“At first it was hard” / “There was simply nothing there”: Low German–Speaking Mennonite Women’s Narratives of Migration between Mexico and Belize

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In the mid-1950s, a group of anti-modern Mennonites, often called horse-and-buggy, Low German, or Old Colony, was preparing to emigrate from Mexico.[2] Talk of instituting a national social security system challenged their commitment to a separation of church and state and the maintenance of their own internal systems for social support, including a *Waisenamt* (a widows’ and orphans’ fund) and fire insurance. They were in Mexico because, some thirty-five years earlier, 7,000 Mennonites had emigrated from Manitoba and Saskatchewan when legislation in those provinces mandated public school education in the English language. They considered this an intrusion by the state. The possibility of emigration to British Honduras (now Belize) emerged after a chance 1955 meeting between Old Colony Mennonite Peter H. Wiebe and US Vice-Consul Peter S. Madison in El Paso, Texas.[3] After several visits by Mennonite delegations, an agreement was signed between the government of British Honduras and “the Reinland Mennonite Church of Chihuahua

and Durango, Mexico," on December 18, 1957. Settlement began the following year.[4]

As a predominantly oral culture intent on "separation from the world," the 1958 migrants to British Honduras rarely published their own history. However, a young schoolteacher created a twenty-two-page booklet with hand-drawn sketches depicting the early days of settlement. [5] The booklet shows numerous scenes of men actively clearing jungles and building homes, yet depicts only a few women, most in passive roles and none mentioned in the accompanying story. The sketches depict a young woman standing in a cornfield while a young man carries a heaping pail of corn ears on his shoulders, a woman being rowed across a river to her new home, a woman—with her back to the viewer—milking a cow, and, lastly, a young woman sitting demurely beside her husband-to-be as they make the culturally required pre-marriage visits to family and friends in a horse-drawn buggy.[6] Yet women were active, rather than passive, participants in the migration process, and constituted a significant proportion of the 3,500 Mennonite migrants to British Honduras in the late 1950s. They had unique experiences in moving from well-established farmlands and a high elevation climate with seasonal temperature variations in northern Mexico to the hot, humid jungle of British Honduras, where new farmlands were cleared. Yet their version of the story rarely gets told.

While both the men and the primarily passive women pictured in the booklet are fulfilling expected gender roles, it was initially the narratives of male leaders seeking new settlement areas that constituted the published record of Mennonite migration to British Honduras.[7] Furthermore, horse-and-buggy Mennonites were often beyond the purview of mainstream Mennonite history, with its focus on progress-oriented national narratives.[8] The last few decades have produced a robust transnational scholarship on Old Colony and horse-and-buggy Mennonites.[9] This scholarship examines how horse-and-buggy Mennonites in Canada and the Global South deal with continuity and change, and includes a broader range of voices in terms of age, gender, and geography.[10] Some of this scholarship focuses specifically on Belize.[11] Yet even recent, more gender-inclusive scholarship provides only a single narrative of migration to Belize narrated jointly by a husband and wife.[12] This paper thus seeks to probe a broader range of Low German Mennonite women's migration experiences between Mexico and Belize.[13]

Social theorist Judith Butler reminds scholars working on women's narratives to question a "universalizing narrative that privileges an assumed solidarity among women."[14] As Mennonite historian Marlene Epp demonstrated in her study of female

Mennonite migrants to Canada, no one factor, such as "religious identity based on particular core beliefs," determines a woman's migration experiences because "individual lived experience" may vary by "class, education, occupation, regional origin, gender, and family position."[15] This "individual lived experience" occurs within what anthropologist Michael Jackson calls a lifeworld, "that domain of everyday, immediate social existence and practical activity with all its habituality . . . its biographical particularities, its indecisive events and indecisive strategies."[16]

While "biographical particularities" necessitate abandoning a universalizing narrative for women's experience, it is still, as Jackson acknowledges, a "shared experience."[17] Women's migration memories may differ from each other yet have common threads, so there is a need to acknowledge migrant women's lifeworlds. Furthermore, women's and men's recollections may be recounted in different contexts and for different purposes.

More significantly, as anthropologist Jan Bender Shetler argues in her study of gendered historical knowledge among women in Tanzania's Serengeti region, simply telling women's stories is not enough. Women's historical narratives are not merely a corrective to an "androcentric" perspective on history. Instead, women's stories are often complementary narratives, thereby contributing to a more complete picture of a culture's communal story.[18] Bender contends that scholars ought to examine what she calls the "epistemology of gendered knowledge" in order "to learn just what kind of historical knowledge women possessed in different places and times and why."[19] Thus, this paper examines Low German Mennonite women's migration narratives to uncover stories that need to be told to provide a comprehensive retelling of the entire community's migration experience, and to keep women's "biographical particularities" in dialogue with their "shared experiences."

Ethnographic Research Context

This article is based on participant observation and interviews of Mennonite women in Belize and northern Mexico between 2010 and 2014.[20] My visits and interviews, like those of anthropological linguist Kelly Hedges, replicated a culturally recognized pattern of informal social interaction among Low German–speaking women known as *Spatsearen* (Low German: visiting).[21] As an interviewer of women, I was ordinarily invited to visit with women in their kitchens, but when both men and women were present, the visit generally occurred in a *Grootstoav* (living or visiting room).

I focus on the migration experiences of only five women, but my understanding of their migratory patterns, perceptions, and attitudes toward ongoing migrations was informed by some ninety additional autobiographical interviews.[22] I deliberately interviewed in Low German, my mother tongue, as it was the language in which they would have experienced, thought about, and discussed their transnational lives. My fifty-four interviews in Mexico were audio-recorded, but of my forty-six interviews in Belize, twenty were with horse-and-buggy women who asked not to be recorded. The other twenty-six interviewees in Belize permitted me to record their life stories.[23] Interviews in the Cuauhtémoc region of northern Mexico included a number of women who had left for British Honduras and subsequently returned to Mexico. Interviews in Belize encompassed women in the colonies of Little Belize, Shipyard, Blue Creek, and Spanish Lookout (and some of their spinoff colonies) who had remained in Belize.[24] Potential interviewees were identified and often also contacted by various local facilitators.[25]

The migrants to British Honduras discussed in this paper are members of, or have roots in, the Old Colony Church, a Mennonite denomination that Mennonite historian John Friesen calls a "conserving" tradition.[26] Members of this group are noticeably visible by their historically anachronistic modes of dress and active forms of resistance to what they perceive to be "worldly" technologies and ideologies. They are also "conservers" in their attempt to give continuity to the denomination's historic Anabaptist beliefs and practices. What follows are published reports on the migration to British Honduras followed by narratives of Old Colony women.

The Published Record of Mennonite Migration to British Honduras

In addition to the booklet with sketches of horse-and-buggy Mennonites settling in British Honduras mentioned above, the story of this migration can be found in a variety of print sources. These include letters to the editor of Mennonite newspapers, front-page articles in national Belizean newspapers, and dissertations from the 1950s and 1960s. Letters to the editor of the *Steinbach Post* from 1957–1959 generally appeared on pages 4 to 8 as "News from Mexico" or "News from B.H. [British Honduras]." They probe the reasons for the proposed 1958 migration. Many describe a move necessitated by economic hardship, caused by lack of rain and corresponding low yields for staple crops such as corn, oats, and beans,

as well as low prices for saleable goods such as eggs and milk paired with high costs for chicken and animal feed.

