

# Where “God sleeps at night”: Integration, Differentiation and Fragmentation in a Mennonite Colony

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## **Introduction**

In 2008 the Belizean Mennonite communities celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Together they looked back, reflecting on where they had come from, how they started making a home in the jungle and how a thriving farming community had developed. And they asked how, while setting themselves apart from the ‘worldly’, they had successfully established themselves as a significant part of the Belizean society.

This paper is about the community of Shipyard Colony in northern Belize, home to over 3000 Mennonites, the majority Old Colony Church members, a minority Kleine Gemeinde and Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church (EMMC) members. We will look at Shipyard from three cultural perspectives: that of integration, differentiation and fragmentation (Martin, 1992, 2002) to explain how changes in the last 50 years affected community life. Our findings are based on nine

months of ethnographic research, from October 2008 to June 2009. By telling the story of three different generations – pioneers, middle age adults and youth – we illustrate that increasing modernity at Shipyard has fragmented the community.

This paper is structured as follows: first we will focus on the history of Shipyard and ask several questions. To what degree were they able to withstand absorption and assimilation into the evolving, wider rural society? How do they attribute religious meaning to these changes and associated conflict, especially with regard to technological adaptation? We will answer these questions by telling stories from three generations. We will link this methodology to Martin's (1992, 2002) three perspectives on culture and conclude with a discussion and conclusion.

### **Shipyard: A History**

The story of Shipyard is one of survival and cultural regeneration for a religiously informed, anti-modern society within a globalizing and modernizing rural world. The Old Colony Mennonites have been battling modernity since their founding in the late nineteenth century. When a large group of Old Colonists came to Belize in 1958, this struggle to keep modernity out of their daily lives continued (Koop, 1991; Plasil & Roessingh, 2009). On the one hand, due to the history of the Old Colony and their anti-modern lifestyle, this group of Mennonites established communities apart from the influence of the Western world, yet on the other hand they worked hard at being a (significant) part of it.

The Mennonite colonies in Belize have a background predominately found in the experience they had in Mexico and further back in their Canadian settlements. By the end of World War I, not even fifty years after they had left Russia, conservative Mennonites were in an uproar in Canada over the Manitoba Ministry of Education's decision to anglicize the schools (Loewen, 1990; Redekop, 1969). As this meant that they would have to teach their children according to the Canadian system, the Mennonites started to think about moving to a new area and in 1922 the Old Colony Mennonites, as well as some Sommerfelder Mennonites, left for Mexico. After World War II, in 1948, groups of Kleine Gemeinde and Old Colony Mennonites also left for Mexico (Quiring, 2003).

From the very start it was difficult making a living in Mexico. Although the Mexican government had generally been very good to the Mennonites, the semi-arid climate and frequent droughts resulted in one bad harvest after another. By 1958 the need for more farmland also became a big issue as too many families in Chihuahua and Durango had

become landless. In the village of Hochfeld in 1958, for example, 23 of 58 couples, 40 percent of the total *Darp*, had no land (Redekop, 1969).

The need for more land triggered the thought of migration. However, there were also other reasons for leaving. The relationship between the Mennonites and the native Mexicans was strained. Stealing and other violent acts occurred with increasing frequency. Some people wanted to leave because other family members wanted to. Interestingly those born in Belize sometimes claim that their parents simply “left the devil behind” and fled modernization. And then, like the other countries that had provided the Mennonites a home over the centuries, Mexico changed the privileges it had once extended to the Mennonites and began planning to include the Mennonites into a national social security system, the *Seguro Social*. As a consequence of these reasons, the first group of men went to see Belize in 1955, at that time still a colony of Britain and called British Honduras (Plasil & Roessingh, 2009; Sawatzky, 1971).

This visit stemmed from a chance meeting in El Paso, Texas, in the spring of 1955 between Peter H. Wiebe, an Old Colony Mennonite from Manitoba Colony and the U.S. Vice-Consul Peter S. Madison. Madison proved to be well informed on the Mennonites largely because of the export of used farm machinery to their Mexican colonies from the U.S. He was also aware of their unwillingness to participate in the new social security program of the Mexican Government and their need for more land. “Why not then, move to British Honduras?”, he suggested (Sawatzky, 1971, p. 332). Madison knew the nature of the Mennonites’ *Privilegium* and felt confident that the government of British Honduras would extend the immunities and guarantees the Mennonites would require if they were to consider migration. He also knew British Honduras first hand and knew that its government was willing to attract agricultural colonists.

