

Mennonites in Mexico and Paraguay: A Comparative Analysis of the Colony Social System

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In this paper I seek to examine the differences between the Mennonite colony social system as it developed between 1920 and 1970 in two Latin American countries — Mexico and Paraguay. Recent research on Canadian and Russian Mennonites (Epp, 1974, 1982; Gerbrandt, 1970; Sawatsky, 1978; Urry, 1978) recognizes that, in spite of resistance and segregation, Mennonites have gradually and selectively yielded to the environmental forces in their new homelands. It is suggested that more comparative research should be undertaken to analyze the influence of the wider environments on Mennonites. This study will examine comparatively the impact of three environmental conditions — political, economical, cultural — on the extent of planned cooperation developed in two Mennonite settlements — the Manitoba-Swift Current colony in Mexico and the Menno colony in Paraguay.

The data used in this analysis comes mainly from library sources. Mennonite scholars (Fretz, 1945, 1953, 1962; Friesen, 1987; Redekop, 1969, 1980; Sawatsky, 1971) have reported extensively on the development of the Mennonite colonies in both Paraguay and Mexico, though none has used a comparative perspective. The Praeger Studies Project has published extensive research monographs undertaken by various development agencies on countries in Latin America. Specific studies related to Paraguay (Pincus, 1968; Arnold, 1971) and Mexico (La Cascia, 1969) were most helpful in examining the environmental variables. Data were selected to analyze the macro-differences between the Mennonite colonies in Mexico and Paraguay.

The Mennonite colony social system is a socio-economic organization designed to provide for the total needs (spiritual, social, physical) of its residents. The Mennonite strategy of settling in isolated block settlements in rural areas facilitated the nurturing of the system as an effective means of

maintaining community social control and fostering a strong loyalty to the church. The impetus for this settlement pattern may be traced historically to the northeast German colonial *Gewanndorf* (Francis, 1955:63) and the Anabaptist theology which defined the relationship of the Christian to the World as "being in the world but not of the world." Both colonies selected for the study were original settlements established during the 1920s by conservative Mennonites from western Canada. Later in the paper a more complete background of the colonies will be provided.

A factor crucial to the survival of a colony social system is that of cooperation of mutual aid. Fretz (1939:208-209) concluded his study on mutual aid among Mennonites by stating that

. . . mutual aid has generally been recognized as being practiced in informal, unorganized form. Among Mennonites there are still many forms of organized and unorganized forms of mutual aid. It is also significant to notice that mutual aid has expressed itself more generally among the Mennonites in organized form to provide protection against natural elements — those which are beyond the control of man such as fire, storm, poverty and death. Organized mutual aid in Mennonite communities has not often concerned itself with profit-making activities. Its purpose has generally been to share losses or promote public welfare or share responsibility in common problems.

The informal or spontaneous form of cooperation mentioned above is very much in evidence among Mennonites and will be taken for granted in this study. It is the extent of organized mutual aid or planned cooperation developed in the respective colonies that is the focus of this study. Planned cooperation is used by community residents to provide for their collective needs (Sanders, 1966:370-71). For example, a mutual fire insurance is organized to cope with property losses due to fire, a credit union is established to provide loans, or a cooperative store is established to provide consumer goods. This cooperation is also instrumental in developing some economic and political power at the grass roots level by means of controlling marketing and purchasing (for examples see Coady, 1939). In analyzing the differences between the Paraguayan and Mexican Mennonite colonies I will consider the extent of planned cooperation demonstrated in four colony institutions — the economy, religion, education, and health care.

The independent variables in this analysis are environmental conditions which affect an ethnic or religious group's ability to develop an autonomous social system within the larger society (Fretz, 1962:104). Political conditions are considered as the first variable. One of the functions of a national government is to make decisions on the kind of society it wants to develop and the means for achieving that goal. As a minority people Mennonites have sought out governments and political leaders willing to negotiate special privileges in return for agricultural development. This variable will focus on the privileges granted by the Mexican and Paraguayan governments, along with other legislation and general attitudes directed toward the Mennonite colonies.