Other letter writers focused on the process of, and rationale for, migration. Some questioned whether the motivation of those planning to migrate was purely economic, suggesting they should be "ready to move for their faith" when circumstances demanded it. Most letters refer briefly to the logistical challenges of migration, but one writer provided an extensive report of his May 1958 trip to British Honduras.[27] He was part of a contingent of sixteen men "sent to Honduras to complete the negotiations begun earlier," though he accompanied them "only for the sake of my curiosity," and concluded, "My wallet got emptier, but in experience I became richer."[28]

Articles on the proposed move of horse-and-buggy Mennonites to Belize in the late 1950s often made front-page news in national Belizean newspapers. Reporters for the two competing national newspapers carried on a lively debate about the suitability of the land-scouting Mennonite immigrants.[29] A Belizean identified as Mr. Verde used the term "migrating birds" when he first saw photographs of Mennonite women about to migrate to British Honduras in the mid-twentieth century.[30] Some reporters were less complimentary about what they called "these strange people."[31] They noted their concern about Mennonites settling in an area of unresolved territorial dispute with neighbouring Guatemala dating back to the late 1600s. One wrote that "the people of Belice [*sic*] [would] be endangered by the existence in the territory of an ethnic and religious group of this nature forming a separate and inconvenient community among the native inhabitants of the national territory."[32] Verde wondered how people who looked poor would be able to generate economic growth to the benefit of Belizeans.[33] In contrast, one British Honduran newspaper editor argued in favour of allowing these seemingly strange people to settle in their country. They claimed Mennonites would "be of extreme economic benefit," as they would assist in making the British colony "agriculturally sufficient."[34] Mennonite contributions to the economy "would bring down the cost of living" because these immigrants "would bring into this country, if our assumptions are correct, a fund of agricultural knowledge that would greatly benefit all those willing to follow their best practices."[35]

Debates concerning the suitability of Mennonite agriculturalists for the Belizean nationalist agenda occurred at a crucial time for both groups. The Mennonites were searching for farmland and a new country in which to freely live out their values. The British Honduran government was moving toward self-governance and

needed to ensure that the colony could feed itself. After further negotiations between Mennonite delegates from Mexico and the British Honduras government in 1957, British Honduras passed laws “to exempt Mennonites from military service, state schools, modern welfare programs, participation in municipal government, and national inheritance laws.”[36] This laid the groundwork for Mennonite migration to British Honduras beginning in March 1958.

Women’s Reflections on Migration from Mexico to British Honduras

What is most remarkable about horse-and-buggy Mennonite women’s narratives of migration is the women’s attitude of ordinariness towards the very idea of migration. For instance, one interviewee admitted that her family had moved to Mexico from Canada in the 1920s, to British Honduras in 1959, to Bolivia in 1973, back to Belize in 1984, to Canada in 2003, and back to Belize in 2007.[37] In fact, most Mennonite women in Belize with whom I discussed migration issues could point to at least two, if not more, international and even internal relocations. While the interviewees remembered details specific to their family’s migration process, they did not speak of the act or frequency of migration as being unusual or unexpected. Instead, they regarded migration as the logical consequence of their countercultural beliefs and lifestyle. They were well aware that they lived outside the moral grid of their neighbours and felt that this ethos of separation from the world would likely include physical relocation. Assuming that migrants identify closely with either their point of origin or their destination, sociologist Halleh Ghorashi claims that contemporary migration scholarship has a strong “sedentary bias [because] it produces dichotomies of rootedness in the places of origin and uprootedness in countries where generations of migrants presently live.”[38] Although Mennonite women in Belize might refer back to their former Mexican, Canadian, or even Russian homeland, they regard themselves as pilgrims on a journey with no permanent earthly home.

The women do, however have a sense of rootedness: in the church, or, as they call it, *de Gemeent*. Each of the five women whose migratory experience is discussed below moved to British Honduras as a member of the Old Colony church. Three moved to Blue Creek, one of the initial 1958 settlements. A fourth woman moved to Shipyard, which was founded the following year when those who favoured steel-wheeled tractors split from those who allowed rubber tires. A fifth woman originally settled in Shipyard and

subsequently moved to a daughter colony, Little Belize, due to a lack of available farmland.[39] As will be shown, despite their common origin in the Old Colony church, these women all remained in a Mennonite church, but followed different life trajectories.

Katrina's Story

As we approached the Rempels' house in a Belizean colony, I noticed the tidy barbed-wire fence around the yard and the evenly spaced bushes surrounding a sizeable plain two-storey house set well back from the main gravelled road.[40] Coming onto the yard, I was surprised to see unique topiary when my driver, Mr. Esqualiano, stopped his pickup truck near the house. He explained to Mr. Rempel that I would like to interview his wife, and Mr. Rempel went to the rear door of the house to call his wife, Katrina. She approached the passenger side of the truck and invited me into her house while the men easily continued their conversation. It was obvious that the two knew each other well. As Mr. Esqualiano told me, he had transported most of these horse-and-buggy Mennonites as they moved to new locales in Belize in search of more land and greater isolation. I didn't know what to expect in this initial meeting. Katrina, assuming that we needed either privacy or at least distance from the noise of lunchtime preparations by her younger daughters, invited me into the *Grootstoav*—a room I was rarely invited to enter. She motioned for me to sit on one of three wooden chairs and retrieved a package of notebooks, tidily stored in a plastic bag, from a cupboard. As she showed me her beautifully handwritten primary school notebooks, she related with delight how much she enjoyed attending school and, particularly, preparing for Christmas, because it celebrated Jesus's birth. As someone who enjoyed poetry, she gladly learned the requisite Christmas poem and Christmas songs. She also treasured the gifts she received from her teachers: pens, pictures, and Christmas sweets.

When I asked her about her migration to British Honduras in 1958, Katrina told me that her family moved when she was twelve years of age. Like many other migrants, she described various modes of transport in the family's move from northern Mexico: truck, bus, train, a ferry from Mérida to Chetumal in Mexico, and then a truck she feared would roll as they traversed rough roads in British Honduras. They finally arrived at a three-room house on stilts that they had rented together with five other families. After about five months, her family travelled by truck and boat to their eventual settlement in the jungle.

"News from British Honduras" columns in the *Steinbach Post* in 1958 would have readers believe that migration to British Honduras was essentially a search for more land for growing families. While the rationale for migration was often expressed in economic terms, it was, at its core, religious, though often initiated by difficult circumstances.[41] Like other conserving Mennonites, Katrina said they migrated to British Honduras because the government in Mexico was *februkt* (used up, irreparable) and no longer honouring some of the concessions given to Mennonites when they first migrated to Mexico from Canada in 1922. Many Mennonites felt the institution of a social security system would be only the first of many ways the Mexican government would gradually rescind the privileges granted them in the 1920s. Other Mennonite women voiced this as a desire to go *wieda trigj* (farther back)—to maintain a lifestyle more separated from the world. However, for Elizabeth, who as a twenty-four-year-old wife and mother of five children moved to British Honduras from northern Mexico, the reason was simple: "daut wia ons enoolent mank de Mexa" (we were tired of living among the Mexicans).[42] Several women stated that this "tiredness" resulted from escalating violence in Mexico which, they noted, included murders and home invasions. Yet the overriding rationale the women offered was the desire to live in a country in which the Mennonites could operate their own internal social security system.

