

From Collective Body to Individual Mind: Religious Change in an Old Colony Mennonite Community in Belize

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Introduction

Entering the Shipyard Mennonite Colony in North Belize one feels thrown back in time at least a hundred years: no electricity lines span the sides of the dusty roadways, no satellite dishes on the wooden roofs, no cars parked in front of the houses. People drive around in buggies: men in black overalls hold the reins, their wives, dressed in dark, high-neck dresses, their heads covered with a black kerchief and a white straw hat to protect them against the merciless tropical sun, quietly sit next to them. The back of the buggy is filled with blond, blue-eyed children of all ages looking suspiciously at the stranger who has entered their colony.

These are Old Colony (*Altkolonier*)¹ Mennonites who left Europe at the end of the nineteenth century to seek more secluded places where they could live according to their own rules and religion (Redekop, 1969). What immediately becomes obvious is the conformity of the colony: all the houses are painted light blue and resemble each other both in architecture and interior. The people also look much the same, adhering to a strictly traditional dress code that does not leave much room for individual taste. These Mennonites adhere to a particular *Ordnung*, a system of rules that regulates almost every aspect of their lives from the use of modern technology to the naming of children. They are supposed to live a plain, simple and humble life, following the traditions of their forefathers and being submissive to God's will as outlined in the Bible. This set of rules and regulations is enforced by a group of preachers who are the spiritual, and in some ways even the secular, leaders of the colony.

However, as one takes a closer look one discovers that there is also a group of "outcasts" who have challenged the traditional system by forming a Bible Study group. Their challenge has gotten them excommunicated by the preachers and banned from the community. They now face a life of hardships, as they are shunned by even close family members and do not receive any help from former friends

and neighbors. They disobeyed the Ordnung and the authority of the preachers and were punished for this transgression.

Max Weber identified three different kinds of leadership: the rational, the traditional and the charismatic. The rational form of leadership rests on chosen leaders and the acceptance of the legality of a system of law and order that has to be followed by all citizens. This is a very bureaucratic, rational and calculated form of leadership resting on a body of laws and the idea that the chosen leader is the “senior,” governing with the help of an administrative staff. The traditional leadership relies on the “Alltagsglauben an die Heiligkeit von jeher geltender Traditionen und die Legitimität der durch sie zur Autorität Berufenen”(Weber, 1972: 124).² The leader thus becomes the master governing his servants as legitimized by old and everlasting traditions and ideas about the holiness of his leadership. The charismatic leadership, finally, depends on the charisma of the leader himself. He convinces his followers by some extraordinary attributes or qualities. Each of the three styles of leadership goes hand in hand with a special form of adherence. While the traditional system is based on obedient and submissive subjects, the charismatic leader has to rely on the loyalty of his followers and rational authority rests on the understanding of the people that this is a legitimate legal system of rule.

Together with leadership comes persecution. Every social system- and especially every leader – has to have means to keep the people in line, otherwise chaos would threaten social order and the authority of the leader. Foucault (1979) states that power in modern societies is exercised and ensured through treatment of those who misbehave rather than through the traditional forms of punishment, which aim at the destruction or the exclusion of the deviant. In traditional societies punishment was highly visible, generally aimed at the body and often very painful either in physical or psychological terms. It was also meant to act as a deterrent to prevent others from following the example of the wrongdoer. In more modern societies this idea is replaced with the idea of the possible betterment of the offender. This form of persecution is aimed at the mind and attitudes of those who do not abide by the norms rather than at physical punishment. It tries to discipline subjects and to teach them self-control.

The Altkolonier community demands a lot from its members – being obedient to strict rules of conduct and depriving themselves of such comforts of modern life as electricity and cars. The Old Colony church offers an all-encompassing way of life. On the other hand, it demands total compliance from its members, who are generally willing to submit to the community. However, sometimes an encompassing ideology does not give enough answers for those who are searching, and even the strictest social system of control

and punishment fails to keep rebellious members in line. This leads us to the central question of this article: What changes took place in the regulative system of the outcasts and what does a comparison of that system to the Ordnung of the Altkolonier tell us about changes in leadership, attitudes and individual belief?

Traditional (religious) systems are generally identified as based on obedience, conformity and social control; “modern” religious groups stress individual responsibility and belief. “If pre-industrial religiosity stressed individual faith within the context of obedience to church and state, modern evangelicalism laid stress on faith in the context of the individual as the free, moral agent!” (Brown 2001: 36). One could describe, as one of the major changes that took place in Shipyard Colony, a move from following the preachers in every aspect of their teachings towards an attitude of self-responsibility.

