutiny of those who speak the language of majority.

This “opening” of experience and identity to inspection by those outside the community is one of the ways that Mennonite writing in Western Canada becomes “postcolonial.” The Mennonite writer in Canada is faced with two questions: can a Canadian Mennonite writer successfully use English without becoming assimilated by the system of values the language represents and, if the writer’s Mennonite identity is bound up so strongly in language as a mark of cultural and religious differences, does writing in another language compromise that identity and blur the lines of cultural distinction (or remove them altogether)? Rudy Wiebe’s *Peace Shall Destroy Many* marks the beginning of the quest to find the answers to these questions. Many later texts written by Mennonites in Western Canada struggle with these questions and, by examining specific texts by Rudy Wiebe, Armin Wiebe, Di Brandt, and Patrick Friesen, readers can see how different Mennonite writers in Western Canada interpret their identities in light of their history and how they express that identity through a language not historically their own.

And so, the historical background of Mennonites both before and after they came to Canada highlights the consistent self-identification by this religious group as “separate” and as a “minority.” The resulting struggle over the maintenance of cultural and linguistic separation explains their ambivalent relationship with the Canadian government and reveals a subject position defined by exclusionary politics that resists simple definition within the nation. The importance of language to that subject position leads to questions about the role of literature written by Mennonites in Western Canada

as Mennonite writers struggle to express their identities in the face of a shift from German to English.

Chapter 2 – Crossing the Border to Name Mennonite Place

“It isn’t any different, from here it’s just . . .”
“It’s just a man-made line.” (Wiebe, *Blue Mountains* 85)

The history of Mennonites in Western Canada both before and after they immigrated to Canada reveals a concern with identity and the way they express their identities. Chapter 1 has shown how the self-identification of the Mennonites as a “separate” people led eventually to a separate religious and ethnic identity for many Mennonites that was based more on cultural and linguistic community than on a shared sense of belonging to a geographic region. While the Mennonite writer in Western Canada comes from a historical background of continued migration and uprootings, s/he nevertheless is able to create a “place” to call “home” through language. Rudy Wiebe and Armin Wiebe seek to create such a “place” in their novels *The Blue Mountains of China* and *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens*. Both novels focus on the concept of “borders” and “border crossings” to delineate a “place” for a Mennonite in Western Canada. Rosemary Marangoly George notes in *The Politics of Home* that colonized writers of fiction in English use “literary tools to assert a subject position for themselves and for the communities they wish to represent – a subject position that draws its validity and energy from a new engagement with the space that can now belong exclusively to ‘our people’” (5). Both novels exemplify this “new engagement” as they “name” a “place” that can “belong” to the Mennonite characters in their novels, but while Rudy Wiebe concentrates his definition of a “place” for a Mennonite in Western Canada around a dominant theme of “land,” Armin Wiebe defines a linguistic “place.” Reading the novels together brings to light the differences between these definitions of “place” and suggests ways in which

the second and later novel builds upon ideas expressed in the first novel. Rudy Wiebe's expression of historical Mennonite experiences provides a background upon which Armin Wiebe builds fourteen years later as the latter expression of Mennonite identities invokes the literary and historical context provided by the earlier text and reveals the way "place" becomes a linguistic "home" instead of a geographic location once the historical search for land has ended. Both writers paint pictures of a minority group seeking separation from "the world" while dealing with pressures to assimilate from more powerful groups of people in the areas of politics, culture, and language. Their respective texts reveal how Mennonites in Western Canada have historically constructed and continue to create a "place" for themselves in Canada in which they can feel "at home."

Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan comments at length on the "historically determinate steps" that make up the "program of naming and unaming":

[E]thnic reality realizes that it has a "name," but this name is forced on it by the oppressor, that is, it is the victim of representation; it achieves a revolution against both the oppressor and the discourse of the oppressor and proceeds to unname itself through a process of inverse displacement; it gives itself a name, that is, represents itself from within its own point of view; and it ponders how best to legitimate and empower this new name (69).

This idea of a "name" plays a large role in the way some Mennonites in Western Canada create a "place" for themselves in that, as Radhakrishnan suggests, after they realize that their identity has, in a sense, been "forced" on them, they go on first to dismantle that externally imposed name and then to reconstruct an identity based upon their own experiences. This new name is "legitimate[d] and empower[ed]" not by the external forces of the "discourse of the oppressor" but "from within" as the experiences of these Mennonites themselves are given voice. Both the historical search of Mennonites to find

“land” and Rudy Wiebe’s representation of that search in *The Blue Mountains of China* demonstrate Radhakrishnan’s program of first unnamings and then naming. Wiebe captures the historical journeys of the Mennonites in Western Canada as he focuses on geographic location and the way movement across borders to and from different pieces of land has affected and still affects their religious and cultural identities. The events within the novel and the novel itself demonstrate a desire to “name” a “space” (as in George’s space that can now belong exclusively to “our people”) that allows for an unrestricted expression of identity. The link between these two projects of “naming” (within the novel and without) comes in the form of literal and metaphorical “border crossings” undertaken by the characters in the novel and, indeed, by Wiebe himself.

In the final chapter of the novel John Reimer comments on the Mennonites’ historical search for “place” in the form of land:

“You know the trouble with Mennonites? They’ve always wanted to be Jews. To have land God had given them for their very own, to which they were called; so even if someone chased them away, they could work forever to get it back. Wherever they got pushed, or they pull themselves, they try to prove to themselves they are building that land” (227).

The comparison of Mennonites to Jews, another religious and ethnic minority, brings with it connotations of a people in exile, wandering in the wilderness, seeking a physical “place” where they can locate their community and establish a sense of identity. This search for land represents a desire to “name” themselves as they continually relocate to a place where they think they can keep themselves a people apart from “the world.”

Wiebe’s novel is a collection of narratives depicting different Mennonite immigrant experiences, all of which demonstrate how the historical Mennonite search for land became an act of “naming.” In the first chapter, Frieda Friesen speaks from

Paraguay as one of those Mennonites who emigrated from Canada in the 1920s to seek a religious freedom they felt existed no longer in Canada. Her voice is that of the traditional Mennonite wife and she speaks mostly of traditionally “female” subjects: housekeeping, marriage, and children (9, 45, 87). She chronicles a personal history full of moves to find land that was better either for farming or for religious and educational freedom. She says of her childhood moves that “[w]e moved here and there in Manitoba, even across the Red River to the East Reserve once for two years, but every quarter we had, even if it looked so good when we moved, it always seemed to have something wrong” (9). Although these moves were rooted in agricultural land suitability, this idea that there is always someplace better comes up in other narratives of dislocation in the novel. Most of these dislocations are a response to social or political forces: Isaak Friesen’s family leaves Russia for Canada around 1878 because his family position as an identical twin second-born by ten minutes in a system governed by primogeniture denies him access to a family farm (26); his nephew inherits the family farm but is dispossessed of his home during the communist regime following World War I (14-15); and David Epp’s family leaves Siberia for China in a search for a life free of persecution (129-130). Whether “pushed” or “pull[ed]” (227), the Mennonites in the novel seek a new physical place to which they can perhaps escape the oppressive forces that shape their experiences (and therefore their identities as based on those experiences) and so seek to “achieve[] a revolution against both the oppressor and the discourse of the oppressor” (Radhakrishnan 69). Within the novel, the search for a new land signifies a search for a “space” that allows for the free expression of identity that comes with “naming” self.

However, Frieda's earlier comment that each move revealed "something wrong" is echoed later in the novel when Franz Epp discusses the circumstances surrounding his family's struggle to escape Russia for Paraguay with his grandson, John Reimer. Franz counters John's approval of the absence of rocks from the farmland with the observation that the sandy soil and high winds combine to make life very difficult. John goes on to say, "Yeah. I guess there's always something wrong. With every country, if it's not one thing it's another" (53). Although John immediately worries that his comment sounds condescending, his concern arises from a fear of offending his grandfather with a seemingly reductive and generalizing definition of different Mennonite migration experiences. His apprehension does not undermine his authority or raise questions as to the validity of his statement given the position of authority he takes in the final chapter. Ironically, this exchange prefaces Franz's narrative of how he and his family waited desperately in Moscow in 1925 for permission from a foreign country to escape to its safety from communist persecution. Here, Wiebe undermines the idealistic notion shown in some of the earlier stories that a shift in geographical place would allow for a freer space within which to express identity. This conflation of geographic location with "place" to build "home" and therefore a subject position is signified in the text most dramatically by the titular image of the "blue mountains of China." This image appears overtly in the chapter that describes David Epp II's leading his village in secret across the Amur River east into China. The memory of those left behind who will suffer for his village's flight plagues David and he leaves his family and his village to go back and take the blame for their actions. It is upon his return to his abandoned house with the knowledge that he will surely be punished that he reflects, "[i]n the moonlight outside he

thought he could see the blue line [...] of the mountains far away, beautiful as they had ever been from there. But he knew now that was only his imagination. Or romantic nostalgia” (140). The relocations in the text reveal that “unnaming” by removing oneself physically from the oppressors and the discourse supporting the oppression is not enough; more than a merely geographic move must be undertaken in order to create a “place” wherein one can express identity freely and “name” that identity.

The undermining of geographical relocation as effective resistance against oppression extends to the idea of “Canada” suggested by the novel. Although most of the narratives do not take place directly in Canada, the concept of “Canada” is nevertheless a recurring thread throughout the novel. The first image in Frieda Friesen’s story recalls a typical reference to snow and represents “Canada” in geographical terms (7). “Canada” as a geographic place then becomes a potential refuge as Jakob Friesen IV’s family tries to leave Russia for Canada where one uncle may have gone (26). In chapter 4, “Canada” shifts to a sense of political power as it suggests government policy and the way those policies prevent would-be immigrants from finding it a haven; when discussing the potential efficacy of seven hundred signatures on a petition protesting the detention of Mennonites in Russia, Franz Epp says, “If Germany doesn’t take us till that slow Canada or some country decides they want us as immigrants, we won’t be here when or if they ever do” (58). The chapters set in Paraguay undermine the notion of “Canada” as a refuge and instead figure the country as one where an increasing cultural shift from “Mennonite” to “English” transforms the refuge into another oppressive force from which to run. Elder Wiebe the Older cites the reason for emigration to Paraguay as being “not because the Canadian Government was taking land away from anyone but because

[...] it no longer allowed them to run their own schools in the German biblical way they wished, as it had promised them it would allow forever when they moved to Canada in 1874" (100). And in chapter 12, "The Vietnam Call of Samuel U. Reimer," Samuel's desire to respond to the call he hears from God to go and "preach peace" in Vietnam is thwarted first by his own Mennonite community whom he derides as "Fat Christians" and then by the Canadian government (and the RCMP) who will not issue him a passport (175). Here "Canada" seems an almost malevolent force whose assimilationist tactics render impotent the global view of peace espoused by the ancestors of the now ineffective Mennonites and whose rhetoric denies movement beyond its borders for anything other than "acceptable" actions governed by policy. Taken together, these images of "Canada" support Wiebe's reading of the Mennonites' historical search for "land" as ineffective in terms of creating a new "place" within which they could "name" themselves as they expressed their cultural and religious identities freely.