Economic conditions constitute the second independent variable. In order for colonies to survive and prosper arrangements must be made for trade and commerce, transportation of goods and services, import and export taxes and physical protection. In this study the economic conditions will be considered in terms of agricultural policies, locations of markets, and transportation systems.

The cultural conditions of a country constitute the final variable. Whenever groups mix, there is some degree of cultural exchange — language, values, norms, belief systems, artifacts. Over long periods of time assimilation may even produce a single homogeneous culture, different from any of the original groups. This analysis focuses on how national cultural values and norms have influenced the cooperative development of a Mennonite colony social system.

These variables will provide the framework for analyzing the relationship between the environment and the Mennonite colony social system. Before proceeding with the analysis I will look briefly at conditions that prompted the Mennonite exodus from Canada and the subsequent colonization in Mexico and Paraguay. This will set the context for the study.

Mennonite Unrest In Canada

After the pioneering struggles in Canada during the 1870s the Mennonites set about developing their closed communities with the intention of practicing their traditional beliefs and customs. However, within a decade after settlement there were indications that relationships between the Mennonites and their environment were less desirable than expected. Three principle factors eventually prompted the search for alternative settlements — imposition of a municipal form of government, compulsory public school attendance and mandatory registration for military service. No one factor was sufficient cause for the migration but in combination created the exodus in the 1920s.

Ironically all three factors violated the privileges that had been initially guaranteed by the Canadian Government (Francis, 1955:44–45; Gerbrandt, 1970:54–59; Epp, 1974:192). In retrospect, it is clear that the goals of the two parties in the agreement were not the same. The government was interested in developing an integrated nation–state stretching from sea to sea. The Mennonites, on the other hand, were determined to set up their own social system within the larger state. The integrationist and segregationist approaches were on a collision course and only time would tell the outcome.

The municipal government was perceived by the Old Colony Mennonites as a way of removing their autonomy and freedom of self-government (Francis, 1955:90–95; Friesen, 1987:18–19). The Old Colony people ended up withdrawing completely from public affairs and renouncing solidarity with other Mennonites. The Sommerfelder and Chortitzer groups were more open to this form of state intervention.

This conflict with the provincial government came up again with the

decision to impose public education on the Mennonites. A series of School Acts were passed by the Manitoba government (e.g., introduction of the English language in 1889, the flying of the Union Jack in 1907, and the School Attendance Act in 1916) to upgrade standards and increase the integration potential of the education system. The full enforcement of government regulations resulted in parents being assessed fines, jail terms and various threats (Francis, 1955:185). This issue was the final blow for many Mennonites, particularly the Old Colony, Sommerfelder and Chortitzer.

The conscription issue had brought some serious repercussions from neighbors and government. While Mennonites did have military exemptions, their lack of participation prompted such political retaliation as excluding them from voting and prohibiting further Mennonite immigration into Canada (Francis, 1955:190). Later both restrictions were lifted, but the damage to Mennonite peace of mind was already done.

The events of three decades (1890–1920) signalled to Mennonites that the Canadian government had no intentions of honoring the privileges granted in 1873 without significant concessions from the Mennonites. In spite of the fact that the Old Colony, Sommerfelder and Chortitzer Mennonites had become relatively successful and wealthy farmers, they were reluctant to compromise or give up their religious and educational freedom (Epp, 1974:225–226). The Old Colony group, now the more conservative of the three, was the first to look for alternative settlements (Friesen, 1987:41–42). The Sommerfelder and Chortitzer followed a little later. The two colonies considered in this study — Manitoba–Swift Current in Mexico and Menno in Paraguay — grew out of the Mennonite exodus from Canada in the 1920s.

The Colonies

The Manitoba–Swift Current colony in Mexico began in 1922 as a product of successful Old Colony negotiations with the President of Mexico for special privileges. Representatives of the Old Colony in 1921 received the following assurances regarding military service, swearing oaths, private schools and use of property.

1. You will not be forced to accept military service.
2. In no case will you be compelled to swear oaths.
3. You will be completely free to exercise your religious principles and to observe the regulations of your church without being molested or restricted in any way.
4. You are fully authorized to establish your own schools, with your own teachers, without any hindrance from government. Concerning this point our laws are exceedingly liberal.
5. You may dispose of your property in any way you may desire. This government will raise no objections to establishment among the members of your sect any economic system which they may voluntarily want to adopt.