Wiebe began inquiring at the Office of Information and Communication in British Honduras. This led the British Honduras authorities to issue an invitation for a delegation of Mennonites to visit the country. In November 1955 the first delegation consisting of Old Colony and Sommerfelder Mennonites, including Wiebe, visited British Honduras. In January 1956 a joint delegation, now consisting of Old Colony, Sommerfelder and Kleine Gemeinde, went south to pursue negotiations (Koop, 1991; Sawatzky, 1971).

On 18 December 1957 the government of British Honduras extended a uniformly worded *Privilegium* that was satisfactory to the Mennonites in all respects. When it became apparent that the Mennonites would move to British Honduras several offers of land, mostly properties used for logging, were made to them.

## The Journey to a New Home

The British Honduran colonies have never been uniform in nature. The people who moved from Mexico to British Honduras did not all leave from the same area in Mexico, as some came from Chihuahua in 1958 and others from Durango in 1959. There were also quite a few who came straight to British Honduras from Canada, although somewhat later in 1960, and from each of the four western Canadian provinces, British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. When asked from where their parents came, almost all Belizean Mennonites say Canada or Mexico; sometimes, when a person who is older than 50 is asked this question, the answer is that the grandparents came from Russia.

Then, too, the Mennonites did not all settle in one community, but each group founded their own distinctive colony, namely, Blue Creek, Spanish Lookout and Shipyard. Since the origin of the colonies, Shipyard has been one of the largest settlements within the country, counting 2059 residents in 1967. Since then, 2 camps out of 23, camp 18 and 22, were abandoned and quite a number of people moved away to Indian Creek and Little Belize in Belize, and to Bolivia. Recently, however, people have started to move back into the abandoned camps of Shipyard so that the count in 2008 stood at 3033.

Although the Mennonite settlements in Belize have a shared history and are regarded as a uniform group by the 'outsiders', they do not hold a homogeneous identity and belief system. However, all Mennonites in Belize are members of a community and share a heterosexual, patriarchal and capitalistic orientation. The consequences of religious change and differentiation within the community, the different ways in which they do business with the outside world and the ways in which they keep to their strict social boundaries is reflected in the context in which each community is embedded (Roessingh & Plasil, 2009, p. 61). If the term *community* is seen as referring to a group of people who share a range of values, a way of life, identify with the group and its participants, and recognize each other as members of that group (Mason, 2000), then the Belizean Mennonites do have something in common with each other that distinguishes them from the members of other groups (Cohen, 1985).

The Mennonite colonies in Belize can be seen as communities within a community since conflicting opinions about the use of modern technology, degree of education, fashion, the interpretation of the Bible, and the acceptance of social changes due to increasing modernity exist. This leads to processes of religious and social differentiation between and within Mennonite communities (Roessingh & Plasil, 2009). Interaction with other Mennonite communities and non-Mennonites, and

different attitudes towards modernity, affect the social and religious systems from within.

### **Shipyard: A Story told by Generations**

Due to the maintenance of strict social boundaries the church leaders of Shipyard managed to keep the large part of the exclusive rural colony within the Old Colony Mennonite fold. The Old Colony people still use horse drawn transportation and refrain from modern machines to work the land. The average family deals with its own financial challenges, thus generating a sufficient income. In our ethnographic field study in Shipyard, we noticed that stories told differed based on the age of the respondents. We could divide them roughly into three categories: the 'youth' up to age 20, the 'mid-age', being 40-50 years of age, and the 'pioneers', those who lived through the first years in the colony. However, most stories related to ways in which modernity slowly entered the community, how small changes lead to big dilemmas and how conflict was evaded. To elaborate on how the Old Colony of Shipyard carry out their anti-modern lifestyle and the challenges they face in achieving this, we focus on the development of Shipyard in the last 50 years.