Katrina observed that adjusting to life in British Honduras entailed significant changes in agriculture and foodways. Changes in crop choices for men implied different menu items and food-storage practices for women. Mennonites had grown cereal grains, beans, corn, and oats in Mexico, but discovered the latter would not grow in British Honduras. Due to differences in soils, rainfall, and humidity, beans and corn had to be planted in seasons opposite to those in Mexico. Instead of planting vegetables in July and August, they had to wait until November or December to plant potatoes, radishes, carrots, onions, and beans, though they could grow watermelon, cucumbers, and cabbage year-round. Not accustomed to eating corn, because they considered it to be fodder for animals, Katrina's family initially gave their corn crop to their Indigenous employees. Katrina further noted that it was from the Indigenous British Hondurans whom they hired as farm workers that her family learned to adapt to seasonal differences and to gradually accept corn as an edible human food. By the time I visited Katrina and her family in 2010, they were comfortably serving rice and beans, rather than potatoes and meat, and referring to them as "our Mennonite food."

When Katrina was in her late teens in 1966, she married a young man who, like her, had migrated from Mexico's Durango state in

search of farmland.[43] They rented a large property vacated by Mennonites who had returned to Mexico. Her husband worked in a sawmill and they started raising a family, but soon moved to another colony where better soil allowed for higher yields of beans and corn and the climate was more hospitable for dairy farming and cheese production. Katrina also pointed out that while they are horse-and-buggy Mennonites, the family uses technology such as a generator-produced power for their windmill to facilitate domestic tasks such as laundry, washing dishes, sewing, ironing, and storing food in a refrigerator. This is considered an acceptable use of technology in her colony as it supports the family and does not constitute identifying with "worldly" technologies.[44]

Katrina appeared to have adapted contentedly to the cultural script presented to her: to be a mother who raised her children with high moral standards informed by her school and church and to practice a good work ethic. However, one curious anomaly slipped into our conversation: she claimed her favourite childhood game was "playing school," an activity in which she was the teacher. I knew that only Mennonite men were teachers in the era of her childhood.[45] As we returned to the kitchen for lunch, it was obvious that Katrina was using her pedagogical interest and skills in educating her married and single daughters in household matters. I sat with three generations of women and girls for the noon meal. My Spanish-speaking driver, who was rarely invited into other Mennonite homes, was warmly welcomed to join the men at another table as he and Mr. Rempel continued their discussion begun earlier.

Several details in Katrina's migration narrative are of particular interest. First, Katrina's imagination permitted her in play as a child to take on a culturally prescribed male role. Nevertheless, she emphasized her love of learning rather than viewing this practice as a challenge to the gendered order.[46] Second, Katrina's overt reference to their Indigenous workers and, particularly, her openness to learning from them reveals that both women and men had frequent grassroots interactions with ethnic outsiders. For example, women interacted with hired farm workers or fish and vegetable peddlers, while the men scouting for land dealt with officials such as governmental representatives or presidents in stately buildings.

Maria's Story

Maria migrated to British Honduras with her family at the age of eight. She described a substantially different migration experience from that of Katrina.[47] My interview with Maria occurred in

northern Mexico, near Cuauhtémoc, in a large, elegant bungalow with a two-car garage, near a four-lane paved highway.[48] Like 125 of the 275 families of Manitoba Colony in Mexico who migrated to British Honduras in 1958, Maria's family found the adjustment to the climate, farming methods, and church life in British Honduras so difficult they remained there a mere three months before returning to Mexico.[49] As she recalled,

> It is very different now, but when we moved there, there was simply nothing there. But we weren't there for very long. We felt that we just didn't get by there. It was so extremely poor and very hot. We had nothing, just a roof, no house, and very many insects. At that time, others also went back to Mexico. The little children almost all died because it was too hot.

As Maria noted, it was imperative that the 1958 migrants made immediate adjustments to meet their physical needs for food, water, and adequate shelter. She recalled a particularly sad event for the early settlers, also reported in the July 22, 1958, issue of the *Belize Billboard*: "Dysentery kills 28 Mennonite babies at Blue Creek."[50] There had been heavy rains, and the migrants had used "polluted rain-water" as drinking water. They soon recognized the need to boil the water, but not before numerous babies died. The women who spoke about the dysentery-related deaths recalled that these fatalities were so frequent, and the need for constructing shelter so urgent, that the settlers often buried multiple babies simultaneously, sometimes even placing several into a single coffin. The irony is that these dysentery deaths occurred just a few months after a May 1958 *Belize Billboard* article reported the need to upgrade Belize City's water system in anticipation of a visit by British royalty, namely Princess Margaret.[51] There was no comparable concern about clean water for the hundreds of new Mennonite settlers.

While contaminated water brought death to numerous infants, water also became a source of delight for children like eight-year-old Maria, who recalled splashing in the many puddles resulting from constant rains. When I asked Maria if she had had to leave toys behind in Mexico, she said: "My parents weren't very rich. We didn't have toys. We played outside with firewood blocks or with boards, or we made ourselves a little room outside." And in British Honduras it was so hot that they "spent a lot of time in the water puddles."

Despite her young age, Maria had a sense that her family's poverty had necessitated the move to British Honduras.

> The land was cheap. Maybe they thought things were getting a bit too [worldly] here. I can't say exactly how much [that was the case], but

> anyway, there was land, there was rain. They would be able to make [economic] progress there.

Having land, however, did not remove the immediate challenges of resettlement. Maria mentioned the limited sources of nutrition for the new migrants:

> And making food, we had to cook almost entirely with ingredients we weren't familiar with. We had sour buns, sugar, and coffee. We had only sugar for dipping [our] sour buns. If we hadn't had vegetables, we wouldn't have stayed alive. Fortunately, we had vegetables on which we survived. But many died.

She did not elaborate about which vegetables they planted or purchased, but by November 1958 there are reports in the *Steinbach Post* that many families had already planted banana trees. Geographer Allen Bushong's 1961 study of Mennonite agriculture in British Honduras reveals that "by August 1959, half of the 617 acres of cleared land at Shipyard had been planted to corn, while plans for the 650 acres of cleared land at Blue Creek included not only corn, but 2000 citrus trees and 1500 coconut trees."[52] Focused on commodity production, Bushong ignored women's gardens, which would have provided much of a family's daily sustenance.[53] However, as is common in Mennonite women's migration narratives, Maria emphasized providing nutritional sustenance for her family, while men's narratives—and indeed, the hand-drawn picture book referred to earlier—erased women's labour and were more focused on land ownership and providing housing.[54]

Maria's narrative provides one more significant insight into Mennonite family life not always found in men's accounts: the role of matrilineal relationships, and especially of matrilocal settlement, in a predominantly patriarchal society. When I asked Maria if they moved together with relatives, Maria revealed that her family moved with several of her mother's siblings: "a couple of brothers, a couple of sisters, [but] they didn't all move at the same time." Interestingly, when Maria's family returned to Mexico, they moved in with her mother's parents until they were again able to purchase a home of their own.[55]

When I interviewed Maria in 2010, she related how her family had gradually built a stable economic life for themselves upon their return to Mexico. They were soon able to purchase a small plot of land and some cattle, and eventually a threshing machine. To their grain farming they added commercial apples, grapes, and strawberries. As one of the older children in the family, with only two older brothers, Maria said she "had to help everywhere—on the fields,

with the cattle—wherever there was work. It was *our* work." Mennonites considered the entire family to be the economic unit.