The link between the search for land and the desire to "unname itself [ethnic reality] through a process of inverse displacement" as well as the link between the "naming" of place within the novel and the novel itself as a "naming" of a Mennonite "place" in Canada is the idea of "border crossings." There are several literal border crossings in the novel that signify metaphorical crossings. The first border crossing in the text is Frieda Friesen's crossing the equator on her way to the ostensible religious freedom in Paraguay; she comments that on board the ship "[t]he sailor spoke only Guarani or Spanish so nobody knows what day we crossed the border" (51). Later, in "Over the Red Line," a chapter overtly about the crossing of borders, Liesel Driediger notes that "Brother Hoppity was always making funeral announcements in German – they

stopped with Russian the minute they were over the border” (73). Both passages indicate the links between geographical borders and linguistic ones as these borders are known (or not known) to be crossed based on a linguistic shift (or lack of it). Wiebe demonstrates these links more forcefully later in the chapter as he details Liesel’s disappointment over the lack of physical difference between the northern and southern hemispheres after she has crossed the equator. She shares the following exchange with her father:

“Pappa, are we over yet?”

“We crossed, yes.”

[...]

“It isn’t any different, from here it’s just . . .”

“It’s just a man-made line.” (85)

The equator, a “red line that stretche[s] across the giant map from one bulkhead to the other” (75), is just another “man-made line” that depends on “naming” either through spoken language or the language of cartography for its existence. The phrase “man-made line” applies not only to the equatorial line on the map but to the border referred to earlier between the Northern and Southern hemispheres and the one separating the U.S.S.R. from the world. This arbitrariness of borders recalls the idea of “naming” as Wiebe highlights the way geopolitical borders are merely representations authorized by a powerful political majority and the way linguistic borders are the result of different discourses adhered to by different people.

Another arbitrary border in this chapter that mirrors the “red line” is the boundary between steerage (the location of the Mennonites) and first class. The first class promenade intrigues Liesel with its occupants who are “all so tall and fine, so elegant, their movements so free, dignified” (81). Liesel resists the place assigned to her as a Mennonite young woman and balks at the lack of freedom she perceives accompanies her

role within the community. She is not, like Frieda Friesen in her narrative, satisfied with a structured future of marriage and children and seeks to experience the world denied to her by virtue of her position of a Mennonite and of a Mennonite young woman. Like the other borders in the text, crossing this barrier requires a shift of language:

[Liesel] could not understand what she thought perhaps Spanish or English or even French, but the German was as refined as somewhere she remembered her father and his friends in Leningrad before they had dragged back on the train third class to that stupid old village and just talked Lowgerman and German that would here sound like – like – she could think of nothing but the heavy feltboots some men still wore, so stinking when they schluffed by (81).

“First class” language mirrors the elegance and the dignity of those belonging to a higher class than the Mennonites in steerage whose Lowgerman and German mirrors the (to Liesel) shameful lowliness of peasants. And while Liesel slips easily past the physical barricade between the decks (79) and the corresponding metaphorical barricade of language, she faces danger in the wholesale acceptance of that world. Staring down into the sea from the front of the ship, she has a seductive vision of a world of fantastic happenings and “two large dark women above her who for a moment faced each other; all they needed was a red line [...] to look precisely like the two lower continents down there on Mr. Adolf’s map” (84). Her vision of the world across this border brings danger: “[a]t that instant, like a new world opening, the double rails swung into space and she fell” (84). She is saved from drowning by the proprietor of the map, Mr. Adolf, and returned to her father and to steerage with the other Mennonites (and, presumably, to her traditional role as a future wife and mother). Magdalene Falk Redekop supports this reading of Liesel’s fall as a crossing of a metaphorical boundary, calling it “an obvious parody of baptism” that is “an ‘anabaptism’ into a false community of sinister oneness

which demands repudiation of one's past, not affirmation of a common past" (104). This episode suggests that crossing the border between one system of meaning to another can be dangerous and that denial of one's roots and historical sense of identity renders one groundless and can lead to "drowning" and losing oneself in the "new world" on the other side of the border.

The final chapter brings together beside the Trans-Canada highway several Mennonites who have all crossed literal or metaphorical borders. The chapter takes place, significantly, in 1967, recalling Confederation and the dream to create a cohesive nation-state known as "Canada." The first character depicted is Dr. Elizabeth Cereno who seems far removed from her former self – adolescent Liesel Driediger who fell into the equator as the ship carrying her Mennonite family in steerage crossed the "red line." She is a linguist and the ease with which she learns and speaks different languages recalls her episode in first class aboard the ship. Her occupation is also the literal manifestation of her metaphorical border crossings into other discourses such as those of higher learning and other cultures as represented by the anglicization of her first name and the Spanish name of her former husband. Her position as a divorced, educated, English-speaking woman suggests she has been successful in her quest to escape the conservative Mennonite woman's role assigned to her by her cultural traditions. She befriends and translates English into Russian for Jakob Friesen who is traveling from Russia to Edmonton. They stop to speak to John Reimer who is literally carrying a cross as he travels west along the Trans-Canada highway, proclaiming the social gospel of Jesus Christ. Dennis Williams (once "Willms," now anglicized) and his family complete this group of representative Mennonites as they picnic beside the highway. These Mennonites

are representative: Elizabeth and Dennis are more “Canadian” than Mennonite as they have rejected (like Dennis) or suppressed (like Elizabeth) their ethnic identities in favour of identities more closely aligned with the Anglo-Canadian majority. Elizabeth, who has retained her mother tongue and participates eagerly in the roadside discussion of Mennonites, says of her background, “I never deny it, but usually it’s nobody’s business” (214). She represents those Mennonites in Canada who have made external accommodations to the surrounding dominant culture but have kept some internal sense of their background and cultural identity. Dennis represents those Mennonites in Canada who have consciously rejected a Mennonite historically-based cultural identity in favour of a self-conception that fits more comfortably into surrounding society. Jakob, as a Mennonite who is not Canadian, highlights the cultural accommodations they have made as they have “named” themselves in the new “place” of Canada in a way that denies the ethnic background of their identities. If Elizabeth and Dennis suggest crossing a border only to replace one oppressive discourse with another and Jakob suggests the refusal to cross borders at all, John suggests the possibility of crossing a border to leave behind an oppressive discourse and to find a “place” where the self-naming of identity outside of the oppressive discourse of the new “place” is possible. John, whom Jakob calls a “Canadian Mennonite,” demonstrates a sort of amalgamation of Mennonite religious principles and a “Canadian” background that leaves him well aware of the power of governments. He acknowledges the very structures of oppression that underlie the historical movements represented within the entire novel; he says, “nearly all the fighting and intrigue and oppression of hundreds of millions of poor all over the world is for the same thing; so the few who are in power (that’s an exact literal statement of the

case: in *power*) or want to get into power, can keep widening their basis of power and influence” (212, his italics). He refuses to conform to the majority in power, whether “Canadian” or not, as have Elizabeth and Dennis. He perhaps does not so much “cross” the border as “place” himself directly on the border. He builds upon his history as represented by the other narratives in the novel and, without losing his sense of historical “place,” creates for himself in Canada a “place” wherein he can “name” his identity as a new self-conception with reference to both his cultural past and present yet without succumbing to the oppressive discourses present in either.

Just as the novel presents the “naming” of “place” through the crossing of geographic, cultural, and linguistic borders so, too, does the novel itself represent a “naming” of “place” in the way it crosses a literary border. With *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, Wiebe was the first major Mennonite writer in Western Canada to write in English and make his text accessible to the outside world. Here he presents not only Mennonite immigrant experiences in Canada, as he did in *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, but he presents the rich historical backgrounds that the Mennonites brought with them. In so doing, he “places” and “names” the experiences of Mennonite immigrants to Western Canada in a way that legitimates their story within the milieu of other experiences in Canada. His novel suggests that the unique experiences and identities of Mennonites in Western Canada are based in part upon their frequent and often fruitless search for a new geographic “place” yet that it is the search itself and the concomitant crossings of geographic, cultural, and linguistic borders that render those experiences unique and worth writing about.

Armin Wiebe's *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens* (1984) builds upon the ideas about the ways Mennonites in Western Canada construct their identities expressed in Rudy Wiebe's *The Blue Mountains of China*. He, too, focuses on the concept of "naming" place and identity, but he demonstrates a more immediate concern with identity as a product of cultural forces once geographic "place" within Canada has been established. Where Rudy Wiebe focuses on identity as a product of a geographic search for land and the failure of that search to provide a "place" where identity construction can happen without oppressive forces, Armin Wiebe grounds his novel in a specific geographic locale within Canada and focuses on the way Mennonites can establish their identities through language. His epigraph to the book from Josef Skvorecky's "Red Music" bespeaks his focus on language as he quotes, "'My God, how we adored this bugging up of our lovely language for we felt that all languages were lifeless if not bugged up a little'" (Foreword). Indeed, Wiebe's main focus in *Yasch Siemens* is language as a system of meaning and the way "Mennonite" language differs from "Canadian" or a "Standard" language. These differences are made manifest in the text through a series of both geographic and linguistic "border crossings" as the Mennonite characters venture beyond their closed community into "the world," exert their own influence upon it, and return to their community with a new layer of experience added to their concept of their identities.

Mary Louise Pratt's theories about the "contact zone" are most applicable to this discussion in the way they inform the meeting of the "Mennonite" culture and the "Canadian" culture. Pratt defines "contact zones" as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations

of domination and subordination” and “space[s] of colonial encounters, the space[s] in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (4, 6). Indeed, the history of many Mennonites’ relationship with the surrounding dominant culture reveals how Canada has been just such a “social space” as these Mennonites who have been “geographically and historically separated” come “into contact” with other Canadians and “meet, clash, and grapple” with those who would take advantage of their dominant position and push for assimilation on the part of the Mennonites. Also useful are Homi Bhabha’s theories of hybridity where hybridity is “a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other ‘denied’ knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority – its rules of recognition” (“Signs” 114). Here, hybridity is the new product resulting from the meeting and intermingling of two unequal languages or systems of meaning. Both the events of the text and the text itself evidence these theories of the “contact zone” and of “hybridity” as Armin Wiebe negotiates between the influences of Mennonite and Canadian culture in order to create an entirely new language.

A reader of this novel, Mennonite or non-Mennonite, will notice immediately the many differences between *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens* and a novel written in Standard English. Henry Wiebe comments on the difficulties a non-Mennonite reader might have when trying to understand this novel:

Granted, a reader may have first to learn Mennonite ways and Mennonite Low German, though simple good will and good reading habits will ensure a 90% return at least on the reader’s time investment. No one can

know everything, but the unknown is not for that reason unimportant. Appreciation of any Canadian subculture requires familiarity with its customs and vocabulary (190).