### **The Pioneers**

The stories told by the pioneer generation at Shipyard illustrate the influence of the church *Ordnung* and social pressure within the community as instruments to deal with the temptation of modernity. They tell of how, in the beginning, all settlers were poor and depended on each other. There was a strong sense of community. A common refrain stated the following: "At the start people worked together like ants. They carried the flour on their back all the way from the river and they were all happy and smoking. Until they started making money, that's when the revolution began." (Interview, 5 June 2009)

The pioneer Old Colonists form strong kinship networks, large and stable family units. The negative views on individualism and upward mobility (outside religion and belief) do not stimulate individual entrepreneurship and a striving for success in business. The taboos on pride repress most forms of advertising and promotion of one's products and their deep religious commitment cuts down on time engaged in business. Being a devoted Christian and obeying the rules of the *Ordnung* gives them more individual satisfaction and community recognition than being a successful businessman. The influence of the deep religious

belief and restrictive social order is far reaching. Almost every decision, individual or communal, is in one way or another affected by Christian belief or the system of the *Ordnung*. One pioneer explained his life goals:

I grew up with the way we live here, I am used to it and I like it. I don't want worldliness, without it's easier to control. Only a few people will be saved and we follow His way, the way of Christ. Nobody is perfect, if we can make it through we will go to heaven. 'Wir sollen das Licht sein für die Welt.' Staying away from alcohol and drugs. It would be hard to live in town, living in a community makes it easier to control yourself. (Interview, 21 March 2009)

While agricultural techniques developed, members of the Old Colony looked for ways to benefit from innovations that were not in disagreement with their rules. Nowadays their farm and road equipment is more modern than what it used to be, although still stripped of the rubber tires. Increasing car and truck traffic required them to adapt as well. When walking on the side of the road in the dark, for example, people now carry flashlights to make themselves visible. Horses and buggies being passed by fast trucks leaving the horse and its passengers covered in a white layer of *caliche* dust also required alterations. One old timer explained that 'Reflectors on buggies were put on there once the amount of vehicles driving through the village increased. Before they were not necessary.' (Interview, 16 June 2009)

There has been a continual struggle to draw the appropriate lines of conduct in order to ensure the survival of the group. The individual is expected to commit him- or herself totally to the rules and therefore to the community. Many of these rules are internalized from early childhood. Right from the cradle Mennonite children learn that obedience to authorities and rules is one of the central values in life and that one has to sacrifice the self for the sake of the group. One interviewee told us about the satisfaction obtained by obeying the *Ordnung*:

Our belief system is important to me. We are following the rules of our ancestors, traditions. By obeying the rules I keep having a good relationship with my neighbours, within the colony. When we lived in Texas for two years, we had a pick-up and lived a more modern life. We knew we couldn't have that here but I don't mind. I do it so I can live in peace with the people around me. (Interview, 6 March 2009)

Religion is always a collective enterprise and is always more attractive when experienced in a group. The stricter the group, the higher overall

commitment as the problem of free riders is diminished (Iannacone, 1994). Strict churches often demand a sort of stigmatizing behavior from their members. The visible difference and ideology of separateness keep the Mennonites from going astray and from participating in the surrounding society.

### **The Middle Age Adults, 40-50**

An important overall factor that has been influencing the increasing modernity the Mennonites are facing is the fact that the economic situation in Belize in general has improved during the last 50 years. This directly affected the economic situation of the Mennonites. One of the main consequences of modernity is that of increased wealth differentiation. One interviewee outlined this development:

How have things changed in these years? The whole country changed and that had its effect on the community. Belize is a developing country and so is the community, that always brings good and bad. In religious aspect; it was one, now it's divided, relationships get weaker. In those early days people were more equal to each other than they are now. It was more loving each other than yourself; treat your neighbor as your own. Not so much a rich/poor divide. I mean, now there are millionaires, while we didn't use to have them.' (Interview, 20 February 2009)