The house Maria now lives in reflects the family's eventual prosperity, but also reveals cultural changes Maria made after leaving the Old Colony church and joining another Mennonite denomination. As she showed me her clothes cupboard, I noticed numerous colourful dresses reminiscent of the dresses worn by Old Colony women but did not see the brown dress worn on the Sunday before and after the annual communion service. Nor were there signs of head scarves or the traditional bonnet older women still wear to the Old Colony church in Belize. Strangely, the spice cupboard in her kitchen also displayed a much broader range than the salt, pepper, and hot sauce I was accustomed to seeing in Old Colony kitchens. While Old Colony kitchens were typically adorned with little more than the calendar from the colony cheese factory, the walls and decorative shelves of Maria's house also contained numerous artificial floral displays. As with Old Colony kitchens, the rooms were spotlessly clean and tidy, but decorative features revealed a different aesthetic sensibility.

Helena's Story

Helena, who lives on a large farm in Belize, had vivid memories of her family's migration to British Honduras in 1958 and invited me for a visit at her home.[56] As I took the long driveway to her house, I thought I saw an empty fenced-in pasture to my right, beyond a border of tall trees. When I arrived at Helena's house, she asked if I had seen her small herd of pet deer. I had to admit that I was so intent on driving my large borrowed pickup truck safely along her long driveway that I had missed seeing them. The pet deer were but one indication that I had arrived at the home of an enterprising, successful farmer. In 2010, Mennonite farmers were experiencing an intense drought, and some were contemplating selling cattle they couldn't afford to feed.

Helena's memories of moving to British Honduras, like those of others, included various modes of transport, but she remembered the segment of the trip when she went to a washroom, threw up, and fainted, probably due to motion sickness. She recalled branches brushing over the top of the truck in which the children, women, and their belongings were riding, and that she had to duck to avoid being hit by the branches on the forest road between Chetumal, Mexico, and Orange Walk, British Honduras. She also recalled that, on arrival, ten small shacks, built to accommodate workers at a nearby

sawmill, were made available to the Mennonites. Since the Mennonites came in groups, these shacks would be successively vacated by immigrants once they had built their own houses, to be made available to incoming settlers. The region was densely forested, and Helena recalls logs being sawed and that *Einheima*, as the Mennonites called the Indigenous workers, burnt a field too soon after clearing it. Thus, the roots of trees were left behind and the Mennonites had to re-clear the area.

While the physicality of travel, clearing the land, and obtaining housing were of interest to Helena, it was her understanding of the contentious nature of the migration to British Honduras that is most poignant. As a young woman of fifteen excited about migrating, she was well aware that her father and his brother had been chosen by the Swift Colony in Mexico to lead the move. She also remembers that there were leaders who opposed their selection, because Helena's father and uncle were more open to using rubber tires on their tractors, a level of technology forbidden by the church and considered worldly at the time.[57] As a result, she said, the choosing of leaders for the group moving to British Honduras was not held strictly according to church rules. At the time, church elections involved writing the name of each candidate on a slip of paper, placing the slips inside a Bible, and having someone pull out a piece of paper. Her understanding was that the men involved repeated the process until they pulled the names they wanted, thus ignoring protocol.

Dissension continued in British Honduras. Her father, along with others, soon realized that the steel wheels favoured and, in fact, enforced by the traditionalists were impractical in the loamy soil and hilly terrain of northern British Honduras. He advocated for and began using rubber tires on his tractors. He was subsequently excommunicated, although Helena said that this process was against church rules since, according to Old Colony church protocol, ministers could be relieved of duties (*too Sied jesat*, set aside) but not excommunicated.

This incident involving Helena's father was so commonly known that it was broadly discussed both in the British Honduras and among those who returned to Mexico.[58] In fact, Helena's story of dissension in the church was corroborated by Tina, a woman from the same colony whose family returned to Mexico after a six-month stay in British Honduras.[59] Tina said they had

> moved [to British Honduras] because they believed that the situation here [in Mexico] had deteriorated . . . [but] when they found out what sort of trouble was occurring there [in British Honduras], they thought there had been enough trouble here, so they wanted to return [to Mexico].

Tina's maternal grandparents had talked of disunity among the preachers who were part of the migration to British Honduras, particularly pertaining to the means of transportation to church. In Mexico, where the land had been relatively dry and flat, Mennonites travelled easily by horse and buggy. In British Honduras, however,

> it was very hilly and muddy, so they had to go to church by tractor. They couldn't do it any other way. And he [a minister] had adjusted to the conditions. And then the next ones [ministers] came from here and they believed *bleibe bei was du gelernt hast* [remain true to what you have learned] and excommunicated the first minister. Then the rough road began and then [my parents] thought, if there's so much disagreement here, then let's just go home [to Mexico].

Tina concluded, "They were never sorry that they came back. They had been greatly disappointed with the life there, compared to what they had imagined it would be like." Several other women told me that if they had not sold everything before moving to British Honduras, their families would also have returned to Mexico.

Tina also recalled the challenges faced by the youth who migrated to British Honduras. It was customary in Mexico for teenaged youth to visit as a group on Sunday afternoons, usually in a home where the parents had conveniently gone visiting friends or relatives. But in pioneer living conditions in British Honduras, families had "little houses," too small for a group of youth to gather. This situation was remedied by young men who "on weekdays, after work, had prepared logs that were our benches, so that we could at least sit on Sunday." And so, Tina's and Helena's recollections include events and age groups often not mentioned in other migration narratives.

Royden Loewen suggests that in oral history contexts, "migration stories are the easy stories," and that stories of "religious duty" occur in the second or third hour of the interview.[60] This was not the case for Helena. Because her father's excommunication was such a defining part of the entire family's migration experience, that story tumbled out easily within the early part of our interview. Its prominence in her personal account stemmed from the far-reaching challenges she faced as a result of her father's excommunication. When she and other young people whose parents had been excommunicated were ready for marriage, they could not be baptized and join the Old Colony church, and consequently they could not get married in the church. They had to wait another year or so until two ministers from a Manitoba-based Mennonite denomination came from Canada and baptized them, allowing them to get married in the new church. By then, she and other young women were either pregnant

or already had an infant in their arms.[61] In this case, church rules could work out in their favour, since the Old Colony church could not censure people whom they had not allowed to join in the first place. This also meant that Helena and her female cohort did not have to endure the public shaming reserved for women whose pregnancies or newly born infants provided evidence they had had sex before marriage. Had they remained in their natal church, they would have had to wear black kerchiefs for their baptism and marriage ceremonies as a means of signifying their transgression of norms.[62] Unsurprisingly, there was no accompanying public shaming for the young men involved, although in private conversations amongst themselves, the young women were quick to suggest comparable rituals for the men.[63]

Because they were no longer allowed to participate in their natal church, Helena's family became part of a local evangelical Mennonite denomination with Canadian roots, and some of her children now have leadership roles within that church. But Helena's discussion about her parental family and of her children reveals other themes I heard in women's gender-focused narratives: the importance of birth order, and the linking of health with fitness for work. Twice in our discussions, Helena provided a list of her fifteen siblings. Each time she emphasized those who were healthy, in comparison with those whose health had never been good, those whose health was failing, or those who had already passed away. During one conversation, Helena highlighted the work she, as an older child and a strong healthy person, was able to do. She proudly ended the conversation with the comment "etj wia eent fon de Junges" (I was one of the boys), a phrase echoed by several other women, as she related how much she had enjoyed driving the tractor on the family's fields.