It is the most ardent desire of this government to provide favorable conditions to colonists such as Mennonites who love order, lead moral lives, and are industrious. Therefore we would deem it a pleasure if this answer would satisfy

you. The afore mentioned privileges being guaranteed by our laws, we hope that you will take advantage of them positively and permanently (Redekop, 1969:251).

The colony was established on a tract of 230,000 acres in the northern state of Chihuahua approximately 70 miles south west of the state capital near the town of Cuauhtemoc.

In the spring of 1922 5,500 Old Colonists arrived in Mexico. Approximately 4,700 settled on the Manitoba–Swift Current colony and the remainder settled in another colony, Hague–Osler, located in the state of Durango, 500 miles farther south (Francis, 1955:192). In many cases whole villages were transported from Canada to Mexico. The village arrangement was based on the *Strassendorf* and *Gewannflur* — a linear one–street village with its surrounding fields and pasture. A village normally contained between 18 and 24 full households (Redekop, 1969:79–80; Sawatsky, 1971:112–114).

The physical environment and climate of the Mantioba–Swift Current colony is largely the result of its high elevation, between 6,500 and 7,500 feet. Stoesz (1947:40) describes the soils as

. . . gravely in general and stony in parts. Their depth range from a few inches on the knolls to a foot or so in the depressions. In fertility they appear to be medium to poor although more fertile lands occur in smaller tracts benefitted from run off and consequent addition of soil and organic matter . . . erosion has already taken its toll of the top soil (see Sawatsky, 1971:104–106 for more detailed description).

The rainfall in this area averages between 14 and 28 inches during the rainy season between July and September. The temperature is relatively moderate (Stoesz, 1947:40).

Much to the disappointment of the farmers, wheat did not grow well in the colony. It was replaced by oats, corn and beans. Oats soon developed as the most important cash crop. Oats, along with corn, was also used to supplement feed for cows and horses. Only very limited irrigation was used for gardens and for crops because water was scarce. In the livestock production most of the cows were used for dairy purposes. Hogs and poultry were also raised, largely for home consumption.

The Menno Colony in central Paraguay (commonly referred to as the Chaco) was established by Sommerfelder and Chortitzer Mennonites coming from Manitoba and Saskatchewan in 1926 (Francis, 1955:192–193). They had received special privileges from the Paraguayan government in the form of Law 514 which is comprised of eight articles. The first article defined their rights and privileges as follows:

1. To practice their religion and to worship with absolute liberty without any restriction and, consequently, to make affirmations by simple “yes” or “no” in courts of justice instead of by oath; and to be exempt from obligatory military service either as combatants or noncombatants both in times of peace and during war;

2. To establish, maintain, and administer schools and establishments of learning, and to teach and learn their religion and their language, which is German, without restrictions;
3. To administer inheritances and especially the properties of widows and orphans by means of their special system of trust committees known as "*Waisenamt*" and in accordance with the particular rules of the community without any kind of restriction;
4. Administer the mutual insurance against fire which is established in the colonies (Fretz, 1953:230).

The other articles refer to matters such as prohibiting sale of alcoholic beverages within a five kilometre zone around the colony, tax exemptions, assurance of future entrance for all Mennonite immigrants, guardianship rights, and authority linkages with the Paraguayan government (Fretz, 1953:230–232). This Law and subsequent amplifications made Paraguay an attractive refuge for Canadian and European Mennonites.

A tract of land (139,000 acres) in the heart of the Paraguayan Chaco was purchased. It is located approximately 155 miles west of Puerto Casado or 250 miles north west of Asuncion. The first settlers reached their land in 1928 after having spent 18 months waiting for survey crews to prepare the land for occupancy. In the middle of 1927 a typhoid epidemic broke out and claimed close to 200 lives (Fretz, 1953:17). During this waiting period some 355 migrants decided to return to Canada. When the land was finally surveyed 14 villages were laid out — 11 were allocated to families coming from Manitoba east reserve, 2 to Manitoba west reserve and 1 to a Saskatchewan group (Friesen, 1987:353–370).