Milena Veenis shows in her case study on Germans in Argentina how people follow countless rules, regulations and codes in everyday life without realizing that they actually do so. However, these codes and rules give meaning to their lives (Veenis 1995: 4). She bases her ideas on the theory of the *habitus* of French historian, Pierre Bourdieu: “The habitus, the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations, produces practices which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent in the objective conditions of the production of their generative principle, while adjusting to the demands inscribed as objective potentialities in the situation, as defined by cognitive and motivating structures making up the habitus” (Bourdieu 1989: 78). Bourdieu sees the habitus as ‘history turned into nature’. People follow countless codes and rules without even thinking about them as they are “inscribed” into their beings and acted out accordingly. Many of our decisions are informed by things other than rationality or a “body of knowledge” (Cohen, 1986). We act out history as inscribed into our beings without realizing it. Even the most rational choice is influenced by past experience. Therefore, even though the outcasts made the decision to leave the Altkolonier and start something new they will always be influenced by their embodied history.

This article is the result of ethnographic field research conducted in the Shipyard Altkolonier Mennonite Colony in Belize from January 2004 until May 2004. Data was gathered through participant observation, informal conversations and semi-structured in-depth interviews with people from both groups: the Altkolonier majority and those who live under the ban. Prior to this research a list of topics had been formulated in order to structure the process of data gathering in the field. During the research period these topics have been constantly specified and extended according to the findings in order to obtain the maximum amount of information. During and after the research the findings have been related to theoretical literature

in order to get deeper analytical insights.

Most interviews were conducted in a mixture of languages. Internally, the Mennonites communicate in their own language of Low German. However, they all have to learn High German, the language of the church, in school as well. Those who have more outside contacts (generally the men and more progressive members of the community) sometimes speak some English or Spanish, the local vernaculars. As most of the interviews were conducted in German, we have left the quotes in the original language with a footnote translating them.

Belize and the Mennonites: From Flanders to the New World

Today there are over a million Mennonites scattered throughout the world (Driedger, 2000). They are the descendants, of course, of a “religio-social rebellion” (Redekop, 1989: 6) that started in sixteenth century Zurich and from there spread rapidly across Europe to Germany, Austria, and The Netherlands (Dyck, 1993; Kraybill and Bowman, 2001). Right from the beginning the Anabaptist movement, embraced in so many different places all over Europe, was very diverse, covering a wide range of different ideas and opinions (Urry 1989: 34).

There were some principles stated in the *Glaubensbekenntnis* (Mennonite Articles of Faith), however, that were recognized by all groups. One of them was the rejection of infant baptism and the necessity for a conscious confession of faith before one could be baptized and become part of the community, the community or congregation being the most important identification group for the individual. Mennonites were organized not in the form of *Kirchen* (churches) but in *Gemeinden* (congregations or communities) in which faith and life were united.

Mennonites were to live outside the “world” and refrain from all “worldly” things that might lead them away from the true faith and distract them from God. “One of the Mennonites’ strongest beliefs is their separation from society. Referring to the Bible, they state that they are to be ‘strangers’ and ‘pilgrims’ in the world. This implies that all their activities should result in better service to their God” (Roessingh and Boersma 2003:3). Living away from the world and its earthly seductions (i.e., nonconformity to the world) conforms with the ideas of *Gelassenheit* (submission to the will of God) and *Demut* (humility), the most important principles that should guide the life of Mennonites who are expected to subordinate their individuality to the community through baptism. “The whole system was bound firmly by a set of rules defined through the interpretation of God’s will made manifest through his word in the Bible” (Urry 1983: 242).

Even though from the very beginning there were Mennonites living in cities, the ideal has always been to live a simple and hard-

working life in an agricultural community away from the seductions of the “world.” “But this is the kingdom of all humility in which not the outward adorning of the body but the inward adornity of the spirit is desired and sought with great zeal and diligence” (Simons in Bender 1936: 95). Other principles Mennonites adhere to are the total separation of church and state, strict pacifism, the refusal to swear oaths, and standing on the authority of the Scriptures alone in matters of faith as well as action (Redekop 1989: 4).