Behind these social developments are technological innovations. Computers, for example, have sneaked their way into Old Colony life and in the last five years there has been a rapid increase in the use of cell phones. Both computers and cell phones are shaking things up, stirring especially the minds of the younger generation, as will be explained later. Both allow for the commercialization of agriculture. One interviewee told us that: 'Life in Shipyard changed a lot since the first time I came here. The Old Colony school for example has not changed a lot, the system is still the same. But farming changed a lot, we have better equipment, fertilizer, that all improved a lot. And there wasn't much cattle, now there is over 15,000 heads.' (Interview, 20 February 2009) Another spoke of the difficulty of isolation in this context:

In the years I have lived here some things changed drastically. We didn't have killing plants in the early days. Now we have them for chickens and beef; they started around 1996. And

the roads used to be very narrow. Now more vehicles pass by in one hour than in 1968 in a month. That's mostly strangers here to do business; the community still doesn't own that many vehicles. The church hasn't changed much. Some leaders have changed and some [competing churches have] got more members.' (Interview, 14 March 2009)

When people started their businesses, more and more people (non-Mennonites) from surrounding villages came to the community to buy their services. The temptations of wealth were appealing. However, wealth is not seen as a blessing when you are trying to shun modernity. One Shipyard resident put it in the following way:

I live my life set off from the rest of the world to keep our heritage and for religious succeeding. Sometimes I'm not satisfied with it, but I wouldn't want all those modern things. Think what will happen if I give all those things to my children, more risks to do bad things like drugs and alcohol. The richer you are, the greater chance to fall out of Church, wealth brings a high risk. (Interview, 20 February 2009)

Not everyone has agreed. In the late 1990s the Old Colony church excommunicated about ten families. This resulted in segmentation in the community because these families decided to stay in the colony, whereas before, excommunicated people moved out of the community. The excommunicated families did not have a church to go to right away. One by one, they found a church to attend but those were new, more progressive churches. Some families became a member of the Kleine Gemeinde church in Blue Creek, others started a local church. When the EMMC church from Blue Creek sent a pastor couple to move into Shipyard to minister to the remaining group of excommunicated people, the colony, for the first time since 1958, was home to two churches. Now Old Colony Mennonites and former Old Colony Mennonites live in the same community. Each day Old Colony members and members from the other churches (sometimes within one family) meet each other on the roads and in the shops within the Shipyard settlement. They do not do business with each other and they refrain from communicating with each other as much as possible. One Old Colonist shared his rather frank viewpoint on the issue: "With people that are excommunicated we make no business deals. You can offer him help but only to a certain extent. We greet them and only shun him if he tries to convert more people; [if that happens] then we are 100% against him; we don't sell him anything and we don't help." (Interview, 21 March 2009)

Those who are not a part of the Old Colony anymore have stopped wearing the uniform, traditional dress. Now men wear jeans and a t-shirt or a short sleeved dress-shirt instead of the black overall, women wear dresses or skirts in light colors, and the girls of the younger generation (EMMC) even wear jeans and shorts! Social fragmentation has caused a change in culture, identity and, above all, religion. The confrontation with 'others' causes dilemmas, especially for the youth. Young people who have not been baptized yet are subjected to more rules than their parents were. This is a consequence of the introduction of mobile phones and computers which are very seductive for the youth and are of course off limits. This is also recognized by some of the older people in the community. One observed that "community life is good for the youth. But they should be able to make their own choice when it comes to religion. Now religion is more like politics and that is not the way it is supposed to be." (Interview, 19 February 2009)

The quote below is a striking example of what is happening in the colony when nobody is watching. It was told to us by a man who was excommunicated more than 20 years ago and yet, due to his profession, still has an important role in the community. Old Colony members pay him visits when they need help applying for visas to travel or to make other arrangements for which they need a computer. He noted rather simply that "Old Colony members are expected to shun me, but they will still visit me during the evenings, when it's dark. 'Cause here in Shipyard, God sleeps at night." (Interview, 20 February 2009) A similar story was told by the EMMC pastor in the community. He was often visited by Old Colony youth who dropped by in the evenings to upload their MP3 players with Christian music.