The physical environment in the Chaco is composed largely of vast stretches of grass and woodlands. Fretz (1962:1–2) describes the area as "covered with almost impenetrable growth of scrub trees, spiny shrubs and cacti, with occasional swampy meadows and open campos. In dry periods the Chaco is hot and dusty, and in wet periods, it is muddy making the roads difficult to travel." For the most part the Chaco lies in the torrid zone. The rainfall tends to vary substantially from year to year (average 28 inches), though is generally adequate for agricultural purposes (Fretz, 1962:2).

Farmers in Menno Colony were disappointed that wheat farming was impossible. Instead their cash crops turned out to be cotton, kaffir and peanuts. One of the big obstacles for the Menno Colony was marketing their cash crops and dairy and poultry products without a rail link. Further disappointment came when local trees were unsuitable for lumber and the native grass turned out to be bitter (Friesen 1987:275). In spite of the early hardships the colony survived and prospered.

On the whole, the two colonies appear to be very similar. Both are comprised of people that come from a relatively similar agricultural experience in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. They were relatively prosperous grain farmers and had some experience with mechanical farming. Physical and climatic conditions in both colonies forced changes in agricultural practices. Both are comprised of people that come from a relatively similar agricultural

experience in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. They were relatively prosperous grain farmers and had some experience with mechanical farming. Physical and climatic conditions in both colonies forced changes in agricultural practices. Both colonies originated for similar reasons during the 1920s with Menno Colony experiencing greater hardship in the early pioneering years. One could make a case that both groups were the conservative remnant of their Canadian counterpart. The religious denominational affiliation is different in name but not substantially different in beliefs and rituals. In terms of authority the Old Colony Church seems to have greater control over its members than the Sommerfelder and Chortitzer. One difference is that in terms of numbers, the Manitoba–Swift Current colony began with more than three times as many settlers. Another difference already evident in Canada is that the Sommerfelder were more individualistic and free to make individual decisions whereas the Old Colony had a more corporate view of the colony social system (e.g., concern for block settlement).

This comparison of the colonists, privileges, physical environment and early experiences underlines the similarities of the two colonies. This commonality provides the baseline for describing the development of the colony social system over the next fifty years, and evaluating how much of the variation may be attributed to environmental conditions.

Variations in Colony Social System

This study of differences in the extent of planned cooperation is limited to a fifty-year period, beginning with the time of settlement. I will compare the extent of planned cooperation exhibited in the two colonies within four institutional areas — economics, religion, education and health care. Some attention will also be given to the cooperation between the various institutions in the colony.

In examining the economic institution one finds that both colonies have diversified their economic base but the Menno Colony has developed its industrial sector more extensively (e.g., saw mill, cotton gin). However, the more important difference is the cooperative approach used to organize the economy and the industry in the Menno Colony. All the business of the colony is under a legally incorporated agricultural cooperative organized in 1936. It is run by the *Chortitzer Komitee* which is comprised of a salaried administrator, a secretary and five or more board members (see Friesen, 1987:490–492 for a text of the Constitution). Fretz (1953:157) reports that in 1950 approximately 620 family heads (almost all) belonged to the cooperative. Profits derived from the 15% mark up were used to expand colony enterprises, maintain and build roads, and support the hospital and general relief (Fretz, 1953:153–158).

In the Manitoba–Swift Current colony the economic and industrial matters are organized mainly on the basis of private family units with some mutual cooperation. The *Oberschulz* and *Schulz* (mayor of village) are in

charge of general administration such as collecting taxes, purchasing land and maintaining roads (Redekop, 1969:80–82). The cheese factories are not cooperatives but extended partnerships (Sawatsky, 1971:293). Several attempts have been made in cooperative ventures but with short lived success (e.g., contract marketing of oats). Thus, while in the Manitoba–Swift Current Colony there is mutual assistance of various kinds, it does not have the integrated cooperative system that Menno developed.