All these ideas, which profoundly challenged the existing church and state authorities, did not really help to make the Mennonites very popular among the ruling churches or sovereigns of Europe. Hence, both Protestants and Catholics persecuted Mennonites in large numbers, forcing them either to go underground, which only promoted their sectarian character, or to seek other, safer places in which to live, thus leading to migrations of whole communities away from the burning stakes. This persecution led them first to Prussia and then Russia, where they settled in large colonies (Dyck, 1993; Plett, 1999; Loewen, 2001). In Russia the Mennonites developed from a religious sect into an ethnic group different from their Russian neighbors and emphasizing their German and Dutch origins. “Settlement in large, exclusive, self-regulating ‘colonies’ with a relatively unsophisticated and linguistically, culturally and ethnically different *Umwelt* has proven most capable of long term survival”: under these conditions the Mennonites established cultural solidarity and a distinct folk identity (Sawatzky, 1971: 2).

Threatened with absorption into the Russian administrative and military system, the more traditional Mennonites migrated to Canada, where the Altkolonier went their own way as the result of quarrels about the proper way of singing and acceptance of the Canadian school system (Redekop, 1969). Those who refused to send their children to public schools packed their bags again and moved to Mexico. However, after being faced with the threat of being incorporated into the Mexican social security system, some sought a new haven where they could live according to their own rules and belief. This haven was found in the British Honduras, with which an agreement was settled in 1957 leading to the migration of some Mennonite groups (Altkolonier, Sommerfelder, Kleine Gemeinde) to this British colony. The Mennonites were granted freedom to administer their own colonies and exemption from military service in exchange for producing foodstuffs for the local market and for export. And so, after some initial hardships and difficulties in adapting to the unfamiliar tropical climate, their humble settlements expanded into thriving colonies (Sawatzky, 1971; Driedger, 1958).

Belize is a multi-ethnic country and the Mennonites are only one group in a colorful mix of languages, religions and cultures.

Today there are about 8300 Mennonites living in around ten different colonies in Belize (Central Statistical Office 2000). There is a difference between more progressive colonies like Blue Creek and Spanish Lookout, which adapted to a changing world, and more traditional ones like Little Belize and Shipyard, where a wide range of modern technologies and objects, as for example cars, state-provided electricity, telephones, watches and radios, are forbidden (Everitt, 1983). However, it is not only the striving for more comfort and economic possibilities that leads people away from the strict groups but also the quest for more religious satisfaction.

Sitting in Church

For devoted Christians going to church is one of the most important aspects of their faith. This is true for both the Altkolonier and the outcasts; however, the outline and content of the particular service differ profoundly. Attending an Old Colony church service is a rather grave and somber experience. People arrive with their horse and buggy shortly before the sermon starts and without looking left or right hurry into church and sit down on the hard wooden benches without arm- or backrests. Women and men enter through different doors and sit on different sides of the church. Children under the age of thirteen (the age when they finish school) are not allowed in church. There is also a seating hierarchy with older people in the front seats and younger ones in the back.

The church is a wooden construction with no decorative elements or adornments whatsoever. The small windows allow only a little air to enter the building and to relieve the faithful a little from the heat. Women are covered from head to toe: bonnet, kerchief, high-necked, thick dresses, aprons and nylon socks. The men at least can take off their straw hats and hang them on a wooden rack above the benches. Nobody talks, people are staring at the floor or out of the window, secretly wiping off sweat that drips from their foreheads and bending forwards to release the tension in their backs. The whole church experience is a rather uncomfortable one, which is in line with their ideology of a hard life: going to church should not be a nice, pleasant, interesting time – like life, church service should be hard on the body and grave on the mind.

After a while the seven *Vorsänger* (song leaders) and the *Prediger* (preacher) enter from a little annex room and the singing starts. Altkolonier have a very particular way of singing. Their singing seems to know no rhythm or melody and the words are drawn out almost endlessly, giving the songs a rather haunting sound. After the singing people fall onto their knees, their heads hidden in their arms and engage in silent prayer, all individually communicating with their Lord. Then the service starts, during which the preacher

reads a sermon written out in its totality, a sermon combining Bible verses with individual thoughts in such a way as to make it difficult to distinguish the two. This particular day he was talking about how important it is to come to church to hear the word of the preacher and not only to read the Bible at home. Listening and reading are also not in themselves enough; people should not only be *Mundchristen* (professing Christians) but must embrace the Word of the Lord with all their heart, be *gottgefällig* (pleasing to God) and start repenting their sinful life: "Jesus erhört nicht die sündigen Geister und der Heilige Geist wohnt nicht in einem sündigen Körper".³