However, *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens* goes beyond an attempt to merely “familiarize” a non-Mennonite reader with this “Canadian subculture” (and thereby reinforcing cultural definitions that place Mennonite culture as “sub” or beneath the culture of the majority). Where Rudy Wiebe’s text seems designed to “familiarize” non-Mennonite readers with Mennonite history, Armin Wiebe’s use of English suggests he does, in Bhabha’s words, “reverse[] the effects of the colonialist disavowal” as he uses the very “rules of recognition” (Standard English) of the “dominant discourse” by subverting those rules and allowing those “‘denied’ knowledges” entrance into the arena in which Canadians express their identities. For instance, Wiebe opens his novel with the sentence, “[t]he year they built the TV tower I was heista kopp in love with Shaftich Shreedda’s daughter, Fleeda” (1). His inclusion of non-English words subverts the “rules of recognition” that allow for only English words in “English” novels and his use of Mennonite names suggests his novel’s subject matter is the “‘denied’ knowledge[]” of identities based on unique Mennonite experiences. He also demonstrates Pratt’s definition of “autoethnography” which “involves partial collaboration with and appropriation of the idioms of the conqueror” (7). Such autoethnographic expressions, she says, “are typically heterogeneous on the reception end as well, usually addressed both to metropolitan readers and to literate sectors of the speaker’s own social group, and bound to be received very differently by each” (7). In other words, while Wiebe’s use of English does seem to collaborate with the “idioms of the conqueror” in that his novel does use “Standard English” words and forms, he “appropriates” those words and forms

and subverts the very rules with which he seems to be collaborating. He speaks both to the group about which he writes (Mennonites) as well as back to the group from which he appropriated the linguistic system (the non-Mennonite English-speaking Canadian majority). The comic nature of this novel perhaps disguises the ramifications of his wholesale subversion of this linguistic system and perhaps leads to conclusions that he tries merely to generate interest in Mennonite culture. However, this novel is no benign attempt to help non-Mennonites “appreciate” a “Canadian subculture;” rather, Wiebe creates a highly political text that, as it reveals how Canadian Mennonites can construct their identities through language, also reveals some of the power relationships between the Canadian majority and the Mennonite minority while undermining and subverting the asymmetrical nature of those relationships.

These power relationships and attempts to address their unequal nature are represented by the events in the life of the titular character, Yasch Siemens, as he seeks to “name” himself and construct his identity. Although Armin Wiebe’s text remains stationary in the imaginary Mennonite rural village of Guthenthal where Rudy Wiebe’s text focuses on movements from one geographic location to another, *Yasch Siemens* is nevertheless also concerned with “land.” Guthenthal is a farming community with most daily activity centering around an agricultural lifestyle. Yasch makes his living as a hired hand helping others cultivate their land. However, land is tied more explicitly to identity through the way the image of land describes various facets of Yasch’s life. He expresses his hopes despite his marginal position in the community as a fatherless and landless individual by saying, “Maybe there is a way for someone like me, born on the wrong side of the double dike, to shovel the manure out of my own gutter instead of someone else’s”

(51). Images of land become metaphors for life such as “[t]hat’s how come the weeds grow in the garden” (to express a frustrating situation), “half-section of hinterland” (to describe an overweight girl’s backside), and “it would still hail the same on the good man’s field as on the bad man’s” (to suggest a situation where he would live unconcerned while others gossiped around him) (1, 44, 117). Land also becomes an image of creativity as he uses images of farming to describe his sexual experiences:

And then Oata is climbing under my blanket and she is covering me with her acres and the crop is so big that I almost can’t breathe and there is so much to disk and to plow and to seed and it seems like it will never be finished and the wild mustard keeps growing behind the plow and a cow bone gets stuck in the harrow and two crows are eating the seeds behind the drill ... (116).

The physical act of sex becomes just as creative an act as it is translated into language. “Land” becomes a metaphor for “place” within which acts of “naming” identity through the expression of experience (in this case, sexual experience) occur. As in *The Blue Mountains of China*, land figures as an important facet of Mennonite identity, but in *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens* that land takes on new meanings as it becomes part of the linguistic system of meaning with which the Mennonites in the text express their identities.

The aforementioned examples of the way “land” figures in this text also reveal some of the linguistic strategies Wiebe uses to “place” and “name” Mennonite identities. Wiebe embarks on his own quest to “bugger up” the Standard English language and its corresponding system of meaning by twisting and subverting the uses and meanings of that language. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin outline several of these “strategies of appropriation” and “abrogation” in *The Empire Writes Back* including

untranslated words, syntactic fusion, code-switching and vernacular transcription (64, 67, 68, 72). Armin Wiebe uses all these strategies as he draws attention to the way many Mennonites in Western Canada subvert the structures underlying the received language (Standard English) and create their own hybrid mix of Low German and English that becomes an expression of their identities.

The first paragraph of the text provides several examples of linguistic appropriation and hybridity:

The year they built the TV tower I was heista kopp in love with Shaftich Shreeda's daughter, Fleeda. I was only almost sixteen and Fleeda was almost sixteen, too, and I had been in love with her all the way since we were only almost fourteen when she looked at me in her little pocket mirror from where she was sitting in the next row in school and I just went heista kopp in love. And now we were both almost sixteen and everything should have fit together real nice, only when you are almost sixteen the whole world seems to get in the way of things that you want because when you are only almost sixteen you don't have a driver's licence. That's where the puzzle doesn't fit. That's how come the weeds grow in the garden (1).

The first obvious example of linguistic appropriation is the un glossed phrase "heista kopp." The closest literal translation from the German gives something like "head over heels." However, a knowledge of Low German is not required for a non-Mennonite (or non-Low-German-speaking-Mennonite) reader; the meaning can be derived contextually, giving the same meaning as using the phrase "head over heels" would, but adding an extra layer of effect as the reader immediately understands that the text is coming from a different linguistic place. Wiebe often uses untranslated words in this way throughout the text. He also sometimes gives the word in its original Low German form, and then explains the word at a later enough point so as to allow for the reader to experience the full effect of difference while nevertheless ensuring the reader does not remain confused:

“they have what they call *freiwilliges*. That means that anybody can go up and do something at the front. It sure is freewillingness all right, but not freewilling enough that a person can stay home from church and listen to the top country songs for the year on the radio” (17-18). Here, the word “*freiwilliges*” initially appears untranslated and without any italics to mark it as “different” from the rest of the English words. Once he has claimed equal status for this Low German word within the English system, Wiebe goes on to give a definition of the event followed by a direct translation, “freewillingness,” for the reader unfamiliar with the Low German term. This linguistic strategy of using unglossed/untranslated words or leaving distance between the introduction of the non-standard term and the later given meaning allows Wiebe to destabilize the “rules of recognition” while keeping the text accessible to his readers.

A second linguistic strategy evident both in the first paragraph and throughout the novel is that of syntactic fusion as Wiebe subverts the standard syntax governing English through a “direct translation” of the Low German with its differing word order. E.F. Dyck notes that “Wiebe writes in the English vernacular spoken by many Mennonites; this vernacular is a fairly literal translation of *plautdietsch* [Low German] into English. It is a new language [...]” (39). The phrases “only almost sixteen” and “all the way since we were only almost fourteen” convey more than just the ages of the characters; these phrases highlight the fact that while this text is ostensibly written in English, its structures are informed by those of another language. Another one of numerous examples of this method of appropriation in the text occurs when Yasch’s mother tells him she needs to see the chiropractor, saying, “My back is to nothing again. We must to the rightmaker go. Can you let loose the truck?” (33). “To nothing” and “rightmaker” are literal

translations of the actual Low German words, while putting the verb at the end of “to the rightmaker go” mirrors the grammar structure of the original language. However, Wiebe does not write in the original language; he writes in this “new language” that uses elements from both systems in order to make new meanings and express the new hybrid identities of Mennonites in Western Canada.

Finally, Armin Wiebe’s use of language highlights the way the meaning of the sign is constructed by culture (using Bhabha’s “rules of recognition”) and subverts the very relationship between signified and signifier. Yasch relates the time when his employer, Nobah Naze Needarp, commands his daughter, Oata, to telephone the RCMP because his “cowfoot” is stolen. Yasch comments that “it sure was a good thing that she never does what her Futtachi says because she would never have been able to bring it by to the mounties that a cowfoot was a crowbar and had to do nothing with cows or crows or even corbies” (50). The RCMP, local representatives of the Canadian government and the dominant culture, would not understand the meaning of “cowfoot” because the hybrid language severs the relationship between the meaning of the word and its accepted term. Wiebe elsewhere demonstrates this breakdown of the relationship of word to its meaning when Yasch refers to “bale loader stairs” or “the quartet with only three singers” (107, 142). If Wiebe were writing in Standard English, he would use the accepted nouns “escalator” or “trio” to denote these concepts; his use of alternate signifiers underlines the constructedness of all linguistic systems and calls into question any notion of Standard English as inherently “correct.”

All of these linguistic strategies serve to create a hybrid language that is neither Low German nor English, but a new “english.” This hybridity is a direct result of Pratt’s

“contact zone” as Mennonites in Western Canada came/come into contact with the power dynamics and systems underlying “Canadian” society, as demonstrated in Rudy Wiebe’s text. Armin Wiebe’s hybrid language is the linguistic equivalent of Rudy Wiebe’s hybrid Mennonite identities as seen in the final chapter of *The Blue Mountains of China*. Where Rudy Wiebe’s characters cross (for the most part) geographic and national borders to engage the “contact zone,” Armin Wiebe’s characters cross cultural and linguistic borders. Rudy Wiebe does demonstrate this hybrid language in certain instances such as Frieda Friesen’s father’s direct syntactic translation when he says, ““But think always like this, [...] it does come all from God, strength and sickness, want and plenty”” or the occasional unglossed word such as when Frieda tells of “Johann K. Friesen of Schoenbach who also became my *velobta* that spring” (10-11). Magdalene Falk Redekop’s reading of *The Blue Mountains of China* emphasizes these direct translations and she says that “[i]f translation constitutes an effort to correlate two worlds, then literal translations deliberately defeat this purpose by drawing the reader’s attention to the absence of synchrony” (100). However, while looking forward to the technique employed by Armin Wiebe in his entire novel, these instances of linguistic subversion in Rudy Wiebe’s text are really only prevalent in one narrative strand of many. For the most part, the “border crossings” in *The Blue Mountains of China* lead solely to changing senses of identity on the part of the Mennonites while the “border crossings” in *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens* go one step further as they demonstrate a sense of “transculturation” as the Mennonite characters both affect and are affected by the dominant Anglo-Canadian and English-speaking majority.