The markets are more readily accessible in Mexico than in Paraguay. Cities like Cuauhtemoc and Chihuahua are much closer than Asuncion is in Paraguay. Traders also come into the villages to buy directly from the farmers. The Menno Colony developed means of getting to market by boat and by airplane. The recent completion of the Trans Chaco highway has also enabled truck transportation and greatly reduced transportation costs. While the Mexican colony is closer to markets it seems that production is largely geared to home consumption. There is little evidence of aggressively pursuing production or marketing (e.g., development of orchards) (Sawatsky, 1971:235). Sawatsky (1971:297) stated that “the solidly agrarian philosophy of Mennonite leadership offers deliberate discouragement to any broadening of the economic base.”

Unemployment and under-employment is high in Manitoba–Swift Current in contrast to Menno where colony expansion has provided much greater employment opportunities in terms of non-farming and farming jobs. Reimer (1974:56) states that “in October, 1972, the total population of the settlements was 5,384 persons in 938 families, of these 562 families are involved in agriculture.” This indicates that only 60% are involved in agriculture, the rest must turn to industry for work. The Mexican colony, on the other hand, is burdened with *Anwohner* (landless farmers) who can not find adequate employment in the colony (Sawatsky, 1971:303).

Within the economic institution there is a clear difference in the extent of planned cooperation developed by the colonies. Where the Menno Colony adopted a formal cooperative strategy to provide a general economic base for the total colony, the Manitoba–Swift Current Colony continued with the traditional informal cooperative strategy. Although some efforts were made in the latter colony to introduce planned cooperation none materialized.

Religion has been at the core of the Mennonite colonies from the beginning of the Anabaptist movement. The key difference between the two colonies appears to be the power of the church in the colony. In Mexico the bishop and ministers hold a strong control over the total colony while in Paraguay the church is separated, particularly from economic matters. This perhaps accounts for greater individual initiative in the Paraguay colony. Sawatsky (1971:278) describes the Mexican situation as one where, “dominance of the church inhibits initiative and tends to leave the individual with a low capacity for well-reasoned self-assertion and self-determination.”

The clergy in Paraguay are open to change and cooperation, particularly with other denominational groups (e.g., General Conference), on issues like

Bible Schools and evangelism. The clergy in Mexico have been extremely defensive-minded and ultra conservative. Attempts at developing some cooperation with the General Conference Mennonites in areas of schools and health care have met with considerable opposition from the clergy. H. S. Bender (1957b:576) sums up the differences this way: "The Menno Church, in contrast to the Old Colony group in Mexico is moving progressively forward and strengthening its religious life and outlook." In the institution of religion there is evidence of planned cooperation in the Menno Colony but not in Manitoba-Swift Current.

Neither the colonists in Mexico nor in Paraguay brought with them a tradition favourable to cooperation with the State in education. Cooperation with other, more progressive Mennonite groups, in this respect was similarly discouraged. In the Menno Colony, however, the colonists began early to upgrade the school system and extend programs well beyond the level of the three R's. This is demonstrated by the presence of a secondary school with a dormitory and Bible School (Fretz, 1962:88). While there is evidence of progress in education in Menno, there is stagnation in the Mexican colony. Sawatsky (1971:305) suggested that education remains below the level of functional literacy. Colony residents are no longer capable of taking on the role of teacher for their own children. Menno Colony clergy have been supportive of educational improvements and Old Colony clergy have been non-cooperative in areas of education. In Menno Colony there are some specific cooperative efforts in setting up teacher training programs together with other colonies in the Chaco area. Again, as in religion and economy, there are some planned cooperative ventures in education in Paraguay but little organized cooperation of any sort in Mexico.

The health care institution reflects a continuation of the earlier pattern. The Menno Colony has through cooperative efforts developed a complete hospital facility with up-to-date modern equipment and services. This work was begun after 1947. Prior to that time medical services were available in a neighboring colony. Fretz (1961:174) notes that by the early sixties the Menno Colony had sixteen employees in their hospital. Acceptance of hospital services may be indicated by greater proportions of children now being delivered in the hospital than in the home. Financing of medical care in Menno is worked out by an inter-colony hospital committee with costs split between patient and colony (Fretz, 1953:131-132).

In Mexico there are no hospitals operated by the colony. Colonists rely totally on services provided by sources outside the colony. There are, however, a few self-made dentists and chiropractors in the colony to serve the people.