The whole sermon centered on somber ideas about submission, penitence and sin and was not really elevating the spirit. The service was extremely ritualized and based on absolute obedience and conformity – from the dresses, to the seating hierarchy, to the way the sermon was given. No-one in the congregation was given the chance to participate; it was the preacher who told them how to understand the Bible. Even though most of them seemed very devout, one could not help feeling that the majority secretly wished it to be over soon and many seemingly paid little attention to what was said. After the sermon had ended they all rushed out of church in disorder. There was no time for socializing before or after church. One preacher explained that this is the way they have always done it as far as he can remember – people should not stay to chat after church.⁴

How different was the church service among the outcasts. People arrived in their pick-ups and then took the time to stand in front of the church to chat and exchange news. People were welcoming newcomers with a handshake and warm words. The church building itself, although as plain as the Old Colony one, had big windows allowing a lot of sun and air to enter and giving it a much less somber appearance. Men and women sat next to each other and children were not only allowed to attend but there was a special part of the service reserved for explaining Bible stories to them. People were dressed modestly but not all looking the same: some were still adhering to traditional dresses while other women wore skirts and blouses instead.

Both the singing (in "modern" style) at the beginning and the welcoming were done by members of the congregation. The preacher then spoke about the love of Jesus for his community and the need to accept him as the Lord in order to be saved. There was some laughter and at the end people were allowed to step up to the pulpit to share their feelings, say a prayer or make some comments. After the service there was again time to socialize and to engage in some conversation. The members of the congregation took an active role during the service and the preacher pointed out love and salvation instead of sin and eternal punishment. Things have definitely changed among the

excommunicated people of Shipyard.

Ordnung und Lehrdienst: Rules and Hierarchy

The Altkolonier social organization, even though based on an ideology of brotherhood and equality before God is in fact a rather hierarchical structure in which everyone knows his or her place. This starts in the family where parents stand above children and husbands above wives. Even though very small children normally have a lot of freedom, the older they get the more it is made clear to them that obedience and submissiveness are central to Mennonite ideology. "Wir beugen ihnen den Rücken wenn sie noch jung sind," one mother stated.⁵

The colony is led by the *Lehrdienst*: six *Prediger* (preachers) and the *Ältester* (Elder or Bishop). All of them are elected for life by the *Bruderschaft* (all baptized males, hence the adult members of the Colony). There are no candidates (although when a new bishop is chosen it is normally expected that he comes from the rank of the preachers and has some experience already); everybody writes the name of his favoured candidate on a piece of paper and the person with the most votes "wins."⁶ Being a preacher is seen as an office of great responsibility. One preacher explained: "Most preachers cry when they are elected. It is not that it is so much work, it is rather the responsibility to lead a good life."

These then are the moral and spiritual leaders of the Colony, those who preach the word of God and teach the community. "The *Lehrer* (individual minister) represents the needs and obligations of faith before God and in turn interprets and declares God's will to the congregation" (Redekop, 1969: 39). All the preachers I spoke to had a natural understanding that they are the interpreters of the word of God and the teachers of the community and therefore had something like a God-given right to lead the Colony in all matters. One preacher explained it like this: "Die Bibel sagt uns, dass wir den Lehrern folgen sollen. Der Älteste ist das geistige Haupt der Gemeinde und wir haben alle unseren Platz und müssen ihn unterstützen. Wir machen die Regeln nicht, wir haben alle unseren Platz in der Ordnung. Aber wir sind die Lehrer und haben die Verantwortung den rechten Weg zu weisen."⁷ (To support his point he referred to, for example: Hebrews 13:7: "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation") It is not the case that the *Lehrdienst* stands above the *Ordnung*, but rather that they are part of the system and have to follow the same rules as anybody else.

However, the *Prediger* fulfill many roles: they are not merely seen as those who perform the sermon on Sundays. They are seen as the interpreters of God's Word and Will and therefore as the teachers and

the leaders of the community: they stand between the faithful and his Lord. Their far-reaching power stems not only from these two roles of teacher and leader but also from a third one: being the judges of the community and enforcers of the Ordnung. The Ordnung, as described above, is a set of rules and regulations that penetrates and regulates almost every inch of Mennonite life (Redekop, 1969; Kraybill and Bowman, 2001). It is seen as set in place by the forefathers and therefore has to be followed without questioning it. "Wir haben das so von unseren Eltern gelernt und so wollen wir das auch halten."⁸ They argue that if they would slip over one rule eventually other slips would follow until the whole system would crumble. One person from Shipyard used the following story to illustrate this point: "There was this guy blowing his horn every day at a particular time. One day his watch breaks so he starts calling the operator every day to ask for the correct time. One day the operator asks why he is asking for the time every day and the horn-blower says, 'To blow my horn at the correct time.' The operator replies, 'But I adjust my watch every day after your horn.' You see, first they want pick-ups, then they want phones, then they want to go to town and drink and dance. If you allow one thing the others will follow."