### **Youth and Young Adults**

The youth is known as most prone to seductions. Post-pubescent boys cause trouble especially often. Because they have not yet been baptised, and therefore are not official members of the Old Colony church, they officially do not cross any lines. One youth explained it the following way: "There is a stage in young people's lives where they are very rebellious. They wanna hear the loud guitar and rock music and reggae. Just to bug people. They have ghetto blasters on their buggies and drive through the Darp and have it blaring loud. It's kind of peer pressure too. The more you do it the more you are respected and you are somebody." (Interview, 5 June 2009)

For many of the Old Colony youth in Shipyard, the presence of the EMMC church is appealing. One resident explained that "Young people are easily convinced of things. That's why EMMC goes after our young

people. Young people experienced little and read little.” (Interview, 5 June 2009) The youth are more open to new ways of thinking and believing, and no less important, they are open to new ways of running their business. A 19 year old man told us about the dilemma he is facing concerning his dad’s business. He works for his dad and is ready to take over the shop but sees modern technology, such as the computer and cell phone, as a way to increase business and productivity. As he put it, the choices he still has to make are important:

I go to both the Old Colony and the EMMC church and I am not baptized yet. I want to but I don’t know yet in which church. Yeah it’s hard sometimes; people talk because they see me going to the EMMC church, while my parents are Old Colony. It produces problems with the pastor of the Old Colony church. He wants me to go to his church and comes and talks to my dad about it. But there is nothing he can do because I am not baptized yet, so according to the *Ordnung* I am not doing anything wrong. The fact that people talk about me does not bother me. But indirectly it affects the business. People don’t come and talk to my face, but well, this is real life. It’s hard though, because we can’t modernize our business. Working according to the Old Colony rules holds down the business. But if I modernize it, Old Colony customers will stop coming to my business, we will lose customers immediately although we would have new ones coming from the outside. While all this keeps me from changing I don’t think the business will survive if we keep going the way we are now. There is not a solution right now, maybe down the road; it’s a matter of time.’ (Interview, 19 February 2009)

Throughout Mennonite history an ideology of suffering and a hard life has prevailed. Modern life corrupts the soul and the narrower and more difficult the path to eternity, the easier heaven’s door will open for the believer (Lentjes, Roessingh & Plasil, 2009). The ideology of choosing this narrow path to heaven is of course very appealing for every Christian to whom reaching heaven’s door is the ultimate goal in life. However, today it takes the leaders of the *Ordnung* more and more effort to keep the modern world out of their Old Colony community. This “war against progress” (Kraybill & Olshan, 1994) is an ongoing struggle against the encroachment of modernity into community life. One youth told us: “My life changed dramatically from that of my grandparents. [It’s] not so much [in] appearance and the way things look, but when it comes to modernization, yes. But people did what they could at that time, now we have more opportunities.” (Interview,

10 June 2009) But change was not only a general alteration: “Our life is different now from that of our grandparents. Our houses are better. We have a propane stove and an electric laundry machine. My grandma had a woodstove and an old laundry machine. They did all the farm work with horses, there was no tractor. The dress codes are still the same but it could be that the colors used to be lighter than now. That will change once in a while.” (Interview, 6 March 2009)

Increasing individuality has replaced a sense of community and led to a culture of *Plietsch* (secret activity). What is not seen by others does not really occur. One of the modern accoutrements the Old Colony church has recently voted against is cell phones. Cell phones are strictly forbidden among all Old Colony members even though they have been seen being used and then quickly being put away when someone approached. One member explained that “some people show two faces. In church they vote against allowing something new to happen in the community. In reality they walk around with cell phones while they just voted against it.” (Interview, 5 June 2009) Life could become quite complicated: “We do use telephones but behind doors. It’s difficult, it has to be done secretly. I am constantly aware of the people around me, to whom I can show my cell phone and to whom not. To which person I can say what.” (Interview, 19 February 2009)

All in all, the changes in the last 50 years seem to have been the result of an ongoing process where small changes slowly became embedded in community life. Although the church system did not change fundamentally, when it comes to the way the church is being led, and the old interpretation of the Bible is still passed on by the leaders, below the surface of official community life, there is a movement that slowly supports a reconsideration of old ways. One young colonist told us that he would “love to see that the church changes [its view on] what the Bible says; there is much more than what the preachers say. More love and acceptance instead of people-favoured rules. In Shipyard man-favoured rules are more important than what the Bible says. That is what I would like to change.” (Interview, 6 March 2009) Another noted: “I think the community has changed a lot, but things change so slow that you don’t even feel it” (Interview, 21 March 2009) A third informant recalled former days: “We had more fun with our horses and buggies in those early days. We had no TV, no computer, no telephone. Now this is all available and everybody wants it. It is much harder to keep these modern things out.” (Interview, 10 June 2009)