This discussion of the nature of cooperation within and between institutions leads me to conclude that the Menno Colony deliberately developed in a strategy of planned cooperation, particularly in the economic sector. Some recent examples of planned cooperation were also found in religion, education and health care. It appears as though this impetus for planned coopera-

tion came very much from the economic conditions. In Mexico one finds that cooperation has remained at the level of informal cooperation among family units. Several efforts at planned cooperation were found but, to my knowledge, none have developed. How does one account for the variance of the level of planned cooperation demonstrated in the two colonies? I will now examine the impact of environmental variables on the colonies in an attempt to answer the question.

Environment and the Colonies

Every organization is located within a larger social system. Much of its daily energy is spent on developing strategies to cope with environmental conditions. Mennonite history may be viewed as a story of strategies developed by a religious minority organization in the context of different environments. The strategy of isolation and segregation appears to be most dominant. Establishing isolated colonies in rural areas is an effective means of controlling environmental influence, but it has a tendency to delude people into thinking that the environment is unimportant. This section will examine three independent variables — government laws and concessions, economic conditions and cultural policies — and their respective influence on the nature of cooperation within the colony system.

Government laws and concessions. The Mexican and Paraguayan governments both agreed to a set of privileges guaranteeing freedom of religion, education and exemption from military service prior to the arrival of the Mennonites. In comparing the two documents it is evident that the Paraguayan document is more inclusive; it prohibits the use of alcoholic or intoxicating beverages in immediate surroundings, gives import tax exemptions for ten years, guarantees entrance to future immigrants and defines the colony's lines of authority. It is also to be enforced and given the status of law. The Mexican privilege is more in the order of a letter of understanding between the Old Colony delegates and the President and Secretary of Agriculture and Economics. It is later followed by a letter of clarification (Redekop, 1969:252). Sawatsky (1971:39) reports that the President "was at first reticent to endorse the clause referring to sectarian schools and the exclusive use of German." He did finally agree since it meant the difference between having the Mennonite farmers or not.

A comparison of the respective documents suggests that while the Paraguayan government willingly confirmed its commitment with a formal law the Mexican government acted more informally, under the pressure of prospective short term gains. In the fifty years that followed the Paraguayan government was faithful to its commitment. The Mexican government as early as 1927 tried, unsuccessfully, to close down the Mennonite schools and churches as a means of enforcing a new socialist constitution. While the Mennonites were able to convince the government to retreat it did make them suspicious and created unrest. In fact, it prompted several groups to leave (Sawatsky, 1971:136). A second attempt to close schools came in 1935 bringing

further unrest and investigation to emigrate. These plans were slowed down when the President assured them in writing that the terms of privileges would be honored by civil and military officials (Sawatsky, 1971:156).

The Paraguayan government, particularly under President Stroessner, is proud of the Chaco Mennonites and their accomplishments. They are used as a model of good agriculturists in an area thought to be closed to agriculture. The Mexican government has in the past also considered the Mennonite colonies with pride but more recently they have received negative press for avoiding Mexican citizenship and not participating in the national social security programs (Sawatsky, 1971:323–326). Mexican officials are beginning to see Mennonites more as a burden to society than an economic and cultural asset.

One may conclude that the political climate for the Menno Colony has been stable and secure since the time of settlement. In the case of the Manitoba–Swift Current Colony the political climate has been less stable and created insecurity and anxiety. This no doubt has prompted various groups to leave the colony over the years.

Economic conditions. Economists show that Mexico was much more developed than Paraguay when the Mennonites first arrived and has remained that way. In examining the Paraguayan economy one finds that it is still essentially an agrarian society with 60% of its population in rural areas and 36.2% (1965) of its gross domestic product derived from the agricultural sector (Arnold 1971:48). Pincus (1968:6) describes the agricultural sector as still “producing at a low level and only for one’s own (or family) needs.” The economic policies are organized around economic liberty where the needs of the country take precedence over needs of individuals or private interests (Pincus 1971:14). The open door to immigrants (including Mennonites) was an attempt to increase agricultural production and become self-sufficient while at the same time opening some of the land lying beyond the immediate environs of Asuncion.