The Ordnung is set in place to regulate the life within the colony and to keep the members of the community away from the world and its dangerous influences. Many of the rules, like the ban on automobiles, exist to make it more difficult for the people to get in touch with worldly influences; others, like the rules about dressing, make the members of the group easily distinguishable from their neighbors and therefore emphasize the distinctiveness of the group. The main argument against modern technology was not that things like pick-ups were sinful in themselves but that they would have a bad influence on especially the young people, alienating them from traditional values and eventually leading them away from the colony altogether.

The preachers are those who make sure that the members of the colony keep in line and abide by the Ordnung. Even though they argue that they do not make up the rules and that important decisions, as for example the excommunication of disobedient members, are made by the whole Bruderschaft, one can recognize the great influence the preachers have over the colony. They preach their views from the pulpit and are the ones that excommunicate dissenters and put them under the ban, meaning that this person has to be shunned by the whole community, even by close family members. What is punished then is not so often the behavior itself but the *Ungehorsamer* (the disobedient one).

Those who were excommunicated due to Bible Study were not put under the ban simply because they read the Bible together but

because they were disobedient to the will of the preachers, who frequently had urged them to stop. By continuing with their practice they challenged the authority of the preacher and therefore had to be punished. What is important among the Altkolonier is that on the surface the Ordnung is to be followed and the authority of the preachers to go unchallenged. Many people secretly have mobile phones, hire drivers to bring them to town and go to the neighboring villages to drink and smoke. Actually, this disobedience is often known to the preachers, who may eventually criticize this kind of behavior but would not excommunicate people for it as long as they publicly adhere to the principles. What is important is obvious conformity rather than inner conviction.

The system is kept up due to the ignorance and fear of the community members. The Prediger are not only feared for their ability to excommunicate people, but because they are seen as the interpreters of God's will their power in the eyes of the Altkolonier goes much further: "Sie halten die Leute mit der Peitsche. Sie sagen, wenn man ausgeschlossen wird, wird einem auch das Tor zum Himmel verschlossen. Das ist das Schlimmste was man einem Christen sagen kann, dass er in die Hölle kommt."⁹

Another factor playing a role in the absolute power of the preachers is the lack of education and the high rate of illiteracy. Their education at school leaves the Mennonites with only marginal reading and writing skills and totally ignorant of subjects like geography, biology or history. Preachers are generally no better educated than laymen at the point where they are elected or afterwards, but due to their job as teachers of the word of God they do acquire a better knowledge of the Bible. As many in the Colony are not able to read and understand the Bible properly they have to rely on what the preachers tell them on Sunday in church.

This combination of fear and ignorance leads to a theocratic system in which the Prediger and the Ältester have almost absolute power, so that most Old Colony people have to respect them for almost everything they have to say. One of the excommunicated people expressed it in the following way: "Here the Elder has too much power. He is like a dictator. It becomes like a dictatorship, people are oppressed. Religion can become like a dictatorship." The great power of the preachers derives from being the bearer of God's word, teaching and translating it to the congregation and thereby setting up the rules for appropriate and correct behavior combined with being the main judicial power in the colony.

Even though it was generally argued that the Ordnung was not the basis of their religion but that the belief in God was central to their faith, many people took the rules and regulations almost as seriously as the Ten Commandments. Having been taught the necessity to

conform and abide from a very young age onwards many saw this as central to their being and as the only way to get to heaven. Some, however, started to doubt the plausibility of the system.

I Saw The Light

The system of obedience to the authority of the preachers and conformity to the rules was challenged by a group of people who started to study the Bible together. Many said that they felt an emptiness inside them; they could not really live their belief among the Altkolonier anymore and therefore searched for new answers to all their burning questions. By studying Scripture they realized that many of the rules were man-made and that in order to be good Christians and to be saved they had to rely on the Bible alone and accept Christ as the only authority in their lives. The preachers reacted by putting them under the ban, the only form of punishment known to them, hoping they would either repent and return or find living conditions so unbearable that they would move away. This did not happen however. The dissenters stayed, built their own church and school and by driving in cars and using modern technologies openly challenged the authority of the preachers, who failed to bring the situation under control.

The preachers accused them of just wanting to have an easier life: “Der Weg war ihnen zu schmal, sie wollten Pick-Ups. Sie haben den Bund gebrochen und Gott wird sie dafür richten.”¹⁰ “Sie wollten keine Zäune mehr.”¹¹ The preachers and many of the other devoted Altkolonier felt betrayed by the actions of the “outcasts,” seeing them as having broken the union they had promised to keep with the community through baptism. They saw them as seeking the easy way out.