Susanna's Story

There is one further way in which women's migration narratives make a contribution to both individual and communal migration stories, and that is by providing the opportunity for social critique. This insight emerged from discussions with Susanna. She lives in a Belizean Mennonite horse-and-buggy colony and invited me to spend several days with her family in her home.[64] Unlike Maria and Helena, who migrated in the late 1950s as children or teenagers from the Cuauhtémoc region in northern Mexico, Susanna migrated to British Honduras from Durango Colony in north-central Mexico in 1978 as a young married woman in search of better farming conditions.

Initially, Susanna's comments on changes brought about by migration to a new climate focused on her everyday lifeworld, namely on clothing. As she enumerated the adjustments in clothing, she explained that because of the heat and humidity there was a need for lighter-weight clothing, dresses without a lining, smaller fringeless kerchiefs, and, of course, more frequent laundering of garments, especially of undergarments such as slips. These had short sleeves to catch underarm perspiration and preserve dresses that were made from more expensive fabrics. Not all style adjustments were related to climate. Susanna added that women's dresses had narrower sleeves in Belize than in Mexico, as evidence that the colonists became more conservative, that is, less worldly.

Other women also mentioned changes in footwear and headwear upon arrival in British Honduras: from wearing stockings and shoes every day in Mexico (often for warmth) to sporting bare legs and wearing *Schlorren* (sandals) weekdays but stockings and shoes for church Sundays. Some noted that the high humidity and heavy rains made the straw hats that had shielded them from the sun in Mexico impractical, so they had to resort to wearing plastic hats for daily outdoor chores. Additionally, whereas women in Mexico were able to wear their traditional lace headcoverings as they rode to church with horse and buggy, in Belize they wore kerchiefs while riding to church on dry, dusty roads and then exchanged their kerchiefs for their traditional Sunday headpieces (stored in beautifully decorated hat boxes tucked under the seat of their buggies) upon arrival at church.

Susanna also discussed changes in food choices and food storage methods. Like other Mennonite women in Belize, she pointed out that rice and beans had replaced cereal grains and potatoes because the latter are virtually impossible to grow in the Belizean climate and soils. With the shift to beans, she noted the accompanying need for *Gausspellen*, pills to counteract the gaseous effects of beans. Food storage methods changed as Mennonites could no longer use any form of underground storage because the high humidity turned everything either rusty or mouldy. She also noted the need to freeze or can meat after a pig-killing, since meat couldn't be salted or smoked in Belize because it would rot. This meant she was bereft of her favourite comfort food: fried smoked pork. Dry goods also had to be protected from humidity. For example, if she wanted to store rolled oats, she had to bake them first to kill insects and then store them in sealed glass jars. Flour often contained insects, so she would have to sieve it using old nylon stockings. As she set the table for yet another tasty meal, she pointed out that she now used metal plates because plates made of melamine resin, which she had used in

Mexico, cracked and food in the cracks rotted, creating a health hazard. Helena's comments exemplify Mennonite historian Marlene Epp's observation that "as immigrants, women assume the responsibility of maintaining food customs often in a social environment that is inhospitable to such ethnic persistence."[65]

Susanna also commented on the effects of the climate on her health, particularly her increased problems with asthma, concluding, "We never should have moved to Belize. I'm always sick here and the doctors are so far away. It was a big mistake." Her outspoken criticisms are not surprising. She was accustomed to speaking her mind and making herself heard, so felt she could freely voice her opposition to the family's migration, though she refrained from doing so in her husband's presence. One morning during my visit she scolded her husband and sons for coming late to breakfast because her carefully prepared meal was getting cold. It was also obvious from our conversations that Susanna had been involved in the decision to purchase a new tractor. She had even persuaded her husband to start his own business, a decision she justified with the saying "whoever doesn't risk, doesn't gain."[66]

Until my follow-up visit with Susanna in February 2014, I assumed that she was the perfect example of a woman from a conserving community who had provided a resistance narrative. However, during my 2014 visit, Susanna changed her "we should never have moved here" theme to "at first it was hard, but we got used to it," a theme I heard from most of my other interviewees but had not expected from her. In fact, she dismissed my comments when I reminded her of her earlier criticisms of the migration, though she did admit that when she first moved to Belize, she "roayd in beyt" (wept a little).

It was not until well after that visit that I realized why Susanna might have re-themed her story. In 2010, she spoke as the mother of a sixteen-year-old daughter who was courting (and would soon marry), so she could encourage her daughter to engage in critical thinking. Susanna knew there was no farmland available for young couples in her colony so marriage would entail resettlement for her daughter, most likely at a distance too great to travel by horse and buggy. By the time of my second visit in February 2014, her daughter Anna had been married for a year and the couple, like other young couples, had moved to a newly founded colony, a three- to four-hour journey by motorized vehicle from her parents' home. Anna happened to be visiting her parents, so Susanna's theme was now one of encouraging Anna, who, like other young wives living in a jungle wilderness, was homesick and dealing with the realities of being in love yet living a challenging daily life. Having recently had

a pacemaker installed, Susanna was in better health than during my earlier visit and was now the survivor who could encourage her daughter to deal with the challenges of yet another relocation. Furthermore, Susanna put the challenge of adjusting to the climate into perspective when she said, "Wie kunnen de het meist nijch fedroajen, oba aus wie iascht aunfungen too fedeenen bauded ons de het nijch soo seeja" (We almost couldn't endure the heat, but once we started to prosper through our earnings, the heat didn't bother us as much). It seems that improved physical and economic health contributed to improved psychological health. Susanna's varying perspectives on the adjustment to life in Belize were a reminder that there is no one definitive version of a narrative. Rather, ever-changing ways of telling a story reflect changing life circumstances and experiences, even among Mennonites whom the popular press likes to romanticize as being "changeless" and "frozen in time."[67]

Mennonite Women's Migration Narratives as Integral to the Communal Narrative

Careful reading of Low German–speaking Mennonite women's memories reminds us why their narratives are integral to the story of Mennonite migration to British Honduras and, in some cases, back to Mexico. These women's lives exemplify not merely an easy acquiescence to prescribed colony ways. Women's oral recollections offer significant insight into attitudes toward migration, personal visceral reactions to the journey, generational differences in the experience of migration, the power of matrilineal connections in a patriarchal society, and the impact of migration on women's everyday lifeworlds. Their narratives portray the women as active, rather than passive, participants in their communities, whose story needs to be told from their own perspective. When told in tandem with men's narratives of migration, they offer a fuller picture of the communal migratory experience.