Armin Wiebe foreshadows the border crossings in *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens* with the very first sentence of the novel as he sets up the position of Gutenthal in relation to the United States: "The year they built the TV tower I was heista kopp in love with Shaftich Shreeda's daughter, Fleeda" (1). This TV tower is located on "the States side" of "the big ditch that cuts [the Mennonites] off from the States" (2). Yasch comments on the difference between the Gutenthalers and the Americans, saying, "the States people are always so full of police stuff and everything" and that "you know how the States people always have to make a big show out of everything, just like they were living on TV" (8, 81-82). The influence of "the world" as it comes in from the States and, by extension, the English-speaking majority reveals itself clearly in the person of Knibble Thiessen, a local "rightmaker." Yasch notes that "people go to the knibbler because a rightmaker isn't a high person like a doctor. A doctor is learned so high that people are scared and you have to talk English – sometimes to a Catholic yet! Even the Flat German ones have often learned themselves away from the *schmallen Lebensweg* – even so far as the United Church!" (35). The "knibblers" are an accepted part of the community as long as they do not demonstrate characteristics of "the world" outside such as higher learning, a switch from "Flat German" to English, or to a different religious denomination. But Knibble Thiessen is succumbing to the influence (and financial potential) of the American market; he markets his heritage with a sign that "doesn't say 'Bone Setter'; it says 'Knockenarzt' in German letters, and then 'General Massage.' He has office hours regular and even old magazines to read in the waiting room." (35-36). His use of German is less a celebration of his heritage than an attempt to exploit it for economic gain as he draws attention to his European roots and perhaps tries to add credibility to his abilities

by suggesting links to a tradition more established than that of the village “Bone Setter.” More telling, Muttachi reads in her local newspaper that ““Knibble Thiessen has just come from California back where he learned about feet rubbing”” (36). Indeed, Thiessen’s waiting room is full of “States women with red lips and earrings” waiting to take advantage of his new skills in reflexology (36). Just like Elizabeth and Dennis in *The Blue Mountains of China*, Knibble Thiessen has crossed the cultural and linguistic border to the extent that he has “unnamed” his traditional identity only to “re-name” himself in a way that denies the importance of his heritage as he alternately suppresses it and exploits it in an attempt to appeal to the cultural majority.

But just as “the world” intrudes on Gutenthal, the Gutenthalers venture forth into the world and thereby enter the “contact zone.” Yasch and Oata go to Winnipeg to pick up Ha Ha Nickel’s new “Honey Wagon” (manure spreader). While there, their tourist destination of choice is “Winnipeg in the cellar,” the direct translation of the Low German term for Eaton’s. Eaton’s works as a symbol of dominant Canadian culture with its “bale loader stairs” and with “all these big women dolls all over the place and some have nice clothes on, and some don’t have any, and some just have legs and they are up side down and have double nylons on just” (107). Yasch and Oata negotiate this space through language as they go to the Grill Room to eat. They order their “fillet mig-nons” ““cooked,”” they answer ““both”” when asked ““soup or juice,”” and Yasch orders ““French’ [salad dressing] because we will eat French food, but Oata says ‘Thousand Islands’ [...] because when she was twelve she found a pen pal once in the *Free Press Weekly Prairie Farmer* that was from Thousand Islands by Ontario and she would like to go visit there some time” (106). Through language, Yasch and Oata subvert the

structured customs beneath that intensely constructed social activity of eating out. The “contact zone” extends to deep beneath Eaton’s to the real “Winnipeg in the cellar” – the bargain basement. Yasch notes that “[t]here isn’t so much lipstick here and not so many shorts and red toenails” and that “[i]t seems like half the cellar is talking Flat German. But then everybody goes to Winnipeg in the cellar” (108). It is in the cellar that these Mennonites initially cross the border of the “asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (Pratt 4) but, as Yasch and Oata’s dining experience suggests, Mennonites are encroaching further and further into the “contact zone” as they begin to undermine those relations through language. The Mennonites in the basement are literally beneath the world of the dominant culture for now, but, like Yasch and Oata, they too can take the “bale loader stairs” up into the world of the majority and actively engage the dominant Canadian culture. This episode is also suggestive of the way many Mennonites have left and are leaving rural predominantly Mennonite communities for cities like Winnipeg. With this move comes a new type of urban Mennonite identity as these Mennonites must negotiate between the traditional rural lifestyle of their past and the new influences in the city. Here the engagement with the “contact zone” does not end with the Mennonite returning to his/her rural “home;” rather, new Mennonite experiences and identities are created as these newly urbanized Mennonites remain in the “contact zone” and “name” for themselves a new “home.”

Having demonstrated the influence of the world of the majority on the Gutenthalers and the beginnings of their engagement with the “contact zone,” Wiebe ends his novel with an episode suggestive of the ways Mennonites in Western Canada can move through and past the “contact zone” and engage directly with the dominant

cultural group. An election in Ottawa brings forth from the fields of Gutenthal Yeeat Shpanst, the new Progressive Conservative candidate. Yasch would like to see a “Flat German” in Ottawa, but notes that “it always seems like the Flat Germans that get in the government always pretty soon forget that they are Flat Germans and when you see them on the CBC news they sound just like a radio, not like maybe they weeded beets or shovelled manure when they were young” (170). At first, Yeeat seems like just such a candidate as he tries to dazzle the villagers with his political rhetoric. ““The bottom line,”” he says, ““at this point in time, is between a rock and a hard place. Irregardless – irregardless of how you are politically orientated there’s no doubt that the powers that be – the powers that shall no longer be – have impacted on every aspect of our lives with it’s [sic] metrified Intrudo policies [...]”” (171-72). The crowd does not respond because the language does not “speak” to them. However, Yeeat’s next words elicit a more favourable response: ““The trouble with our country today is that our government in Ottawa is like a beetweeder that hacks off all the beets and leaves the weeds standing, then says, ‘Look how well the crop is growing.’ I say that it’s time to let the government know that it is buttered out!”” (172). The crowd claps and Yasch notes that “[b]uttered out is good Flat German” (172). Yet despite assurances he will make a Mennonite voice heard, Yeeat disappears once he goes to Ottawa. Yasch despairs that “[e]very evening we all watch *The Journal* to see if they will have heard of Yeeat Shpanst yet but it seems like Barbara and Mary Lou only know about the people whose initials are BM or JC” (174). Although he is silenced, Yeeat nevertheless *does* go to Ottawa; the minority actively seeks to engage the majority. Armin Wiebe here speaks less to the question of how much Mennonites in Western Canada *can* affect the majority than to the issue of the fact that

they try to do it at all. Like Samuel Reimer and John Reimer in *The Blue Mountains of China*, Yeeat Shpanst (and through him the Mennonites in Gutenthal) ventures into the realm of Canadian politics with the intent of negotiating with the “powers that be” (172). Both texts suggest that while obstacles may occur, Mennonites in Canada must continue to try to express their identities in ways that will allow those once-silenced voices to be heard.

With this acknowledgement of the outside world and the need for attempts to engage it come nevertheless a caution against the full embracing of the values of that world. The novel ends where it began – with States TV. Yasch, priding himself on his self-sufficiency, decides against purchasing Pug Peters’s satellite TV dish at an auction, saying, “I thought that if I brought home a \$2000 antenna [the family] wouldn’t be satisfied with that 11-inch black and white no more and be after me to buy color, and that’s just too much. In these troubled times you have to watch out” (176). Yasch recognizes that his Mennonite identity is a precarious thing in “these troubled times” given the constant pressure from those in the cultural and linguistic majority, a pressure he sees potentially affecting his family if he increases their exposure to the outside world. However, Armin Wiebe suggests that complete “separation from the world” is not possible for a Mennonite in Western Canada and that an identity cannot be formed entirely apart from the influence of those who command some power in the shaping of that identity. Instead, Wiebe posits through the events of the text and the linguistic strategies in the text itself a hybrid identity, at once informed by the Mennonite way of life and the new Canadian influences. Having engaged with the “contact zone,” Yasch

expresses his identity through a hybrid language/system of meaning that incorporates elements from both systems.

A discussion of Armin Wiebe's conception of the way this hybrid language/system of meaning can be used to engage the outside world is not complete without an acknowledgement of the way that language works within the community. Like Frieda Friesen in *The Blue Mountains of China*, the Mennonite woman in Gutenthal finds herself limited to the conservatively-defined roles of "wife" and "mother." Moreover, Yasch (presumably like other men in Gutenthal) uses the same language he uses to define his "place" to objectify women in this text to the point where they are often merely bodies. He tells of "pointing [his] eyes all the time to Schtramel Stoezs's long legs" (3), of seeing the "States women" and the Eaton's patrons who are all "red lips and earrings" and "women with shorts on and red lips and toenails" (36, 107), and says that "[i]f Oata is a half-section, Sadie is one track of the field road" (45). The constant references to Oata's size (43, 55, 57, 59) and Yasch's plan to marry Oata and inherit her land after she dies of her obesity (78) reveal the extent of the objectification of women and suggest that language in this text has both the power to resist cultural oppression as well as the power to oppress a marginalized group within another marginalized group. Bringing to mind Arun Mukherjee's "internal centres and peripheries" and Diana Brydon's "different orders of colonial experience" (Mukherjee 222, Brydon 2), the representation of women in this text complicates this discussion of the hybrid language in *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens* by emphasizing the ability of language to act as a tool in resistance against external oppression while acting simultaneously as an internal form of oppression. The success of this text in fostering resistance against the cultural and linguistic majority is

tempered by this recognition of the failure of this language to fully resist internal structures of oppression and it remains for other Mennonite writers to explore the full potential of this new language to challenge the traditionally-defined role of women within many Mennonite communities.

This hybrid language *is* successful as a new means of expression for Mennonite identities in that it provides a way across the linguistic and cultural borders separating Mennonites in Western Canada from the outside world. However, when it comes to crossing borders to “name” place, both Rudy Wiebe and Armin Wiebe suggest that while some accommodation must be made in terms of the dominant majority (whether political, cultural, or linguistic), there is potential danger in going too far past the border crossing. The borders must be crossed; whether driven by persecution or led by the promise of something better, Mennonites have historically crossed many geopolitical borders with hopes of finding a place in which they could “name” their identities through experiences founded on separation. However, the novels sound a note of caution for those Mennonites in Western Canada who, like Elizabeth Cereno, Dennis Willms, or Knibble Thiessen, “fall off” the ship and drown themselves in the identities that they either choose for themselves or that are thrust upon them by the “discourse of oppression” pressuring them from within their destination of choice. Wholesale acceptance of the world of the dominant political, linguistic, or cultural majority can lead to merely trading one name for another and leaves a Mennonite in Western Canada a “victim of representation” (Radhakrishnan 69). While each of these characters does demonstrate an agency as s/he consciously and strategically redefines him/herself in terms that are seen to be more appealing to the cultural majority, the characters are criticized from within their

communities for appearing to have become assimilated. But if, like John Reimer or Yasch Siemens, a Mennonite in Western Canada crosses the border into the new country retaining a sense of his/her cultural and linguistic history while choosing carefully the extent to which s/he will allow the language of the dominant majority to affect him/her, s/he can “unname [him/her]self through a process of inverse displacement” by “represent[ing] [him/her]self from within [his or her] own point of view” (Radhakrishnan 69). This new identity based upon new and old experiences manifests itself in a “new” hybrid language that engages those in the majority without acquiescing to external pressure to assimilate.