## **From Integration to Religious and Entrepreneurial Fragmentation**

An interesting process in Shipyard Colony is the way in which two cornerstones of the Old Colony community have changed due to external and internal influences (Roessingh & Plasil, 2006). Looking at the rise of the EMMC church in Shipyard, one can see that the cornerstone of traditional religious beliefs is challenged and that the religious environment is changing. Differences in religious views cause tension between friends, within families, and in the colony (Plasil & Roessingh, 2006). Although these tensions play a significant role in internal relations and in the colony, it seems that even the Old Colony Mennonites in Shipyard have accepted the existence of another congregation, the EMMC, in the colony. Looking at the historical development of the Mennonites, their religious history also reflects the possibility of breaking away from a congregation. This type of schism is embedded in the tradition of the church and has always been a reflexive aspect of Mennonite history.

The other cornerstone consists of agriculture and entrepreneurial activities, both of which have evolved from a basic way of farming, into a more complex economy. On the one hand the consequences of this change are reflected in the use of more advanced machinery with innovative technology, with the possibility of working a variety of lands, some parts marshland, others more productive and cultivated. On the other hand this transformation has had a major impact on the business culture of Belize. The Shipyard Mennonite entrepreneurs have created an internal market for goods like furniture, dairy products and poultry. Furthermore, the Shipyard Mennonite businesses import and supply the country with different types of merchandise.

Traditionally, and until recently, the Old Colony Mennonites of Shipyard could be characterized by their religious consensus and collective agribusiness, shared by all members of this colony. This situation can be explained by what Martin (1992, 2002) calls the integration perspective. Recently, however, as we described above, bursts in the homogeneity of the colony have been witnessed. The most obvious one is the rise of the EMMC as a result of the schism in the Old Colony church.

Martin (1992, 2002) points out that there are other perspectives, besides integration, by which to interpret the culture within an organization such as Shipyard Colony. First, from a differentiation perspective it is argued that subcultures exist within the colony and that competition and conflict are seen as a result of different interests. The many subcultures are the basis for divided opinions and short or long term coalitions between the different parties. Agreements between the coalitions are made on the necessity of rational decisions.

Secondly, the fragmentation perspective is based on the principle that increasing ambiguity of concepts and relations within groups and the colony can be witnessed, leading to a highly fragmented colony (Martin, 1992, 2002).

Although there are different congregations in the colony, this does not explain that a process of fragmentation is going on in Shipyard. Rather, most families in the colony share the same basic assumptions through their Anabaptist background and their common history in the sense of migration, language and values. Thus, the perspective of differentiation should be more applicable in this case. Loewen (1993) describes the way Mennonites migrated from Russia to Manitoba and Nebraska and adapted to a market economy of a differently structured world, and did so without losing their own religious values. In fact, this is an important aspect of the Mennonite culture for it mirrors their entrepreneurial adaptation of the environmental reality and their religious values, which they cherish as a compass for household and colony norms. Redekop, Ainlay and Siemens argue that:

Many Mennonites have undertaken entrepreneurial activities within the Mennonite community context, but they [have] not deviate[d] from group norms in lifestyle or belief. In fact, they often [have] helped determine the direction that local interpretation and practice of the traditional Mennonite beliefs took. This is a distinguishing characteristic of local Mennonite entrepreneurs. They do not extend their activities far beyond the Mennonite community because their local mind-set is threatened by the greater world, and they are unwilling to risk the disapproval of the members of the Mennonite community which would be the inevitable response to any deviance from Mennonite economic norms (1995, p. 46).