Most of the outcasts agreed that in their eyes the Altkolonier have too many rules. They argued, however, that a more comfortable life style and fewer regulations were not the reason why they left. They left because they could not live their true belief in the old system anymore.

Adam remembers the time before he and the others got excommunicated: he always had problems with the Altkolonier; their beliefs did not go deep enough for him. He wanted to learn more about Jesus and to study the Bible more extensively. There was nobody to talk to about these things; he felt really alone, nobody was there. He wanted to have fellowship but most of the others in the colony were not even true believers; they went to church on Sunday but did not really know anything about Christ. But he needed fellowship, so he went to the preachers to talk about his problem and about Jesus but they were not interested. They told him it is not necessary for the “low” people to know about these things; it is enough for them to

come to church and listen. But he wanted more.

Then he found somebody. He always tried to get a particular spot in church – in the back, close to the window, where it was cooler and one had something to lean against. Some eight years ago he had found somebody sitting in exactly that spot. He had thought there was still enough room for him to sit there too, so he stepped over there but the man on the bench left to make room for him. Adam had felt really bad about that. This other person was John, with whom he was already acquainted. They started talking and discovered they were both interested in the same things: they both liked to talk about Jesus and to study the Bible. So from then on, whenever they met, they talked about the Bible.

John was already in contact with brother Leo and they started Bible Study meetings.¹² Howard soon joined them, as did Leo's and Adam's brothers. Then more and more people came. Sometimes it was so full that they could not fit all the people into the house anymore, there were so many interested in learning more about the Bible. Then the preachers started criticizing them and many people got afraid and left. Even the core of the group promised twice that they would stop studying the Bible together but whenever they met they could not help talking about Jesus, so they came together again; they just could not stop it. The third time the preachers told them to stop they refused and then one after the other was excommunicated.

Most of them experienced their excommunication as a shock at first, but they all emphasized that they now have the feeling that they are finally free, that they have seen the light while others are still left in the darkness of ignorance and fear. They stressed that it is not outside obedience to man-made rules that count, but that everybody is responsible for his or her actions and that inner conviction is more important than outside conformity.

So when these people were excommunicated their ties to the community of those who follow the same rules and rituals were cut off and it was no longer demanded from the outcasts that they follow the rules. All of them then turned to a more individualistic interpretation of the necessity to lead a proper, authentic Christian life not to please other humans but to please God; that is, inner conviction and belief are important, not external rules and regulations. This feeling of pleasing God and not humans gave a lot of them the feeling of being above those who still believed they could be saved if they put steel wheels on their tractors and have an exact number of pleats in their skirts, thereby legitimizing their position and giving them comfort in a distressing situation.

From Collective Body to Individual Mind

By drawing on the theoretical ideas outlined in the Introduction

one might interpret the processes taking place in Shipyard as moving from obedience and conformity to rules and authorities to individual responsibility and conviction: in other words, from a collective body to individual minds.

Even though the preachers are elected by the Bruderschaft, the Old Colony form of leadership is a rather autocratic system in which the Prediger have very far-reaching powers over their subjects. When the outcasts were referring to the Altkolonier as being a dictatorship they were not talking about the process of a preacher being elected democratically but about the power they have over the community. Many were afraid of the preachers. One cannot say that they are above the law; they have to abide by the same rules as the laymen and have to try even harder to set a good example, but still it is they who enforce many of these rules and uphold them by preaching from the pulpit. So even though the Altkolonier leaders may be seen as a rational form of leadership consisting of chosen leaders and chosen helpers in administration, the grip they have over the community in Shipyard points towards very traditional ideas about leadership and legitimacy.

Although according to Weber the Altkolonier were adhering to the traditional type of leadership, the outcasts followed more rational or even charismatic leaders. The difference in preaching and involvement of laymen in church shows that the role of the preacher has changed. He merely guides the members of the congregation, who have their own fair share of influence. The preacher is respected but not feared; it is his person rather than his position that makes him accepted as a leader and he has to accept the wishes of his congregation in order to keep their trust.

This can also be seen in the forms of persecution and punishment that are followed. Traditional ways of punishment are aimed at the body of the dissenter and even though Altkolonier refrain from physical punishment their way of prosecuting people is aimed at the body of the villain. They try symbolically to annihilate the body of the deviant completely by denying him or her further existence as a member of the community. This form of persecution is highly visible and strongly aimed at punishment and not at betterment of the wrongdoer. In more modern societies this idea is replaced with the idea of a possible betterment of the offender. This form of persecution is aimed at the mind and attitudes of those who do not abide by the norms rather than at physical punishment; it tries to discipline subjects and to teach them self-control. This change can be identified in Shipyard as well.