Chapter 3 – Creating a Bridge Between Minority Experiences

do you understand this? where we came from?
it all adds up
figure it out for yourself (Friesen, *Shunning* 89)

Di Brandt and Patrick Friesen join Rudy Wiebe and Armin Wiebe as they speak different Mennonite identities in Canada using a new “hybrid” language. Where Rudy Wiebe and Armin Wiebe choose the novel form to explore what being a Mennonite in Western Canada may suggest, Brandt and Friesen use poetry to express the way their cultural and linguistic heritage affects their own identities and the way they convey those identities. The use of poetry enhances the effect of this hybrid language as the very form of the texts (more so than the novels) subverts the grammatical and formal conventions of Standard English. Like Rudy Wiebe and Armin Wiebe, these writers write out of a “place” informed by Mennonite culture and the history on which it is based. Brandt takes the concept of “naming” identity one step further than do the other writers discussed as she resists not only the external oppressive forces she feels but the internal forces she (like many of Armin Wiebe’s female characters) feels within the community. Like Rudy Wiebe and Armin Wiebe, the poets’ choices of subject matter and the way they use English demonstrate both the notions of “hybridity” and “mimicry” of Homi Bhabha as they reflect an image back to other Canadians that is ambivalent and “almost the same, *but not quite*” (“Mimicry” 86, his italics). In Brandt’s writing, this ambivalent and often uneasy image reflects back to both other Canadians and other Mennonites as she writes from a metaphorically “doubly-colonized” position as a Mennonite writer within Canada and as a woman within the Mennonite community. She stretches and pushes against the

boundaries of form that usually make up the language of Standard English as she speaks her way through the silencing she experiences in both positions. Her poetry expands the resistance capabilities of language already discussed in the texts by Rudy Wiebe and Armin Wiebe and suggests ways in which this hybrid language of a minority works in instances of oppression beyond those of political and cultural difference. Similarly, Friesen's words highlight the differences between the experiences of Mennonite Canadians and other Canadians while they simultaneously build bridges between those differences. The bridges he builds look forward to future relationships between different minority and majority groups that recognize difference without remaining separated by it. His work also demonstrates the results of the move of Mennonites in Western Canada from rural life to urban life and shows how Mennonite religion and culture can remain a key factor in the construction of identity despite a movement away from the geographically separate community. The two poets differ in their attitudes toward their Mennonite heritages but both of them are nevertheless affected by it. Together they join Rudy Wiebe and Armin Wiebe in speaking with the hybrid voices of Mennonite writers in Western Canada to both non-Mennonites and other Mennonites alike and open up their expressions of Mennonite identities and experiences in ways that speak to all readers.

The foreword to Di Brandt's first collection of poems, *questions i asked my mother* (1987), demands replication in full as it touches on each of the ways that her writing manifests postcolonial forms of resistance, reconstruction, and hybridity:

learning to speak *in public* to write love poems
for all the world to read meant betraying once &
for all the good Mennonite daughter i tried so
unsuccessfully to become acknowledging in myself
the rebel traitor thief the one who asked too

many questions who argued with the father & with
God who always took things always went too far
who questioned every thing the one who talked too
often too loud the questionable one shouting
from rooftops what should only be thought guiltily
in secret squandering stealing the family words
the one out of line recognizing finding myself
in exile where i had always been trying as
always to be true whispering in pain the old
words trying to speak the truth as it was given
listening in so many languages & hearing in this one
translating remembering claiming my past
living my inheritance on this black earth among
strangers prodigally making love in a foreign
country writing coming home (foreword).

The speaker's first words, "learning to speak *in public*," highlight the roots of silence from which she perceives her identity as a woman and as a Mennonite has grown. She must first "learn" to speak and then she must also learn to speak "*in public*" where she will be heard. She calls herself a "rebel traitor thief" who "steal[s] the family words" and suggests how learning to speak from a position of silence demands a transgressive act whereby the speaker appropriates discourse not her/his own and uses it to make the unheard heard. The "questioning" and "argu[ing] with the father & with / God" take place on both "levels" of oppression that she experiences: she questions patriarchal authority as a woman and she questions cultural and linguistic authority imposed upon her as a Mennonite writer. She draws on some of the same ideas present in the works of Rudy Wiebe and Armin Wiebe as she writes of her position as someone "in exile" and "among strangers" in "a foreign country." Her word "translating" brings to mind especially Armin Wiebe's work and the accompanying discussion on hybridity and "contact zones." Finally, her closing words "writing coming home" invoke an image of a

“place” of belonging that corresponds to the “place” of “naming” that Rudy Wiebe and Armin Wiebe seek as they write of different “border crossings.”

A grounding of this discussion of Di Brandt’s exploration of Mennonite identity in postcolonial theories requires a revisitation of the particular postcolonial theories in question. Much of Di Brandt’s poetry seems to emphasize feminist theories more than traditionally-defined “postcolonial” theories; her resistance comes most often in the form of challenges to patriarchal authority, and a relative scarcity of direct references to colonial power such as governments or the English language perhaps elicits the question “what makes these poems postcolonial?” As noted in the introduction, Stephen Slemon argues for the inclusion of Canada within the “Second World” category in the theoretical field and for “the project of identifying the kinds of anti-colonialist resistance that can take place in literary writing” (73). He further notes that this “critical field is concerned with identifying a social force, colonialism, and with the attempt to understand the resistances to that force, *wherever they lie*” (74, his italics). Diana Brydon’s definition of “postcolonialism” as “a locally situated, provisional, and strategic attempt to think through the consequences of colonialism and to imagine nonrepressive alternatives to its discursive regime” and as “a complex of processes designed to circumvent imperial *and* colonial habits of mind” becomes again an important concept when dealing with Brandt’s work (10-11, her italics). It is this idea of postcolonialism as a “thinking process” or a literary strategy of resistance against a social force that the poetry of Di Brandt invokes. The colonizing processes Brandt faces as a woman and as a Mennonite may differ in kind (especially when comparing these colonizing processes to those more traditionally defined as such within the postcolonial field) but they nevertheless *are* regimes of

oppression and as such her resistance against these regimes can be usefully explored using the particular postcolonial theories invoked throughout this thesis such as those of Slemon, Brydon, Bhabha, George, and Pratt.

Di Brandt's collections of poetry, *questions i asked my mother*, *Agnes in the sky*, and *mother, not mother*, foster an exploration of the way she resists linguistic and cultural oppression in order to name her identity. Such an exploration must begin with an answer to the question, "against what is she resisting?" or, in terms of the foreword, "what is she 'betraying'?" In a collection of essays written over ten years entitled *Dancing Naked: Narrative Strategies for Writing Across Centuries* (1996), Brandt describes the linguistic forces her poetry resists:

Every image, no matter how physical or mundane, was loaded with inherited meanings and belonged to the official story in a particular, prescribed way. And all the memories and feelings called up by the writing were somehow in contradiction to that story, everything I wanted to say in my poems, I realized to my dismay, was forbidden in the rigid code of my Mennonite upbringing (34).

These "inherited meanings" and this "official story" are part of both "levels" of "colonization" that she faces: the religious and cultural significations embedded within the English language with which she writes as a Mennonite in Canada and the inherent patriarchal coding of the language of God and the father she subverts as a woman. A poem from her second collection, *Agnes in the sky*, provides an example of these inherited meanings:

the man in the pulpit quotes Jesus
& Shakespeare to prove the world
is still round a perfect circle in
God's eye in spite of acid rain & the
hole above Antarctica ripping the sky
apart he believes the world is made

of words let me not the words are
magic to the marriage of true minds
if he pulls enough magenta coloured
scarves from his coatsleeves we
will believe the hole in our minds
will disappear & the dead lakes rise
up & dance with the trees admit
impediments while this white bride
kisses this black prince & all around
us there is the faint rustling of leaves (*Agnes 5*).

Here, the language of Jesus (the patriarchal authority of the Bible) and Shakespeare (an image of Western cultural authority) come together to “prove the world / is still round,” invoking images of Columbus and colonial expansion. The use of these “inherited meanings” goes against the experience of the poet as the authority in this poem (“the man in the pulpit”) denies the existence of the pollution she knows exists. She notes that “he believes the world is made / of words,” reinforcing the power of the “inherited meanings.” The quotation from William Shakespeare’s Sonnet #116 seems to be one of many “magenta coloured / scarves [pulled] from his coatsleeves,” suggesting the authority is a magician who uses these words to mask the real oppressive nature of the tradition from which the words spring. This poem indicates the way linguistic and cultural authority (that of Western cultural tradition, Mennonite religious tradition built upon it, and patriarchal tradition) all work together through language to oppress and “colonize” the Mennonite poetic persona represented here.

Di Brandt uses the very language of these “inherited meanings” to betray, undermine, and subvert the power structures beneath this authority. She notes in her essay collection that she “couldn’t write prose because [she] kept getting stuck in the sentences: once you started you had to say whatever the syntax prescribed” (*Dancing 13*).

Instead, she writes in a poetic form that eschews standard English syntax and grammar rules, bringing to mind Homi Bhabha's discussion of mimicry where "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite*" ("Mimicry" 86, his italics). Her poetic diction and style mark the beginning of her resistance as she expresses her identity using familiar words in an unfamiliar form. The intent of these poems is literary resistance through the expression of identity. Brandt writes that poetry is "deeply political and potentially transforming" and that it holds "much power [...] in shaping the imaginative life of a society" (*Dancing* 11). She also sees creating poetry as "[n]aming the suppression as the beginning of remembering, undoing it" (*Dancing* 21). Di Brandt's poetry is political as it engages structures of power and their leaders and she names that which suppresses her through her poetry in an attempt to begin the process of "undoing it."

However, Brandt's poetry is not only resistance. Her foreword begins with "learning to speak *in public*" and the previous discussion has shown how she learns to speak through the very linguistic structures that kept her in silence. Yet the foreword ends with "translating remembering claiming my past / living my inheritance on this black earth among / strangers prodigally making love in a foreign / country writing coming home." Her identity, she recognizes, is inescapably derived in part from her past, painful and oppressive as it is. She "translat[es]" her identity for these "strangers," who are non-Mennonites or Mennonites that do not share her views, in ways that bring her writing to a free space in which she can "name" her experiences and the way they affect her. Her writing creates a place of hybridity where the colonizing structures that made her (again, in Radhakrishnan's words) a "victim of representation" (69) meet the resistance

of her poetry and become a new place from which she can express her identity. She describes this new place in *Agnes in the sky*:

since we cannot meet on father ground
our father's land as sister & brother ever
let's imagine a new place between us
slightly suspended in air but yet touching
earth [...] (*Agnes* 28).

This “father ground” and “father’s land” is the space limited by the authorial structures of Western culture as well as the patriarchy. The speaker invites her “brother” to “imagine” with her a “new place” – a bridge between different experiences that does touch the earth (and the concomitant power structures) but stays “slightly suspended in air” (suggesting a place beyond the social forces that oppress them). This “new place” becomes, in a sense, what Mary Louise Pratt would call a “contact zone” as the poet brings her experiences into contact both with another’s experiences and the earthly power structures that seek to bind those experiences. Like John Reimer or Yasch Siemens, the speaker finds a “new place” that allows her to “unname [her]self through a process of inverse displacement” because she does not lose touch with her history (painful as it is) nor does she allow herself to be subsumed by world of her “brother.”