This is an interesting argument because in the last 50 years the Old Colony of Shipyard has faced quite a few challenges. Throughout the years, modernity caused the colony to fall apart into two churches instead staying united in the one. Then, too, the presence of computers and telephones shook up the way of thinking about business. These two things introduced new temptation for the youth and younger generations. As a result, the church elders have a tougher task to keep their people behaving within boundaries. The *Ordnung* can be regarded as designed to keep the colony pure and controlled. Many restrictions are there to keep the young within the colony and a system of punishment and remorse is installed to keep members on the right track. In a strict church, members have to choose to participate fully or not at all (Iannaccone, 1994). If disobedience is

prosecuted rather severely (excommunication or putting someone under the ban), people will think twice about whether or not to walk the narrow path.

The *Ordnung* that regulates every inch of life among the Old Colony Mennonites of Shipyard was set in place to guarantee their separation from the world by setting boundaries and through rules about transportation, fashion, language, the generation of electricity or attitude towards non-Mennonites. Old Colony Mennonites explicitly refuse to take part in the process of modernization which is reflected in the rejection of using many technologies of the modern world. However, when compared to the generation that started the colony in 1957, small changes brought on by modernity have implicitly found their way into community life.

### **The Old Colony and the use of Selective Modernity**

One of the Mennonites' strongest basic beliefs is their separation from society. Referring to the Bible, they state that they are to be 'strangers and pilgrims' in the world. In connection with that, the most important factor in their life is *Gelassenheit* or the submission to the will of God, which results in values like obedience, humility, and simplicity. That implies that all activities should be to help them better serve their God. That aspect of *Gelassenheit* is also seen in the way the Mennonites select the use of modern technology. Modern technology that opens the possibility to connect the community with the outside world is suspicious. That is the reason why large groups of Mennonites refuse to use telephones in the household, privately owned cars, or the radio and electricity.

Eric Brende (1996) formulates two basic rules in the process by which a social group like the Mennonites accept modern technology. First, the technology-in-use will be understood by all members of the community. In this way, social stability is guaranteed, specialist workers refused and the technology is integrated in all aspects of personal life. Secondly, all technology is tested against the basic values and beliefs of the society to be sure that the new technology fits well in their way of life. For example, technology and machinery is in use (especially farm machinery), but is owned by the community, not by the individual.

Technology-in-use is often adapted to local conditions, making it easier to use according to the local way of life. In this way, Mennonites want to be able to control technology without technology controlling them. But the influence of the EMMC or Kleine Gemeinde farmers, who are allowed to use rubber tires on their tractors and combine and

advanced machinery, even in Shipyard, on the Old Colony farmers should not be underestimated on the long term.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, the Old Colony have been able to withstand modernity to a large degree. As we have shown above there are some traits of modernization, but as a whole these are not substantial enough to lead to change on a larger scale. Of course, the roads have improved, as has farm equipment and the overall quality of life over the last 50 years. But the colony has remained stable over the years, neither expanding much in terms of numbers, nor diminishing. Some people have left the colony to start a new Old Colony community in Little Belize and Indian Creek, while others have left the Old Colony for a new, more open life in Blue Creek, Spanish Lookout, or abroad. Probably the way of life of the Old Colony Mennonites in Belize will not change very much. No mobile phones and computers and other new technologies will broaden the way. Although it is easy for outsiders to think of the 'narrow path to heaven' as self-sacrifice, it is not necessarily considered as such by the Old Colony members themselves. One member explained that "we use steel wheels because it keeps the speed down. When I drive on a bumpy road with my tractor I just think about the less fortunate, instead of complaining." (Interview, 5 June 2009) This very act reminds him that he is "the world, no telephone, no TV. [Sure] I would want outside people to live like me, to have a future in eternity. It is hard to do bad things or to hide it. Not having all those bad things – drugs, alcohol, women - is good. Temptations are outside and in Shipyard it's all closed off from that. It's a joy living outside the world!" (Interview, 20 February 2009)

When the Mennonites arrived in Belize in 1958, their primary motives were based on religious principles and the need for agricultural land. A strong internal cohesion gave them the advantage they needed to settle and develop as a prosperous agricultural community. The case of the Old Colony Mennonites of Shipyard shows us that internal religious disputes and the interference of an outside church like the EMMC contributed to the fragmentation of a community. It shows us also that differences in values and norms inside a community can result in denying the existence of family and other community members and even in a kind of deep distrust towards members of other Mennonite settlements and the 'outside' world.

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