The problems in the Paraguayan economy focus increasingly not on production but marketing: domestic and foreign. Middlemen often control the markets and decrease the returns to the farmer. Credit facilities (banking, advisory services) are not developed to support expansions. In spite of government policies to try to improve agricultural output, taxation policies are not consistent. Pincus (1968:130) states, “Paraguay taxes agricultural exports and levies heavy duties on most imports needed for crop and livestock production, as well as on supplies and equipment required for the establishment of essential handling, processing and transportation facilities for farm, ranch and forest products.” Some relief has come in removing import taxes on fertilizers and insecticides. Transportation routes have been improved and expanded (e.g., Trans Chaco Highway) considerably since 1955 (Pincus, 1968:218). This has improved substantially the marketing of agricultural products, particularly for the Chaco Mennonites. In general, farms in Para-

guay are uneconomic in size (under 10 hectares or 25 acres) and located in a radius of 90 miles east of Asuncion.

Since the mid-thirties the Mexican economy has grown at an annual rate in excess of 6 percent with agriculture growing at about 4.8% (Hansen, 1971:4, 56). Mexico is no longer a developing country though many rural areas are still impoverished and the majority of the farmers are still on subsistence levels. Much of the farm work is done by using primitive methods though substantial mechanization has occurred. Mexico is now a modern industrial nation that is no longer dependent on agriculture. Hansen (1971:4) noted:

The agriculture sector employed 65 percent of Mexico's work force and constituted over 23 percent of gross domestic production in 1940; 30 years later it employs less than half the work force and accounts for 16 percent of the aggregate domestic product. In contrast, manufacturing activity has raised its share of total domestic product from 17.8 percent to 26 percent, and now employs more than 16 percent of the labour force.

Mexican agriculture has received some incentive in the post-1940 economic development period. Large irrigation projects were developed and rural road networks were expanded. Land tenure laws have changed to accommodate private commercial producers (Hansen, 1971:57). Hansen feels that both the private farms (over 5 hectares) and collective farms have increased agricultural production for growing domestic and foreign markets while the *minifundistas* have become much more efficient. Some of the increased production is due to increased acreage but more than half is accounted for by investments in irrigation and roads, new seeds, fertilizers and pesticides, improved production techniques and greater labour inputs. Mexico's record of agricultural growth is far greater than any other Latin American country (Hansen, 1971:57-61).

The economic climate of the two countries shows a marked contrast. During the period under consideration Mexico has pushed for extensive agricultural reform in efforts to improve production and marketing. It has also shifted its economic base from agriculture to industry. For much of this period the Paraguayan economy has remained sluggish and underdeveloped. Agriculture is still the single mainstay of the economy. Since 1955 foreign investments have been used extensively in developing industries and more efficient transportation systems. In comparison it seems like the Mexican Mennonites deliberately avoided maximizing economic opportunities while their counterparts in Paraguay struggled to overcome a repressive and restrictive economic institution.

Cultural Policies. Beyond the initial social and cultural privileges extended to the Mennonites one finds very little in the way of official assimilation policies in either country. Some pressure was put on the Old Colony Mennonites to adopt the Spanish language and close their churches. Unofficially it seems that Mexico wanted both structural and cultural assimilation while Paraguay was more interested in structural assimilation.

Policies or no policies some cultural assimilation occurs whenever two or more groups with divergent cultural backgrounds interact. Certainly Mexico expected this to occur and Paraguay as well. In Mexico the Manitoba-Swift Current colony was surrounded by the Mexican culture and also some other Mennonite groups. The proximity of the Mexicans in the towns, Cuauhtemoc and Chihuahua, and also coming to the villages as traders and farm laborers resulted in some cultural exchange in spite of resistance by the Mennonites. In the colony one will find the Mexican culture represented in styles of dress, building construction, use of Spanish and Indian words, bribery and gambling and negative attitudes toward work. From the other small progressive Mennonite groups have come pressures to adopt the use of rubber tired tractors and automobiles, credit union form of banking, teaching of Spanish in school and relaxing the authority of the church.