A poem from her third collection, *mother, not mother* (1992), demonstrates that the resistance of the first two collections is still a force in the construction of the poetic voice and reveals how that identity has come to be expressed from this new “place” of “naming”:

what *de Englische*
didn't understand:

that telling my story
didn't make me one of them.

that my fear of being silenced
isn't obsolete.

i came from far away,
& brought everything with me.

the body remembers being
beaten & tortured & killed.

i stole the language
of their kings & queens,

but i didn't bow down to it,
i didn't become a citizen.

how hard it is to tell a story
so it can be heard.

how easily the reader climbs
on top of it,

pronouncing judgment
the eternal optimist, tourist,

pointing fingers (*mother* 30).

The Low German words, *de Englische*, name the oppressors as “other” and the reference to the historical persecution of Mennonites highlights the speaker’s feelings of difference based on historical background from those in the majority surrounding her. She rejects any notion that her writing in English means she is in any way assimilated; she is not “one of them” and she did not “become a citizen.” But she nevertheless *does* tell her story. She expresses her identity through the very structures which she feels oppress her. And there *is* a reader. Being heard is difficult (which is why so many of her poems deal with speaking out of silence) and the reader can easily “pronounc[e] judgment” and “point[] fingers,” but there is nevertheless someone who reads her poems and joins her

on the bridge she has created. Bhabha's theories of hybridity and mimicry inform this reading as she disavows the authority of the dominant discourse and then uses that discourse to express her identity in a manner "almost the same but not quite" as that traditionally allowed by that authority.

In *Decolonising Fictions*, Diana Brydon and Helen Tiffin reject "a one-way transmission of culture from metropolis to periphery" in favour of a "two-way traffic characterised by the failure of the imperial power to acknowledge colonial and postcolonial cultural contributions and their differences." They go on to note that "this two-way traffic is itself crossed and complicated by its own contradictions and divisions, and by a multiplicity of intersecting relations with other cultures" (15). Di Brandt's poetry displays just such a two-way traffic that both informs and is informed by the imperial power (in whatever form it manifests itself) and that is also "complicated by its own contradictions and divisions" within Mennonite culture itself. She resists cultural and patriarchal oppression while simultaneously turning the tools of that subjugation back upon the oppressors and voicing her identity in a form available to all readers.

Just as in the work of Rudy Wiebe, Armin Wiebe, and Di Brandt, the poetry of Patrick Friesen reveals the attempt of a Mennonite writer to express his identity in the face of colonizing/colonized power relationships. However, he goes even further than do Rudy Wiebe and Armin Wiebe in his conception of a Mennonite's potential interaction with "the world." His poems demonstrate not only the resistance through language already discussed in the works of Rudy Wiebe and Armin Wiebe but he also focuses on ways to reconstruct the relationship between the minority and the majority in a way that rejects the experiences of neither. While his poetry does not touch upon the oppression

Brandt feels as a Mennonite woman, Friesen is nevertheless equally concerned with the expression of his own identity as a product of his upbringing and Mennonite culture and the means through which he can best express it. His works also represent the move of Mennonites from rural, separate communities to urban centres and suggest that their unique identities can still be expressed. From his first collection of poetry to some of his more recent work, Patrick Friesen's identity underlies his struggle to find the freedom of self-expression in the face of a dominant worldview that seeks to make him a "victim of representation" (Radhakrishnan 69) and he uses that self-expression to begin a process of bridge-building between the two places.

In a 1987 interview, Friesen discusses the way his Mennonite heritage has become an integral part of his identity:

[N]o matter what you do about it, no matter where you go [the Mennonite community] is always there. I'm long past doing anything about it, either connecting with it or trying to break it. I used to try to leave, purposely steer away. There's no steering away from it. You're born into it. (qtd. in Tiessen, "hooked"155)

Unable to escape his past, Friesen writes poetry from a position informed by that past. He often refers to Mennonite history and culture, especially in his earlier work, perhaps as a result of his vain attempt to "purposely steer away." Even when his identity as a "Mennonite writer" is not readily apparent in the subject matter, he often portrays himself as an outsider or an alien which, as the discussion of the Mennonites' historical quest for separation has illustrated, is often characteristic of Mennonite self-conception. An examination of some poems from his poetry collections *the lands i am*, *The Shunning*, *Unearthly Horses*, and *st. mary at main* demonstrates the expression of Friesen's

Mennonite identity in the face of cultural pressure both directly in his choice of “Mennonite” subject matter and indirectly as he expresses his position as a poet.

The lands i am (1976) begins with a poem that highlights the idea of power over the expression of identity. In “sun king again,” the speaker writes of his intention to hold that power:

I'll be staunch
subdue the rabble
and be aristocrat again

be king
for a moment

[...]

the walls of my estate firm
unguarded
the gate shifts slightly
on an easy hinge

and I go in and out and

for a moment
I am king
and king governs
the lands I am (5).

The speaker's declaration that he will “subdue the rabble” shows that there is a need for control when it comes to matters of identity. The “sun king” in the title and the words “aristocrat,” “flags,” and “estate” invoke former French king Louis XIV whose nickname “the Sun King” and all of the concomitant images of control over land and subjects suggest power over “place” and identity (“Louis XIV” 584). Further, the aligning of government institutions with the power of self-expression places the poem in the realm of postcolonialism and my focus on the way Canadian institutions have had (and continue to

have) the same power over the self-expression of other Mennonite writers. While the speaker likely did not experience the reign of Louis XIV, Friesen's Mennonite ancestors did experience regimes of political oppression. His earlier-cited comment about his all-pervading sense of the Mennonite community and his use of Mennonite history in the poems discussed below suggest the importance of his sense of Mennonite history to his own expression of identity and link the voice of the speaker in this poem to Friesen's own sense of identity. The poet's identity is made up of "lands" and echoes the search for "place" seen in *The Blue Mountains of China*. Although this poem does not directly address the issue of a Mennonite identity as a function of its historical and cultural past, its focus on the links between government institutions, the power to construct identity, and an identity constructed from different "lands" connects this poem to Mennonite history and texts such as *The Blue Mountains of China*.

A poem entitled "culture building" in *the lands i am* demonstrates further the importance of Mennonite history to Mennonite writers in Western Canada as it draws upon the speaker's past and its effect on his present identity:

sometimes my spirit is here on the prairies
sometimes on the steppe or in some forest
where the bones of Roman soldiers hang
I have seen blood run in ditches near Poltava
I have heard the double cries
as scythes hacked twitching embryos
from swollen bodies (10).

The poet goes on from describing the horrors of Mennonite experiences during the Russian revolution and his sense that he himself has experienced them to Dumont who "shot buffalo on the great plains" and who "shot men with white skin." Of both Gabriel Dumont and his grandfather (who likely had first-hand experience of those Russian

steppes) he says that “any myth you’re going to build or believe / has its roots in this common event / this dying of heroes and pioneers” (10). These “myths” are constructed histories that become foundations of identity for those who embrace them. Those with the power to construct those histories also have the power to construct identities; the reference to the ambiguously viewed “hero,” Gabriel Dumont, suggests that the poet aligns his own experience (and those of his ancestors) with those of the Métis, another people struggling to express their identities in the face of colonial oppressors.

One of Patrick Friesen’s more overtly “Mennonite” texts, *The Shunning* (1980), joins and builds upon the projects of Rudy Wiebe and Armin Wiebe to make Mennonite experiences known to non-Mennonites. The subject matter of this collection of poems is distinctly Mennonite as it portrays the “shunning” or banning of Peter Neufeld from his community of Mennonites for controversial religious ideas that go against the official teachings of his community’s church. The church elders base their authority for the banning of Neufeld on the scriptural passage “*Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened*” (28). Friesen highlights the politics of exclusion and the way exclusion of difference can be “authorized” by language. This linguistic exclusion seems restricted to within the Mennonite community; however, Friesen sets the poems in 1914 and indirectly refers to the Canadian Mennonite experiences of exclusion during World War I which were based in large part on linguistic difference and a commitment to nonviolence. He also assigns Doctor Blanchard, an “outsider” to the Mennonite community, both the only voice in the collection written using Standard English and jarring references to John Stuart Mill and Carlyle that remind the reader of the linguistic and cultural majority that surrounds and threatens the

community and says, along with Doctor Blanchard, “I don’t rightly understand. Strange people” (49).

However, Friesen goes beyond simply “naming” Mennonite identities through the depiction of a Mennonite way of life. Beyond the events of this story of exclusion, the poet/narrator of the story in *The Shunning* often demonstrates concern that the outside world as represented by Doctor Blanchard does understand both the events and the people about which he writes. While he includes Low German words and phrases, the poet draws attention to their presence by placing them in italics and providing a glossary in the back of the text. Although Armin Wiebe’s use of untranslated and non-italicized words is a sign of resistance against the cultural majority, Friesen’s translation and italicization does not necessarily suggest acquiescence to the oppression. Rather, like Di Brandt, Friesen seems to be concerned more with the act of *translation* than strategies only of *resistance*. He perhaps sees the very events of *The Shunning* as enough of a strategy of resistance in that the subject matter is so foreign to a non-Mennonite reader. He asks, “What do you want to know about Mennonites? What don’t you know?” (87). The “you” is the reader who presumably is not Mennonite. Friesen intentionally reaches out to his non-Mennonite readers and expresses concern that they understand him and the heritage on which he constructs his identity. He suggests that simply writing about something distinctly “Mennonite” will elicit questions on the part of the non-Mennonite reader – a desire to know more about this “other” group of people. He writes:

And do you understand we’ve come from memories?

simlins cowshit fires
horses wandering home through blizzards
Toews or Reimer frozen in the sleigh

grasshoppers in plagues
those born on oceans those buried there
steppes that father often talked of
with their yellow waves of wheat
the swamps of danzig where no armies could come
whaling ships yes whaling ships
and some of our people sailors
horse and foot blade flame and iron
those driven from home
and there being bears in the mountains
and soldiers in the countryside

do you understand?

those are my memories father's
his mother's maybe her mother father
their friends their neighbours (89)

He suggests a people's collective memory, one unique to those who are a part of his people. But he ends this poem with these lines:

do you understand this? Where we came from?
it all adds up
figure it out for yourself (89).