Women's roles in the household are a central theme in their migration narratives. Katrina's introduction of new foods into the family's menu, Maria's concern about using unfamiliar ingredients in her cooking, and Susanna's changes in food storage methods present several aspects of changes that women dealt with in a new environment. As Susanna relates, women were also responsible for clothing suitable for a seemingly inhospitable climate. These household issues, along with responsibilities for the health of the family, ensure that women's migration narratives will differ considerably from those of men, particularly those in leadership. As Mennonite

historian Royden Loewen observes, "Women, it seems, were especially mindful of the social elements of migration. . . . Because of their roles within the farm household, the migration was even more disruptive to their lives and offered a much greater expansion of their worlds than for the men who regularly traveled."[68]

Women's anxieties and visceral memories of travel to British Honduras are not all that surprising. Women were never part of the delegations of men who travelled to scout out potential farmlands and negotiate with government officials. Women did not have the privilege, as did the writer to the *Steinbach Post*, to accompany a delegation simply to satisfy their curiosity. While Helena's father, a delegate, made three trips to British Honduras prior to immigrating with his family, most women made only one trip—when they moved with their family. Like other women, Helena would have sat in the back of a truck, as only men were allowed to sit in the cab with the hired driver. Her contact with cultural outsiders, like Katrina's, and, indeed, like that of men who were not part of the delegations, would have been with Indigenous farm workers or peddlers.[69]

Despite the many commonalities in these women's migration stories, it is with respect to the church that the women's biographical particularities diverge most poignantly from the shared experience. Interestingly, all five women remained in Mennonite churches, as did most of my other interviewees. Given the colony context of these women's lives, the church is as much a socio-economic structuring agency as a religious organization. Consequently, the continued affiliation with Mennonite churches is not surprising. However, only two of the five—Katarina and Susanna—remained in the Old Colony church in Belize, Katarina seemingly contentedly, while Susanna maintained a questioning spirit. Maria's and Tina's families returned to Mexico, where, disillusioned with the dissension in their church in Belize, they moved to another Mennonite denomination. Helena's family remained in Belize, but having been excommunicated, her family was integral in establishing a Mennonite community based in a denomination that had been imported from Manitoba.

The migration experiences of the women discussed in this paper are all aspects of what Jan Bender Shetler calls the "epistemology of gendered knowledge" that reveals "just what kind of historical knowledge women possessed in different places and times and why."[70] These aspects detail what Michael Jackson would call these Mennonite women's "immediate social existence and practical activity, with all its habituality, . . . its biographical particularities, its decisive events and indecisive strategies."[71] However, they need to be placed in dialogue with the male master narratives of immigration to flesh out the story of what women were doing while the men

were presumably “making history.” Women’s narratives are thus not a mere corrective to an androcentric perspective on history but an integral part of a culture’s communal story.[72] They are indeed a dance between individual lifeworlds and the shared experience of a community.

Notes

[1] Earlier versions of this paper were presented at “Still/Moving: Stories of Low German–Speaking (Dietsche) Mennonite Women,” a one-day interactive conference at King’s University College, Western University, London, ON, Aug. 26, 2016, at the Annual Meeting of the American Folklore Society, Santa Fe, NM, Nov. 5–8, 2014, and at “Anti-modern Pathways: ‘Horse and Buggy’ Mennonites in Canada, Belize and Latin America,” at the University of Win-nipeg, Oct. 21–22, 2011. Thanks to Kerry Fast for culturally sensitive edit-ing and for assistance in focusing the thesis of this paper. Thanks also to the reviewers for their insightful questions and critiques.

[2] The Mennonites discussed in this paper are often identified by language, level of technology, or church affiliation. Most are descendants of Mennonites who migrated from Canada to Mexico in the 1920s and are members of the Old Colony Church. In recent scholarship, the term horse-and-buggy has been used to designate those groups within this church who are committed to using anti-modern technologies historically deemed permissible by their church.

[3] Harry Leonard Sawatzky, *They Sought a Country: Mennonite Colonization in Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 332.

[4] Sawatzky, *They Sought a Country*, 332.

[5] Royden Loewen states that Mennonite migrants to British Honduras and Bolivia were more conservative than most, so moved “to depart from . . . more modern, Mennonite communities in Mexico.” Consequently, they left fewer autobiographies and letters than migrants from Canada to Mexico and Paraguay of the 1920s or 1940s. Royden Loewen, *Village among Nations*: *“Canadian” Mennonites in a Transnational World, 1916–2006* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 121.

[6] *Ungefähre Darstellung aus den ersten Jahren in Shipyard Kolonie. Zusatz: Anfang der Little Belize Kolonie* (self-pub., 1999). The booklet comprises sketches and text by an unnamed schoolteacher in Little Belize Colony and contains a map of Little Belize. It was given to me by the husband of an interviewee in Little Belize Colony in 2010.

[7] For example, see Gerhard. S. Koop, ed., *Pioneer Years in Belize* (self-pub., 1991). This book relates the experiences of Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites who settled in Spanish Lookout in 1958, a colony not included in this study. All contributors are male and reference only men’s experiences of the migration from Mexico to British Honduras. This group is also the focus of the chapter “Reinventing Mennonite Tradition: Old Ways in the Jungles of British Honduras” in Royden Loewen, *Diaspora in the Countryside: Two Mennonite Communities and Mid-Twentieth Century Rural Disjuncture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 169–201. Loewen includes references to

women's diaries. Since he is discussing negotiations with government, church, and community in which male leadership prevailed, comments about and from women are minimal. However, Loewen has a longstanding commitment to including women's voices in Mennonite migration scholarship, already evident in a 1996 presentation to the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society titled "Women and Immigration: 1874–79," *Preservings*, no. 8, part 1 (1996): 33–35. See also "Mennonite Colonization in British Honduras," appendix to Sawatzky, *They Sought a* Country, 331–67. Sawatzky, who is quite critical of "the permissible state of technology" among the Old Colony, whom he calls Altkolonier based on their origin in the Old Colony in Russia, refers essentially to land settlement and use, with no mention of women's part in resettlement.

[8] For a discussion of this reorientation, see Royden Loewen, "A Village among the Nations: Low German Migrants and the Idea of Transnationalism in the History of Mennonites in Canada," *Conrad Grebel Review* 33, no. 1 (Winter 2015): 29–48; Loewen, *Village among Nations*; and *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 22 (2004).

[9] For a discussion of this reorientation, see Loewen, "A Village among the Nations"; Loewen, *Village among Nations*; and *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 22 (2004). This scholarship often resulted from collaborations between university professors and teams of graduate students, i.e., historian Royden Loewen of the University of Winnipeg and anthropologist Carel Roessingh of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, and their students. Loewen's research with his collaborators is published in Royden Loewen, *Horse-and-Buggy Genius: Listening to Mennonites Contest the Modern World* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2016); Roessingh's collaborative work is published in Carel Roessingh and Tanja Plasil, eds., *Between Horse and Buggy and Four-Wheel Drive: Change and Diversity among Mennonite Settlements in Belize, Central America* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2009). *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 31 (2013) contains further articles on horse-and-buggy Mennonites by these researchers.