The Menno Colony, located in the heart of the Chaco, is largely sheltered from the Paraguayan culture. The only native people in the immediate area are a few ranchers and nomadic Indian tribes. Although there is evidence of indigenous cultural influence it is clear that the more significant cultural impact came from two nearby Mennonite colonies, namely Fernheim and Neuland. Fernheim, located 15 miles due west, was settled by 1481 Russian Mennonites in 1930. Neuland, located 35 miles southwest, was settled in 1947 by 2389 Russian Mennonites. The Fernheim immigrants had been very successful farmers, educators and businessmen in Russia prior to the Revolution of 1917. Many of these skills were now used to conquer this new territory. Fretz (1962:91) describes the impact of Fernheim on the area and the other colonies.

Fernheim came to be the centre of ingenious social and mechanical inventions which were required to compete successfully against the terrific odds encountered when transplanting an industrialized culture into the heart of an underdeveloped country. This colony set the pace for its neighboring colonies, Menno and Neuland, in the area of economic organization. It likewise set up a model colony organization for a self governing political system, a universal education system, and a high grade health program with hospital and sanitation service for the isolated colonists.

It was also in Fernheim where an air strip was built to accommodate DC-3 aircraft, industries beyond the elementary handicraft types were set up and a teacher's training school was established. It is this late Russian Mennonite culture rather than indigenous culture that had a strong influence on the Menno Colony beyond the immediate pioneering days (Fretz, 1962:91).

Conclusion

From the analysis of the data it can be concluded that several explanations may be offered as to why the Menno Colony developed planned cooperation and the Manitoba-Swift Current Colony did not. Clearly the economic circumstances faced by the two colonies were very different. The Mennonites in Mexico arrived just before extensive agricultural reform was

introduced. The agricultural sector had been growing at a steady rate and markets expanding. The location of the colony near the Cuauhtemoc and Chihuahua markets made it relatively easy for the individual farmer to market surplus products and import staple goods. In contrast the economic conditions in Paraguay were underdeveloped, markets were far removed from the colony and transportation systems antiquated. Survival in the Chaco without some changes in the colony social system was doubtful. One of the options was to bring in some planned cooperatives to harness the already existing informal cooperation in special ways. There is no way of knowing whether the economic conditions would have been sufficient cause to create planned cooperation or whether the colony would have relocated as some other groups have done. My conclusion is that the economic conditions were a necessary prerequisite for the development of planned cooperation but not sufficient under the circumstances.

This leads to the cultural variable. The Old Colony Mennonites seem to have resisted the cultural assimilation forces of both the Mexican culture and other Mennonite groups surrounding the colony. This does not mean that they have remained unaffected. The successful resistance may be attributed to a feeling of relative superiority toward the Mexican culture and a lack of differentiation from other Mennonite groups. In Paraguay, as in Mexico, the cultural influences have not come from the Paraguayans, with the exception of some influences from the neighboring Indian tribes, but from the neighbouring Fernheim Colony. As Fretz points out, this colony had become the modernizing force in the Chaco. It was here that planned cooperation was used to organize the economic institution. Along with economic benefits came social and political rewards for the colonists. My conclusion is that this working model of economic organization was instrumental in facilitating the development of planned cooperation in the Menno Colony. It should be noted that this was not limited only to the economic institution but, like in Fernheim, carried over to other institutions as well.

Aside from providing the initial support for the settlement, both national governments remained relatively uninvolved in the administrative affairs of the two colonies. There is no indication that the Mexican government restricted the development of a cooperative economic structure in the colony. The Paraguayan government sanctioned the colony cooperative charter but otherwise left economic matters in the hands of the colonists. Other environmental factors not examined in this study, such as technology, legal and demographic conditions, need to be examined as possible explanatory variables.

In summary this analysis of variations between Mennonite colony social systems finds that in Paraguay the Menno Colony has developed a model of planned cooperation to organize its economic institution which is almost totally absent in the Mexican Manitoba-Swift Current Colony. The structural variation is attributed primarily to the different economic and cultural conditions that prevailed in the external environment of the respective colo-

nies. This comparative study confirms recent suggestions that environmental factors shape the organizational structures produced by Mennonites, even in isolated locations.

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