Friesen's poetry becomes a "contact zone" as these memories exclusive to Mennonites and their descendants are expressed in a way that non-Mennonites are invited to understand. He writes about "Mennonite" subject matter not to exclude those outside the community but to include them. This poetry manifests in some ways Bhabha's theories about hybridity in that Friesen uses words not his own (or at least, not originally his own) to express his own ideas back towards those in cultural and linguistic control. Yet while there is a sense of ambivalence inherent in the writing in that it *is* resistance against the cultural powers that be, there is nevertheless a sense of hope, a sense that after the resistance comes reconstruction. He tells his non-Mennonite readers that he will provide all the necessary clues to understand this minority group but that understanding will come

only with effort on the part of the majority. Friesen's writing is postcolonial in that this invitation demonstrates (in Diana Brydon's words) "a locally situated, provisional, and strategic attempt to think through the consequences of colonialism and to imagine nonrepressive alternatives to its discursive regime" (10). If one of the "consequences of colonialism" is a denial of Mennonite experiences (Bhabha's "'denied' knowledges" ["Signs" 114]), then Friesen's poetry "imagine[s]" a "nonrepressive alternative[]" as he writes about Mennonite experiences in a way that validates them and opens them up to other readers. These readers must "figure it out" for themselves and, in so doing, allow for Friesen's successful expression of that part of his identity based so strongly on his cultural and linguistic heritage.

It is important to note that this expression of identity does not lead to assimilation on the part of a Mennonite writer like Friesen; like Brandt, communicating his position using the language of the majority does not make him one of that majority. The final poem of *Unearthly Horses* (1984) demonstrates that Friesen's position as a Mennonite writer in Western Canada remains apart from the cultural and linguistic majority:

ich stehe
zwischen nein
ein fusz im feuer

ja (75).

This poem is translated as:

I stand
between no
one foot in the fire

yes (78).

That the poem is in High German highlights its function as resistance against the cultural majority as the non-Mennonite reader comes into contact with an “other” language. Yet Friesen provides a translation so that once the challenge has been articulated the reader can enter Friesen’s worldview on the poet’s terms. This place of standing “between” is the same as that of other postcolonial writers who stand “between” their cultural heritage and the forces oppressing the expression of that heritage. This “between” is also the border crossed by John Reimer in Rudy Wiebe’s text, the linguistic border crossed by Yasch in Armin Wiebe’s text, and the “new place” built by Di Brandt. That one foot is “in the fire” suggests the danger of this position and the ambivalent nature of self-expression from such precarious footing.

Further examples of Friesen’s articulation of this place “between” can be seen in a more recent work, *st.mary at main* (1998), where he writes of Winnipeg and the place of a writer in Winnipeg. This collection is significant to this discussion because it moves beyond the rural, separate community invoked in the work of Rudy Wiebe, Armin Wiebe, and in Di Brandt’s resistance against the oppression felt in her youth. He addresses the shift over the past half century from a rural environment to an urban environment made by many Mennonites. No longer must “land” geographically separate from the outside world be a part of the “place” of “naming” a Mennonite identity. Yet the focus on language and its power to separate or connect remains the same. In a poem called “provencher bridge” he writes of his friend Suzanne:

there’s so much between us
words and icons
all the gold and rubble
of nations

we live like that
with our different ways
how we genuflect or not
how we speak or dance
where our ships came from
we live like that
meeting on the bridge

[...]

and here we live
never quite home
feeling betrayed
and abandoned
on both sides of the river (35-36).

Suzanne, from “le havre / montreal or brest” represents another minority within Canada. The poet acknowledges the distance between them built from “words and icons” which are the differences resulting from different cultural heritages. These differences of “how we genuflect or not / how we speak or dance” depend on another difference between them, “where our ships came from.” It is interesting that one of the differences he highlights is the way each responds to authority; the two of them are from two different minority groups within Canada (he, Mennonite and she, French) yet both find a common ground in the way they relate (or do not relate) to those in power, be it cultural, linguistic, or political. He writes that both of them feel “betrayed” and “abandoned,” presumably by those who *are* at “home” in Winnipeg (perhaps those who are a part of an Anglo-Canadian, English-speaking majority). Yet Friesen writes not in French or German but in English. He does not write a text that would intentionally exclude as he (and Suzanne) has been excluded. As he describes the physical bridge on which they sometimes meet, Friesen writes a metaphorical bridge that reaches from his position as a minority writer both to other minorities in Canada, represented by Suzanne, and the majority, represented

in part by the reader of English. It is, however, important to remember here Arun Mukherjee's caution against a homogenizing definition of this "majority" subject position; just as the Mennonite writer as a "white Canadian" can occupy a position on the "internal [...] peripher[y]," the English-speaking population of Winnipeg is not necessarily made up entirely of people that occupy a position in the "internal centre[]" (222). This note of caution complicates the idea that those who use English are necessarily part of the majority and hold a position of privilege. Friesen's linguistic bridge is accessible to all readers of English whether their use of the dominant language structure is a manifestation of their position within the dominant political or cultural majority or whether they too are adversely affected by a discourse of oppression despite their use of English.

A return to the poem with which this discussion of Mennonite/s writing in Western Canada began suggests that Friesen's poetry in English is the best (and perhaps only) method of self-expression for him. He captures the Mennonite sense of wandering and self-induced exile in the poem "nomads":

[...]
the nomad gone to ground in winnipeg
via ukraine poland and the lowlands
the nomad without fields
without mountains to cross
the nomad without a way
gone to poetry
here
this city
poet with 600,000 words
a language he wasn't born into
poet with his senses about him
an empty mirror
and the desire to love (48).

This poem brings together many elements of the experiences of Mennonite writers in Western Canada. It highlights this Mennonite's position as a "nomad," someone who moves from place to place voluntarily in search of land free of outside control. It evokes the historical background the Mennonites share as represented in Rudy Wiebe's text and the way the people's collective memory of emigration always underlies who they are. This nomad who is "without a way" is "gone to poetry" with the sense that the movement to poetry is and is not of his own volition in the same way that one can both "go" somewhere voluntarily and "go" mad involuntarily. The "600,000 words" of the "language he wasn't born into" are nevertheless the tools of this and other Mennonite writers such as Armin Wiebe or Di Brandt. They use those words as tools to build literary bridges that do not negate their own experiences of identity but reach out to others in a way that allows their identity to be expressed and, more importantly, understood. The number of words, "600,000" is the same as the number of people in Winnipeg; the correspondence suggests perhaps that just as words make up a language so do unique experiences make up the identity of this city. The "desire to love" signifies the act of reaching out to "the world" through language; this hybrid language created by the crossing of the linguistic border from German into English and their corresponding systems of meaning allows the poet to retain his sense of his identity as rooted in his past while engaging actively and fruitfully with those outside his community using a language all can understand.

Patrick Friesen, along with Rudy Wiebe, Armin Wiebe, Di Brandt, and other Mennonite writers in Western Canada, finds himself "between" worlds – between his cultural past never far from the surface and his present, between the historical desire for

separation and the pressure to assimilate, between the Low German of his ancestors and the English he has learned. His poetry gives voice to a position that successfully negotiates these worldviews and does not locate itself solely on one side of the bridge or the other. Whether writing about his identity and its ties to land, Mennonite history, or his experience as a writer in Winnipeg, Patrick Friesen speaks out from a position assailed by cultural and linguistic pressure.

Finally, the comparison between the poetry of Di Brandt and Patrick Friesen reveals the different ways they extend the ideas about the expression of identity developed by Rudy Wiebe and Armin Wiebe. Di Brandt's work expands the ability of Mennonite writing in English to resist oppressive power structures as she uses her poetry to "name" herself both in terms of her minority subject position as a Mennonite writer and as a Mennonite woman. Her linking of postcolonial and feminist thought leads to a larger sense of the power of hybrid language; her poetry indeed begins to dismantle colonial "habits of mind" in whatever form they may be found. Patrick Friesen extends the ability of this "new" hybrid language to "name" experience to include the idea that "naming" Mennonite minority experience forges links to other "named" minority experiences. As the move from rural motifs to an urban landscape in his poetry suggests, Mennonite identities can be "translated" through this hybrid language without denying the lived experiences even if the geographic separation so important to some Mennonites is not maintained. Both writers use a poetic form that highlights the resistive force inherent within this language and suggests new ways to "translate" Mennonite minority identities and experiences.

Conclusion - A Language of Their Own

“[...]and the firece sunlight showed them strangely side by side, looking together at themselves” (Wiebe, *Blue Mountains* 103)

This discussion of Mennonite/s writing in Western Canada comes full circle as it returns to the question with which it began: “how do Mennonites as immigrants to Western Canada make sense of their identities without a land or language to call their own?” The examination of the Mennonites’ historical struggle and search for identity along with texts by Rudy Wiebe, Armin Wiebe, Di Brandt, and Patrick Friesen has begun to reveal part of the answer to this question. Postcolonial theories such as those of Diana Brydon, Enoch Padolsky, Rosemary Marangoly George, Mary Louise Pratt, Homi Bhabha, and Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan help make sense of the question and lead to new ways of understanding the expression of Mennonite identities in Western Canada.

First, the analysis has shown how “Canada” has come to be conceived and represented in different Mennonite experiences. Diana Brydon’s argument for the inclusion of Canada within the field of postcolonial studies because it exhibits “different orders of colonial experience” (2) supports the inclusion of the Mennonites in Western Canada as a “colonized” people in terms of their experiences with cultural and linguistic pressures to assimilate. Rudy Wiebe’s *The Blue Mountains of China* depicts the history of movement and separation on the part of the Mennonites and highlights the different roles “Canada” has played in that history. “Canada” has been seen alternately as a land opportunity, a cultural haven, a religious refuge, an oppressive assimilationist power, and an uneasy “home.” The history of Mennonite “separation” from “the world” and the concomitant self-conception as “other” shows how Mennonites intentionally constructed

themselves as a minority people on the margins both before and after they immigrated to Canada. Armin Wiebe's *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens* picks up the historical narrative where Rudy Wiebe leaves off and demonstrates how the Mennonites' historical search for a "land" to call their own became for many a struggle to find a "language" of their own in the face of pressure from the surrounding cultural and linguistic majority. *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens* draws attention to the way Mennonite self-expression in Canada has become in many cases (in the words of Diana Brydon and Helen Tiffin) "two-way traffic" instead of a "one-way transmission of culture" (15). The language used by Yasch as he narrates is a hybrid, "new" language that translates elements of the Low German language and the Mennonite culture using Standard English in a way that both resists against pressure to become more "Canadian" and also goes forth into the political and social realm of the majority with his Mennonite identity intact. Di Brandt's poetry focuses on another one of Canada's "different orders of colonial experience" as she uses the hybrid "new" language seen in Wiebe's text to express her identity both as a Mennonite writer in Canada and as a Mennonite woman. Her work complicates homogenizing tendencies that pit harmonized groups of people like the Mennonites and Anglo-Canadians against one another without acknowledging power relationships within those groups. Her work suggests that all ethnic groups in Canada, whether (in Enoch Padolsky's words) the "ethnic minority" or the "ethnic majority" (27), have internal unequal power relationships and, as she harnesses the very power discourse used to subjugate her, she demonstrates how those relationships can be resisted from within. Patrick Friesen's work builds upon the foundation laid by these previous texts as he extends the idea of a minority voice in a hybrid language beyond Mennonite self-

expression to the expression of other minority experiences within Canada. His move from rural locations to urban ones in his poetry symbolizes the Mennonite movement away from geographic “separation” in Canada to a “place” that, while it does not accept a generic “Canadian” voice with which to express identity, moves towards reconstructing heretofore unequal cultural relationships into more mutually understanding ones.