[10] Loewen states the intent of *Horse-and-Buggy Genius* was "to share the voices of some 250 horse-and-buggy people from thirty-five communities as they spoke to eight university-trained observers of culture and society. Loewen, *Horse-and-Buggy Genius*, 221.

[11] Anne Kok and Carel Roessingh, "Where 'God sleeps at night': Integration, Differentiation and Fragmentation in a Mennonite Colony," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 31 (2013): 167–82; Joasia Haniewicz, "Belize—A Mennonite Story," *Preservings*, no. 23 (Dec. 2003): 87–100; Roessingh and Plasil, *Between Horse and Buggy and Four-Wheel Drive*; Royden Loewen, "Meeting the Outside Gaze: New Life in British Honduras and Bolivia, 1954–1972," in *Village among Nations*, 119–50.

[12] Tanja Plasil and Carel Roessingh, "The Mennonite Road to Belize," in Roessingh and Plasil, *Between Horse and Buggy and Four-Wheel Drive*, 51–54.

[13] Prior scholarship focused on identity issues of Old Colony Mennonite women includes Kerry Fast, "The Garden(s) of Riva Palacios: A History," *Preservings*, no. 37 (2017): 18–23; Kerry L. Fast, "Religion, Pain, and the Body: Agency in the Life of an Old Colony Woman," *Journal of Mennonite* Studies 22 (2004): 103–30; Kerry L. Fast, "Why Milking Machines? Cohesion and Contestation of Old Colony Mennonite Tradition," *Journal of Mennonite Studies*

31 (2013): 151–66; Doreen Helen Klassen, "'I wanted a life of my own': Creating a Singlewoman Mennonite Identity in Mexico," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 26 (2008): 49–68.

[14] Kamran Asdar Ali, "Voicing Difference: Gender and Civic Engagement among Karachi's Poor," in "Engaged Anthropology: Diversity and Dilemmas," *Current Anthropology* 51, no. S2 (Oct. 2010): S314.

[15] Marlene Epp, "Pioneers, Refugees, Exiles, and Transnationals: Gendering Diaspora in an Ethno-Religious Context," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 12, no. 1 (2001): 138.

[16] Michael Jackson, *Things as They Are: New Directions in Phenomenological Anthropology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 7–8.

[17] Jackson, *Things as They Are*, 8.

[18] Jan Bender Shetler, "The Gendered Spaces of Historical Knowledge: Women's Knowledge and Extraordinary Women in the Serengeti District, Tanzania," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 36, no. 2 (2003): 283.

[19] Shetler, "Gendered Spaces," 283.

[20] A summer 1994 trip to interview Mennonites in the Chihuahua state of Mexico about their memories of migrating from Canada to Mexico in the 1920s had already familiarized me with the cultural groups I interviewed in subsequent visits, although I noticed substantial cultural and economic changes when I returned to Mexico in 2010. Special thanks to Abe Warkentin (Steinbach, MB), Rosabel Fast, and Bill and Nora Janzen for facilitating travel, lodging, and potential interviewees in the summer of 1994. My summer 1994 research was sponsored by the Mennonite Central Committee Canada Low German Concerns Committee.

[21] See Kelly Lynn Hedges, "*Plautdietsch* and *Huuchdietsch* in Chihuahua: Language, Literacy, and Identity among the Old Colony Mennonites in Northern Mexico" (PhD diss., Yale University, 1996), 144. See also Loewen, *Village among Nations*, 195–96.

[22] The idea of focusing essentially on four or five women's personal stories emerged from my reading of Mennonite historian Marlene Epp, "Pioneers, Refugees, Exiles, and Transnationals," a study of Mennonite women who came to Canada, often alone, from various points of origin. However, unlike Epp, I have chosen several women from what was perceived to be a fairly homogenous ethno-religious group at the time of their migration from Mexico to British Honduras to illustrate the range of personal experiences within such a group.

[23] The term "horse-and-buggy Mennonites" refers to those Mennonites who regard certain forms of technology as "worldly," that is, technologies that could lead to individualism, pride, and any values that undermine the communal practice of their religious beliefs. Technologies that are avoided include electricity (although stand-alone generators are allowed) as well as motorized forms of transport like cars and trucks and, for some groups, tractors with rubber tires, as they make access to town, with its challenges to communal values, too easy for the youth. When these Mennonites travel distances not amenable to horse-and-buggy travel, they hire drivers who own vehicles, take public transport such as buses, trains, or planes, or ask for rides on the backs of pickup trucks. Men can freely use these means of transport, but women, who use horse-and-buggy transport within their own colonies, are ordinarily accompanied by a male family member when using public forms of transport.

[24] My 2010, 2013, and 2014 research trips to Belize and Mexico were funded by a Memorial University of Newfoundland SSHRC/Vice-President's Research Grant (2009), a Grenfell Principal's Research Fund grant (2009), a D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation grant (2010), and a Vice-President's SSHRC Research Grant (2012). Funding for transcription of interviews was received from the Vice-President's Research Fund, Memorial University of Newfoundland (2009, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017). Sincere thanks to Rosabel Fast and Kerry Fast for undertaking the tedious, but invaluable, work of transcription.

[25] In Belize, Agatha Klassen contacted potential interviewees in Blue Creek and loaned me a pickup truck (2010), Albert and Maria Burn provided lodging in Orange Walk (2010), and Mr. Esqualiano, whom I hired as my driver to horse-and-buggy communities, made contacts in Mennonite colonies such as Shipyard and Little Belize (2010, 2014). In Mexico, various Mennonite Central Committee personnel facilitated finding housing, transportation, and interviewees. Special thanks to Carol and Ron Neisteter (2010), Ruth and John Janzen (2010), and Margaret and Dave Penner (2013).

[26] John J. Friesen, *Building Communities: The Changing Face of Manitoba Mennonites* (Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2007), 129.

[27] His report includes modes of transportation, types of lodging, the quality and value for money of restaurant meals, and the humid climate where "one would have to bathe and change clothes daily and work only mornings and after afternoon lunch." He also writes about encountering those with "black-coloured skin" who were "friendly and willing to help."

[28] Jakob D. Enns, letter to the editor, *Steinbach Post*, May 27, 1958, 4.

[29] Namely, "the *Belize Times*, owned by the ruling People's United Party and the independent *Belize Billboard*." Loewen, *Village among Nations*, 122.

[30] Quoted in Plasil and Roessingh, "Mennonite Road to Belize," 51. Cultural outsiders have occasionally used metaphors to describe both the process and frequency of Mennonite migration. In her children's book *Migrant*, Newfoundland author Maxine Trottier parallels the experience of a young Mennonite girl's family's annual labour-related travels between Ontario and Mexico with the seasonal migration of geese. Maxine Trottier, *Migrant* (Toronto: Groundwood Books/House of Anansi, 2011), 2

[31] Staffman, *Belize Billboard*, Dec. 10, 1957, 2.