While among the Altkolonier traditional forms of punishment prevail, the excommunicated people speak instead about betterment and leading people in the right direction (Focault, 1979). Among the

outcasts the idea of excommunication still existed, but they were strictly opposed to the harsh enforcement of the ban and stressed the importance of trying to convince the black sheep to better themselves and to offer help to find the right path again.

They saw good Christian behavior as the individual responsibility of the believer and stressed that those who have accepted the Lord do not even want to engage in sinful behavior anymore. They argue that it is not rules about dress and pick-ups that should keep people in line but inner conviction and the personal need to live a good Christian life. One statement was particularly telling about the ideas most of the outcasts have about this: "When I was still with the Old Colony I broke the rules from time to time when nobody was looking. But now I do not want to sin anymore, because God sees everything. I said 'damn it' lately and I immediately apologized to Jesus."

The emphasis on the importance of rules, as well as on belief, has to do with notions about authenticity (Linnekin, 1992). Both groups, the Altkolonier and the outcasts, argue that the true, authentic way is according to their own ideas. While the Altkolonier stress the importance of following the *Ordnung* and keeping things the way they are in order to be saved, the excommunicated state that only through belief will one find heaven's gate. Both see themselves as defending the true, authentic Mennonite and all-Christian ideology that will bring salvation, and accuse the other group of having left the true path. The Altkolonier argue that the outcasts might say that they left because of the Bible Study, but they really only wanted to have more freedom and the possibility to drive pick-ups. They deny the excommunicated people authenticity of conviction by stating that they only appear to adhere to certain ideas while in reality they seek something completely different. The outcasts, on the other hand, doubt the authenticity of Old Colony behavior and state that they only seem to adhere to the *Ordnung* while secretly doing something completely different.

As pointed out before, sometimes it seems that the Altkolonier only publicly adhere to the rules while not really believing in them themselves. This might be true in some cases where fear of punishment is the main reason to keep in line, at least on the outside. However, for most of the Altkolonier of Shipyard the rules are adhered to out of a deep inner conviction that they are good and correct. They have internalized the *Ordnung* to the extent that it becomes almost incomprehensible to them that things could be different: they have literally embodied the Altkolonier system, as Bourdieu would call it. They do not shun their former friends and family members who have been put under the ban out of pure viciousness or ill will, but rather because of a deep inner conviction that they are doing the right and proper thing.

In the Old Colony one of the strongest ideologies is the submission of the individual to the community. Individuals are seen as one part of a body, helping to keep it going and functioning. One has to submit to the rhythm of the body otherwise one would disturb the whole. The Altkolonier emphasis on appearance and external submission are good examples of that. In order to be a real part of the community they all have to look the same – dress, haircut, shoes; individual taste has to be sublimated to the ideas of the community about proper attire. The bodies of the community have to work hard to keep the Colony thriving. Sitting down and thinking about different ways of doing things are not appreciated. Creativity, intellect and ambition are looked at with suspicion. Nobody should stick out his or her head.

It is the body of the member that becomes important (Focault 1979). The female body must produce more and more members of the community. Church attendance is about physical presence not active participation. Individual expressions like showing emotions or affection are discouraged. The individual becomes submerged in the body of the community and only as long as all the individual elements work together can the Colony flourish. This is what the preachers try to achieve with their sermons – keeping the limbs of the body in line so the whole can survive. If conditions deteriorate and threaten the existence of the Colony, the more traditional members of the community generally move as a whole – as one body. Old Colony preachers are not so much concerned with the minds of their members as with their bodies, which have to appear obedient, at least in public.

Things are different among the excommunicated people in Shipyard. Here the individual mind becomes the center of attention. Good educations for the children and studying and discussing the Bible are of central importance to the outcasts. What is important is not external conformity but internal conviction. God can look inside and know what we are thinking, therefore we have to keep our minds pure and not only when somebody is looking. Active participation in the community and especially in church are appreciated; people should share their thoughts and ideas with the community after the sermon. Appearance becomes less important; even though most still dress in a rather traditional way, their rhetoric is about the freedom of the individual to dress the way he or she wants: it is each person's own responsibility. The community does not function as one body with one head that tells the other limbs what to do, but rather as a conglomerate of individual minds trying to find the best solutions for the community to survive. The individual is also not tied to the collective body by birth anymore but can choose the group that most fits his or her ideas.