Second, the textual examinations have spoken to the issue of the representation of Mennonite women. Of the two main female characters in *The Blue Mountains of China*, Frieda is depicted as a traditional, conservative Mennonite woman who concerns herself exclusively with marriage and family. Unlike Frieda, Elizabeth is adventurous and her flirtation with and eventual movement towards the outside world demonstrate her unwillingness to conform to the ideal of the Mennonite woman as suggested by Frieda. Armin Wiebe also depicts traditional Mennonite women destined to be submissive wives who are objectified by the men around them like “Shaftich Shreeda’s daughter, Fleeda” (1). While Wiebe’s portraits of Yasch’s mother and his girlfriend, Oata, suggest the possibility of female power as both women try to run Yasch’s life and usually succeed in their efforts (31, 55, 115), the constant objectification of women within this text using the very language that resists external cultural and linguistic oppression complicates the role of language within the text and reveals how postcolonial resistance can occur simultaneously with internal oppression within the same community. Di Brandt’s work, as discussed, subverts and rejects the traditional role assigned to Mennonite women and the resultant voice is similar to that of Rudy Wiebe’s Elizabeth as self-expression seems to come only in the face of rejection of the Mennonite cultural heritage. Patrick Friesen gives voice to traditional Mennonite women who conform to the role prescribed for them,

even to the point of denying the marital bed to a shunned husband (*Shunning* 30). Later, in *Unearthly Horses*, he further gives voice to women with “maria’s death,” a poem about a dead grandmother who is linked to *The Shunning’s* Carolina (27). His representation of Mennonite women lends validity to their unique experiences within the community. The writers all depict the role of the traditional Mennonite woman in the same way but each suggests a different response to that role. Rudy Wiebe (through the character of Frieda Friesen) presents a woman who accepts her role and expresses her identity solely through traditional “female” pursuits. Armin Wiebe reveals the way this traditional female role can lead to the objectification of women and, while he provides glimpses of female power within that role, his text is a sobering reminder that many Mennonite women continue to feel internal oppression despite the larger Mennonite community’s often successful engagement with the outside world. Rudy Wiebe (through the character of Dr. Elizabeth Cereno) and Di Brandt in her poetry demonstrate female power found only through resistance to that internal oppression. Patrick Friesen depicts mostly traditional Mennonite women, but he suggests that even the voicing of that experience is a form of resistance against those who would silence Mennonite women. While this examination has only touched upon this subject, further study of the representation of Mennonite women in texts by these and other Mennonite writers will yield additional comments to the fruitful topic only touched upon here.

Third, the examination of these texts by Mennonite writers has shown how the important concept of “border crossings” plays a role in the self-expression of Mennonites in Western Canada. Again, *The Blue Mountains of China* provides the background behind the Mennonites’ history of numerous literal border crossings and suggests ways in which

those geopolitical borders are not only “man-made” (103) but also mirrored by metaphoric linguistic and cultural borders. Yasch Siemens dances across these metaphoric borders as he “buggers up” the English language and creates something entirely new with his crazy mix of Standard English and Mennonite culture. Di Brandt crosses a literary border as she eschews a novelistic form and writes in a poetic voice void of externally imposed grammatical, syntactic, or punctuation structure. And Patrick Friesen not only crosses a border from rural to urban subject matter, but he also seeks out points of contact the Mennonites in Western Canada share with other groups. Through his work he tries to find ways to build linguistic bridges across all of those borders. These “border crossings” that are so prevalent in a Mennonite in Western Canada’s construction of identity allow the Mennonites to be a part of “Canada” while nevertheless allowing them to retain their own unique identities and means with which to express those identities.

Fourth, these texts all emphasize the power to “name” identity and the way geographic or linguistic movement on the part of the Mennonites in Western Canada has led and continues to lead to further understanding of that power. The Mennonites’ historical assumption that a free geographic “place” was enough to guarantee autonomy in self-“naming” is revealed to be false by Rudy Wiebe. Despite move after move to find a “place” uncontrolled by a dominant majority, the Mennonites in the text continually find, in Frieda Friesen’s words, “something wrong” with each new location (9). As Armin Wiebe displays in his text, the “place” where (in Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan’s words) the “victim of representation” can “achieve[] a revolution against both the oppressor and the discourse of the oppressor” is not the “romantic nostalgia” of a utopian

ideal like the blue mountains of China (Radhakrishnan 69; Wiebe, *Blue Mountains* 140). Instead, this “place” is found through the use of the very discourse of the oppressor itself – language. Yasch Siemens uses his curious mix of language to “name” himself and his “place” both within the village of Gutenthal and within Canada in a way that subverts his categorization as someone on the margin. He then reconstructs or renames himself in a positive and self-affirming way. Di Brandt shouts out both her “name” and her right to “name” herself in the face of external and internal community opposition with poetry that refuses to bow to a history of felt oppression. She, too, “achieves a revolution” as her once-silenced voice breaks free from its linguistic and cultural shackles and proceeds to “name” her experiences and identity as meaningful and valid. This “naming” of Mennonite experiences as meaningful and valid appears as well in Patrick Friesen’s *the lands i am* and *The Shunning*. His later collections take that newly “named” self and work towards sharing that construction of identity with others while acknowledging and helping them in their right to name themselves. These texts all demonstrate how the Mennonites’ historical desire to “name” their own identities in the face of political, religious, cultural, and linguistic oppression came to be translated to Canada and how that “place” of “naming” has been found through language.

Finally, these texts provide examples of Homi Bhabha’s ideas of “hybridity” and “mimicry” as the Mennonites in question “name” their “place” through language. While Rudy Wiebe’s *The Blue Mountains of China* does not overtly undermine what Bhabha calls the “rules of recognition” created by the discourse of the dominant majority (in this case, Standard English) (“Signs” 114), he nevertheless provides a foundation on which later movements towards “hybridity” can rest as he validates the experiences of

Mennonites in Western Canada as “worth” writing about. His “strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal” (“Signs” 112) comes through his insistence that the historical experiences of Mennonites before they came to Canada form a part of their current identities and that the previous lives of immigrants before they come to Canada are still a part of their “Canadian” identities. *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens* is a study in “hybridity” as Armin Wiebe takes those “rules of recognition” that make up Standard English and subverts them in a way that reverses the “process of domination” and “reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other ‘denied’ knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority” (“Signs” 112, 114). What results is an example of “mimicry” as the language Yasch (and Wiebe) speaks back to the dominant discourse is “almost the same *but not quite*” with “its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority” (“Mimicry” 86, 88, his italics). Armin Wiebe demonstrates how this hybrid language can be used against the dominant discourse in a way that resists its assimilationist tendencies. Di Brandt and Patrick Friesen also create a “new” hybrid language as they meld together different Mennonite experiences with Standard English while undermining the very “rules of recognition” of that English. Their language speaks out and back against the power that seeks to contain them. Each text in its own way manifests Bhabha’s theories of “hybridity” and “mimicry” and shows how these theories help make sense of Mennonite identities in Western Canada.

Taken together, these texts and the postcolonial theories invoked to help analyse them all shed light on what it means to be a Mennonite writing in Western Canada and what that writing can mean both to Mennonites and non-Mennonites alike. The epigraph

to this conclusion captures the place these Mennonites have built for themselves as they cross borders to “name” themselves using hybrid languages. Rudy Wiebe writes of a cross-cultural contact that “the fierce sunlight showed them strangely side by side, looking together at themselves” (*Blue Mountains* 103). Like the two people in the novel, these Mennonites sit “side by side” with other Canadians, whether those of other minorities or those of the majority. These texts demonstrate that a Mennonite identity in Canada can never be based on complete “separation” and that some relationship must exist between them and the outside world. The two groups, Mennonites and non-Mennonites, can only “look[] together” if they are able to use a language both groups can understand. The move from German to English was the first step in making Mennonite experiences available to other Canadians and the resulting creation of a hybrid language ensures that their unique experiences and identities do not get lost in the translation. The two groups look “at themselves.” No longer do Mennonites look only at other Mennonites nor do Canadians look only at a homogeneously-defined group of “Canadians;” the groups come together to look at the ways they each represent themselves and one another. This “looking together at themselves” allows each voice to be heard and validates each experience. Each person’s identity maintains its uniqueness but it does so in a way that invites another to share in what makes that identity unique. Mennonite/s writing in Western Canada is indeed postcolonial as it breaks down barriers between people yoked in unequal power relationships and fosters renewed understanding between the writers and the readers.

This analysis only begins to answer some of the questions suggested by a discussion of postcolonial aspects of Mennonite/s writing in Western Canada. Many more

answers could be found by further discussion of these ideas with reference to other Mennonite writers such as David Waltner-Toews, Miriam Toews, Lois Braun, and Sandra Birdsell. Waltner-Toews's poetry couples many of his Mennonite experiences with his encounters with the world beyond his Mennonite community and his mingling of art and science suggest a different application of Homi Bhabha's theories of hybridity. Toews's novels speak of both her own experiences growing up in a Mennonite community as well as fictional experiences of living in communities with Mennonites. Her texts along with Lois Braun's short stories deal with marginalized characters who are part of some minority group and would merit discussion using the aforementioned ideas in terms of the way their texts use language to speak minority positions and engage the cultural, linguistic, and political surrounding majorities. Sandra Birdsell writes from the unique position of the child of a Métis father and a Mennonite mother and her works shed light on the way each group has historically experienced forms of oppression and the ways they have used language to express their identities based upon those experiences.

Further study could also expand on the ideas suggested about the representation of Mennonite women in these texts and compare those representations to those in texts by other Mennonite writers. Do the "voices" of Mennonite women differ in texts written by female writers from those written by male writers? How has the increasing urbanization of Mennonites in general changed the conception of the role of the Mennonite woman within the community and has the representation of that role in literature reflected that change? Further study might also compare these ideas about Mennonite writing in Canada with ideas about other minority writing in Canada. How do the postcolonial theories invoked here inform discussions about, for example, Jewish writing in Canada?

Like many Mennonites in Canada, many Jewish immigrants to Canada come from a history of displacement and cultural difference and the textual expressions of their experiences may bear some similarity to some Mennonite textual expressions of minority experiences. The ambivalent position of Mennonites in Canada as both colonized and colonizer suggests further study is necessary in the area of the representation of Native people in Mennonite texts. How does the representation of Native peoples in texts by Mennonite writers shed light on Native experiences, Mennonite experiences, and the changing relationships between the two groups? What similarities and differences present themselves if one compares and contrasts texts by the two groups as responses to a dominant Canadian majority? These questions all reveal that the answer to the question “how do Mennonites as immigrants to Canada make sense of their identities without a land or language to call their own?” is multi-faceted and that the relationships between Mennonite writers, their communities, and the surrounding world are complex and can provide rich material for future study.

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