[32] *Belize Billboard*, Dec. 4, 1957, 1.

[33] Plasil and Roessingh, "Mennonite Road to Belize," 51.

[34] *Belize Times*, Aug. 29, 1957, 3.

[35] *Belize Times*, Sept. 20, 1957, 3; Editorial, "The Mennonites," *Belize Billboard*, July 21, 1957, 4.

[36] Loewen, *Village among Nations*, 120. See Sawatzky, *They Sought a Country*, 334–36 for a copy of the British Honduran agreement issued to the Reinland Mennonite Church of Chihuahua and Durango, Mexico, dated Dec. 18, 1957.

[37] Personal interview, Feb. 18, 2010.

[38] Halleh Ghorashi, "Negotiating Belonging beyond Rootedness: Unsettling the Sedentary Bias in the Dutch Culturalist Discourse," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40, no. 14 (2017): 2426.

[39] For the sake of confidentiality, the women's names are not identified with a particular colony.

[40] From notes, photos, and memories of a personal visit in Belize, Mar. 10, 2010. All names of interviewees are pseudonyms.

[41] Kerry Fast effectively makes this argument in "Why Milking Machines?"
[42] Personal interview in Belize, Mar. 1, 2010.
[43] Royden Loewen identifies migrants to Belize as originating "from Chihuahua state, Mexico," yet a number of my interviewees identified Durango, a northwestern state of Mexico, as their point of origin. Loewen, *Village among Nations*, 119.
[44] See Fast, "Why Milking Machines?," for a discussion on how colony Mennonites ascertain which technologies are acceptable in their attempt to follow religious tradition and to remain "separate from the world."
[45] For a discussion of Old Colony Mennonite children's imaginative play see Doreen Helen Klassen, "'I Always Played Restaurant': Mennonite Childhood Play as Anticipation/Antithesis of Motherhood," in *Mothering Mennonite*, ed. Rachel Epp Buller and Kerry Fast (Toronto: Demeter Press, 2013), 273–92.
[46] See Katherine Borland's description of her argument with her grandmother in "'That's Not What I Said': Interpretive Conflict in Oral Narrative Research," in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, ed. Sherida Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (New York: Routledge, 1991), 63–75. Borland's grandmother argued that she was not a feminist and never regarded her independent spirit as a feminist position. Her grandmother's resistance is a good reminder not to impose current theoretical positions on stances taken within a different paradigm.
[47] Personal interview in Mexico, May 6, 2010.
[48] Using a transnational lens on Mennonite migration to and from Latin America has fostered a robust literature on return narratives, mostly focused on the return of Kanadier Mennonites from Mexico to Canada. For example, see *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 22 (2004); and Ernest N. Braun, "There and Back: A Tale of Two Decisions," *Preservings*, no. 45 (2022): 29–34. The dialogue on the return of horse-and-buggy Mennonites from Belize to Mexico is found most commonly in the *Steinbach Post* issues in 1958–1959.
[49] A. W. Peters, from Cuauhtémoc, Chihuahua, Mexico, states: "Several families have once again returned from BH, including Abram Penners, who left us here in spring; strangely, from this colony many have already returned, but none from the Quellen Colony." *Steinbach Post*, Dec. 2, 1958, 3. Of the Old Colony 275 families that moved to British Honduras in the late 1950s, about 125 returned to Mexico within five years. Sawatzky, *They Sought a Country*, 342.
[50] *Belize Billboard*, July 22, 1958, 1.
[51] *Belize Billboard*, May 3, 1958, 1.
[52] Loewen, *Village among Nations*, 133, citing Allen D. Bushong, "Agricultural Settlement in British Honduras: A Geographical Interpretation of its Development" (PhD diss., University of Florida, 1961), 116, 118.
[53] Loewen, *Village among Nations*, 133.
[54] See Karen Warkentin, "'So Ha' Wie Daut Emma Jedohne' (That Is How We Have Always Done It): The Collective Memory and Cultural Identity of the Old Colony Mennonites in Bolivia" (master's thesis, University of Manitoba, 2010). Warkentin states that for Old Colony migrants to Bolivia, "land ownership has come to represent the basis of ideal Old Colony Mennonite male identity" (36), along with religion, whereas women's identity was focused particularly on family relationships and sustenance (62).
[55] Karen Warkentin highlights the importance of female familial relationships, particularly with sisters, in the migration process. Karen Warkentin, "'*Emma*

jedohne': Memories and Old Colony Mennonite Identity," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 31 (2013): 138–41.

[56] Personal interviews in Belize, Feb. 16, 2010, and Feb. 17, 2014.

[57] Sawatzky traces the decision to forbid the use of rubber tires to a 1916 decision by Old Colony leaders in Manitoba and Saskatchewan "to ban the automobile forever and to arrest technological innovation in agricultural machinery at the then existing level." Sawatzky, *They Sought a Country*, 352.

[58] See also Haniewicz, "Belize—A Mennonite Story."

[59] Personal interview in Mexico, June 7, 2010.

[60] Loewen, *Horse-and-Buggy Genius*, 8.

[61] Helena says she knew so little about human reproduction that she hadn't even realized she was pregnant until one day when she mentioned feeling nausea to some other young women and realized she hadn't menstruated for several months.

[62] Single women who were not pregnant, but had had premarital sex, were expected to wear a white kerchief for their baptism and marriage. If they decided not to admit this publicly before marriage, they could visit their minister after their wedding, admit to having had premarital sex, be excommunicated for two weeks, and then be reinstated into the Old Colony Church.

[63] Based on her experience in Belize, an anonymous source shared several of the details in the foregoing paragraph with me. She also told me one young woman suggested that the fathers of the prenuptial infants should wear a red handkerchief dangling from the fly of their trousers.

[64] Invited home stay, Mar. 14–16, 2010, and personal interview, Feb. 18, 2014, both in Belize.

[65] Marlene Epp, "The Semiotics of Zwieback: Feast and Famine in the Narratives of Mennonite Refugee Women," in *Sisters or Strangers? Immigrant, Ethnic, and Racialized Women in Canadian History*, ed. Marlene Epp, Franca Iacovetta, and Frances Swyripa (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 314–40.

[66] Unfortunately, my field notes contain only the English translation and not her actual Low German expression.

[67] Oscar Holland, "Meet Belize's Secluded Mennonites, a Community Frozen in Time," CNN, Aug. 9, 2021, https://www.cnn.com/style/article/belize-mennonites-jake-michaels/index.html.

[68] Royden Loewen, *Hidden Worlds: Revisiting the Mennonite Migrants of the 1870s* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2001), 28.

[69] It was in his 1993 study of Kleine Gemeinde migration and resettlement that Royden Loewen first pointed out that while Mennonite men "scouted out the farmland and negotiated with governments" and "chose the general places of settlement," it was the women who chose "the particular place of residence." Royden Loewen, *Family, Church, and Market: A Mennonite Community in the Old and the New Worlds, 1850–1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto of Press, 1993), 98–99. This pattern was also described by of some of my Old Colony interviewees.

[70] Shetler, "Gendered Spaces," 283.

[71] Jackson, *Things as They Are*, 7–8.

[72] Shetler, "Gendered Spaces," 283.