However, the outcasts have not completely freed themselves from old, inscribed ideas yet. When asked about their use of pick-ups most were very fast to explain that they did not buy them because they were seeking more comfort but that they had to buy them because the situation in Shipyard forced them to do so (many had to look for work outside the colony and often the outcasts were denied the use of the local bus). They still adhere to the rules to the extent that they have to defend themselves when making use of modern technology. As Bourdieu has stated, we are all part of “yesterday’s man” (1989) and the outcasts of Shipyard will not be able to get rid of that situation soon. The still traditional attire of many of the women is as much proof of that as their need to defend the use of modern technology. They are struggling to overcome old, inscribed ideas which made sense in the Old Colony world but often do not fit the new circumstances. By refusing to abide by the preachers and the Ordnung anymore and by putting greater emphasis on belief and inner conviction, they have started to cut the ties with their past, but this will be a slow process. Nobody can say yet how far the changes in Shipyard might go.

Driedger (2000) described similar processes that took place in the Blumenfeld Colony in Canada at the beginning of the last century. These led to the migration of those Old Colony Mennonites to Mexico and eventually to Belize. It seems that even though the preachers try hard to maintain the traditional way of life, forces of modernity and individualization continue to work even in such a remote place as Shipyard.

Conclusion

In our introduction we asked the question: What changes took place in the regulative system of the outcasts compared to the Ordnung of the Altkolonier and what does that tell us about changes in attitudes and individual belief? By comparing the two groups now living side by side in Shipyard – the Altkolonier majority and a minority that broke away because the old concepts did not answer their new questions about belief and salvation anymore – we have tried to show how changes in the regulative system were also reflected in the change of attitudes among the outcasts. The comparison of the two church services shows how among the Altkolonier obedience and conformity are central to their idea of a good Christian life that will eventually lead to salvation. The preacher is seen as the teacher of the community who brings the Word of God to his congregation. In a way he is also seen as both the secular and spiritual leader, one who directs the laymen in most aspects of their lives by enforcing the rules and regulations of the Ordnung. He also has the right of punishment, which in the case of the Altkolonier is mainly directed at the body of the dissenter, which is symbolically cut out of the

community through excommunication and shunning.

Among the outcasts, however, things have changed. Here the preacher is seen as guiding his congregation, which is allowed to participate in many aspects of religious and worldly life. People actively take part in church and share their ideas and visions with the congregation at the end of the service. People are not expected to all look, act and think the same – the different dresses of the women in church reflect this liberality as much as the use of modern technology. Personal conviction and belief in Jesus come to the forefront instead of conformity and obedience to authority and rules. One is not part of one collective body in which preachers and the Ordnung regulate almost every aspect of spiritual and secular life anymore; rather the emphasis is on the mind of the individual believer. We do not want to state that the Altkolonier lack all personal conviction or belief or that the outcasts suddenly became completely disentangled from old ideas and values. Both are influenced by embodied ideas about leadership, rules, values, belief, right and wrong. The Altkolonier are convinced that they are doing the right thing while the outcasts are engaging in a slow process in which they try to overcome old ideas in order to find new and more satisfying answers.

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Notes

- 1 The German term *Altkolonier* is used by the Mennonites themselves and therefore will be used alternately with the term *Old Colony* in this article.
- 2 The everyday trust in the holiness of everlasting traditions and the legitimacy of those who are seen as the authority through these traditions.
- 3 "Jesus does not listen to the sinful people and the Holy Spirit does not live in a sinful body."
- 4 Some of the other Mennonite groups had their own ideas about this custom; they said that the preachers did not allow socializing after church in order to prevent people from talking about or analyzing the sermon too much.
- 5 "We bend their back when they are still young."
- 6 If there are serious concerns about the morality of the chosen man, the Bishop can refuse his appointment.
- 7 "The Bible teaches us that we should follow leaders. The *Ältester* is the spiritual leader of the community and we all have our place and have to collaborate. We do not just make rules, we all have our place in the *Ordnung*. But we are the teachers, we have the responsibility to show the right path."
- 8 "We learned it like this from our parents and want to keep it that way."
- 9 "They keep the people with a whip. They tell you when you get excommunicated then also the door to heaven is shut for you. This is the worst you can tell to a Christian, that he will go to Hell."
- 10 "The path was too narrow for them, they wanted to have pick-ups. They broke the union and God will punish them for that."
- 11 They did not want to have fences anymore.
- 12 Real names have been changed by the authors.